Language in Pictland

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the case against 'non-Indo-European Pictish'

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Studia Hameliana 2

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Illustration on cover: Brandsbutt, near Inverurie, Aberdeenshire
                This fractured stone was once part of a prehistoric stone circle. In
                the early Middle Ages it was carved with a pair of Pictish symbols
                (a 'crescent-and-V-rod' above a 'serpent-and-Z-rod') and an ogham
                inscription, which reads IRATADDOARENS[-]

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PERCEPTIONS OF THE PICTS

Things Pictish are currently enjoying a remarkable vogue in Scotland. Books about the Picts sell extremely well, as do jewellery, knitwear, T-shirts, and cards incorporating Pictish designs. The highly active Pictish Arts Society, which has just celebrated its tenth anniversary, boasts several hundred members, sponsors well-attended lectures, conferences, and field-trips, and also publishes a regular Newsletter and Journal.[1] While the Pictish Arts Society might be considered the mainstream of the Pictish 'Revival', there is also a more nebulous fringe, which embraces those who claim to practise pagan Pictish religion,[2] and even one, the self-styled Robbie the Pict, who has declared unilateral independence and stoutly defends his rights in 'Free Pictland'.[3] Pictish irredentists are few and far between, but more mainstream Scottish cultural nationalism incorporates a view of the Picts as proof of the special-ness and separateness of the Pictish/Scottish nation.

The old-style link between language and 'race' lies at the heart of Pictish studies. To earlier scholars, identifying the linguistic affinities of the Picts seemed to guarantee an understanding of their racial affinities, and thus to establish the racial origins of the Scottish nation. We are beginning to appreciate ethnicity as a culturally-con-structed category, in the past as in the present, and to acknowledge that genetics need have little or nothing to do with it, yet it would be foolish to deny the connec-tion between language and other aspects of culture. If the current generation of scholars is tangled up in caveats and qualifications when talking about ethnicity, previous generations have not felt so fettered. Celtic studies have been particularly prone to cavalier statements about language, blood, and racial 'personality', which may now cause us to laugh or wince. Nonetheless, it is surely indisputable that in

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[1] The Society's address is 27 George Square, Edinburgh, EH8 9LD, Scotland. Its most recent and most ambitious project is the publication of E. H. Nicoll (ed.) 1995: *A Pictish Panorama: The Story of the Picts, and, A Pictish Bibliography* (Balgavies, Angus: The Pinkfoot Press).

[2] Most notably, Kaledon Naddair (a.k.a. J. A. Johnston), editor of the magazine *The Pictish Sha-man* (1987-) which 'focuses on the Initiatory Wisdom of the Primal Kelts – the Kruith-ni/Ffichti/Picts', and author of a number of practical manuals on Druidism and 'Keltic Mysteri-ies', including, 1986: *Pictish and Keltic Art Symbolism (The Sacred Hieroglyphs)* (Edinburgh: Keltia).

[3] See various articles in *The Scotsman* newspaper (Edinburgh): 16 January 1988 'Invasion will put Picts back in picture'; 'Pict for the old country'; 'Robbie the Pict fights fine over parking tickets'; *The Herald* (Glasgow): October 1994 'Robbie the Pict finds hole in Scotland's mint'.

Iron Age Europe the speaking of a Celtic language was, to a greater or lesser degree, correlated with specific forms of social organization, cultural expression, and religious practice. In the Medieval period, the little evidence we have suggests that contemporary observers shared our perception of the importance of language in constructing ethnic identity. The seventh-century English historian Bede described the peoples of Britain, not in terms of the political divisions of his day, but in terms of four meta-political linguistic groups – English, Britons, Picts, and Scots.[4] Provided we are not overly rigid in applying it, we can work on the premise that, while language is not the sole criterion for establishing ethnicity, it is one of the key components.[5]

Since the Middle Ages, the historical obscurity of the Picts has left them vulnerable to being pressed into service to promote various national myths and political agendas. As William Ferguson wryly observed, the Picts are 'evidently plastic people who can be moulded into any desired shape'.[6] The key role of the Picts, as inhabitants of Scotland at the curtain rise of Scottish history, has been used to undermine the role of the late-arriving Gael in the making of the nation. In the eighteenth century respected scholars argued, in terms that now seem alarmingly racist, that Pictish was the ancestor of modern Scots (English) and thus that there were civilized Germanic-speakers in Scotland long before the first barbaric Goidel stepped ashore.[7] More subtle, perhaps, was the view that it was from Pictish rather than Old Irish that Scottish Gaelic descended, thus disposing of the supposed embarrassment of a Presbyterian nation founded by immigrant Irish Catholics![8] The briefest glance

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[4] *Historia Ecclesiastica* I.1. B. Colgrave & R. A. B. Mynors (eds) 1969: *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford: Clarendon) 16-17.

[5] For a recent discussion of the role of language in the construction of ethnic identity among the Insular Celts in the Early Medieval period see T. Charles-Edwards 1995: 'Language and Society Among the Insular Celts', in: M. Green (ed.) 1995: *The Celtic World* (London: Routledge) 703-36.

[6] W. Ferguson 1991: 'George Buchanan and the Picts', in: *Scottish Tradition* 16 (1990-1) 18-32, at 21-2.

[7] J. Pinkerton 1789: *An Enquiry into the History of Scotland preceding the reign of Malcolm III* (Edinburgh).

[8] See W. F. Skene 1836: *The Highlanders of Scotland* (2nd edition 1902, London: Stirling, ed. A. MacBain); E. W. B. Nicholson 1904: *Keltic Researches* (London). Not all proponents of the Q-Celtic theory had sectarian motives. It still has its adherents today, see S. McGregor 1994: 'The Abers of Perthshire', in: *Pictish Arts Society Journal* (Spring 1994) 12-19.

at the extant evidence shows both these theories to be unfounded.[9] Only two hypotheses are up for serious discussion – that Pictish was a Celtic language related to Gaulish and Brittonic (i.e. 'P-Celtic'); or that it was a *pre*-Celtic, non-Indo-European tongue, the descendant of the language of the Bronze Age population. The former theory has been favoured by generations of scholars, yet it is the non-Indo-European Picts who continue to capture the popular imagination, the oddity of alleged pre-Indo-European origins providing cherished proof of the uniqueness of the Picts.

It is significant that the Picts have been becoming more non-Indo-European of late. In 1902 John Buchan published a short story in which a young Oxford scholar goes in search of the Picts in a remote and mountainous area of contemporary Scotland. Surprisingly enough he finds them, or rather they find him.[10] Fortunately, the hero's study of Medieval Welsh literature enables him, with a little difficulty, to understand their mutterings, and, with far greater difficulty, to escape. The point here is that at the turn of the century the popular perception was that the Picts spoke a Brittonic language akin to Welsh. Yet, today, current editions of text-books and historical dictionaries give the unanimous impression of a people of obscure and pre-Indo-European origins. Even those works which acknowledge the existence of Celtic Pictish tend to place far greater emphasis on non-Indo-European Pictish, for instance Glanville Price's *The Languages of Britain* (1984), which has the 'Picts' arriving in Scotland before the 'Celts', devotes seven pages to 'Pictish', i.e. non-Indo-European Pictish, and only two and half to 'Celtic Pictish'.[11] On the basis of these, you might be forgiven for thinking that Pictish was scarcely an appropriate topic for a lecture to the Stichting A. G. Van Hamel voor *Keltische* Studies!

As early as 1582, the great Scottish Humanist scholar (and native Gaelic-speaker) George Buchanan declared his belief that the Picts were 'sprung from the Gauls'.[12] Notwithstanding the sometimes feverish popular adherence to the Germanic and Goidelic theories of Pinkerton, Skene and others, Celtic scholars were more or less

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[9] As argued in detail by A. MacBain 1897: 'Mr. Skene versus Dr. Skene', in: *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 21 (1896-7) 191-214; and T. F. O'Rahilly 1946: 'On the Language of the Picts', in: *Early Irish History and Mythology* (reprinted 1984, Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies) 353-84.

[10] J. Buchan 1902: 'No-Man's Land', in: *The Watcher by the Threshold and Other Tales* (Edinburgh: Blackwood).

[11] G. Price 1984: *The Languages of Britain* (London: Edward Arnold), 'Pictish' 20-27, 'Celtic Pictish' 155-7.

[12] Quoted by Ferguson 1991:18.

unwavering in their support of Buchanan's view.[13] Until, that is, 1892, when Sir John Rhŷs put the cat among the pigeons by proposing, on the basis of his study of the inscriptions of Pictland, that Pictish was a non-Indo-European language.[14] His theory was taken up by Zimmer who was more concerned with supposed non-linguistic evidence of non-Indo-Europeanness.[15] F. C. Diack attempted, unsuccessfully, to revive the Q-Celtic hypothesis,[16] but in general the P-Celticists held the day, especially after the publication in 1926 of W. J. Watson's *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* which demonstrated the importance of the Brittonic component in the Scottish onomasticon.[17] Already in 1897 Alexander MacBain had declared the Pictish problem solved – Pictish was clearly a P-Celtic language.[18] Yet the non-Indo-European thesis refused to die. Eóin MacNeill's study of the names in the Pictish King-List led him to identify what he thought was a strong non-Indo-European component in Pictish, though he accepted the presence of Brittonic as far north as the Moray Firth.[19] In the 1940s R. A. S. Macalister joined the ranks of the non-Indo-Europeanists, on the basis of his study of the Pictish inscriptions.[20] But how, you might ask, could such distinguished Celtic scholars as Whitley Stokes,[21]

[13] The case was authoritatively restated at the beginning of the nineteenth century by G. Chalmers 1807-24: *Caledonia* 3 vols. (2nd edition 1887-1902, London: Paisley).

[14] J. Rhŷs 1892: 'The Inscriptions and Language of the Northern Picts', in: *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 26 (1891-2) 263-351. He subsequently revised his conclusions, abandoning attempts to link Pictish with Basque. Although he persisted in his belief in non-Indo-European Pictish, he conceded Brittonic as the dominant Celtic influence (1898): 'A Revised Account of the Inscriptions of the Northern Picts', in: *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 32 (1897-8) 324-98.

[15] H. Zimmer 1898: 'Matriarchy Among the Picts', in: G. Henderson 1898: *Leabhar nan Gleann* (Edinburgh) 1-42 (transl. from the original which appeared in the *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Romanistische Abteilung* 15 (1894) 209-240. I am indebted to Thomas Clancy for a copy of this article.

[16] F. C. Diack 1944: *The Inscriptions of Pictland: An Essay on the Sculptured and Inscribed Stones of the North-East and North of Scotland; with other writings and collections* (Aberdeen: Spalding Club).

