ScARF Scottish Archaeological Research Framework

Regional Archaeological Research Framework for Argyll

Chapter 8. Early Medieval



Penannular brooch from Loch Glashan crannog, Argyll. Copper alloy with amber settings, 8/9th century, brooch diameter 34mm. © Ewan Campbell

8. Early Medieval

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Brief Summary

Between AD 400 – 1100, the Kingdom of *Dál Riata* (Argyll) was a Gaelic speaking region. It is during this period that the Vikings first arrived in Argyll, with evidence for this mostly being focused on the islands. Christianity became increasingly important. Although Argyll and Bute has some of the most important early medieval sites in Scotland (eg Iona monastery and Dunadd royal fort), some of the best examples of early Christian carved stone monuments in Europe and a number of Viking/Norse graves (eg Kiloran Bay, Islay and Luss, Loch Lomond), in archaeological terms very little is known about this period. There has been much discussion about the development of the *Dál Riata*, the adoption of Christianity and the type of contact between *Dál Riata* and its neighbours (early Irish, British and Anglo-Saxon and then later Norse) but little is known about how ordinary people lived and died during this period, the types of buildings they lived in, how they managed the land and their early churches.

8.1 Introduction and scope

In contrast to the national medieval ScARF document (Hall and Price 2012), it has been decided to split the medieval period into two sections: an early medieval section covering roughly AD 400-1100, and a later medieval section covering c.1100- c.1600. The early medieval section will deal with the Gaelic-speaking kingdom of *Dál Riata*, and the impact of Norse-speaking incomers on this area. The reasons for this split are principally that we are dealing with very different sources of data and academic specialisms for the two periods, with different major research themes. Obviously, there is overlap of themes in some areas, and also with the later Iron Age period in this area of Scotland, but the present approach was seen as the most practical.

Argyll and Bute have some of the most important early medieval sites in Scotland, or indeed in the entire Atlantic Façade. Pre-eminent amongst these are the monastery of Iona and the royal fort at Dunadd, but apart from these key sites, and the Early Christian carved stone monuments of the region, the archaeology of the area is rather poorly studied compared to other areas of Scotland. Apart from the introductory sections of the RCAHMS Inventories (RCAHMS 1971, 1975, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1988, 1992), the only specific previous overview of Argyll's archaeology was *The Archaeology of Argyll* edited by Graham Ritchie (1997), which included chapters by Ian Fisher on the Early Christian archaeology, and Marilyn Brown on the Norse period, but nothing on early medieval secular society. Margaret Nieke's chapter in the Argyll Book (Omand 2004) does however cover this area, and Campbell's Saints and Sea-kings (1999) is a popular account of the early medieval period. The Norse period evidence is more fully covered within Graham-Campbell and Batey's (1998) *Vikings in Scotland: an archaeological survey*. This paper will concentrate on archaeological evidence for the period, as the historical, ecclesiastical, art historical and placename evidence has been extensively discussed and is not easy to summarise. The literature on Iona itself is vast – Professor Richard Sharp (pers. comm.) has listed over 1500 bibliographic references relating directly to Iona, but a short archaeological bibliography is given below (see Iona Case Study).It should also be noted that there is a separate Iona Research Strategy in production, specifically related to Iona (Campbell, Forsyth and Maldonado forthcoming). This research strategy is inter-disciplinary, covering archaeology, history, toponymics, Gaelic language, literature, environment and art.

Traditionally, early medieval Argyll has been seen as being settled from north-east Antrim by Gaelic peoples, the *Dál Riata*, supplanting an original Brittonic-speaking ('Pictish') people. This view has been challenged by Campbell (2001), who has shown there is no archaeological, historical or linguistic evidence for this migration. This view has been generally accepted by many archaeologists, but has in



View of St Blane's Chapel from the south ©HES

turn been challenged (McSparron and Williams 2012). Whichever view is accepted, there is no doubt that Argyll was a Gaelic-speaking area throughout the early medieval period. The precise location of the Norse hybrid Gall-Gaedhil (Gaelic-speaking foreigners) of western Scotland has been much debated, with all areas from the Hebrides to Ayrshire and Galloway being proposed (Clancy 2008), but they would have been well-known in Argyll. The political history of *Dál Riata* is complex and difficult to unravel from the surviving documentation, but involved competing lineages of four major dynasties of peoples or *cenéla*, and interaction with their Pictish and British neighbours. There are competing ideas on many aspects of political organisation, dynasties, and warfare in the period 600-800 (for a recent summary up to c. 800 see Fraser 2009; for one detailed discussion Broun 2015). Some aspects of religious life are better known, but are dominated by works associated with Iona, with other important sites such as St Blane's, Bute, or St Moluag's, Lismore being relatively undocumented. The period from 800-1100 is even less well understood, but is when *Dál Riata* became known as *Airer Gaedel* (the shore of the Gaels) or Argyll.

Apart from the long-standing major problems of chronology, exacerbated by a sparse material culture, themes of transition and culture contact have tended to dominate discourse on early medieval Argyll. These themes include: the development of the early Scottish kingdom of *Dál Riata* from an iron age kin-based society, focussing on the power centres such as Dunadd; the adoption of Christianity and its impact on society, craft and monumentality; and culture contact, both between *Dál Riata* and neighbouring Irish, British and Anglo-Saxon polities, and later with Norse peoples. The term 'early medieval' is widely used throughout Europe for this period, and is adopted here in preference to less neutral labels such as Dark Age, Post-Roman, Early Christian, or Alcock's (1981) term of Early Historic, but it is recognised that the period also falls within the scope of the Late Iron Age of western Scotland. The geographic scope of the RARFA is confined to the modern administrative council of Argyll and Bute, but this discussion necessarily includes the wider region of the kingdom of the *Dál Riata*, which extended

to Ardnamuchan, Morvern and possibly Arran. A draft of this document was presented at the two day Symposium entitled Unfolding Argyll's Archaeological Story in Kilmartin on 27-28th November 2015 and after circulation further discussed and revised at subsequent meetings on July 13th 2016 and 3rd Nov 2016.

8.2 Historical background and sources

In recent years there has been an upsurge of research and new thinking on the early medieval historical sources and their interpretation. The older narrative, based on the work of Bannerman (1974), Anderson (1973), and Nicolaisen (1976), established a broad outline of events up to the point when contemporary sources (principally the putative annals of the 'Iona Chronicle') cease out around 740. Three principle kindreds (Cenél nGabráin, Cenél Loairn, and Cenél nóengusso) were identified and associated with Kintyre, Lorne and Islay respectively, and Cenél nGabráin seen as the dominant grouping, providing many of the kings of *Dál Riata*. The historical sources are notoriously difficult to interpret – they were repeatedly copied and altered to suit contemporary ideas. Nevertheless, these sources, which include the civil survey *Míniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban*, the genelogical tracts *Cethri primchenéla Dáil Riata*, the 'Iona Chronicle', as well as Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* and poetry associated with Iona, provide much more extensive information for Argyll than any other area of early medieval Scotland. Recent work on these sources (some unpublished) by scholars such as Dauvit Broun, David Dumville, James Fraser, Nick Evans, Gilbert Márkus, Thomas Clancy, Thomas O'Loughlin, Simon Taylor, Alex Wolff and Benjamin Hudson have greatly increased our understanding of the period, though it is still not possible to give a conventional comprehensive narrative account of events.

It is not easy to summarise this work, but recent syntheses by Fraser (2009) for the earlier period and Woolf (2007) for the later, outline some of the new thinking, though there is still much debate. More recent work includes Broun (2006; 2015) on the genealogical tracts, Evans (2010) on the annals, and Dumville (2002) on the civil survey.



Swordle Bay boat burial pre-excavation photograph.
©Harris et al. 2017.

