

# Scottish and Irish metalwork and the ‘*conspiratio barbarica*’

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## SUMMARY

*The dating evidence for ‘Donside terrets’ is reviewed, and it is suggested that they were still current as late as the fourth century AD. It is suggested that these and other objects and stylistic links in metalwork between Ireland and Scotland may be considered as evidence for the alliance between Picts and Scots in the late Roman period.*

## DONSIDE TERRETS

Massive, ‘Donside’ or ‘Don’, terrets have been the subject of a considerable amount of literature, despite the fact that they are mostly without useful association and are to modern taste singularly unlovely objects.

Doubt has been expressed over the theory that they were terrets (rein-rings on a chariot yoke). Livens has asserted that ‘it is well nigh impossible to fit a strap round a bar placed in the mouth of any one of the sockets’ (1976, 154), and has pointed out that the wear on surviving examples is more in keeping with suspension with the socket upwards (*ibid*). Macgregor has, however, suggested a method by which they might have served as terrets (1976, 39).

Although in detail they vary, in general they consist of an oval ring with a base concealing a strap bar from which rises a projection, most commonly like fleshy lips (for a series of illustrations: Livens 1976, Fig 2). Despite arguments about function, the Don terrets fit in with the terret family as a whole, and stylistically belong with them. Twenty-six examples are known, three unlocated, 16 from northern Britain and 10 of these north of the Forth–Clyde line (Macgregor 1976, 47). The clustering of finds in north-east Scotland gave rise to their name, as they were clearly most popular in territory occupied by the Picts or their Caledonian ancestors.

That they originate in Roman terrets cannot now be seriously doubted. Very similar terrets have been found on the Continent in Roman military contexts, for example in the period 150–250 AD in southern Holland (Bogaers 1952, 4–6), from the Roman fort at Faimingen in Germany, where they are dated to the second century (Drexel 1911, 39), and even from Pannonia (Alfolfi & Radnoti 1940, taf xxvii).

The Continental prototypes are most likely to have been introduced to Scotland during one of the Roman campaigns against the northern tribes. The *VI Victrix* legion came from Germany to York and thence to Hadrian’s Wall at the time of its construction (Breeze 1982, 87), and there were further units from Germany posted to the Wall at the time of the northern disturbances

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around 154: an inscription from Newcastle notes the arrival of reinforcements from the army of both the provinces of Germany (Breeze 1982, 120). On both these occasions, or at some other time during the second century, the prototypes could have been introduced from the Continent, possibly, but not necessarily, from Germany, in view of the cosmopolitan character of the garrisons of the northern frontier. For the terrets to have been seen and copied in North Britain it is easiest, but not necessary, to envisage some fairly major engagement between Roman and Caledonian forces; the expedition of Severus and his sons in 209 into northern territories would be an obvious occasion.

There is no evidence to suggest that Don terrets developed before the end of the second or early third century AD. As we shall see, all the associated objects could belong to this period or later. A possible exception is the so-called vase-headed lynch pin from Cairngryffe (Childe 1941, pl LII, 4). This odd object has, as Macgregor has noted, scored lugs reminiscent of a second/third-century bucket mount from Welshpool (Macgregor 1976, 49; Welshpool find, Boon 1960, pl XV). It might also be noted that the swelling from which the lugs project is reminiscent of a Roman melon bead, a type that became very popular in the second century but which also occurs later (Guido 1978, 100). E T Leeds argued a second/third-century date for the terrets on the grounds that they displayed lead soldering (1933, 122–3).

There is a growing body of evidence that Don terrets had a longer currency than has generally been supposed. Charles Thomas has drawn attention to what appears to be a representation of just such a terret on a Pictish stone from Walton, Fife (1961, pl 22). The Class I Pictish symbol stones are claimed to date from the fifth century, and to represent objects in contemporary use (Laing & Laing 1984), so if this fairly crude representation does in fact represent such a turret, it might indicate the survival of the type.