[17] W. J. Watson 1926: *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Blackwood).

[18] A. MacBain 1892: 'Ptolemy's Geography of Scotland', in: *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 18 (1891-2) 267-88, at 288.

[19] E. MacNeill 1940: 'The Language of the Picts', in: *Yorkshire Celtic Studies* 2 (1940) 3-45.

[20] R. A. S. Macalister 1940: 'The Inscriptions and Language of the Picts', in: J. Ryan (ed.) 1940: *Féil-Sgríbhinn Eóin Mhic Néill. Essays and Studies Presented to Professor Eóin MacNeill ...* (Dublin) 184-226.

[21] W. Stokes 1890: 'On the linguistic value of the Irish Annals', in: *Transactions of the Philological Society* (1888-90) 365-433 (IV: Pictish Names and other Words 390-418).

John Rhŷs, William Watson, and Eóin MacNeill hold such widely conflicting views? The answer lies, of course, in the extreme difficulty of the evidence, which is slight, disparate, technically challenging, and apparently contradictory. Pictish is indeed a *Trümmersprache*, to use Untermann's term,[22] a fragmentary language of which only the merest remnants survive.

The evidence for a Brittonic aspect to Pictish was undeniably strong, yet there was also material which appeared stubbornly to defy all explanation other than that it was indeed non-Indo-European. Faced with the contradiction, most scholars chose simply to privilege their primary focus of research at the expense of other bodies of evidence. Kenneth Jackson was the first to attempt to engage seriously with *all* the evidence. In 1955 he published his views in a seminal article called simply 'The Pictish Language', one of the most enduring contributions to the epoch-making collection *The Problem of the Picts*.[23] Quite rightly, he concluded that neither side could be dismissed, yet, it seemed, neither could they be easily integrated. Instead, Jackson came to the startling conclusion that there had in fact been TWO, quite separate languages in Pictland: one the language of the pre-Indo-European inhabitants, the other, the Gallo-Brittonic tongue of Iron Age invaders. It was natural that the views of such an eminent and respected scholar should have commanded the greatest respect. Jackson's theory of the 'Two Pictishes' quickly became the orthodoxy, and remains so to this day.[24]

The public's urge to non-Indo-Europeanize the Picts doubtless stems from the desire to make them different, special. If age bestows dignity on a people or nation then the more ancient the ancestral stock, the better. Nations must, however, be careful in the origin myths they choose for themselves, and the myth of the Bronze Age Picts is a double-edged sword. In promoting the exoticness of the Picts one is forced to account for the apparent mystery of their sudden disappearance (since there is nothing particularly exotic about medieval Scotland). By thus labelling the Picts an evolutionary dead-end one justifies the view that the proper history of

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[22] Quoted by D. E. Evans 1993: 'The Identification of Continental Celtic with Special Reference to Hispano-Celtic', in: J. Untermann & F. Villar (eds) 1993: *Lengua y Cultura en la Hispano Prerromana: Actas del V Coloquio Sobre Lenguas Y Culturas Prerromanas de la Península Ibérica (Cologne, 25-28 November 1989)* (Salamanca: Ediciones Universidad) 563-608, at 564.
[23] K. H. Jackson 1955: 'The Pictish Language', in: F. T. Wainwright (ed.) 1955: *The Problem of the Picts* (Edinburgh: Nelson, repr. 1980, Perth: Melven Press) 129-160, Appendix I 161-6.
[24] Most recently restated by D. Ó Corráin 1995: 'Ireland, Scotland and Wales, c.700 to the early eleventh century', in: R. McKitterick (ed.) 1995: *The New Cambridge Medieval History. II. c.700-c.900* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.) 43-63, at 55.

Scotland begins only with the eclipse of the Picts in the mid-ninth century. Thus the Pictish period becomes a historiographic 'false start', and the Picts merely an intriguing prelude to the real story of Scotland.

At the expense of acknowledging the fundamental Celticity of the Picts, the non-Indo-Europeanization of the Picts has encouraged the popular and academic perception of them as uniquely odd and exceptional among all the peoples of north-west Europe, and thus engendered a kind of 'anything goes' attitude to Pictish history. It has encouraged the view that the study of the Pictish language is not only particularly difficult and unrewarding, but also somewhat futile. Thus an important member of the Celtic family has been unjustifiably neglected.[25] Pictish exoticism on the one hand provokes, on the other, an equally unhelpful revisionist back-lash which refuses to acknowledge that the Picts were in *any way* different from their neighbours.[26] Yet the Picts can be different without being non-Indo-European. Scotland has always had a problem deciding how 'Celtic' a country it is, one reason why Scottish nationalism has such a different complexion to Irish or Welsh nationalism. This is not helped by the false equation of 'Celtic' solely with 'Gaelic'. By talking of the Picts as if they were not Celts, Scots exclude an important branch of their common Celtic heritage.

My aim in this study is to argue that there was only one language spoken by the Picts, and that it was a member of the Celtic family, a cousin to the siblings Welsh, Cumbric, Breton, and Cornish.[27] It may seem presumptuous of a historian like my-

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[25] Only two pieces of original work on the nature of the Pictish language have appeared in print since 1955, both brief treatments embedded in larger articles: W. F. H. Nicolaisen 1972: 'P-Celtic Place-Names in Scotland: a reappraisal', in: *Studia Celtica* 7 (1972) 1-11; and J. T. Koch 1983: 'The Loss of Final Syllables and Loss of Declension in Brittonic', in: *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 30 (1983) 201-33 (section on Pictish 214-20).

[26] Alfred Smyth's laudable attempt to re-Celticize the Picts has been much criticized, not always with complete justification. A. P. Smyth 1984: *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000*, The New History of Scotland 1 (London: Edward Arnold).

[27] Several aspects of my argument are anticipated by Smyth's controversial *Warlords and Holy Men* (46-52, 58). Unfortunately his comments on language have been overshadowed by his treatment of other aspects of Pictish history, of which they are quite independent. I cannot agree with the author of the most extended of the book's reviews that Smyth's position on non-Indo-European Pictish is 'extreme and unnecessary' nor that it 'on the whole ... does not convince' (W. D. H. Sellar 1985: 'Warlords, Holy Men and Matrilineal Succession', in: *The Innes Review* 36 (1985) 29-43, at 30). Since Smyth's message seems to have failed to get through I feel it

self to take on one of the greatest Celticists of this century on a topic of Celtic linguistics, yet it will become apparent that I am critical, not of Kenneth Jackson's philology, for which I retain the highest regard, but of the implicit (non-linguistic) assumptions that lie behind how he chose to interpret his data.

KENNETH JACKSON AND THE LANGUAGES OF THE PICTS

Towards the end of his 1955 article, Prof. Jackson made an attempt to link his linguistic conclusions with the archaeological evidence for Scottish prehistory, admitting that his thoughts on the archaeology of the linguistic situation were 'purely speculations', and 'put forward with the greatest reserve' (p.155). A comparison with the archaeological framework outlined by Stuart Piggott in his contribution to *The Problem of the Picts*,[28] shows the extent to which Jackson was influenced by Piggott, who had been Abercromby Professor of Prehistoric Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh for four years by the time Jackson took up his chair of Celtic there in 1950. It is clear enough from Jackson's text that he was heavily indebted to Piggott for his understanding of Iron Age archaeology, but a decade later he explicitly acknowledged his intellectual debt to his 'friend and colleague' in a footnote in his *The Oldest Irish Tradition*.[29]

As Jackson himself said, '[p]re- and proto-historic archaeological studies in Scotland seem to be in a state of flux at present, and the philologist must tread with caution'.[30] It is over forty years since Jackson wrote on the Pictish language, and indeed much has changed. Prehistoric Scotland looks very different in the 1990s to how it did in the 1950s.[31] Perhaps one of the most important advances for our purposes is the radical reappraisal of the brochs. Jackson held the then prevalent view that they were the architectural manifestation of a recent migration of 'broch-builders' from

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necessary to restate the case against non-Indo-European Pictish in greater detail, and to attempt to refute Jackson more comprehensively.

[28] S. Piggot 1955: 'The Archaeological Background', in: F. T. Wainwright 1955:54-65, esp. 64.
[29] K. H. Jackson 1964: *The Oldest Irish Tradition: A Window on the Iron Age*, The Rede Lecture 1964 (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.) 55 n.1.
[30] 1955:155.
[31] See, for instance, W. S. Hanson & E. A. Slater (eds) 1991: *Scottish Archaeology: New Perceptions* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen U.P.).

southern Britain; it is now abundantly clear that they are an indigenous development.[32] Scottish archaeologists are now freeing themselves from the notion of recurrent waves of people sweeping across the country all but submerging older population groups, and are thus able to accord the indigenous inhabitants of Scotland a more active role in linguistic and cultural change. This fundamental shift is part of a more general trend in archaeological theory to down-play the role of invasion and wholesale population replacement in prehistoric cultural change. Archaeologists are still grappling with the complex ethnic equation, though they have long since abandoned the simplistic conflation of language, material culture, and discrete population groups. No longer is the spread of each new art style or technical innovation attributed to the movement of a distinct race of people. The dust has yet to settle on this issue, and lively debates are currently underway concerning, for instance, Indo-Europeanization, and the dispersal of Celtic.[33] We are all too familiar with those maps with heavy arrows showing the spread of different language families across Europe, but the view of hermetic, homogeneous languages moving around like billiards balls on a table is an abuse of the Comparative Method. Recent work on, for instance, language contact and areal linguistics has enhanced socio-linguistic awareness in models of language change, and no longer can migration be assumed as the sole, or even principal, means of language dispersal.[34]

Of course, it would be unfair to criticize Jackson for his adherence to a now superseded model, and both articles must be read as products of their time.[35] Nor would it matter particularly if Jackson's linking of archaeology and philology were merely a tail-piece to his main argument, but it is not, it is the very basis of it. Only after working back through Jackson's argument in detail does it become apparent to which extent his cumulative linguistic argument in favour of non-Indo-European is dependant on an archaeological framework which has long since been abandoned. With this underpinning removed the argument starts to unravel.

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[32] Ian Armit (ed.) 1990: *Beyond the Brochs: Changing Perspectives on the Atlantic Scottish Iron Age* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P.).

[33] See, for instance, C. Renfrew 1987: *Archaeology and Language: The Puzzle of Indo-European Origins* (London: Jonathan Cape); J. P. Mallory 1989: *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology and Myth* (London: Thames & Hudson).

[34] S. G. Thomason & T. Kaufman 1988: *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics* (Los Angeles: University of California Press).

[35] Cf. the interpenetration of archaeological and linguistic arguments in H. M. Chadwick 1949: *Early Scotland: The Picts, the Scots, and the Welsh of Southern Scotland* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.).

