Dún Nechtain, Fortriu and the Geography of the Picts

ABSTRACT

In the nineteenth century the Pictish kingdom of Fortriu and the site of the Battle of Nechtansmere were located by scholars in Menteith and Strathearn and at Dunnichen in Forfarshire respectively. These identifications have largely gone unchallenged. The purpose of this article is to review the evidence for these locations and to suggest that there is in fact unambiguous evidence that Fortriu lay north of the Mounth on the shores of the Moray Firth and that a case can be made that Nechtansmere was fought in Badenoch. Fortriu has long been recognised as the core territory of Pictavia and its re-location in the North has profound implications for our understanding of the course of early Scottish History.

In this paper I shall be suggesting two revisions to the way we think about the geography of northern Britain in the early middle ages. The first concerns the location of the Battle of Dún Nechtain, fought between Ecgfrith of Northumbria and the Picts in 685. The second concerns the location of the Pictish province or kingdom of Fortriu. Neither suggestion is entirely dependent upon the other so the reader may wish to accept one without the other. They are presented together because they each point to the same conclusion: that the North was more significant in Pictish history than has previously been supposed.¹

Dún Nechtain, 685

In the year of our Lord 684 Ecgfrith, king of the Northumbrians, sent an army to Ireland under his dux Berht, who wretchedly devastated a harmless race that had always been most friendly to the English, and his hostile bands spared neither churches nor monasteries. The islanders resisted force with force so far as they were able, imploring the

¹ Early versions of this paper were presented to the Medieval Scottish Studies Seminar at the University of Glasgow, the Scottish History Seminar at the University of Edinburgh, Groam House Museum at Rosemarkie, the Irish Medievalists’ Conference at Kilkenny, Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru in Aberystwyth, and the First Millennia Studies Group in Edinburgh. A draft of the text was discussed at a seminar held at the Strathmartine Centre in St Andrews organised by Dr Barbara Crawford. I am very grateful to the participants at all these events for their support and suggestions. I am particularly grateful to Professor David Dumville for reading and commenting on the text in depth.
merciful aid of God and invoking His vengeance with unceasing imprecations. And although those who curse cannot inherit the kingdom of God, yet one may believe that those who were justly cursed for their wickedness quickly suffered the penalty of their guilt at the avenging hand of God. Indeed the very next year the king rashly took an army to ravage the land of the Picts, against the urgent advice of his friends and particularly of Cuthbert, of blessed memory, who had recently been made a bishop. The enemy feigned flight and lured the king into some narrow passes in the midst of inaccessible mountains; there he was killed with the greater part of the forces he had taken with him, in the fortieth year of his age, the fifteenth year of his reign on the twentieth of May. As I have said, his friends urged him not to attack the Irish who had done him no harm; and the punishment for his sin was that he would not now listen to those who sought to save him from his own destruction.²

So the Bernician Bede, writing nearly fifty years after the events described, recounted the decisive turning point in what must have seemed the inexorable northward advance of the Northumbrian English. From this time on the Northumbrians seem to have abandoned any serious ambitions to control territory north of the Forth. Bede, although giving the longest and most detailed account of the battle, did not name the site of this great defeat. It has long been noted, however, that the Annals of Ulster [AU], probably at this point drawing upon a now lost chronicle kept at the monastery of Iona, record the same event under the year 686 (correctly 685, since AU is generally a year out at this point):³

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3 For the Iona Chronicle lying behind the Annals of Ulster [AU], and other Irish chronicles, at this point see John Bannerman, ‘Notes on the Scottish entries in the early Irish annals’, Scottish Gaelic Studies 11 (1968) 149-170, reprinted in J. Bannerman, Studies in the History of Dalriada (Edinburgh, 1974), 9-26. I am also grateful to Nicholas Evans for discussing his ongoing work in this area with me.
The battle of Dún Nechtain on the 20th of May, a Saturday, that is, in which Ecgfrith son of Oswiu, king of the English, having completed the fifteenth year of his reign, was slain with a great body of his soldiers.4