Fraser and others see an Iona influence in the annalistic references, which distort the picture in favour of Cenél nGabráin, and St Blanes, Bute is seen as an equal to Iona in importance. Other kindreds such Cenél Comgaill (based in Cowal) have been written out of pedigrees, and others such Cenél nEchdach, Cenél nGartnai, Cenél Salaich and Cenél Cathboth are identified. This more complex and fluid picture of dynastic conflict, alliance and merger is more akin to the picture known in contemporary Ireland, than the rather static three kindred model given by Bannerman. Iona-related studies, starting with Sharpe's Life of Columba (1995), include new understanding of the significance of Adomnán as a major European intellectual and theologian (O'Loughlin 2007; Jenkins 2010, Wooding 2010, Márkus 1997), and Iona as a literary centre (Clancy and Márkus 1995). For the later period advances include works by Clancy (2011) Hudson (2006) and Wadden (2016). For placename studies, Taylor (2007) highlights some of the problems with Nicolaisen's interpretations and investigates ecclesiastical placenames (Taylor 1996). Church dedications have been studied by Rachel Butter (2007) and there is now an online resource to saints names in Scotland [http://www.saintsplaces.gla.ac.uk]. Norse placenames have been investigated by Jennings (2004) and MacNiven (2015) amongst others. This work suggests that topographical rather than habitative placenames represent the earliest strata of Norse settlement. Names such as Brodick, Sannox, Carradale and other *-dalr* names may then be sites of Norse mainland settlement, for which no archaeological evidence has been found. More detailed survey by Anne Bankier (2005) on the placenames of Ardnamurchan indicates coastal, topographic as well as potential habitative names, but it is clear that there is a lack of supporting archaeological data for the area. In 2011 a pagan Viking boat burial was excavated at Swordle Bay, a so far unique discovery in the west mainland region (Harris et al. 2017; Batey 2016).

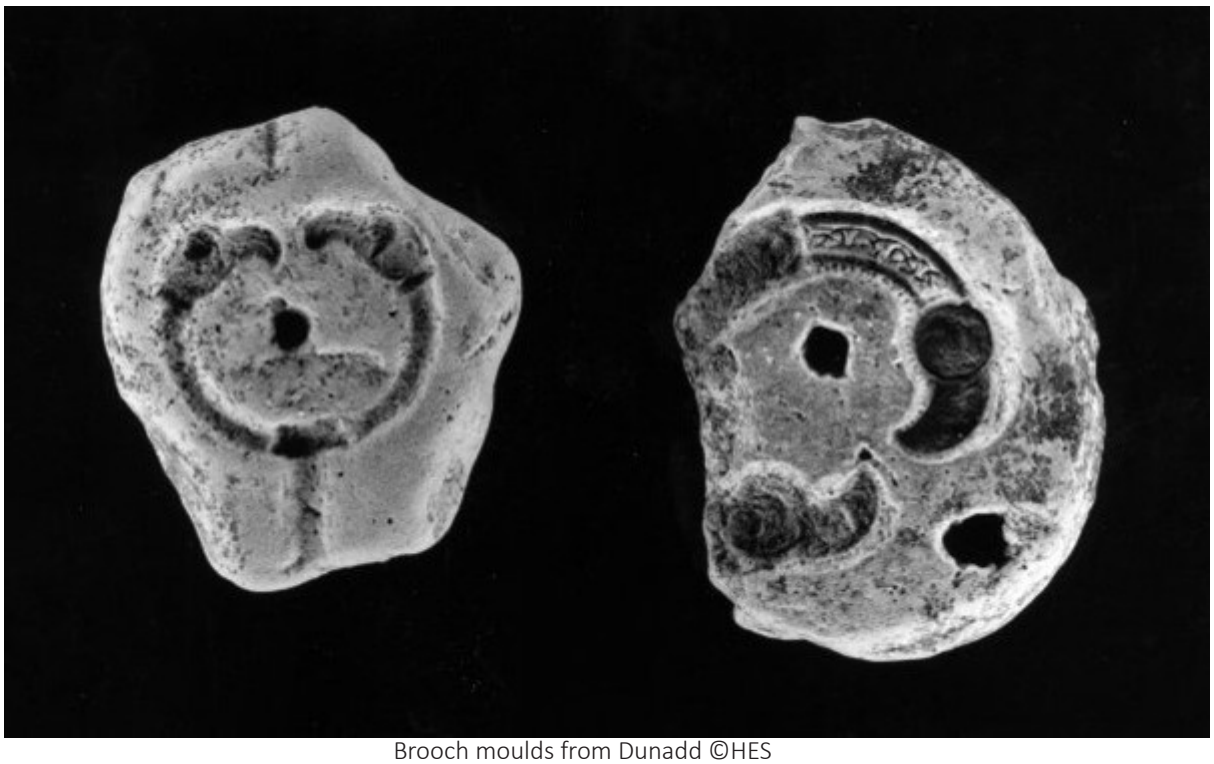
The issue of the end of *Dál Riata*, and the process of Gaelic takeover of Pictland is particularly obscure and debated. Some authors consider that a reference to the Picts 'smiting' *Dál Riata* in 741, indicate that the region came under Pictish control in the 8th century, though by the ninth century there were Gaelic kings of Pictland. The process by which Dál Riata came to be known by the 9/10th century as Argyll (from the Gaelic *Airer Goídel* – the shore or margin of the Gaels), and the relationship of the Gaels with the Gall-Gaedhil is also obscure (but see Kruse and Jennings 2009), though it has been suggested that it was named in contra-distinction to I*nnse Gall,* the Norse-dominated Hebrides.

8.3 Previous work

8.3.1 Antiquarian accounts

As Ritchie (1997) has documented, antiquarian interest in the sites of the area was (with the exception of Iona and Norse burials) mainly confined to prehistoric monuments, until the famous Celticist W F Skene identified Dunadd as the capital of Dál Riata in 1876, and WFL Thomas expanded on the importance of its footprint in inauguration rituals there. These insights led to the pioneering survey of Lorn and Mid Argyll's duns and forts by David Christison (1904) and the excavation of Dunadd by Christison and Anderson (1905). Apart from providing large numbers of finds, these excavations, and a number of interventions around Iona Abbey (CANMORE ID 21664) and at St Blane's, Bute (CANMORE ID 40292), belong to the antiquarian period in their lack of rigour and recording. Rather more controlled excavation at Dunadd was undertaken by J Hewitt Craw (1930), which, while recovering many more finds by sieving, still lacked proper stratigraphic recording. However, Craw was able to note the resemblance of the E ware pottery found at Dunadd to that from the Mote of Mark, and date it and the accompanying brooch moulds to the eighth century, thus giving a chronological marker for this period for the first time.

Norse period burials, with their rich grave goods,



Brooch moulds from Dunadd ©HES

have understandably attracted attention since the late 18th-century uncovering of graves at Ballinaby (CANMORE ID 37407), Islay. Several important boat burials and other graves were excavated in the 19th century from the islands off the Argyll mainland, mainly Islay, Colonsay and Oronsay, Coll and Tiree (see summaries in Grieg 1940; Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998). Other stray finds have been re-assessed and for example on Islay at Cruach Mhor (CANMORE ID 37666), Gordon was able to identify a grave assemblage from a series of stray finds eroded from sand dunes (Gordon 1990). Ongoing research by James Graham-Campbell and Caroline Paterson in relation to the extensive pagan Viking assemblage from Scotland, as a whole, includes a much deeper understanding of the antiquarian finds of potential grave material within Argyll. These results are eagerly awaited and will change perceptions of this part of the archaeological record when they are fully available. This will also provide a correction of the several inaccuracies identified in the reporting of Grieg in 1940 and potentially an increase in the number of graves identified within the islands, although very interestingly there remains a distinct lack of verified grave evidence on the mainland of Argyll (James Graham-Campbell pers comm.). It was only in the post-WWII period that advances began to be made in understanding the archaeology of the early medieval period in the area. It is best to consider these investigations in a thematic manner, rather than a chronological one.