#### THE LINTON 'B' CEMETERY

More significant is the discovery of a Don terret in the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Linton B, Cambridgeshire. This burial ground was excavated in 1853 by R C Neville, a meticulous excavator for his time. It was found in grave 9, with a key suspended from its central projection: it had been worn at the waist as an ornament (Neville 1854, 97). The associated objects included saucer brooches and other objects indicative of a very late fifth/sixth-century date. The terret has projecting knobs on its hoop, reminiscent of the knobs on the series of 'knobbed terrets' which Macgregor has assigned to the second–third centuries AD (1976, 46).

The Linton B cemetery comprised some 104 graves dug into an earlier barrow, apparently of the Bronze Age. Baldwin Brown dated it to the early sixth century (1915, 87), a view endorsed by Meaney, who, however, sees it starting in the late fifth and not continuing past the end of the sixth (1964, 68). Evison has discussed a Germanic brooch of early type from the cemetery, which she would assign to the earlier fifth century (1965, 74).

It is now generally appreciated that Roman finds in pagan Anglo-Saxon graves are not merely the chance objects picked up by Anglo-Saxon immigrants, but heirlooms belonging to the mixed race Romano-British ancestors of the people buried with their Anglo-Saxon style grave furniture. The Linton B cemetery shows a number of features in keeping with a population with just such a past. While these 'heirlooms' may sometimes be of considerable antiquity, the majority date from the late third and more particularly the fourth-century; nearly all the coins from Linton B, for example, were of fourth-century date.

The likeliest explanation for the Linton terret is that it was an object acquired some time towards the end of the Roman occupation of Britain, in a context which will be considered below.

## THE DINAS EMRYS TERRETS

The Linton terret is not alone in enjoying a post-Roman context. There are two terrets from the Welsh hillfort of Dinas Emrys (Gwynedd), that were discovered a few inches below the turf in the excavations of Breese in 1910, and not reported until after their loss (Breese 1930, 350). From the same excavations, but within a Norman tower, just above natural, came a series of gold-plated studs and a gold-plated bronze bar (*ibid*). The studs were probably the type of tanged studs now familiar from post-Roman contexts in Britain and Ireland, for example from Lagore in Co Meath (Hencken 1950, fig 2) or Dinas Powys, Glamorgan (Alcock 1963, fig 19, 2).

It is the terrets rather than anything else that have led commentators to assume that there was an Iron-Age occupation at Dinas Emrys. At the time of the original excavation, and again at the time of the excavations carried out by H N Savory in 1954–6 the terrets were believed to date from the first century AD (Savory 1960, 16 & 50). But, as we have argued above, the terrets are unlikely to be earlier than the second century, and could be later. It is therefore worth considering the circumstances of their excavation in detail.

The Dinas Emrys terrets were found in the vicinity of the 'Pool', which as Savory has demonstrated (1960, 51–2) was in use in the fifth/sixth century. Savory found some postholes and nondescript pottery which he interpreted as pre-dating the 'Pool' and being therefore Iron-Age: these postholes appear to have been for some kind of platform over the wet hollow (Savory 1960, 34). The 'Iron-Age' pottery came from a lined pit. First-century samian also appears to have been contemporary with the 'pit' and therefore with the 'Iron-Age' pottery. Savory distinguished this 'first-century' phase of occupation from a later fourth/fifth century Roman occupation. This phase pre-dated the construction of the 'Pool' but was associated with late Roman pottery and glass, a smelting furnace and what was probably a circular hut, disturbed by the digging of the 'cistern' (Savory 1960, 39).

In retrospect, it seems more probable that the terrets were associated with Savory's 'late Roman' phase (II) than with the first-century phase. The evidence for occupation in the early phase is extremely meagre: none of the ramparts belongs to this phase, and there is no diagnostic structure. Also, if Savory is correct in his dating, the first century is too early for the terrets. Further, the terrets came from above the lowest level, to which the 'Iron-Age' material seems to have belonged. They are far more likely to be contemporary with Savory's Late Roman phase, or even contemporary with the 'Pool'.