A far later text, *Libellus de Exordio atque Procursu istius hoc est Dunhelmensis Ecclesie*, written in Durham in the early twelfth century, provides an alternative but related name for the site of the battle: *Nechtanesmere (quod est stagnum Nechtani)*, ‘Nechtan’s Mere’.5 This English name for the battle, ‘Nechtanesmere’, became, in the modern historiography, the most commonly used form, though more recently, partly driven by nationalist sentiment, the Scottish name ‘Dunnichen’ has come to the fore.6 This usage follows the identification made by George Chalmers in the early nineteenth century of the *Annals of Ulster’s Dún Nechtain* with the hill and village name of Dunnichen in contemporary Forfarshire, now Angus.7 Chalmers based his identification on early forms of the name preserved in the cartulary of Arbroath abbey: Dunnichen comprised part of the abbey’s original endowment.8 The majority of these forms are either ‘Dunectin’ or ‘Dun[n]echtyn’. It is unlikely that they could derive from anything but *Dún Nechtain*. This identification has been accepted, with varying degrees of caution, by all scholars working in the field.9

Locating the battle in this part of Angus, however, has always created some problems for interpreting Bede’s description of the site as *in angustias inaccessorum montium*—‘in tight places amid inaccessible mountains’.10 Some commentators have attempted to ameliorate this problem by modifying Chalmers’ identification of the battle site as the village of Dunnichen on the south side of Dunnichen Hill, with the partially drained Dunnichen Moss representing the remnant of the ‘mere’, suggesting, in its stead, sites slightly farther afield. Already in the nineteenth century Thomas Arnold, commenting on Symeon of Durham’s allusion...
to Nechtanesmere, had suggested that the battle had been fought in Forfar parish to the north of Dunnichen Hill and that the ‘mere’ was in fact Rescobie Loch or one of its near neighbours. In 1996 Leslie Alcock opted for Restenneth Loch, a little farther west. More recently still James Fraser has pointed out that in the seventh century this string of lochs along the upper reaches of the Lunan was almost certainly a single, undivided, stretch of open water. Fraser floated the idea that Restenneth priory itself may mark the site of an earlier ecclesiastical establishment built to commemorate the battle. The tight place would then be the valley which contained this lake; yet from Restenneth priory, standing, in all likelihood, on the old shore-line, to the highest point of the surrounding hills, Turin Hill, the elevation is only something in the region of 190 metres, and on the south side of this valley, at least, the descent is very gentle and was probably cultivated almost to the hill-tops in antiquity. It is hard to imagine that Bede’s Bernician informants, whose homes lay among the Cheviots, Lammermuirs and North Pennines, would have regarded this landscape as one of inaccessible mountains. Alcock betrayed his own unease at the traditional identification when he explained that, ‘[a]s for Bede’s “defiles of inaccessible mountains”, these are the recollections of a shattered army, and need to be toned down very considerably to fit the topography between Strathmore and Dunnichen Hill’. Fraser pointed out that in the nineteenth century Restenneth Loch lay within the Dunnichen estate but also admitted that it lay in Forfar parish rather than Dunnichen, and we may confidently suppose that the parish boundary preserves an earlier boundary than the modern estate. Indeed Restenneth itself was the original parish centre; so it is unlikely that this area has recently changed hands between Forfar and Dunnichen.

While it is undeniable that the place-name Dunnichen does indeed derive from an earlier Dùn Nechtain, it is far from clear that it was the Dùn Nechtain of the Irish chronicles. Another site of this name survives which fits Bede’s description far better than Dunnichen. This place is Dunachton in Badenoch (Inverness-shire), lying on the western shore of Loch Insh. The loch-shore stands at the same altitude as the highest peaks around Dunnichen.

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13 Fraser, Dunnichen, 685, 62.
14 Ibid., 101.
15 The SMR database CANMORE notes field-rigs at an altitude of 200 metres on Dunnichen Hill.
16 Leslie Alcock, Kings and Warriors, Craftsmen and Priests in Northern Britain AD 550-850 (Edinburgh, 2003), at 136, the emphasis in the quotation is mine.
17 Fraser, Dunnichen, 685, 64.
18 Ian B. Cowan, The Parishes of Medieval Scotland, Scottish Record Society (Edinburgh, 1967), 68 and 171. I am grateful to Simon Taylor for drawing this to my attention.
19 See G.W.S. Barrow, The Kingdom of the Scots, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 2003), 45 for a map of the shire of Alvie, containing the davoch of Dunachtton, which indicates the heights of
The earliest surviving mention of this site, as the ‘chapel of Nechtan’, appears in the records of a dispute between Alexander Stewart, earl of Buchan and lord of Badenoch, and Alexander Bur, bishop of Moray, in the early 1380s. Various factors suggest that the site may have been of significance in Pictish times. Least ambiguous is the presence of an inscribed stone from the site. Allen and Anderson described it as follows:

