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## *Picti*: from Roman name to internal identity

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### ABSTRACT

Recent scholarship has become increasingly sceptical about the importance of Pictish identity in the first millennium A.D. It has been suggested that *Picti* was an external classical general label for people inhabiting northern Britain only adopted internally in the late seventh century. This article reviews the references to *Picti* in late antique and subsequent Insular sources from the late third century to A.D. 700. It proposes that the term was adopted in northern Britain by the end of the Roman period and maintained afterwards through the usage of Latin, due to imperial influence and conversion to Christianity. While not the only ethnic identity upheld in the region, the concept of *Picti* was used by the kings of Fortriu for their wider realm in the late seventh century because it was already known and significant.

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## Introduction

The Picts, usually defined broadly as the inhabitants of Scotland north of the firths of Forth and Clyde except for the Lennox, Argyll and the southern Hebrides, have long been an important, if somewhat perplexing, element in our understanding of early medieval Britain. The Latin term *Picti* underlying the modern name appears in contemporary written sources from the late third century A.D. until the early tenth century, but from the people themselves we have only one substantial surviving text (albeit existing in two versions), the Pictish king-list. As the last major ethnic group in Britain to become ‘extinct’, depicted in ancient sources as painted barbarians, in medieval texts as adherents to matrilineal succession and identified now as the creators of the still undeciphered symbol stones, it is understandable that the Picts can serve in the imagination as a mysterious relic population in contrast to more ‘civilised’ societies.<sup>1</sup> The perceived

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<sup>1</sup> The following abbreviations are used in this article: *HE*: Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, in *Bede’s Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, eds. and trans. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); *MGH*: Monumenta Germaniae Historica. The abbreviations for the different Irish annals are described in note 93.

See Anna Ritchie, *Perceptions of the Picts: from Eumenius to John Buchan* (Rosemarkie: Groom House Museum Trust, 1994), and Colin Kidd, ‘The Ideological Uses of the Picts, 1707–c.1990’, in *Scottish History: The Power of the Past*, eds. E.J. Cowan and R.J. Finlay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 169–90, for discussion of perceptions over time. F.T. Wainwright, ed., *The Problem of the Picts* (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1955), while innovative for its time, is the classic example of the earlier view.

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exceptionalism of the Picts has been challenged since the 1980s by scholars including Alfred Smyth, Leslie Alcock and Katherine Forsyth, part of a fundamental reappraisal of the textual, linguistic and archaeological evidence, and of our approaches to them represented in groundbreaking monographs by James E. Fraser and Alex Woolf.<sup>2</sup> This comprehensive reconsideration, challenging received interpretations maintained by generations of scholars, reflects important international shifts in scholarly approaches to the past. One dimension has been the increasing recognition of the fluid and situational nature of identity, often contrasted (sometimes with a degree of exaggeration) with the preceding view that ethnic and other groups had more fixed and definable characteristics.<sup>3</sup> When combined with increasing scepticism about the reliability of textual sources, a result has been that the antiquity of particular ethnic identities and kingdoms has been critiqued.

As part of this re-evaluation, scholars have become increasingly sceptical about the extent of a Pictish identity before the late seventh century, when multiple sources mention *Picti*. A key issue has been lack of evidence for the use of *Picti* as an internal identity name (an endonym). Fraser has argued that until the late seventh century *Picti* was an external term not employed in northern Britain.<sup>4</sup> According to this view, its increased use as an endonym was the result of the rise to dominance of the kingdom of Fortriu, especially after the battle of Dún Nechtain (also known as Nechtanesmere) in 685, when the king of Fortriu, Bridei son of Beli, defeated the Northumbrians. This fundamentally weakened the Northumbrian hold on the lands north of the Firth of Forth. According to Fraser, *Picti*, recovered from late antique texts, was a useful collective term promoted by the kings of Fortriu to denote the inhabitants of the new larger kingdom. It was subsequently adopted by writers such as Bede, Adomnán and the chroniclers of Iona, who also projected back the concept of a Pictish over-kinship onto the past. Fraser, therefore, has argued that earlier references, such as the appearance of *rex Pictorum* in the Irish chronicles for people in the late sixth and early seventh centuries, were the result of the reimagining of history in the light of the dominance of the later kingdom of Fortriu.<sup>5</sup>

More recently, Woolf has built on Fraser's analysis by stressing that Pictish terms perhaps were only utilised as endonyms for the period of Fortriu's hegemony, described by him as about 160 years and six generations from the late seventh century to the mid

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<sup>2</sup> Alfred P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men. Scotland AD 80–1000* (Edinburgh: Edward Arnold, 1984); Leslie Alcock, 'Pictish Studies: Present and Future', in *The Picts. A New Look at Old Problems*, ed. Alan Small (Dundee: University of Dundee, Department of Geography, 1987), 80–92; Katherine Forsyth, *Language in Pictland: The Case Against 'Non-Indo-European Pictish'* (Utrecht: de Keltische Draak, 1997); Katherine Forsyth, 'Literacy in Pictland', in *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies*, ed. H. Pryce (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 39–61; James E. Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland. Scotland to 795* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009); Alex Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba, 789–1070* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> See the studies in Walter Pohl and Helmut Reimitz, eds., *Strategies of Distinction. The Construction of Ethnic Communities, 300–800* (Leiden: Brill, 1998); Andrew Gillett, ed., *On Barbarian Identity. Critical Approaches to Ethnicity in the Early Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002); Werner Goetz, Jörg Jarnut and Walter Pohl, eds., *Regna and Gentes. The Relationship Between Late Antique and Early Medieval Peoples and Kingdoms in the Transformation of the Roman World* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Guy Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West 376–568* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann, eds., *Post-Roman Transitions. Christian and Barbarian Identities in the Early Medieval West* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); Walter Pohl, 'Introduction – Strategies of Identification: A Methodological Profile', in *Strategies of Identification: Ethnicity and Religion in Early Medieval Europe*, eds. Walter Pohl and Gerda Heydemann (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 1–64.

<sup>4</sup> Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 44–54, 224–7; James E. Fraser, 'From Ancient Scythia to the Problem of the Picts: Thoughts on the Quest for Pictish Origins', in *Pictish Progress. New Studies on Northern Britain in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Stephen T. Driscoll, Mark Hall and Jane Geddes (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 15–43, especially 25–8, 33.

<sup>5</sup> Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 94–5, 281–2, 368, 370–2.

ninth (more precisely, perhaps, from the battle of Dún Nechtain in 685 to the Scandinavian defeat and killing of members of the royal dynasty in 839).<sup>6</sup> As Woolf states,

This raises the question of whether there was enough time for a self-consciously and distinctive ‘Pictish people’ to emerge and, even were this so, for them to become the majority population in every province of Pictavia.<sup>7</sup>

According to Woolf, there would have been three main phases relating to Pictish identity from 300 to 700. First, a phase from c.300 to when Gildas’ *De excidio Britanniae* was written, during which *Picti* was a Latin term employed by the classical world as a non-ethnic word for barbarians in northern Britain. The second phase, from Gildas’ text to the later seventh century, was one with no references to contemporary Picts, followed by the third phase when the earlier Latin texts (probably the writings of Patrick or Gildas) were used to revive *Picti* and utilise it for new circumstances, as the ethnic group for the new, dominant Verturian kingdom.<sup>8</sup> The implications of Woolf’s arguments are that we should be very wary of using the terms ‘Picts’, ‘Pictish’ and ‘Pictland’, especially regarding the period outside of 685–839.<sup>9</sup>

Much of this interpretation rests on the absence of evidence for Latin *Picti* as an internal identity term, but it should be recognised that establishing for certain how they named themselves collectively is not possible. However, there are later textual sources which clearly had origins from the mid eighth century onwards which do mention *Picti* as an endonym and their land as *Pictavia*.<sup>10</sup> Scholars are generally comfortable with the view that *Picti* was an internal identity considerably before this, since there are a number of external texts by the English and Gaels from the late seventh century which mention *Picti*. The difficulty for scholars is to determine whether *Picti* was also a term in use in periods when there are very few surviving texts concerned with northern Britain, which is the situation between the late Roman era and the late seventh century. Fraser and Woolf favour the view that the absence of references to *Picti* between Gildas and the rise of Fortriu indicates that Pictish identity did not exist during that era, but this conclusion should be scrutinised and evaluated in terms of its probability, even if certainty is not attainable. Indeed, when the attestations of *Picti* and the context of northern Britain are analysed, a plausible case can be made that *Picti* was an endonym from the late Roman period onwards.

### Late antique references to *Picti*

Starting with the first phase of usage, the term *Picti* is found in the following sources in the late antique period, from the end of the third century to the mid sixth century:

<sup>6</sup> Alex Woolf, ‘On the Nature of the Picts’, *Scottish Historical Review* 96 (2017): 214–17.

<sup>7</sup> Woolf, ‘On the Nature’, 215.

<sup>8</sup> Woolf, ‘On the Nature’, 214.

<sup>9</sup> See D.W. Harding, *Re-writing History: Changing Perceptions of the Archaeological Past* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 222–41, for similar conclusions.

<sup>10</sup> For Pictish sources, see Katherine Forsyth with an appendix by John T. Koch, ‘Evidence of a Lost Pictish Source in the *Historia Regum Anglorum* of Symeon of Durham’, in *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500–1297*, ed. Simon Taylor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 19–34; the Pictish king-lists: Marjorie O. Anderson, ed., *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1980), 245, 247, 265, 271, 279, 286; and ‘The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba’: Marjorie O. Anderson, ed., *Kings and Kingship*, 249–51; both discussed in Dauvit Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 72–3, 76–8. No Pictish manuscripts have been satisfactorily identified, so transmission of surviving Pictish texts would be through others, either inside their territory but later, or outside Pictland.

- Anonymous, Panegyric VIII (V), 11.4, a panegyric for Constantius Caesar (written 297 or 298, possibly at Trier).<sup>11</sup>
- Anonymous, Panegyric VI (VII), 7.2, a panegyric for Constantine (written 310 at Trier).<sup>12</sup>
- Anonymous, *Nomina provinciarum omnium (Laterculus Veronensis)* (written 312 × 14).<sup>13</sup>
- Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* (written c.392).<sup>14</sup>
- Anonymous, *Origo Constantini imperatoris*, also known as the first part of ‘The Anonymous Valesianus’ (written in the fourth century).<sup>15</sup>
- In five poems by Claudian (end of the fourth century and start of the fifth century):
  - i Claudian, ‘Panegyric on the Third Consulship of Honorius’, *Panegyricus dictus Honorio Augusto tertium consuli*, line 54 (late fourth century).<sup>16</sup>
  - ii Claudian, ‘Panegyric on the Fourth Consulship of Honorius’, *Panegyricus dictus Honorio Augusto tertium consuli*, line 32.<sup>17</sup>
  - iii Claudian, ‘Against Eutropius, First Part’, *In Eutropium. Liber prior*, line 393 (about 398, delivered in 399?).<sup>18</sup>
  - iv Claudian, ‘On the Consulship of Stilicho’, *De consulatu Stilichonis, Liber secundus*, line 254 (delivered early 400).<sup>19</sup>
  - v Claudian, ‘On the Gothic War’, *Bellum Geticum*, line 418 (about events of 402).<sup>20</sup>
- Anonymous, ‘Gallic Chronicle of 452’, *s.a.* 382 (written in 452 or shortly after).<sup>21</sup>
- Apollinaris Sidonius, C. Sollius (c.430–79), *Carmina* vii, 90 (delivered on 1 January 456).<sup>22</sup>
- Constantius of Lyon, ‘Life of Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre’, *Vita Germani episcopi Autissiodorensis* (between 475 and 480).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>11</sup> R.A.B. Mynors, ed., *XII Panegyrici Latini* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 222, 299; C.E. Nixon and Barbara Saylor Rodgers, trans., *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors. The Panegyrici Latini* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), 104–44 (126–7).

<sup>12</sup> Mynors, ed., *XII Panegyrici Latini*, 190, 299; Nixon and Rodgers, *In Praise*, 211–53 (227).

<sup>13</sup> A.L.F. Rivet and Colin Smith, trans., *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1979), 76; Alexander Riese, ed., *Geographi Latini minores* (Hildesheim: Henninger Brothers, 1878), 128 (§13), where the text has ‘Gentes barbarae quae pullulaverunt sub imperatoribus. Scoti Picti Caledonii Rugi Saxones Franci ...’

<sup>14</sup> Wolfgang Seyfarth, Liselotte Jacob-Karau and Ilse Ulmann, eds., *Ammiani Marcellini, Rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*. 2 vols (1: *Books XIV–XXV*; 2: *Books XXVI–XXXI*) (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1978), 1: 183 (xx 1.1), 2: 9 (xxvi, 4.5), 2: 47 (xxvii.8.5). For a translation, see John Carew Rolfe, ed. and trans., *Ammianus Marcellinus*. 3 vols (London: William Heinemann, 1935–9), 2: 2–3, 586–9; 3: 52–3.

<sup>15</sup> See Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 3: 506, 510–11. On this text, see Friedhelm Winkelmann, ‘Historiography in the Age of Constantine’, in *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity: Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.*, ed. Gabriele Marasco (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 3–41 (15–17, 35–9).

<sup>16</sup> John Barrie Hall, ed., *Clavdii Clavdiani Carmina* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1985), 55; S. Ireland, trans., *Roman Britain. A Sourcebook* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), 154.

<sup>17</sup> Hall, ed., *Clavdii*, 62; Ireland, *Roman Britain*, 154–5.

<sup>18</sup> Hall, ed., *Clavdii*, 158; Ireland, *Roman Britain*, 163.

<sup>19</sup> Hall, ed., *Clavdii*, 215; Ireland, *Roman Britain*, 163.

<sup>20</sup> Hall, ed., *Clavdii*, 254; Ireland, *Roman Britain*, 165.

<sup>21</sup> R.W. Burgess, ‘The Gallic Chronicle of 452: A New Critical Edition with a Brief Introduction’, in *Society and Culture in Late Antique Gaul: Revisiting the Sources*, eds. R.W. Mathisen and Danuta Schanzer (London: Ashgate, 2001), 52–84 (67): ‘Incursantes Pictos et Scottos Maximus strenue superavit.’

<sup>22</sup> W.B. Anderson, ed. and trans., *Sidonius: Poems and Letters*. vol. 1: *Poems. Letters, Books I–II* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1936), 124–5.

<sup>23</sup> W. Levison, ed., ‘Vita Germani episcopi Autissiodorensis auctore Constantio’, in *Passiones vitaeque sanctorum aevi Merovingici*, eds. B. Krusch and W. Levison. MGH, *Scriptores Rerum Merovingici* 7 (Hanover: Hahn, 1920), 225–83 (263); F.R. Hoare, trans., ‘The Life of Saint Germanus of Auxerre’, in *Soldiers of Christ. Saints and Saints’ Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Thomas F.X. Noble and Thomas Head (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 75–106 (76 for the text’s date, 89 for the reference to *Picti*).

- Patrick, 'Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus', *Epistola ad milites Corotici* (fifth century).<sup>24</sup>
- Gildas, 'On the Ruin of Britain', *De excidio Britanniae* (late fifth or first half of the sixth century).<sup>25</sup>

A further reference to the Picts is found in the commentary on Virgil's poetry called Servius Danielis, in which, added to a discussion of *picti* in *picti Agathyrsi* in *Aeneid* 4.146, it is stated that the *gens in Britannia* had *stigmata*, 'marks'.<sup>26</sup> It is possible that this comment was derived from a late Roman source, such as a putative fourth-century text by Aelius Donatus, but given later interest in potential references to Picts by Insular (perhaps Gaelic) scholars displayed in Virgilian commentaries, a later date, from the seventh to ninth centuries, is perhaps more likely.<sup>27</sup> As a result, this example probably provides more evidence about the early medieval development of ideas of Pictish origins than for late antique perceptions.<sup>28</sup>

In total, therefore, *Picti* are referred to in 15 surviving texts by 11 writers. Some of these sources – the two panegyrics and the five poems of Claudian, produced around the start and end of the fourth century – were clearly intended for audiences at the centres of the Western Imperial regime, reflecting and projecting knowledge of the concept of the Picts among the upper echelons of the Western Empire. Ammianus Marcellinus, a pagan former high-ranking soldier in the curial class possibly from Antioch, wrote his *Res gestae* in Rome after his retirement from the army.<sup>29</sup> His information on the Picts may have been derived from notes he wrote during his military service after news from Britain reached the headquarters in Gaul or elsewhere, or from research undertaken in Rome. He utilised military sources dating back to at least 357, so it is plausible that he encountered *Picti* in multiple ways, and that, on the whole, the information he recounts is reliable, even if he could distort his account for literary and political effect.<sup>30</sup> His history was intended for an educated audience, although his satirical comments about Rome and senators and his generally positive account of the pagan

<sup>24</sup> A.B.E. Hood, ed. and trans., *St. Patrick. His Writings and Muirchu's Life* (London: Phillimore, 1978), 35–40, 55–9.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Winterbottom, ed. and trans., *Gildas. The Ruin of Britain and other works* (London: Phillimore, 1978), 13–79, 87–142.

