

# Early Medieval Argyll: a research framework

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## **A. Previous work**

*Introduction.* 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 Iona and Dunadd, but apart from these key sites, and the carved stone monuments, the archaeology of the area is rather poorly known compared to other areas of Scotland. Apart from the introductory sections of the RCAHMS *Inventories*, 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 Seakings* (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.

Traditionally, early medieval Argyll has been seen as being settled from north-east Antrim by Gaelic peoples, supplanting an original Brittonic speaking people. This view has been challenged by Campbell (2001), who has shown there no archaeological, historical or linguistic evidence for this migration. This view has been generally accepted by many archaeologists, but has in turn been challenged (McSparron & Williams 2012). Whichever view is accepted, there is little doubt that Argyll was a Gaelic-speaking area throughout the early medieval period. The location of the Norse hybrid *Gall-Gaedhil* (Gaelic-speaking foreigners) of western Scotland has been debated, with all areas from the Hebrides to Ayrshire and Galloway being proposed (Clancy 2008).

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 or Early Christian, or Alcock's (1981) Early Historic, though it is recognised that it also falls within the Late Iron Age of western Scotland.

*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 and at St Blane's, Bute, 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, have understandably attracted attention since the late 18th-century uncovering of graves at Ballinaby, 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, 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.

*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, 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 Llyud in 1699. However, detailed descriptions of many monuments were not published until the mid-19th century (Graham 1850, Stuart 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, Ellary (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 2013). 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 & Batey 1998, 250) reinforce recent historical and archaeological work by Guard which indicates that Iona was thriving in the Norse period, rather than being destroyed by raiding.

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), 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.

*Crannogs.* The first crannog to be excavated in Argyll was the marine crannog of An Dòirlinn, Eriska (Munro 1885), though no artefacts were recovered and no other dating was possible at this early stage. This site is unusual as it lies outside the two known concentrations of marine crannogs in the upper Clyde estuary and the Beaully 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 & Campbell 2005). Re-assessment of the material led to the realisation 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 to Dunadd. 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 crannog structures (see discussion in Crone & Campbell 2000, 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. 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 (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 & Henderson 2005). These results, along with the Loch Glashan 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.

*Duns, brochs and hillforts* are the classic settlement form of the area, and there have been many excavations in the post-war period (see iron age section). Several of these opportunistically produced early medieval evidence of both occupation and/or construction. These include Balloch Hill, Dun Chonallich, Eilean Rìgh 1, Ardifuir, Kildalloig Dun, Kildonan, Dun an Fheurain, Dun Fhinn, Ugadale, and Leccamore (summary in Crone & 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 (Lane & Campbell 2000) and Dunollie (Alcock & 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 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, 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 iron age (see iron age section). 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, Tiree (Mackie 1974), and the unpublished Tirefour, Lismore excavated by Simon Stoddart. Recent 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 (Batey 2002, 185). Tirefour has external settlement which has produced an outstanding 8th-century pin, and a stone building of the 12th century of Norse type. As with the forts and duns, both these sites indicate the continuing significance of these iron age sites into the medieval period.

*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, Carsaig; Eilean Mór (Fisher 2001); and St Columba's cave, Ellary which was excavated by Marion Campbell in the