The symbol stone was found in 1870 over a door in the old steading at Dunachton, the stones of which were used in building Dunachton Lodge, and was preserved and removed to its present position by Mr C. Fraser Mackintosh of Lochardill, then commissioner for the Mackintosh of Mackintosh, proprietor of Dunachton. It has been erected on a sandstone base on the terrace at the south corner of the garden, about 100 yards from the front door of the Lodge. Unfortunately, a portion of the right upper corner of the stone, including part of the upper lip of the figure, has been broken away. It is a slab of dioritic stone, 4 feet 3½ inches high by 16 inches wide by 4½ inches thick, sculptured with incised lines on one face... Close to the top of the stone [it has] the beast’s head symbol, ornamented on the neck with a vertical line terminating in a small round cup, and at the lower left hand corner with a curved line with a similar termination.

This stone is of the category of undressed incised monuments which Allen and Anderson categorised as Class I monuments and which are widely held to belong to the sixth to eighth centuries. The most recent analysis of Pictish art is less comfortable than earlier works with the chronological aspects of Allen and Anderson’s three-class schema; nonetheless, it confirms that the undressed incised monuments, as a type, preceded the dressed cross-slabs (Allen and Anderson’s ‘Class II’), which are hardly likely to have appeared before the eighth century, and that their production need not have ceased when the new category of monument was introduced.

There was certainly a chapel at Dunachton by the time of the dispute between the Wolf of Badenoch and Bishop Bur, and it appears to have

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19 (Continued) surrounding mountains and the location of Loch Insh. Alasdair Ross tells me (pers. comm.) that Dunachton actually comprised three dabhach lands rather than the one indicated by Professor Barrow.

20 Cosmo Innes (ed.), Registrum Episcopatus Moraviensis: e pluribus codicibus consarcinatum circa A.D. MCCCC, cum continuatione diplomatum recentiorum usque ad AD MDCCXIII, Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh, 1857), no. 159.

21 J. Romilly Allen and Joseph Anderson, The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1903; reprinted Balgavies, 1993), ii. 100. A recent visit to the site by Dr Simon Taylor and me has confirmed that the monument is still situated as described and indeed matches this description. We are grateful to Hamish Rae of the Dunachton Estate for allowing us access and providing valuable assistance and information during the visit. It may be of note that the Dunachton monument is the highest Pictish stone on Spey and is possibly one of the highest in the whole of Scotland.

22 George Henderson and Isabel Henderson, The Art of the Picts: Sculpture and Metalwork in Early Medieval Scotland (London, 2004), 10-12. It should be noted that the ‘Aberlemno Battle Stone’, often linked with arguments locating the battle of Don Nechtain at Dunnichen (some four miles distant), is a relief cross-slab which is almost certainly of eighth-century date (ibid., 37-40).
been dedicated, like the neighbouring parish kirk at Alvie, to St Drostan. It is not clear, however, whether in the middle ages Dunachton was a part of Alvie parish, to the north, or Kingussie parish (St Columba), to the south.\(^{23}\) Across the Spey from both Alvie and Kingussie parishes lay the parish of Insh, dedicated to St Adomnán and apparently an ecclesiastical lordship in the thirteenth century.\(^{24}\) The Spey opens into a moderately sizable loch as it passes Dunachton: Loch Insh. ‘This name of Loch Insh’, as W. F. Skene wrote, ‘or “the lake of the island,”’ is obviously a secondary name’, but there are no clues as to its earlier designation.\(^{25}\)

It is clear then that this ‘Dún Nechtain’ is indeed in a narrow place surrounded by inaccessible mountains and adjacent to a substantial loch, as our sources indicate was the case with the site of Egfrith’s battle.\(^{26}\) It is also at a strategically very important position at a point where as many as five passes through the mountains converge. Professor Barrow has noted that Ruthven castle, in Kingussie parish, some four miles south-west of Dunachton, lay at the point where the three main passes out of Atholl, emerging from Glen Feshie, Glen Tromie and Glen Truim, converge.\(^{27}\) To these can be added the two great water-routes up into Badenoch from the southwest, along Loch Laggan and Loch Ericht. A case could thus be made that this ‘Dún Nechtain’ is more likely, in strategic terms, to be the site of the battle than Dunnichen in Angus. Indeed, if we take Bede’s claim that all Egfrith’s friends thought him foolish to attempt such an expedition, then an adventure across the spine of Britain would seem to fit the bill better than a raid into the eastern lowlands, an area which the Northumbrians had dominated for a generation by this time.

