

# The morphology of Pictish



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Celtica 35 (2023), 33–55

DOI: 10.58480/SCS-n4573-7wtq4

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## THE MORPHOLOGY OF PICTISH

### ABSTRACT

The linguistic affiliation of Pictish has long been disputed. Since the nineteenth century many investigators of Pictish have argued that it was a Celtic language. Yet the morphological behaviour recorded in the Ogam inscriptions associated with the Pictish kingdoms is not paralleled in Brythonic or in Old Irish, and much of the onomastic material recorded in ancient sources such as Ptolemy's *Geography* also appears to preserve characteristics that are not found in comparable Celtic forms. The morphology of Pictish indicates that it may be an Indo-European dialect influenced by Brythonic, but that it cannot be considered a regular member of the Celtic family of languages.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

IT HAS BECOME increasingly common in recent years for the language spoken in early medieval Pictland to be described as a Brythonic dialect. Guto Rhys observes that a 'new consensus' has arisen recently among Scottish medievalists regarding the Brythonic nature of Pictish,<sup>1</sup> but this view seems to be one that has emerged largely among scholars who have approached the main difficulties represented in the linguistic record in unorthodox manners. Many of the difficulties have been widely known since the publication of a key survey by Kenneth Jackson that is often still cited as a seminal contribution to understanding the nature of Pictish.<sup>2</sup> Others to have written on the topic have shown more reserve than Rhys, crediting Jackson as the leading expert on Brythonic in his day and considering his position better established than those promoted otherwise.<sup>3</sup> Most of the concerns raised regarding Jackson's approach have not proved as convincing from a linguistic perspective as the broader acceptance of the criticisms of Jackson's analysis, particularly among Scottish medievalists,

<sup>1</sup>Guto Rhys, 'Approaching the Pictish language: historiography, early evidence and the question of Pritenic', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2015, 118.

<sup>2</sup>Kenneth H. Jackson, 'The Pictish language', in Frederick T. Wainwright (ed.), *The Problem of the Picts* (Edinburgh, 1955 [reprinted Perth, 1980]), 129–66. The 1980 reprint has Jackson's 'addenda and corrigenda' on 173–6.

<sup>3</sup>Damian McManus, review of Katherine Forsyth, *Language in Pictland: The Case against 'Non-Indo-European Pictish'*, *Studia Hameliana* 2 (Utrecht, 1997), *CMCS* 38 (1999), 108–10; Patrick Sims-Williams, 'Bronze- and Iron-Age Celtic-speakers: what don't we know, what can't we know, and what could we know? Language, genetics and archaeology in the twenty-first century', *The Antiquaries Journal* 92 (2012), 427–49, at 431; Simon Rodway, 'The Ogam inscriptions of Scotland and Brittonic Pictish', *Journal of Celtic Linguistics* 21 (2020), 173–234.

would seem to warrant. The matter is a key concern of Scottish history, but despite the criticisms that have emerged of Jackson's claims, the matter remains unresolved from a linguistic perspective.

Before the appearance of Jackson's key study, many analyses of Pictish had assumed that it was a Brythonic language. Jackson's main evidence was the Ogam inscriptions that have largely still defied a transparent analysis. Alfred Smyth and Katherine Forsyth disputed Jackson's treatment of the onomastic and epigraphic evidence for Pictish,<sup>4</sup> but largely on grounds that would not be considered probative in contemporary linguistic discourse.<sup>5</sup> Smyth and Forsyth criticised Jackson's etymological understandings, dismissing his claim that there was significant evidence that a non-Celtic language was spoken in Pictland in the ancient and early medieval periods. The most extreme position is taken by Forsyth who attempts to demonstrate that some of the Ogam inscriptions of Scotland can be understood as Brythonic. Several of the Ogam inscriptions, dated by Forsyth to the sixth to tenth centuries,<sup>6</sup> have long been thought to feature Gaelic elements, and both Brythonic and Old Norse names have been claimed to appear in some of the finds. Simon Rodway has argued that Forsyth's analysis of several of the Ogam inscriptions as linguistically Brythonic is implausible,<sup>7</sup> however, reflecting a widely shared opinion that the Ogam inscriptions of Scotland remain significantly opaque. Many of the Ogam-inscribed stones were found in Shetland and Orkney, but the same recurrent linguistic features appear to be present in the inscriptions discovered in Aberdeenshire, as if only one language is represented by the epigraphic texts. In the eighth century Bede (*Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* 1, 1) also referred to Pictish as if it were a single language. Yet, as Jackson contended, the language of the Pictish inscriptions cannot readily be understood as Brythonic, and if the Ogam texts are not demonstrably Celtic, the logical conclusion would seem to be that Pictish was not a Brythonic language.

Yet considerable onomastic evidence has survived associated with Pictland and the Picts that does seem to be Brythonic. Names of early and pre-Pictish tribes, people and places are recorded in ancient as well as medieval and modern sources, and many of these have been plausibly assessed as linguistically Celtic. A long tradition of associating recurrent place-name elements found in north-eastern Scotland with items of Welsh, Cornish and Breton vocabulary arose over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and it was accepted by Jackson at face value.<sup>8</sup> Most of the place-names are first attested only quite

<sup>4</sup>Alfred P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80–1000* (London, 1984), 46–53; Forsyth, *Language in Pictland*.

<sup>5</sup>McManus, review of Forsyth.

<sup>6</sup>Katherine Forsyth, 'The Ogam inscriptions of Scotland: an edited corpus', unpublished PhD thesis, Harvard University, 1996, lxx–lxxvi.

<sup>7</sup>Rodway, 'The Ogam inscriptions of Scotland'.

<sup>8</sup>William J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926); W. F. H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names* (London, 1976); Simon Taylor, 'Pictish place-names revisited', in Stephen T. Driscoll, Jane Geddes and Mark A. Hall (eds), *Pictish Progress: New Studies on Northern Britain in the Early Middle Ages*, *The Northern World* 50 (Leiden, 2011), 67–118.

recently, but they are widely accepted to preserve evidence that Pictish was a Brythonic language – or something very close to it. Since Jackson's time there has even been a tradition of attempting to explain how this 'Pritenic' form of Pictish (as Jackson called it) diverged from Brythonic – the linguistic ancestor of Cumbric, Welsh, Cornish and Breton. The approach taken by Forsyth to the epigraphic evidence stems from a conviction that the analyses of the onomastic material are more reliable than Jackson's assessment of the inscriptions, but this seems to be the reverse relationship that epigraphic evidence usually holds to onomastic material.

Forsyth's approach is to try to shoehorn Brythonic forms into some of the Ogam inscriptions and dismiss the other texts as too linguistically obscure to be considered as evidence for the nature of Pictish. But if the inscriptions preserve linguistic material that cannot be taken as Brythonic, this evidence is a primary, not a secondary consideration. Jackson suggested that the epigraphic remains of Pictish might represent an archaic pre-Celtic dialect, adopted by originally Brythonic-speaking elites, or that the language preserved in the Ogam inscriptions may have served as a learned dialect, much as Coptic is only employed today as a liturgical language.<sup>9</sup> The most obvious manner in which to approach epigraphic Pictish, however, is to take it as reflecting the regular, living language of a local speech community – an elite one, given the cost, effort, skill and erudition involved in raising stone monuments – and that it is the onomastic evidence that appears to be Brythonic which needs explaining. Rodway accepts that a Pictish form of Latin *crux* 'cross' may be preserved on the Burrian stone (as *c[e]rroccs*) and that an etymologically Celtic name *Nehhtons* (cf. the Old Irish god *Nechtán* and the Pictish king's name *Nechtán*) is preserved on the Lunnasting stone. In each case, the identified term is the last in the text, however, an indication that the untranslated portion is likely to preserve verbal or deictic forms such as indications of who made or raised the monument or a memorial formula such as 'here lies'. Neither the Burrian nor the Lunnasting inscription obviously lends itself to an interpretation comparable to the Irish Ogam memorials, which typically feature little more than the name of the deceased in the genitive case.<sup>10</sup> It seems rather more likely that some of the ostensibly Pictish Ogams preserve more complex expressions than just onomastic labels and hence are more diagnostically important representatives of Pictish than are personal and place-names preserved in otherwise non-Pictish sources, no matter how many of them are attested.

In order to assess claims that Pictish is a Brythonic language, the evidence called upon to justify the neo-Celtic nature of the language needs to be surveyed critically. A considerable amount of onomastic material is recorded in ancient sources such as the *Geography* of Ptolemy that has been asserted to prove that Scotland was predominately Celtic-speaking in Roman times. But the onomastic evidence has not been interpreted systematically – its morphology has never been directly addressed. The Ogam inscriptions have also

<sup>9</sup>Jackson, 'The Pictish language', 154.

<sup>10</sup>Damian McManus, *A Guide to Ogam*, Maynooth Monographs 4 (Maynooth, 1991), 51–2.

been subject to much piecemeal etymological speculation rather than through the application of approaches such as those employed in the decipherment of a non-Indo-European epigraphic language such as Etruscan. The evidence of place-names has been surveyed more regularly, but often in ways that presume that Pictish was a neo-Celtic language rather than accepting that onomastic evidence is an inherently limited yardstick of linguistic affinity. An analysis of epigraphic Pictish reveals that it attests fundamental characteristics that cannot be explained as neo-Celtic, but that do seem likely to be Indo-European, much as the early onomastic evidence recorded in sources such as Ptolemy suggests.