ARCHAIC SURVIVALS

It should of course be pointed out that, as Jackson himself noted,[36] the survival of Basque to the present day indicates that there is nothing inherently improbable in the survival of a non-Indo-European language in northern Britain into the ninth century of our era.[37] There are faint traces of non-Indo-European languages surviving untill the final centuries B.C. in the Iberian and Italic peninsulas, in Sardinia, and in the Alpine Region. So, the possibility of non-Indo-European survival in Pictland cannot be dismissed out of hand. But is it likely, and more importantly, is it supported by the evidence?

Archaic features survive in a language because its speakers are marginal, socially or physically, to the dominant culture. Jackson put forward both geographical and social isolation as possible reasons for the survival of non-Indo-European in Scotland. He referred to the Iron Age inhabitants of the Highlands as 'these remote Northern tribes', but this begs the question, remote from whom? Our mental geography is land-based, indeed car-based. Even to modern Scots, the Highlands and Islands of north-west Scotland seem remote and inaccessible. But historians forget at their peril that in earlier times the sea united rather than divided. The islands and deeply indented sea-lochs of Atlantic Scotland are not quite the 'Mediterranean of the North', but we need only look to the successes of the medieval Lordship of the Isles for an indication of the opportunities they offer a people used to moving around by sea. All the more so in the Viking period when the region was very much part of the mainstream. Modern political geography can obscure our view of Scotland's diverse North Sea and Atlantic sea-board contacts and cause us to forget that Continental influence need not come each time across the shortest stretch of water.[38] Behind this particular prejudice lurks the old diffusionist model of Britain filling up with new people and ideas from the bottom each time; the notion that innovations cross the Channel at full steam, but gradually peter out in momentum, reaching the far North only after a considerable time-lag, if at all. Yet if we look at the pattern of trade in the immediately post-Roman centuries we find Atlantic Britain in direct contact with western Gaul via the Irish sea, thence to Visigothic Spain and the Med-

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[36] 1955:152.
[37] R. Collins 1986: *The Basques*, The Peoples of Europe (Oxford: Blackwells).
[38] M. O. H. Carver 1990: 'Pre-Viking traffic in the North Sea', in: S. McGrail (ed.) 1990: *Maritime Celts, Frisians and Saxons* (Council for British Archaeology Research Report 71).

iterranean, at a time when the southern and eastern Britain was more isolated.[39] If we go right back to the third millennium B.C. we see the same region fully partici-pating in a megalith building culture which stretched from Iberia to Scandinavia.[40] The remoteness of northern Scotland in a given period must be proven not as-sumed.[41]

More central to Jackson's argument of the survival of a pre-Celtic language in the North is the notion of social isolation, as is clear from his statements about 'pre-Celtic people forming the great bulk of the population' and that the 'Celtic super-stratum was thin' (his words, p. 153, cf. pp. 154, 157). He envisaged the relation be-tween these two groups as of a Celtic 'aristocracy' or 'upper class' holding down a 'conquered people'. Clearly, what he had in mind was a situation of long-term lin-guistic apartheid. It would be wrong to deny, either that two or more languages can co-exist over a long period in a relatively small area, or that a closed social elite may speak a language quite different from the mass of the population. These excep-tional socio-linguistic situations, however, are possible only in the context of very particular social and economic relations. They are generally the product of a signifi-cant imbalance in technology, military power, or political organization between two groups, and/or manifest physical difference of race, and/or the exploitation of sepa-rate parts of the eco-system (as when nomadic pastoralists dominate a settled far-ming population), or, more recently, the monopolization of resource access by an elite group in a capitalist economy. The model of a thin layer of immigrant elite overlaying an indigenous population over an extended period is not compatible with what we know of settled barbarian social organization, whether Celtic or Germanic.

Here is not the place to discuss theories of language dispersal, or acculturation, but for practical purposes Early Medieval Ireland provides a well-documented dem-onstration of how ethnic replacement occurred in a society which was analogously 'rural, tribal, hierarchical, and familial' to that of the Picts. In Ireland we see domi-

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[39] E. Campbell 1996: 'The archaeological evidence for external contacts: Imports, trade and eco-nomy in Celtic Britain A.D. 400-800', in: K. R. Dark (ed.) 1996: *External Contacts and the Economy of Late Roman and Post-Roman Britain* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell) 89-96.

[40] There is a vast specialist bibliography on the subject, but for a handy map illustrating the point see B. Cunliffe 1979: *The Celtic World: An Illustrated History of the Celtic Race, Their Culture, Customs, and Legends* (New York: McGraw-Hill, repr. 1986, New York: Crown) 12-14.

[41] This relativity is stressed by Ian A. Morrison in his 'Introduction' to P. G. B. McNeill & H. L. MacQueen (eds) 1996: *Atlas of Scottish History to 1707* (Edinburgh: The Scottish Medieval-ists and the Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh), at 1: 'Location is not a geog-raphical constant ... Scotland may look "peripheral" but not everyone has seen it as so'.

nant tribes establishing bridge-heads in new areas and forcing the neighbouring tribes into tribute relationships as *aithech-thúatha*.[42] The increasing economic marginalization of the latter, and the expansion of the former, leads to population replacement over time.[43] In linguistically homogeneous Early Medieval Ireland the result was simply a squeezing out of unsuccessful lineages. In a situation where the dominant groups spoke a different language it is easy to see how the same process would engender linguistic replacement. If the language of the incomers came to be perceived as the language of social advancement, or rather a bulwark against social decline, language shift through bilingualism would cause the rate of acculturation to exceed that of straightforward population replacement.

I will avoid the vexed question of the date of the introduction of Celtic to the British Isles. Even the most extravagant theories acknowledge that the Celts were not the first inhabitants of Scotland, that honour goes to Mesolithic foragers about 7000 B.C.[44] The last pre-Celtic language was doubtless only the most recent of several linguistic layers, but whatever its nature, it is unlikely to have become extinct within a single generation of the arrival of Celtic. We must therefore imagine a period of bilingualism and co-existence, perhaps with some borrowing in both directions. But given our knowledge of barbarian social dynamics, how long is this indigenous language likely to have lingered on in a given area? A couple of generations? A century or two? Scarcely the six hundred years which separate the earliest evidence for Celtic speakers in Britain,[45] from the start of our detailed evidence in the first century A.D., even less plausibly, the millennium which separates the *Massiliote Periplus* from the beginning of the era of the historical Picts. Within exactly the same time-frame the first Celts in Ireland, and in southern and western Britain and Armorica encountered non-Celtic speakers, yet there is absolutely no evidence for the survival into the historic period of separate, pre-Celtic-speaking populations in Ireland, *Dumnonia*, Cumbria or Brittany. Why should we assume less well-documented northern Britain to be any different?

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[42] F. J. Byrne 1973: *Irish Kings and High-Kings* (London: Batsford) 45-6.

[43] I am grateful to Alex Woolf for discussing this process with me.

[44] C. R. Wickham-Jones 1994: *Scotland's First Settlers* (London: Batsford, for Historic Scotland).

[45] J. T. Koch 1986: 'New Thoughts on *Albion, Ierni*, and the 'Pretanic' Isles', in: *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 6 (1986) 1-28; J. T. Koch 1991: 'Ériu, Alba, and Letha: When was a language ancestral to Gaelic first spoken in Ireland?', in: *Emania: Bulletin of the Navan Research Group* 9 (1986) 17-27; plus other contributions to *Emania* 9 (Focus on the Origins of the Irish).

PICTISH versus PRITENIC

Having considered the historiographical background in some detail, we come at last to the evidence. This, we find, falls neatly into two periods, either side of the twin horizons of Christianity and indigenous literacy. It is vitally important to keep the diachronic axis firmly in mind. Failure to distinguish sufficiently between the Roman and the Medieval periods results in the overly synchronic view which has lead to much obfuscation in Pictish Studies.[46] The fault-lines of apocope, syncope, and the myriad phonological and other changes which mark the inception of the Neo-Celtic languages are no less central to the history of Pictish, than to any other Celtic language.[47] Following Jackson[48] it seems logical to reserve the label 'Pictish' for the Neo-Celtic language of Early Medieval northern Britain, and term the earlier language 'Pritenic'.[49] Thus 'Pictish' is to 'Pritenic' as 'Welsh' is to 'British' (as spoken in Wales), and all are subsumed by 'Brittonic'. We have no difficulty in avoiding anachronism by maintaining a terminological distinction between the 'Welsh' of the Middle Ages and their Roman-period ancestors in the same area, the 'British', which in no way obscures the direct genetic, linguistic, and cultural continuity between the two. In this sense 'Welsh' is simply a chronological label, a discrete period in the ongoing ethnic development of the region. A non-Celtic example of a similar distinction is the use by Swedish scholars of the labels Vendel, Viking, and Norse, to refer to successive periods in the history of a single Scandinavian people. Anna Ritchie has argued sensibly in favour of emphasizing the chronological rather

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[46] One brief, non-linguistic, example is the way in which Classical references to body painting and tattooing by the occupants of northern Britain (which may or may not have had some historical veracity in the first century) are invoked in discussions of the Christian art of their descendants 600 or more years later – an aspersion which the cross-slab patrons would undoubtedly have found somewhat offensive!

[47] J. T. Koch has labelled this the 'central seismic fracture running through the middle of Celtic studies' ('The Conversion and the Transition from Primitive to Old Irish *c*.367–*c*.637', in: *Emania* 13 (1995) 39-50, at 39).

[48] 1955:160.

[49] Attempts by Koch (1983:214) and others to reserve 'Pritenic' for what Jackson refers to as 'Gallo-Brittonic Pictish' and other writers as 'Celtic Pictish', leaving 'Pictish' for 'non-Indo-European Pictish', have not caught on. I am arguing that this is, in any case, a spurious distinction, that there *is* only 'Celtic Pictish', and thus 'Pritenic' is available as a label best applied to the earlier period of that language.

than ethnic connotations of the term 'Pictish'.[50] Thus the question which has dogged Pictish studies – 'Who were the Picts and where did they come from?' – is seen to be a non-question. As it is in western Britain, so it is in the North. The Picts, like the Welsh, were not a people who came from anywhere, but, rather, a home-grown development, the sum total of all previous migrations, to which, at a certain time, it becomes appropriate to apply the label 'Pictish'.