<sup>26</sup> George Thilo and Hermann Hagen, eds., *Servii Grammatici qui feruntur in Vergilii Carmina Commentarii*, vol. 1: *Aeneidos Librorum I–V Commentarii* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1923), 490, discussed in Brent Miles, *Heroic Saga and Classical Epic in Medieval Ireland* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), 44.

<sup>27</sup> Miles, *Heroic Saga*, 25–33, 43–5.

<sup>28</sup> Two further references to *Picti* have been proposed. One has been the name *Pexa* (for \**Pecti* or \**Pectia*) in the 'Ravenna Cosmography' (Rivet and Smith, *Place-Names*, 196, 211, 438–40). Given that *Pexa* appears in a confused list of *civitates* along the Antonine Wall, and its orthographic differences from *Picti*, it is unclear whether this word is related to *Picti*. Another suggested appearance of the population group *Picti* is in Vegetius' *Epitoma rei militaris*, 'Abridgement of Military Affairs' (written at the end of the fourth century or in the early fifth century): Karl Lang, ed., *Flavi Vegeti Renati, Epitoma rei militaris* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1885), 153 (IV.37), where the text mentions Roman scouting boats which the Britons called *picati*, 'tar-daubed', for which a suggested emendation has been *pictae*, 'painted': N.P. Milner, trans., *Vegetius: Epitome of Military Science*. 2nd edn. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1993), 144, n. 3. If the latter, it would mean 'painted', agreeing with *liburnae*, 'galleys'; it need not refer to a type of Pictish vessel as Benjamin Hudson, *The Picts* (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), 30, 128, has suggested as a possibility.

<sup>29</sup> E.A. Thompson, *The Historical Work of Ammianus Marcellinus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 1–19; Guy Sabbah, 'Ammianus Marcellinus', in *Greek and Roman Historiography*, ed. Marasco, 43–84, especially 50–4.

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, *Historical Work*, 20–41; Sabbah, 'Ammianus Marcellinus', 50–3. For a more sceptical account of the *Res gestae*, regarding it as fundamentally a literary account, see Timothy D. Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus and the Representation of Historical Reality* (London: Cornell University Press, 1998). However, Barnes acknowledged



Emperor Julian would not have endeared his work to everyone.<sup>31</sup> Two other fourth-century texts mention the Picts. One, *Nomina provinciarum omnium*, lists the *Picti* alongside *Scoti* and *Caledonii* as barbarian peoples which had ‘sprung up’ during the imperial era, and the second, *Origo Constantini imperatoris*, states that Constantius Chlorus died after obtaining a victory over the Picts. Both are difficult to place contextually, although they indicate that *Picti* would have been encountered in a range of fourth-century texts.

In addition to the Roman period textual references, there is a dice tower found in Vettweiß-Froitzheim near Cologne, dated to the fourth century, which has PICTOS VICTOS HOSTIS DELETA LVDITE SECVRI, ‘The Picts are beaten, the enemy annihilated, let us play without a care’ incorporated into one side of its metal structure.<sup>32</sup> As Fraser Hunter has noted, this indicates that the concept of the *Picti* was not just a literary phenomenon, but one popular enough to be engraved on an object found on a Roman rural settlement close to the German frontier.<sup>33</sup>

The fifth and sixth century references also show that *Picti* was not just a term found in the imperial court or army. The Gallic Chronicle of 452 (which referred to Magnus Maximus fighting against *Picti* and *Scotti* c.382) was written in southern Gaul, probably by a monk whose focus was primarily on Gaul, but also on threats to the Western Empire more generally.<sup>34</sup> In Constantius’ ‘Life of Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre’, written for bishops of Auxerre but also for a wider Christian audience, *Picti* joined with *Saxones* to make war on the Britons.<sup>35</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris’ reference to *Pictus* and *Scotus* appears in a poem for his father-in-law, the Emperor Avitus, but, like Avitus, Sidonius was a member of the Roman elite of southern Gaul.<sup>36</sup>

Patrick’s *floruit* is a matter of great dispute, but it is clear that he wrote his texts in the fifth century while a missionary in Ireland.<sup>37</sup> His statement in his *Epistola* that the British Christian soldiers of Coroticus were selling Christian captives taken from Ireland to the

(152–3) that Ammianus used insider military sources, even when that meant that his resulting account did not always present a positive portrayal of Julian at the battle of Strasbourg in 357.

<sup>31</sup> Thompson, *Historical Work*, 72–86; Sabbah, ‘Ammianus Marcellinus’, 76–7.

<sup>32</sup> Fraser Hunter, *Beyond the Edge of the Empire – Caledonians, Picts and Romans* (Rosemarkie: Groam House Museum, 2007), 4–5. The object also has VTERE FELIX VIVAS, ‘Good luck, live well’ along three other sides.

<sup>33</sup> Hunter, *Beyond the Edge of the Empire*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Steven Muhlbberger, *The Fifth-Century Chroniclers. Prosper, Hydatius, and the Gallic Chronicle of 452* (Cambridge: Francis Cairns, 1981), 136–92 on the text overall, 156–65 on the author, 178–9, 190, on the item about the *Picti* and *Scotti*; Burgess, ‘Gallic Chronicle’, 52, suggests that it was completed in 452 probably in Viennensis, perhaps in Valence or Marseilles.

<sup>35</sup> Hoare, ‘Life of Saint Germanus’, 76–8; Levison, ed., ‘Vita Germani’, 263 (§17): ‘Interea Saxones Pictique bellum adversus Brittanos iunctis viribus susceperunt’ (Hoare, ‘Life of Saint Germanus’, 89: ‘Meanwhile the Saxons and Picts had joined forces to make war upon the Britons’).

<sup>36</sup> Anderson, *Sidonius, Poems and Letters*, vol. 1: xxxvi–xxxvii, text at 124–5, ll. 88–92: ‘victicia Caesar / signa Caledonios transvexit ad usque Brittanos; / fuderit et quamquam Scotum et cum Saxone Pictum, / hostes quaesivit, quem iam natura vetabat / quaerere plus homines’ (‘Caesar took his victorious legions over even to the Caledonian Britons, and although he routed the Scot, the Pict and the Saxon, he still looked for foes where nature forbade him to look any more for men’).

<sup>37</sup> The debate is long running. In favour of a mid to late fifth-century date for Patrick’s mission in Ireland, see David N. Dumville and others, *Saint Patrick A.D. 493–1993* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993), 13–18, 39–57; T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 214, n. 129; 239. For an earlier date see John Koch, ‘Cothairche, Esposito’s Theory and Neo-Celtic Lenition’, in *Britain 400–600: Language and History*, eds. Alfred Bammesberger and Alfred Wollmann (Heidelberg: Winter, 1990), 179–202. Colmán Etchingham, ‘Conversion in Ireland’, in *The Introduction of Christianity into the Early Medieval Insular World: Converting the Isles I*, eds. Roy Flechner and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 181–207 (193–6, 204), cautiously dates Patrick’s works to before c.500 through his references to Franks and Gauls, and argues that a very early fifth century or late fourth century date is much less likely than later.

Picts assumes that the letter's audiences were well acquainted with the latter group. In the *Epistola* Patrick states that his text should be sent to the (presumably British) soldiers of Coroticus and read out in front of all the peoples (*coram cunctis plebibus*), partly to urge that no one dine with the soldiers or receive their alms.<sup>38</sup> This public circulation probably included Ireland, since the *Epistola* became a source for an episode in Muirchú's late seventh-century 'Life of Patrick'.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, it would have been logical for Patrick to demonstrate at least that he was trying to assist his converts and to console them that the raiders would go to hell, at the most that, as a Christian and Briton, he had more power than pagans to rectify the situation. Therefore, Patrick's letter provides not only evidence that a substantial Latin literate audience in fifth-century Britain were already accustomed to the term *Picti*, but also indicates how knowledge of the term could have spread in Ireland, since Patrick explained the situation to his followers orally and through his text.

Gildas provides the most substantial early account of the Picts, describing them as savage raiders and settlers who, along with *Scotti*, attacked the Britons. It is clear that the Picts in his own lifetime lived in northern Britain, but his claim that they settled on the mainland at the end of the Roman period contradicts the evidence of earlier classical sources, which mention *Picti* active north of the frontier from at least the end of the third century.<sup>40</sup> Gildas' text reflects both the contemporary existence of people called *Picti* alongside ignorance of their origins and earlier history; clearly by this time the term had a role in British society beyond Roman era literate sources.<sup>41</sup>

The combined textual and inscription evidence indicates that *Picti* were known in a wide variety of textual, geographical and temporal contexts, being relatively common in late Roman sources relating to Britain. Understandably, given the prominence of military encounters with them, the surviving references to the Picts were produced primarily among those associated with the army and central secular elites involved in political affairs, particularly in the Western Empire. However, the Gallic Chronicle of 452, Constantius' 'Life of Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre', Patrick's 'Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus' and Gildas' 'On the Ruin of Britain' all indicate that the concept of the Picts had permeated to the rest of literate society, and was known in Gaul, Britain and Ireland after the end of Roman Britain. *Picti* is likely to have been in general use, particularly in Roman Britain, for people north of the Roman frontier.

This still leaves the important issue of the precise connotations of the term. While there is a possibility that *Picti* was a Latinisation of an endonym from north of the frontier, no convincing vernacular etymology has been proposed.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, it seems too

<sup>38</sup> Patrick, *Epistola*, §§2, 7, 21, in *St Patrick*, ed. Hood, 35, 38, 55, 56, 59.

<sup>39</sup> Muirchú, 'Life of St Patrick', §29, in *St Patrick*, ed. Hood, 77, 98.

<sup>40</sup> Neil Wright, 'Gildas's Geographical Perspective: Some Problems', in *Gildas: New Approaches*, eds. M. Lapidge and D. Dumville (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1984), 85–105 (86–92, 104–5).

<sup>41</sup> A minimum position would be that only Gildas knew about the Picts from now lost sources, enabling him to adapt this population group's history to his own purposes. However, his audience presumably could have accessed Gildas' sources or others on the Picts, like Patrick's *Epistola*, which, as proposed above, indicates a wider societal knowledge of the Picts. In addition, his correspondence with clerics like Uinniau (see discussion below) who were active in Ireland means that his audience would have encountered different ethnic groups and have been more inclined to maintain Latin ethnic terminology like *Picti* and *Scotti*. In such a context, it is unlikely that the term *Picti* was not already known to Gildas' audience.

<sup>42</sup> Rivet and Smith, *Place-Names*, 438–40, and George Broderick, '\*Pixti/\*Pexti, Picti? The Name "Picti" Revisited', *Journal of Scottish Name Studies* 9 (2015): 9–42 (18–29), for a discussion of scholarship on the question. Rivet and Smith's suggestion that *Picti* derived from a Pictish element *pett* is unlikely. That element, originally denoting a piece



great a coincidence to be chance that the Latin term was appropriate for a barbarian people, so it is likely to have originated in that language. Woolf states that *Picti* was ‘a loose pejorative term that had come into existence when it became necessary to distinguish the barbarous peoples of northern Britain from those Britons who had by now become mundane and compliant provincials’ and that ‘it does not seem to have been regarded as an ethnonym’.<sup>43</sup> It is likely that *Picti* originated as a term which distinguished those outside the empire from those within; as Fraser has suggested, the inhabitants of provincial Britain had changed, rendering them more distinct from those more outside of Rome’s cultural orbit.<sup>44</sup>

Yet that did not mean that *Picti* lacked an ethnic dimension. Ammianus Marcellinus described the *Scotti* and *Picti* of 359–60 as ‘savage’ *gentes*; in his catalogue of adversaries to the Romans in the period 364–78, they were included in the list of peoples (*Picti Saxonesque et Scotti, et Attacotti*, ‘Picts, and Saxons, and Scotti, and Attacotti’), who were ‘harassing the Britons with constant disasters’, while for 367 he stated that the Picts, divided into two *gentes*, the *Dicalydones* and *Verturiones*, attacked the province, along with the *Scotti* and *Attacotti*.<sup>45</sup> *Gentes* was used here by Ammianus for larger groups like the *Picti*, *Scotti*, *Saxones* and *Attacotti*, but also for constituent parts, such as the *Dicalydones* and *Verturiones*.<sup>46</sup>

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of land, is a strange choice for a population group name, and is largely found in place-names with Gaelic specific elements, most presumably dating to after 900: Simon Taylor, ‘Pictish Place-names Revisited’, in *Pictish Progress*, eds. Driscoll, Hall and Geddes, 67–118 (77–80, 103, 105). Broderick ‘\*Pixti/\*Pexti’, 29–36, argues convincingly that linguistically *Picti* could be a Celtic word meaning ‘fifth’, but his suggestions that it could have the extended meanings ‘five, group of five’ and ‘those living in / occupying the middle’, are highly speculative, the former explanation ignoring the fact that it would be an ordinal, not cardinal, numeral. The appearance of a potential form *Pecti* once in Ammianus’ text, at xxvi 4.5 has been cited as evidence for a native origin by Broderick ‘\*Pixti/\*Pexti’, 11–12, 20, but the text in MS V (the earliest surviving witness) is *Recti*, in a clearly confused passage with multiple mistakes, so the *e* here could be a later change: Seyfarth, Jocab-Karau and Ulmann, eds., *Ammiani Marcellini*, 2: 9. In sum, it is plausible that a Celtic name for a constituent group which rose to prominence meaning ‘the fifth ones’ was taken up and interpreted as *Picti* by the Romans, since it could be related to ideas of barbarity. If so, it would supplement, rather than negate the arguments made in this article. However, on balance, the arguments for Celtic origins are not as convincing as those for a Latin derivation.

<sup>43</sup> Woolf, ‘On the Nature’, 214.

<sup>44</sup> Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 47–9; Fraser, ‘From Ancient Scythia’, 25–6. On the negative portrayal of the Picts, see Edwin Hustwit, ‘Britishness, Pictishness and the “Death” of the Noble Briton: The Britons in Roman Ethnographic and Literary Thought’, *Studia Celtica* 50 (2016): 19–40 (32–5).

<sup>45</sup> Seyfarth, Jocab-Karau and Ulmann, eds., *Ammiani Marcellini*, 1: 183 (xx 1.1), relating to 359–60; 2: 9 (xxvi 4.5) relating to 364–78; 2: 47 (xxvii 8.5), relating to 367. See R.S.O. Tomlin, ‘Ammianus Marcellinus 26.4.5–6’, *Classical Quarterly*, new series 29 (1979): 470–8. The *Dicalydones*, appearing as *Dicalydonas* (acc. pl.) in Ammianus’ text, is a modified form of *Calidones* which is also reflected in the Ὠκεανὸς Δυσηκαληδονίος (equivalent to Latin *Oceanus Duecaledonius*) of Ptolemy’s *Geography* of A.D. 140 × 150 (Rivet and Smith, *Place-Names*, 44, 338), used for the sea to the west (or, less likely, north) of northern Britain. The *Di* element means ‘two’, perhaps indicating a ‘twinned’ or ‘double’ people (Rivet and Smith, *Place-Names*, 338) related in some way to the *Calidones*, a term for people inhabiting part of Britain north of the Clyde-Forth line: for some basic discussion of a difficult subject, see Rivet and Smith, *Place-Names*, 289–91. The name *Verturiones* is closely related to the medieval kingdom of Fortriu (\**Uerturia*), so the *Verturiones* may, like Fortriu, have been located around the Moray Firth: Alex Woolf, ‘Dún Nechtain, Fortriu and the Geography of the Picts’, *Scottish Historical Review* 85 (2006): 182–201.

<sup>46</sup> The location of the *Attacotti* is uncertain, though usually they are regarded as Irish: Philip Freeman, ‘Who Were the Atecotti?’, in *Identifying the ‘Celtic’*: CSANA Yearbook 2, ed. J.F. Nagy (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002), 111–14. Philip Rance, ‘Attacotti, Déisi and Magnus Maximus: The Case for Irish Federates in Late Roman Britain’, *Britannia* 32 (2001): 243–70, and Kim McCone, *The Celtic Question: Modern Constructs and Ancient Realities* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2008), 12–14, have argued inconclusively that the name is an early form of the later Old Irish word for vassal peoples, *aithechthúatha*. Alternatively, Thomas Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 158–60, has suggested that the *Attacotti* were a confederation of the Ulaid in northern Ireland. While the sources do repeatedly mention *Scotti* alongside *Attacotti*, the nature of the connection is not clear, and Jerome’s description of the *Attacotti* as a *gens Britannicam* – Rance, ‘Attacotti’, 246 – indicates that they at least partially derived from Britain as well as Ireland.