## THE CRICHIE HOARD

The hoard found at Crichtie, Aberdeenshire, is the only one in which a Don terret was associated with more than one object. The hoard came to light in 1867 under a large stone near a hillfort, not far from Inverurie (Chalmers 1867; Callander 1927, 246). The terret was associated with a door-knob spear-butt and a series of 13 bobble-headed shale pins (not 7 as stated by Macgregor 1976, 177; see now Ralston & Inglis 1984, 57), which warrant closer scrutiny here.

The pin heads are closely comparable to an example from Dinas Powys, Glamorgan (which, however, has a bronze rather than the iron shank of the Crichtie pins), and this led Alcock to suggest that Don terrets should be assigned to the fifth century AD (1963, 177, fn 4), a suggestion refuted by Stevenson who pointed out that bobble-headed pins occur at Traprain Law in 'pre-Severan' contexts and on broch sites (1966, 33; 1955, 292–3). The bobble-headed pins from the broch sites are from unstratified contexts, and could belong to post-broch occupation.

Apart from that from Dinas Powys, there is a series of bobble-headed pins from post-Roman contexts. In *Scotland*: two from the Mote of Mark (Curle 1914: one bone with metal shank, and one unpublished, of black glass imitating jet with iron shank), datable to the

fifth–sixth centuries; one from Buston crannog, Ayrshire, datable to the seventh century (Munro 1882, fig 214); a group from Viking contexts at Birsay, Orkney, where they were regarded as residual from the Pictish phase (Curle 1982, 50, nos 259–62, fig 38). In *Ireland* they occur at Lagore (Hencken 1950, fig 21), at Creevykeel and Cush (Laing 1975, 334 & refs). In *England* there is an example from the pagan Saxon cemetery at Chessell Down, Isle of Wight (Arnold 1982, fig 18).

That they were fashionable in post-Roman centuries does not of course exclude earlier usage. The Traprain pins are clearly all of the period to the early years of the fifth century, which is the latest dating now suggested for the site (Close-Brooks 1983). Many problems have yet to be resolved about the chronology of Traprain, and the dating assigned to material from the pre-Cruden excavations must be regarded with caution. On present evidence, however, the Traprain pins appear to be no earlier than the second–third centuries AD (Stevenson 1966, 43).

#### Knobbed spear-butts

Traprain has also produced a mould for a knobbed spear-butt similar to that from Crichtie. This came from Curle's excavations (1920, 89, fig 20), and is assigned to Level 2, which has been variously dated from the second to fourth centuries AD. Another mould for a knobbed spear-butt was found there with coins of the late first and second centuries AD indicative of a second- or third-century date (Cree 1923, 214).

Knobbed spear-butts are common finds in Ireland, but none comes from a datable context. They have recently been studied by Raftery (1982), who has pointed out to us that the association of these with material at the crannog at Lisnacroggher does not necessarily indicate an early date since the crannog had prolonged occupation (pers comm).

There is a mould for a knobbed spear-butt from Little Dunagoil, Bute, a fort usually dated to the first century BC–AD (Macgregor 1976, 85). But it seems unlikely on present evidence that knobbed spear-butts are as early as this, and there is also 'Dark-Age' occupation at Little Dunagoil, indicated by post-Roman pottery (Marshall 1964). Among the moulds from the Mote of Mark is one that may be for a very small spear-butt.

The most useful source of information on spear-butts is a reference in Cassius Dio. Alluding to the Caledonian armies of the third century AD, he says (Bk LXXVII, 12) that the natives were armed with 'a shield and a short spear with a bronze apple attached to the end so that, when it is shaken, it may clash (or rattle) and terrify the enemy'.

As with Don terrets, knobbed spear-butts in Scotland seem to belong initially to the second or third century AD, possibly continuing into later centuries. But how late? A clue is provided by Pictish symbol stones. Charles Thomas has noted that the spears that appear on Class I stones have knobbed butts (1963, 51). A plaque from Bewcastle also shows the native god Cocidius carrying a spear with a knobbed butt (Thomas 1963, 51). It is equally notable that the spears carried by Pictish warriors on Class II stones (which date from the late seventh century onwards) do not have knobbed butts. Clearly, they were obsolete by then.

