H.M. CHADWICK MEMORIAL LECTURES 13

JAMES GRAHAM-CAMPBELL

Pictish Silver: Status and Symbol

DEPARTMENT OF ANGLO-SAXON, NORSE, AND CELTIC

UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE

Hector Munro Chadwick (1870-1947) was Elrington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Cambridge from 1912 to 1941. Through the immense range of his scholarly publications, and through the vigorous enthusiasm which he brought to all aspects of Anglo-Saxon studies — philological and literary, historical and archaeological — he helped to define the field and to give it the interdisciplinary orientation which characterises it still. The Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, which owes its existence and its own interdisciplinary outlook to H.M. Chadwick, has wished to commemorate his enduring contribution to Anglo-Saxon studies by establishing an annual series of lectures in his name.

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Pictish Silver: Status and Symbol

JAMES GRAHAM-CAMPBELL

Hector Munro Chadwick died the year in which I was born, although I had the opportunity of meeting his widow, Nora, while myself an undergraduate at Trinity and she an Honorary Life Fellow of Newnham. Over the years, I have also had the pleasure of meeting several of their pupils — and the good fortune to be taught by some of them.

When the invitation to give the Thirteenth H. M. Chadwick Memorial Lecture arrived from the Head of ASNC, it began reasonably enough with the suggestion that the subject would be at my discretion, but it continued 'we hope that you might deploy the full range of your expertise within the wide scope of the Department's concerns'. I was never an ASNaC myself and thus am inevitably wanting in the expertise necessary to embrace 'the wide scope of the Department's concerns'. Indeed, my undergraduate days witnessed ASNC's departure from Downing Street, but this is ancient history now. However, before this separation from Archaeology and Anthropology took place it had been easy for us archaeologists to attend the lectures given there by Kathleen Hughes, Peter Hunter Blair and Ray Page, although to hear the then Elrington and Bosworth Professor, Dorothy Whitelock, a pilgrimage was required to larger quarters. In addition, I appreciated her sherry when I became an honorary ASNaC, as it were, as the token archaeologist on the Society's committee!

It was perhaps these various connections that brought to mind Pictish silver, when I was asked to name my subject, because I remember once talking to the Society, back in the 1980s, on the subject of a lost Pictish treasure from Orkney. So Pictish silver is my topic, despite having been reminded recently by Isabel Henderson, my 'Pictish' predecessor as Chadwick Memorial Lecturer, that I had told her a decade ago that I had just given 'my last word' on this subject in a paper read at Cornell and Kalamazoo!

This was, in fact, never published and, in any case, much of importance has happened in Pictish studies in the meantime so that it is not really surprising that I find myself wanting to return to this subject once again.

On the Norrie's Law hoard and the Monifieth plaque

One reason for my wishing to revisit the subject of Pictish silver is because of Lloyd Laing's endeavour to refute my dating of the deposition of the greatest Pictish treasure ever to have been found, that from Norrie's Law in Fife (pl. 1).[1] Although most of this treasure was melted down in the nineteenth century, some small part survives and it is a reasonable estimate that the hoard originally amounted to *c.*12.5 kg of assorted silver. Some of this is certainly late Roman in origin, most obviously a folded spoon fragment present as scrap metal, and Laing supposes that the hoard was deposited as early as the fifth century, with its contents ranging in date from the late first or second century to the late fourth/early fifth century, whereas I have argued elsewhere that it could not have been deposited any earlier than the mid/late seventh century.[2] I remain unconvinced by Laing's hypothesis, even though I am happy to accept his suggestion (since developed by Craig Cessford)[3] concerning the function and date of the putative penannular brooches, with their plain terminals and twisted hoops (pl. 2), as being derived from the type of torc worn on the chest in Roman military manner.

The key pieces for chronological purposes are the two oval plaques, with their red-enamelled Pictish symbols (pl. 2), which are dated by almost everyone — other than Laing — to the seventh century (indeed, the late Robert Stevenson preferred a date for them as late as *c.*700). These plaques are admittedly of unknown use, but they must surely have been powerful players in the 'status and symbol' stakes.

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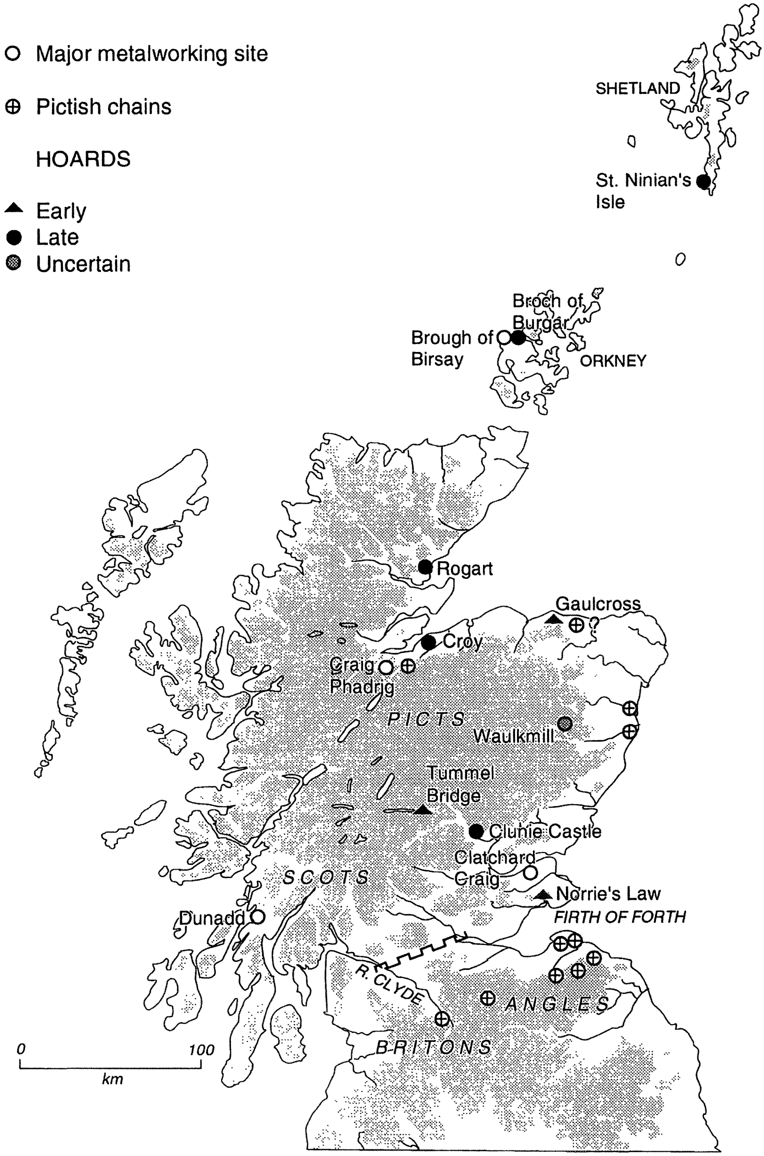
[1] L. Laing, 'The Hoard of Pictish Silver from Norrie's Law, Fife', *Studia Celtica* 28 (1994), 11–38.

[2] J. Graham-Campbell, 'Norrie's Law, Fife: on the Nature and Dating of the Silver Hoard', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 121 (1991), 241–59.

[3] C. Cessford, 'Torcs in Early Historic Scotland', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 14 (1995), 229–42.


○ Major metalworking site
⊕ Pictish chains
HOARDS
▲ Early
● Late
● Uncertain
SHETLAND
St. Ninian's Isle
Broch of Burgar
Brough of Birsay
ORKNEY
Rogart
Gaulcross
?
Croy
Craig Phadrig
PICTS
Waulkmill
Tummel Bridge
Clunie Castle
Clatchard Craig
Norrie's Law
FIRTH OF FORTH
SCOTS
Dunadd
R. CLYDE
ANGLES
BRITONS
0
100
km

I Location map of Pictish silver hoards and metalworking sites.