Similarly, the Panegyric of Constantine of 310 stated that Constantine ‘did not seek to occupy the forests and swamps of the Caledonians and other Picts’.<sup>47</sup> Another source, *Nomina provinciarum omnium (Laterculus Veronensis)*, of 312 × 14, lists the *Caledonii* alongside the *Picti* and *Scotti*, as ‘Barbarian nations that sprang up under the emperors’, though it is possible that the writer was simply compiling names of peoples encountered by the Romans.<sup>48</sup> As a result, no particular interrelationship should be inferred from the appearance of both *Caledonii* and *Picti* in the same list.<sup>49</sup> Ammianus and the panegyric indicate that the *Caledonii* could be considered one ethnic group among the *Picti*, but it would be a mistake to assume that this was always the case.

For Patrick, the *Picti* were also a *gens*, and also clearly geographically, as well as religiously, separate from the Britons.<sup>50</sup> Patrick attacked Coroticus for selling his captives ‘to a foreign people which does not know God’ (*genti exterae ignoranti Deum*), the foreign people specified elsewhere as *Picti*.<sup>51</sup> Coroticus and his warriors (*milites*) were, through their actions, no longer fellow-citizens or citizens of the holy Romans but instead the citizens of demons (‘non dico civibus meis neque civibus sanctorum Romanorum sed civibus daemoniorum, ob mala opera ipsorum’).<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, Patrick regarded them as people from his own *patria*.<sup>53</sup> While Coroticus and his soldiers might lose their citizenship of the civilised world and could be depicted by Patrick as associates or allies of the *Scotti*, *Picti* and *apostati*,<sup>54</sup> there is no implication that Coroticus and his soldiers would become members of any of these groups. Presumably, for Patrick *Picti* was an ethnic term like *Franci* for a group living in a different region from the *Brittones*. It did not just denote uncivilised and un-Christian Britons. While the evidence is inconsistent, reflecting the complex and varied nature of identity, it overall indicates that *Picti* was regarded as a broader ethnic identity for people north of the Roman frontier which included smaller ethnic groups, such as the *Verturiones*, as well as more local units.

It could be argued that *Picti* did not refer to all the inhabitants of Britain north of Hadrian’s Wall, since it did not include those identified as *Brittones* or *Scotti*.

<sup>47</sup> Panegyric VI (VII), 7.2, in *XII Panegyrici Latini*, edn. Mynors, 190, 299; J.C. Mann, and R.G. Penman, trans., *Literary Sources for Roman Britain*. 3rd edn. (Cambridge: London Association of Classical Teachers, 1996), 50.

<sup>48</sup> *Nomina provinciarum omnium (Laterculus Veronensis)*, in *Geographi Latini Minores*, ed. Riese, 128 (§13): ‘Gentes barbarae quae pullulaverunt sub imperatoribus. Scoti Picti Caledonii Rugi Saxones Franci ...’ (other peoples are then listed); Ralph W. Mathisen, ‘Catalogues of Barbarians in Late Antiquity’, in *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World. Cultural Interaction and the Creation of Identity in Late Antiquity*, eds. R.W. Mathisen and D. Shanzer (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 17–32 (22).

<sup>49</sup> See Mathisen, ‘Catalogues’, especially 22–3.

<sup>50</sup> For Patrick’s use of *gens*, see T.M. Charles-Edwards, ‘Perceptions of Pagan and Christian: From Patrick to Gregory the Great’, in *The Introduction of Christianity*, eds. Flechner and Ní Mhaonaigh, 259–78 (263–70).

<sup>51</sup> *Epistola*, §14, in *St Patrick*, ed. Hood, 37, 57. There might be considered some uncertainty whether the ‘foreign people’ were the Picts, as *Epistola*, §12, in *St Patrick*, ed. Hood, 37, 57, has both *Scotti* and *Picti* in a general statement about Christians delivered into the hands of *Scotti* and *Picti*, but *Epistola*, §15, in *St Patrick*, ed. Hood, 37, 58, makes it clear that these particular captives were sold to the Picts. The distance involved in this process is stressed by Patrick in *Epistola*, §15, in *St Patrick*, ed. Hood, 37, 58: ‘sons and daughters who so far have not been put to the sword, but have been carried far off and transported to distant lands, where sin is rife, openly, grievously and shamelessly; and there freeborn men [*recte* ‘freeborn people’] have been sold, Christians reduced to slavery – and what is more, as slaves of the utterly iniquitous, evil and apostate Picts’ (‘... filios et filias suas quas adhuc gladius nondum interfecit, sed prolongati et exportati in longa terrarum, ubi peccatum manifeste graviter impudenter abundat; ibi venundati ingenui homines, Christiani in servitute redacti sunt, praesertim indignissimorum pessimorum apostatarumque Pictorum’). Similarly, in comparing and contrasting the situation when the Franks captured Christian Gauls in *Epistola*, §14, in *St Patrick*, ed. Hood, 37, 57, Patrick again stresses the foreign location of the Picts.

<sup>52</sup> *Epistola*, §2, in *St Patrick*, ed. Hood, 35, 55.

<sup>53</sup> *Epistola*, §11, in *St Patrick*, ed. Hood, 36, 57.

<sup>54</sup> *Epistola*, §2, in *St Patrick*, ed. Hood, 35, 55.

However, we should not regard Pictish identity as static, for the term is unlikely to have referred always to the same exact configuration in an unchanging geographic area. Indeed, Guy Halsall has plausibly argued that when *Picti* further north exerted political overlordship southwards, people living between the walls of Hadrian and Antoninus Pius could have regarded themselves as *Picti*.<sup>55</sup> Political allegiances could promote particular ethnic identifications, although not in all cases. Nor need such changes have been permanent, as is indicated by the fact that the Britons south of the Forth and around the Clyde ultimately came to regard themselves as Britons, more closely related to people living in Wales and western England than to their northern neighbours.

That Pictish control of the southern region was not complete or was only a temporary feature of the late fourth century is indicated by Ammianus Marcellinus. He stated that the ‘raids of the savage tribes of the Scots and the Picts, who had broken the peace that had been agreed upon, were laying waste places near the frontiers, so that fear seized the provinces’ (‘cum Scottorum Pictorumque gentium ferarum excursus rupta quiete conducta loca limitibus uicina uastarent et implicaret formido provincias’), prompting the Caesar Julian to send his commander-in-chief, Lupicinus, with military detachments from Gaul to Britain to deal with the threat in the winter of 359–60.<sup>56</sup> While it is possible that Julian wanted to send Lupicinus elsewhere to remove an impediment to his proclamation as emperor in 360 (a possibility not mentioned by Ammianus), there must have been a plausible military imperative to induce Lupicinus to go.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, there is little reason to doubt that Ammianus was correct to claim that the *Picti* and *Scotti* were threatening the empire, and that his description of the details at least reflected what his readership regarded as possible. Since the fears of those in the provinces would have already been realised if the attacks were south of Hadrian’s Wall, the most natural reading of the passage is that the *Picti* and *Scotti* were laying waste the zone to the north of the wall, presumably where there had been Roman outposts, such as Risingham, Bewcastle and High Rochester, and the inhabitants were more Romanised.<sup>58</sup> The passage indicates

<sup>55</sup> Guy Halsall, ‘Northern Britain and the Fall of the Roman Empire’, *Medieval Journal* 2, no. 2 (2012): 1–25 (9–10).

<sup>56</sup> Seyfarth, Jocab-Karau and Ulmann, eds., *Ammiani Marcellini*, 1: 183 (xx 1.1). The translation is adapted from Rolfe, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 2: 2–3; cf. J.C. Mann, ‘Loca’, *Archaeologia Aeliana*, 5th series, 20 (1992): 53–5. It has been questioned whether Ammianus did mention *Scotti* in his *Res gestae*, because in two cases the textual evidence is problematic, and in the other instance *Scotti* could be amended to *saeva*: Philip Bartholomew, ‘Fourth-Century Saxons’, *Britannia* 15 (1984): 169–85 (175–6). Certainly, at xx 1.1, in the ninth-century MS V the *SCO* of *Scottorum* has been written subsequently over erased text (although maybe the right part of the o is original?): Seyfarth, Jocab-Karau and Ulmann, eds., *Ammiani Marcellini*, 1: 233; digital text of Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 1873, f. 67v, at [http://www.mss.vatlib.it/guii/console?service=present&term=@5Vat.lat.1873\\_ms&item=1&add=0&search=1&filter=&relation=3&operator=&attribute=3040](http://www.mss.vatlib.it/guii/console?service=present&term=@5Vat.lat.1873_ms&item=1&add=0&search=1&filter=&relation=3&operator=&attribute=3040) (accessed 19 December 2019), but there was only space for 2–4 letters, not for Bartholomew’s suggested *Attacottorum* here. This, and the likelihood that another large population group accompanied *Pictorumque* here, makes it likely that the emendator was correct to include *SCO*. In the case of xxvi, 4.5, MS V’s text is clearly corrupt, reading originally ‘pannonis & qua directisaxonesque secuti etata citti uritanos’, with a near contemporary subsequently drawing a line through *ecuti* and writing *cotti* to produce *scotti*: Seyfarth, Jocab-Karau and Ulmann, eds., *Ammiani Marcellini*, 2: 9; digital text of MS Vat. lat. 1873, f. 138v, line 10, as above. Again the medieval emendation, this time potentially based on the exemplar so that it has *Scotti et Atacitti*, is likely to be correct. In this case, as with the suggestion for xxvii 8.5, that *Scotti* was originally *saeva*, Bartholomew’s proposed radical emendation (reading from *recti* onwards the text as ‘Franci Saxonesque etiamtum tractus Gallicanos’) is far less convincing. In sum, it is relatively clear that *Scotti* were mentioned in all three cases by Ammianus Marcellinus.

<sup>57</sup> For an account of the context (which broadly regards Ammianus’ text as reliable), see John Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (London: Duckworth, 1989), 93–100; for the view that Julian was already behaving as if he intended to become emperor by 359, see Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 153–5.

<sup>58</sup> David J. Breeze, *The Frontiers of Roman Britain* (London: Batsford, 1982), 136; Mann, ‘Loca’, 53. The lack of fourth-century Roman finds north of Hadrian’s Wall makes it unlikely that the outposts were much if at all occupied

that before this episode these areas were not occupied by the *Scotti* and *Picti*, and that the *Picti* were not simply all the inhabitants beyond the frontier, but were a group with a more restricted meaning.

Ammianus also mentioned here that *Scotti* were aggressors attacking close to the frontiers. Although their origins are not specified, the passage increases the probability that there were *Scotti* settled in northern Britain in the fourth century, and that they occupied or controlled (albeit perhaps briefly) some territory close to Hadrian's Wall or the province's north-western coast, perhaps lands in the Solway Firth to Clyde Firth area. This would perhaps accord best with Ammianus' account (for instance, explaining why *Scotti* had a peace agreement with the Romans). It is clear from other sources that *Scotti* were not confined in the late antique period to Ireland. Written sources and other linguistic evidence indicate that *Scotti* settled in this period along the western seaboard of Britain, including Cornwall and Wales.<sup>59</sup> Most pertinently, Orosius wrote that *Scotti* inhabited the island of *Menavia*, probably the Isle of Man.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, by the early fifth century this term was not confined to those living in Ireland; land occupied by *Scotti* was visible to many inhabitants of Roman Britain.

Later written sources make it clear that by the late sixth century Argyll and the southern Hebrides were part of the Gaelic cultural zone, sharing close connections with Ireland. How exactly *Scotti* came to reside in western Scotland is not clear, although certainly Gaelic accounts dating from the seventh century and later of elite settlement from Ireland cannot be regarded as reliable.<sup>61</sup> The ultimate inclusion of parts of northern Britain in this Gaelic zone presumably reflected the close connections and the movement of people (how many is uncertain) between Ireland, particularly County Antrim, and Argyll and the southern Inner Hebrides.<sup>62</sup> Similar earlier cultural affinities between Ireland, the Isle of Man and the Hebrides might be indicated by the fact that Ptolemy listed these islands as relating to Ireland rather than Britain.<sup>63</sup> At present, however, there is an absence of demonstrably early place-name or other evidence supporting a theory of Gaelic settlement in this period in Galloway, Ayrshire or Dumfriesshire.<sup>64</sup> Overall, while caution is necessary, it is plausible that *Scotti* in the late fourth century inhabited parts of Argyll, Inner Hebridean islands and the Isle of Man, and could have had a military presence in south-west Scotland. Therefore, there is no reason to reject Ammianus' account of the situation in 359–60.

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in that century: Rob Collins and Lindsay Allason-Jones, eds., *Finds from the Frontier: Material Culture in the 4th–5th Centuries* (York: Council for British Archaeology, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350–1064* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 139, 141, 148–52, 168–9, 174–81.

<sup>60</sup> Orosius, 'History against the Pagans', 1.2.75, in *Ireland and the Classical World*, ed. and trans. Philip Freeman (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001), 111–13.

<sup>61</sup> Ewan Campbell, 'Were the Scots Irish?' *Antiquity* 75 (2001): 285–92; David N. Dumville, 'Ireland and North Britain in the Earlier Middle Ages: Contexts for *Míniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban*', in *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000*, eds. C. Ó Baoill and N.R. McGuire (Aberdeen: An Clò Gaidhealach, 2002), 185–211.

<sup>62</sup> The northern part of County Antrim was also part of the over-kingdom of Dál Riata, which by 700 was dominant over Argyll and the Inner Hebrides.

<sup>63</sup> Rivet and Smith, *Place-Names*, 131–2; note, however, that in Ptolemy's *Geography* (140) a population group in Argyll, the *Epidii*, appears in a P-Celtic form.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Gaelic in Medieval Scotland: Advent and Expansion', *Proceedings of the British Academy* 167 (2010), 349–92, especially 363–8, 373–5, 378–9, 386–8; Thomas Owen Clancy, 'The Gall-Ghàidheil and Galloway', *Journal of Scottish Name Studies* 2 (2008), 19–50 (40–5). Further place-name analysis may indicate whether any Gaelic place-names in south-west Scotland are likely to pre-date the seventh century.

It is likely that increasing linguistic divergence of the Gaelic branch of the Celtic language from Pictish played a role in the distinction between *Picti* and *Scotti*; certainly by the seventh century Gaelic was very different from British (and presumably Pictish), both languages each having undertaken a series of significant linguistic changes.<sup>65</sup> Alex Woolf, citing mainly short inscriptions dominated by names, has suggested that in the fourth century all these languages would have been more mutually intelligible.<sup>66</sup> However, this probably understates their divergence, since by then both languages were already being transformed through multiple changes, the results of which meant that by 400, while people might recognise some words (but not others) in the other Celtic language, sentences would be difficult to understand.<sup>67</sup> The evidence for the language(s) in Pictish territory is relatively scanty and problematic, but it is clear that a Celtic language was spoken there which in the early medieval period was close to the British spoken to the south, sharing many, but not all, of the latter language's developments, with identified differences making it only perhaps a little closer to Gaelic.<sup>68</sup> By 700 speaking Gaelic may have been a precondition for recognition as *Scotti*, but that may not have been the case in the Roman period; we should be wary of assuming that language was always a key factor in determining identity, differentiating *Picti* from *Scotti*.<sup>69</sup>

<sup>65</sup> For a detailed study of relevant sound changes see Kim McCone, *Towards a Relative Chronology of Ancient and Medieval Celtic Sound Change* (Maynooth: The Cardinal Press, 1996), 81–125, 145–65.

<sup>66</sup> Woolf, *From Pictland*, 332–5.

<sup>67</sup> For the development of relevant differences between British and Gaelic in the ancient and immediately post Roman periods, see Paul Russell, *An Introduction to the Celtic Languages* (Harlow: Longman, 1995), 14–15, 28–60, 115–36, 231–57. Anthony Harvey, 'The Significance of Cothraige', *Ériu* 36 (1985), 1–9 (2, 9); and idem, 'Languages and Literacy in Mid-First-Millennium Ireland: New Questions to Some Old Answers', in *Transforming Landscapes of Belief in the Early Medieval Insular World and Beyond: Converting the Isles II*, eds. Nancy Edwards, Máire Ní Mhaonaigh and Roy Flechner (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 47–63 (58–61), has argued convincingly that the process of transformation in both languages, which conventionally began in the fifth century and ended in the seventh century, began earlier, because otherwise it is necessary to hypothesise that a remarkable number of changes in both British and Gaelic took place in a brief period of time. Unfortunately, however, the evidence he produces does not enable the start of the process to be dated any more precisely than to after the Roman invasion of Britain in A.D. 43.