#### SURVIVAL OF OTHER 'CALEDONIAN' OBJECTS

The argument thus seems strongly to suggest that Don terrets and knobbed spear-butts were probably still in use in the fourth (and possibly even the fifth) centuries AD. It is equally possible that some other categories of 'Caledonian' objects have a longer currency than generally supposed. Massive armllets are one possibility. Charles Thomas has suggested that the double disc symbol of the Picts is meant to represent a massive armllet (1963, 57). While accepting the

identification, Macgregor dismisses it as 'conscious antiquarianism' (1976, 108). If Macgregor's typological sequence for these armlets is correct, the armlet from Stanhope (Peebles) is an early one, yet the associated material belongs to the later second or even third century AD (Macgregor 1976, 109).

When we turn to distribution, some significant facts emerge. The massive armlets are confined to Scotland, with the exception of one from Newry, Co Down (map, Macgregor 1976). Knobbed spear-butts are widely distributed in Ireland, but are comparatively rare in Scotland and, with one possible exception, not represented in England (Raftery 1984, 125). Donside terrets are not represented in Ireland, but have a significant scatter down the eastern part of England, as far as London.

It seems possible, in the light of the above, that the dispersal of these 'Caledonian' object types is connected with the alliance between Picts and Scots in the fourth century. The easterly distribution of Don terrets in England is compatible with the known events of the barbarian alliance of the fourth century. It is quite possible that the Irish hanging-bowl escutcheon from the River Bann should be viewed in this context (for the dating of hanging bowl escutcheons, Longley 1975). To this horizon too may possibly be ascribed the earliest of the hand-pins.

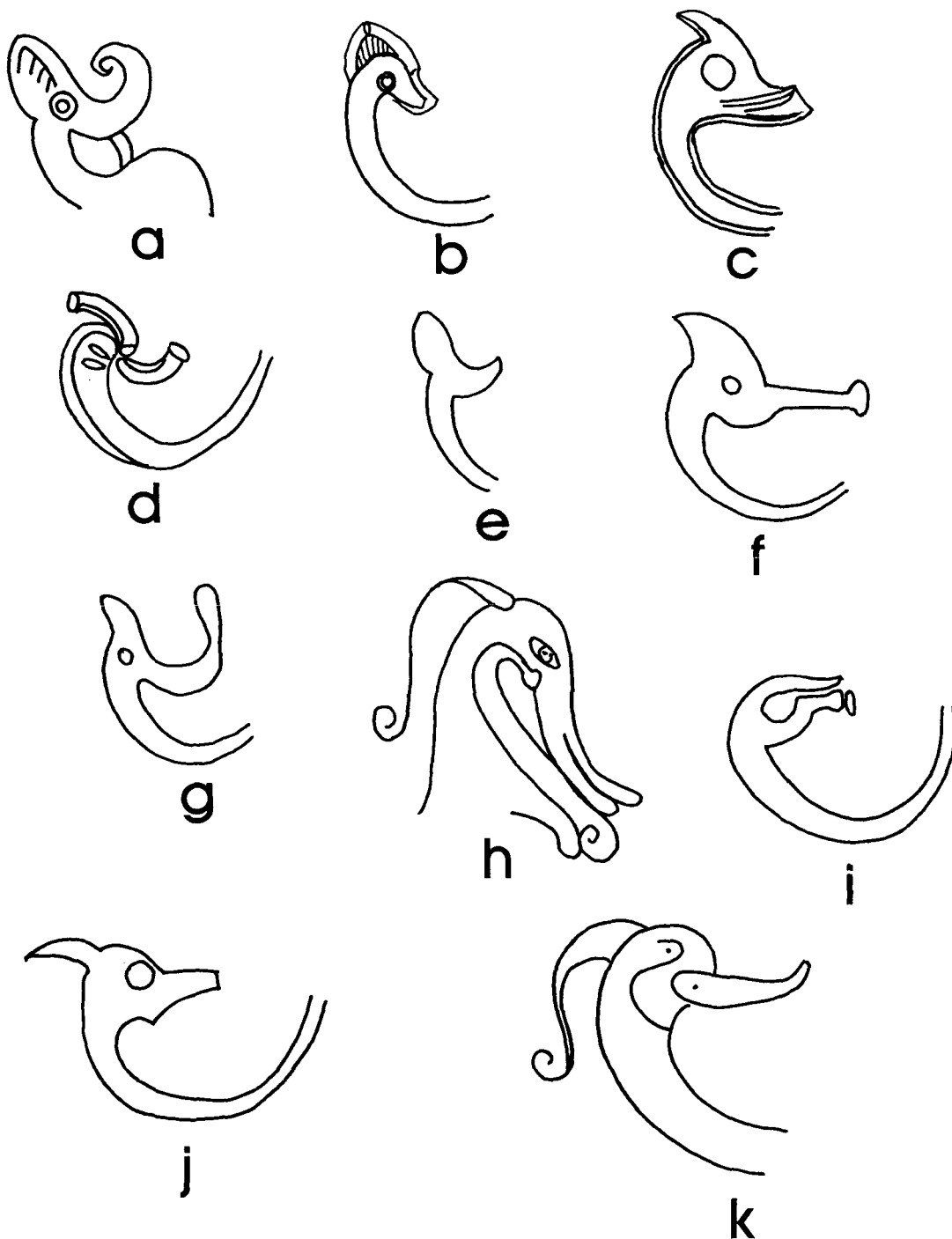
#### LATER LINKS BETWEEN IRELAND AND SCOTLAND