8.3.2 Carved stone monuments

One exception to the pattern of neglect of early medieval archaeology has been the study of the Early Christian carved stones of the area (Foster et al 2016) which are still one of the most important resources for understanding the period, and one of the outstanding collections in European terms. These have excited interest from at least the 17th century, with good drawings of some monuments by Edward Lluyd in 1699. However, detailed descriptions of many monuments were not published until the mid-19th century (Graham 1850, Stuart



Luss Hogback Stone ©HES

1867, Drummond 1881). Although Allen and Anderson's (1903) *Early Christian monuments of Scotland* remains the key corpus of these monuments, it did not deal comprehensively with the western Scottish material, and many of the simpler cross-marked stones were not recorded. The key modern recording work was undertaken by the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland as part of their work in compiling the Inventories of Argyll from the 1960s to 1980s. The carved monuments from these seven volumes were extracted into a single publication (Fisher 2001), which combines descriptions with an overview of research on the stones. This extensive research has concentrated on the art historical study of the crosses, particularly those with figurative scenes, and is too extensive to describe in detail here. An exception has been the work by Meggen Gondek deriving from her PhD on the social implications of the wealth and power invested in the construction of the monuments (Gondek 2003, 2006b) and a study of the important but little-known site of Cladh a'Bhile (CANMORE ID 39051), Ellary (Gondek 2006a). More recently, Katherine Forsyth and Adrian Maldonado have re-assessed the Iona monuments in advance of their re-display in the new Abbey Museum. New insights into the location and meaning of many of the monuments resulted from this work (Forsyth and Maldonado 2012). Further investigation of the Iona group by these specialists is proposed. The Norse grave-slabs from Iona whose importance has been previously highlighted (Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998, 250) reinforce recent historical and archaeological work by GUARD Archaeology Ltd at the Glebe Field site (Will 2012) and others nearby, just outside the monastic enclosure. Finds of Hiberno-Norse pins, steatite vessels and other Norse artefacts indicate that Iona was thriving in the Norse period, rather than being destroyed by raiding, and may have been the site of a market here.

Other significant carved stones from the Norse period include a fine runic carved fragment from Inchmarnock, Bute which is a find recorded before the more recent excavations by Lowe, a Ringerike style cross slab from Islay (Dóid Mhàiri) (Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998, 250), and a runic inscription from Dunollie (K Forsyth pers. comm.), as well as the enigmatic Luss hogback stone. This latter piece, which is located within

a circular churchyard within the village of Luss, is a complete recumbent stone of hogback form with clear roof tegulations visible (Lang 1974, 217-8), and part of a larger cognate group of stones best exemplified in Scotland at Govan on the Clyde (eg Ritchie 1994) from the Viking age. Another cross from Kilmartin church can be included here, as well as a cross-slab from St Finan's church, Kilmorie which seems to have affinities with Govan.

8.3.3 Crannogs

The first crannog to be excavated in Argyll was the marine crannog of An Dòirlinn, Eriska (CANMORE ID 23328) (Munro 1885), though no artefacts were recovered and no other type of dating was possible at this early stage of archaeology. This site is unusual as it lies outside the two known concentrations of marine crannogs in the upper Clyde estuary and the Beauly Firth (Hale 2004), and it may be that others remain to be discovered on the Argyll coastline. The chance exposure of a crannog when Loch Glashan was drained as part of a hydro-electrical works, and later excavated by Jack Scott in 1960, led to the discovery of a range of organic material previously unrecorded, though unfortunately publication was delayed until recently (Crone and Campbell 2005). Re-assessment of the material led to the realisation by Batey that the leather 'jacket' described by Scott in fact was an early book satchel (see also Campbell 2010 for discussion). Leather-working seems to have been the main activity on this crannog, but E ware pottery and crucibles for fine metalworking link it directly to Dunadd (CANMORE ID 39564). An iron axe and a segmented silver-in-glass bead show contacts with the Norse world, rarely seen on mainland Argyll. Radiocarbon dates on the wooden objects from the site suggest a long period of occupation, though whether this was continuous or not is debateable, given the uncertainty over the taphonomic and decay processes within



Figure 97: Penannular brooch from Loch Glashan crannog, Argyll. Copper alloy with amber settings, 8/9th century, brooch diameter 34mm. © Ewan Campbell

crannog structures (see discussion in Crone and Campbell 2005, 117-8). A survey of the crannogs of Loch Awe undertaken by Ian Morrison in the 1970s formed the basis of his influential book, *Landscape with lake dwellings* (1985), which investigated the relationship of the Loch Awe crannogs to the surrounding landscape, written from a geographer's perspective. No excavation took place during this survey, and only one radiocarbon date was obtained, which suggested an early Iron Age occupation at Ederline boathouse crannog (CANMORE ID 22775). Diving excavation has a long history in Argyll, with the Rev R J Mapleton undertaking one of the first diving explorations of a crannog in Britain at Loch Coille Bharr (CANMORE ID 39078) (Mapleton 1868). However, the only recent diving excavation has taken place at Ederline boathouse crannog, with both radiocarbon dates and finds of E ware indicating early medieval re-occupation of a site which was constructed in the early iron age and abandoned in the middle iron age (Cavers and Henderson 2005). These results, along with the Loch Glashan (CANMORE ID 40047) (Figure 97) evidence suggest that the crannogs, like the forts and duns, were intermittently occupied throughout the span of the first millennia, and it would be impossible to have excavation strategies which focussed on 'iron age' or 'early medieval' occupations.

8.3.4 Duns, brochs and hillforts

Duns, brochs and hillforts are the classic settlement form of the area, and there have been many excavations in the post-war period (see Chapter 7: The Iron Age). Several of these opportunistically produced early medieval evidence of both occupation and/or construction. These include Balloch Hill, Dun Chonallich (CANMORE ID 22772), Eilean Righ 1 (CANMORE ID 22857), Ardifuir, Kildalloig Dun, Kildonan (CANMORE 38756), Dun an Fheurain (CANMORE ID 22954), Dun Fhinn, Ugadale Bay, and Leccamore (summary in Crone and Campbell 2005, 120-2, Table 4). Indeed, as Alcock and Alcock (1987) pointed out, there are as many defended sites with early medieval dates as those with iron age ones. However, it was Leslie Alcock's campaign of investigating sites mentioned in contemporary annals and other documents that put 'Early Historic', as he named it, archaeology on a sound footing in Scotland. Two Argyll forts, Dunadd (CANMORE ID 39564) (Lane and Campbell 2000) and Dunollie (Alcock and Alcock 1987), were excavated in the 1980s as part of this campaign, both providing extensive evidence of the importance of these sites associated with kings of the Dál Riata. This was the first programme of early medieval excavation in Argyll driven by a research agenda, and the results showed the value of small-scale interventions in establishing the broad chronology and material culture of defended sites. All these small-scale excavations however, suffer from well-known problems of siting keyhole trenches in sites with complex stone sequences and deep stratigraphy. In particular, no convincing buildings (other than ephemeral turf metal-working bothies at Dunadd) have been identified in any of these excavations. More recently, excavations at Dun Mhuirich (CANMORE ID 39122) (see Dun Mhuirich Excavation: Case Study), Tayvallich, have produced early medieval occupation beneath a long sequence of medieval and post-medieval deposits (Regan 2012, 2013). All of these sites have shown that it is not possible to predict the presence or chronological span of a defended site from the surface form of the enclosures. In no cases do we have any excavation evidence for areas outside of the enclosures which might give a clue as to lower status activities and structures – a project under John Barrett in the 1980s looked at examples of fields associated with duns, but was never published (Nieke 1990, 139).

While brochs are characteristic of western and northern Scotland, there are few within Argyll, reflecting a different regional tradition in the