It is important to recall that their closest known parallel in Pictish metalwork is a lost crescentic plaque found 'in a mound' at the Laws, Monifieth in Angus, in 1796 (pl. 3). This unique object is generally dated to the (late) eighth century, even by Laing.

It is a double-sided, cut-out symbol, with what is presumably the main face comprising a crescent and V-rod, but having the Norrie's Law combination of symbols on its reverse (i.e. the double disc and Z-rod, with a dog's head). It was reportedly made of bronze, although it is somewhat curious that, if not of silver, it was to remain in circulation well into the Viking Age when it was inscribed with Norse runes. I do wonder therefore whether the Monifieth plaque might not, in fact, have been made of base silver for such would most probably have gone unrecognised at the time. Much late Pictish silver is of poor quality, to the extent that the contents of the St Ninian's Isle hoard, from Shetland, were thought to be bronze on discovery, given their 'brilliant green incrustation'. It was only during conservation in the Research Laboratory of the British Museum that these 'ugly ducklings' were discovered to be of silver,[4] for 'the true nature of the metal was concealed by a greenish earthy coating of copper compounds'.[5]

Before leaving the subject of the Norrie's Law hoard, I would like to reiterate my old suggestion that some of its silver may derive from ceremonial weaponry because this is a subject to which I shall be turning shortly.[6] The hoard contains the remains of a large silver disc, seemingly too slight to have formed a plate or dish. So might this not have been the cover for a circular parade-shield? However, the particular piece of silver that first suggested this idea to me was the spiral-bossed disc (pl. 2), for this brings to mind the spiral-ornamented parade-shield carried by the first of the three warriors depicted, in ceremonial dress, on the Pictish symbol-stone from the Brough of Birsay, in Orkney (pl. 4). He is clearly a leader of men for not only does he alone carry a decorated shield, his is the most

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[4] 'Archæological "Ugly Ducklings": the Strange Story of the St Ninian's Treasure, or the Bronze which Turned out to be Silver when Cleaned', *Illustrated London News* (22 November 1958), 892–3.

[5] H. J. Plenderleith, 'The Conservation of the Objects', in 'The St Ninian's Isle Silver Hoard', *Antiquity* 33 (1959), 241–68, at 248.

[6] Graham-Campbell, 'Norrie's Law', pp. 247–8 and 250.

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II Silver torc, plaque and spiral-bossed disc from the Norrie's Law hoard (photo: NMS).

III The Monifieth plaque (reverse).

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IV The Brough of Birsay symbol-stone (detail) (photo: NMS).

elaborate hairstyle (in which he wears a band), and there is also an ornamented hem to his tunic. Here then we are presented with three outward — and clearly visible — signs by which his status was projected.

The dating of this particular piece of Norrie's Law silver does, however, remain a matter of some considerable controversy, Laing suggesting that it 'has its closest counterparts in the second century AD, though it could be later'.[7] On the other hand there are others, including Susan Youngs, in her recent discussion of a metal-detected mount from Coddenham in Suffolk, who are happy to argue that, whereas such 'raised, tapering spirals in relief' undoubtedly 'hark back to the La Tène metalwork of the Roman period and earlier', their use continued into the sixth or seventh century AD.[8]

Weaponry is a subject of current concern with regard to the study of Pictish art in general, for Laing has recently published two papers in which he has endeavoured to overthrow the accepted eighth-century dating for the *floruit* of Pictish 'relief-style' sculpture partly on the basis of sword depictions on the (Class II) cross-slabs.[9] It is to silver sword-fittings that I shall be coming shortly, in an attempt to address this matter — but first some further introductory remarks.

By way of introduction

Given the special nature of a Memorial Lecture, I had hoped to begin my paper proper with a suitably inspiring quotation from the writings of Chadwick himself. On turning, however, to his posthumously published book, *Early Scotland* (prepared for the press by Nora in 1948), one discovers from her 'Introduction' that he had not in fact begun his proposed sections on art and religion, for which she found 'only one or two memoranda and references'.[10] It maybe, as she supposed, that these 'missing sections would have been very brief', but one remains tantalised by her following remark that 'the writer had been much interested in early Scottish ecclesiastical art, and in the so-called Pictish symbols, for more than twenty-five years'.

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[7] Laing, 'Norrie's Law', pp. 23–4.

[8] S. Youngs, in S. West, *A Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Material from Suffolk*, East Anglian Archaeology Report 84 (1998), 22–3.

[9] L. Laing, 'The Date of the Aberlemno Churchyard Stone', *Pattern and Purpose in Insular Art*, ed. M. Redknap, *et al.* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 241–51 and L. Laing 'The Chronology and Context of Pictish Relief Sculpture', *Medieval Archaeology* 44 (2000), 81–114.

When Isabel Henderson delivered the Seventh Memorial Lecture in 1996, on *Pictish Monsters: Symbol, Text and Image*, she certainly deployed her academic skills across the wide scope of ASNC's interests, in a manner to which I cannot begin to aspire, but it is therefore all the more appropriate for me to commence with a quotation from her seminal paper on the St Andrews sarcophagus, published a couple of years later:[11]

> What makes the Sarcophagus uniquely grand, for us and no doubt also for its contemporary viewers, is its use of imagery derived not from everyday native institutions, but from exotic models ... The presence in Pictish treasuries of such models is irrefutable evidence that Pictish society was not an inward-looking, self obsessed 'lingering Iron Age survival' but one aware of, and fired by, all the cultural stimuli that came with their membership of European Christendom ... The nature of the art of the Sarcophagus suggests that these exotic influences were not received by the Picts only at second-hand from the south or west, pre-digested, as it were, by other artists in Great Britain and Ireland, but were physically present to be copied from, the consequence of 'princely gifts' to a religious foundation or its elite patron.

I follow this with the opening words from a paper by Craig Cessford, on 'Pictish silver and the Gododdin poem', published by him in 1996:[12]

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[10] N. K. Chadwick, 'Introduction', in H. M. Chadwick, *Early Scotland* (Cambridge, 1949), 11–26, at 12.

[11] I. Henderson, '*Primus inter Pares*: the St Andrews Sarcophagus and Pictish Sculpture', *The St Andrews Sarcophagus: a Pictish Masterpiece and its International Connections*, ed. S. M. Foster (Dublin, 1998), pp. 97–167, at 98–9.

[12] C. Cessford, 'Pictish Silver and the Gododdin Poem', *Pictish Arts Society Journal* 9 (Spring 1996), 30–1.

> After stone, the most common surviving medium for Pictish art is silver, which has been recovered in considerable quantities in hoards such as that found at Norrie's Law, Fife.

Very true, but what Cessford does not point out is that, although Pictish silver has been recovered in considerable quantities, what survives today of most of these treasures is minimal — perhaps only 1/17th in the case of the Norries's Law hoard (as mentioned above), and nothing at all in the case of that from the Broch of Burgar in Orkney (and most regrettably, given that the nineteenth-century accounts indicate that its contents would have been more than a match for the well-known hoard from St Ninian's Isle).[13] In any case, who can tell how representative such limited survivals may really be? And then again, archaeological excavation has both produced answers and created new problems in our understanding of where and when prestige artefacts, such as those that make up these hoards, were being made and used in both the Northern Isles (e.g. on the Brough of Birsay, Orkney)[14] and Mainland Pictland (e.g. at Clatchard Craig, Fife).[15]

On the St Ninian's Isle treasure

The fact is that the *only* Pictish treasure known to us in its entirety, for certain, is that found on St Ninian's Isle, on the 4th July 1958, and that is only because it was recovered during an archaeological excavation, even if it was one that was completely unscientific by modern standards. This 'dig' was undertaken by students from the University of Aberdeen, directed by the late Professor Andrew O'Dell who was then the Head of the Department of Geography. As is well known, the treasure consists of twenty-eight silver objects, weighing 1918.4 gm,[16] and part of the jawbone of a

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[13] J. Graham-Campbell, 'A Lost Pictish Treasure from the Broch of Burgar', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 115 (1985), 241–61.

[14] C. L. Curle, *Pictish and Norse Finds from the Brough of Birsay 1934–74* (Edinburgh, 1982).