At this point one needs to consider whether there are any factors beyond the particulars of the two sites which might militate against either of them being the location of the battle in 685. One potential problem immediately rears its head. According to the *Annals of Tigernach*


\(^{24}\) Barrow, ‘Badenoch and Strathspey: 2’, 8-9. Since Adomnán was abbot of Iona at the time of the battle it is tempting to imitate James Fraser’s suggestion that Restenneth was in some sense a ‘Battle Abbey’ and to speculate that Insh parish originated as a gift to Iona in thanks for spiritual support. The parish of Insh also had a fair called ‘Feil Columcelle’: William Reid, *Grantown and the Adjacent Country: A Guide to Strathspey* (Grantown, 1883), 46. I am indebted to Alasdair Ross for this reference.

\(^{25}\) W.F. Skene, ‘Appendix I: Identification of Localities’, 303-28, at 328, in W. Reeves (ed.), *Life of Saint Columba*, Historians of Scotland vol.vi (Edinburgh, 1874). Skene here speculated that this place was the site of the battle of Monid Carno (AU 729.2) and that Dunachton is named from Nechtan son of Derile. It is curious that Skene should have discussed Pictish battles in connection with this place and never once alluded to the possibility that the battle of 685 was fought here, even if only to dismiss it.

\(^{26}\) In addition to Symeon’s description of the battle as Nechtanesmerwe should note that *Historia Brittonum* alludes to the battle as Gueith Lin Garan, ‘the Strife of Crane Lake’, Harleian recension § 57, printed in E. Faral (ed.), *La Legende Arthurienne: études et documents, Première Partie: Les Plus Anciens Textes*, 3 vols (Paris, 1929), iii, 39.

[AT] the Pictish commander at the battle of Dún Nechtain was Bruidhe mac Bili regis Fortrenn — Bredei son of Beli, king of Fortriu.28 Since the rest of this account of the battle is drawn from the same source as that in AU, we cannot be sure if this further piece of information is an addition to the text of AT or an omission from AU.29 The role of Bredei, however, receives some confirmation from verses on the battle attributed to Riagal of Bangor,30 and also from Historia Brittonum, which predates the source from which AT and AU diverge, and which appears to be fully independent at this point: it states, after naming Ecgfrith in a Bernician pedigree, Echgrifid ipse est qui fecit bellum contra fratrem suum, qui erat rex Pictorum, nomine Birdei….31 Bredei son of Beli also appears in the Pictish king-lists, where he is accorded a reign of twenty-one years. His death is noted in AU and AT under the year 693.32 His obituary identifies him as king of Fortriu.

The location of Fortriu

The problem with this identification of Bredei as king of Fortriu is that modern historians have, for the most part, presumed this kingdom to lie in the southern part of the country. E.W. Robertson, writing in 1862, equated the name Fortriu with that of the medieval deanery of Fothrif, broadly speaking west Fife, and derived both from a hypothetical *Forthreim which he analysed as ‘Forth Realm’.33 On the map in his frontispiece Fortreim is shown running along the left bank of the Forth and comprising Clackmannanshire and Menteith in addition to west Fife. This equation is etymologically unsound. Fothrif probably derives from Gaelic foithir followed by Fíb (‘Fife’) and seems to mean something like ‘district appended to Fife’.34 Fortriu on the other hand seems to descend from the population-group name Verturiones recorded by Ammianus Marcellinus in the late fourth century.35 Some five years after Robertson published his book, W. F. Skene stated, in the preface to his Chronicles of