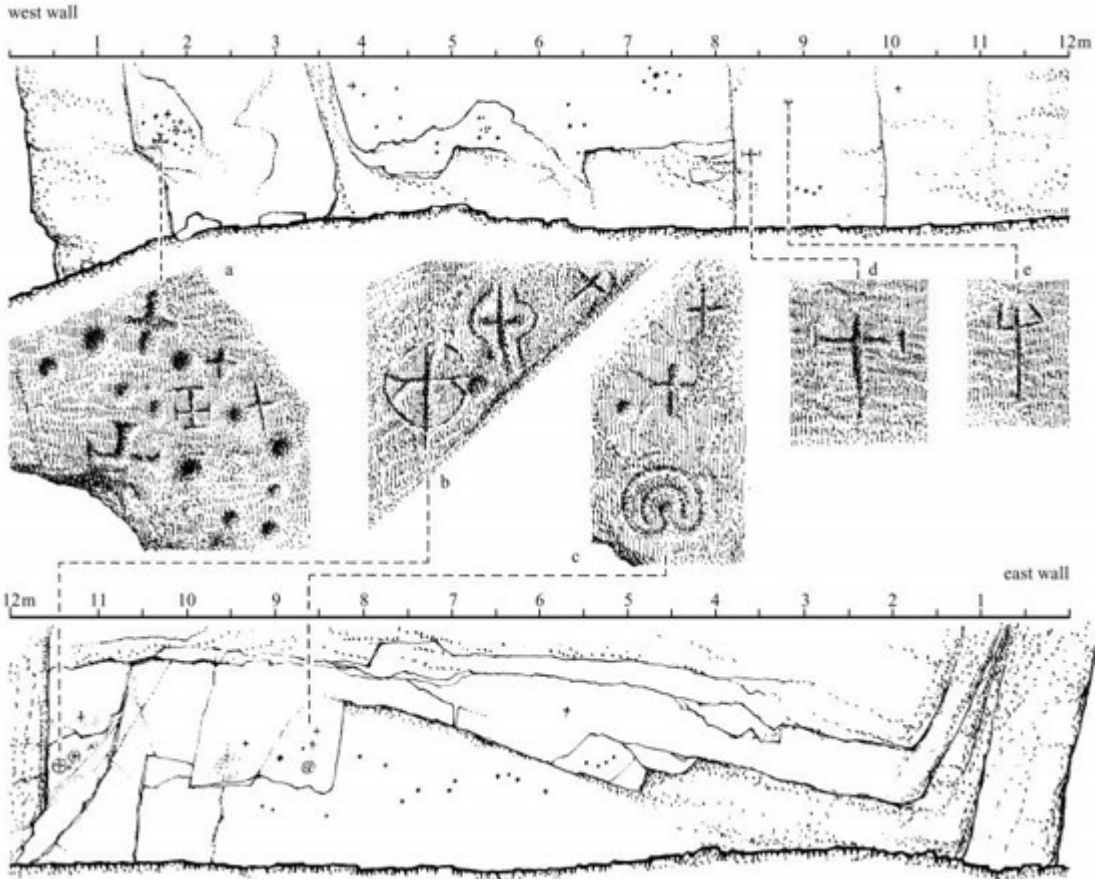


Tirefour Broch ©HES

Iron Age (see Section 7.4.4). As elsewhere however, broch sites tend to remain foci of settlement in the early medieval period. Two broch sites have been excavated: Dun Mor Vaul (CANMORE ID 21524), Tiree (Mackie 1974), and the unpublished Tirefour (CANMORE ID 23082), Lismore excavated by Simon Stoddart. Recently obtained dates from Dun Mor Vaul confirm a 7/8th-century date for a burial within the broch, which also has a comb and whetstone identifiable as Norse in late deposits (Batey 2002, 185). Tirefour has an external settlement which has produced an outstanding 8th-century pin, and a stone building of the 12th century. As with the forts and duns, both these sites indicate the continuing significance of these iron age sites into the medieval period.

8.3.5 Caves

An important and distinctive feature of early medieval Argyll is the (re-) occupation of caves in the early medieval period. Several of these have been identified from Christian symbols carved on the cave walls, for example Nuns' and Scoor Caves (CANMORE ID 21977), Carsaig; Eilean Mór (CANMORE ID 38642) (Fisher 2001); and St Columba's cave, Ellary (CANMORE ID 39012) which was excavated by Marion Campbell in the 1960s and 1970s, but published much later using her archives (Tolan-Smith 2001, 25-72). Both St Columba's cave and Boulder Cave (CANMORE ID 39032), Ellary (ibid, 73-148) produced a range of finds which can be ascribed broadly to the first millennium AD. These include a hand-pin, bone combs, a folding balance, an oil-shale box (possibly a reliquary), as well as evidence for fine metalworking. It is unfortunate that these important finds were not fully investigated, the emphasis of Tollan-Smith's work being on the prehistoric use of the caves, and further information may result from closer study. Other caves have been proposed as early medieval hermitage sites based on local tradition or placename evidence, but have not been excavated. A significant cave setting with extensive Norse runic inscriptions has been recorded on Holy Island, Arran, just outside modern Argyll. St Molaise's cave (CANMORE ID 40079), with its cross and runic inscriptions, was initially examined by Balfour (1909). The use of caves in contemporary Iceland (Arhonson 2015) and Ireland (Connolly et al. 2005) illustrate that

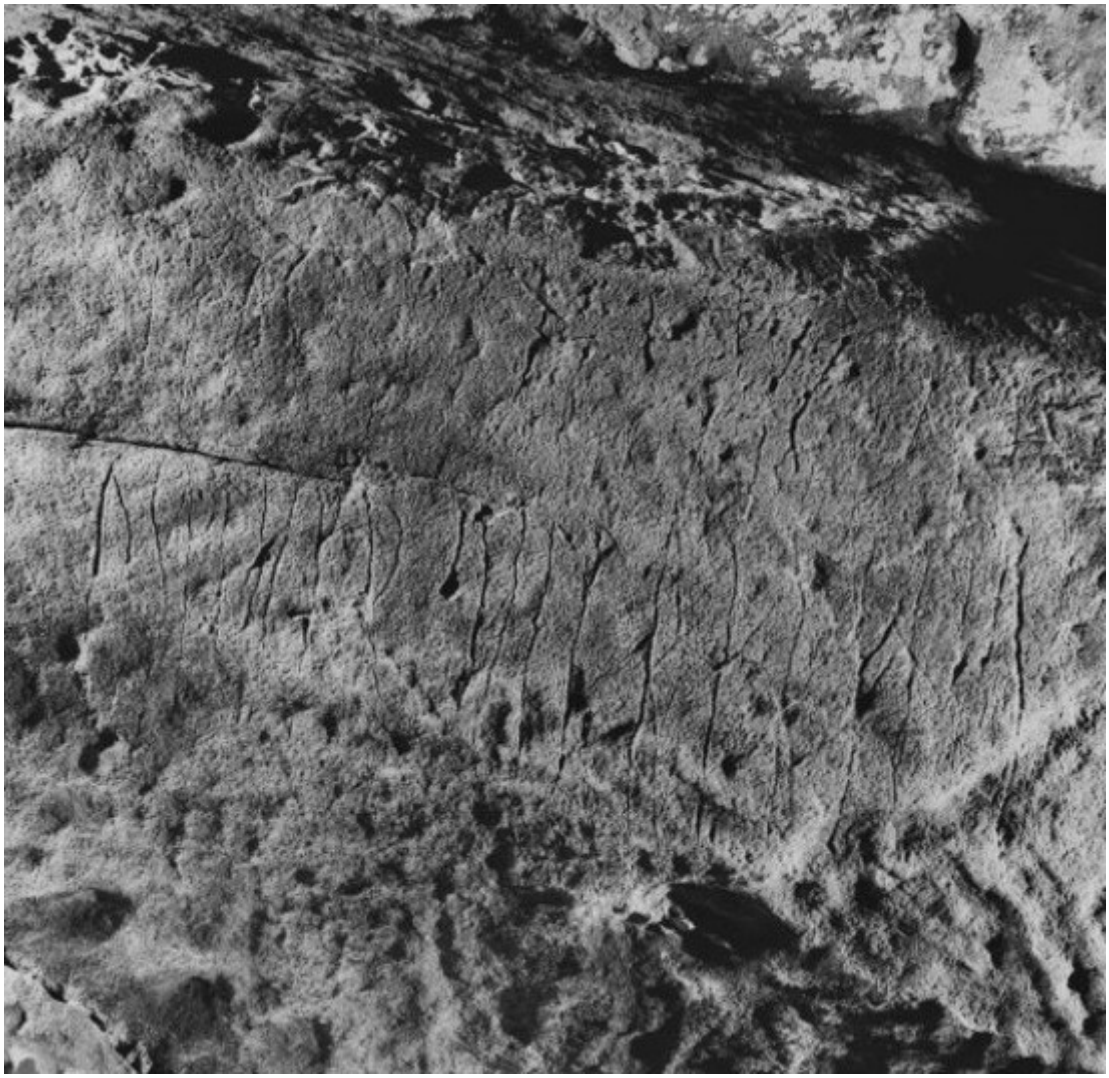


Detail of linear crosses, trident symbols, horse-shoes and cup mark carvings on the walls of Scoor Cave ©HES

this is a widespread phenomenon in the Atlantic region.