[15] J. Close-Brooks, 'Excavations at Clatchard Craig, Fife', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 116 (1986), 117–84.

[16] This is the total weight of the hoard when it was weighed in the British Museum Research Laboratory (on 15 October 1958), after conservation (File no. 1165).

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V Part of the St Ninian's Isle silver hoard (photo: NMS).

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VI The St Ninian's Isle hoard revealed on 4 July 1958 (photo: Shetland Museum).

porpoise; these were contained in a wooden box which had been buried below a stone slab, sometime about AD 800 (and thus most likely on account of some of the first Viking raids on Scotland).

It is now thirty years since the treasure was fully published, with its contents described and discussed by David Wilson.[17] It is therefore not too soon to return to this remarkable find, once hailed 'as the most important single discovery in Scottish archaeology'.[18] I shall begin by summarising its inventory: the twenty-eight silver objects consist of eight bowls (one of which is a seventh-century Anglo-Saxon hanging-bowl); twelve penannular brooches (one of which is larger than the others, but has a disintegrated pin); three cone-shaped mounts; one spoon and a claw-like instrument; two U-shaped scabbard chapes; and a sword pommel (pl. 5).

The exceptional importance of the contents of the hoard has served to overshadow the fact that all too little was recorded concerning the circumstances of its discovery. So, what actually happened on St Ninian's Isle, on the 4th July 1958?

The facts of the matter are that a sixteen-year-old Shetland schoolboy, named Douglas Coutts, who had that very day joined the excavation as a volunteer, was put to dig in an area which had been heavily disturbed by later burials within the nave of the (ruined) medieval church that had been 'cleared' during the previous two seasons.[19] It was thus this novice troweller who lifted the grey sandstone slab underneath which the hoard was revealed (pl. 6). This broken stone (just 14 inches long) is lightly incised with the remains of a regular outline cross (pl. 7), but according to Charles Thomas (writing in 1973) it was found 'face downwards, covering the hoard or treasure of silver objects'.[20]

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[17] A. Small, C. Thomas and D. M. Wilson, *St Ninian's Isle and its Treasure*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1973).

[18] F. T. Wainwright, 'The St Ninian's Isle Excavation', *The Northern Isles*, ed. F. T. Wainwright (Edinburgh, 1974), pp. 193–4, at 193.

[19] The discovery of the St Ninian's Isle treasure inevitably attracted considerable media interest, but I have chosen to disregard the newspaper reports in favour of the two considered and extensively illustrated accounts published in the *Illustrated London News*: 'An outstanding find of Celtic jewellery: the St Ninian's hoard in a Shetland island. Hidden from Viking marauders: the bronzes of St Ninian's, Shetland', *ILN* (23 August 1958), 300–1; and 'Ugly Ducklings' (see above, n. 4), in *ILN* (22 November 1958), 892–3.

[20] Thomas, *St Ninian's Isle*, p. 37 (no. 15), pls. 8 and 16.

The various accounts of the excavation are sketchy affairs and contain all too many gaps and a number of contradictions.[21] The 'definitive' account was compiled by the late Alan Small, after O'Dell's untimely death, and Small (who had himself worked on the excavation) was the first to admit that it was a sorry affair, given that he had had to cobble it together, as best he might, from the most meagre scraps of information.[22] One such scrap of evidence is the published photograph, printed from a colour slide, showing the hoard still in the ground; it is somewhat out of focus and contains no proper scale.[23] Anyway, it shows how the slab was turned over on being lifted and laid aside, its rough *underside* bearing traces of the box and of corrosion products that remain as copper staining on its reverse (pl. 6).[24] As reported by O'Dell: 'In contact with this stone were fragments of rotted wood and metal with the familiar bright green of weathering copper'.[25]

It is evident therefore that the slide was printed back to front and that it was a genuine case of 'X marks the spot'. In fact, none of the published accounts of the discovery of the hoard (before 1973) refers to the slab as having been 'face downwards'; indeed, that in the *Illustrated London News*, for 23 August 1958, describes (p. 301) how 'trowelling was going on about 5 ft. below the church foundation-level when a thin slab of stone with a lightly engraved cross was found'. It was presumably therefore the reversed print of

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[21] There are three preliminary accounts of the discovery of the hoard published by O'Dell (apart from those in *ILN*): 'Excavations at St Ninian's Isle', *The Scottish Geographical Magazine* 75 (1959), 41–3; that forming the 'Introduction' to the article in the December 1959 issue of *Antiquity* (see above, n. 5), at 241–3; and that accompanying the volume of illustrations published for Aberdeen University: A. C. O'Dell and A. Cain, *St Ninian's Isle Treasure* (Edinburgh, 1960), pp. 4–5. The single page record of the discovery in O'Dell's small notebook contains no additional information (Shetland Archives, D.1/359/6, unpaginated).

[22] A. Small, 'The Site: its History and Excavation', in *St Ninian's Isle*, pp. 1–7.

[23] *St Ninian's Isle*, pl. 16; a letter written by O'Dell (on 27 October 1958), now in the Shetland Archives, D.1/359/1/5/25, states that: 'The black and white photographs of the St Ninian's cache when the stone was first lifted are extremely disappointing and it is only the colour which brings out the difference between metallic gleam and damp earth.'

[24] I am grateful to Tommy Watts, Curator of the Shetland Museum, for supplying me with a print from this slide (pl. 6) and for confirming that the bronze staining is still visible on the reverse of the stone.

[25] In *ILN* (23 August 1958), 302.

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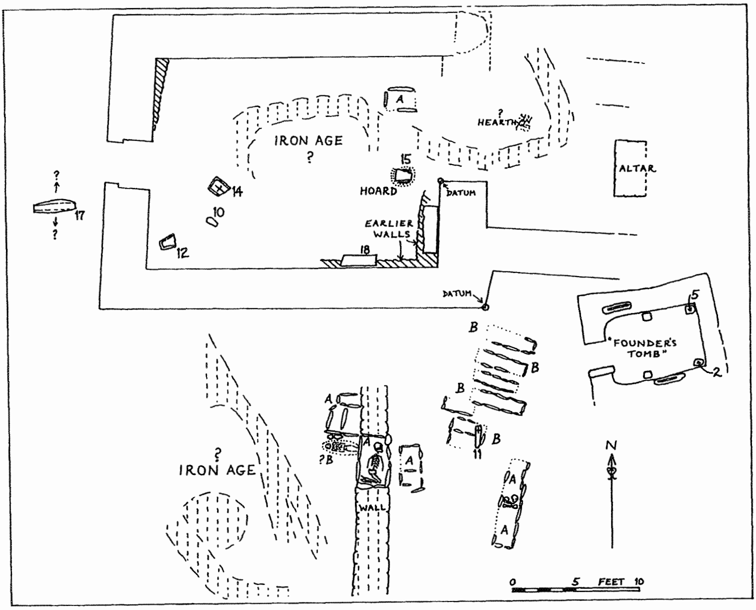
VII The broken cross-slab which covered the
St Ninian's Isle hoard (photo: Shetland Museum).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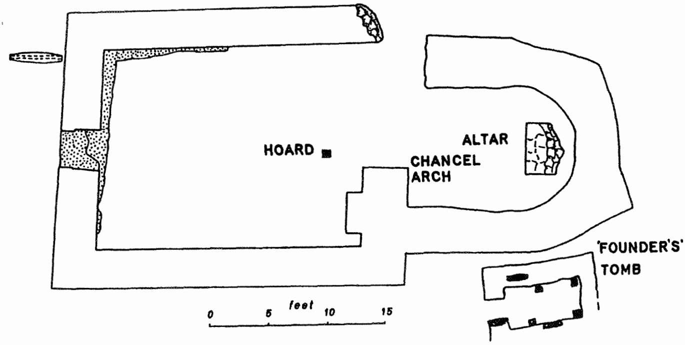
VIII St Ninian's Isle: reconstructed site-plan (1967).