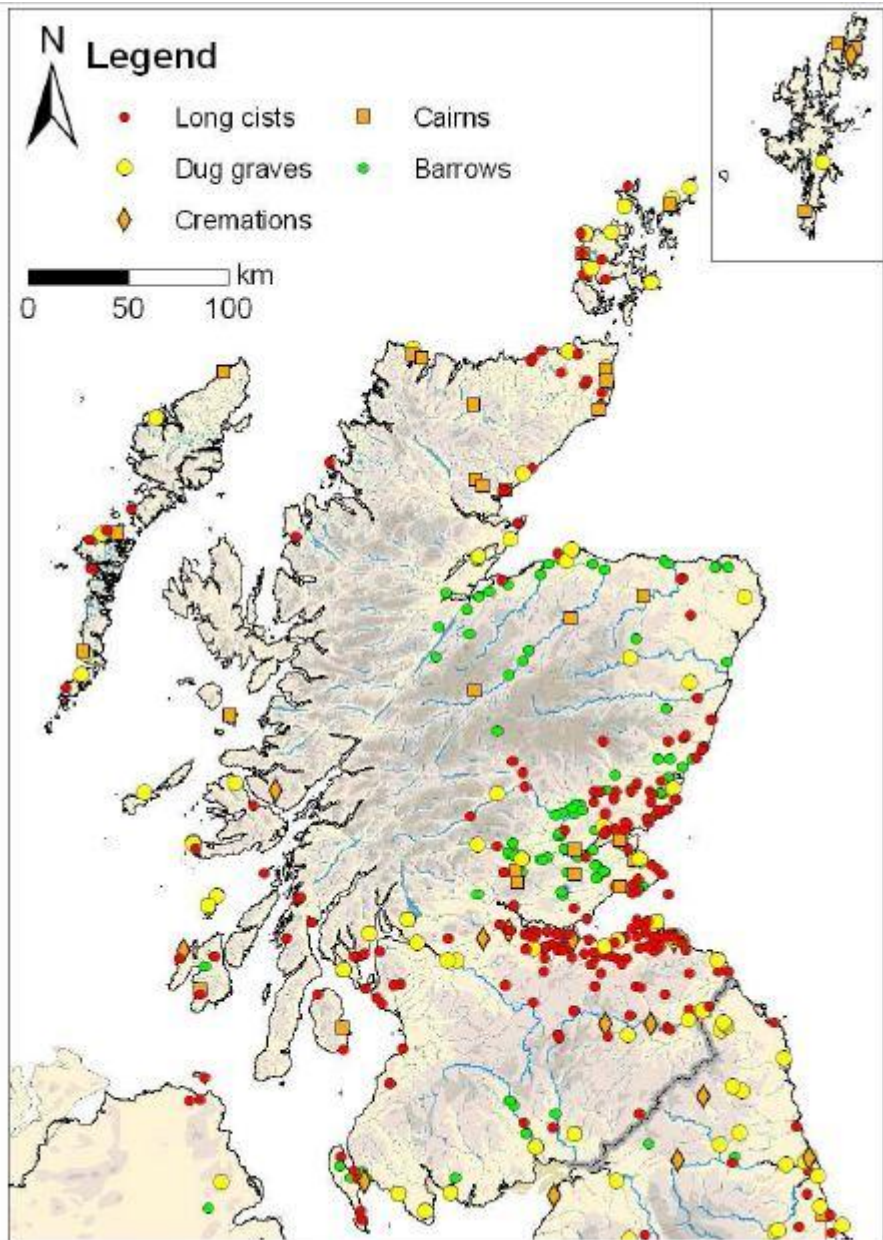
1960s and 1970s but published much later using her archives (Tollan-Smith 2001, 25-72). Both St Columba's cave and Boulder Cave, Ellary (ibid, 73-148) produced a range of finds which can be ascribed broadly to the first millennium AD. These include a hand-pin, bone combs, a folding balance, an oil-shale 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, with its cross and runic inscriptions, was initially examined by Balfour (1909). The use of caves in contemporary Iceland (Arhanson 2015) and Ireland (Connolly et al 2005) illustrate that this is a widespread phenomenon in the Atlantic region.

*Ecclesiastic sites.* The extensive evidence for ecclesiastical sites (monasteries, hermitages, chapels and sculptured stones) has been summarised by Fisher (1998). 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 has demonstrated that the enclosures at Iona are complex and multi-phase. Apart from Iona, the monastic sites of Inchmarnock (Lowe 2008), St Blane's (Anderson 1900; Laing et al 1998; Duffy 2010; Geddes & Hale 2010) and Crarae (Kirby & Alexander 2009) have been excavated, while Ardnadam (Rennie 1984) and Baliscate, 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 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 chapel sites on Islay and elsewhere, which have western doorways, are similar to Irish forms which are early medieval. These would repay excavation.