## 2. NON-CELTIC PICTISH VS BRYTHONIC

Attempts to determine the linguistic nature of Pictish informed by the development of comparative philology first emerged in the late nineteenth century, but prior to the appearance of Jackson's 1955 assessment, the linguistic affiliation of the language had been widely disputed. The declarations by Alexander Macbain and William Watson that Pictish was a *p*-Celtic dialect relied on analyses of the place-names of north-eastern Scotland,<sup>11</sup> but the Ogam inscriptions were largely considered untranslatable – an unexpected difficulty if Pictish was a Brythonic language. Jackson's two-language proposal seemed to best explain the linguistic evidence, but it was developed at a time when contact-induced linguistic change was not well understood and explanations of Indo-European and Celtic morphology had yet to develop much beyond the model assumed by comparativists in the late nineteenth century. If the language preserved in the Ogam inscriptions is not Celtic, the first scenario proposed by Jackson may apply – Jackson proposed that the aristocrats of early medieval Pictland may have been of Celtic descent, but that they had adopted an indigenous pre-Celtic language of northern Scotland and that this language is preserved in the Ogam inscriptions. The inscriptions remain largely obscure, but Jackson's conclusion that they were probably not Indo-European was reached at a time when understandings of Indo-European morphology were much less advanced than they are now and his supposition can be tested in a more regular manner than was previously possible.

The name *Nehhtons*, for example, appears most straightforwardly to be taken as preserving either the nominative singular masculine morpheme *-s* inherited from Indo-European or the genitive singular marker *\*-osjo* (cf. Sanskrit *-asya*, Homeric Greek *-οιο*, Old Latin *-osio* and Lepontic *-oiso*), as *Nechtan* appears to continue *\*Neptuh<sub>3</sub>nos* (cf. Latin *Neptūnus*). But *Nehhtons* appears to have lost its expected stem vowel *\*-o-* in a manner quite contrary to the way the loss of nominative and genitive endings is usually presumed to have occurred in Brythonic.<sup>12</sup> Such a loss is more expected of Germanic (cf. the Gothic nominative singular *dags* < *\*dagaz* 'day' and the Old Norse

<sup>11</sup>Alexander Macbain, 'The Picts', *The Celtic Magazine* 12 (1887), 385–91, 433–40, 481–6 and 529–41; Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, 10–72.

<sup>12</sup>Kenneth H. Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain* (Edinburgh, 1953), 618–33; John T. Koch, 'The loss of final syllables and loss of declension in Brittonic', *BBCS* 30 (1983),

genitive singular *dags* < \**dagas*) and the sigmatic ending has even led to attempts to read the inscriptions as if they were Norse, with the Bressay inscription *crrosc : nahhtvddadds : datr : ann . | bennises : meqqddroann*<sup>13</sup> being interpreted by Thomas Clancy as if it were the \**crosg Nahtudads dótr Ann[a] ben Nis(s)is ma(i)c Dróán* ‘(memorial) cross of Nahtudads’s daughter Anna, the wife of Nissi mac Dróán’, with the *-s* marking the genitive case.<sup>14</sup> The problem with such piecemeal interpretations is that they leave the impression that the inscriptions preserve syntactically irregular hotchpotches, when other finds, such as the Lunnasting inscription that Forsyth reads as *ettecuhetts : ahehhtannn : hccvvevv : nehhtons*,<sup>15</sup> appear to feature *s*-marking in texts that just remain ‘utterly baffling’.<sup>16</sup>

There are many forms preserved in the Pictish inscriptions that retain endings comparable to that of *Nehhtons* and *Nahhtvddadds* – at least ten seem apparent in Forsyth’s corpus. But if they are not all to be accorded intrusive Old Norse *s*-genitives and the texts will not readily yield to Celtic interpretations, then the ending *-s* seems likely to represent a morphological characteristic of epigraphic Pictish that is not Brythonic. The Brythonic languages lost their case system (and endings such as *-s*) at the end of antiquity and *Nehhtons* is accordingly not an expected early medieval Brythonic form. Forsyth suggests that the ending may reflect the Old Irish demonstrative *so* ‘this’<sup>17</sup> or, following a suggestion of John Koch’s, the Breton demonstrative determiner *-se* ‘there’.<sup>18</sup> But Rodway describes these identifications as ‘totally *ad hoc*’<sup>19</sup> – demonstratives are not expected to be cliticised to names and the identification does not reflect the outcome of a systematic study of the relevant forms. The Ogam inscriptions of Scotland seem to preserve some behaviour characteristic of Gaelic naming and some may even record Old Norse forms. The recurrent ending *-s* appears to be evidence that the epigraphs are significantly (and systematically) different from contemporary Gaelic and Brythonic texts, however, and the inability of previous investigators to offer anything other than partial or controversial interpretations of many of the Pictish Ogams gives the strong impression that the language of their inscriptions cannot reasonably be assessed as if it were Brythonic or a pastiche of Old Norse and neo-Celtic elements.

Rather than some sort of unprincipled mixture of Gaelic, Old Norse and Brythonic, with each inscription perhaps representing a different form of linguistic combination, Jackson proposed that a fourth language must be

201–33; Patrick Sims-Williams, *The Celtic Inscriptions of Britain: Phonology and Chronology*, c. 400–1200, Publications of the Philological Society 37 (Oxford, 2003), 109–15.

<sup>13</sup>Forsyth, ‘The Ogam inscriptions of Scotland’, 117–38.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas O. Clancy, review of Richard A. V. Cox., *The Language of the Ogam Inscriptions of Ireland* (Aberdeen, 1999), *Peritia* 13 (1999), 332–41, at 336. An Old Norse translation was originally proposed by Charles Graves, ‘On the Ogham inscriptions found on a monument at Bressay, in Shetland’, *PRIA* 6 (1853–7), 248–9, and it was accepted by Jackson, ‘The Pictish language’, 142.

<sup>15</sup>Forsyth, ‘The Ogam inscriptions of Scotland’, 402–19.

<sup>16</sup>Forsyth, *Language in Pictland*, 36.

<sup>17</sup>Forsyth, ‘The Ogam inscriptions of Scotland’, 114.

<sup>18</sup>See Forsyth, ‘The Ogam inscriptions of Scotland’, 218, 414 and 416.

<sup>19</sup>Rodway, ‘The Ogam inscriptions of Scotland’, 189.

represented in the inscriptions, a language that originally formed a substratum to the Brythonic of the early Pictish elites. Earlier linguists, from John Rhŷs to Julius Pokorny,<sup>20</sup> had come to similar conclusions, but Forsyth criticises Jackson's proposal that a non-Celtic substratum existed in Pictland in what she describes as a 'long-term linguistic apartheid'.<sup>21</sup> Since the 1970s, however, linguists have become much more interested in how language change occurs through contact as well as the traditional focus on internal development, and investigations of mixed languages, creoles and how language shift occurs are now available. The Ogam inscriptions and the onomastic evidence suggest that some kind of language mixture or assimilation transpired over the course of the first millennium in Pictland. The linguistic 'problem of the Picts' has tended to be seen in an exclusively binary manner – Celtic or pre-Celtic. But if there is some indication that the Ogam inscriptions preserve both Brythonic and non-Brythonic features, the binary approach adopted by many recent investigators may just have been mistaken. Just as it seems wrong to attempt to force Old Norse or Gaelic interpretations onto the inscriptions by emending readings to suit a given interpretation, so also hammering Brythonic terms into texts that otherwise seem interminably cranky or just claiming they are too obscure to be cited as evidence does not seem to represent a regular linguistic approach to explaining Pictish.

The main problem with assessing Pictish predominantly through onomastics is that the Brythonic approach to Pictish has failed to explain the epigraphic evidence. Explaining morphological features of Pictish such as the *s*-marking of *Nehhtons* and *Nahhtvddadds* is key to resolving the question of the linguistic affiliation of Pictish because morphology is less commonly borrowed than lexemes, and the *s*-marking in the Ogam inscriptions seems unlikely to be a neo-Celtic feature. Cross-linguistically, morphological evidence is a primary matter as far as linguistic affiliation is concerned, whereas lexemes usually are not. English toponymy is riddled with elements that do not have a Germanic origin, but English remains morphologically Germanic, preserving features such as *s*-genitives that were foreign to Latin, Brythonic and Anglo-Norman. But morphology is also often preserved in onomastic evidence, including the onomastic forms from northern Scotland preserved by ancient authors such as Ptolemy, and it can also be assessed to see if it is typically Celtic or Indo-European.

<sup>20</sup>John Rhŷs, 'The inscriptions and language of the northern Picts', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 26 (1892), 263–351; idem, 'A revised account of the inscriptions of the northern Picts', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 32 (1898), 324–98; Vittore Pisani and Julius Pokorny, *Allgemeine und vergleichende Sprachwissenschaft – Indogermanistik; Keltologie*, Wissenschaftliche Forschungsberichte, Geisteswissenschaftliche Reihe 2 (Bern, 1953), 157.

<sup>21</sup>Forsyth, *Language in Pictland*, 14.

## 3. THE ETHNONYMS OF PTOLEMY

Many of the characterisations of Pictish produced in reaction to Jackson's 1955 survey refuse to accept that Pictish may have been a mixed or hybrid language. The binary approach to Pictish that demands that it should have an exclusively neo-Celtic or non-Celtic identity is characteristic of the assessments proffered by Smyth, Forsyth and Guto Rhys of the names recorded in ancient sources for tribes, rivers and places in northern Scotland, especially those recorded by Ptolemy. These names presumably provide a linguistic background to Pictish – if some of the names recorded in ancient sources are not Brythonic, then they may throw some light on the linguistic nature of the Pictish Ogams. In accordance with the approach taken by Watson, however, many of the names recorded by Ptolemy are often still argued to be either Celtic or not Celtic based on (possible) etymological analyses of the roots they record, not assessments of the morphology they seem to preserve. Most recently, Rhys sets out the evidence of the ethnic names recorded by Ptolemy in a manner that reflects the kind of linguistic analyses employed in onomastic studies in Watson's day.<sup>22</sup> Comparative linguistics has developed significantly since the 1920s, particularly in terms of understandings of Indo-European morphology, and a better understanding of Celtic word formation has also emerged since the appearance of Watson's studies.