HOARD
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CHANCEL
ARCH
'FOUNDER'S'
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XI St Ninian's Isle: O'Dell's site-plan (1959).

the hoard in the ground that led Charles Thomas to suppose that the slab had been upside down.[26]

So, where was the hoard buried, under its cross-marked slab, that it might readily be re-located? O'Dell himself, in the interim publication of the discovery in *Antiquity* (in 1959), stated that the treasure had been found 'close to the southern chancel arch foundation', but of course this chancel arch had not been constructed when the hoard itself was buried in about AD 800.[27] Indeed, Thomas has argued that the apsidal chancel (his Phase 5) represents an addition — 'some time after 1200' — to the twelfth-century chapel that had been constructed (Phase 4) 'above the first chapel' (Phase 3).[28]

Thomas, who surveyed the visible remains of the site in 1967, recorded structural evidence for there having been an earlier stone chapel, but his published plan of it (pl. 8)[29] differs somewhat from that published by O'Dell (pl. 9).[30] In particular, he depicts part of this earlier building not shown on O'Dell's own plan, although in fact noted by him in his 1960 account of the south side of the building.[31] In this he describes the existence of

> the foundations of a 3 feet thick drystone wall, with plastering on the inner face which is formed of rectangular blocks. This foundation underlies very closely the south-east angle of the medieval nave and continues for the greater part of the length of the south wall of the nave. There is little doubt that it is the pre-Norse church ... No definite traces of floor could be seen but at the horizon of this, as given by the lower edge of plastering on the wall, the hoard was found ...

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[26] I am most grateful to Professor Charles Thomas not only for informing me (in correspondence: 28 December 2002) that 'I think my published statement ... was probably wrong and I'm not sure why I claimed as much', but also for giving me access to his personal file of papers (1967–9) relating to his contribution to the publication of *St Ninian's Isle*.

[27] O'Dell in 'St Ninian's Isle Silver Hoard', p. 242.

[28] Thomas, *St Ninian's Isle*, p. 13.

[29] Thomas, *St Ninian's Isle*, fig. 8.

[30] O'Dell in 'St Ninian's Isle Silver Hoard', fig. 1; O'Dell and Cain, *St Ninian's Isle Treasure*, p. 2.

[31] O'Dell and Cain, *St Ninian's Isle Treasure*, p. 5.

On the other hand, O'Dell depicted (but did not describe) the existence of a continuous stretch of earlier foundation under the west wall, together with its northern return, but only a small part of this, at the north-west end, appears on the plan drawn up for publication by Thomas, although this return is in fact recorded on his actual field-plan.[32]

What O'Dell also recorded, in his 1959 account,[33] is that the hoard

> had been contained in a larch box of which a few splinters, impregnated with metal salts, had escaped decay. The bowls were upside down and the brooches and other objects tangled together, showing it had been hurriedly carried and buried with the top down ... All the objects were within the dark brown traces of the box and although the ground above had been disturbed to the extent of containing an Iron Age pot, the hoard itself and the earth immediately round it had no evidence of disturbance since burial.

His 1960 version added little to this:[34]

> The hoard had been buried in a box of larch, a tree not introduced to Britain until the eighteenth century. The objects were tumbled together and the bowls inverted suggesting that it had been buried upside down possibly after a hurried carrying to the spot.

It is worth taking a closer look at the photograph (pl. 6). The slab clearly covered the box almost entirely and had thus prevented it from being crushed (although the uppermost bowl was 'dented'), and its surrounding earth does indeed show no signs of disturbance. No dimensions are recorded for the evidently oblong box, but based on the photograph (and given that the slab is 35 cm long and that the bowls average 15 cm in diameter), it is possible to estimate that it is likely to have measured approximately 24 x 18 cm.

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[32] This field-plan has been preserved by Charles Thomas in his file referred to above in n. 26.

[33] O'Dell in 'St Ninian's Isle Silver Hoard', pp. 242–3.

[34] O'Dell and Cain, *St Ninian's Isle Treasure*, p. 5.

But what really caused O'Dell to suggest that the box had been 'hurriedly carried and buried with the top down'? Alas, next to nothing was recorded by the excavators concerning the actual manner in which the hoard had been packed into its box, although the photograph indicates that the pile of inverted bowls filled one end, with the other objects placed alongside them.

Rupert Bruce-Mitford was clearly mistaken in supposing that 'Professor O'Dell wisely lifted the entire complex intact and brought it straight down to the British Museum Research Laboratory in London',[35] at least insofar as one would understand the words 'entire complex intact' today. It is true that it was reported in the *Illustrated London News*, on 23 August 1958 (p. 301), that 'very few Shetlanders have yet seen these treasures, as so fragile were they that it was necessary to fly them immediately to the British Museum Laboratory for conservation and cleaning', although the Research Laboratory was clearly in error in dating its file on the hoard '30/6/58', given that that is four days before its discovery![36]

As far as can be judged, the only parts of the hoard that could be considered to have arrived at the British Museum 'intact' were three lots of nested bowls, for it was reported in the same article in the *Illustrated London News* (p. 301) that:

> The cache was carefully opened and was found to contain 25 examples of metalwork, of which the precise nature has not, in all cases, been determined. There were twelve brooches of Celtic design ... There were six bowls, one within the other, and these were only partially separated, as they were discovered to be very fragile ... There was also a hanging-lamp, with an inner lining ...

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[35] R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, 'The Treasure of St Ninian's', *Scientific American* 203:5 (November 1960), 154–66, at 157.

[36] File no. 1165; it is the month that was wrongly recorded, for there exists a memorandum written by O'Dell (dated 30 October 1958) which states that the hoard 'has been in the British Museum laboratory since the end of July' (Shetland Archives: D.1/359/1/5/30).

At the same time, it is relevant to note that the series of pre-conservation photographs, accompanying the above article in the *Illustrated London News*, was the work of Alexander Cain, ARPS, from the Anatomy Department, University of Aberdeen.

The British Museum report published in *Antiquity*, written by H. J. Plenderleith,[37] states that 'the bowls were more or less in a pile one inside the other, the topmost being inverted, and although dented, it was in better condition than the others'. Both the hanging-bowl and the bowl with the enamelled escutcheon are stated to have been amongst 'the underlying bowls' and it may be deduced, from notes in the Laboratory file (no. 1165), as well as the pre-conservation photographs, published both in the *Illustrated London News* and by O'Dell and Cain, that the 'topmost' bowl was that with the clearly cross-marked base (catalogued as no. 1), and it is indeed 'in good condition', apart from being 'dented'. It was photographed (pre-conservation) with another bowl nested within it,[38] and it is clear from the conservation notes that this was bowl no. 5. It is also possible to establish from the notes that the internal ornament of bowl no. 6 was only revealed when bowl no. 3 was removed from it. Within no. 3 must therefore have been bowl no. 4 (three bowls are illustrated as still nested together before conservation),[39] given that bowl no. 2 is the only one to have been photographed, pre-conservation, separately from the others,[40] and that the bowl inside the hanging-bowl (no. 8), first thought to be its 'liner',[41] can be identified from the conservation notes as bowl no. 7. Despite Plenderleith's reference to the 'topmost [bowl] being inverted',[42] the fact is that it arrived in the Laboratory with another bowl within it, so it can only be assumed that his use of the singular in this context was a slip and that all the bowls had, indeed, been inverted to form a single pile, as indicated by the other evidence reviewed above.

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[37] It is, however, evident that the actual conservation work was undertaken by R. M. Organ (as named in *ILN*, 'Ugly Ducklings', 892); see also R. M. Organ, 'The Treatment of the St Ninian's Hanging Bowl Complex', *Studies in Conservation* 4 (1959), 41–50.

[38] *ILN* (23 August 1958), fig. 3; O'Dell and Cain, *St Ninian's Isle Treasure*, pp. 26–7.

[39] O'Dell and Cain, *St Ninian's Isle Treasure*, 22.

[40] *ILN* (23 August 1958), fig. 9.

[41] *ILN* (23 August 1958), fig. 8; O'Dell and Cain, *St Ninian's Isle Treasure*, p. 28.

[42] Plenderleith in 'St Ninian's Isle Silver Hoard', p. 248.