There has been a great deal of discussion over when the proto-Picts become recognizably Picts proper.[51] The debate hinges on the interpretation of the uses of the word *Picti* by Roman authors and by later Christian writers (Gildas, Bede, et al.) and the sense which modern scholars are to make of these. The upper limit of the term is the late ninth century, when a Gaelic dynasty secured hegemony over former Pictland. Progressive Gaelicization had already been underway for several centuries by then, so that by the twelfth century assimilation was complete and all trace of Pictish had disappeared.[52] Provided we remember that it is merely a heuristic device I think it useful to distinguish between the Pictish-speaking Picts of the early Middle Ages, and the Pritenic-speaking proto-Picts of the Iron Age, without prejudice to what Romans meant by the word *Picti*. This usage has a number of advantages, most notably for present purposes, that the term 'Pritenic' reflects the fact that the inhabitants of north Britain shared a common origin with the Britons further south, but had begun to diverge from them already by the time of our earliest sources. This is exactly parallelled in the relationship between the native Welsh term for the Picts, *Prydyn*, and for the island as a whole, *Prydein*.[53]

So, we begin with the evidence for Pritenic – the ancestor of Pictish.

[50] A. Ritchie 1994: *Perceptions of the Picts: From Eumenius to John Buchan*, Groam House Lecture 4 (Rosemarkie: Groam House Museum).
[51] F. T. Wainwright 1955a: 'The Picts and the Problem', in: F.T. Wainwright 1955:1-53; M. O. Anderson 1987: 'Picts – the Name and the People', in: A. Small (ed.) 1987: *The Picts: A New Look at Old Problems* (Dundee: Graham Hunter Foundation) 5-14; A. Smyth 1984:43-46.
[52] At this time, Henry of Huntingdon notes that of all the peoples of Britain mentioned by Bede, only the Picts have disappeared; see T. Arnold (ed.) 1870: *Henrici Archidiaconi Huntendunensis Historia Anglorum,* Rolls Series 74 (London) 12-13.
[53] On Welsh and Irish terms for Picts and Pictland, see K. H. Jackson 1954: 'Two Early Scottish Names', in: *Scottish Historical Review* 33 (1954) 14-18.

THE EVIDENCE FOR PRITENIC

The evidence for Pritenic is entirely onomastic, consisting of place-, ethnic- and personal-names recorded in Greek and Latin accounts of northern Britain.[54] We can but guess at how the Romans gleaned this information, or how comprehensive or reliable it is. The main army spent only the briefest time north of the Mounth, as is reflected in the lack of place-names recorded in the territories of the northern and western tribes. Agricola's fleet circumnavigated the island and picked up a certain amount of information on coastal features.[55] Unfortunately, the most important of the extant texts, the *Geography* of Ptolemy of Alexandria, is one of those with the most tortuous transmission. Native names first written down in Roman military documents are transmitted at second- or third-hand through intervening Latin sources to reach our extant text, written in Greek in the early second century A.D., and preserved in manuscripts no earlier than the eleventh. There is considerable doubt over the reading of certain names, and extreme caution must be exercised when dealing with uncorroborated forms. Other sources, such as the *Agricola* of Tacitus or the *History* of Cassius Dio, have a more direct transmission, and thus preserve more reliable forms, yet their authors were little concerned with toponymy and mention only a handful of names.

For what it is worth, it is clear that Classical authors thought in terms of the essential linguistic and cultural unity of tribes of all the island of Britain. Tacitus refers to the tribes of the North as *Britanni* and says that, apart from their red hair and long limbs, they were the same as the inhabitants further south.[56] Whether or not the inhabitants of Caledonia thought of themselves as fundamentally different from those further south we do not know. Since our concern is the ancestors of the Picts it is quite proper that we restrict our study to the area that would eventually become Pictland. Straight-away we face a difficulty – what about the area north of the Clyde

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[54] A general survey of the topic, including full bibliographic details of the primary sources, is contained in A. L. F. Rivet & C. Smith 1979: *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London: Batsford).

[55] Although Ptolemy's knowledge of Irish geography suggests that not all onomastic information was derived from military sources; Tacitus (*Agricola* 24) comments that the harbours and approaches of Ireland were known to merchants.

[56] *Agricola* 11, which he takes as an indication of 'German' origin. Are we to take such statements any more seriously than modern stereotypes of 'Sandy the (red-haired) Scotsman'?

which was settled by Gaelic incomers before the period of the historical Picts? It would be anachronistic to claim this territory as somehow 'Pictish', but the little evidence we have suggests it was no less Pritenic than the area further east.

If we look first at Ptolemy's *Geography*, starting in the west at the mouth of the Clyde, heading northwards and following the coast all the way round to the Forth in the east, including all the off-shore islands along this route and all the peoples and places named in the hinterland, we arrive at a total of 49 names. Excluding the derivative names, such as promontories named for the neighbouring tribe, these comprise 41 separate name forms – seven islands, twelve tribes, three towns, and nineteen coastal features (estuaries and promontories). Jackson excluded the Forth and Clyde themselves, which is scarcely important, but also the tribal name of *Epidii*, which is more problematic. It is true that we have no way of proving that the pre-Gaelic inhabitants of Argyll were Pritenic rather than British, or indeed, if there was felt to be any appreciable difference in the first century. Technically, Kintyre is south of the Forth-Clyde line, but in the first century as in the twentieth, Argyll was part of the Highlands and it is clear from the order in which Ptolemy lists the names that he thought of the *Epidii* as one of the northern tribes. Jackson's tally of 38 names included a mere 16 names which in his view were 'clearly or probably Celtic' (42%), leaving 22 (58%) 'not certainly Celtic at all'. At first glance this is indeed a striking statistic but closer inspection reveals a rather different picture.

Jackson acknowledged that different categories of names carry different evidential weight – thus the names of towns and tribes are more telling than river-names, which, as is widely known, are generally among the most conservative elements of the toponymy. It is essential therefore to divide Ptolemy's names into two groups – those relating to social phenomena (settlements and tribes), and those referring to natural features (rivers, islands, promontories, etc.). To take the human geography first. There are six 'towns' named north of the Forth-Clyde: Rivet and Smith stress that all the *poleis* named by Ptolemy are Roman settlements or camps. There is, they maintain, not a single example of his naming a native settlement in the whole of Britain.[57] It is therefore far from surprising that two of our examples have Latin names (one in Greek translation), these have no bearing on the question of Pritenic language and can be eliminated from further discussion. Throughout Britain it was common practice for the Romans to apply to their settlements the native names of prominent natural features nearby. The remaining northern examples take this form.

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[57] 1979:116. But what, in that case, of the nine *poleis* named by Ptolemy in Ireland?

Three are names for rivers (*Devana*, *Tuesis* and *Tameia*), and therefore have no additional linguistic value. Only a single name is independent – *Bannatia*, a fort in Perthshire. The name is of Brittonic form, a common place-name element meaning 'horn', 'spur', 'promontory of rock', which is found in a number of places elsewhere in Britain, and also on the Continent.[58] So our first piece of evidence ties us firmly to the rest of the Celtic-speaking world.

The pattern is repeated when we turn to the dozen ethnic names of the north.[59] Two of these – *Cornavii*, *Decantae* – are also attested further south (either a parallel linguistic formation, or an actual splinter group of the same people). In addition to these unambiguously Celtic names, Jackson was prepared to admit, the *Carnonacae*, *Lugi*, and *Smertae*. We would add the *Epidii* to give a total of six demonstrably Celtic tribal names, two of which are diagnostically Brittonic. This leaves a further six – the *Creones*, *Caereni*, *Caledonii*, *Vacomagi*, *Venicones*, *Taexali* – which Jackson would count as 'not certainly Celtic at all'.

Jackson's reservations as to the Celticity of certain names are not to be taken lightly, yet his grounds for objection are not always apparent. His 1955 article was not the appropriate forum for a detailed discussion, and it is to our great regret that he offered no explanation, there or elsewhere, for his reluctance to count these names as Celtic. Why did he reject the otherwise universally accepted interpretation of the *Caereni* as 'sheep people'? It is not easy to understand Jackson's reservations about the Celticity of the *Caledonii* whose name has been traced to the root **kalet* 'hard', parallelled in the *Ancalites*, a tribe of south-east Britain, the *Caleti* of Gaul, and in a range of personal names. In his article he dismisses the *Taezali*, or *Taexali*, without further discussion, yet in his *Language and History in Early Britain* (1953) he had suggested that a slight textual emendation would enable a 'satisfactory derivation', though, to our exasperation, without explaining what such a derivation would be![60] Other scholars have linked the tribal name with the Gaulish divine name *Taxis*.[61]

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[58] In, for instance, Austria, France and Spain, according to Rivet & Smith 1979:262.

[59] For a convenient summary of the argument for each name see the relevant entry in Rivet & Smith's alphabetical list. Their discussion of Celtic linguistics should not, however, be accepted uncritically in every case.

[60] 536 n.2.

[61] For other possible instances of **Taxis*, see A. Holder 1891-1913: *Alt-celtischer Sprachschatz*, 3 vols. (Leipzig: Teubner) II.1778. For a more sceptical view, see D. E. Evans 1967: *Gaulish Personal-Names: A Study of Some Continental Formations* (Oxford: Clarendon) 116-7.

The confidence with which Jackson dismissed the Celticity of problematic names is in marked contrast to the admirable caution displayed by scholars of Continental Celtic. Prof. Evans reminds us that '[t]he handling of names in general, not least the reliable and worthwhile recognition of their Celticity in so very many cases, is exceedingly hazardous'.[62] When the language is as imperfectly attested as Pictish/Pritenic, the textual transmission of the forms so doubtful, and the names in many cases attested only once, we should not be too rash in attributing our failure to explain them solely to their being non-Celtic.[63] No conclusive explanation has been produced for the *Vacomagi*, yet the first element appears in ethnic and personal names on the Continent: *Bello-vaci*, *Are-vaci*, *Vaccaei*,[64] and the second element is parallelled in *Vehomagi*. Exactly what these names might mean is not clear, yet they are Celtic in formation. The same is true of the *Creones*. Their name contains the *-on-es* suffix known from so many Celtic ethnonyms, though the meaning of the root is unclear.

If we are wavering in accepting the Celticity of these problematic tribal names, it is surely of the greatest significance that the river *Deva* ran through the territory of the *Taezali*. If Celtic-speakers were sufficiently established in the region to have named the major river, this should give us pause before dismissing a Celtic explanation for the local tribal name. Likewise with the river *Tama* and the place-name *Bannatia* in the territory of the *Vacomagi*. Rivet and Smith express their 'near-total confidence in [the] general excellence' of Jackson's etymologies and opinions.[65] While it may be true that 'he is hardly ever open to challenge', nonetheless Prof. Jackson was not infallible. He rejected the *Venicones* as 'non-Celtic', yet his confidence has proved to be misplaced. Koch has convincingly demonstrated that *Venicones* is the ethnic name behind the *Maen Gwyngwn* of the Gododdin, and is to be explained as the utterly Celtic 'kindred hounds'.[66]

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[62] Evans 1993:568.