The best-evidenced forms of the ethnic names recorded by Ptolemy (*Geography*, 2, 3, 9–14) in the original Greek, along with the usual Romanised forms, are as follows:

|            |                   |
|------------|-------------------|
| Δαμνόνιοι  | <i>Damnonii</i>   |
| Ἐπίδιοι    | <i>Epidii</i>     |
| Κέρωνες    | <i>Cerones</i>    |
| Κρέωνες    | <i>Creones</i>    |
| Καρνονάκαι | <i>Carnonacae</i> |
| Καρινοὶ    | <i>Carini</i>     |
| Κορναύιοι  | <i>Cornavii</i>   |
| Καληδόνιοι | <i>Caledonii</i>  |
| Δεκάνται   | <i>Decantae</i>   |
| Λοῦγιοι    | <i>Lugi</i>       |
| Σμέρται    | <i>Smertae</i>    |
| Οὐακομάγοι | <i>Vacomagi</i>   |
| Οὐενίκωνες | <i>Venicones</i>  |
| Ταιξάλοι   | <i>Taexali</i>    |

Other peoples from ancient Scotland include the *Boresti* mentioned by Tacitus (*Agricola* 38), the *Maeatae* (Μαιάται) described by Cassius Dio (in Xiphilinus' epitome of Dio 77, 12) as a confederation of tribes near the northern border of the Roman province, and Ammianus Marcellinus (*Res gestae* 27, 8, 5) records a Pictish tribe called the *Verturiones*, a people separate from the *Dicalydones*

<sup>22</sup>Rhys, 'Approaching the Pictish language', 144–56.

(who appear just to have been the earlier *Caledonii* with their ethnonym prefixed by an element *di-*). The *Verturiones* seem to have a name related to that of the later Pictish kingdom *Fortriu*,<sup>23</sup> but the main early group north of the Antonine Wall in the second century appears to have been the *Caledonii*, the *Caledoniam incolentes* ('inhabitants of Caledonia') of Tacitus (*Agricola* 25).

Rigorous linguistic assessment of ethnonyms requires more sophistication than just etymological speculation. It entails explicit morphological and semantic analysis, even if understandings of Celtic word formation are not as well developed as they could be. Stefan Zimmer has produced a comprehensive survey of Welsh word-formation,<sup>24</sup> but there is no wider study available comparable to the overview for Germanic produced by Wolfgang Meid.<sup>25</sup> Robust models of Indo-European nominal morphology are now available, reconciling apophonic behaviour with accent, suffixation and nominal classes, and studies such as Paul Russell's analysis of the formation of Celtic words with velar suffixes and Karin Stüber's assessment of the Celtic *n*-stems are available.<sup>26</sup> It is not entirely clear how suffixation developed more generally in the Celtic languages, however. Karl Horst Schmidt provided a pioneering study of continental onomastic compounds,<sup>27</sup> demonstrating that Gaulish dithematic names are constructed in several different key ways, and other principles of onomastic formation can be derived from studies such as Patrizia de Bernardo Stempel's typological analysis of Celtic ethnonyms.<sup>28</sup> None of these works was available to Jackson when he produced his seminal study of Pictish, but none of them is employed by more recent investigators either.

The ethnonyms recorded by Ptolemy all appear to be derivationally Indo-European coinages: they mainly appear to feature one onomastic root enlarged by one or more morphologically common Indo-European suffixes. The largest number are ethnonyms that feature nasal suffixes of a type that is particularly common in Gaulish and Germanic onomastics. The *Damnonii*, *Caledonii*, *Cerones*, *Creones*, *Venicones* and *Verturiones* all seem likely to preserve the enlargement *-on-* also found in the Gaulish ethnonyms *Ceutrones*, *Lingones*, *Pictones*, *Redones*, *Santones*, *Senones*, *Suessiones* and *Turones*, and more commonly in Germanic ethnonyms such as *Aviones*, *Burgundiones*, *Frisiavones*, *Gutones*, *Helvecones*, *Herminones* and *Hilleviones*. There does

<sup>23</sup>John Rhŷs, *Celtic Britain* (London, 1904), 322; Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, 68–9.

<sup>24</sup>Stefan Zimmer, *Studies in Welsh Word-Formation* (Dublin, 2000); cf., similarly, for Old Irish, Patrizia de Bernardo Stempel, *Nominale Wortbildung des älteren Irischen: Stammbildung und Derivation*, Buchreihe der Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie 15 (Tübingen, 1999).

<sup>25</sup>Hans Krahe and Wolfgang Meid, *Germanische Sprachwissenschaft III: Wortbildungslehre*, Sammlung Götschen 2234 (Berlin, 1969).

<sup>26</sup>Paul Russell, *Celtic Word-Formation: The Velar Suffixes* (Dublin, 1990); Karin Stüber, *The Historical Morphology of N-Stems in Celtic*, Maynooth Studies in Celtic Linguistics 3 (Maynooth, 1998).

<sup>27</sup>Karl Horst Schmidt, 'Die Komposition in gallischen Personennamen', *ZCP* 26 (1957), 33–301.

<sup>28</sup>Patrizia de Bernardo Stempel, 'Linguistically Celtic ethnonyms: towards a classification', in Juan Luis García Alonso (ed.), *Celtic and Other Languages in Ancient Europe* (Salamanca, 2008), 101–18.

not seem to be much cause to believe that the ethnonyms have been subject to significant Graecisation or Latinisation given that the ethnonyms recorded by Ptolemy for regions such as Africa (compare those from Mauretania such as *Metagonitae*, *Socossi*, *Verves*, *Mazices*, *Verbices*, *Salinsae*, *Cauni*, *Bacuatae*, *Macanitae*, *Volubiliani*, *Iangaucani* and *Nectiberes*) do not feature such clear evidence of preserving Indo-European derivational morphology. Stefan Schaffner argues that the Germanic ethnonymic nasal suffix had multiple origins – primary *n*-stem, individualising and possessive (Hoffmann) suffixes<sup>29</sup> – and the formant employed in Celtic appears to reflect similar diversity.<sup>30</sup> Comparable formations are rarer in other Indo-European languages (e.g. *Macedones*, *Paeones* and *Paphlagonēs*), but the relevant ethnonyms recorded by Ptolemy and Ammianus are most regularly segmented as *Damn-onii*, *Caled-onii*, *Cer-ones*, *Cre-ones*, *Venic-ones* and *Verturi-ones*.

Another suffix characteristic of Celtic ethnonyms is a dental enlargement similar to that attested in *Maeatae*. Most recently analysed by Luka Repanšek,<sup>31</sup> the Celtic dental suffix is reflected widely in Gaulish ethnonyms including *Abrincates*, *Carnuates*, *Cornacates*, *Nantuates* and *Tolsates*. It is an adjectival formant, but as Repanšek observes, Gaulish ethnonyms in *-at* are usually derived from place-names (such as *Tolsates* to *Tolosa*) or nominal roots (such as *Caeracates* to *\*kaerak-* ‘sheep’) and *Maia* was the name of the Roman fort at the western end of Hadrian’s Wall at Bowness-on-Solway in Cumbria.<sup>32</sup> Ethnonyms with velar suffixes are more problematic, however. The suffix *-ak-* is widely employed in Celtic personal names, but as an *ā*-stem the northern ethnonym *Carnonacae* appears to represent a type of formation atypical of Celtic ethnonyms. Russell could only cite one continental example of an ethnonym that features comparable enlargement, the Belgic *o*-stem *Levaci*,<sup>33</sup> although the name of the Brythonic *Bibroci* (cf. *\*bibrus* ‘beaver’) mentioned by Caesar (*Bellum Gallicum* 5, 21) clearly features a suffix *-ok-*, and the *Cantii* are also referred to as the *Cantiaci* (cf. the place-name *Durovernum Cantiacorum*), just as Caesar (*B.G.* 5, 21) mentions a tribe called the *Segontiaci*, both evidently featuring a suffix *-jak-*. Nonetheless Ptolemy’s *Carini* is morphologically similar to the Belgic ethnonym *Morini* (presumably a derivative of *\*mori-* ‘sea’) and the Irish form *Darini* (Δαῖνοι; cf. *\*dāri-* ‘fertile, vigorous, violent’). Similarly, the *Cornavii* are usually linked with the Brythonic *Cornovii* (cf. *\*korno-* ‘horn’), while *Taexali* is most immediately comparable to the names of the Gaulish *Medulli* and *Venelli* (cf. *\*medu* ‘mead’ and *\*uēni-* ‘blood relative, kin’).

It is only after the suffixes of the ethnonyms of Ptolemy have been analysed that their roots and bases can then be assessed with any confidence. In two

<sup>29</sup>Stefan Schaffner, ‘Zu den Wortbildungstypen der altgermanischen Völkernamen mit *n*-Suffix’, *Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft* 69 (2015), 145–89.

<sup>30</sup>Stüber, *The Historical Morphology of N-Stems*, 90–118.

<sup>31</sup>Luka Repanšek, ‘Two notes on Old Celtic morphology’, *Acta Linguistica Petropolitana* 10 (2014), 239–54, at 240–5.

<sup>32</sup>A. L. F. Rivet and Colin Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1979), 408.

<sup>33</sup>Paul Russell, ‘The suffix *-āko-* in Continental Celtic’, *EC* 25 (1988), 131–73, at 138; idem, *Celtic Word-Formation*, 13.

instances of forms apparently featuring *-on-*, however, the bases of the relevant ethnonyms were evidently considered problematic by Jackson. The ethnonym *Venicones*, which also appears to be attested epigraphically in the singular *Venico* in a dedication from Carrawburgh, can only be analysed as featuring a reflex of a nasal suffix if its base is accepted to be *\*uēnik-* (cf. Gaulish *ouēvikoi* ‘clansmen’).<sup>34</sup> But Watson assumed that the ethnonym is a dithematic compound featuring a reflex of *\*kones* ‘hounds’ (translating *Venicones* as ‘swamp hounds, alder hounds’)<sup>35</sup> and Koch compares the form to the *Gododdin*’s toponym *Maen Gwynngwn*, analysing *Venicones* as ‘kindred-hounds’.<sup>36</sup> The *Gododdin* appears to place Maen Gwynngwn beyond Bannauc (i.e. Bannockburn), putting it in Pictland, and Gaulish names featuring *Veni-* ‘blood relative, kin’<sup>37</sup> (as opposed to the collective *\*uēniā* ‘kindred’) as a first element are relatively common (e.g. *Venicarus* ‘kin-loving’ and *Veniclutio* ‘kin-famous’).