In a recent study Smyth has observed that it is probably misguided to confine discussion of the Picts to the period after which they first appear in the documentary record (in the late third century) (Smyth 1984, 44). The fact is that there is considerable cultural continuity in Northern Scotland in the first four centuries AD, and that the Caledonians and their successors are in fact as much 'Picts' as their named descendants. If this is accepted, the archaeological evidence for Irish-Scottish relations in the first four centuries AD can be seen to shed light on the question of the relationship of Picts and Scots as a whole. Warner (1983) has reviewed the evidence for connections between Scotland and Ireland in the earlier part of the Iron Age. While not disputing Warner's overall conclusions, there are a few additional points that may be made.

The first concerns the dating of certain Irish pieces. The first is the mirror handle from Ballymoney, Co Antrim. This object has been studied by Jope, who linked it stylistically with the Keshcarrigan bowl (1954, 95), and thus dated it to the first century AD. But the confronted beasts on the Ballymoney mirror handle are far removed from the naturalism of the Keshcarrigan duck-handle, and the overall shape of the handle is far removed from that of the Desborough (Northants) mirror with which Jope compared it (1954, 94).

Pictland provides the closest parallels both for the form of the mirror handle and the confronted beasts. The mirror handle is very similar to those represented on certain Class I Pictish stones (eg Thomas 1963, fig 6, 26), while the confronted animal heads with their lentoid ears can be closely matched on a series of swivel rings from Pictland, studied by Stevenson and one of us (Stevenson 1976; Laing 1974). The closest parallel for the Ballymoney beasts in fact is to be found on a swivel ring from A' Chrois, Tiree, and indeed Kilbride-Jones compared them without drawing any conclusions about date or provenance (Kilbride-Jones 1980, fig 33, 3-4).