8.3.6 Ecclesiastic sites

The extensive evidence for ecclesiastical sites (monasteries, hermitages, chapels and sculptured stones) has been summarised by Fisher (1998) and need not be reiterated here. More recent research includes Rachel Butter's PhD on Argyll saints (http://www.saintsplaces.gla.ac.uk/) (Butter 2007 and new work on Iona (see Iona: Case Study). However, little of the excavation at these sites has been carried out to modern standards, and Iona has been particularly badly treated given its European significance (O'Sullivan 1998). Recent geophysical work by the Orkney College Geophysics Unit for the National Trust of Scotland has demonstrated that the vallum enclosures at Iona are complex and multi-phase. Apart from Iona, the monastic sites of Inchmarnock (CANMORE ID 40268) (Lowe 2008), St Blane's (CANMORE ID 40292) (Anderson 1900; Laing et al. 1998; Duffy 2012; Geddes and Hale 2010) and Crarae (CANMORE ID 281472) (Kirby and Alexander 2009) have been excavated, while Ardnadam (CANMORE ID 40746) (Rennie 1984) and Baliscate (CANMORE ID 294740), Mull (Wessex Archaeology 2010) are the only excavated examples of medieval chapel sites which may have an early medieval phase. It has been assumed that church buildings were in wood, but recently ó Carragáin (2010) has suggested that St Columba's Shrine (CANMORE ID 21652) on Iona may date to the 8th century, and be the first of the stone-built shrines in the Gaelic world. Recent research by Waters (2011) has suggested that a number of stone-built shrine chapel sites on Islay and elsewhere, which have western doorways, are similar to Irish forms which are early medieval. These



Detail of the runes inscribed on the wall of St Molaise's Cave

would repay excavation

Recent reassessment of the material from Charles Thomas's excavations on Iona (Campbell and Maldonado 2016; forthcoming) has shown the presence of window glass, the first from early medieval Scotland, as well as other unique items, illustrating the importance of re-evaluating old collections of material.

8.3.7 Burials

Despite the importance of ecclesiastical sites, and later Norse burials, there is very little information available on burial in the area (Figure 98). Acid soils mean that bone preservation is poor and, therefore, Iron Age burials are almost unknown. Many early medieval burial sites are still used as graveyards and so excavation is not possible. Outside of church cemeteries, the only early graves known were discovered by aerial photography at Newton (CANMORE ID 18084), Islay (McCullagh 1989). Here a linear barrow cemetery had features similar to those familiar from the Pictish areas of eastern Scotland, but now known to be more widespread (Maldonado 2012). The lack of aerial reconnaissance in western Scotland may have hindered the recognition of other examples. Apart from excavations at various sites on Iona, burials are also known at Inchmarnock (CANMORE ID 40268) and St Ninian's Point (CANMORE ID 40437), Bute, Baliscate (CANMORE ID 294740), Mull, and Ardnadam (CANMORE ID 40746),



Recording the remains of a Medieval chapel at Baliscate, Mull © HES

Cowal. Most of these are simple dug graves, but there is a handful of sites with long-cists (Maldonado 2011, fig 5.5), including two important ones beneath the floor of St Columba's Shrine (CANMORE ID 21652), Iona. It has recently become apparent that cremation burials continued into the nominally Christian period (Maldonado 2011, 106-8, Campbell et al. forthcoming), and one example has been recorded from Morvern, and another from Islay deposited in a re-used Bronze Age urn (Cook 1999), so there is potential for further recognition of this rite within Argyll in future, possibly like the Islay example associated with short cists. There is a severe lack of modern radiocarbon dates on burials of the period, and no isotopic work has been carried out so far.

Norse period burials are better known, though not many are recorded within the area, and many were poorly excavated, hampering interpretation. The Scottish Viking Graves Project and other work on the material is in progress, but so far unpublished, though summarised recently (Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998).

The pagan burials include boat burials, such as the major find at Kiloran Bay (CANMORE ID 38173) on Colonsay (Anderson 1907), and another possibly burnt boat at Kings Cross Point (CANMORE ID 40078) on Arran (Balfour 1909). Multiple graves are known, as perhaps demonstrated at Carn a Bharraich (CANMORE ID 37816) on Oronsay (McNeill 1891; Anderson 1907), although particularly problematic to interpret as this was an antiquarian find. Animal burials, as at Machrins (CANMORE ID 37923) on Colonsay where a small lap dog was included in the grave goods (Ritchie 1981) and also at Kiloran Bay (CANMORE ID 38173) where a horse was included within the boat (Anderson 1907) are known in addition to high status weapon burials, as on Islay with a major grouping recovered at Ballinaby (Anderson 1880; Edwards 1934). Elsewhere, the combination of antiquarian and stray finds with older excavations and rescue excavations at the Cnoc nan Gall/Machrins (CANMORE ID 37922) complex is demonstrating the value of re-assessment of all data sources to identify cemetery groups (see for example Becket and Batey 2014).On Iona, a

burial with a rune-inscribed gravestone, (noted above) illustrate the continuing importance of the site to the Christian Norse.

The major new discovery within this region has been the identification of a Viking cemetery located south of Luss on the west shores of Loch Lomond at Mid Ross. A poorly documented earlier find had located a shield boss, spear and bent sword from the Viking period at Boiden, and excavations nearby in advance of golf course developments revealed a much more extensive multi-period complex of sites. Part of this included a massive ring ditch enclosing two burial phases (one east-west and the other north-south). Within the group of north-south

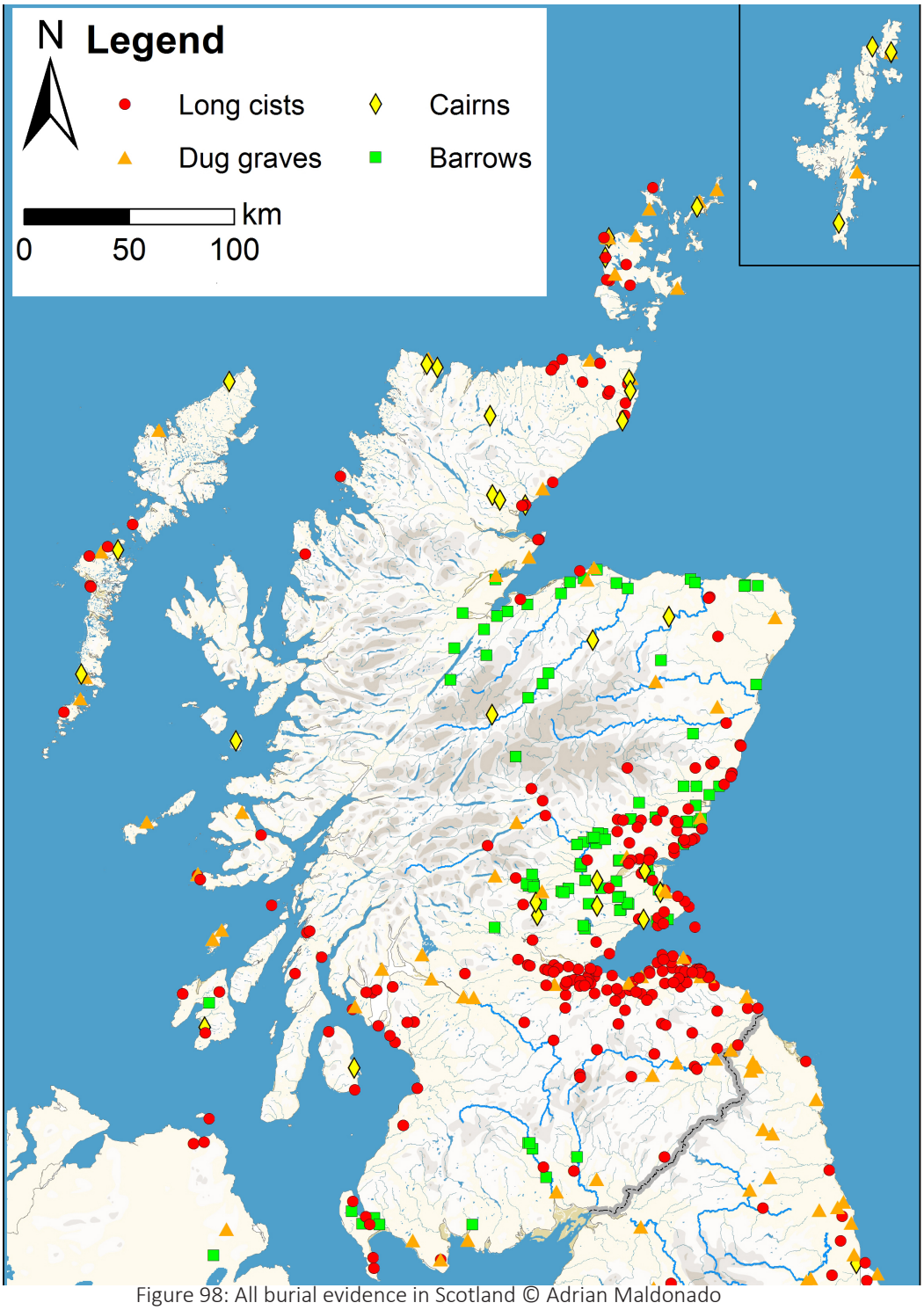


Figure 98: All burial evidence in Scotland © Adrian Maldonado

grave cuts were finds including a perforated Anglo-Saxon coin, a Scandinavian whetstone, and within the enclosing ditch, a shield boss. There are potentially up to 15 individual graves represented in this phase of activity at the site (Batey forthcoming).