Yet Andrew Breeze criticises Koch’s etymology of *Venicones* as lacking a clear onomastic parallel.<sup>38</sup> De Bernardo Stempel’s survey of the usual manner in which Celtic ethnonyms are formed makes it obvious that they reflect an ‘onomastic dialect’<sup>39</sup> as Celtic ethnonyms are restricted to a limited set of semantic fields, and a dithematic ethnonym meaning ‘kin-hounds’ appears to be linguistically irregular. Breeze compares *Venicones* to martial personal names such as Brythonic *Cunobelinus* ‘hound-strong’, the Arthurian figure *Gwrgi* ‘manly hound’ and the *Goddodin*’s *Erthgi* ‘bear-hound’, but *Venicones* would have to be an otherwise unparalleled type of ethnonym for it to feature a second element *-cones* ‘hounds’. *Gwynngwn* is also most regularly understood to mean ‘white-hounds’ in Old Welsh (with *Gwynn-* ‘white’ < *\*uindo-*) and Koch suggests that the use of *Gwynn-* ‘white’ represents an early Welsh reanalysis of *Veni-* ‘kin’. An analysis as *\*Venicones*, however, seems superior to ‘kin-hounds’, given how Celtic ethnonyms are usually formed.

The other ethnonym that features a suffix *-on-* that Jackson considered etymologically difficult is *Caledonii*. It is most obviously analysed as featuring a first element *\*kaled-*, but no such base is attested in Celtic. Zimmer suggests that the ethnonym may continue a *bahuvrihi* with a Hoffmann suffix *\*kal-ēd-on-* ‘having hard feet’ (< *\*kalo-pēd-h<sub>3</sub>on-*) as the *-e-* is recorded

<sup>34</sup>Robin G. Collingwood and Richard P. Wright (eds), *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain, I: Inscriptions on Stone* (Oxford, 1965), no. 1543; Xavier Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise. Une approche linguistique du vieux-celtique continental*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 2003), 313; Graham R. Isaac, ‘Scotland’, in Javier de Hoz, Eugenio R. Luján and Patrick Sims-Williams (eds), *New Approaches to Celtic Place-Names in Ptolemy’s Geography* (Madrid, 2005), 189–204, at 201.

<sup>35</sup>Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, 23.

<sup>36</sup>John T. Koch, ‘The stone of the Weni-kones’, *BBCS* 31 (1980), 87–9.

<sup>37</sup>Jürgen Uhlich, ‘Verbal governing compounds (synthetics) in early Irish and other Celtic languages’, *Transactions of the Philological Society* 100 (2002), 403–33, at 413.

<sup>38</sup>Andrew Breeze, ‘Three Celtic names: Venicones, Tesis and Soutra’, *Scottish Language* 25 (2006), 71–9.

<sup>39</sup>De Bernardo-Stempel, ‘Linguistically Celtic ethnonyms’; on the term ‘onomastic dialects’, see John Insley, ‘Early Germanic personal names and onomastic dialects’, in Andrew James Johnston, Ferdinand von Mengden and Stefan Thim (eds), *Language and Text: Current Perspectives on English and Germanic Historical Linguistics*, *Anglistische Forschungen* 359 (Heidelberg, 2006), 113–32.

as long (-η-) in Ptolemy and it was clearly scanned long by Lucan (*unda Caledonius fallit turbata Britannos; Pharsalia* 6, 68).<sup>40</sup> But the Gaulish moneyer's name *Caletedu* (Καλετεδου)<sup>41</sup> demonstrates how a compound meaning 'having hard feet' (< \**kaletō-ped-*) would be expected to appear in a Celtic ethnonym, and inherited \**ē* is usually thought to have developed to *ī* in all of the Celtic languages well before the second century.<sup>42</sup> Instead, De Bernardo Stempel proposes to derive *Caledonii* from \**kaletō-γδόν-* 'the tough people', but similar contractions are not attested in comparable continental forms such as *Borbetomagus*.<sup>43</sup> Eric Hamp's comparison of *Caledones* to *Macedones* and a participial suffix \*-(*e*)*do-* would also render the ethnonym problematic from a Brythonic perspective as he had earlier argued that the Celtic languages replaced \*-(*e*)*do-* with \*-(*o*)*do-*.<sup>44</sup> Given the spelling *silvae Calidoniae* 'of the Caledonian Forest' recorded by Pliny (*Natural History* 4, 16), Lionel Rivet and Colin Smith maintained that the original form of the ethnonym was \**Calidones*,<sup>45</sup> and Rhys supposes that *Caledonii* may feature a suffix \*-(*i*)*do-*.<sup>46</sup> But there is no evidence for a suffix \*-(*i*)*do-* in Celtic otherwise – the Brythonic suffix \*-(*e*)*do-* is a reflex of \*-(*o*)*do-* after inherited \*-(*i*)*do-* > \*-(*i*)*do-* during the fourth or early fifth century.<sup>47</sup> Rhys points to the Gaulish moneyer's name *Caletu* and further continental names such as *Caledia*, *Caledonia*, *Caledo* and *Caledonnis*,<sup>48</sup> but personal names derived from ethnonyms (such as *Caletu* 'the Caledonian' and *Caledonia* 'of the family of the Caledonian') are common enough in provincial Roman epigraphy – compare names derived from Germanic ethnonyms such as *Tungro* 'the Tungrian' or *Batavinia* 'of the family of the Batavian'.<sup>49</sup> Rhys's analysis of *Caledonii* is morphologically unexpected, a recurrent problem with the Celtic etymologies often proposed for the ethnonyms recorded by Ptolemy for peoples dwelling north of the Antonine Wall.

Not all of the ethnonyms recorded by Ptolemy are as problematic. Five of the other forms cited by Rhys could well be regular Celtic formations.<sup>50</sup> The *Damnonii* appear to have been the 'subduers' or 'conquerors' (cf. Old Irish *damnaid* 'ties, binds, subdues, conquers'), but they evidently dwelt on both sides of the Antonine Wall. Further west, Watson proposed that the name of the

<sup>40</sup>Stefan Zimmer, 'Some names and epithets in *Culhwch ac Olwen*', *Studi Celtici* 3 (2006), 163–79, at 163–7.

<sup>41</sup>Paul-Marie Duval et al. (eds), *Recueil des inscriptions gauloises*, 4 vols (Paris, 1985–2004), M-91 and 92.

<sup>42</sup>Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, 304 (and n. 1).

<sup>43</sup>De Bernardo-Stempel, 'Linguistically Celtic ethnonyms', 111 n. 118; cf. Isaac, 'Scotland', 193–4.

<sup>44</sup>Eric P. Hamp, 'Traces of participial \*-(*o*)*do-* in Celtic', *Ériu* 40 (1989), 113–17; idem, 'Note on Continental Celtic and Indo-European', *EC* 38 (2008), 59–67, at 59.

<sup>45</sup>Rivet and Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*, 289.

<sup>46</sup>Rhys, 'Approaching the Pictish language', 147–8.

<sup>47</sup>Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, 353–6; Zimmer, *Studies in Welsh Word-Formation*, 551.

<sup>48</sup>Xavier Delamarre, *Noms de personne celtiques dans l'épigraphie classique* (Paris, 2007), 53.

<sup>49</sup>*L'Année épigraphique* 1924, no. 21 and 1973, no. 351.

<sup>50</sup>Rhys, 'Approaching the Pictish language', 144–56.

*Epidii* of Kintyre is a *p*-Celtic coinage because of the root *ep-* ‘horse’ (< \**ēku-*) that is reflected in the Brythonic languages and Gaulish<sup>51</sup> (cf. Breton *eb* ‘horse’, Old Irish *ech* ‘horse’ and the name of the Gaulish horse goddess *Epona*) and *-id-* could well reflect \**ped-* ‘foot’ as if the ethnonym was a *bahuvrihi* ‘having horse feet’ or reflected a toponym; compare Middle Irish *ed* ‘space, distance, shelter’ < \**ped-* ‘foot (as a unit of measure)’.<sup>52</sup> Similarly, Rhys compares the *Cerones* of the west coast with the Germanic ethnonym *Caerosi*,<sup>53</sup> which has been explained most recently by Jozef van Loon as a derivative of \**hair-* ‘grey-haired, distinguished’ enlarged by the comparative suffix \*-*ōz-*,<sup>54</sup> and the Old Irish cognate *cíar* ‘brown’ (< \**kēr-* < \**keir-*) may explain *Cerones*. Moving closer to Pictland, Watson’s explanation of *Decantae* as meaning ‘those who are excellent, worthy’ based on an *-nt-* enlargement of the root of Old Irish *dech* ‘better’<sup>55</sup> can be considered regular given the Brythonic ethnonyms *Brigantes* and *Novantae*, but De Bernardo Stempel argues on typological grounds that *Dekantae* is better understood as a cognate of Gaulish *δεκάντεμ* and indicates ‘the ten’.<sup>56</sup> Further north were the *Smertae* whose ethnonym was connected rather idiosyncratically with a meaning ‘smeared ones’ by Watson, but it is more obviously to be linked with the Gaulish onomastic element *Smert-* ‘provider’.<sup>57</sup>

Yet Graham Isaac’s ‘tentative suggestion’<sup>58</sup> that *Creones* of the west coast may reflect a development (as ‘those characterised *par excellence* by body, shape; the shapely ones’) of a cognate of Middle Irish *crí* ‘body’ (< \**krip-*) seems semantically unlikely. De Bernardo Stempel interprets the name of the *Taexali* of Aberdeenshire as the ‘hatchet people’,<sup>59</sup> as if the expected form \**tāxslo-* ‘axe’<sup>60</sup> has had a palatal vowel irregularly inserted in its root, a back vowel added to its suffix and is unexpectedly missing an agentive suffix.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, Rhys’s connection of the name of the *Carini* with \**karo-* ‘to love’<sup>62</sup> (supported by De Bernardo Stempel) does not explain the *-i-*, and the ethnonym seems unlikely to have had anything to do with \**kariā* ‘mistake, sin’<sup>63</sup> on semantic grounds.<sup>64</sup> *Cornaviii* is also problematic

<sup>51</sup>Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, 23–4.