[63] For the handling of similar problems in Iberia, see J.-L.García Alonso 1992: 'On the Celticity of some Hispanic Place-Names', in: *Études Celtiques* 29 (Actes du IXe Congrès international d'études celtiques, Paris, 7-12 juillet 1991), Deuxième Partie: Linguistique, Littératures, 191-202.

[64] Evans 1967:475-76.

[65] 1979:8.

[66] J. T. Koch 1982: 'The Stone of the *Wenicones*', in: *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 29 (1982) 87-9.

Notwithstanding the difficulties mentioned, the general impression gained from the nomenclature of the human geography of northern Britain is: so far, so Celtic. However, the picture changes slightly when we turn to look at natural features. It cannot be disputed that some of the names of rivers and islands are indeed best interpreted as pre-Celtic or even pre-Indo-European. What is at issue, is the implications of this fact. Jackson was mistaken in his assertion that the survival of pre-Celtic names meant the survival of a pre-Celtic language, much less of a distinct pre-Celtic population.[67] Place-names are the cultural items most likely to be borrowed by an incoming people. It is an axiom of place-name studies that the names of rivers are 'often very ancient and survive well'.[68] The persistence of Celtic river-names in Anglo-Saxon England demonstrates that old names can withstand invasions, and the not inconsiderable number of rivers, states, and towns in the United States bearing Native American (Indian) names shows that, in certain circumstances, indigenous names can survive even genocide. Such survivals are highly revealing as to the nature of the native/incomer interface, and about the processes by which names are fixed and transmitted. They need not, however, imply anything about the survival of the *spoken language*. It is important to distinguish between onomasticon and language proper (in the case of Pritenic the evidence is solely for the former), and thus between substrate influence on spoken language and the continued use of old names.

Just like the ethnonyms, the Ptolemaic river names are affected by problems of corrupt readings and disputed interpretation. There are, however, a handful which W. F. H. Nicolaisen has identified with reasonable certainty as having roots in Old European (*Alt-europäisch*), that is a pre-Celtic Indo-European language or languages.[69] Before we get carried away by these pre-Celtic survivals, we should note that Old European roots lie behind a number of rivers, not only in southern and western Britain, but also throughout the Continent. The survival of pre-Celtic river-names in Scotland would be significant only if it could be demonstrated that the proportion is

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[67] Jackson appears to undermine his own argument that 'a people still speaking a pre-Celtic language survived late in Pictland' (1955:153) when he suggests that non-Indo-European place-names might be going unrecognized in modern Scotland just as they do elsewhere in Britain (1955:154). Surely he does not mean by this that non-Indo-European-speakers survived late in England?

[68] Rivet & Smith 1979:271.

[69] Including the river *Varar* > Farrar; cf. various modern river names: e.g. the Adders and Carts, possibly the Ness, the Shiel and the Shin. See W. F. H. Nicolaisen 1976: *Scottish Place-Names* (London: Batsford) 173-91.

markedly higher here than further south. This has yet to be done. Perhaps more telling than the survival of Old European names, is the fact that most rivers, including several major ones, have clearly Celtic names – *Clota* (Clyde), *Deva* (Dee), *Tava* (Tay).

More remarkable than the survival of pre-Celtic river-names is the 'awesome antiquity' of the names of many Scottish islands.[70] Nicolaisen states that '[p]ractically all the major islands in the Northern and Western Isles have ancient names, so ancient and so linguistically and lexically opaque that we do not have any plausible referents for them elsewhere; they are linguistic fossils, perhaps three thousand years old or older'.[71] He lists: Arran, Islay, Tiree, Mull, Rum, Uist, Lewis, Unst, Yell, and the Hebrides (Ptolemy's *Ebudae*). These names, 'a faint echo from linguistic prehistory',[72] are of the greatest interest, but, as I have explained, the survival of the name does not necessarily imply the survival of the original speech community. Again, it is more significant that the major archipelago, the Orkneys, have a clearly Celtic name, as does Ptolemy's prominent north-westerly island *Dumna*.

I have argued that, in the past, undue stress has been placed on the pre-Celtic names of Scotland. Yet to go too far in the opposite direction, and suppress them, in order to avoid the excesses of Pictomania, would be equally wrong. We must acknowledge the presence of pre-Celtic, or even pre-Indo-European material, but to deal with it properly we must have a clear idea of what it actually signifies. With the introspection typical of Pictish studies, pre-Celtic survivals have been seized upon as proof of the exceptional nature of Pictish.[73] In fact, a broader perspective reveals that pre-Indo-European substrate influences are to be found in most, if not all, European languages. Eric Hamp's work on words for 'pig' has shown a number to be just such survivals.[74] Similarly Polomé has identified as ultimately pre-Indo-European

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[70] W. F. H. Nicolaisen 1992: 'Arran Place Names: A Fresh Look', in: *Northern Studies: The Journal of the Scottish Society for Northern Studies* 28 (1992) 1-13, at 3.

[71] 1992:2-3.

[72] 1992:3.

[73] In contrast, the pre-Celtic place-names of France are dealt with very matter of factly by E. Nègre 1990: *Toponymie Générale de la France, Volume Ier: Formations préceltiques, celtiques, romanes*, Publications Romanes et Françaises CXCIII (Geneva: Librairie Droz). He lists several hundred examples (Première Partie – Formations préceltiques, 19-100, §§1004-1769).

[74] E. Hamp 1987: 'The Pig in Ancient Northern Europe', in: S.N. Skomal & E.C. Polomé (eds) 1987: *Proto-Indo-European: The Archaeology of a Linguistic Problem (Studies in Honor of Marija Gimbutas)* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for the Study of Man) 185-90.

several plant, animal, and animal-product terms in Germanic, Baltic and Slavic.[75] The probable substrate origin of words for 'apple' and 'snake' in many European languages,[76] including English, shows that, while substrate survivals are rare, remarkable, and very difficult to prove, they are not essentially peculiar. So the interesting question is not whether Pritenic exhibited substrate influence, but rather, was the pre-Celtic layer of the palimpsest more prominent here than elsewhere in Europe?

Jackson made much of the distribution of allegedly pre-Celtic place- and ethnic-names, but the number of names in each onomastic category is so small that meaningful statistical analysis is impossible.[77] Nor can we restrict quantitative analysis of Pritenic place-names, as Jackson did, solely to those which happened to be recorded by Ptolemy. There are a number of names preserved only in other classical sources (of course, the vast majority will not have been preserved at all). Jackson's discussion of the various groups of ancient and modern place-names fails to convince, not least because he appears to resort to special pleading (that the incoming Celts should adopt the indigenous pre-Celtic language in some areas but not others), and seems at times to undermine, or even contradict his own argument (pp.156-8). His discussion of modern place-names verges on the tendentious, most notoriously in his distribution map of 'certain P-Celtic place-name elements ... *north of the Antonine Wall*' (my italics).[78]

Jackson's interpretation of the significance of the Pritenic place-names appears to have been shaped by his understanding of the distribution of the *pit-* place-names. Speaking of the latter, he stated it to be 'beyond reasonable doubt that they were all given by one single population speaking some sort of P-Celtic language, which inhabited eastern Scotland from the Forth to around the Dornoch Firth, and occupied much more thinly parts of the western mainland'.[79] This explanation has been refuted by Simon Taylor who has argued convincingly that most *pett* (Pit-) names

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[75] E. C. Polomé 1986: 'The Non-Indo-European Component of the Germanic Lexicon', in: A. Etter (ed.) 1986: *o-o-pe-ro-si: Festschrift Ernst Risch zum 75. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter) 661-72.

[76] E. Hamp 1979: 'The North-European Word for 'apple'', in: *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 37 (1979) 158-66.

[77] Which is why I do not give revised percentages of 'clearly Celtic' and 'not clearly Celtic' names.

[78] See Nicolaisen's criticism 1972:6.

[79] 1955:149.

date from the post-Pictish period, and that the word was borrowed as a place-name element by Gaels when they settled in former Pictland, doubtless along with aspects of the administration system which it reflects.[80] He has neatly demonstrated that '*pett* was functioning as an appellative or common noun right up to the end of the Gaelic-speaking period' and that the distribution of *pit-* place-names reflects, not the extent of Pictland at any period, but rather the shape of the Gaelic kingdom of *Alba* immediately before its expansion south of the Forth.[81]

Nor should we be misled by the effect of subsequent history or chance survival on the preservation of names to the present day.[82] The relative rarity of Brittonic names in the North and West is not, as Jackson maintained, because there the 'Celtic superstratum' was thin, but rather, reflects the fact that later Gaelic and Norse settlement, bringing, not only different languages, but different systems of land-tenure and place-naming, all but smothered the earlier place-names. The lack of Brittonic names would be significant only if one could point to the survival of a body of pre-ninth century non-Celtic names in their stead. One cannot. Orkney lacks Celtic names, not because it was sparsely endowed with them to begin with, but because it lacks almost *any* pre-ninth century names; these were abandoned or rendered obsolete after the arrival of the Norse. All we have is the name of the archipelago itself to show that the pre-Norse inhabitants were Celtic-speakers. The same conclusion must be drawn from the smattering of modern pre-Gaelic Celtic place-names in the North and West (e.g. the Brittonic Applecross, opposite Skye[83]), and of other Ptolemaic names in the region, such as *Cornavii*, *Smertae*, and *Dumna*. These show Celtic-speakers settled throughout Scotland, from Kintyre to Orkney, including Easter and Wester Ross and the Outer Hebrides.

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[80] S. Taylor 1995: *Settlement Names in Fife* (unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Edinburgh). Nicolaisen has recently revised his earlier opinion that they were products of a period of Pictish-Gaelic bilingualism in the ninth and tenth centuries (1972:3-5). His current position now seems in broad agreement with Taylor's, see W. F. H. Nicolaisen 1997: 'On Pictish rivers and their confluences', in: D. Henry (ed.) 1997: *The Worm, the Germ and the Thorn. Pictish and related studies presented to Isabel Henderson* (Balgavies, Forfar: Pinkfoot Press) 113-8, at 113.
[81] S. Taylor 1994: 'Some Early Scottish Place-Names and Queen Margaret', in: *Scottish Language* 13 (1994) 1-17, at 3.
[82] Before basing any claims on the distribution of inscriptions (as Jackson does 1955:157) one must first eliminate other factors such as differential levels of archaeological activity, agricultural improvement, and antiquarian interest, not to mention local geology and continuity of settlement and church sites. All the Orkney oghams were recovered during archaeological excavation, none of the Mainland ones were.
[83] < *Apor-crossan*, Watson 1926:78.