<sup>68</sup> Simon Taylor, 'Pictish Place-Names Revisited'; Alan James, 'P-Celtic in Southern Scotland and Cumbria: A Review of the Place-Name Evidence for Possible Pictish Phonology', *Journal of Scottish Name Studies* 7 (2013), 29–78; Guto Rhys, 'Approaching the Pictish Language: Historiography, Early Evidence and the Question of Pritenic' (PhD diss., University of Glasgow, 2015). There is some uncertain evidence that Pictish was not as influenced as British was by Latin, since medieval Pictish did not adopt Brittonic's 'New Quantity System' for vowel length, a significant development of the late sixth or early seventh century: Guto Rhys, 'The Non-Operation of the "New Quantity System" in Pictish', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 79 (2020), 37–45. Rhys suggests that this change may have been a result of influence from spoken Latin on British, and that it would have resulted in some problems of intelligibility between Pictish and British. In this respect, at least, Pictish did not diverge as far as British from the common Insular Celtic ancestor shared with Gaelic. To summarise the current view on Pictish, according to Rhys, 'The Pictish Language', *History Scotland* (January/February 2020), 16–22 (22), 'The restricted evidence demands that we keep an open mind as to whether Pictish was a truly distinct language to Brythonic (as Bede stated) or perhaps simply the most northerly dialect or continuation of it.' The debate continues regarding whether another non-Celtic language was known or spoken. For a historiographical overview, see Rhys, 'Approaching the Pictish Language', 58–123. For the view that the language spoken in Pictland was simply Celtic, see Katherine Stuart Forsyth, 'The Ogham Inscriptions of Scotland: An Edited Corpus' (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1996), and eadem, *Language in Pictland*. For recent studies supporting the existence of another language, see Graham R. Isaac, 'Scotland', in *New Approaches to Celtic Place-Names in Ptolemy's Geography*, eds. Javier de Hoz, Eugenio R. Luján and Patrick Sims-Williams (Madrid: Ediciones Clásicas, 2005), 189–214, and Simon Rodway, 'The Ogham Inscriptions of Scotland and Brittonic Pictish', *Journal of Celtic Linguistics* 21 (2019): 173–234.

<sup>69</sup> For the significance of language for Irish (more correctly Gaelic) identity at the start of the eighth century, see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 579–80. As Woolf, *From Pictland*, 332–4, suggests, there may potentially have been more of a continuum between Pictish and Gaelic among speakers of these languages in some areas of northern Britain than we find in surviving written sources, but this requires further study.



The development of a separate Gaelic identity in northern Britain is difficult to perceive, but, as with *Picti*, our lack of contemporary evidence does not mean that such self-perception could not have existed. On the *Scotti* and *Picti*, Gildas wrote that:

They were to some extent different in their customs, but they were in perfect accord in their greed for bloodshed: and they were readier to cover their villainous faces with hair than their private parts and neighbouring regions with clothes.<sup>70</sup>

For Gildas the *Picti* and *Scotti* were separate groups with ‘different customs’ as well as similar barbarity and savageness. Unfortunately, Gildas did not explain what these differences in customs were, or whether there were other significant differences between them, such as variation in their spoken language. It would be a mistake, however, to dismiss this evidence for the existence of a distinction between *Scotti* and *Picti*, which, as just argued, was already present in northern Britain in the fourth century. What cannot be expected is that everyone regarded the characteristics of these ethnic groups in similar ways; for some language could have been a key determinant, but for others political loyalties might be decisive. An instance of the latter is Bede’s reference to the place-name *Pean-fahel* (modern Kinneil) at the east end of the Antonine Wall as Pictish, even though it contains a mixture of British or Pictish (*penn*, ‘head’) and Gaelic (*fál*, ‘wall’) language elements.<sup>71</sup> For Bede this place presumably had both a Pictish and English form (*Penneltun*) because it lay on the border between the Pictish and Northumbrian kingdoms. We might expect, therefore, that over the centuries perceptions regarding what differentiated a *Scottus* from a *Pictus* would have varied, but the evidence indicates that such identities existed and were significant to people.

### The term *Picti*: from Gildas to 700

What happened after Gildas? According to the minimalist hypothesis, the use of *Picti* faded away after the ancient period because its currency had been confined to the classical world and was intrinsically connected with imperial ways of thinking about provincials and barbarians. It was rediscovered and popularised only in the later seventh century when Verturian rulers sought legitimacy for their new wider hegemony. Certainly, in the period between 500 and 700, Cassiodorus and Jordanes did not refer to Picts in their surviving texts, relying instead on other earlier classical accounts, such as those by Tacitus and Cassius Dio, as well as Orosius and Pomponius Mela, for instance repeating the idea that Claudius conquered the Orkney islands.<sup>72</sup> The only continental writer in this era to mention the Picts is Isidore in his *Etymologies*. Isidore explained that the name *Picti* was derived from their tattoos, and elsewhere he etymologised the

<sup>70</sup> Gildas’ *De excidio Britanniae*, in Gildas, ed. Winterbottom, 23 (§19.1).

<sup>71</sup> *HE*, 42–3 (I.12); K.H. Jackson, ‘The Language of the Picts’, in *Problem*, ed. Wainwright, 129–60 (143).

<sup>72</sup> Cassiodorus, *Chronica ad a. DXIX*, in *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII*, vol. 2, ed. Theodor Mommsen. MGH, *Auctores Antiquissimi* 11 (Berlin: apud Weidmannos, 1894), 109–61 (137, no. 654: A.D.44); Jordanes, *Romana*, in *Iordanis, Romana et Getica*, ed. Theodor Mommsen. MGH, *Auctores Antiquissimi* 5, part 1 (Berlin: apud Weidmannos, 1882), 1–52 (34: §260, for the Orkneys); Jordanes, *De origine actibusque Getarum*, written c.551, in *Iordanis, Romana et Getica*, ed. Mommsen, 53–138. For discussion of the latter text, see A.H. Merrills, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 100–69, especially 116, 136–42. For a reprint of Charles C. Mierow’s translation of the geographical introduction to Jordanes’ *De origine actibusque Getarum*, I.4–V.38, see Merrills, *History and Geography*, 321–6. Jordanes in his description of Britain in *De origine actibusque Getarum* made the argument that the Goths could not have come from Britain since the Romans had completed the conquest of that island (142), an argument which would have been nullified if he had included unconquered Picts.



Scotti from *Pictus* too.<sup>73</sup> Isidore's work presumably reflected the conjunction of these two groups in late antique sources, but need not indicate any independent knowledge. Isidore was a very popular writer, with his *Etymologies* copied and distributed by the mid seventh century in Ireland, but his text did not provide details which would have enabled inhabitants of northern Britain to identify themselves as *Picti*.<sup>74</sup> However, once such a Pictish identity was established, Isidore's text would have provided significant support.<sup>75</sup>

Turning to Insular sources, nearly all the texts in which *Picti* next appear can be dated to the end of the seventh or early eighth centuries. While the Pictish king-lists contain a seventh-century stratum, probably including a contemporary list by c.663 or soon after at the latest, the exact contents of this antecedent text are not clear, so we cannot be sure whether it was regarded as 'Pictish' at the time.<sup>76</sup> This means that we are reliant on external sources to understand how the use of *Picti* developed.

Some of our earliest Anglo-Saxon sources contain many references to Picts, mainly relating to Northumbrian political and ecclesiastical interactions with them from the seventh century onwards. Stephen's *Life of Wilfrid*, probably written 713 × 16, mentions *Picti* as northern enemies of the Northumbrian King Ecgfrith (671–85), and as part of Wilfrid's ecclesiastical territory.<sup>77</sup> In the Anonymous *Life of Cuthbert*, written in Lindisfarne between 699 and 705, one episode has Cuthbert travelling by boat from Coldingham to visit the Pictish region of the Niuduera, probably somewhere in Fife.<sup>78</sup> Bede mentioned Picts frequently in his texts, utilising multiple earlier works, not just Gildas' *De excidio Britanniae*, Constantius' 'Life of Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre', and other recent Anglo-Saxon texts, such as the Anonymous *Life of Cuthbert*, but also Pictish sources; but his works were produced in the early eighth century, so they do not provide clear evidence for an earlier Pictish identity.<sup>79</sup> Versions of the Anglo-

<sup>73</sup> Stephen A. Barney and others, trans., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 198 (IX.ii.103), 386 (XIX.xxiii.7).

<sup>74</sup> Mark A. Handley, 'The British Isles and the Mediterranean World: Contact and Exchange AD 400–700', in *Origins and Revivals: Proceedings of the First Australian Conference of Celtic Studies*, eds. G. Evans, B. Martin and J.M. Wooding (Sydney: Centre for Celtic Studies, University of Sydney, 2000), 159–85 (165–6); Pádraig Ó Néill, 'Romani Influences on Seventh-Century Hiberno-Latin Literature', in *Irland und Europa. Ireland and Europe. Die Kirche im Frühmittelalter. The Early Church*, eds. P. Ní Chatháin and Michael Richter (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 280–90 (287); J.N. Hillgarth, 'Ireland and Spain in the Seventh Century', *Peritia* 3 (1984): 1–16. Isidore's discussion of Picts as tattooed perhaps inspired Insular commentators on Virgil's texts who made connections between contemporary Picts and the instances of the adjective *picti* in Virgil's works, but the date of these commentaries is not certain: Miles, *Heroic Saga*, 23–33, 43–5; Fraser, 'From Ancient Scythia', 31.

<sup>75</sup> Similarly, notes in Servius' 'Commentaries', partly through additions in Servius Danielis (see note 26), reflect how *Picti* could be utilised for origin accounts: Fraser, 'From Ancient Scythia', 30–4.

<sup>76</sup> Molly Miller, 'The Disputed Historical Horizon of the Pictish King-Lists', *Scottish Historical Review* 58 (1979): 1–34 (9–12).

<sup>77</sup> Stephen, 'Life of Wilfrid', in *The Age of Bede*, trans. J.F. Webb, ed. D.H. Farmer. Revd edn. (London: Penguin, 2004), 105–84 (128–9, 154, 164–7). On the text's date, see Catherine Cubitt, 'St Wilfrid: A Man for His Times', in *Wilfrid. Abbot, Bishop, Saint. Papers from the 1300th Anniversary Conference*, ed. N.J. Higham (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2013), 311–30 (313).

<sup>78</sup> 'Anonymous Life of Cuthbert', in *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert. A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede's Prose Life. Texts, Translation and Notes*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: University Press, 1940), 59–139 (82–5: Book II, Chapter IV). On the text's date, see 13. The Cuthbert episode, probably with a real basis, would date to his time at Melrose, from 651 to perhaps the 670s: Clare Stancliffe, 'Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary', in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community to AD 1200*, eds. G. Bonner, D. Rollason and C. Stancliffe (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1989), 21–44 (29–33).

<sup>79</sup> Fraser, 'From Ancient Scythia', 27–30; Nicholas Evans, 'Ideology, Literacy and Matriliney: Approaches to Medieval Texts on the Pictish Past', in *Pictish Progress*, eds. Driscoll, Hall, and Geddes, 45–65 (58). The relevant works are the 'Verse Life of Cuthbert', in *Bedas metrische Vita sancti Cuthberti*, ed. Werner Jaeger, (Leipzig: Mayer and Müller, 1935), 77–9 (XI), on which see also Michael Lapidge, 'Bede's Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*', in *St Cuthbert*, eds. Bonner, Rollason, and Stancliffe, 77–94; the 'Prose Life of Cuthbert', in *Two Lives*, ed. Colgrave, 141–307 (192–5:

Saxon Chronicle and the related late tenth-century ‘Chronicle of Æthelweard’ also refer to the Picts, but their common source was compiled from older texts in the ninth century, so the potential for later adaptation is high.<sup>80</sup> In stating that the Emperor Claudius in the first century A.D. and Ceolwulf, king of the West Saxons c.600, fought against the Picts, and that the northern Picts supposedly converted by Columba were called *wærteres* (that is, the people of Fortriu), they do reflect awareness that the Picts inhabited Britain before 700; but these items could all have been included later; certainly all other references to Picts before 700 in the Anglo-Saxon chronicles are largely based on Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, these Anglo-Saxon sources provide no certain independent evidence for Pictish identity before 700, but given that they reflect close political and ecclesiastical relations, including a phase of dominance, as far back as the 670s, it is plausible that their repeated use of *Picti* is not due to a later, post-685, relabelling.

Indeed, a separate bishopric based at Abercorn for the people north of the Forth (and some to the south as well?) was created in 681 for the *provincia Pictorum* according to Bede at a time when British episcopal structures were simply incorporated into Deiran and Bernician bishoprics (the other bishops in 681 being based in York, Lindisfarne, Hexham and Lindsey).<sup>82</sup> This indicates that those beyond the Forth were regarded as different by the Northumbrians. Moreover, if, as is likely, Stephen’s *Life of Wilfrid* and Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History* are correct in quoting the text of the proceedings of the Council of Rome held by Pope Agatho in 680 which included Wilfrid’s affirmation of the true Catholic faith in Pictish territory, then *Picti* were recognised by that time in Rome, and presumably by the English, as inhabitants of northern Britain and Ireland alongside *Angli*, *Brittones* and *Scotti*.<sup>83</sup> These two pieces of evidence point to the Anglo-Saxons regarding the people north of the Forth as *Picti* rather than *Brittones* before the Battle of Dún Nechtain in 685 established Fortriu as the dominant power in the region.<sup>84</sup>

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XI, 238–9; XXIV, 242–3; XXVII); his *Chronica maiora*, in *Bedae venerabilis Opera, Pars VI, Opera didascalica* 2, ed. C.W. Jones. Corpus Christianorum Series Latina CXXIIIIB (Turnhout: Brepols, 1977), s.a. *Anno Mundi* 4377, 4403, 4410; trans. Faith Wallis, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 219, 220, 221–2; and *HE*, 16–21 (I.1), 40–5 (I.12), 48–9 (I.14), 62–5 (I.20), 150–1 (II.5), 212–13 (III.1), 220–5 (III.3), 230–1 (III.4), 294–5 (III.6), 300–1 (III.24), 314–15 (III.25), 370–1 (III.27), 428–9 (IV.12), 478–9 (IV.26), 524–5 (V.9), 532–53 (V.19), 560–1 (V.21), 562–7 (V.23–4) (s.a. A.D. 565, 698, 711).

<sup>80</sup> Michael Swanton, ed. and trans., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (London: Phoenix Press, 2000); editions of individual chronicles have been published by multiple authors, David Dumville and Simon Keynes as general editors: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983–); A. Campbell, ed. and trans., *Chronicon Æthelwardi. The Chronicle of Æthelweard* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1962). On the textual relationships, see Janet Bately, *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, vol. 3: *MS A* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1986), lxxix–lxxxviii.

<sup>81</sup> Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, 3, 6–7, 12–13, 18–21, 39, 41; Campbell, ed., *Chronicon Æthelwardi*, 4, 6, 13, 18, 21. While only the reference to Ceolwulf fighting against the Picts (as well as the English, Britons and *Scotti*) is found in version A, the appearance of other references to the Picts in the ‘Chronicle of Æthelweard’ and other witnesses (especially versions D and E) indicates that most came from the common source earlier than the time, c.890, when the early section of A was written.

<sup>82</sup> *HE*, 370–1 (IV.12); see also 428–9 (IV.26).

<sup>83</sup> Stephen, ‘Life of Wilfrid’, in *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*, ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), 112–15 (§53); *HE*, 524–5 (V.19); see Catherine Cubitt, ‘Appendix II: The Chronology of Stephen’s Life of Wilfrid’, in *Wilfrid*, ed. Higham, 334–47 (340, 344); Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 432–5, and Cubitt, ‘St Wilfrid: A Man for his Times’, 313–14, 328–9.

<sup>84</sup> It is interesting to ask how the Northumbrians established who was a Briton or a Pict, and where they placed the frontier of the Roman empire. If not already known from the inhabitants around the Antonine Wall, once the Northumbrians became Christian, late antique texts (including Gildas) would have made them aware that it was a Roman construction (or at least built at their instruction). It may have been regarded as the key imperial boundary (perhaps more than Hadrian’s Wall?), marking where the divide between Pict and Briton might be expected.