<sup>52</sup>Eric P. Hamp, ‘Old Irish *ed*, *id*’, *ZCP* 34 (1975), 20–9.

<sup>53</sup>Rhys, ‘Approaching the Pictish language’, 149.

<sup>54</sup>Jozef van Loon, ‘Een etymologie en haar historische implicaties: de stamnaam *Caerosi* (De Bello Gallico 2.4)’, *Verlagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Nederlandse taal- en letterkunde* 2006, 375–400.

<sup>55</sup>Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, 18.

<sup>56</sup>De Bernardo Stempel, ‘Linguistically Celtic ethnonyms’, 109.

<sup>57</sup>Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, 17; Delamarre, *Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise*, 277.

<sup>58</sup>Isaac, ‘Scotland’, 196.

<sup>59</sup>De Bernardo Stempel, ‘Linguistically Celtic ethnonyms’, 108.

<sup>60</sup>Ranko Matasovic, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series 9 (Leiden, 2009), 374–5.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. Isaac, ‘Scotland’, 203.

<sup>62</sup>Rhys, ‘Approaching the Pictish language’, 148.

<sup>63</sup>Matasovic, *Etymological Dictionary of Proto-Celtic*, 192.

<sup>64</sup>The alternate reading and etymology that links the ethnonym to the Gaulish *Caeracates* (Rivet and Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*, 286–7) is even less acceptable given that Old Irish *caera* ‘sheep’ is a *k*-stem.

as it appears to preserve suffix vocalism of a type not expected in a Celtic ethnonym derived from *\*korno-* ‘horn’ – although Ptolemy also spells the British ethnonym *Cornovii* similarly, in contrast to the expected form that is attested epigraphically (as *Cornov[iorum]* and *Cornovia*).<sup>65</sup>

In contrast, the *Vacomagi* of Moray look to bear a dithematic construction, but Pokorny’s connection of the ethnonym with the Celtic *s*-stem *\*magos* ‘plain, field’<sup>66</sup> (cf. Old Welsh *maessid* ‘fields’) is morphologically unexpected as *Vacomagi* is an *o*-stem. The element *Vaco-* also lacks a clear etymology. The Gaulish ethnonym *Bellovaci* features an initial theme *Bello-* ‘strong, forceful’ and what appears to be a similar second element (presumably a noun), but Pokorny’s translation of *Vaco-* as ‘crooked’ is semantically improbable,<sup>67</sup> and produces an even less plausible meaning for *Bellovaci*. Many of the ethnonyms from northern Scotland recorded by Ptolemy can be taken as unproblematically Celtic. *Damnonii*, *Decantae*, *Epidii*, *Cerones*, *Cornavii*, *Smertae* and *Venicones* could be all Celtic ethnonyms, but many others attested for ancient Scotland north of the Antonine Wall can only be understood as Brythonic constructions if otherwise unparalleled phonological, morphological or semantic development is to be accepted in their derivations.

Sometimes the deviations from what would be expected of a Celtic ethnonym are small. Rhys considers the Celticity of the ethnonym *Lugi* to be ‘assured’ and suggests that it may be linked with the root *\*lug-* found in the name of the god *Lugh* (< *\*Lugus*) and Old Irish *luige* ‘oath’ (< *\*lugio*).<sup>68</sup> But a Celtic ethnonym derived from *\*lugus* or *\*lugio* would be expected to feature a plural ending such as that attested for the continental *Lugoves*,<sup>69</sup> or a form comparable to that attested in the Germanic ethnonym *Lugii* (Λουγίους) first recorded by Strabo (*Geography* 7, 1, 3). Anders Ahlqvist’s connection of the ancient Scottish ethnonym with Old Irish *loch* ‘dark, black’ is phonologically unexpected,<sup>70</sup> and Watson’s translation ‘the ravens’ is based on a folk etymology for *Lugdunum* recorded by Clitophon of Rhodes (*De Fluviiis* 6, 4),<sup>71</sup> despite the etymologies recorded in classical sources being renowned for being without any linguistic value. The problem with the spelling *Lugi* may have arisen because of how the term was transmitted originally – errors can sometimes be made out in forms recorded by Ptolemy. But the ethnonyms he recorded for regions such as Scandinavia do not feature as much irregularity as must be assumed for his description of Scotland if the forms he records are all to be understood as Brythonic coinages. Rather than reflecting widespread

<sup>65</sup> *Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, nos 288 and 639; Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, 377; Rivet and Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*, 324–5.

<sup>66</sup> Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols (Bern, 1959–69), I, 1135.

<sup>67</sup> Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, I, 1135.

<sup>68</sup> Rhys, ‘Approaching the Pictish language’, 149–50.

<sup>69</sup> Theodor Mommsen et al. (eds), *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 17 vols (Berlin, 1863ff.), II, no. 2818 and XIII, no. 5078.

<sup>70</sup> Anders Ahlqvist, ‘Two ethnic names in Ptolemy’, *BBCS* 26 (1975), 143–6; Jacob King, ‘Lochy’ names and Adomnán’s *Nigra Dea*, *Nomina* 28 (2005), 69–91.

<sup>71</sup> Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, 17.

textual irregularity, the morphology preserved in the ethnonyms recorded in the *Geography* suggests that many of the tribes that dwelt north of the Antonine Wall in Ptolemy's day may have spoken Indo-European, but not Brythonic dialects.

Only half of the ethnonyms attested by Ptolemy can be explained as regular Celtic formations – only seven from fourteen – and as Jackson observed, the most difficult forms (*Caledonii*, *Vacomagi* and *Taexali*) are those that Ptolemy places in the later Pictish heartland.<sup>72</sup> It may be that Pictish featured a lenition of *\*-t-* > *-d-* in *Caledonii* that did not also affect *Decantai*, *Maeatae*, *Smertae* and *Verturiones*, and semantic, textual or morphological developments could similarly excuse *Cornavii*, *Creones* and *Lugi*. But the *Verturiones*, held in the fourth century by Ammianus to be one of the two tribes of the Picts, also have an etymologically problematic ethnonym, as do Tacitus' *Boresti*. *Verturiones* was explained by Francis Diack as Celtic,<sup>73</sup> the prefix *Ver-* in *Verturiones* being commonly found in Gaulish onomastics and a root *\*tur-* is clearly preserved in the name of the Gaulish *Turones*. The Old English form *Wærteras* 'inhabitants of Fortriu', however, suggests that the ethnonym did not undergo the expected neo-Celtic development of *\*Ver-* > *Vor-* that dates to the end of the Roman period (cf. Bede's spellings *Vertigernus* and *Vurtigernus*).<sup>74</sup> More radically, the ethnonym *Boresti* is argued to reflect a textual corruption by Stan Wolfson,<sup>75</sup> but it seems to preserve superlative morphology not found in the neo-Celtic languages which is comparable to that attested in Ancient Greek *φῆριστος* 'best, bravest' and its Avestan cognate *bairišta* 'helping best' (< *\*b<sup>h</sup>eristos*). Many of the ethnonyms recorded in ancient sources for peoples from north of the Antonine Wall seem irregular from a Brythonic perspective – they vary morphologically, phonologically or semantically from what is expected of Celtic ethnonyms.

Forsyth claims that there are only a handful of early onomastic forms associated with ancient Scotland that cannot be explained as Brythonic,<sup>76</sup> but the evidence for Brythonic speakers living in Pictland in late antiquity is much weaker than is often asserted. Most of the names associated with peoples who lived in the region of the later Pictish kingdoms do not have acceptable Brythonic etymologies and those few names (such as *Decantae* and *Venicones*) that do can simply be taken as evidence that some Celtic was spoken in the area. Rather than try to uphold so many problematic etymologies, a better-justified conclusion would be to admit that Pictland does not seem to have been a majority Brythonic-speaking area in antiquity. Considerable evidence is preserved in ancient accounts that points to one or more non-Brythonic languages being spoken in northern Scotland in Roman

<sup>72</sup>Jackson, 'The Pictish language', 136.

<sup>73</sup>Francis C. Diack, 'Place-names of Pictland', *RC* 38 (1920–1), 109–32, at 121–2; Rivet and Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*, 496–7.

<sup>74</sup>Jackson, *Language and History in Early Britain*, 273.

<sup>75</sup>Stan Wolfson, *Tacitus, Thule and Caledonia: The Achievements of Agricola's Navy in Their True Perspective* (Oxford, 2008), 35–46.

<sup>76</sup>Forsyth, *Language in Pictland*, 19–26.

times, and given the lack of clear evidence for Brythonic morphosyntax in the Pictish inscriptions, a descendant of one of these languages may well be preserved in early medieval Pictish epigraphy.