29 For problems of this sort in the relationship between these two chronicles see K. Grabowski and D. Dumville, Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales (Woodbridge, 1984), at 109-52.
30 These brief stanzas are preserved in an Irish chronicle: J. Radner (ed.), Fragmentary Annals of Ireland (Dublin, 1978), 54.
31 ‘It is this Ecgfrith who fought a battle against his parallel cousin, who was king of the Picts, by name Bredei...’ Text from Faral, Legende, iii. 39; my translation. For the relationship between Ecgfrith and Bredei see Alex Woolf, ‘Pictish matriliny reconsidered’, Innes Review 49 (1998) 147-67, at 161-2.
32 AU 693.1, AT [692]. For the king lists see M. O. Anderson, Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland, 2nd edn (Edinburgh, 1980), 248, 262, 272, 280.
33 E. W. Robertson, Scotland under her Early Kings, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1862), i. 33.
35 W. J. Watson, The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland (Edinburgh, 1926) [CPNS], 68-9.
the Picts and Scots, ‘Fortren can be identified with the western parts of the county of Perth, including the vale of Strathearn.’ Skene made it clear here, and in his later work, that he associated Fortriu (or ‘Fortren’ as he called it) with the first province described in the twelfth-century tract known as *De Situ Albanie*. Skene made it clear here, and in his later work, that he associated Fortriu (or ‘Fortren’ as he called it) with the first province described in the twelfth-century tract known as *De Situ Albanie*.

*De Situ Albanie* [DSA], ‘Of the Organisation of Scotland’, is a late twelfth- or very early thirteenth-century tract surviving only in the fourteenth-century Poppleton manuscript. *De Situ Albanie* states that *Albania* was:

… divided in antiquity into seven parts by seven brothers, of which the principal part is Angus with the Mearns, so named from Angus the first-born of the brothers. The second part, however, is Atholl with Gowrie. The third part, then, is Strathearn with Menteith. The fourth part of the parts is Fife with Forthri. The fifth part, in truth, is Mar with Buchan. The sixth, however, is Moray and Ross. The seventh part then is Caithness on this side of the mountain and beyond the mountain, because the mountain the Mound divides Caithness through the middle.

Immediately following this section of the text is a more detailed description of the seven provinces which the author ascribed to the authority of Andrew, bishop of Caithness from ca 1147 to his death in 1184. Interestingly, the order of the provinces is not identical in the two lists (labelled *DSa* and *DSb* by Anderson), although it might be inferred from the text that the author was not aware of this. It reads as follows:

The first realm was, just as a true relator related to me, Andrew that is, and a venerable man, bishop of Caithness, a Scot by nation and a monk of Dunfermline, from the best water which is called in Gaelic *Froch* [Forth?],

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36 W. F. Skene (ed.), *Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots and other Early Memorials of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1867), ciii.
37 W. F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland: A History of Ancient Alban*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1876-80), i. 207, 340, 342, and iii. 43.
38 The Scottish pieces from the Poppleton manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale ms lat. 4126, fo. 26v-32r) are usefully printed in Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*, 240-60, and described at 235-40. Anderson identified seven distinct tracts which each run on from the other and presumably represent a collection made prior to incorporation in the present manuscript. The genealogical material and regnal lists which it contains strongly suggest that the compilation was made in the reign of King William (1165-1214). *De Situ Albanie* is the first piece in this collection. *DSA* has been usefully translated in David Howlett, ‘The structure of *De Situ Albanie*’, in Simon Taylor (ed.), *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500-1297: essays in honour of Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson on the occasion of her ninetieth birthday* (Dublin, 2000), 124-45, at 136-9. For a discussion of the manuscript context see also J. C. Crick, *The Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, vol. iii, *Summary Catalogue of the Manuscripts* (Woodbridge, 1989), 256-61.
in Welsh Werid, in Romance, indeed, Scottewatre (that is, ‘water of the Scots’, which divides the realms of the Scots and the English, and runs alongside the town of Stirling), as far as that other noble river that is called the Tay. The second realm is to the river Isla, just as the sea goes as far as the mountain in the northern territory of Stirling, which is called Athran. The third realm from the Isla as far as the Dee. The fourth realm from the Dee as far as the great and wonderful river which is called the Spey, the greatest and best of the whole of Scotland. The fifth realm from the Spey as far as the mountain of Druimm nAlban. The sixth realm was Moray and Ross. The seventh was Argyll.40