Another matter of uncertainty arises out of O'Dell's observation,[43] concerning the appearance of a badly corroded bowl (no. 5) that this

> may be due to the bowls having been wrapped for burial in a thin fabric which unevenly held the corroding groundwater and so gave a ripple effect.

As no reference is made by either Plenderleith or Wilson to there having been any such 'thin fabric' wrapping, this can be dismissed as no more than preliminary speculation on the part of O'Dell. Even if the bowls were not wrapped up, the evidence is that they formed a neat pile in the box, so it is surely of little significance which way up they were placed. So, what with the box having been buried inside the chapel, out of sight and with a slab placed carefully over it, there is no real evidence for this having been done so 'hurriedly' that it was upside down in the ground.

However, given the idea created by O'Dell, that the hoard had been buried hurriedly, it has not been unreasonable for commentators to suppose that, as Vikings appeared over the horizon, the treasure was rushed by its owner(s) to the chapel in order that the box might be buried within the ecclesiastical enclosure for its sanctity — or, at any rate, in the expectation that Viking raiders would not spend their time digging under the floor of a chapel on the off-chance that treasure might have been buried there.

Alternatively, if we were to suppose that the treasure was the property of the church in the first place, then there would have been good cause for it to be concealed within the chapel (out of view of any possible spectators) and thus, for all we really know, it could have been buried carefully and the right way up!

My concern with such basics of source criticism might seem nit-picking in the extreme, given the overall importance of the hoard itself, but I believe that the matters under review have come to affect, in part at least, how the hoard has been interpreted.

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[43] O'Dell and Cain, *St Ninian's Isle Treasure*, p. 6.

It is well documented that, soon after the St Ninian's Isle hoard was discovered, a dispute arose as to whether its contents represented a collection of objects required for church use (as argued by Monsignor David McRoberts),[44] or the secular valuables of a local Pictish chieftain, buried beneath the floor of his local church (the interpretation preferred by David Wilson and others since).[45]

In my opinion, however, Wilson's conclusion that the whole represents 'a family treasure brought for sanctuary to the church in a time of attack' is to be rejected in favour of a third possibility, as advanced by the late Kathleen Hughes (and also by Isabel Henderson):[46]

> We have here a hoard of miscellaneous silver. David McRoberts has argued that all the pieces have a liturgical use, that the six bowls are chalices [etc.]. But ... In all, the case for the hoard as liturgical in context seems unacceptable. Nor does it seem likely that this is the accumulated treasure-hoard of some viking marauder, since the hack-silver, ingots and coins which might then be expected are missing. I should support a different solution. Irish churches had no coinage and they must have kept small banks of precious objects with which to conduct legal agreements and purchases; they may also have acted as banks for laymen. The most likely explanation is that treasure belonging to, and under the protection of, the church was buried during a troubled period of viking raids and settlement. If so, presumably everyone who knew where it was deposited either fled or was killed. The archaeological

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[44] D. McRoberts, 'The Ecclesiastical Significance of the St Ninian's Isle Treasure', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 94 (1960–1), 301–13 and D. McRoberts, 'The Ecclesiastical Character of the St Ninian's Isle Treasure', *The Fourth Viking Congress, York, August 1961*, ed. A. Small (Edinburgh, 1965), pp. 224–46.

[45] Wilson, *St Ninian's Isle*, pp. 145–6.

[46] In her 1977 Hunter Marshall Lecture, 'Where are the Writings of Early Scotland?', published in K. Hughes, *Celtic Britain in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. D. Dumville (Woodbridge, 1980), pp. 1–21, at 12; see also I. Henderson, *The Picts* (London, 1967), p. 214: 'The most plausible explanation offered for the somewhat miscellaneous nature of the hoard is that it represented the movable wealth of the foundation and so included gifts from the community it served.'

> evidence suggests that the pre-viking church on St Ninian's Isle was abandoned and possibly sacked, for beneath the twelfth-century church are the ruins of an earlier church. The fragments of the pre-viking shrine, lying at a level below the twelfth-century church, show that it had been smashed and dispersed.

Whether the excavated evidence for the pre-Viking shrine does in fact demonstrate 'that it had been smashed and dispersed' seems to me to be far from certain. It is to be hoped that the recent (re)-investigation of part of the site by the University of Glasgow may have thrown some light on this and related matters.[47]

The Hughes 'solution' is one that I find particularly attractive because it serves to resolve several puzzles, such as why the hoard contains two scabbard chapes, but only one sword pommel, and why, in any case, they had been removed from the scabbards and sword in question. It is entirely reasonable to suppose that this had been in order to add them (perhaps on different occasions) to 'a small bank of precious objects' in church possession. Equally, such a process would explain why the three conical bosses make little sense, today, on their own. And why the spoon and claw-like object do not seem to form a pair. And why the collection of bowls does not appear to form a set, quite apart from containing an heirloom. And, above all, why there are quite so many brooches when these were worn singly, as depicted so clearly on the well-known Hilton of Cadboll stone,[48] and also that from Monifieth, Angus.[49]

The porpoise bone

Unfortunately, Kathleen Hughes made no reference to the mysterious porpoise bone, and I would have much liked to ask her what she made of it. When O'Dell stated that 'this, the only non-metallic object, is strong evidence of [the hoard's] ecclesiastical connection',[50] he was assuming it to be 'a relic held at the church', commenting that:[51]

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[47] As noted in *Discovery and Excavation in Scotland* n.s., 2 (2001), 86–7; see R. Barrowman, forthcoming (n. 61).

[48] See (for example), Henderson, *Picts*, pl. 60.

[49] M. R. Nieke, 'Penannular and Related Brooches: Secular Ornament or Symbol in Action?', *The Age of Migrating Ideas*, ed. R. M. Spearman and J. Higgitt (Edinburgh, 1993), 128–34, with fig. 15.1.

> It may have significance as a porpoise bone or it may have been thought to have been a human bone which had been part of an early Pictish saint or teacher.

This interpretation was developed at greater length by Bruce-Mitford:[52]

> It is difficult to see why a bone should be deliberately concealed in the box with the silver, unless it was regarded as a relic. Many early saints were especially associated in legend with animals: St Jerome with his lion; St Cuthbert of Northumbria with the sea otter; St Malo of Brittany with the sow he restored to life ... The porpoise bone in the St Ninian's treasure might have commemorated some special association of this kind between a local saint and the porpoise, a beast that is often seen plunging in the sea around the Shetlands.

This suggestion that the bone might have been a relic was passed over by David Wilson (not surprisingly given his interpretation of the hoard as being secular in character). He commented:[53]

> The fact that a porpoise bone occurs in the hoard is puzzling. References in Celtic literature are few and confusing and of no real significance. There are hints, however, that the mammal was important in the early Christian period. The dolphin, a creature of very similar appearance, which is rare in northern waters, frequently appears as an ornamental motif in western contexts and there is a hint in Anglo-Saxon documents that porpoises were in some demand. The deeper meaning of this bone is an enigma.

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[50] O'Dell in 'St Ninian's Isle Silver Hoard', p. 243.

[51] O'Dell and Cain, *St Ninian's Isle Treasure*, p. 7.

[52] Bruce-Mitford, 'Treasure of St Ninian's, p. 162.

[53] Wilson, *St Ninian's Isle*, pp. 123–4.

While finding myself entirely in agreement with Wilson's concluding sentiment, the rest of his paragraph is somewhat opaque, given that we are not told where these 'few' references are to be found, or just what these 'hints' amount to.[54]

The wooden box

In fact, of course, this bone was not the only non-metallic object associated with the hoard — given that it was contained in a wooden box. As already mentioned, this is said to have survived as no more than 'a few splinters, impregnated with metal salts'. What is curious about this is that there is no mention of the box having had any nails or other metal fittings, but maybe such were not looked for, or retained, in the excitement of the discovery of the treasure itself.