8.3.8 Material culture

In general, Argyll dun sites tend to produce few artefacts (Crone and Campbell 2005, 121, Table 4), and the area was almost aceramic for most of the first two millennia. The outstanding exception is the royal site of Dunadd (CANMORE ID 39564) (Lane and Campbell 2000), which has produced a wide variety of materials relating to craft activities, as well as some of the largest quantities of imported 6/7th-century Continental pottery in Atlantic Britain (Figure 99). Crucibles and moulds showed the production of fine metalwork (brooches and pins) using gold, silver and copper alloys, making this one of the most important metalworking sites in Atlantic Britain. Anglo-Saxon items were present on the site, and their designs copied and adapted into Celtic forms as part of the development of the Insular Art style (Campbell and Lane 1993). Most of the brooches being produced were of Fowler's Type G, which is widespread in northern Britain and Ireland. There are no signs of regional types of metalwork that can be identified with Dál Riata as a polity, but unique pins found at Tirefour (CANMORE ID 23082), Lismore (Campbell forthcoming), Macrihanish (Batey 1990), and at Kilellan (CANMORE ID 37496), Islay (Ritchie 2005, 143-4), as well shrine fittings from Iona, show an flourishing and artistically innovative tradition. The imported pottery and glass (Figure 100), from Aquitaine, is also found on surrounding sites such as Ardifuir dun (CANMORE ID 39140), Ederline Boathouse crannog (CANMORE ID 22775), and Loch Glashan crannog (CANMORE ID 40047) (Campbell 2007), probably reflecting client/lord relationships with Dunadd. Further examples are known from Dunollie , Little Dunagoil, Bute, and Kildalloig dun, Kintyre (CANMORE ID 38708), while Iona has continental pottery as well as the most northerly known example of African Red Slipware produced in the Carthage area. These finds and others show that there is no doubt that at the power centres of the area were in close contact with the Continent and even the Mediterranean world at this period. Exotic items include a Byzantine gold-in-glass tessera, the mineral orpiment and madder colourants from Dunadd (CANMORE ID 39564). Other sites with considerable quantities of material include the royal site of Dunollie (Alcock and Alcock 1987), and the crannog at Loch Glashan (CANMORE ID 40047) (Crone and Campbell 2005) where large amounts of wooden objects and leather-working debris (mainly shoes) were identified. The vallum ditch at Iona also produced organic items, including shoes, bowls, ladles, buckets, a wooden staff, and structural timbers. There was a leather satchel at Loch Glashan which is best interpreted as a book satchel of a form known from Ireland (Campbell 2010; cf Clarke 2012, 110-112). The survival of an early medieval wooden crozier on Lismore (the Bachuil Mor of St Moluag), still in the possession of the hereditary keeper, is unique in Scotland in remaining in private hands. Another reliquary, from Kilmichael Glassary, is of early 12th-century date, and shows Norse influences, but encloses an early iron handbell (Caldwell et al. 2012).

For the Norse period, apart from the grave goods, both hoards and stray finds are found scattered through the region. This material has been summarised (Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998), and the gold and silver items catalogued in detail (Graham-Campbell 1995 updated 2008). A rare example of a Viking Age find from the region was recorded by Graham-Campbell from Lismore (2008) as a fragment of a gold arm ring recovered from Kilcheran (CANMORE ID 273161). Although Scotland did not produce any coins throughout the first millennium, both hoards and stray finds are found. New finds are regularly reported to Treasure Trove and published in PSAS (Bateson 1989; Bateson and Holmes 1997, 2003, 2006, 2013). However, none have been found in Argyll since 1978, the period covered by these lists, reflecting the paucity of

evidence for 8-10th century period in Scotland generally. Rich grave goods from both male and female burials include Norse types of swords, shields, balances and weights, harness mounts, oval brooches, pins, axes and other tools. Most unusual is a bronze ladle from Ballinaby (CANMORE ID 37407), Islay, unique in Scotland.

An important class of objects are motif pieces and graffiti-inscribed slates. From Dunadd (CANMORE ID 39564) there are sketches for brooches, and a large slate showing attempts to construct complex knotwork, and animal art (Lane and Campbell 2000, 186-9). These are important for showing the processes involved in the creation of complex metalwork of the period. There is also an inscribed pebble which shows the presence of literate people on the site. From Inchmarnock (CANMORE ID 40268) there is a large collection of graffiti-inscribed slates, including text, figurative scenes, and decorative elements (Lowe 2008). These give insights into the process of teaching literacy. A smaller collection comes from old excavations at nearby St Blane's (CANMORE ID 40292). Inscribed monuments are rare in Argyll, however, with a handful from Iona, and single examples from a few other sites (Campbell 2010). The