Rather than focus merely on doubtful negative evidence, it is more worthwhile to concentrate on the positive evidence for the Celtic nature of Pritenic. Rivet and Smith have remarked on the essential unity of the place-names throughout Britain in the Roman period.[84] We have the same roots and the same formations recurring north and south, sometimes even the same names (*Ituna, Alauna, Dumnonii*), a cohesion which extends to the Celtic-speaking areas of the Continent too. To the extent that the names of the North reflect cultural practice, we glimpse recognizably Celtic ideology (the place *Medionemetum*[85]); possible reflexes of divine names (*Lugi*); personal names reflecting Celtic ideals or myths (*Calgacus, Argentocoxos*).

Rivet and Smyth claim that the names of the North present more difficulties than those further south.[86] One wonders to what extent this has become a self-fulfilling prophesy. Because we are primed to expect the North to be exceptional, we attribute all apparent difficulties to non-Indo-European survivals. Similar difficulties further south are just, well, difficulties. No particular significance is attached to the fact that *Verulamium*, the Roman name for the southern English town of St Albans, though very well documented, has defied explanation.[87] Yet, for whatever reason, there is a general reluctance to give the Picts the benefit of the doubt, despite the greater textual uncertainty over many northern names. It should give us pause that, in general, the better the transmission of Pritenic names and the more concrete the referent, the more unambiguously Celtic the evidence – all three extant Pritenic personal names are clearly Celtic.

At this point, I'd like to take stock very briefly. I began by contending that Jackson's argument was based on a now abandoned archaeological framework and that his model of a Celtic superstratum holding down a large pre-Celtic population was unacceptable. I went on to identify three main problems with Jackson's handling of the data: his misinterpretation of the significance of pre-Celtic survivals; his confidence in dismissing doubtful forms as 'not Celtic'; his failure to take into account the widespread geographical distribution of Celtic names. Re-examining the evidence in the light of these, I am led to conclude that, contrary to Jackson's argu-

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[84] 1979:11.
[85] 'Middle *nemeton* (sacred grove)', cf. the numerous modern place-names in former Pictland incorporating the element *nemeton*, Watson 1926:246-8.
[86] 1979:11.
[87] Rivet & Smith 1979:20, 497-9.

ment, there was only one language spoken in northern Britain during the Roman pe-
riod, the Brittonic language Pritenic. While there is indeed evidence of place-names
surviving from earlier linguistic strata it has yet to be demonstrated that these sur-
vivals are more significant north of the Forth-Clyde line than south of it, and in any
case, for present purposes they are of minor importance in a total picture which is
overwhelmingly Celtic.

My aim in this has been to dispose of the theory of a second 'non-Indo-European
Pritenic' language. I will not be discussing the dialect position of Pritenic, since this
has been amply treated in print by Prof. Jackson himself, and more recently by Prof.
Koch.[88] Their conclusions are that, though it was still only a dialectal cleavage at
this point, the split from British had begun already by the first century A.D., perhaps
slightly earlier. It is not clear when the two became mutually unintelligible, if at all,
though by the early eighth century Bede thought of Pictish and British as separate
languages.[89] Three-and-a-half centuries beyond the Imperial frontier doubtless ac-
celerated the divergent development of what was to become Pictish. Personally, I
feel that the relationship between Pritenic and Gaulish has been overplayed, and that
the apparent connections are more a reflection of the similar date of attestation of
the two languages as against the much later neo-Celtic languages, but this is some-
thing for the linguists to sort out. While attention will always focus on the ways in
which Pritenic diverges from other Brittonic languages, we must keep in mind that
they are united by far more than divides them.

I have dealt with the evidence for Pritenic at length because it is the keystone of
Jackson's argument for two Pictishes. With only one Pritenic, his case is fatally
weakened. The survival of a non-Indo-European language in northern Britain into
the medieval period becomes even more far-fetched when it is seen that it is not sup-
ported by the evidence of the intervening centuries.

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[88] Jackson 1955:156-7, *et passim*; Koch 1983:214-7.
[89] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* I.1; Colgrave & Mynors 1969:16-17.

THE EVIDENCE FOR PICTISH

Turning now to look at Pictish proper, the language of the historical Picts, the evidence comprises five categories. Least problematically we have place- and personal names in contemporary and near contemporary sources from outside Pictland[90] – most notably, Adomnán's *Life of Columba*,[91] Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*,[92] the Irish annals,[93] scattered references in Irish and Welsh literature,[94] and miscellaneous Anglo-Saxon sources,[95] such as the Durham *Liber Vitae*.[96] More problematic is the contemporary evidence from inside Pictland – the inscriptions,[97] and the personal names in the sole Pictish text, the King-List.[98] In addition we have the modern place-names of former Pictland. As discussed above, some of these are genuine survivals from the Pictish period, but most are Gaelic coinings of the post-Pictish period using Pictish elements borrowed into Scottish Gaelic as loan-words.[99] In addition to the Pictish traces in the onomasticon, there is Pictish substrate influence on the Gaelic language. Study of this final category of material has scarcely begun.[100]

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[90] The principal sources are presented in translation by A. O. Anderson 1922: *Early Sources of Scottish History A.D. 500-1286*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, repr. 1990 Stamford: Paul Watkins).

[91] A. O. Anderson & M. O. Anderson (ed. and transl.) 1991: *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, Oxford Medieval Texts (Oxford: Clarendon, repr. of London e.a.: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1961).

[92] B. Colgrave & R. A. B. Mynors 1969.

[93] W. Stokes 1890.

[94] These have yet to be collected. For Cormac's Glossary, which contains a lone Pictish word, see P. Russell 1988: 'The Sounds of Silence: The Growth of Cormac's Glossary', in: *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 15 (1988) 1-30, and refs.

[95] A. O. Anderson 1908: *Scottish Annals from English Chroniclers A.D. 500-1286* (London: David Nutt, reprinted 1991 Stamford: Paul Watkins).

[96] J. Gerchow 1988: *Die Gedenküberlieferung der Angelsachsen*, Arbeiten zur Frühmittelalterforschung 20 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter).

[97] K. Forsyth 1996a: *The Ogham Inscriptions of Scotland. An edited corpus* (PhD dissertation Harvard University, Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI); E. Okasha 1985: 'The Non-Ogam Inscriptions of Pictland', in: *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 9 (1985) 43-70.

[98] M. O. Anderson 1980: *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press).

[99] See the works of Taylor and Nicolaisen. Nicolaisen's 1972 article is an important corrective to Jackson's over-emphasis on the separateness of Pictish within the neo-Brittonic family.

[100] D. Greene 1983: 'Gaelic: syntax, similarities with British syntax', in: D. S. Thomson (ed.) 1983: *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland* (Oxford: Blackwell) 107-8. See also reviews of Kenneth Jackson's *The Gaelic Notes in the Book of Deer* by D. Greene 1972: *Studia Hibernica* 12, 167-70, and D. Macaulay 1975: *Scottish Historical Review* 54, 84-7. I owe these references to Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh, to whom I am most grateful.

Jackson discussed the Pictish personal names preserved in external sources in his 1955 article and concluded that, bearing in mind the tendency of Irish sources to Gaelicize foreign names, the picture was overwhelmingly 'P-Celtic'.[101] There are however a couple of doubtful names, and with these, as with Ptolemy's tribal names, we have the same old problems of establishing reliable readings, and in confidently diagnosing Celticity. He identifies three names – *Bredei*, *Derelei*, and *Bargoit* – for which he could find 'no good reason to think ... Celtic'.[102] In fact, possible Celtic derivations have been put forward for all three, and even if their etymology is doubtful, phonologically they seem acceptable as Celtic.[103] Given our conclusion about the nature of Pritenic, with whom does the burden of proof lie? By their very nature personal names are notoriously difficult to etymologize. Pictish is in no way exceptional in having names which we fail to understand. Irish, for instance, has a number of personal names which have yet to be satisfactorily explained, despite having forms far better established than the Pictish ones.[104]

It is unfortunate that there is insufficient time for a full discussion of the only Pictish text, the so-called 'Pictish Chronicle', or more correctly, 'Pictish King-List'.[105] This intriguing text is of the greatest importance as the sole surviving Pictish document,[106] but it is a particularly apt topic for this series' discussion since it

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[101] 1955:142-3.

[102] 1955:143.

[103] If, as is possible, *Derile* is a woman's name then it is easily explainable in terms of Irish phonology, see M. O. Anderson 1980:175; for a suggested Celtic derivation for *Bredei* see M. O. Anderson 1980:246, Koch 1983:217, also O'Rahilly 1946:365. Variant readings and suggested etymologies, not all of which inspire confidence, are proposed by Stokes 1890.

[104] E.g. *Niall* and *Brian* – D. Ó Corráin & F. MacGuire 1990: *Irish Names* (Dublin: Lilliput, original edition 1981 Dublin: Academy Press) 35, 145. O'Rahilly's explanation of *Niall* (1946:232) has not found universal acceptance, though we can only concur with his statement (1946:367 n.5) that '[t]he fact that an Irish or Pictish personal or place-name is not intelligible to us does not authorize us to assume that the name is non-Celtic, for our knowledge of the vocabulary of Celtic is, and must always remain, very imperfect'.

[105] For a diplomatic edition of the various texts see M. O. Anderson 1980; for a discussion of the Scottish materials in the best manuscript witness see M. O. Anderson 1949: 'The Scottish Materials in the Paris Manuscript, Bib.Nat., Latin 4126', in: *Scottish Historical Review* 28 (1949) 31-42; E. J. Cowan 1981: 'The Scottish Chronicle in the Poppleton Manuscript', in: *Innes Review* 32 (1981) 3-21; for the King-List specifically see M. O. Anderson 1950: 'The Lists of the Kings', in: *Scottish Historical Review* 29 (1950) 13-22; M. Miller 1979: 'The Disputed Historical Horizon of the Pictish King Lists', in: *Scottish Historical Review* 58 (1979) 1-34.

[106] The earliest manuscript is fourteenth century. Although the text, as it stands, long post-dates the end of the Pictish period proper, Marjorie Anderson (1980) has shown it to be derived ultimately from a text datable to c.724. A brief, up-to-date introduction to the text is contained

was studied by A. G. Van Hamel himself in the context of his edition of *Lebor Bret-nach*.[107] Successive work by several scholars has served to untangle, at least in part, the various layers of this composite work, 'a beguilingly simple record of the Pictish past',[108] which is basically a list of Pictish kings with reign-lengths, mingled with some pseudo-historical material on the origin of the Picts and the foundation of the monastery of Abernethy by Brigit of Kildare. The language of the text is Latin though it incorporates purely Pictish names and others which have been Gaelicized to varying degrees. In the historical section, where the names can be corroborated with other sources, they conform to the expected Brittonic pattern. In the pseudo-historic section there is a great deal of confusion, much of it clearly scribal, and in any case, since names seem to have been gathered up to fill the blanks of historical memory, some may be pure invention. In a couple of instances scholars have, with great ingenuity, been able to recover the Celtic name underlying the extant jumble, others are too corrupt to identify.[109] Jackson gives the example of *Uipoig namet*, re-presented in the various recensions as *Uipo ignaviet*, *Poponeuet*, *Uerpempnet*, and *Uumpopual*. He is doubtless correct to link *Uipoig* with the Pritenic *Uepogenus*.[110] Future work may uncover further Celtic identifications. Having made due allowance for the nature of the material and of its tortuous transmission, the problematic names in the King-List offer insufficient grounds for an argument in favour of non-Indo-European Pictish (*pace* Mac Neill). The positive evidence offered by the list as a whole is overwhelmingly in support of Brittonic Pictish.