There are certain similarities too in the Ballymoney beasts and those that form the loops of hanging-bowl escutcheons, for example those from the Tummel Bridge find (Kilbride-Jones 1937). Related to the Ballymoney mirror handle are two others, of bone, from Bac Mhic Connain on North Uist, with angle mouldings like duck-beaks, and from Lochlee crannog, Ayrshire (Macgregor 1976, nos 271 & 272). Warner has pointed out that they are unlike the Iron-Age mirror handles from Britain, but in form recall an Irish scabbard chape (1983, 168). But both



ILLUS 1 The Pictish 'Swimming Elephant' and some of his cousins: a, dragonesque fibula, Cirencester; b-c, the Petrie Crown; d, the Bann Disc; e, bronze ball from Walston, Lanarkshire; f, Latchet, Ireland; g, hand-pin, Ireland; h, Pictish symbol stone; i, Sutton Hoo hanging bowl; j, the River Bann hanging bowl escutcheon; k, the Hunterston Brooch (scales various)

these sites have late occupation; Bac Mhic Connain has produced a Pictish knife-handle, as well as a variety of other finds, none conclusively Dark Age (Beveridge & Callander 1932), while Lochlee has finds of various dates including early Christian, medieval and post-medieval.

Returning to the Ballymoney mirror handle, it belongs with a group of relief-decorated objects from contexts in Ireland and Scotland. These are the 'boss style' objects, of which one of the most characteristic is a silver repoussé disc from the Norrie's Law hoard in Fife (Macgregor 1976, no 349). The date of the deposit of Norrie's Law has been debated extensively, and in a recent study we have suggested that it was deposited in the fifth century but includes some pieces which may be earlier, among them this plate (Laing & Laing 1984). The Norrie's Law plate is probably a Pictish product of the fourth century; its closest relations are a series of bronze discs from Ireland, notably the Monasterevin and unprovenanced British Museum discs. With its trumpet spirals and high relief modelling the BM disc is very close to the Norrie's Law plaque. The function of these discs has been argued, but it seems quite possible that they are in fact versions of Roman military phalerae, perhaps inspired by some prototype seen in the field in Northern Britain (for phalerae, see Maxfield 1981, 91–5).

It is likely that these discs owe their inspiration to the high relief modelling found in Caledonian metalwork of the second and third centuries. They have much in common with the relief work on the massive armlets already discussed, one of which as we have seen reached Ireland.

In the chronological gap perhaps may be fitted two objects with rather more restrained low relief ornament. These are the Bann disc and the Petrie crown (O'Kelly 1961; original publication of the Bann disc, Raftery 1940). The main element of the Bann disc is a triskele pattern, with crested bird's head terminals. This pattern is one which can be seen in later early Christian metalwork, for example on an Irish latchet (Henry 1965, pl 13), or on a series of hanging-bowl escutcheons from Britain. Although the simple triskele occurs in Iron-Age art in the first–second century BC, for example in the Tal-y-Llyn, Merioneth, hoard (Savory 1968, figs 5, 6, 8, 10 & 11), or on the Clevedon torc from Somerset (Savory 1968, fig 12), the triskele of trumpet patterns seems to have developed in the Roman period, through the influence of *trompetenmuster* ornament (Macgregor 1976, 186). The triskele, however, also occurs in Romano-British art: the closest counterparts for the pattern on the Bann disc are a series of disc brooches, notably one from Silchester (Boon 1974, fig 19, 2) and two from St Albans (Wheeler 1936, 217; also Frere 1972, fig 51, 24, where dated to 300–315 AD), the first of which was dated to not earlier than the third century, AD, a date also assigned to one from Colchester (Hull 1958, fig 47, 7), and another from Richborough (Bushe-Fox 1949, pl XLV & 139).

The ornamental arrangement on the Petrie Crown is different, though it is stylistically similar to that on the Bann disc. Here we see the tripartite arrangement that was followed on the British Museum disc, though it shares with the Bann disc the use of crested birds' heads.

A study of these birds' heads on a series of pieces of metalwork is a useful exercise. The ultimate model would seem to be the dragonesque fibulae of the northern part of Roman Britain which were fashionable in the second century AD (Feachem 1951). From here they can be traced in an unbroken line through the Bann disc and Petrie crown to a series of similar creatures on metalwork of the early Christian period in both Ireland and Scotland; the latest versions are to be seen on Pictish sculptures and on the Hunterston brooch.