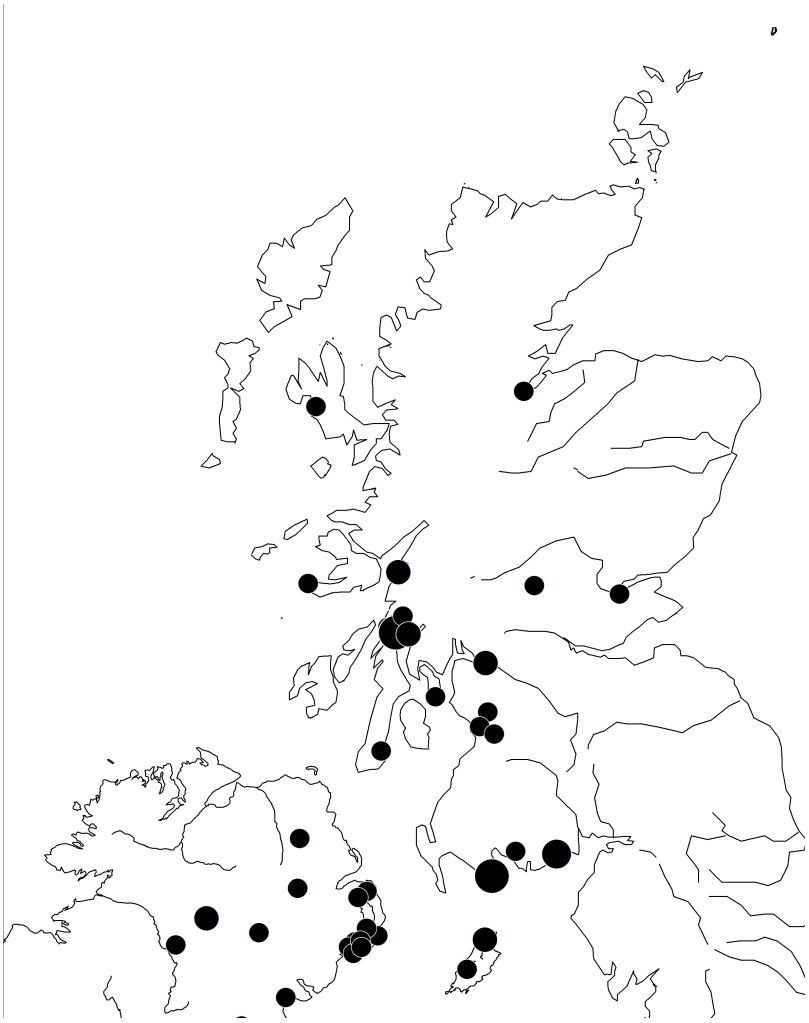


Figure 99: Current E ware distribution in Scotland © Ewan Campbell

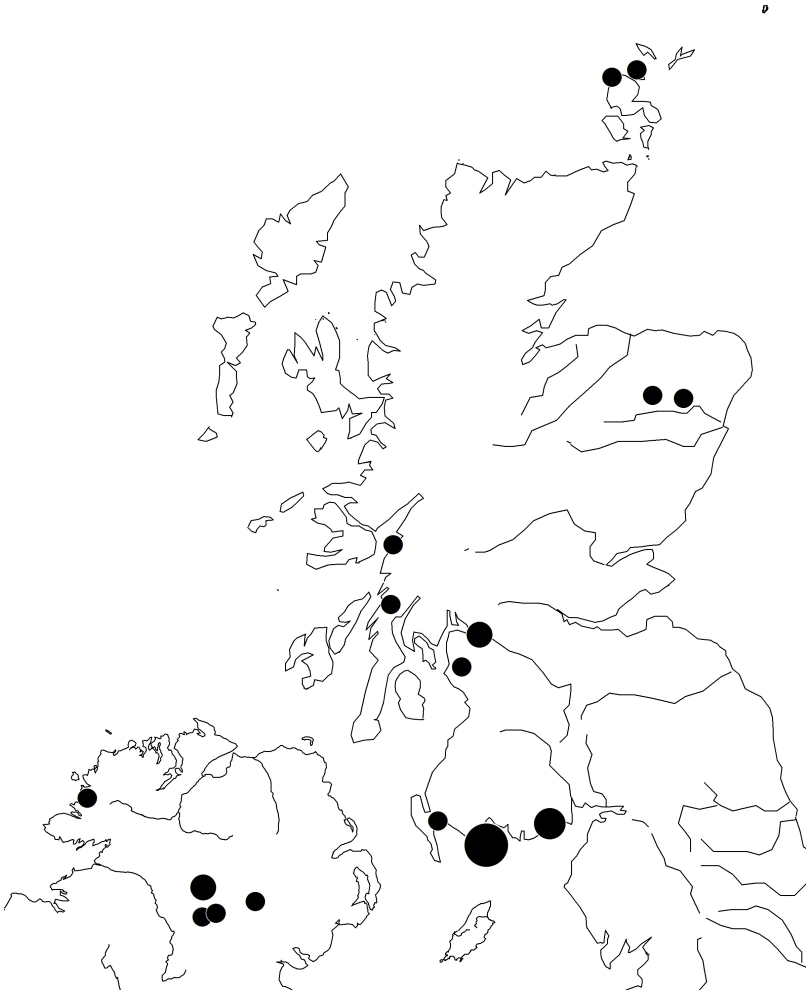


Figure 100: Current glass imports distribution © Ewan Campbell

earliest of these, the Echoid stone (Iona Abbey CANMORE ID 21667), may refer to one of the early 7th-century kings of Dál Riata, Eochaid Buide (Forsyth pers comm). The others include ogham inscriptions from Gigha (CANMORE ID 38615), Bruach an Druimein (CANMORE ID 39451), Inchmarnock (CANMORE ID 40268), a Latin inscription from Lochgoilhead (CANMORE ID 23614) and and runic inscriptions from Iona, Inchmarnock (CANMORE ID 40268) and Dunollie .

8.3.9 Secular buildings

As already mentioned, virtually no secular buildings apart from hilltop duns are known from the area. A few ephemeral turf shelters were identified in the metalworking area of Dunadd (CANMORE ID 39564) (Lane and Campbell 2000, illus 2.38), but the dates of other stone-built structures on the site are unknown. Possible buildings of the period are the long-houses excavated at Little Dunagoil, Bute by Marshall (1964). A 9/10th-century lead weight

of Norse type was found associated with one of these houses, but the stratigraphy is confused, and there are also early medieval beads, glass metalwork and pottery from the same area. More recently, at Dunstaffnage a small enigmatic sub-rectangular post-built structure with associated grain-drying kiln, hearths and pits has been dated to the 8/9th centuries (Ellis pers comm). Traces of stone and timber buildings within the monasteries of Iona (CANMORE ID 21649), Inchmarnock (CANMORE ID 40268) and St Blane's (CANMORE ID 40292) have also been found, including an unusual very large circular post-built structure on Iona, but we really have very little idea what secular buildings looked like.

Possible cellular structures, usually thin walled and revetted into earlier material are currently associated with secondary occupation of other sites, again this may be due to a bias in the excavation and survey record. Ten such sites include the possible re-use of the cell at Kildalloig or the structures discovered within Dun Mac Sniachan and possibly Dhun Ghirgeadail and An Caisteal (CANMORE ID 21757). A revetted cellular settlement was recovered from the machair sand at Machrins, Colonsay (Ritchie 1981). Early excavations may not have recognised these sometimes flimsy structures as at Dùn Mhic Choigil (CANMORE ID 38479) (Hedges and Hedges 1976, 376), and it is likely that modern excavation may recover more. These structures inserted in Iron Age monuments may belong to the early medieval period or later, though only the Machrins (CANMORE ID 37923) structures are dated. The Machrins cellular buildings look typically mid-first millennium, but have produced an 8/10th-century Norse period date (Ritchie 1981, 267), though this may represent re-occupation.

8.3.10 Environment

(see also Section 4 and Section 10.2)

The last two millennia have until recently been poorly studied by environmentalists in Scotland, who have tended to concentrate on earlier Holocene material. In Argyll pollen work by Rymer (1980) was pioneering, and some wrok was carried out in conjunction with the Iona excavations of Reece (1981) and Barber (1981). More recent work has been carried out in the Oban area (Macklin et al. 2000), around Dunadd (CANMORE ID 39564) (Housley et al. 2004, 2010), and in Kilmichael Glen (Jones et al. 2011). While this work has concentrated on chronology, land-use changes and their possible relationship to climatic fluctuations, unravelling the complexity of sea-level changes in this region have also been studied (Gray and Sutherland 1977, Shennan et al. 2006). Although the sea-level changes at this period are relatively minor, they have been claimed to have had significant impact in some places, for example in Islay with the Rhinns possibly being a separate island (Dawson et al. 1998). This work has only scratched the surface of environmental change at this period and much more needs to be done.

8.3.11 Community involvement

One of the key archaeological surveys of a region in Scotland was undertaken in the 1950s by two local amateur archaeologists, Mary Sandeman and Marion Campbell of Kilberry (1962). Their survey of Mid-Argyll included all periods, and as well as identifying and describing sites and monuments, they recorded a great deal of interesting local knowledge and folklore. This pioneering work, along with that of Dorothy Marshall in Bute, led to the re-invigoration of several local societies, particularly supported by Eric Cregeen of the School of Scottish Studies, and Jack Scott of Kelvingrove Museum [http://www.glasgowlife.org.uk].

Many of these are still active today, and new groups have formed, for example the Hidden Heritage project at Arrochar and Tarbet. This project brought together survey, excavation and place name study of the area which resulted in both academic publication on Gaelic place-names under the guidance of Simon Taylor (Carmichael et al. 2014), and more specifically local publication including a Viking heritage trail

in the district (Arrochar and Tarbet CDT).

Excavation and survey involving local communities has also been instigated by Kilmartin Museum, for example the important medieval fort of Dun Mhuirich (CANMORE ID 39122) (see also Case Study 10: Dun Mhuirich Excavation) (Regan 2012, 2013), and on Bute, where the Bute Heritage Project has carried out a number of initiatives, and produced publications (Duffy 2012).

There are also active groups on Lismore, where West Highland grave-slabs have been recently re-housed; on Islay with a project centred around the Kildalton Cross (CANMORE ID 251204); and on Tiree where a survey of a potential early medieval site has been undertaken by a newly established community-based project combining activities instigated by An Iodhlann with Northlight Archaeology, ACFA and Glasgow University.

8.3.12 Undefended sites

Undefended sites must have existed in this period, but have so far resisted attempts to locate them, with the possible exception of the poorly understood Bruach an Druimein, Poltalloch (CANMORE ID 39541) (Abernethy 2009) and the Dunstaffnage site mentioned above. The lack of aerial reconnaissance in the region may have contributed to this, but it is also possible that many dispersed settlements may lie beneath post-medieval buildings. There are other surprising gaps in our knowledge of types of structure however. No horizontal mills have been identified in western Scotland, despite their abundance in Ireland, and their occurrence in the Northern Isles. There are no tidal mills, again common in Ireland, or even fish traps dated to this period, despite many suitable locations.