For the Gaelic world, we are fortunate to have a number of pertinent texts, particularly some connected to the monastery of Iona. The *Amrae Coluimb Chille*, which mentions Columba teaching among the *túatha Toi* ('peoples of the Tay'), used to be generally dated c.600, but Jacopo Bisagni has recently argued cogently that it was composed in the ninth century.<sup>85</sup> Muirchú's *Life of Patrick*, written c.695 for Áed, bishop of Sleaty (in County Carlow, Ireland), which displays knowledge of Patrick's *Epistola*, probably stated that Palladius died in the land of the Picts, after failing as a missionary in Ireland.<sup>86</sup> Adomnán's *Life of St Columba*, written c.700, which mentions an episode in the 'Life of Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre', contains numerous references to the Picts.<sup>87</sup> Fraser has argued that the episodes in Pictland can be divided into two groups, some concerned with the northern Pictish king, Bridei son of Mailcon, and his region around the Great Glen, others perhaps more to the south.<sup>88</sup> Fraser has proposed that the southern episodes, stated to have involved journeys across Druim Alban and which do not specifically mention the Picts, are earlier, dating from the mid seventh century, while the more northern episodes are later, reflecting the rise of Fortriu.<sup>89</sup> The text also refers to other groups from the later Pictish region, including the Miathi who c.600 fought a battle against Áedán mac Gabráin.<sup>90</sup> The Miathi were the Maeatae mentioned by classical authors c.200, probably by c.600 based around the Firth of Forth.<sup>91</sup> Adomnán in the same work also has a leader called Artbranan *primarius Geonae cohortis*, 'leader of the Genonian cohort', who went to Skye by boat to gain baptism from Columba before he died.<sup>92</sup> He needed an interpreter, reinforcing the argument that the leader may have been from the later Pictish zone (perhaps from the territory of Ce).<sup>93</sup>

Taken together, and combined with general references to peoples and territories among the Picts, these pieces of evidence indicate that the region from the Forth northwards was fragmented into multiple units and identities, and that by 700 *Picti* was an established term. However, it is important to stress that we have few surviving texts from any Insular society before the late seventh century, and most we do have (such as Anglo-Saxon charters and law texts) we would not expect to mention the Picts or their region. Much of the argument for the late adoption of a Pictish identity rests on the lateness of the sources mentioning *Picti*, but there are virtually no earlier Latin

<sup>85</sup> Jacopo Bisagni, ed. and trans., *Amrae Coluimb Chille: A Critical Edition* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 2019), 213–17; Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 99.

<sup>86</sup> Muirchú, 'Life of Patrick', §8 in *St Patrick*, ed. Hood, 61–98 (64, 85), where the text has *in Britonum finibus*, and §29 (77, 98), where Patrick's letter is used and mentioned. Thomas Owen Clancy, 'The Cults of Saints Patrick and Palladius in Early Medieval Scotland', in *Saints' Cults in the Celtic World*, eds. Steve Boardman, John Reuben Davies and Eila Williamson (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2009), 18–32 (19–20), plausibly (if not conclusively) prefers the reading of most manuscripts, in *Pictorum finibus* (Hood, ed., *St Patrick*, 78). For the date of the *Vita*, see Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 439–40.

<sup>87</sup> Adomnán, 'Life of St Columba', in *Adomnán's Life of St Columba*, eds. and trans. A.O. Anderson and M.O. Anderson. Rev. edn. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 144–7 (II.34), where the 'Life of Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre' was used.

<sup>88</sup> J.E. Fraser, 'Adomnán, Cumméne Ailbe, and the Picts', *Peritia* 17–18 (2003–4): 183–98, building on analyses by Isabel Henderson, *The Picts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), 74–5, and by Máire Herbert, *Iona, Kells and Derry. The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 15–17, 139–42.

<sup>89</sup> Fraser, 'Adomnán, Cumméne Ailbe'; also Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 98–103.

<sup>90</sup> Adomnán, 'Life of St Columba', in *Adomnán's Life of St Columba*, eds. Anderson and Anderson, 31–3 (I.8, I.9).

<sup>91</sup> Anderson and Anderson, eds., *Adomnán's Life of St Columba*, 6; Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 15–17.

<sup>92</sup> Adomnán, 'Life of St Columba', in *Adomnán's Life*, ed. Anderson and Anderson, 62–3 (I.33).

<sup>93</sup> Richard Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona. Life of St Columba* (London: Penguin, 1995), 294, n. 149.

texts in which we would expect the word to appear. When such sources start to survive, they universally, in multiple countries, employ *Picti* as a general term for the people north of the Forth in eastern side Scotland.

However, there is one other important group of texts from Britain and Ireland which do contain contemporary references to the Picts before 700: the Irish chronicles. Surviving in multiple versions in manuscripts from the 1090s and later, they contain various sources, including items from an 'Iona Chronicle', which was a contemporary record of events by about 660, if not earlier.<sup>94</sup> Certainly, some contemporary recording began by the mid sixth century, with a few real events recorded beforehand, but the extent to which these early items were rewritten or supplemented by subsequent additions is uncertain.<sup>95</sup> Excluding misplaced items, the title *rex Pictorum* is found in obituary notices for a number of people from the 580s onwards. Fraser is sceptical about these titles, regarding them and potentially the earliest seemingly Pictish event, the 'flight before the son of Mailcon', found in the *Annals of Ulster* both in 558 and 560, as additions from the late seventh century or later, reflecting a political viewpoint consonant with the ideology of Fortriu in the late seventh century or later.<sup>96</sup> However, this is unlikely to adequately explain the references to the Picts.

The appearance of *rex Pictorum* is not systematic, either before or after 685. Before 685 *rex Pictorum* appears seven times from the 580s to 685.<sup>97</sup> Six of these refer to kings also

<sup>94</sup> John Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1974), 9–26; Nicholas Evans, 'Irish Chronicles as a Source for the History of Northern Britain, A.D. 660–800', *Innes Review* 69, no. 1 (2018): 1–48.

<sup>95</sup> Alfred P. Smyth, 'The Earliest Irish Annals: Their First Contemporary Entries, and the Earliest Centres of Recording', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 72C (1972): 1–48; T.M. Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*. 2 vols. (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 1: 7–9, 38–58; Nicholas Evans, *The Present and the Past in Medieval Irish Chronicles* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2010), 171–4.

<sup>96</sup> The main Irish chronicle texts are: 'The Annals of Ulster', in *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*, I, eds. and trans. Seán Mac Airt and Gearóid Mac Niocaill (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), hereafter **AU**; 'The Annals of Tigernach', the annal (except where A.D. dates are known) identified by the number of kalends (given at the start of each annal) from the start of the third fragment covering c.488–766, ed. Henry Gough-Cooper, 'The Annals of Tigernach, the Third Fragment', [https://www.academia.edu/7440729/Annals\\_of\\_Tigernach\\_the\\_Third\\_Fragment\\_From\\_Oxford\\_Bodleian\\_Library\\_Rawlinson\\_MS\\_B488\\_folios\\_7r\\_14v](https://www.academia.edu/7440729/Annals_of_Tigernach_the_Third_Fragment_From_Oxford_Bodleian_Library_Rawlinson_MS_B488_folios_7r_14v) (accessed 25 April 2022), hereafter **AT**; William M. Hennessy, ed. and trans., *Chronicum Scotorum. A Chronicle of Irish Affairs, from the Earliest Times to A.D. 1135; with a Supplement, Containing the Events from 1141 to 1150*. Rolls Series 46 (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1866), hereafter **CS**; 'The Annals of Roscrea', in D.F. Gleeson and S. Mac Airt, 'The Annals of Roscrea', *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy* 59 C (1957–9), 137–80, hereafter **ARC**, checked against Bart Jaski and Daniel Mc Carthy, *A Facsimile Edition of the Annals of Roscrea*, [https://www.scss.tcd.ie/misc/kronos/editions/AR\\_portal.htm](https://www.scss.tcd.ie/misc/kronos/editions/AR_portal.htm) (accessed 24 April 2013); Denis Murphy, ed., *The Annals of Clonmacnoise being Annals of Ireland from the Earliest Period to A.D. 1408* (Dublin: printed at the University Press for the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland, 1896), hereafter **AClon**; Seán Mac Airt, ed. and trans., *The Annals of Inisfallen (MS. Rawlinson B. 503)* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1951), hereafter **AI**; Joan Newton Radner, ed. and trans., *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1978), hereafter **FAI**. Dates corrected to correspond to other chronicles' dates are placed in square brackets. The 'flight before the son of Mailcon' item is found at AU 558.2; AU 560.2 (AT kl. 67.3, CS 560.3, ARC 30.2, AClon 563, p. 88). Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 94–5, 371, and cf. 224–7.

<sup>97</sup> The surviving chronicles vary in their inclusion and use of titles, but where a title is found in the main hand of AU and another chronicle, then it usually came from the 'Chronicle of Ireland' (the common source which ended in 911). In addition, where *rex Pictorum* only appears in either AU or another chronicle, it probably was derived from the 'Chronicle of Ireland', since AU generally preserves the 'Chronicle of Ireland' text, and the common source of AT and CS tended to add Gaelic *ri Cruithnech* rather than the Latin title. The likely instances of *rex Pictorum* or *regnum Pictorum* before 685 are (those items actually with *rex Pictorum* or *regnum Pictorum* are in bold): Cennalath (**AU 580.3**, **AT kl 87.2**, AClon 580, p. 89); Bridei son of Mailcon (**AU 584.3**, AI 584.1, AT kl. 90.1, AClon 584, p. 89); Gartnait son of Domelch (**AT kl. 106.2**, **ARC 83**, AClon 590, p. 97); Eochaid Buide son of Áedán (**AU 629.4** from *Liber Cuanach*; other chronicles' items for him lack this title); Ciniod son of Luthrin **AU 631.1**, AI 633.2 as *ri Alban* (**AT kl 135.2**, **CS 631**, AClon 632, p. 102); Talorc son of Uuid (**AU 653.1**, AT kl 154.1 (without title) and **AT kl 154.2**, AClon 649, p. 104); Talorcen son of Ainfrith (**AU 657.3**, AT kl 157.4, CS 653 [657].4, AClon 653, p. 105); Talorcen is

found in the Pictish king-lists, although the two sources share other people not given the title *rex Pictorum* in the Irish annals from 580 to 685.<sup>98</sup> The other appearance of this title is in AU (in an addition attributed to the Book of Cuana) for Eochaid Buide, a Cenél nGabráin ruler who later appears in the Dál Riata king-list.<sup>99</sup> Eochaid's title is not implausible, although its transmission from the Book of Cuana, but not in any other chronicles, makes its accuracy difficult to assess.<sup>100</sup> Leaving aside the case of Eochaid, the other six kings clearly do not comprise all the kings in later Pictland who ruled from the 580s to 685. Indeed, no person in the Irish chronicles clearly corresponds to the king-list's Nectan *nepos* Uerp whose death would have been recorded in the Irish chronicles between AT kl. 106 (corresponding to AU 599, c.A.D. 602) and AT kl. 135 (AU 631, A.D. 632 or 633).<sup>101</sup> The lack of a continuous sequence of people called *rex Pictorum* in the Irish chronicles is not what we would expect from a later attempt to project back a Pictish kingship; while the loss of items during transmission is possible, the lack of titles for so many kings found in the Pictish king-list weakens the argument for a systematic attempt to revise the Iona Chronicle. Given that in the period between 685 and 740 the title *rex Pictorum* was used only for three out of seven Pictish overkings, it seems unlikely that someone attempted to create a clear sequence of Pictish kings in the Iona Chronicle.<sup>102</sup>

There are in fact some pieces of evidence indicating contemporary usage of 'Pictish' terminology before 685, since there are also two other, probably contemporary, items from the 660s and 670s which mention the Picts:

- AU 669.3 (also AT kl 169.2, CS 665.2):<sup>103</sup> *Itarnan & Corindu apud Pictores defuncti sunt* ('Itarnan and Corindu died among the Picts' or 'were killed by the Picts').<sup>104</sup>

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also called *ri Cruithne* in AT kl 155.4, *ri Cruithnech* in CS 651 [655].4, where the equivalent item, AU 654.5, does not mention him, but this title is likely to be a Clonmacnoise-group addition.

<sup>98</sup> For editions of the Pictish king-lists, see Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, 245–9, 261–89. Pictish kings reigning before 685 not given the title *rex Pictorum* are: Gartnait son of Uuid (AU 635.6 and AU 635.8); Bridei son of Uuid (AU 641.2, AT kl. 143.2, CS 639 [recte 641].1, ARC 118.2 [later hand]); Gartnait son of Donuel (AU 663.3, AT kl. 163.3 with *ri Cruithneach*, CS 659 [663].3 with *ri Cruithnech*, ARC 132.4 (addition in left margin) with *ri Cruithneac[h]*, AClon 659, p. 106 with 'king of Picts'); Drust son of Donuel (AU 672.6, AT kl 172.5, AClon 668, p. 108) (expulsion *de regno*); (AU 678.6, AT kl 178.6, CS 674.3, AClon 674, p. 109).

<sup>99</sup> Eochaid Buide son of Áedán (AU 629.4 from *Liber Cuanach*). Other items relating to Eochaid lack this title, and AT associates him in a combined, confused item, with Gaelic Argyll: AT3 kl 133.2; AI 631.1; CS 629.2; AClon 627, p. 101. On Eochaid, see Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 156–62; Bannerman, *Studies*, 95–6.

<sup>100</sup> Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 156–7, proposes that it may be a translation of *ri Cruithni*, relating to the Irish kingship.

<sup>101</sup> Evans, *Present*, 240–1. The Nechtan son of Cano whose death is found in AU 621.3 and CS 621.2 is a candidate, but since Nechtan was a Gaelic as well as Pictish name, it is far from certain that these texts refer to the same person.

<sup>102</sup> After 685 *rex Pictorum* and *regnum Pictorum* are found with: Nechtan son of Der Ilei (AT 724.2, AClon 722, p. 113; AT 728.5 has *righi na Picardach*, corresponding to 'kingship of the Picts', which is not reflected in AU 728.4, while AClon 725, p.114, has 'did receive Neaghtinn the son of Derills as king into the K. dome'), *rex* in AU 713.7, AT 713.8, AClon 710, p. 112; AU 717.4; AT 717.3, CS 713 [717].2, ARC 170.1; Drust (AT 726.4 has *regnum Pictorum*; AU 729.3, AT 729.4, AClon 726, p. 114; elsewhere *rex* in AU 726.1, AT 726.1); Unuist son of Uurguist AT 729.4, AU 729.3, AT 729.4, AClon 726, p. 114; AU 736.1, AT 736.1, AClon 733, p. 116. Pictish kings between 685 and 740 without *rex Pictorum* and *regnum Pictorum* are: Bridei son of Beli (*rex Fortrenn* in AT kl 186.4 [A.D. 685]; AU 693.1, AT kl 193.2, FAI §115 [693], AI 691.1 have *ri Cruithnech*; Taran son of Entifidich AU 697.1 (expulsion), AT kl 197.1, ARC 156.3 (later addition), AU 699.3 (journey to Ireland); Bridei son of Der Ilei (AU 706.2, AT 706.2); Eilpin (*rex* in AU 728.4, title not in AT 728.4, AT 728.5, AClon 725, p.114; however, by implication Elpin was ruler of the Pictish kingdom according to AT 726.4: '... Druist de reghno Pictorum ictus 7 Elphin pro eo regant'). Talorcen son of Drostan is called *rex Athfoitle* (AU 739.7, AT 739.6, ARC 185.5 in a later addition), so he probably only ruled in Atholl.

<sup>103</sup> A.D. 668 or 669.

<sup>104</sup> *Corindu* is unidentified, though Thomas Owen Clancy, 'Deer and the Early Church in North-Eastern Scotland', in *Studies on the Book of Deer*, ed. K. Forsyth (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008), 363–97 (376–7), refers to an



- AU 676.3:<sup>105</sup> *Multi Pictores dimersi sunt i l-Laind Abae* ('Many Picts were drowned at Lann Abae').<sup>106</sup>

Overall, these items push the employment of Pictish terminology back to considerably before the Battle of Dún Nechtain in 685, to at least the period of Northumbrian domination north of the Forth.<sup>107</sup>

However, in the most positive reading of the evidence, the first use of *rex Pictorum* in the annals could date as early as the 580s. Fraser has suggested that 'The flight before the son of Maelcon' item, located c.560 even before the coming of Columba, was a late inclusion, designed to show the power of the (supposedly) Pictish king Bridei son of Mailcon over the Gaels of the west.<sup>108</sup> However, this item's vagueness, not specifying that Bridei was involved nor who was fleeing or where they had left, would have made it poor propaganda, and there is no evidence for any alteration. It is likely that this item was written when the earliest monks included a few events preceding the foundation of Iona. That increases the probability that references to *reges Pictorum* from c.580–685 also were at least relatively contemporary, rather than added as later propaganda.

## The transmission and maintenance of *Picti* as an ethnic term in northern Britain

How did these later Insular writers know about the existence of *Picti* in northern Britain? If we focus solely on textual transmission, Ireland and Iona can be regarded as key vectors in the spread of the concept of the Picts. If medieval writers did encounter *Picti* in late antique Latin sources, they would generally have encountered unspecific references to *Picti*. In theory, access to multiple classical sources or identification of the *Caledonii* (which survives in the place-names Dunkeld, Rohallion and Schiehallion in Perthshire) and *Verturiones* (the ancestor, mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus, of later Fortriu, Pictish \*Verturia) with medieval peoples and places might have enabled the *Picti* to have been correctly located in northern Britain.<sup>109</sup>

However, no evidence has been uncovered that any Insular writers before 700 had access to the surviving late antique texts which mention the Picts, apart from the

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identification with St Machar of Old Aberdeen. Itarnan may be St Ethernan, who has dedications in Fife, Madderty in Perthshire (Strathearn), possibly Forfar in Angus, Rathen in Buchan, and whose name probably appears in early medieval inscriptions in eastern Scotland (375–7).