On the basis of the personal names preserved in these various sources Jackson was able to reconstruct an outline historical phonology of Pictish which he summarized in an appendix to his 1955 article.[111] This has been augmented and refined by Koch.[112] There is nothing I can add to their conclusions.

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in D. Broun 1995: 'The Picts in Documentary History', in: Nicoll 1995: 2-5.

[107] A. G. van Hamel 1932: *Lebor Bretnach: The Irish version of the Historia Britonum ascribed to Nennius. Edited from all the manuscripts*, Irish Manuscripts Commission (Dublin: Stationery Office).

[108] Broun 1995:3.

[109] See for instance Anderson's suggestions (1980:246 n.72, n.82), and others mentioned by Smyth (1984:51).

[110] 1955:145.

[111] 1955:161-6.

[112] 1983:214-7.

INSCRIPTIONS

The sole remaining plank in the argument in favour of non-Indo-European Pictish is the inscriptions, and I have left them to the end because, in a way, this is where the theory of non-Indo-European Pictish was born.[113] By now it should be obvious why I find far-fetched Jackson's model of the language of an underclass, surviving for over a thousand years to be first written down in texts commemorating the élite in an alphabet borrowed from Ireland. Jackson was prepared to accept this model since he classed the inscriptions as part of Pictish ritual practice and, in his view, '[a] people who gave up their own system of inheritance in favour of that of the aborigines might well have done the same with their ritual, even their whole religion'.[114] He is of course referring to the bug-bear of Pictish matriliny, which is brought forward to show that the survival of a non-Indo-European language is not extravagant, just as the survival of a non-Indo-European language is brought forward to show that the survival of supposedly non-Indo-European matriliny is not extravagant. The supposed matriliny of the Picts, the belief that with them succession followed through the mother, is one of the most enduring and widely known 'facts' about the Picts.[115]

Historiographically, alleged matriliny of the Picts makes an interesting comparison with their alleged non-Indo-European language, for here too circumstantial evidence is amassed in support of a specious argument grounded ultimately on an utterly discredited assumption; in this case the late nineteenth-century social evolutionist model of human society evolving unilineally from anarchy, through matriarchy to patriarchy.[116] Though to refute the case in detail would require a whole other study, I contend that most of the evidence habitually adduced is either irrelevant (Classical accounts of lax Caledonian morals) or more easily explained in other ways (the MAQQ of the ogham inscriptions).[117] The little which remains points, not to thoroughgoing matriliny, but to a patrilineal system which acknowledged cognatic relations, in other words, typical Celtic kinship.[118] Even if the sources supported matriliny, which they do not, there is absolutely no indication that matriliny was a non-Indo-European phenomenon; there is no trace of it in Basque society.

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[113] Rhŷs 1892.
[114] 1955:154.
[115] See Ó Corráin 1995.
[116] As exemplified by Zimmer 1898.
[117] Notwithstanding Sellar 1985.
[118] T. Charles-Edwards 1993: *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford: Clarendon).

Similarly, to interpret the famous Pictish Symbols as somehow non-Indo-European is utterly unwarranted. The individual symbols are unique, but the style in which they are rendered draws, demonstrably, on features of La Tène and Mediterranean art. As a writing system, I have argued elsewhere that Pictish symbols are most usefully seen as one of several responses to Roman literacy by those on the fringes of the Empire, analogous to ogham in Ireland, and to runes in Scandinavia, not to mention the strikingly similar *bildstenar* of contemporary Gotland.[119]

The corroborative evidence has been shown to be illusory and thus the case for non-Indo-European must stand or fall on the inscriptional evidence alone. If it *were* proved that the inscriptions represented a non-Indo-European language then we would be faced with the difficult problem of explaining why this language is not reflected in the other bodies of evidence, especially the place-names. But this problem would have to be overcome since the evidential value of the inscriptions outweighs all other categories because it is the only evidence to reach us direct from Pictland – all other evidence has passed through at least one linguistic sieve to reach its present form, often after a delay of several centuries. Thus, if it could be proved that the inscriptions were written in non-Indo-European then that would over-ride the negative testimony of the other evidence.

The technical difficulties inherent in epigraphy mean that the inscriptions would in any case be the toughest nut to crack, but the problem is compounded by the relative lack of work done on the material to date.[120] There are about a dozen inscriptions in the Roman alphabet,[121] but these have to be squeezed hard to extract any linguistic

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[119] K. Forsyth 1997a: 'Some thoughts on Pictish Symbols as a formal writing system', in: D. Henry 1997: 85-98; 1997, forthcoming: 'Literacy in Pictland', in: H. Pryce (ed.) 1997: *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P.). For *bildstenar*, see E. Nylén & J. P. Lamm 1988: *Stones, Ships and Symbols: The Picture Stones of Gotland from the Viking Age and Before* (Stockholm: Gidlunds, original Swedish edition 1978).

[120] The two theses on ogham inscriptions in Pictland (Padel 1972, Forsyth 1996a) remain unpublished and Okasha's corpus of non-ogham inscriptions (1985) was not concerned with linguistics. Jackson published a number of short contributions on individual inscriptions (see refs. in Forsyth and Okasha) but these are coloured by his convictions about the non-Indo-European nature of Pictish.

[121] See Okasha 1985 for refs. For Dupplin, see Forsyth 1995: 'The Inscriptions on the Dupplin Cross', in: C. Bourke (ed.) 1995: *From the Isles of the North: Medieval Art in Ireland and Britain (Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Insular Art)* (Belfast: HMSO) 237-44.

juice. A handful contain complete vernacular personal names, and these are of re-cognizably Brittonic type: *Drosten*, *Uoret* (*Uurad*),[122] *Custantin*;[123] or, as one might expect, Gaelic: *Forcus*.[124] Many problems persist, the Newton Stone remains unde-ciphered, and aspects of other inscriptions are still without satisfactory explana-tion,[125] though this far from warrants the label 'non-Indo-European'.

The crux of the matter lies with the three dozen inscriptions written in the ogham script; a writing system invented by the Irish perhaps as early as the fourth century and borrowed by the Picts to write their own language.[126] Because the ogham in-scriptions reflect the interface between Pictish and Gaelic society, throughout the period when the former was in mortal decline due to the expansion of the latter, they are not a straightforward indication of the nature of Pictish. In interpreting them we must be sensitive to the possibility that apparently Goidelic features are due to the Irish origin of the orthographic system, indeed some are probably in Irish.[127] As one who has grappled with these inscriptions on and off for several years I am well aware of the extreme difficulty of the material, and am fully conscious that a dis-turbingly large number resist explanation, but it is simply not true to say, as Jackson did,[128] that all Pictish oghams are unintelligible gibberish.

In the nineteenth century when the suggestion was first made that the oghams of Scotland were proof of the non-Indo-European nature of Pictish, ogham was widely regarded as a pagan druidic creation; thus students of Pictish ogham were predis-posed to regard the inscriptions as odd. In recent years, however, the work of Damian McManus and others has shown that there is nothing inherently cryptic or magical about ogham. Instead we have come to see it as a pragmatic epigraphic

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[122] The Drosten Stone, St Vigeans.

[123] Dupplin.

[124] The Drosten Stone.

[125] E.g. the *ipe* and *ett* of the Drosten Stone, notwithstanding T. Clancy's (1983) ingenious inter-pretation, 'The Drosten Stone: a new reading', in: *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 123 (1983) 345-53.

[126] For a discussion of ogham outside Scotland, see D. McManus 1991: *A Guide to Ogam*, Maynooth Monographs 4 (Maynooth: An Sagart). For ogham in Scotland see K. Forsyth 1996a.

[127] For instance, Formaston (see Plate 2) and Buckquoy.

[128] 'The ogam inscription on the spindle whorl from Buckquoy, Orkney', in: A. Ritchie 1977: 'Excavation of Pictish and Viking-age farmsteads at Buckquoy, Orkney', in: *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 108 (1976-7), 174-227, at 221-2.

script in widespread use over a period of many centuries, albeit in restricted contexts only. Another possible reason why some scholars have been predisposed to dismiss Pictish oghams as gibberish is that they had a misplaced expectation of how easy it should be to understand them.[129] They underestimated the problems of interpreting texts in a poorly attested language written in an unfamiliar orthography, usually without word-division, and in general had an unrealistic notion of how transparent are non-formulaic inscriptions in whichever language. Page's comments on the difficulty of interpreting Anglo-Saxon runic inscriptions are most salutary in this respect.[130]

The difficulties of interpreting the Scottish oghams are of two kinds: firstly those of establishing the correct reading, and secondly of interpreting the text thus established. A disappointingly large proportion of the thirty-five Scottish oghams are too fragmentary or too weathered to yield any linguistic information whatsoever. Short disjointed sequences of letters on worn and broken slabs may look outlandish, but these should not colour our perception of the rest of the data. Only about eighteen inscriptions are sufficiently undamaged to be philologically significant, but even these are not without their problems. The ogham script is particularly susceptible to misreading. If part of a roman letter is missing it is often possible to reconstruct it. If part of an ogham letter is missing it becomes a completely different letter. McManus has done much to enhance our understanding of the original transliteration key, but it is not yet clear how the Picts adapted it to the phonemic inventory of their own language. The widespread gemination of certain consonants has not been satisfactorily explained, nor is there a clear understanding of the phonetic value of the first character of the second consonant group, used in later Irish inscriptions to represent manuscript 'H'. Furthermore, a number of Scottish ogham inscriptions contain one or more of the so-called 'supplementary letters', or *forfeda*, which were added to the original inventory of twenty characters. Some of these are unique or occur only infrequently, and there is considerable doubt over how these are to be transliterated.

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[129] That Jackson's super-scepticism on epigraphic matters was not restricted to Pictland is amply demonstrated by his unwillingness to accept the Poltalloch ogham's CRONAN (i.e. the common Irish male personal name *Cronán*) as 'certainly Gaelic', Jackson 1983: 'Ogam stones and early Christian Latin inscriptions', in: D. S. Thomson (ed.) 1983: *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland* (Oxford: Blackwell) 220-21.