If it is not Brythonic, however, Pictish still seems likely to have been an Indo-European language. The ethnonyms recorded by Ptolemy often seem to feature typically Indo-European derivational morphology, but not clear evidence that they are Celtic coinages. Jackson contended that the language of the Pictish inscriptions was probably non-Indo-European and Patrick Sims-Williams asserts that the non-Indo-European nature of Pictish is also apparent in river-names from the north-east of Scotland recorded by Ptolemy.<sup>77</sup> Yet Hans Krahe,<sup>78</sup> and his student W. F. H. Nicolaisen,<sup>79</sup> included northern Scotland in the area of Krahe's Old European hydronymy, a scheme of recurrent elements that appear in European river-names and that have Indo-European roots, and many of the less transparent onomastic formations associated with the Caledonians and the Picts can be explained as Indo-European. It has never been clear what to make of Krahe's theory – Nicolaisen long remained a promoter of it,<sup>80</sup> but Isaac rejects it.<sup>81</sup> Krahe saw the Old European hydronymy as reflecting an early developmental stage of the north-western Indo-European languages that preserved archaic morphophonology, and if Krahe's theory has any truth to it, Scotland should have been home to Indo-European speakers since the Bronze Age.<sup>82</sup>

Sims-Williams's contention reflects Isaac's finding of a significant number of early non-Celtic river-names in northern Scotland.<sup>83</sup> The river-names are Ptolemy's (2, 3, 1 and 5) *Boderia*, *Ila*, *Celnius*, *Nabarus* and *Tina* (Βοδερία, Ἰλα, Κελνίου, Ναβαρίου and Τίνα), and Isaac does not just find them all implausibly Celtic, he even argues that they may be non-Indo-European. Rhys rejects Isaac's analysis on the grounds that *Boderia* and *Celnius* may be corrupt spellings and that some of Isaac's criticisms of the Celtic etymologies proposed by figures such as Watson may be overblown.<sup>84</sup> But Rhys's assertion that Watson was correct to associate *Nabarus* (also recorded as Ναβαρίου and Ναυαρίου) with Greek νέφος 'cloud' (< Indo-European *\*nebʰos* 'cloud, mist'),<sup>85</sup> a form that appears to be cognate with Old Irish *nem*, Old Welsh *nem*, Old Breton *nem* and Old Cornish *nef* 'heaven, sky', presumes that the hydronym has unexpectedly retained *-b-* rather than the (otherwise) pan-Celtic

<sup>77</sup> Sims-Williams, 'Bronze- and Iron-Age Celtic-speakers', 431.

<sup>78</sup> Hans Krahe, *Unsere ältesten Flussnamen* (Wiesbaden, 1964). Old European etymologies for northern Scottish hydronyms are supplied by Krahe on 40, 49, 89, 92 and 104.

<sup>79</sup> W. F. H. Nicolaisen, 'Die alteuropäischen Gewässernamen der britischen Hauptinsel', *Beiträge zur Namenforschung* 8 (1957), 209–68.

<sup>80</sup> Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, 173–91; idem, '“Old European names” in Britain', *Nomina* 6 (1982), 37–42; idem, 'The functions of suffixes in early Scottish hydronymy', in Thorsten Andersson and Eva Nyman (eds), *Suffixbildungen in älteren Ortsnamen*, Acta Academiae Regiae Gustavi Adolphi 88 (Uppsala, 2004), 109–18.

<sup>81</sup> Isaac, 'Scotland', 189, n. 1.

<sup>82</sup> Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, 191.

<sup>83</sup> Isaac, 'Scotland', 208–13.

<sup>84</sup> Rhys, 'Approaching the Pictish language', 163–70.

<sup>85</sup> Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, 47.

development *-m-*. It also assumes that *Nabarus* preserves a semantic strand ‘cloud, mist’ not surely attested (otherwise) in Celtic and that the *a*-vocalism of the root of *Nabarus* is morphophonemically irregular. A reflex of *\*neb<sup>h</sup>-* is accepted by Carolin Schneider to be preserved in Brythonic river-names such as *Amber* and *Amir* as evidence of a zero-grade development *\*ambr-* (< *\*nb<sup>h</sup>-r-*) comparable to Sanskrit *abhrá* ‘cloud’ and Latin *imber* ‘rain’.<sup>86</sup> But Nicolaisen took the similarity of *Nabarus* to *\*neb<sup>h</sup>-* as evidence that the hydronym could not be Celtic and was instead Old European (where the root vowel *-a-* is typical of Krahe’s river names).<sup>87</sup> Citing Hamp’s otherwise unsupported reconstruction of the hydronymic root as *\*h<sub>3</sub>neb<sup>h</sup>-*, Rhys asserts that the unexpected root vocalism in *Nabarus* could have arisen ‘due to assimilation to the suffix ... or regular anaptyxis from the zero-grade’,<sup>88</sup> but this claim merely underlines how irregular the discourse on Pictish often is.

Much of the analysis of the evidence found in classical sources such as Ptolemy is reliant on proposals that have long since been rendered otiose by more recent developments in comparative linguistics. Relatively few of the ethnonyms and river-names recorded by Ptolemy in areas later associated with the Picts can be considered possibly Celtic without some irregularity being acknowledged. Yet the ethnonyms and other onomastic forms recorded in ancient accounts can all be explained as reflecting some sort of Indo-European inheritance, even if a specifically Brythonic one often seems unlikely when the terms are considered from a morphological perspective. There is persistent, if unclear evidence that there were speakers of dialects other than Brythonic in Scotland in the ancient period, but these seem most plausibly taken as speakers of non-Celtic Indo-European dialects, not those of pre-Indo-European languages. The key question, however, remains – could any of these dialects have produced the consistently unexpected behaviour attested in the Pictish Ogam inscriptions?

#### 4. SIGMATIC MORPHOLOGY AND PLACE-NAMES

After the Roman legions were withdrawn from Britain and the Anglo-Saxons arrived, more sources for the linguistic nature of Pictish emerge in the form of the names recorded in medieval and modern sources. The earliest of these are contemporary with the Ogam inscriptions, but among the onomastic material, the place-name evidence is described by Simon Taylor as ‘provid[ing] the strongest indication’ that Pictish was a Brythonic language.<sup>89</sup> The evidence recorded in ancient accounts is not consistently and obviously Brythonic, and names recorded in sources such as Bede and the Pictish kings’ lists sometimes

<sup>86</sup>Dagmar Wodtko, Britta Irslinger and Carolin Schneider, *Nomina im indogermanischen Lexikon* (Heidelberg, 2008), 499–504.

<sup>87</sup>Nicolaisen, ‘Die alteuropäischen Gewässernamen der britischen Hauptinsel’, 250; idem, *Scottish Place-Names*, 188–9; idem, ‘“Old European names” in Britain’, 41; idem, ‘The functions of suffixes in early Scottish hydronymy’, 114.

<sup>88</sup>Eric P. Hamp, ‘On claims of pre-Celtic place-names’, *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 16 (1990), 191–2, at 192; Rhys, ‘Approaching the Pictish language’, 167.

<sup>89</sup>Taylor, ‘Pictish place-names revisited’, 68.

appear to preserve contradictory evidence.<sup>90</sup> Yet Taylor contends that the evidence of place-names, mostly recorded long after Pictish had become extinct, is the most important consideration for understanding the nature of the ancient and early medieval language. Taylor's approach is clearly a resumption of that of Watson, whose main evidence for the Brythonic nature of Pictish was the place-name evidence that he was the first to assess in such a comprehensive manner. But many of Watson's findings have been rejected by later specialists such as Taylor. Contemporary Scottish place-name analysts appear to have decided that Watson's approach to Pictish was sound, even if many of the key parts of his argument should now be rejected. But before considering this evidence and its re-evaluation by place-name specialists such as Taylor, a closer examination of the epigraphic evidence is required.

The key problem with Taylor's approach to understanding Pictish is that it appears to reverse the relationship of the place-name evidence to the epigraphic material that applies in most other regions from which there are records of fragmentarily attested languages or *Trümmersprachen*. Inscriptions that appear to preserve more than just names are key to determining linguistic affiliation because the core of a language is not generally held to be the onomastics, but rather the morphosyntax, the verbal system, the system of deixis and counting – the onomastic dialect may be only a surface feature from a structural perspective. In contact-induced linguistic change, significant lexical replacement or suppletion may occur without a corresponding change in the basic vocabulary or at the morphosyntactic level.<sup>91</sup> Many English place-name elements have parallels in Latin or French because of borrowing, not because English is an Italic or Romance language. The more significant the influence of loanwords becomes, however, the more a language will tend to be influenced phonologically and morphosyntactically, until in extreme instances either language shift or creolisation may occur.<sup>92</sup> The Ogam inscriptions are presumably so difficult to interpret because they record core linguistic features of Pictish – such as the sigmatic inflexional morpheme apparently recorded in the spelling *Nehhtons* on the Lunnasting stone – whereas the place-names assessed by Watson and Taylor may only preserve borrowed elements. Pictish could well simply have loaned the place-name elements set out by Watson and Taylor from Brythonic languages that speakers of Pictish were in contact with over an extended period of time. If the toponymic evidence is indeed the 'strongest indication' of the

<sup>90</sup>For example, Bede (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 5, 21) records a letter addressed to *Naiton rex Pictorum* whose name appears to have been recorded in the king-lists as *Nechtan* and on the Lunnasting stone as *Nehhtons* as if one form (*Naiton*) is Brythonic (cf. *Neithon* of Al Clut) but the other (*Nechtan*, *Nehhtons*) is Pictish or Gaelic. He also records a place-name *Peanfahel* (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 1, 12) that he says is Pictish (despite it lying south of the Firth of Forth and hence not being in Pictland), but which has usually been taken as if it were a Gaelicised Brythonic formation (Jackson, 'The Pictish language', 143).

<sup>91</sup>Sara Grey Thomason and Terrence Kaufman, *Language Contact, Creolization and Genetic Linguistics* (Berkeley, 1988), 50.

<sup>92</sup>A different mix of feature transfer may occur in instances of linguistic 'imposition', however, for example in migrant languages when most speakers use a different dominant language; see Donald Winford, 'Theories of language contact', in Anthony P. Grant (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Linguistic Change* (Oxford, 2020), 51–74, at 58–9.