<sup>105</sup> A.D. 675.

<sup>106</sup> *Lann Abae* is unidentified.

<sup>107</sup> The use of the form *Pictores* (present in AU and AT, whereas CS has *Pictones*) is interesting, since it was written by someone who assumed that the word was a third declension noun containing the stem *Pictor-* rather than second declension noun based on *Pict-*, the result being the use (as with *amor*, 'love') of the *-es* case ending for the nominative and accusative plural forms, rather than more common *-i* and *-os* endings. The use of *Pictores* reflects a lack of familiarity and understanding with *Picti*, but awareness of the genitive plural form *Pictorum*, from which the *-es* ending was extrapolated. The annalist presumably derived this from examples of 'X *Pictorum*', most likely cases of *rex Pictorum* in the same text. If original, this would indicate both the inclusion of *Picti* in texts available in Iona in the late 660s and 670s, combined with unfamiliarity on the scribe's part, but potentially the instances of *Pictores* were due to later scribal alteration.

<sup>108</sup> Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 94–5.

<sup>109</sup> *Cat Coit Celidon*, 'Battle of the Caledonian Wood', was fought by Arthur according to the British text, *Historia Brittonum*, written 827 × 9: *Historia Brittonum* §56, in Nennius. *British History and the Welsh Annals*, ed. and trans. John Morris (London: Phillimore, 1980), 35, 76. *Caledonia* and *Caledonii* do not appear in other early medieval sources.



works of Constantius, Gildas and Patrick. Constantius' 'Life of Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre' and Patrick's *Epistola* do not specify the location of the *Picti*, but Gildas stated that they were an overseas northern people who settled in northern Britain south to the wall at the end of Roman Britain.<sup>110</sup> Letters by Columbanus show that Gildas was in contact with another cleric, Uinniau (called St Finnian and variants in Gaelic), who is likely to have been active in Ireland.<sup>111</sup> Gildas's *De excidio Britanniae* was mentioned and used in letters by Columbanus, who in the late sixth century became a monk at the monastery of Bangor in County Down and was taught early in his life by a disciple of Uinniau.<sup>112</sup> Gildas, Uinniau and Columbanus each wrote a new form of document, the penitential; these reflect a developing tradition with Columbanus' version influenced by Uinniau's penitential.<sup>113</sup> This increases the probability that the transmission of *De excidio Britanniae* to Columbanus was also through Uinniau. If Uinniau had a copy of Gildas' text, then Columba, who according to Adomnán's *Life of St Columba* was taught by a certain Uinniau, could have also known *De excidio Britanniae* or have been taught Gildas' explanation of the ethnic composition of Britain. Fraser has stressed Columba's scholarship, and provides evidence that Columba may himself have written (or at least used) a penitential influenced by Uinniau, so it is quite likely that he knew Gildas' works via Uinniau.<sup>114</sup> Through Columba and his successors, the term *Picti* came to be employed in the Iona Chronicle, and knowledge of the word would have been disseminated throughout northern Britain, among the Northumbrians as well as north of the Forth, wherever Iona was influential.

This is one possibility, but other avenues of transmission for Gildas' text and views probably existed. Fragments of comments by Gildas on ecclesiastical discipline survive, partly in citations in the early eighth-century Irish church law collection, the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*, but also in a late ninth-century Frankish manuscript in extracts which also indicate transmission through Ireland.<sup>115</sup> From this evidence, Richard Sharpe argued that Gildas, especially through his *De excidio Britanniae*, which urged the laity and clergy to reject sinful practices for the sake not just of their souls but also their people, was key in the promotion of a reformed, more ascetic, monasticism in British and Irish territories.<sup>116</sup> If so, then Gildas' works, including his *De excidio Britanniae*, were copied, read and disseminated, spreading his perception of the Picts alongside his spiritual arguments, so we should not assume that Columba and Iona were the sole transmitters of Pictish identity in northern Britain.

Moreover, we should be wary of accepting that Gildas' text provided the only means of transmission to northern Britain for the term *Picti*, since a strong case can be made that

<sup>110</sup> Gildas' *De excidio Britanniae*, in *Gildas*, ed. Winterbottom, 23 (§19.1); Wright, 'Gildas's Geographical Perspective', 86–92, 104–5. It is uncertain whether Gildas meant the Antonine or Hadrianic wall.

<sup>111</sup> David N. Dumville, 'Gildas and Uinniau', in *Gildas*, eds. Lapidge and Dumville, 207–14; Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 69–70.

<sup>112</sup> Dumville, 'Gildas and Uinniau', 207; Richard Sharpe, 'Gildas as a Father of the Church', in *Gildas*, eds. Lapidge and Dumville, 193–205, especially 196–7; Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 70–1. Gildas, Fragments of letters, in *Gildas*, ed. Winterbottom, 80–2, 143–5.

<sup>113</sup> Ludwig Bieler, ed. and trans., *The Irish Penitentials* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1963), 3–5; Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 73–4. Gildas, *Praefatio Gildae de poenitentia*, in *Irish Penitentials*, ed. Bieler, 60–5; Uinniau, *Poenitentiale Vinniani*, in *Irish Penitentials*, ed. Bieler, 74–95; Columbanus, *Paenitentiale S. Columbani*, in *Irish Penitentials*, ed. Bieler, 96–107.

<sup>114</sup> Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 72–5.

<sup>115</sup> Gildas, Fragments of letters, in *Gildas*, ed. Winterbottom, 80–2, 143–5. Sharpe, 'Gildas as a Father', 194–6.

<sup>116</sup> Sharpe, 'Gildas as a Father', 199–202.

contact with Latin literate culture would have been sustained from the Roman period onwards, first through the empire, then through Christianity. Given the lack of clear evidence for self-identification north of the Forth, comparative evidence is key for interpreting the situation in northern Britain.<sup>117</sup> For Ireland there is good evidence, from the linguistic analysis of the orthography of ogham inscriptions and some early glosses, that some Latin literacy was present on that island considerably before the fifth century and the conversion to Christianity.<sup>118</sup> It has been plausibly suggested that Roman burials and items, including Roman alphabetic text on coins, stamped ingots, Samian ware and other pottery, as well as Irish visitors to the empire and soldiers in the Roman army, meant that many in Ireland encountered and could gain competency in spoken and written Latin.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, the runic alphabet was probably created in southern Scandinavia by adapting the Roman alphabet in the first two centuries A.D., being first employed on portable objects before its usage expanded to include larger stone monuments.<sup>120</sup> As in Ireland, this is likely to have taken place in a context of significant contact with the Roman empire, even though in the case of runes, the southern Scandinavia region of their creation was not adjacent to the frontier.<sup>121</sup>

It might be suggested that, even though the people north of the Forth-Clyde line were not far from the imperial frontier, they interacted less with the Romans than the Irish or southern Scandinavians.<sup>122</sup> Certainly, the dearth of Roman objects in eastern Scotland between Moray and the Firth of Tay after the early third century indicates that the main contacts the Romans maintained in the late Roman period were located further south.<sup>123</sup> However, Fraser Hunter has suggested that the naturalistic form of much later Pictish art was inspired by the Romans, and Charles Thomas argued that both the practice of carving ogham inscriptions and the Pictish symbols on monumental stones was inspired by Roman sculptural practice.<sup>124</sup> Since the origin of the Pictish symbols has now been suggested convincingly to date to at least the third or fourth centuries A.D., earlier than previously thought, this enhances the argument for Roman

<sup>117</sup> See below for discussion of vernacular terminology.

<sup>118</sup> Harvey, 'Languages and Literacy', where he argues that ogham inscriptions indicate knowledge of Latin orthographic practices before final syllables were lost, and that glosses in the *Codex Paulinus* kept at Würzburg contain words preserving an orthographic system created before lenition had taken place in Gaelic (and before the later dominant Gaelic orthographic system was introduced through British Christians). Harvey rejects a fifth-century date for the creation of ogham from Latin script, arguing for an earlier date to explain its wide dissemination by then. The earliest dateable example from Ireland may be from Newgrange, in phases which include a fourth-century medallion of the Emperor Constantine II; see Gordon Noble, Martin Goldberg and Derek Hamilton, 'The Development of the Pictish Symbol System: Inscribing Identity Beyond the Edges of Empire', *Antiquity* 92 (2018): 1329–48 (1344).

<sup>119</sup> Elva Johnston, 'Literacy and Conversion on Ireland's Roman Frontier: From Emulation to Assimilation?', in *Transforming Landscapes*, eds. Edwards, Ní Mhaonaigh and Flechner, 23–46 (34–5).

<sup>120</sup> Michael P. Barnes, *Runes: A Handbook* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998), 9, 14; Johnston, 'Literacy and Conversion', 36–8; R.I. Page, *Runes* (London: British Museum Press, 1987), 23, 29–31.

<sup>121</sup> Barnes, *Runes*, 9, 11; Johnston, 'Literacy and Conversion', 37; Halsall, 'Northern Britain', 4–5.

<sup>122</sup> For a summary of the Irish evidence, see Freeman, *Ireland*, 1–13; Johnston, 'Literacy and Conversion', 32–6.

<sup>123</sup> Hunter, *Beyond the Edge*, 32–6; Fraser Hunter, 'Beyond the Frontier: Interpreting late Roman Iron Age Indigenous and Imported Material Culture', in *Finds from the Frontier*, eds. Collins and Allason-Jones, 96–109 (96–100); Fraser Hunter, 'Looking Over the Wall: The Late and Post-Roman Iron Age North of Hadrian's Wall', in *AD 410: The History and Archaeology of Late and Post-Roman Britain*, ed. F.K. Haarer (London: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 2014), 206–15 (208). In addition to those south of the Forth, there are some items in the Hebrides and from the Moray Firth northwards, all of which Hunter ('Beyond the Frontier', 98–100), has interpreted as primarily the results of selected imperial diplomatic patronage.

<sup>124</sup> Hunter, *Beyond the Edge*, 38–42; Charles Thomas, *The Early Christian Archaeology of North Britain* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 93–5, 97–8.

influence.<sup>125</sup> As with the developing usage of the runic script, the earliest dateable Pictish symbols were on smaller media than later, more monumental examples.<sup>126</sup>

Inspiration from depictions of ‘barbarians’ on Roman monuments may also partly account for the depictions of naked warriors incised on some substantial stones north of the Forth, dating to somewhere between the third to sixth centuries.<sup>127</sup> While the importation of Roman products north of the Forth may have reduced in scale in the late Roman period, there are still indicators that the empire influenced this region’s material culture and ideological expression through monuments.

Direct contacts with the Romans would have encouraged the people north of the Forth to learn Latin. There are some items from this period distributed predominantly north of the frontier (including north of the Forth) which also are found in Roman Britain, a pattern interpreted as the result of immigration into the empire, although they plausibly reflect movement in both directions across the frontier.<sup>128</sup> The burial of the dead in communal cemeteries often in cist graves orientated broadly west–east, no longer regarded as necessarily Christian, was a practice found throughout north-west Europe and adopted widely north of the Forth by the fifth to seventh centuries, reflecting deep Roman influence on a key social practice.<sup>129</sup> People north of the Forth clearly maintained diplomatic relations with the empire, since Ammianus Marcellinus stated that the *Picti* and *Scotti* broke treaties with Rome in 359–60, and that *arcani* or *areani* acting as Roman agents north of the frontier betrayed the empire in favour of the Picts in 367.<sup>130</sup> Moreover, Pictish raids by sea and land, sometimes undertaken in conjunction with *Scotti* and *Saxones*, meant that they heard their victims and allies using the term *Picti*, while simultaneously becoming aware of differences and similarities among their forces, perhaps stimulating the use of broad ethnic terms. Indeed, the ‘Barbarian conspiracy’ of the Picts, *Scotti* and Saxons must have been organised via a *lingua franca*, the prime candidate being Latin.<sup>131</sup> In addition, as with other frontiers, the taking of captives during

<sup>125</sup> Noble, Goldberg and Hamilton, ‘Development of the Pictish Symbol System’, 1334–41, 1344–5. It should be noted that the current dated sample is small.

<sup>126</sup> Noble, Goldberg and Hamilton, ‘Development of the Pictish Symbol System’, 1339, 1341–2.

<sup>127</sup> Mark Hall and others, ‘Warrior Ideologies in First-Millennium AD Europe: New Light on Monumental Stelae from Scotland’, *Antiquity* 94 (2020): 127–44.

<sup>128</sup> Hunter, ‘Beyond the Frontier’, 100–4.

<sup>129</sup> Adrián Maldonado, ‘What does Early Christianity Look Like? Mortuary Archaeology and Conversion in Late Iron Age Scotland’, *Scottish Archaeological Journal* 33, nos. 1–2 (2011): 39–54; Adrián Maldonado, ‘Death and the Formation of Early Christian Scotland’, in *Making Christian Landscapes in Atlantic Europe. Conversion and Consolidation in the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Tomás Ó Carragáin and Sam Turner (Cork: Cork University Press, 2016), 225–45.

<sup>130</sup> Seyfarth, Jocab-Karau, and Ulmann, eds., *Ammiani Marcellini*, 1: 183 (xx 1.1), 2: 76–7 (xxviii 3.8). The *areani* (or *arcani*) were probably successors to some extent to the role of the *exploratores* operating from Roman forts north of Hadrian’s Wall in the Severan period: K.A. Steer, ‘Roman and Native in North Britain: The Severan Reorganisation’, in *Roman and Native in North Britain*, ed. I.A. Richmond (Edinburgh: Nelson, 1958), 91–111 (98–9, 106); David J. Breeze, *The Frontiers of Roman Britain* (London: Batsford, 1993), 139–40.

<sup>131</sup> For connections of the Saxons with the Roman Empire, see Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 124–31, 157–9, 383–6; Halsall, ‘Northern Britain’, 5–6. Ammianus Marcellinus’ text should not be regarded as impartial or without distortion, and he did have a view that the empire was increasingly under threat in the reigns of Christian emperors (Barnes, *Ammianus Marcellinus*), which could arguably have prompted him to embellish the threat of the attacks of 367–8, for instance by creating the idea of a ‘barbarian conspiracy’; see Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations*, 58, 117, for scepticism about this as a co-operative endeavour. However, the episode was fundamentally one in which the threat was countered effectively by Count Theodosius, about whom Ammianus was ambivalent: see Jan Willem Drijvers, ‘Ammianus on the Revolt of Firmus’, in *Ammianus after Julian. The Reign of Valentinian and Valens in Books 26–31 of the Res gestae*, eds. J. den Boeft and others (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 129–55; and thus also by the Emperor Valentinian, elsewhere portrayed as a tyrant by Ammianus. If not through more direct means, co-ordination of military activities between the Saxons and Franks and the *Picti* and *Scotti* in Britain and Ireland could have been facilitated by

warfare, both by Romans and the inhabitants of northern Britons, provided a likely context for cultural interaction, partly because sometimes captives returned to their homelands.<sup>132</sup>

In addition, there is evidence for connections with Ireland. ‘Door-knob’ spearbutts and various pin types and their moulds are found in both Ireland and northern Britain in the late Roman period.<sup>133</sup> Interaction is also perhaps reflected in the adoption of ogham (for the Pictish language) in northern Britain presumably from the Gaelic world, the earliest example being from the Broch of Gurness, Orkney, radiocarbon dated to calibrated A.D. 340–540 (95% probability) in a phase of the site which also contained a relatively simple symbol stone.<sup>134</sup> This interchange of objects and literacy could have been undertaken through Celtic languages (though this became more difficult as these languages diverged), but Latin would probably have been another available medium for communication. A picture, therefore, can be created of the area north of the Forth, that it had many direct relations with Roman Britain and its more Rome orientated neighbours south of the Forth, but also indirect connections with other societies beyond the frontier, in Ireland and continental Saxon lands, and also interactions with classical social practices. The overall effect of these interconnections was that the *Picti* were located in the zone fundamentally transformed through contact with the Roman world. An important part of this was the Latin language and literacy, presumably including the concepts expressed through these media.