8.3.13 Interaction with prehistoric monuments

Much recent work in Ireland, England and Scotland (eg Campbell et al. forthcoming b; Semple 2013) has pointed to the involvement of early medieval communities with prehistoric sites, though there is not much direct evidence of this in Argyll. Clearly, sites such as Dunadd (CANMORE ID 39564) were located at least partly with reference to the rich monumental landscape of Kilmartin Glen (Lane and Campbell 2000, illus 1.4). In Argyll, a Norse period hoard was inserted in one of the Kilmartin cairns, and recent excavations at Torbhlaren rock art site (CANMORE ID 39543) have revealed iron age and early medieval activity there (Jones et al. 2011, 120), something increasingly being seen at Scandinavian rock art sites. On Iona it is possible that the D-shaped enclosure and the well may represent an iron age sacred site, as early dates have been obtained from beneath the vallum. The positioning of Killevin chapel (CANMORE ID 40022) and monastic enclosure (CANMORE ID 281472) next to Crarae chambered tomb (CANMORE ID 40024) is possibly another example of deliberate appropriation or sanctifying of a pagan monument (Kirby and Alexander 2009, 96).

8.4 Gaps in the evidence

There are numerous major gaps in the evidence for the period. Lower status, undefended sites are virtually unknown, as are associated agricultural elements such as fields, byres, barns, and mills (if they exist). We have almost no knowledge of any building types, even on higher status sites, except for the potentially roofed duns. Norse settlement sites are only hinted at by stray finds. Early churches and chapels are almost entirely unknown, cemetery studies lack sufficient numbers of dated burials to define periods of use, no non-ecclesiastical cemeteries have been excavated (with the possible exception of the new burials at Mid Ross, Loch Lomond), and isotopic analyses have not been undertaken. For the important site of Iona, we have little dating evidence for the complex pattern of monastic enclosures, and no knowledge of the form of monastery and buildings in the

period 800-1200. There has been no systematic work on the ceramics of the period, which though sparse compared to the Western Isles, have been found.

8.5 Key research areas

- The discovery of undefended, agricultural, and lower status sites.
- The role of Iona in the creation of sacred Christian landscapes.
- The date and form of monastic enclosures and buildings
- The chronology and function of crannogs.
- How unique is Dunadd?
- Early Christian Monuments – Landscape, monumentality and materiality.
- Where is the evidence for the Norse on the mainland?
- Where are the Norse settlements on the islands to go with the burials?

8.6 Recommendations for future work

Some of the recommendations here are not specific to the early medieval period – as should be clear from the above document, the Iron Age and later medieval periods cannot be separated from the early medieval period in many cases. A number of specific research programmes can be suggested.

1) The creation of an investigation policy for Iona

Iona was one of the most significant places in the intellectual and artistic life of North-west Europe in the 7/8th centuries. Apart from the artistic achievements of the High Crosses and llustrated manuscripts such as the Book of Kells, and literary works such as the Life of Columba, Adomnán's On the Holy Places, and the Corpus Canonnum Hiberernensis were produced, it was one of the key places where the idea of the earthly monastery as a metaphor of Heavenly Jerusalem was developed (O'Loughlin 2007; Jenkins 2010). Understanding the expression of these ideas in the physical reality of monuments, buildings and artefacts is a key research theme in early medieval studies.

An attempt has been made to develop a coherent policy for investigation of Iona, with a major AHRC application from the multi-disciplinary Iona Research Group based at the University of Glasgow, however this was unsuccessful. Other means of carrying out this work is essential, given the prime place of Iona in the cultural development of early medieval Europe. Some of this work is already taking place (Campbell and Maldonado forthcoming; Campbell et al. forthcoming), but further survey and selected excavation of archaeological features – such as ditches – would enable a much more coherent picture of the site to be revealed. The nature of the Viking presence on the island is a most significant adjunct to the earlier activities, and in combination with ongoing rescue excavations on the island this would be a very fruitful way to proceed as an additional strand to this work.

2) Further research and investigation of other monastic centres

Other monastic centres, such as St Molaug's (CANMORE ID 23090) on Lismore and St Blane's on Bute (CANMORE ID 40292) also deserve further study, some of which is in progress (eg Duffy 2012). The burial site of Cladh a'Bhile(-CANMORE ID 39051) is a very early site for which we have no documentary evidence, but the quantity of sculpture indicates an important regional centre, possibly with pre-Christian origins (Gondek 2006a). On Tiree there are sites potentially linked to Iona, at Kirkipol and Ceann a' Mhara (CANMORE ID 21477) (for carved stones see RCAHMS 1980, site 325, figs 195-6). At Kirkipol, geophysical survey by Darko Maricevic from University of Reading potentially indicates the location of an early Christian

chapel/graveyard.

3) Further coastal survey to identify inter-tidal and maritime sites

There is scope for further survey work by community groups, particularly ongoing monitoring of eroding coastlines, searching for tidal mills, harbours and fish traps in the inter-tidal zone, and searching for horizontal mills. Aerial reconnaissance and LIDAR should be extended to this area to search for unenclosed and lowland sites – Dave Cowley's recent work shows the value of this in western areas (Cowley 2009).

4) Multi-disciplinary approaches to field survey

Integrating field survey, aerial survey, remote sensing, toponymics and antiquarian accounts provides a route into wider landscape studies. A combination of specialisms provides a much fuller view of landscape presence in the Norse period. For example, the inclusion of Norse place name studies by Johnston (1995) for Coll and Tiree (with commentary of Islay, Mull and Lismore) forms a framework for naming the landscape by a Norse-speaking population (see also Holliday 2016).

5) Re-examination of artefacts from previous excavations originally classified as Iron Age/Early Medieval

Re-assessment of older collections in museums and older excavations can bring new material to light, as at Iona. A comprehensive list of museum and other holdings relevant to the area would be a first step here.
There would be a useful project to locate and undertake examination of local collections held within Argyll. For example, study of the multi-period pottery collections from Tiree in Glasgow museums enabled Alan Lane to identify Norse platters (Lane 1990), and other potential types remain to be discovered from eroding sand-blow sites.

There are many major houses in the region, landowners will have material in their attics and this needs to be brought together gradually. The loss of papers for the Luss Estate for example, which included detail and probably also the original finds from the Boiden burial has been unfortunate and probably not unique. New work can build on this rather than discount it.

Additionally, as a desk based/museum based activity initially, the reviewing of excavation collections for material which was not published earlier, or which could have been mis-identified is a way forward, especially if it can highlight areas of under representation.

Radiocarbon dating of older material may also yield surprising results, as with the Sanaigmhor cremated material. Dating the Lismore crozier would be a good example.

6) Excavation

As far as excavation is concerned almost any new site will produce worthwhile data given our poor state of knowledge. The recent Dun Mhuirich (CANMORE ID 39122) (see Dun Mhuirich Excavation: Case Study) excavations have highlighted the often very long sequences of occupation of defended sites in the region and the difficulty of separating out an early medieval component in the landscape. However, as documented royal sites, Tarbert (CANMORE ID 39316) and Dunaverty (CANMORE ID 38302) would repay small-scale excavation to compare with Dunadd (CANMORE ID 38564) and Dunollie. The main trench (Site 3) at Dunadd was never bottomed in 1981, due to funding policy changes, and could fruitfully be finished. Marshall's trenches at Little Dunagoil are a priority to be re-opened to assess the stratigraphic interpretation of the site. Eilean Davin, Crinan, has been proposed as a trading site and has produced an Irish type of cable bead. James's work at Glenan needs to be extended to other sites to search for early buildings beneath later settlements. Some the putative early chapels on Islay should also be excavated. Any new

cemetery sites of the period should have extensive radiocarbon and isotope studies. An ambitious plan for crannogs might be to core a large number to establish broad chronologies, which could be linked to pollen work in the lochs.
The search for comparable sites in larger scale surveys, followed up in selected cases by small scale excavation would enable new fieldwork to benefit from the pre-existing material culture data. It is clear that there is much reuse and continuity of function in the sites spanning the early medieval period represented in this review, in order to progress it is necessary to develop fieldwork strategies which can maximise this often remote landscape: can it really be so very different from elsewhere in Scotland? If it is, then how and why?

Palaeoenvironmental Priorities (see also Section 4.8)

1. Careful reconstruction of later Holocene relative sea level fall is needed at Dunadd to fully understand the significance of the coastal setting of this fort.
2. The pollen analyses of Miller and Ramsay (in Housley et al 2004) in the early historic period near Dunadd to be tested at a network of sites.
3. An environmental history of monastic settings.

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