This description is very confused and seems to represent a summary of Bishop Andrew’s description, whether oral or written, by someone who himself did not have a clear idea of Scottish geography. Some of the provinces are clearly identical to those described in the first list, while others are hard to make sense of even with reference to a map.41 Summarised in the more straightforward language of DSa the provinces in DSb might be identified as follows:

1. Fife with Fothriff, but possibly also including Strathearn with Menteith.42 (DSa 4 + 3)
2. ? though possibly Strathearn with Menteith and Atholl with Gowrie (DSa 3 + 2)
3. Angus with the Mearns (DSa 1)
4. Mar with Buchan (DSa 5)
5. Moray and Ross? (DSa 6?)
6. Moray and Ross (DSa 6)
7. Argyll (not covered in DSa)43

Skene explained the discrepancies in the two lists by suggesting that DSa belonged to the pre-viking period, when Argyll was independent of

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40 Primum regnum fuit sic ut mihi verus relator retulit Andreas uidelicet et uir uenerabilis Cathahemensis episcopus natione Scottus et Dunfermienius monachus ab illa aqua optima que Scottice uocata est Froch Britannice Werid Romane uero Scottewatre id est aqua Scottorum qui regna Scottorum et Anglorum diuidit et currit inuixta oppidum de Struielin usque ad flumen alius nobile quod uocatum est Tae. Secundum regnum ad Hilef sicut ucerte usque ad montem aquilonali plagua de Struielin qui uocatur Athran. Tertium regnum ad Hilef usque ad De. Quartum regnum ex De usque ad magnum et mirabile flumen quod uocatur Spe maior et meliorum totius Scotie. Quintum regnum de Spe usque ad montem Drumalban. Sextium regnum erat Arragathel. Translation from Howlett, ‘The structure’, 138-9, with minor modifications.

41 The reference to the sea coming as far as Athran, for example, looks like a simple indication of the tidal reach of the Forth which has somehow slipped into the discussion of the second realm from the description of the Forth in the previous section, and it is hard to see what the other boundary of the second realm is. Possibly something has dropped out of the text.

42 Although the mention of mons Athran (Abbey Craig?) may, in a hypothetical prototype, have designated the westerly extent of Fothriff.

43 For a full discussion of these problems and others related to DSa see Dauvit Broun, ‘The seven kingdoms in De situ Albanie: a record of Pictish political geography or imaginary map of Alba?’, in Edward J. Cowan and R. Andrew McDonald (eds), Alba: Celtic Scotland in the Middle Ages (East Linton, 2000), 24-42.
Pictish rule and Caithness subject to it, while DSb belonged to a later era when Argyll (Dál Riata) and Pictavia were united and Caithness had been lost to Scandinavian conquest.  

A sevenfold division of Pictavia was also implied in a number of Irish tracts and the longer versions of the Pictish regnal list (including that found in the Scottish collection in the Poppleton manuscript). In these texts the eponymous ancestor of the Picts, Cruithne, is awarded seven sons from whom the provinces of 'Alba' took their names. In the regnal list the same seven sons are said to have ruled after their father in succession. The order in which the names of the sons are listed varies both between and within the texts, and so we probably cannot read geographical significance into it. W. J. Watson analysed the names and produced normalised Old Irish forms for them: Círēinn (or Círíg, Fólla, Fortriu, Fíb, Cé, Fidaid and Cat. Some of these names have transparent relationships with known medieval Scottish provinces, most unambiguously Fólla, Fíb and Cat, which would seem to correspond to Atholl, Fife, and Caithness and Sutherland. A presumption that these seven provincial names must match up with the seven provinces described in DSa has led to more or less happy marriages of names with provinces. Inference, guesswork and a process of elimination led to the emergence of the following consensus:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Círēinn:} & \quad \text{Angus with the Mearns;} \\
\text{Fólla:} & \quad \text{Atholl with Gowrie;} \\
\text{Fortriu:} & \quad \text{Strathearn with Menteith;} \\
\text{Fíb:} & \quad \text{Fife with Fothriff;} \\
\text{Cé:} & \quad \text{Mar with Buchan;} \\
\text{Fidaid:} & \quad \text{Moray with Ross;} \\
\text{Cat:} & \quad \text{Caithness [and Sutherland].}
\end{align*}
\]

As Isabel Henderson warned as long ago as 1967 and Dauvit Broun has demonstrated in more recent times, the basis for relating DSA and the sons of Cruithne is very slight, and the identification of the Pictish provinces is far from certain. Yet to a large extent the damage was done, and few of those with an interest in early Scotland have yet realised that the map of the Pictish provinces which appears in almost every textbook is a doubtful construct of recent origin.