It is often assumed that the adoption of new ethnic terms, such as *Picti*, as an endonym should be the result of political unification. J. C. Mann suggested that there was political consolidation north of the empire, paralleling that along other Roman frontiers, but the evidence is unclear; Ammianus Marcellinus stated that *Picti* who attacked the empire in 367 were divided into two groups, the *Dycalidones* and *Verturiones*. This could be interpreted as meaning that the *Picti* were no longer divided, but the text is ambiguous; there may have been other unmentioned Pictish polities, and this source also indicates that *Picti* sometimes allied with other ethnic groups in attacking the empire.<sup>135</sup> However, political unity was not necessary to support such an identity; for instance, the Gaelic-speaking regions of Ireland and northern Britain from at least the seventh century onwards shared a collective identity as *Scotti* in Latin, *Góidil* in Gaelic, without a single dominant kingship. Instead, shared cultural, social and linguistic features, including a common legal system and learned class, enabled the maintenance of a broader identity, encompassing many, often mutually hostile polities.<sup>136</sup>

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the treacherous *arcani*, who could have acted as intermediaries. There is no reason to regard this alliance as inherently implausible.

<sup>132</sup> Noel Lenski, ‘Captives and Romano-Barbarian Interchange’, in *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World*, eds. Mathisen and Shanzer, 185–98.

<sup>133</sup> Hunter, *Beyond the Edge*, 46–8; Hunter, ‘Beyond the Frontier’, 100–3.

<sup>134</sup> Noble, Goldberg and Hamilton, ‘Development of the Pictish Symbol System’, 1344. See also Forsyth, ‘Literacy in Pictland’, 44–55, 58, on Pictish ogham inscriptions and the generally later Roman alphabet inscriptions, including comments that the adoption of ogham among the Picts may have been pre-Christian (58), and that the continued choice of including vernacular ogham perhaps reflects the unusually secular nature of Pictish sculpture (54–5).

<sup>135</sup> J.C. Mann, ‘The Northern Frontier after A.D. 369’, *Glasgow Archaeological Journal* 3 (1974): 34–42 (40–2); Seyfarth, Jocab-Karau and Ulmann, eds., *Ammiani Marcellini*, 2: 47 (xxvii 8.5).

<sup>136</sup> For *Góidil*, ‘Gael’, adopted into Gaelic from the British language in the seventh century, see John T. Koch, ‘On the Origins of the Old Irish Terms *Góidil* and *Góidél*’, in *Origins and Revivals*, eds. Evans, Martina and Wooding, 3–16.

It might, therefore, be envisaged that a degree of shared culture and experience as residents of northern Britain interacting with the Romans could produce similar results, sustaining a Pictish identity. While not uniformly found throughout later Pictland, shared sculptural traditions in the late antique period connected people inhabiting much of the region north of the Forth. The unique first millennium A.D. symbol tradition, found largely on sculpture, is predominantly distributed in Scotland north of the Forth apart from Argyll and the southern Hebrides, thus including most of the region identified as Pictish in texts of the seventh to ninth centuries.<sup>137</sup> The earliest dated symbol stones before 600 have also been found in the northern and eastern areas that were later included in Pictland. The most reliable early evidence comes from Dunnicaer, a sea-stack on the North Sea coast of the Mearns, where stones incised with symbols are dated by association with a rampart radiocarbon dated to A.D. 250–400 (95% probability).<sup>138</sup> However, other symbols in the caves at Covesea, Moray, and East Wemyss, Fife, may date to contexts from the third or fourth centuries, and symbol-bearing bone objects from Orkney have been radiocarbon dated to the fifth or to the sixth centuries.<sup>139</sup> Together, these examples indicate a wide distribution, probably by the end of the Roman era. The symbol tradition provides a strong contender for an iconic cultural and social marker, since the symbols are highly distinctive and would have been highly visible, creating a talking point for those not acquainted with their meanings. In a similar way, but to a lesser extent (due to the small corpus, and its distribution in the east from Fife to Aberdeenshire), surviving examples of large incised carved naked warriors, probably dating from the late antique period, also indicate shared artistic, social and ideological values amongst those inhabiting areas north of the Forth.<sup>140</sup>

While it is dangerous to extrapolate identity from the evidence of material culture, these examples are exceptional because they would have been striking statements in the landscape, proclaiming a particular non-Roman identity by adapting aspects of the classical world.<sup>141</sup> They are indicators of cultural solidarity which could have encouraged the adoption of the broad ethnic name *Picti* as a Latin term of self-identification, used to distinguish themselves from others, and ironically, the Roman empire. As a Latin word its currency was presumably limited, being maintained through the usage of *Picti* when people spoke, read and wrote Latin, but it is likely to have been current alongside vernacular terms among elite groups and travellers who most frequently encountered the Romans and Britons, and among those ethnic groups fighting together against the empire.

Key to the survival of *Picti* as an endonym would have been the adoption of Christianity in northern Britain early enough to produce a means by which Pictish identity could survive into the seventh century. This was a result of the use of Latin in the Church, since

<sup>137</sup> See Sally Foster, *Picts, Gaels and Scots. Early Historic Scotland* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2014), 99, figure 60.

<sup>138</sup> Noble, Goldberg and Hamilton, 'Development of the Pictish Symbol System', 1339.

<sup>139</sup> Noble, Goldberg and Hamilton, 'Development of the Pictish Symbol System', 1334, 1336, 1340–1.

<sup>140</sup> Hall and others, 'Warrior Ideologies'.

<sup>141</sup> Hall and others, 'Warrior Ideologies'; Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 377–8; Noble, Goldberg and Hamilton, 'Development of the Pictish Symbol System', 1344–5. Similarly, the creation and use of ogham and runes, used for marking identity and claims to property, can be envisaged as conscious transformations of Roman prototypes, rejecting wholesale adoption of classical forms: Johnston, 'Literacy and Conversion', 37–9. Parallel processes can be seen in the spread of Roman games: see Mark A. Hall and Katherine Forsyth, 'Roman Rules? The Introduction of Board Games to Britain and Ireland', *Antiquity* 85 (2011): 1325–38.

Christianity was a religion centred on a book, the Bible, and other accompanying works. The inhabitants of northern Britain would have wanted to locate themselves ethnically among the *gentes* in salvation history, so this could have maintained their self-identification with the *Picti* found in late classical sources.

Unfortunately, our understanding of the adoption of Christianity among the peoples of northern Britain is still minimal.<sup>142</sup> Scholars correctly reject the medieval depiction of a few saintly individuals, such as Columba or Ninian, as the evangelists for the Picts, but this means that we have to acknowledge the lack of good documentary evidence.<sup>143</sup> In addition, much of our archaeological evidence, largely from burials, does not in most cases clearly indicate whether people were Christians or pagans, and there is an absence of early substantial and distinctive church buildings.<sup>144</sup> However, clearly by the late seventh century the Picts were Christianised sufficiently for hostile Northumbrian writers, such as Stephen of Ripon, not to have commented on paganism as part of Pictish society. The evidence from Forteviot in Perthshire indicates that even in the second half of the seventh century and later, when we are sure that Christianity was dominant, there were non-Christian ritual practices relating to prehistoric monuments.<sup>145</sup> This indicates that in locations like Rhynie, Aberdeenshire, where there is a stone carved to depict a savage man with an axe-hammer, and a miniature axe-hammer was found at the fourth- to mid sixth-century elite, probably royal, complex south of the village, such potential references to pagan rituals surrounding the pole-axing of cattle do not preclude the contemporary existence of Christianity in the vicinity.<sup>146</sup>

In terms of textual references to paganism, Adomnán in his *Life of St Columba* presented those Columba encountered in the late sixth century in Pictish lands or beyond Druim Alban as largely pagans, in particular King Bridei son of Mailcon and his *magi* residing at his stronghold beside the River Ness.<sup>147</sup> The portrayal of spiritual conflict in these cases was probably a retrospective creation by Adomnán, but elements of non-Christian beliefs, such as the power of wells and of healing stones, are found in these episodes (transformed and utilised by Columba), perhaps indicating that he was reshaping earlier accounts.<sup>148</sup> On the whole, Adomnán's text does probably reflect a later perception that some Picts around Loch Ness were pagan in the late sixth

<sup>142</sup> No clear examples of pre-700 Latin texts survive from the later Pictish zone, but the Newton Stone in Aberdeenshire has an ogham and an alphabetic inscription, probably both in the Pictish vernacular: see Kelly Kilpatrick, 'The Newton Stones and Writing in Pictland, Part 2: The Newton Stone Ogham, Pictish Latin-Letter Alphabetic Inscription and the Pictish Symbol System', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 150 (2021): 407–34. The latter inscription appears to indicate that a unique monumental alphabetic script derived from Late Roman cursive was used in Pictland, but its date and therefore context is uncertain.

<sup>143</sup> Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 83–115.

<sup>144</sup> Maldonado, 'Death and the Formation', 225–45.

<sup>145</sup> Adrián Maldonado, 'Barrows and the Conversion of the Landscape at Forteviot, Perthshire', in *Transforming Landscapes*, eds. Edwards, Ní Mhaonaigh and Flechner, 319–50 (326–7, 336–41).

<sup>146</sup> G. Noble and others, 'A Powerful Place of Pictland: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Power Centre of the 4th to 6th Centuries AD', *Medieval Archaeology* 63 (2019): 59–94.

<sup>147</sup> Adomnán, 'Life of St Columba', in *Adomnán's Life*, eds. Anderson and Anderson, 12–13 (I.1), 62–5 (I.34), 66–71 (I.37), 108–11 (II.11), 126–9 (II.23), 132–5 (II.27), 138–47 (II.31–5), 166–71 (II.42), 178–81 (II.46), 200–3 (III.14); Fraser, 'Adomnán, Cumméne Ailbe'.

<sup>148</sup> Adomnán, 'Life of St Columba', in *Adomnán's Life*, eds. Anderson and Anderson, 108–11 (II.11), 140–4 (II.33). See Fraser, 'Adomnán, Cumméne Ailbe', 186–7, 189–90; Duncan Sneddon, 'Adomnán of Iona's *Vita Sancti Columbae*: A Literary Analysis' (PhD diss., University of Edinburgh, 2018), 237–40; Nicholas Evans and Gordon Noble, 'The Early Church in Northern Pictland', in *The King in the North. The Pictish Realms of Fortriu and Ce*, eds. G. Noble and N. Evans (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2019), 135.



century, but some Christianisation in the area is possible, indeed made probable if an abbot like Columba travelled up the Great Glen in the first place, seemingly on non-missionary affairs.<sup>149</sup>

Given the likelihood that Christian and other beliefs and rituals could co-exist and were often shared, it is difficult to determine the chronology of religious change without extraordinarily clear evidence. The absence of textual evidence should not surprise us, since no account of the conversion of Argyll and the southern Hebrides to the west survives either; Adomnán presents this western region as Christian when Columba founded Iona, indicating that it was largely converted by 563.<sup>150</sup> This conclusion is supported by the Irish chronicle obituary notice *c.*594 of Lugaid of the monastery of Lismore (Firth of Lorne, Argyll).<sup>151</sup> The memory and understanding of conversion was generally lost without the survival of a major church involved in the process.

What we can do is establish roughly when Christianisation was taking place, and use comparative evidence from other regions to understand the process, before relating this to the issue of the adoption of a Pictish identity in the north of Britain. Archaeological evidence and church dedications indicate that major foundations were a feature of what became Pictland from the seventh century onwards.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, texts indicate that there were monastic establishments near Fetternear in Aberdeenshire and (less certainly) at Abernethy by the Tay by the early seventh century, while burials of monks on the Isle of May have been dated to the mid to late sixth century.<sup>153</sup> Christianity was clearly sufficiently established by the late sixth century to support substantial church centres north of Lothian.

Elsewhere, substantial efforts to Christianise outside of the Roman empire were under way by the early fifth century. Already by 431 there had been converts in Ireland, since in that year Pope Celestine sent Palladius to the *Scotti* who were Christian and presumably had asked for a bishop.<sup>154</sup> In addition, Christian slaves, such as Patrick, were presumably another group whose situation might have attracted attention. In the mid fifth century, the missionary work in Ireland was the result of a papal ideology and policy in favour of expanding Christendom beyond the empire to new *gentes*, with Britain and Ireland as particular foci in the struggle against heresy.<sup>155</sup> As a result, in the fifth and sixth centuries many people, especially Britons, crossed the sea to Ireland to preach the faith and

<sup>149</sup> As argued by Bisagni (*Amrae Coluimb Chille*, 214–16), the argument of Fraser ('Adomnán, Cumméne Ailbe') that the episodes were transferred by Adomnán from southern to northern Pictland, is weakened by the lack of evidence for a strong cult of Columba in the south before the late seventh century, when dedications to contemporary Columban clerics indicate substantial influence in the area: Simon Taylor, 'Seventh-Century Iona Abbots in Scottish Place-Names', in *Spes Scotorum, Hope of Scots: Saint Columba, Iona and Scotland*, eds. D. Broun and T.O. Clancy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 35–70, especially, 40–3; Simon Taylor, 'Columba East of Drumalban: Some Aspects of the Cult of Columba in Eastern Scotland', *Innes Review* 51, no. 2 (2000): 109–30 (111–14).

<sup>150</sup> David N. Dumville, 'St Patrick and the Christianisation of Dál Riata', in *Saint Patrick*, eds. Dumville and others, 183–9 (187–9).

<sup>151</sup> AU 592.1, AT kl. 97.4 and AT kl. 99.1, CS 590.2, ARC 74, AClon 590, p. 91; AFM 588.3. See Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 105–6.

<sup>152</sup> M.O.H. Carver, Justin Garner-Lahire and Cecily Spall, *Portmahomack on Tarbat Ness: Changing Ideologies in North-East Scotland, Sixth to Sixteenth century AD* (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, 2016); Gordon Noble and others, 'Kinneddar: A Major Ecclesiastical Centre of the Picts', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 148 (2018): 113–45. Clancy, 'Deer', 392.

<sup>153</sup> Clancy, 'Deer', 367–75; Evans and Noble, 'Early Church', 140–67; Maldonado, 'Death and the Formation', 232–6.

<sup>154</sup> T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper, and Leo the Great: Mission and Primatial Authority', in *Saint Patrick*, eds. Dumville and others, 1–12 (1); Handley, 'British Isles', 159–85 (160).

<sup>155</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper, and Leo'.

establish churches and monasteries, to the extent that their pronunciation of Latin texts altered the orthography used by Gaels to write their own language.<sup>156</sup>

It cannot be assumed that the Christianisation process was exactly the same in northern Britain, but similar factors would have prompted missionary activity and conversion from the late fourth century onwards. As Patrick's 'Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus' makes clear, the Picts, when not themselves raiding (as is attested in the fourth century), were a market for Christian slaves. This is likely to have aided Christianisation by encouraging attempts by the Britons to Christianise the Picts, in the same way that Patrick's Irish experience probably later inspired his later missionary activity. Since there is strong evidence that many people north of the Forth spoke a P-Celtic language close to British, the linguistic barrier faced by British missionaries to the north was much less substantial than for Ireland, making the new religion relatively easy to communicate.<sup>157</sup>

Moreover, the same concerns of spreading the faith and preventing heretics from finding refuge would have been as relevant to northern Britain as to Ireland. Prosper in his *Contra Collatorem* of 434 praised the achievements of Pope Celestine in bringing the 'barbarian' island of Ireland to Christianity through the ordination of a bishop there and the removal of heresy from the British provinces on the 'Roman island', referring to the missions of Palladius to Ireland and Germanus to Britain.<sup>158</sup> These missions were indirectly connected to the fifth-century debate on predestination which created divisions in the Church, with most in the southern Gallic Church unfavourable to the pro-Augustinian views of Prosper.<sup>159</sup> Therefore, while Prosper simplified the situation in Britain for rhetorical and ecclesiastical political purposes when he subsumed Britain north of the frontier into his characterisation of the island, his prose was presumably intended to withstand sceptical scrutiny.

Amongst these potential contemporary critics were those who referred to *Picti* in their works, and therefore knew that Britain was not simply a 'Roman island', including the clerical writer who mentioned the Picts in his Gallic Chronicle of 452.<sup>160</sup> Sidonius Apollinaris, who also later mentioned *Picti*, could have had a reasonable understanding of the state of Christianity in Britain from multiple sources. His grandfather had been the praetorian prefect of the usurper Constantine III who had ruled Britain from 407 to 410, he was a friend of Constantius, who between 475 and 480 wrote the 'Life of Germanus', which mentions the Picts, and he possibly met the British Bishop Faustus of Riez, another critic of Augustine's concept of predestination, who, after emigrating to Gaul (becoming abbot of Lérins in Provence in 433 or 434), maintained contacts with Britain.<sup>161</sup> In such a context there presumably was some knowledge among the clerical and secular elite of southern Gaul and Italy that not all of Britain had actually been under imperial control before 411. Therefore, if there had been no Christianisation north of Hadrian's Wall, Prosper's generalised statement that the Roman island had been kept 'catholic' by Pope Celestine would have provoked a critical response, given

<sup>156</sup> David N. Dumville, 'British Missionary Activity in Ireland', in *Saint Patrick*, eds. Dumville and others, 133–45.