Recent reassessment of the material from Charles Thomas's excavations on Iona 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.

*Burials.* Despite the importance of ecclesiastical sites, and later Norse burials, there is very little information available on burial in the area (Fig 1). Iron age burials are almost unknown, and the acid soils mean that bone preservation is poor. 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, 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 and St Ninian's Point, Bute, Baliscate, Mull, and Ardnadam, 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, 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.



*Fig 1. All burial evidence in Scotland (Maldonado 2012, Fig 3.2)*

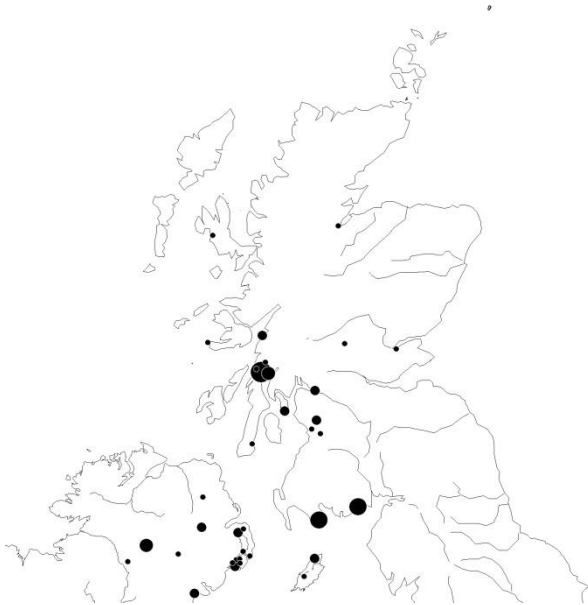
Norse period burials are better known, though not many are recorded within the area, and many were poorly excavated, hampering interpretation. The Scottish Viking Graves Project and other work on the material is in progress, but so far unpublished, though summarised recently (Graham-Campbell and Batey 1998). The pagan burials include boat burials, such as the major find at Kiloran Bay on Colonsay (Anderson 1907), and another possibly burnt at King Cross Point on Arran (Balfour 1909). Multiple graves are known, as perhaps

demonstrated at Carn a Bharraich on Oronsay (McNeill 1891; Anderson 1907), although particularly problematic to interpret as this was an antiquarian find. Animal burials, as at Machrins on Colonsay where a small lap dog was included in the grave goods (Ritchie 1981) and also at Kiloran Bay 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 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 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).

*Material culture.* In general, Argyll dun sites tend to produce few artefacts (Crone & Campbell 2005, 121, Table 4), and the area was almost aceramic for most of the first two millennia. The outstanding exception is the royal sites of Dunadd (Lane & 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 (Fig 2). 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 & Lane 1994). 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. The imported pottery and glass, from Aquitaine, is also found on surrounding sites such as Ardifuir dun, Ederline Boathouse crannog, and Loch Glashan crannog (Campbell 2007), probably reflecting client/lord relationships with Dunadd. Further examples are known from Dunollie, Little Dunagoil, Bute, and Kildalloig dun, Kintyre, while Iona has continental pottery as well as the most northerly example of African Red Slipware from 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 gold glass tessera, orpiment and madder colourants from Dunadd. Other sites with considerable quantities of material include the royal site of Dunollie (Alcock & Alcock 1987), and the crannog at Loch Glashan (Crone & Campbell 2004) 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, ladels 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). The survival of an early medieval wooden crozier on Lismore, still in the possession of the hereditary keeper, is unique in Scotland, though known in Ireland. Another reliquary, from Kilmichael Glassary, is of 12th-century date but encloses an early iron handbell (Caldwell et al 2012).