For the present purposes our main interest is with the identification of Fortriu with Strathearn and Menteith. As we have seen, this identification originated with Skene as early as 1867, but it was not until he

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44 Skene, Chronicles of the Picts, lxxvi.  
45 Broun, 'Seven kingdoms', 50-1. Texts of two of the Irish tracts on Pictish origins were printed, with translations, in Skene, Chronicles of the Picts, 24-7 and 325-5.  
46 CPNS, 108.  
47 The greater part of the foregoing discussion of DSA draws heavily on Broun, 'Seven kingdoms'. Isabel Henderson's caveat appeared in her book The Picts (London, 1967), 36.  
48 E.g., Benjamin T. Hudson, Prophecy of Berchán: Irish and Scottish High-Kings of the Early Middle Ages (Westport Conn., 1996), at 83 n.73: 'the Earn was within Fortriu according to the tract De Situ Albani'. Fortriu is, of course, not named in DSA.
published the final volume of Celtic Scotland, in 1880, that he revealed his evidence. In a footnote he explained that ‘when the Pictish Chronicle tells us that the Norwegians were cut off in Sraithberne or Straherne, the Irish Annals narrate the same event as a slaughter by the men of Fortren’.

The first source to which Skene was alluding is The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba [CKA] in which the account of the reign of Causantín mac Aeda begins:

Causantín mac Aeda held the kingdom forty years. In his third year the Northmen plundered Dunkeld and all Albania. The very next year the Northmen were slain in Sraith Herenn.

The second is AU:

904.4 Ímar grandson of Ímar was killed by the men of Fortriu, and many were slain about him.

From this Skene, very reasonably, inferred that Ímar was the leader of the Northmen mentioned in CKA and that he was slain by the men of Fortriu in ‘Sraith Herenn’. So far this seems a fair assessment; but he clearly presumed that the fact that the victors were ‘men of Fortriu’ meant that the battlefield was in Fortriu and this is, presumably, not a given. In the words of my colleague Dr Simon MacLean, ‘It could have been an away match’. It is also not absolutely clear where ‘Sraith Herenn’ was. Philologically it is probably Srath Éireann but there are at least two places in Scotland with this name. In Perthshire, as Skene noted, there is Strathearn; but north of the Mounth Strathdearn, the valley of the Findhorn, the ‘White Earn’, bears this name: that this river was also known simply as the Earn is confirmed by the place-name ‘Invererne’ at the mouth of the river just north of Forres. The Findhorn is so called to distinguish it from the Deveron, the ‘Black Earn’, Dubh Éireann, farther east, in Banffshire. There is no recorded usage of the term ‘Strath’ in connection with the Deveron.

The use of the terms ‘black’ and ‘white’ as contradistinctive signifiers is known elsewhere in Gaelic onomastics. The battle in Srath Éireann may, then, have taken place either north or south of the Mounth and either in or outwith the territory of the men of Fortriu. Skene’s equation of Fortriu with Strathearn and Menteith seems far from secure.

49 Skene, Celtic Scotland, iii. 43 n.4.
51 AU 904.4: Imhar sa Imhair do marbad la firu Fortrenn, 7 ár már n-imhi.
54 To this might be added the observation that there are no Pictish symbol stones in Menteith and precious few in Strathearn.
At this point we should turn to other evidence for the location of Fortriu, beginning with the Irish chronicle-record. The following list comprises all the entries which I have been able to locate.

AU 664.3 Bellum Lutho Feirnn, i.e. in Fortriu.

AT (equivalent to AU 686): Cath Duin Nechtain uicesimo die mensis Maii, sabbato die factum est, in quo Ecgfrith mac Osa, rex Saxorum, quinto decimo anno regni sui consummato, magna cum caterva militum suorum interfecit est la Bruidhi mac Bili regis Fortrenn.

AU 693.1 Bruide m. Bile, rex Fortrend, moritur, 7 Alphin m. Nectin.