In 1959, it was stated (without reference) that the wood had been identified as larch and this identification has naturally enough been repeated ever after. The British Museum Research Laboratory file (no. 1165) does, however, contain two letters (dating from November/December 1958) addressed to Plenderleith who had sent the fragments for identification to E. W. J. Phillips,[55] who had in turn forwarded them to Dr C. R. Metcalfe at Kew. Phillips reported that 'there is now sufficient evidence to say that one of the pieces is almost certainly larch wood and a number of the other pieces are probably also larch but we cannot be quite sure'. Metcalfe himself wrote that 'after the material [at first thought to be bark] had been revived we found that it is wood and that the structure agrees with that of larch'. A decade later, Edgar Phillips wrote (on 26 February 1968), in answer to a letter from Alan Small, that 'he [Metcalfe] was satisfied that the material was larch of very slow growth'.[56]

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[54] I am grateful to Lesley Abrams for having drawn my attention, after the lecture, to the relevant paper by Mark Gardner, 'The Exploitation of Sea-Mammals in Medieval England: Bones and their Social Context', *Archaeological Journal* 154 (1997), 173–95.

[55] Director of the Forest Products Research Laboratory (Dept of Scientific and Industrial Research).

[56] Shetland Archives, D1/359/2/20.

As Wilson pointed out, 'the only exotic element connected with the hoard was the larch-wood box in which it was enclosed', for larch is a tree not native to Britain or Ireland; he continued:[57]

> It could be argued, with some weight, that the box or the wood was imported from central Europe which was at that time its natural habitat ... On the other hand, the wood could have come as driftwood.

In the context of recent suggestions concerning the existence of long-range Pictish contacts, the possibility that the box itself might have been an import from central Europe is one that might be worth further consideration, but something as exotic as a presentation casket would surely have been furnished with fancy metalwork fittings.

On the other hand, there is the driftwood suggestion, but in this case it must be supposed that the larch was from North America, as has been shown to be the case with the spruce 'found in numerous coastal archaeological sites in the largely treeless Northern and Western Isles of Scotland'.[58] In fact, it is not always easy for wood specialists to tell larch and spruce apart and so there exists the possibility that the box might in fact have been made from spruce, which would have been the more readily available of the two species.[59] However, '*Larix* cf *laricina*, an American species of larch, was found in a prehistoric hearth' at Kebister in Shetland,[60] and there is 'one definite example of larch wood charcoal' from the recent excavations on St Ninian's Isle itself, where 'spruce/larch wood charcoal was one of the most frequently identified species found throughout the site'.[61]

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[57] Wilson, *St Ninian's Isle*, p. 146, note 2.

[58] C. Dickson, 'The Plant Remains', *Kebister: The Four-thousand-year-old Story of One Shetland Township*, ed. O. Owen and C. Lowe (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 229–44, at 241. For the occurrence of North American driftwood in Scotland, see A. Graham, 'Spruce and Pine Timber in Two Scottish Prehistoric Buildings', *Archaeological Newsletter* 4:9 (June–July 1952), 133–7; and J. H. Dickson, 'North American Driftwood, especially Picea (spruce) from Archaeological Sites in the Hebrides and Northern Isles of Scotland', *Review of Palaeobotany and Palynology* 73 (1992), 49–56.

[59] I am most grateful to Dr Jon Hather for discussing this problem with me and for undertaking to investigate whether or not any detailed records of the original identification may be preserved at Kew.

[60] Dickson, 'Plant Remains', p. 241.

There is therefore no reason why the box containing the St Ninian's Isle hoard should not have been made from larch driftwood, but as the fragments are no longer known to survive, any further speculation would seem to be fruitless.

Anglo-Saxon ornaments?

In 1991, Leslie Webster suggested that both the scabbard chapes and the pommel (pl. 6) are not necessarily Pictish after all (as argued by Wilson), but might rather be of Anglo-Saxon workmanship.[62] She has recently returned to this theme, identifying these three objects not just as 'Anglo-Saxon', but more specifically as being of Mercian manufacture and thus 'a very likely diplomatic gift from a Mercian king ... [to a] ... powerful Pictish contemporary'.[63] However, there are those who still prefer her previous alternate suggestion that 'at the very least [they] show the strength of Anglo-Saxon influence in eighth-century Pictland'. Isabel Henderson, for example, has mounted a spirited defence for the pommel being of Pictish workmanship, relating its animal ornament to that on the Nigg cross-slab.[64]

At the same time, there is plenty of evidence that there was an ongoing Anglo-Saxon tradition for splendid sword pommels as symbols of status (such as that of silver from Fetter Lane, London).[65] I shall be returning to silver pommels and their significance in due course, but first some further thoughts concerning the two chapes.

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[61] J. Miller and S. Ramsay, 'Botanical Analyses of Samples from St Ninian's Isle', in *Excavations at St Ninian's Isle, Shetland, 1999–2000*, ed. R. Barrowman (forthcoming).

[62] L. Webster in *The Making of England: Anglo-Saxon Art and Culture, AD 600–900*, ed. L. Webster and J. Backhouse (London, 1991), pp. 223–4, nos. 177 and 178.

[63] L. Webster, 'Metalwork of the Mercian supremacy', in *Mercia: an Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, ed. M. P. Brown and C. A. Farr (Leicester, 2001), pp. 263–77, at 272.

[64] I. Henderson, 'Variations on an Old Theme. Panelled Ornament on Pictish Sculpture at Nigg, Easter Ross, and St Andrews, Fife, and the Book of Kells', in *The Insular Tradition*, ed. C. E. Karkov, M. Ryan and R. T. Farrell (New York, 1997), pp. 143–66, at 160–1.

[65] E.g. *Making of England*, pp. 221–2, no. 173.

The chapes

It is true of course that the reading of the reverse of the inscribed chape (pl. 10) currently advocated by Michelle Brown means that it no longer *has* to be considered Pictish, as was the case with the reading established by Kenneth Jackson.[66] Both Jackson and Julian Brown were agreed that the inscription on the front of the chape 'reads INNOMINEDS; that is *in nomine d[ei] s[ummi]*, 'in the name of God the highest'.

On the reverse, the (no longer disputed) reading is RESADFILISPUSSCIO, or to Jackson *resad fili spusscio*, which he translated as '[the property] of Resad the son of Spusscio', with Resad and Spusscio being taken to be Pictish personal names. As Jackson commented, however: 'There is only one difficulty here, that neither name is a known one, not to mention that the second perhaps looks a little queer.' He continued: 'But this is of no real importance ... [because] ... rather little is known about Pictish nomenclature, but what is known indicates that it was quite often very queer indeed.'

Julian Brown, on the other hand, had initially proposed that a possible reading might be *resad fili sp[irit]us s[an]c[ti]o*, that is '— of the Son and Holy Spirit', 'with the final *o* being considered as an ornamental filler'. This suggestion was, however, rejected by Jackson as 'far-fetched':

> Mr Brown appears now virtually to have abandoned — and rightly so — the former British Museum reading *resad fili spus sci o*, interpreted as 'of the Son and the Holy Ghost', no attempt being made to account for *resad*, and the *o* being taken as 'a filler'.

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[66] The publications of the inscriptions cited in this section are (in chronological order): T. J. Brown, 'The Inscriptions', in 'St Ninian's Isle Silver Hoard', pp. 250–5; K. Jackson, 'The St Ninian's Isle Inscription: A Re-appraisal', *Antiquity* 34 (1960), 38–42; K. Jackson, 'Appendix A. The Inscriptions', in *St Ninian's Isle*, pp. 167–73; E. Okasha, 'The Non-Ogam Inscriptions of Pictland', *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 9 (Summer, 1985), 43–69, at 57–9, no. 6; and M. Brown, 'published in advance of her publication', in *'The Work of Angels': Masterpieces of Celtic Metalwork, 6th–9th Centuries AD*, ed. S. Youngs (London, 1989), p. 110, no. 102.

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X The St Ninian’s Isle inscription (drawing: Eva Wilson)

Jackson continued his dismissal of Brown's interpretation in a footnote:

> The whole thing was doubtless regarded as a continuation of *in nomine dei summi*, and if *resad* and *o* had not been there, and the two *et*'s had been, it would have been convincing. The 'filler' is a council of despair; and the entire formula as it stands would be unique, not to say extraordinary.