Celtic nature of Pictish, the case supported by the place-names seems inherently weak given how readily loanwords can and do occur, and how heavily they may affect languages (including the associated toponymy).

The Ogam inscriptions have largely been addressed previously in an etymological manner, with putative terms and names being associated with similar-looking forms found in better-understood contexts. The usual practice in Etruscan studies, however, has been to employ ‘combinatory’ (collocation) and ‘bilingual’ (text-type) methods rather than to rely on an etymological approach – appeals to Indo-European etymologies have generally failed to advance the analysis of what is generally accepted to be the main non-Indo-European language of ancient Italy.<sup>93</sup> The bilingual approach to Etruscan entails comparing Etruscan inscriptions with similar Latin, Old Italic or Greek texts that are better understood, and a similar approach can be applied to the Pictish Ogams. Funerary inscriptions are the commonest type of monumental epigraph and they are normally formulaic, whether they appear on Irish memorials, Scandinavian rune-stones or Latin monuments, and it seems most principled to examine the Ogam inscriptions of Pictland from the perspective of their recurrent elements – how they are collocated and how the combinations recorded in the inscriptions compare to what is typically found in contemporary Old Irish, Old Norse, Latin and Old English memorials. Old Irish, Old Norse and Latin funerary texts are highly formulaic and Old English memorials seem largely to have followed fixed forms as well, making the bilingual or text-type approach very likely to be applicable to the analysis of Pictish.

One of the recurrent forms in the Pictish Ogam inscriptions has been proposed to be the Bressay stone’s *crrosc* ‘cross’ as it is similar to the spelling *c[e]rroccs* attested on the Burrian stone. But a clearer instance is *maqq*, an element that is preserved five times and which appears to be spelt twice more as *meqq*.<sup>94</sup> Others still include sequences such as *ette* and *datt-*, and recurrent endings such as *-s* and *-evv* are also evident. Marking the recurrent elements in bold and the endings with underlining, the inscriptions that feature some commonality are:<sup>95</sup>

|                    |                                                                                          |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Golspie            | <i>allhhallorredd<b>maqq</b>niavrrcerr</i>                                               |
| Latheron           | <i>dunnodnnat<b>maqq</b>net[u]</i>                                                       |
| Formaston          | <i><b>nehht</b>vrobaccenne<u>vv</u>   <b>maqq</b>otalluorrrh</i>                         |
| Altyre             | <i>jam<b>maqq</b>[.].[a].[m]vsmahhr[a]rassudds</i>                                       |
| Dyce 2             | <i>eottassarhetoddedd<b>otsmaqq</b>rogoddadd</i>                                         |
| St Ninian’s Isle 1 | <i>[b]e<b>smeqq</b>nanammovves<sup>t</sup></i>                                           |
| Bressay            | <i><b>crrosc</b>:nahhtv<b>ddadd</b>s:<b>datt</b>r:ann.[benn]ises:<b>meqq</b>ddrroann</i> |
| Burrian            | <i>i[.].[irr]annurractke<u>vv</u>c[<b>e</b>]rroccs</i>                                   |
| Lunnasting         | <i><b>ette</b>cuhetts:ahehht<b>annn</b>:hccv<u>vevv</u>:<b>nehht</b>ons</i>              |

<sup>93</sup>Rex E. Wallace, *Zikh Rasna: A Manual of the Etruscan Language and Inscriptions* (Ann Arbor, 2008), 10–13.

<sup>94</sup>Jackson, ‘The Pictish language’, 140.

<sup>95</sup>After Forsyth, *The Ogam Inscriptions of Scotland*, and Iain Fraser (ed.), *The Pictish Symbol Stones of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2008), 13.

|                 |                                         |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------|
| Cunningsburgh 2 | <i>..ehteconmors_</i> ...               |
| Brandsbutt      | <i>irataddoarens_</i>                   |
| Cunningsburgh 3 | <i>etteco ... avvr ... av:datt[...]</i> |
| Brodie          | <i>eddarrnonn</i>                       |
| Scoonie         | <i>eddarrnonn</i>                       |

As Jackson noted, the variant *meqq* appears as if it may reflect the Gaelic genitive of *mac(c)* ‘son’,<sup>96</sup> but each time *meqq* appears (as *bennises* : *meqq* on the Bressay and [*b*]es *meqq* on the St Ninian’s Isle 1 stones) it follows a form ending in *-s*, which suggests that the *-s* is a case marker. Taking the ending as a genitive marker makes little sense from a neo-Celtic perspective, but as *Nechtán* appears to reflect a development of *\*Neptuh<sub>3</sub>nos*, the most obvious manner in which to interpret the marker is as a retained Indo-European nominative singular or genitive singular ending. Yet the ending *-s* is not found in conjunction with all likely names recorded in the inscriptions – the texts *allhhalloreddmaqqniavarrcerr* on the Golspie stone and *dunnodnnatmaqqnet[u]* from Latheron appear to feature names without such an ending before the indication *maqq*,<sup>97</sup> and *eddarrnonn* on the Brodie and Scoonie stones has plausibly been linked with the name of St Ethernan (which was presumably, like *Nechtán*, also an *o*-stem originally).<sup>98</sup> An *s*-genitive makes sense from an Old Norse or Old English perspective, but the Germanic ending is also inherited from Indo-European, being a reflex of the genitive singular thematic marker *\*-os̥io*, and the sigmatic marker could be an inherited possessive with *Nehhtons* ‘Nehhton’s’ < *\*Neptuh<sub>3</sub>nos̥io*.

Rather than a mishmash of Old Norse and Gaelic, the sequence on the Bressay stone is more regularly interpreted as a memorial featuring two Pictish names and several Pictish lexical modifiers. The recording of two names is characteristic of Roman, Old Norse and Old English memorials, with one name representing that of the commissioner and the other the memorialised. In Old Norse and Old English funerary texts, the name of the commissioner regularly comes first,<sup>99</sup> whereas Roman memorials often topicalise or raise the memorialised person’s name to initial position (particularly when the formula *Dis Manibus* ‘to the spirits of the departed’ is used). Many of the interpretations of the Pictish Ogam inscriptions have treated syntax as if it were secondary to etymological analysis, but an interpretation of the opening sequence on the Bressay stone as *\*Nahtudads dótr Ann[a]* represents the reverse of the syntax regularly found in Old Norse forms such as *Ingibjörg dótr Andréss* ‘Ingebjörg daughter of Andreas’. Instead, *nahhtvddadds* appears more regularly taken as the name of the person the stone was set up to commemorate,<sup>100</sup> with *nises:meqqddroann* (as Clancy segments the text) representing the name of a second person – that of the commissioner of the

<sup>96</sup>Jackson, ‘The Pictish language’, 140.

<sup>97</sup>Forsyth, ‘The Ogam inscriptions of Scotland’, 299–320 and 360–73.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid., 139–59 and 480–94.

<sup>99</sup>Claiborne W. Thompson, *Studies in Upplandic Runography* (Austin, 1975), 9; Raymond I. Page, *An Introduction to Old English Runes*, 2nd ed. (Woodbridge, 1999), 140–2.

<sup>100</sup>Cf. Victor E. Nash-Williams, *The Early Christian Monuments of Wales* (Cardiff, 1950), 7–10.

monument. A more regular syntactic approach to the Bressay inscription than to take it as a pastiche of Old Norse and Gaelic is to interpret it (following Clancy's segmentation) as '(memorial) cross of Nahtudad ... of Nissi mac Dróán', with the difficult text in the middle reflecting a memorial expression. In Old Norse memorials, the fixed phrase is usually *let ræisa stæin þennsa æftir* 'set up this stone in memory of' or a similar expression,<sup>101</sup> while Old English inscriptions often just have *sette æfter* 'set up in memory of'.<sup>102</sup> A verb phrase of this sort would not appear after its subject or object in a language that featured mandatory verb-initial word order, however, the key syntactic characteristic of the Insular Celtic languages.

If a similar interpretation is applied to the morphologically marked terms on the Lunnasting stone, a comparable syntax seems to be evident. If its first *s*-marked element is accepted to be a name, its inscription can also be understood as preserving two *s*-genitives, *Cuhetts* and *Nehhtons*, separated by a memorial expression. Where the middle sequence in the Bressay inscription (if Clancy's segmentation is followed) looks to have been *dattr : ann . | ben*, on the Lunnasting stone it appears to be *ahéhhtannn : hccvvevv*. Most recently, Forsyth interprets *ettecuhetts* as 'this is far' and a similarly *s*-marked sequence on a stone from Cunningsburgh, Shetland, as *eheteconmors* 'this is great'.<sup>103</sup> But Forsyth had earlier accepted that *conmors* was 'probably' a form of the Old Welsh name *Conmor* (< \**Kunomoros*)<sup>104</sup> – her more recent interpretation has evidently developed from her attempt to explain the element *-s* as a Celtic demonstrative. The key feature of the forms in *-s*, however, is that they often appear in connection with names in text-final position, and Forsyth suggests that *ira* in the sequence *irataddoarens* on the Brandsbutt stone could be interpreted as 'here lies' (comparable to the common Latin memorial expression *hic iacet* or Old Irish Ogam *koi*).<sup>105</sup> Given the Bressay stone's *crrosc:nahhtvddadds*, the Cunningsburgh and Brandsbutt inscriptions seem more regularly interpreted on morphosyntactic grounds as featuring *s*-marked names in final position following expressions indicating 'memorial stone' or 'in memory of'.

More remarkably, the sequences that come between the two forms marked with *-s* in the Bressay and Lunnasting inscriptions share the recurrent sequence *ann* or *annn*. Given the segmentation proposed by Clancy, the Lunnasting inscription can also be taken to feature much the same syntax as the Bressay text, with forms marked with *-s* appearing in the same position relative to *ann*:

*crrosc nahhtvddadds dattr ann ben nises meqq ddrroann*  
*ette cuhett<sub>s</sub> ahéhht annn hccvvevv nehhtons*

<sup>101</sup>Thompson, *Studies in Upplandic Runography*, 9.