*Fig 2 Current E ware distribution in Scotland*

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 & 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. Although Scotland did not produce any coins throughout the first millennium, both hoards and stray finds are found, and new finds Treasure Trove are regularly reported in PSAS (Bateson 1989; Bateson & Holmes 1997, 2003, 2006, 2013), but 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, Islay, unique in Scotland.

An important class of objects are motif pieces and graffiti-inscribed slates. From Dunadd there are sketches for brooches, and a large slate showing attempts to construct complex knotwork, and animal art (Lane & 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 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, probably to children. A smaller collection comes from old excavations at nearby St Blane's. Inscribed monuments are rare in Argyll, however, with a handful from Iona, and single examples from a few other sites (Campbell 2010). The earliest of these, the Echoid stone,



may refer to one of the early kings of Dal Riata (Forsyth pers comm). The others include ogham inscriptions from Gigha, Bruach an Druimein, Inchmarnock and Lochgilphead, and runic inscriptions from Iona and Dunollie.

*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 (Lane & Campbell 2000, illus 2.38), but the date of other stone-built structures on the site are unknown. The only possible buildings of the period are the longhouses 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. Traces of stone and timber buildings within the monasteries of Iona, Inchmarnock and St Blane's have also been found, including an unusual very large circular post-built structure on Iona, but we really have very little idea of what secular buildings looked like.

*Environment.* 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 more recent work has been carried out in the Oban area (Macklin et al 2000), around Dunadd (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 & Sutherland 1977). Although the changes at this period are relatively minor, they have been claimed to have had significant impact, for example in Islay with the Rhinns possibly being a separate island (Dawson et al 1998).

*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 Glasgow Museums. 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 (Regan 2012, 2013), and on Bute, where the Bute Heritage Project has carried out a number of initiatives, and produced publications (Duffy 2010).

*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 (Abernethy 2009). 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. One attempt to investigate field systems surrounding duns was never published (Nieke 1990, 139).

*Interaction with prehistoric monuments.* Much recent work in Ireland, England and Scotland 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 were located at least partly with reference to the rich monumental landscape of Kilmartin Glen. In Argyll, a Norse period hoard was inserted in one of the Kilmartin cairns, and recent excavations at Torbhlaren rock art site 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 Killewin chapel and monastic enclosure next to Crarae chambered tomb is possibly another example of deliberate appropriation or sanctifying of a pagan monument (Kirby & Alexander 2009, 96).

## **B. The main themes for the periods in question**

Apart from the long-standing major problem of chronology, exacerbated by 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.

## **C. Gaps in the evidence**

There are numerous major gaps in the evidence for the period. Lower status, undefended sites are 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), and isotope analyses have not been undertaken.

#### **D. Key research areas**

- The discovery of undefended and lower status sites, of all periods.
- The role of Iona in the creation of sacred Christian landscapes.
- The chronology of crannogs.
- How unique is Dunadd?
- Early Christian Monuments – Landscape, monumentality and materiality.
- Where is the evidence for the Norse on the mainland? And why is it so difficult to find? A combination of specialisms provides a much fuller view of landscape presence in the Norse period. For example, with 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. The physical identification of this population is long overdue.

#### **E. How to move forward in the future.**

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. Iona**

Attempts have 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, but further survey and selected excavation of 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. Survey**

There is scope for further survey work by community groups, particularly ongoing monitoring of eroding coastlines, searching for tidal mills and fish traps in the inter-tidal zone, and searching for horizontal mills. Aerial reconnaissance 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).

### 3. Re-assessment of older material

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. 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.

### 4. 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 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** and **Dunaverty** would repay small-scale excavation to compare with Dunadd 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** could usefully be re-opened to assess the stratigraphic interpretation of the site. **Eilean Davin**, Crinan, has been proposed as a trading site. 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?

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