[130] R. I. Page 1973: *An Introduction to English Runes* (London: Methuen).

Plate 1 — Mains of Afforsk, near Kemnay, Aberdeenshire

This large block of stone probably served as a boundary marker. The ogham runs along two opposite edges and, though damaged, can be seen to include the personal name *Necton*. A prominent cross is carved on the upper surface.

Plate 2 — Formaston, near Aboyne, Aberdeenshire

Only a fragment of this elaborately carved cross-slab survives. To the right of the interlace-filled cross-shaft is part of a Pictish mirror symbol and two lines of ogham lettering. The use of 'supplementary' letter-forms (*forfeda*) causes problems of interpretation, but the text appears to be written in Old Gaelic (Old Irish).

Plate 3 — 'Rodney's Stone', from Dyke, near Forres, Moray

This, the longest of the Ogham inscriptions of Pictland, runs the entire length of each edge on this face and a further distance on the reverse. Unfortunately most of the lettering has been lost to wear, though the personal name *Ethernan* can be discerned at one point. This side features a pair of Pictish symbols and other motifs; an elaborate cross, filled with interlace, is carved on the reverse.

Plate 4 — Auquhollie, near Stonehaven, Kincardineshire

This prehistoric standing stone (2.4 m. tall) is probably one of the earliest oghams of Pictland. The inscription is visible along the right edge of the stone.

But the problems do not end with the establishment of the text. In only a very few cases is word division expressly indicated, and in many of the others segmentation presents real problems. Occasionally the inscriptions conform, more or less, to the Irish 'X MAQQI Y' formula, enabling personal-names to be sectioned off. In a number of cases these are otherwise attested; e.g. Scoonie's EDDARRNONN (cf. the Pictish Saint *Etharnon*), Afforsk's NECTON (i.e. *Nechton, Neiton,* the well-known Pictish name of saint and kings, cf. Lunnasting's NEHHTONN; see Plate 1), Formaston's TALLUORRH (cf. Pictish *Tallorg*; see Plate 2), possibly Inchyra's LIETREN (cf. the *Lutrin* in the Pictish King-List, perhaps itself a mis-copying of *Lietren*?). Others are composed of elements known or parallelled elsewhere. For instance, Latheron's DUNNODNNAT could be taken as *Dunod* + -*nait* (cf. Pictish *Gart, Gart-nan, Gart-nait*) in which case the first element may be compared with Welsh *Dunawt* (< Latin *Donatus*). Such names can be shown to be Celtic, and are usually more specifically identifiable as Brittonic.[131] But as soon as the texts depart from the standard formula, we are somewhat at sea. This, however, is as true for post-Classical Irish ogham inscriptions as it is for the roughly contemporary Scottish ones. In many cases, from context we simply do not know what kind of text to expect. Of course it is possible to extract plausibly Celtic words or roots here and there, but that is scarcely a defensible methodology. But neither is it defensible to attribute all difficulties to the texts being written in a non-Indo-European language.[132]

Even when a reading is utterly unambiguous, inscriptions are prone to all the familiar onomastic problems discussed above, not least the difficulty of correctly establishing Celticity. Take, for instance, Inchyra's SETU. This informal, four-letter inscription seems likely to be a personal-name. No such name is actually attested, but surely we are not to reject it for this reason alone. In any case, the chances are that it is a hypocoristic form. Nor does it seem fair to make a linguistic argument on the basis of the curious, five-letter, circular ogham from Logie Elphinstone, which seems more likely to have a decorative or symbolic/ritual function rather than semantic meaning. The epigraphic texts must be approached with an appropriately flexible attitude and a willingness to reserve judgement in cases of doubt. There are

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[131] Though Golspie's ALLHALLORRED looks distinctly Anglo-Saxon!
[132] Nor can the inscriptions be dismissed as being carelessly carved (*pace* Smyth 1984:58), on the contrary most are skillfully executed and several exhibit features apparently designed to enhance legibility.

a small number of inscriptions which appear utterly baffling, Brandsbutt's IRATADDOARENS-,[133] for instance (see Plate on front cover), or Lunnasting's ETTECUHETTS : AHEHHTTANNN : HCCVVEVV : NEHHTONN,[134] but how much weight must these bear against the more numerous examples of plausibly Celtic names?

Further work is perhaps needed before a more definite pronouncement may be made, but on current evidence the non-Indo-European verdict is premature. As an example of the dangers of jumping too hastily to a non-Indo-European conclusion, I mention a tentative new interpretation of the Buckquoy ogham. This text was first read by Jackson as ETMIQAVSALLC and pronounced 'wholly unintelligible and cannot be Celtic'.[135]

Fresh analysis has demonstrated that he was reading this circular text backwards.[136] Instead the lettering could be read BENDDACTANIML, which might be interpreted as Old Irish *bendacht anim L*, 'a blessing on the soul of L'. As a further example, the text scratched along the length of the small cross-slab from Burrian in Orkney is problematic for several reasons. It is cursively carved with no indication of word division, a number of key letters are damaged and there are several *forfeda* characters of uncertain sound-value. A fair transliteration of the ogham letters would be I[–]IRANNURRACT *X* EVVC *X* RROCCS. This is rebarbative to say the least, but if we break it up as *I[–]irann uract cheuc chrocs* we could take the second word as a Pictish cognate of the Old Welsh **guract* 'he/she made' (cf. *gwreith* 'I made')[137] and the fourth as a spirantized form of a straightforward Pictish **crocs*, 'cross' (< Latin *crux*). The third word remains problematic, but if the damaged first word is a personal name we may have here a Pictish sentence explaining who carved the cross.[138] The difficulties are real but perhaps the possibilities in these two offer some hope that other seemingly intractable inscriptions may, in time, yield their secrets.

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[133] Unless IRA is a Pictish verb, cognate with the Breton *irha* 'he lies' proposed for the Lomarec inscription by L. Fleuriot 1970: 'L'inscription du sarcophage de Lomarec', in: *Annales de Bretagne* 77 (1970) 639-53.

[134] Though the final word is surely the name otherwise rendered *Nechtan*, *Naiton*, and *Neitan*. Padel has compared the opening cluster of the penultimate word to Welsh *chw-* (1972:30).

[135] Jackson 1977: 222.

[136] K. Forsyth 1996b: 'The Ogham-Inscribed Spindle Whorl from Buckquoy: Evidence for the Irish Language in Pre-Viking Orkney?', in: *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 125 (1996) 677-96.

[137] I am grateful to John T. Koch for this suggestion.

[138] Interestingly enough with SVO syntax!

CONCLUSION

For forty years the existence of non-Indo-European Pictish has been taken for granted, with the serious and unfortunate consequences outlined above. In this study I have attempted to refute Prof. Jackson's argument point by point, and to show that on current evidence the only acceptable conclusion is that, from the time of our earliest historical sources, there was only one language spoken in Pictland, the most northerly reflex of Brittonic. Those who wish to argue differently will have to adduce new evidence or fresh interpretations. I do not rule out the possibility of pre-Celtic substratum influence on Pictish, in fact I regard it as all but certain. This, however, should be considered utterly unremarkable (and as I have stressed is not at all the same thing as the survival of a non-Indo-European speech-community).

Donnchadh Ó Corráin has characterized the Irish language as 'an indigenous realization of Celtic, heavily influenced by the pre-Celtic languages spoken in Ireland',[139] and it has been argued by others that substratum influence is what makes the Insular Celtic languages distinct from Continental Celtic. On this point, Jackson himself wrote 'on the one hand ... the Celtic languages, including Irish, are fundamentally Indo-European ones ... their basic structure is much the same as that of most of the languages of Europe .... On the other hand, the Celtic languages, and particularly Irish, have developed in other respects in some very strange ways, some of which may possibly be due to the speech-habits of pre-Celtic people learning Celtic; 'aspiration' and the other initial mutations are remarkable examples'.[140] This language shift, however, occurred long before the earliest extant evidence and does not in any way imply the survival into the historic period of distinct non-Indo-European languages anywhere in the British Isles. The Picts have languished in the non-Indo-European ghetto long enough, it is high time they were acknowledged as being as fully Celtic as their Irish and British neighbours, and studied accordingly.

In 1995, as in 1955, Pictish studies is in a state of flux. It is clear that we are about to enter a new and exciting phase. Much more waits to be written on the subject of language in Pictland, a complex and important topic, of which I have been

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[139] 'Prehistoric and Early Christian Ireland', in: R. Foster 1989: *The Oxford Illustrated History of Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford U.P.) 1-52, at 3; a view endorsed by Koch 1995:48-9.
[140] 'The Irish Language and the Languages of the World', in: B. Ó Cuív 1969: *A View of the Irish Language* (Dublin: Stationary Office) 1-10, 10.

able only to scratch the surface. I have tried not to misrepresent the difficulties presented by Pictish, but would echo Koch's sentiment that the 'extreme import' of the topic demands that 'the pitfalls should be braved'.[141] My hope is that, as a historian, I have cleared the decks for the linguists – the next steps will be theirs.[142]

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[141] 1983:214.

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Almost everything connected with the Picts has formed the subject of controversy at some time or other, and perhaps nothing has been so controversial as the question of what language they spoke.

Kenneth Jackson, 'The Pictish Language', in: F. T. Wainwright (ed.), *The Problem of the Picts* (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1955).

In the nineteenth century it had been established that Pictish was related to the Brittonic branch of the Celtic family of languages, yet there were many who were not satisfied with the notion that Pictish was simply the most northerly cousin of Welsh, Cornish, and Breton. Such an explanation did not, they argued, account for the non-Celtic place- and tribal-names in Classical accounts of northern Britain; for the outlandish forms in the only extant Pictish document, the 'King–List'; and, above all, for the baffling ogham inscriptions of Pictland. Instead, this evidence seemed to point to a pre-Indo-European aspect of Pictish. Controversy raged until the publication, in 1955, of Professor Kenneth Jackson's seminal article 'The Pictish Language', in which the author offered a radical solution to the old problem. He argued that there had, in fact, been two languages existing side-by-side in Pictland – one, Celtic Pictish, in widespread use, and the other, non-Celtic Pictish, reserved for religious and ceremonial contexts – and this has been the orthodox position ever since. There have, however, been tremendous advances in Pictish Studies in the four decades since Jackson wrote, and his theory must now be called into question. Forsyth draws on the disciplines of history and archaeology as well as linguistics to argue that the notion of 'non–Indo–European Pictish' can no longer be sustained and that there was only one Pictish language, and it fully Celtic.