<sup>102</sup>Page, *An Introduction to Old English Runes*, 141–2.

<sup>103</sup>Katherine Forsyth, 'Pictish language and documents', in John T. Koch (ed.), *Celtic Culture: A Historical Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, 2006), 1444–6, at 1444.

<sup>104</sup>Forsyth, 'The Ogam inscriptions of Scotland', 357.

<sup>105</sup>Forsyth, *Language in Pictland*, 36 n. 133.

The two inscriptions (both from Shetland) appear to represent much the same type of text, with *ette* (also found on the Cunningsburgh 3 stone and beginning the the Roman-letter text on the Newton stone)<sup>106</sup> presumably a comparable expression to *crrosc*. If the Bressay inscription is correctly interpreted as ‘(memorial) cross of Nahtudad ... of Nissi mac Dróán’, the similar Lunnasting text seems likely to have meant ‘(memorial) *ette* of Cuhett ... of Nehhton’.

In funerary memorials, the memorial elements are usually formulaic and fixed, and the variation is mainly confined to the onomastic elements. This cross-linguistically common distribution suggests that the sequences *ann* and *annn* are likely to be the formulaic memorial expression equivalent to ‘set up in memory of’ and a similar sequence *ann* also appears to be recorded on the stone from Burrian, Orkney, with the text before *cerroccs* presumably preserving a name. The form *urractkevv* cannot be immediately connected with a name attested in another source, although *hccvvevv* and the sequence *nehhtv-robaccennevv* on the Formaston stone (from Aberdeenshire) both have similar endings,<sup>107</sup> which suggests that the inscription may feature verb-second word order: *if .Jir ann urractkevv cerroccs*. The Lunnasting stone’s *dattr* may also be formulaic as it is apparently paralleled as *datt[...]* on the Cunningsburgh 3 stone, but determining a specific meaning for it (nominal, adverbial or otherwise) remains difficult.

Rather than being completely obscure, then, it is evident that names can be rescued from some of the Pictish Ogam inscriptions and that other recurrent elements such as *ette* and *ann* can also be discerned. But the key morphosyntactic feature appears to be the sigmatic marking of names attested in many of the inscriptions, a behaviour that does not seem likely to be Gaelic or Brythonic in origin. The sigmatic morpheme could have been retained from a form of Celtic that had preserved separate genitive inflexional morphology of a kind for which Koch found no later evidence in his scheme for the development of the early case system of Welsh.<sup>108</sup> But no sign of the inherited Indo-European genitive marker preserved in Lepontic as *-oiso* is continued in Old Irish, Celtiberian or Gaulish either, and the Pictish Ogam inscriptions are so difficult to make sense of otherwise that it seems more likely that they record a non-Celtic language. Nor is the sigmatic marker reasonably considered a sign that the inscriptions are Old Norse or have otherwise been influenced by Germanic (perhaps Old English) morphology given that morphological loaning is comparatively rare and is usually concomitant with heavy lexical borrowing. The idea that the morpheme may reflect influence from a non-Indo-European language (given that Etruscan, after all, also has an *s*-genitive) also seems to be ruled out by the Indo-European appearance of all the ethnonyms attested in

<sup>106</sup>Kelly Kilpatrick, ‘The Newton stone and writing in Pictland’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 150 (2021), 7–22 and 407–34.

<sup>107</sup>Given it is so common, *-evv* is probably another Pictish morphological ending. It may represent the same ending as that found in Old Irish \**Fortriu* (genitive singular *Fortrenn*; cf., similarly, *Ériu* ‘Ireland’, genitive singular *Érenn*), which if the connection with *Verturiones* is to be upheld, could reflect a nominative singular *n*-stem ending (< Indo-European \**-iō(n)*).

<sup>108</sup>Koch, ‘The loss of final syllables’.

northern Scotland in classical sources. The most obvious conclusion is that the endings in *-s* represent a Pictish grammatical marker inherited from Indo-European that distinguishes the language of the inscriptions from Gaelic and Brythonic. The marker appears to represent an inherited genitive ending and it seems to represent the key diagnostic linguistic feature preserved in Pictish epigraphy.

The Ogam inscriptions suggest that any Celtic elements in Pictish are loaned. There is also evidence that some of the recurrent elements preserved in early Scottish place-names that are often connected with Brythonic are in fact Gaelic coinages. The main evidence cited by Jackson for 'Pritenic' Pictish was the element *pit-* preserved in over 300 northern Scottish place-names.<sup>109</sup> It had been linked with Welsh *peth* 'thing' and Old Irish *cuir* 'part, property' by Rudolf Thurneysen,<sup>110</sup> terms that never appear in Welsh and Irish place-names. It was later observed by Taylor, however, that *pit-* is always employed with a Gaelic second element and hence that it is a relatively recent place-name formant.<sup>111</sup> But if the element only became productive at a relatively late date, then it is not good evidence that Pictish was a Celtic language any more than the Gaelic place-names with *pit-* are evidence that Gaelic is a *p*-Celtic dialect. The main evidence for Pictish being a *p*-Celtic dialect was an illusion – *pit-* seems likely to have been a loan of Middle Latin *petia*, *petium* 'piece (of land)', a term that Thurneysen argued was a loanword from Gaulish,<sup>112</sup> but Charles Livingston took to reflect a Vulgar Latin verb *\*pettio*, *\*pettiare* < *\*peditio*, *\*peditiare* 'to measure in feet'.<sup>113</sup>

Other elements that recur in Scottish place-names were argued by Watson to reflect terms that are widely paralleled in Brythonic toponymy. What seems to be a cognate of the Welsh place-name element *aber-* 'river-mouth, confluence' (< *\*ad-ber-* 'carry to') is commonly attested in Scotland,<sup>114</sup> but it sometimes appears in an early variant *apor-* that Rhys argues reflects early Gaelic phonological development.<sup>115</sup> The frequency of the *aber-* (and *apor-*) names in Scotland and the lack of cognate forms in Old Irish suggest a connection with Brythonic, but like the toponymic element that apparently continues *pit-*, the Scottish names featuring *aber-* could just represent Gaelic formations. Some of the *aber*-names are not obviously connected with river-mouths or confluences (as if they instead reflect Gaelic *eabar* 'marsh, mud, puddle' < *\*ek-ber-*), and they include *Stagnum Aporum* (Lochaber) and *Aporcrossan* (Applecross) on the west coast. Like the *pit*-names, many of the recurrent elements attested in Scottish toponymy that have been linked with similar Welsh forms may reflect Gaelic coinages rather than be evidence that

<sup>109</sup>Jackson, 'The Pictish language', 146–8.

<sup>110</sup>R. Thurneysen, *Keltoromanisches: Die keltischen Etymologien im etymologischen Wörterbuch der romanischen Sprachen von F. Diez* (Halle a. S., 1884), 71.

<sup>111</sup>Taylor, 'Pictish place-names revisited', 78; cf. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, 151–9.

<sup>112</sup>Thurneysen, 70–2.

<sup>113</sup>Charles H. Livingston, 'Etymologie du mot français "pièce"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 55 (1954), 178–88.

<sup>114</sup>Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, 458–67.

<sup>115</sup>Rhys, 'Approaching the Pictish language', 191–3.

Pictish was a Brythonic language. Some Gaelic terms may have been adopted from Cumbric or could just reflect inherited elements that became more popular in Scotland than they were in Ireland. When they are analysed closely, the place-names explained by Watson as Pictish often do not preserve clear evidence that they are Brythonic coinages, despite the acceptance of many of Watson's etymologies by figures such as Jackson.

## 5. CONCLUSION

There is undoubtedly some evidence that shows that Pictish onomastics was influenced by Brythonic, but there does not seem to be much cause to conclude more than that. The Pictish inscriptions, however, appear to preserve morphosyntactic evidence that a non-Celtic language was spoken in much of north-eastern Scotland during the early medieval period, one that would be expected to have long been in contact with Cumbric and presumably also to have been affected by language contact. If many members of the Pictish elite were descended from Brythonic speakers who had become linguistically acculturated to a non-Celtic idiom – or were descended from Pictish speakers who had adopted Brythonic – the evidence for some etymologically Brythonic names but inscriptions that appear to be resistant to an analysis as Celtic would be expected. English toponymy is riddled with loanwords from Latin and French as well as those of Celtic origin and no one would argue that place-names featuring *-caster*, *-don*, *-minster*, *-port*, *-street* or *-wick* are good evidence that English is a Romance or a Celtic language. But the Ogam inscriptions appear to be good evidence that Pictish was not a Brythonic language – the linguistic evidence points in the reverse direction to that argued by Taylor, Smyth and Forsyth.

Much of the analysis of the Pictish language has taken its direction from the attempts of early writers such as Macbain and Watson to demonstrate that the Picts were Brythonic-speakers. Often their etymologies have been rendered implausible by more recent developments in comparative linguistics, from the reconsideration of Indo-European apophony that arose after the decipherment of Hittite to more recent studies of Celtic word formation. Other etymologies promoted by Macbain, Watson and later authors are inconsistent with Brythonic phonological development or just appear to represent Gaelic coinages. Similarly inconclusive interpretations of the Pictish inscriptions have emerged that seek to gloss over evidence that cannot reasonably be explained as Brythonic, Gaelic or Old Norse. The conclusion must remain that Jackson was correct in his assessment that epigraphic Pictish was not a Celtic language and that some of the evidence for Celtic names in north-eastern Scotland reflects Brythonic influence. But only one language needs to be posited to explain the inscriptions commissioned by the early medieval Pictish elite, a morphosyntactically non-Celtic idiom that onomastic evidence suggests may have been significantly influenced by Brythonic.

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