<sup>157</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 89–92, 94–5.

<sup>158</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper, and Leo', 1.

<sup>159</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Palladius, Prosper, and Leo', 3–10; Handley, 'British Isles', 159–60.

<sup>160</sup> Muhlberger, *Fifth-Century Chroniclers*, 156–65.

<sup>161</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 49–51, 199–202; Handley, 'British Isles', 161.

that, as Charles-Edwards has argued, for theological reasons, the continued existence of pagans beyond the empire had become a ‘pressing problem’.<sup>162</sup> While the argument is highly speculative, it seems likely that Prosper made this statement in 434 in the knowledge that some conversion of the ‘barbarians’ north of the wall, including the *Picti*, had been attempted and had made considerable progress.

Some Pictish experience of Christianity in the fifth century is perhaps indicated by Patrick’s ‘Letter to the Soldiers of Coroticus’, in which the Picts are described as *ignoranti Deum* (‘not knowing’ or ‘ignoring’ or ‘misunderstanding’ God) and *apostatae* is twice included in juxtaposition with *Picti*, seeming to refer to them.<sup>163</sup> *Apostatae* here may not have referred to lapsed Christians but more, through an extended meaning, to the Picts as general rebels (against the empire?).<sup>164</sup> However, it is difficult to avoid the view that it had a predominantly religious meaning, given the word’s origins. Patrick’s text indicates that the *Picti* by the mid to late fifth century had experienced Christianity, but did not, in Patrick’s opinion, sufficiently adhere to the morals, beliefs or practices of the religion, a failure perhaps exemplified by their purchasing of Christian slaves.<sup>165</sup>

If Christianisation in what later became Pictland is regarded as probably an ongoing process from the fourth to seventh centuries, then the phase in the fifth and sixth centuries overlapped with the period in which late antique Insular people, such as Patrick and Gildas, were writing about *Picti*. It is likely that when the new converts asked the question of who they were, there were multiple possibilities, but most were called *Picti* or *Scotti* in Latin, utilising the most common terms in the late empire. Given that British clerics were active in Ireland as late as the mid sixth century, continuing to transfer ethnic perceptions there through texts like Gildas’ *De excidio Britanniae*, it is plausible that the idea of Pictish identity would similarly have been repeatedly reinforced through the activities of Gaelic and British clerics north of the Forth.

It might be expected that the end of Roman rule would have reduced the need for the differentiation implicit in the word *Picti*, especially between Britons and Picts whose speech was relatively similar. In this period the presence of Roman material culture dramatically declined in Britain, and British vernacular culture, represented by *Y Gododdin* and the poetry of Taliesin, became significant for elites, perhaps especially among the northern Britons. In some areas close to the Forth, a more ‘British’ identity like their southern neighbours could have been appealing. Certainly poems in *Y Gododdin* mention people from ‘beyond Mynydd Bannawc’ (the Gargunnock Hills, from which the Bannockburn flows south of Stirling), and from *Maen Gwyngwn*, the ‘stone of the *Venicones*’ ethnic group, probably based in Fife, among those warriors aiding the Gododdin south of the Forth.<sup>166</sup> However, inscriptions provide strong evidence for Latin being spoken widely among the population of former areas of Roman Britain into the

<sup>162</sup> Charles-Edwards, ‘Palladius, Prosper, and Leo’, 4.

<sup>163</sup> *Epistola*, §§2, 14, 15, in *St Patrick*, ed. Hood, 35, 37, 55, 57–8; David N. Dumville, ‘Picti apostatae(que)’, in *Saint Patrick*, eds. Dumville and others, 129–31.

<sup>164</sup> Dumville, ‘Picti apostatae(que)’, 130–1.

<sup>165</sup> Fraser, *From Caledonia*, 111–12.

<sup>166</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 6–7; John T. Koch, ‘The Stone of the Weni-Kones’, *Bulletin of the Board of Celtic Studies* 29 (1980): 87–9. Koch equates the son of Cian from *Maen Gwyngwn* in version A.9, with the son of Cian called Lliyyeu in version B.11, who was ‘from beyond Bannauc’: *The Gododdin*, trans. Joseph P. Clancy, in *The Triumph Tree. Scotland’s Earliest Poetry AD 550–1350*, ed. Thomas Owen Clancy (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1998), 46–78 (49, 70).

seventh century, and their presence in southern Scotland both connects that area to the British south while differentiating it from practices north of the Forth.<sup>167</sup> Moreover, texts such as Gildas' *De excidio Brittanniae*, the early ninth-century *Historia Brittonum*, and genealogies for Welsh dynasties portraying descent from Roman figures all indicate that the Britons' previous membership of the Roman empire remained an important aspect of their history and identity.<sup>168</sup>

By the seventh century the Britons had developed their own ethnic terminology derived from Celtic \**Combrogī* (hence modern *Cymry*), 'fellow-people of the district', in addition to a vernacular word (*Brython* by the tenth century) derived from Latin *Brittones*.<sup>169</sup> These terms distinguished them from the English, but also their Celtic neighbours, now called the *Gŵyðyl*, 'woodsmen', a word later more generally used for Gaelic speakers, and *Prydyn*, employed for those in the north who had remained unconquered and un-Romanised when *Prydain*, British for 'Britain', had been dominated by the Romans.<sup>170</sup> *Y Gododdin* includes poems which mention conflicts against the *Gŵyðyl* and *Prydyn*, pejoratively called *gynt*, meaning foreign, perhaps heathen, peoples.<sup>171</sup> Overall, it is likely that the British identification of themselves with the empire and civilisation, in contrast to the English, Gaels and even similarly P-Celtic northern neighbours, continued after the fifth century, even if the boundary could have varied considerably.<sup>172</sup> In opposition to this, a Pictish identity potentially could retain an appeal in the medieval period, especially as the territories of the Britons fell under Anglo-Saxon control. This might explain why, when Bridei son of Beli, king of Fortriu, defeated the Northumbrians in 685, his expanded kingdom, which reached south of the Forth by 698, was 'of the Picts' not 'of the Britons' or 'of the northern Britons', even though he himself had British Strathclyde ancestry. Presumably being *rex Pictorum* rather than *rex Brittonum* seemed more politically astute.

Those called *Picti* had their own vernacular terms, perhaps not just those for their local communities and districts, for wider regions and kingdoms, but also for over-arching identities. Although it is plausible, there is no clear evidence that Latin *Picti* was adopted as a vernacular term.<sup>173</sup> In the two neighbouring Insular Celtic languages the

<sup>167</sup> Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 77–89, 94–115.

<sup>168</sup> Gildas' *De excidio Brittanniae*, in Gildas, ed. Winterbottom, 13–29 (§§1–26), especially 28 (§25) on Ambrosius Aurelianus; *Historia Brittonum*, in Nennius, ed. Morris, 18–28 (§§7, 10–11), 39 (§15), 59–67 (§§19–31), 80 (§66); P. Bartrum, ed., *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1966), 9–15, especially genealogies 2, 4 and 16, and probably genealogy 1. See Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 202–19, 226–8, 234–41, 359–64, 437–52, for discussion of these sources, and the ambivalent attitude of the Britons to the Romans, as former citizens of the great empire, but nevertheless a separate ethnic group from them.

<sup>169</sup> Thomas Charles-Edwards, 'Language and Society Among the Insular Celts AD 400–1100', in *The Celtic World*, ed. Miranda J. Green (London: Routledge, 1995), 703–36 (710–15).

<sup>170</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Language and Society', 723; Koch, 'On the Origins'. Koch suggests that *Gŵyðyl* was perhaps initially a British negative term relating to people in Argyll (and sometimes those in the Highlands; could the term initially have had a broader meaning, including later Picts?), which in the seventh century was borrowed into Gaelic as *Goidil*, 'Gauls', with *Goidelc* becoming the Gaelic for their own language.

<sup>171</sup> John T. Koch, 'Celts, Britons, and Gaels – Names, Peoples, and Identities', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion*, new series, 9 (2003): 41–56 (56), but, given that the Gaels in Britain were already Christian by the mid sixth century, Koch's suggestion that *gynt* means 'heathens' or '(heathen) tribes' here seems unlikely.

<sup>172</sup> There presumably was a region, including Stirlingshire, Clackmannanshire and Strathearn, which could easily have had a British identity in the sub-Roman period, even if it ultimately became divided between the Picts and Northumbrians. This area has a relative lack of Pictish Class I symbol stones but also contains Roman forts such as Ardoch and Stragaeth, and signal stations along the Gask Ridge, creating visible links to the Roman empire.

<sup>173</sup> W.F.H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names. Their Study and Significance* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2001), 193–5, supported the view that there was a native term underlying *Picti* using evidence from Old English personal names

names for the Picts were *Cruithni* in Gaelic and *Prydyn* or *gwŷr Pryden* in British, employing cognates from an ancient common word *\*K<sup>w</sup>ritenoi*, so perhaps people in northern Britain used a form of this word themselves.<sup>174</sup> The original semantics of *\*K<sup>w</sup>ritenoi* and related words are complex and uncertain, relating to Ireland and Britain, but in the British language at least it came to have a dual focus on Britain as a whole and on the Picts, being used in contrast to its derivative Romanised forms, *Britanni* and *Brittones*, employed for British speakers living south of the Picts.<sup>175</sup> *Prydyn* may, therefore, have had connotations of ancientness and non-Roman culture, which could have been attractive as an endonym in northern Britain.<sup>176</sup> The term was used later in the Pictish kingdom, since the common source of the Pictish king-lists (datable to 834 × 76) had a Cruithne son of Cinge as the first ruler, placed deep in the past, in the first millennium B.C.<sup>177</sup> Though Cruithne is a Gaelic name-form, Gaelic concepts are already found included in Bede's account of Pictish origins, so it is plausible (if not verifiable) that Cruithne was a pre-ninth-century name in the king-list, perhaps reflecting a Gaelic translation of a Pictish ancestral figure.<sup>178</sup>

The ancient terms *\*Albijū*, 'Britain', and the related ethnic term *Albiones* (hence 'Albion'), in Old Gaelic *Alba*, with related Welsh *elfydd*, meaning 'earth, land, district' and similar words, may have provided an alternative, as it certainly did when it was used in its Gaelic form for Pictland from the end of the ninth century onwards.<sup>179</sup> A Pictish version of this word might be reflected in the *Albidosi* mentioned in a tenth-century raid on the English in the 'Chronicle of the Kings of Alba', but these *Albidosi* were not *Scotti* and might have been English, so it is possible that the word refers to the 'men of the land' rather than an ethnic group.<sup>180</sup> Whether or not Gaelic *Alba* had a Pictish equivalent, *Alba*'s adoption as the name for the Pictish kingdom by 900 resulted

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(including Pecthelm, a Northumbrian bishop of Whithorn who died in 735), the Old English name for the Picts (variously *Pehtas*, *Pihtas*, *Pyhtas*, *Peohtas* and *Piohtas* in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle), and Old Norse forms (*Péttar*, *Péttir*, *Peti*), and *Pétlandsfjorðr* for the Pentland Firth. Given their later date, there is no reason why these were derived from an ancient vernacular term, but they could potentially reflect medieval vernacular usage, since similar variation between *i* and *e* in the first syllables is found for Pictish words in other sources: see Nicholas Evans, 'Circin and Mag Gerginn: Pictish Territories in Irish and Scottish Sources', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies* 66 (Winter 2013): 1–36 (28–31). However, given that these terms referring to Picts were Old English and Old Norse vernacular words, it is best to assume, unless proven otherwise, that all these linguistic forms reflect these external languages and how they adapted Latin *Picti* into their vernaculars (in the case of Old Norse, perhaps via Old English), rather than Pictish.

<sup>174</sup> Kenneth Jackson, 'Two Early Scottish Names', *Scottish Historical Review* 33 (1954): 14–18 (16–18); John T. Koch, 'On Celts Calling Themselves "Celts" and Related Questions', *Studia Celtica* 43 (2009): 73–86 (80); Dauvit Broun, 'Alba: Pictish Homeland or Irish Offshoot?', in *Exile and Homecoming. Papers from the Fifth Australian Conference of Celtic Studies, University of Sydney, July 2004*, ed. Pamela O'Neill (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2005), 234–75 (255–9).

<sup>175</sup> For ideas about the ancient meaning of *\*K<sup>w</sup>ritenoi*, see Koch, 'Celts, Britons and Gaels', and for discussion of its medieval connotations, see Broun, *Scottish Independence*, 79–84.

<sup>176</sup> Broun, *Scottish Independence*, 83, 88.

<sup>177</sup> For the date of the Pictish king-list archetype, combine Broun, *Scottish Independence*, 77–8, with Evans, 'Ideology, Literacy and Matriliney', 50. For references to Cruithne in the Pictish king-lists, see Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, 245, 265, 271, 279, 286.

<sup>178</sup> For discussions of Pictish origins and settlement accounts, see Fraser, 'From Ancient Scythia', 27–33; Evans, 'Ideology, Literacy and Matriliney', 51–9.

<sup>179</sup> John T. Koch, 'New Thoughts on Albion, Iernē, and the Pretanic Isles (Part One)', *Proceedings of the Harvard Celtic Colloquium* 6 (1986): 1–28 (3–6); Broun, 'Alba', 258–9, n. 85.

<sup>180</sup> 'The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba', in *Kings and Kingship*, ed. Anderson, 252. Broun, 'Alba', 258–9, n. 85; Woolf, *From Pictland*, 177–80.



in the term paralleling the dual associations of *Prydyn* and *Prydain* with Pictland and Britain, while continuing to emphasise the ancientness of the realm.<sup>181</sup> Neither of these vernacular possibilities, with their associations with Britain, exactly corresponds with the likely semantics of *Picti*, but they all shared non-imperial connotations, so *Picti* was perhaps an adequate Latin form equivalent to these putative vernacular ethnic identities.<sup>182</sup>

## Conclusions

The ethnic name *Picti* is found in more sources before the late seventh century than recent scholarship has acknowledged, and while it may have originated as a general pejorative Latin term for barbarians north of Roman Britain, by the fifth century it often had more specific connotations, excluding *Scotti* and *Brittones* living north of Hadrian's Wall. It is not possible to prove that *Picti* was an endonym in northern Britain before the late seventh century, since all our surviving contemporary written sources were written by outsiders. Nevertheless, these surviving texts, as well as contextual evidence, together enable a strong case to be made that *Picti* was adopted by inhabitants north of the frontier to describe themselves, reflecting the existence of Latin literacy and their varied interactions with both the empire and their neighbours, the *Scotti*, *Brittones* and *Saxones*. It is plausible that Christianisation of the *Picti* began by the fifth century, continuing and reinforcing this general identity, ensuring its survival. Pictish identity became even more established in the seventh century as Gaelic and later Anglo-Saxon clerics reinforced the concept throughout northern Britain. Moreover, while this may have happened after 700, at some point from the 630s onwards instances of *picti* and *Picti* in Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* and commentaries on the works of Virgil were used to produce a classical ancestry for the Picts in Thrace or Scythia. By the late seventh century, what had been a general ethnic term had become a political title, employed in Latin speech and texts for the expanded realm of Fortriu after the Battle of Dún Nechtain in 685.

The alternative to this interpretation is to regard this part of northern Britain as exceptional, the only area of the Insular world where a broad ethnic Latin term used in the late imperial era (like *Scotti*, *Brittones* and *Saxones*) fell out of use. Such terms continued to be employed in addition to more local, often political, ethnic vernacular names. The contrast with the development of *Scotti* would be the most notable, since that word did successfully make the transition from a Roman term to an endonym adopted in areas unconquered by the Romans by the late seventh century. If the history of *Picti* was different, it would imply that eastern Britain north of the Forth was especially isolated from the Roman and Christian world. Moreover, it is necessary to argue that suddenly in the late seventh century this situation was transformed: the rulers of Fortriu could promote Pictish identity not only in their own realm, but also successfully immediately throughout Britain and Ireland, to the near total exclusion of alternative ethnic names in surviving texts. These propositions are unlikely and underestimate the deep

<sup>181</sup> Broun, *Scottish Independence*, 83–4. The main difference is that *Alba* had no associations with the Cruithni in Ireland.

<sup>182</sup> However, *Scotti* came to replace *Picti* as the Latin term for the people of the kingdom the Alba, reflecting the dominance of Gaelic culture after 900.

transformations that Christianity and the Roman empire could produce, as well as the interconnectedness of the region before the late seventh century. *Regnum Pictorum* was the logical choice as the name for the over-kingdom of Fortriu because it built on an established self-identity in northern Britain which made a literate connection with the late antique past. *Picti* was successful as a term, not only due to scholarly antiquarianism, but because over centuries it epitomised the complex ideological attraction and repulsion to the ‘civilised’ Roman world felt by those inhabiting northernmost Britain.

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