It is this creature which appears on a cast bronze ball from Walston, Lanarkshire, that was grouped along with the carved stone balls of eastern Scotland by Anderson (1883, 162), who believed them Pictish. Although Atkinson argued that the stone balls were in fact Neolithic, not Pictish (1962 27–8), the distribution is so strongly suggestive of a Pictish origin that the date of

some of them needs to be considered again. What is a 'Neolithic' stone ball doing in the Dark-Age fort of Dunadd, Argyll, for instance (Christison & Anderson 1905, fig 35)?

A similar type of bird head in simpler form appears on the coiled armlet from Ballymahon, Co Meath (Rynne 1964). This object Rynne suggested belonged to the fifth or sixth century AD, on account of similarity of the central dot (or 'eye') on the bird's head to that on other decorated pieces such as various lachets and a bronze button from Garranes. While not disputing his date, we would suggest that the model for the armlet is one of the Scottish 'Caledonian' armlets of 'Culbin' type, eg that from Wester Craiglockhart Hill, Midlothian (Macgregor 1976, no 222).

All this argues for a continuing interplay between Scotland and Ireland throughout the third and fourth centuries AD, with a cross-fertilization of ideas in metalwork. There are other signs of links between Ireland and Scotland in the period in other media. The D-shaped bracelets found on Irish early Christian sites seem to owe a debt to the glass bangles popular in Scotland in the second century (Stevenson 1955), and one of us has suggested elsewhere that millefiori-working in Ireland in the early Christian period may have been influenced by the cable patterns that appear on these bracelets, which need not be confined to the second century but could continue into the third or even fourth.

## PICTS AND SCOTS

There would appear, then, to be evidence for a long history of cultural interplay between Scotland and Ireland, which dates back to before the time of the '*Conspiratio Barbarica*' of 367 AD. If we follow Smyth's suggestion that we should not confine the term 'Picts' to the period after which they first appear in the documentary record, then we are probably correct in thinking of Picts as existing certainly in the third and second centuries AD, in view of the cultural continuity in Northern Scotland from the second to the fourth centuries.

Given this, is it possible to re-assess a number of later assertions about the Picts, that only seem inexplicable in terms of a fourth-century of later date?

### THE PICTS OF IRELAND

In the context of Irish-Scottish relations in the early centuries AD the problem of the Picts of Ireland assumes a new significance. The subject has been briefly touched on in recent years by Kilbride-Jones (1980, 132f) and by Smyth (1984, 59-60). In summary, there are references in Irish sources to *Cruithin* (or *Cruithni*) in Ireland. The word is the same as that used for the Picts in Scotland, and is related to the word for the British, Pritani, which appears in Pytheas as the name for Britain - the Pretanic Isles. Britannia, the Roman name for Britain, is a corruption of this. The name means 'people of shapes or designs' and is taken to be an allusion to the custom of tattooing, which Caesar believed was peculiar to the indigenous natives of the inland regions (ie the non-Belgic population). The Irish before the eighth century clearly believed that the *Cruithin* of Ireland were the same as the Picts of Scotland. Bede relates how the Picts came from Scythia and sought refuge in Ireland, where they were refused land, so settled instead in Scotland. MacNeill pointed out that references to the Irish *Cruithin* cease to be made after 773, when the Scots and Dalriada were at war with the Picts and thus latter were regarded as being inferior peoples (MacNeill 1933, 20). The homeland of the *Cruithin* in Ireland was eastern Ulster, and seven, possibly nine, small kingdoms are recorded for the *Cruithin* as late as 563 (MacNeill 1933, 10). References to them appear in the *Annals of Ulster* from this date until the late eighth century or later, when they are ignored owing to the low esteem in which they were held.

The evidence then implies that there were non-native peoples in Ireland who were regarded



by the Irish as Picts, and that they occupied territories centred on Eastern Ulster, the area directly opposite Scotland. In this context long-standing links between Picts and Scots assume a particular significance, and the material connexions between Scotland and north-east Ireland in the later Iron Age fall into place.

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