Elisabeth Okasha included the St Ninian's Isle chape in her article on 'The Non-Ogam Inscriptions of Pictland', believing it to 'contain decoration of a Pictish nature' (following Wilson). She queries Jackson's expansion of *ds* as *d[ei] s[ummi]*, pointing out that *ds* is 'the usual abbreviation' for *deus* and commenting that

> Brown suggests (and rejects) the idea that *deus* could be ungrammatically used here for *dei*. This seems to me to be a reasonable possibility; or perhaps the metal-worker mistakenly copied *dī* as *ds*.

On the other hand, for the text on the reverse of the chape, Okasha advocates 'as a possibility' Brown's alternative reading, noting that it had received support from McRoberts: *resad fili[i] sp[irit]us s[an]c[t]i o*. She concludes by suggesting that both texts may be read together as meaning: 'In the name of God, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Resad', with the comment that

> *spus* and *sci* are common abbreviations for *spiritus* and *sancti*. The final *o* would presumably be an error, perhaps due to a confusion over the abbreviating of nouns in oblique cases. *Resad* would be a [Pictish] personal name, presumably of the owner.

So Resad remains even if his supposed father, Spusscio, is no longer with us! But even Resad is disposed of by Michelle Brown who, while accepting *in nomine d[eu]s* as the reading of the inscription on the front, suggests that that on the reverse is to be read:

> *res ad fili spus scio*, contracted *sp[irit]us s[an]c[t]io* (corrupt), 'property of the son of the holy spirit'. It forms the second half of one inscription beginning 'in the name of God'.

While accepting that Christian invocations were regarded as appropriate to arms and armour in the eighth century, as on the York (Coppergate) helmet, it is worth noting that the latter does not lay claim to be holy property.[67]

It is important to remember that these two chapes do not form a pair, even though both are horseshoe-shaped with gaping animal-head terminals (pl. 5).[68] To start with they are different in size, but more significantly the inscribed one is, in Wilson's words 'much worn', whereas 'the second chape is in mint condition as if it had never been used'. The inscribed one is made in three pieces and is silver gilt; the second is made in two pieces and is of plain silver.[69]

In 1991, Webster proposed the Anglo-Saxon manufacture of the inscribed chape, citing parallels from both north and south of the Humber, beginning with the York (Coppergate) helmet,[70] as also pointed out by Dominic Tweddle.[71] This not only has the related inscription (already noted) invoking divine protection for its owner, but also shares the use of animal-heads with shovel-shaped muzzles and spiralled eyes. As for the 'shovel-snouted frieze of animal heads' on the reverse of this chape, Webster commented that it 'recalls the Fetter Lane pommel and Gloucester key'. In her most recent paper,[72] Webster concludes that 'up-turned shovel shaped muzzles' form

> a distinctive style element ... which seems to know no boundary. Perhaps significantly, high-class sword-fittings,

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[67] E. Okasha, 'The Inscriptions: Transliteration, Translation and Epigraphy', in D. Tweddle, *The Anglian Helmet from Coppergate* (London, 1992), pp. 1012–15.

[68] There are enlarged colour photographs of the two chapes together in *'Work of Angels'*, p. 154, nos. 102 and 103.

[69] Wilson, *St Ninian's Isle*, pp. 64–6, nos. 15 and 16, 118–22 and 137–40.

[70] Webster in *Making of England*, p. 224.

[71] Tweddle, *Anglian Helmet*, pp. 1134–5.

[72] L. Webster, 'The Anglo-Saxon *Hinterland*: Animal Style in Southumbrian Eighth-century England, with Particular Reference to Metalwork', *Veröffentlichung der Joachim Jungius-Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften Hamburg* 90 (2001), 39–62, at 56.

> which feature rather large in this group, are quintessentially likely to travel. Nevertheless, there is a hint that more than chance lies behind this northwardly mobile set of links.

As for the second chape, Webster commented (in 1991) that its 'interlocking animals ... cannot be closely paralleled in Anglo-Saxon art, though like the ornament on the pommel, they owe a clear debt to Anglo-Saxon sources'.

Concerning the overall form of the two chapes, she observed (also in 1991) that 'they have no surviving Insular parallel', although she has since pointed out that such are clearly enough depicted in Pictish sculpture, as on the St Andrews sarcophagus,[73] and also a cross-slab from Meigle (no. 3).

So here we reach the nub of the problem. Such chapes were known and used in Pictland, but are so far unknown from any other context, although Webster is convinced of the Anglo-Saxon workmanship of at least the inscribed chape. Perhaps then the answer is that this — the worn example — is an actual import, whereas that 'in mint condition' is a Pictish-produced version, of simplified construction. I would also like to draw attention to the fact that the shovel-snouted animal heads of the proposed copy differ, in two important respects, from those on their proposed model. For these are likewise simplified, in that (i) they have projecting tongues in place of little fishs, and (ii) they lack the characteristic Anglo-Saxon trumpet-scroll terminal to the eye, having their heads filled instead with triskele scrolls, recalling the spiral ornament on one of the conical mounts from the hoard.

On the St Andrews sarcophagus

Let us now return to the St Andrews sarcophagus and its mounted lion-hunter, taking note of Webster's observation that 'it can hardly be a coincidence that the horseman on the front ... is also equipped with a sword of Anglo-Saxon eighth-century type'.[74]

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[73] Webster, 'Anglo-Saxon *Hinterland*', p. 56.

[74] Webster, 'Anglo-Saxon *Hinterland*', p. 56.

This is an observation with which Henderson is in agreement, having herself written of this weapon:[75]

> The blade guard is straight. The pommel is approximately of the cocked-hat shape. It has a domed (verging on the triangular) element set on a short straight upper guard, producing a pyramidal contour. Wilson, the only [previous] commentator, considered the pommel to be 'not inconsistent' with the form of the pommel in the St Ninian's Isle treasure ... Certainly the pommel on the St Andrews sword relates more closely to Anglo-Saxon sword-hilts of the 8th century, than to those of the 9th century.

It is also closely resembled by the pommel on Jonah's sheathed sword as depicted, together with his shield, beside the whale that has swallowed him, on the Fowlis Wester cross-slab (no. 2) from Perthshire (pl. 11).[76]

I cannot leave the St Andrews sarcophagus, as evidence for 'princely gifts' to Pictish treasuries, without reference to the exceptional weapon worn by David whilst engaged in killing the lion with his bare hands. This has been admirably described and discussed by Henderson who identifies it as a Germanic weapon: a single-edged *seax* in a sheath that bears a striking resemblance to an ivory skeuomorph made for the so-called knife of St Peter, now in the Cathedral Treasury at Bamberg, both of which display interlace decoration.[77] Henderson's conclusion is that a hypothetical model for the St Andrews carving would take the form of

> a contemporary royal knife [that] is unlikely to have been a native production but would be evidence for gift exchange at a royal level. The suitability of a gift of a *de luxe* hunting knife for a Pictish king is obvious.

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[75] Henderson in *St Andrews Sarcophagus*, p. 158.

[76] Described and illustrated in Laing, 'Chronology and Context', p. 86, figs. 1 and 2, h.

[77] Henderson in *St Andrews Sarcophagus*, pp. 161–4, fig. 47.

Before moving on from the St Andrews sarcophagus, I shall quote one last comment by Henderson with regard to the (previously mentioned) sword being wielded by the mounted lion-hunter.[78] It

> should be noted [that] the St Andrews hilt is quite different from the one shown on a sword clearly incised on the reverse of the early 8th-century cross-slab in Aberlemno churchyard where the blade-guard curves towards the blade, and the upper guard away from it, with no sign of a raised pommel.

On the Aberlemno churchyard stone

It had not been my intention in this lecture, as first conceived, to make mention of that most splendid stone in Aberlemno churchyard (near Forfar, in Angus), but Lloyd Laing has recently (2000) published two revisionist papers concerning it.[79] In his opinion, this particular Aberlemno cross-slab (no. 2) is no longer to be considered as dating from the (early) eighth century, but should be dated to the ninth, and to the mid-ninth century at that (or even later). No longer is the zenith of Pictish relief carving to be considered as having lain in the eighth century, rather 'most of the relief sculptures of Pictland belong to the 9th and 10th centuries'.[80]

Laing's suggestion that the Aberlemno stone is to be re-dated by a century or more is largely based on the nature of the weapons depicted in its famous battle-scene. His discussion of these does, however, get his argument off to an unfortunate start:[81]

> In Anglo-Saxon art the first occurrence of a secular warrior is on the Repton shaft, Derbyshire ... identified by the Biddles as a portrait of the Mercian king Ethelbald (who died 757).

What then of the yet more famous scene on the lid of the Franks Casket, dating from the first half of the eighth century? The existence of this Northumbrian battle-scene is completely overlooked by him despite the fact that it provides the most relevant extant parallel for that on the Aberlemno stone.[82] Instead, Laing is forced to seek out later Irish parallels, stating that 'in terms of general style, the combat scene on Aberlemno 2 is best paralleled on the base of the Market Cross at Kells',[83] and that 'the best parallel for the Aberlemno helmets can be found on the two soldiers at the base of the west face of the shaft at Durrow'.[84] According to Peter Harbison, these soldiers (who are guarding the tomb of Christ) wear 'plumed helmets';[85] they are certainly very odd looking, but the same scene on the Cross of the Scriptures at Clonmacnoise shows the soldiers wearing conical helmets,[86] as are also found depicted on tenth-century Anglo-Scandinavian sculpture.[87]

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[78] Henderson in *St Andrew Sarcophagus*, pp. 158–9.

[79] As cited above (in n. 9).

[80] Laing, 'Chronology and Context', p. 114.

[81] Laing, 'Aberlemno Churchyard Stone, p. 244.

The Durrow cross-shaft cannot seriously be considered to provide 'the best parallel for the Aberlemno helmets', when one compares the helmeted warrior on the lid of the Franks Casket with the York (Coppergate) helmet, and then the York helmet with the helmeted warrior on Aberlemno (pl. 12). They are all one and the same thing — crested helmets, with nasals and neck protectors — and the first two are certainly of eighth-century manufacture. But helmets are not the main concern of Laing, rather it is the swords depicted on Aberlemno that supposedly 'point to a date no earlier than the mid-ninth century' for this sculpture; the fact that ornamental features on the front have clear parallels in eighth-century Insular art is then explained away by him as 'a deliberate revival of designs associated with the Columban foundation at Iona'.[88]

Isabel Henderson has already drawn our attention to what appeared to her, at any rate, to be depictions of two different types of hilt on Pictish swords on eighth-century sculpture — with

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[82] L. Webster, 'Stylistic Aspects of the Franks Casket', in *The Vikings*, ed. R. T. Farrell (London, 1982), pp. 20–31, at 26–7, pl. 26; Tweddle, *Anglian Helmet*, p. 1100.

[83] Laing, 'Aberlemno Churchyard Stone', p. 244.

[84] Laing, 'Aberlemno Churchyard Stone', p. 246.

[85] P. Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland* (Bonn, 1992), vol. 1, p. 81 and vol. 2, fig. 255.

[86] Harbison, *High Crosses*, vol. 1, p. 51 and vol. 2, fig. 140.

[87] Tweddle, *Anglian Helmet*, p. 1100.

[88] Laing, 'Aberlemno Churchyard Stone', p. 250.

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XI Swords depicted on the Fowlis Wester cross-slab (left), and on the Aberlemno churchyard stone (centre and right) (drawing: David Taylor).

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XII Reverse of the Aberlemno churchyard stone (detail) (photo: T. E. Gray).

Anglo-Saxon parallels suggested for both St Andrews and Fowlis Wester (like that surviving in the St Ninian's Isle hoard), which she thinks 'could represent a native ceremonial type', with the other indicating to her that the Picts may well have had their own forms of sword-hilt which need not necessarily have related to either Anglo-Saxon or Viking types.[89]

There are two such weapons for consideration on the Aberlemno stone (pls. 11–12). At the top right of the battle-scene is a sword, seemingly discarded by the helmeted rider in flight; it is simply depicted by means of an incised outline that needs the right lighting to be seen at its clearest today because of the inevitable effect of weathering on the surface of the stone. According to Henderson, this has 'no sign of a raised pommel',[90] but according to Laing it belongs to the type with 'an upturned guard on top of the hilt, on which the pommel is set'.[91] Anyway, the curved guards are clear enough, whatever one chooses to make of the putative pommel lump (pl. 11). The second, potentially diagnostic, sword-hilt is held by the front foot-soldier in the middle register; it is carved in relief, although 'less clearly' for all that. This does indeed have a pronounced central lobe, which Laing suggests is best paralleled by the pommels on mid- to late ninth-century Anglo-Saxon swords,[92] such as those from the River Witham and Gilling West, Yorks.[93]

By way of conclusion: the Oxfordshire ('Beckley') silver sword pommel

For me, however, what is actually represented on the Aberlemno stone takes the form of an undoubtedly eighth-century, Anglo-Saxon, silver sword pommel from Oxfordshire (pl. 13), which has, in Leslie Webster's words, 'extraordinarily stylized zoomorphic decoration' that 'is linked in more than one way to Pictland'.[94] It will of course be for Webster to draw out the exact nature of these

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[89] Henderson in *St Andrews Sarcophagus*, pp. 158–9.

[90] Henderson in *St Andrews Sarcophagus*, p. 159.

[91] Laing, 'Chronology and Context', p. 86.

[92] Laing, 'Aberlemno Churchyard Stone', pp. 241 and 243.

[93] E.g. *Making of England*, pp. 276–7, nos. 250 and 251.

[94] Webster, 'Anglo-Saxon *Hinterland*', p. 56.

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XIII The ‘Beckley’ silver sword pommel, Oxon (photo: BM).

links in her own publication of this remarkably fine object, but she has already pointed out that it

> was found within the boundaries of an Anglo-Saxon royal domain, suggesting a courtly context for its loss. High status artefacts of this kind were surely among the treasures and diplomatic gifts which travelled north to Northumbria and beyond, into the Pictish realms.[95]

Here, then, we are back in the world of silver-mounted weapons as symbols of status: the world of the St Ninian’s Isle hoard (together with the various other late Pictish treasures) and the world of the St Andrews sarcophagus (together with the *floruit* of the Pictish ‘relief style’ of sculpture). The Oxfordshire pommel is not just a splendid find for Anglo-Saxonists, but it is also a key-piece for Pictish studies, even if only in the meantime by virtue of its raised central lobe and upcurved profile, for these features alone are enough to enable us to reclaim the Aberlemno churchyard stone for the eighth century — and thus so much else besides!

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[95] Webster, ‘Metalwork’, p. 272.

Acknowledgements
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NB: the illustrations are not reproduced to scale, with the exception of pl. 13.

List of Plates

I Location map of Pictish silver hoards and metalworking sites.

II Silver torc, plaque and spiral-bossed disc from the Norrie's Law hoard (photo: NMS).

III The Monifieth plaque (reverse).

IV The Brough of Birsay symbol-stone (detail) (photo: NMS).

V Part of the St Ninian's Isle silver hoard (photo: NMS).

VI The St Ninian's Isle hoard revealed on 4 July 1958 (photo: Shetland Museum).

VII The broken cross-slab which covered the St Ninian's Isle hoard (photo: Shetland Museum).

VIII St Ninian's Isle: reconstructed site-plan (1967).

IX St Ninian's Isle: O'Dell's site-plan (1959).

X The St Ninian's Isle inscription (drawing: Eva Wilson).

XI Swords depicted on the Fowlis Wester cross-slab (left), and on the Aberlemno churchyard stone (centre and right) (drawing: David Taylor).

XII Reverse of the Aberlemno churchyard stone (detail) (photo: T. E. Gray).

XIII The 'Beckley' silver sword pommel, Oxon (photo: BM).

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