AU 725.7 Conghal m. Maele Anfaith, Brecc Fortrend, Oan princeps Ego, moriuntur.

AU 736.2 Bellum Cnuicc Coirpri i Calathros uc Etar Linddu inter Dal Riatai 7 Fortrend, 7 Talloggan m. Fergusso filium Ainsferaelach fugientem cum exercitu persuequit, in qua congressione multi nobles conciderunt.

AU 763.10 Bruide, rex Fortrenn, moritur.

AU 768.7 Bellum i Fortriu iter Aedh 7 Cinaeth.

AU 820.3 Custantin m. Fergus, rex Fortrennu, moritux.

AU 834.1 Oengus m. Fergus, rex Fortrennu, moritux.

AU 839.9 Bellum re genitib for firu Fortrenn in quo ceciderunt Eoganan m. Oengussa 7 Bran m. Oengussa 7 Ed m. Boanta 7 alii pene innumerabiles ceciderunt.

AU 865.6 Conmael equonomus Tamlaichta, 7 Tuathal m. Artgusso, prim-episcop Fortrenn 7 abbas Duin Caillenn, dormierunt.

AU 866.1 Amlaiph 7 Auisle do dul i Fortrenn co nGallaib Erenn 7 Alban cor inuriset Cruithentwaith n-uile 7 co tuscat a ngiallo.

AU 904.4 Imhar ua hImhair do marbad la firu Fortrenn, 7 ár már n-imbi.

55 Stokes, The Annals of Tigernach, i. 169, with Stokes’ emendations in angled brackets and deletions in rounded brackets.

56 AU 664.3 The Battle of Luith Feirnn, i.e. in Fortriu.

AT 685 The battle of Dun Nechtain on the twentieth day of May, a Sunday that is, in which Ecgfrith Oswing, king of the Saxons, having completed the fifteenth year of his reign, with a great band of his soldiers was slain by Bredei son of Beli, king of Fortriu.

AU 693.1 Bredei son of Beli, king of Fortriu, dies and Alpin son of Nechtan.

AU 725.7 Congal son of Mael Anfaid, Brecc of Fortriu, Oan princeps Ego, dies.

AU 736.2 The battle of Cnoc Coirpre in Calathros at Etar Linddu between Dál Riata and Fortriu, and Talorgan son of Urguist pursues the fleeing son of Anbcellach with an army, in which conflict many nobles were slain.

AU 763.10 Bredei, king of Fortriu, dies.

AU 768.7 A battle in Fortriu between Aed and Ciniod.

AU 820.3 Custantin son of Urgust, king of Fortriu, dies.

AU 834.1 Unust son of Urgust, king of Fortriu, dies.

AU 839.9 A battle won by the heathens over the men of Fortriu in which were slain Uuen son of Unust and Bran son of Boanta and others, almost innumerable, were slain.

AU 865.6 Conmael economist of Tallaght, and Tuathal son of Artgus, chief bishop of Fortriu and abbot of Dunkeld, slept.

AU 866.1 Amlaib and Auisle went into Fortriu with the Gaill of Ireland and Britain and plundered the whole Pictish people and took hostages.

AU 904.4 Imar grandson of Imar was slain by the men of Fortriu and a great slaughter around him.
Few of these entries give us any useful geographical information. If we knew where Luith Feirnn was, it would certainly provide an important clue; but we do not. Four of the entries are simply notices of the deaths of kings of Fortriu and a further two of ecclesiastics, presumably bishops since they have a territorial rather than a domestic appellation. The battle between Aed and Ciniod in 768 is equally unlocalised as are the conflicts of 839 and 866, although the latter appears to be the wasting of Pictania noted by CKA in the third year of Causantín mac Cinaeda.57

The entry for 736 holds out a little more hope although it is unclear whether inter here means that the battlefield lay between Dál Riata and Fortriu or merely that the battle was fought by forces from these two kingdoms. The obit of Tuathal mac Artgusso might imply that Dunkeld58 was in Fortriu, since he appears to have been abbot of one and chief bishop of the other, yet in the same year, at AU 865.2, we come across another pluralist, Cellach mac Ailella, who was abbot of both Kildare, in the south of Ireland, and Iona, on the north-west coast of Scotland, and two years later, at AU 867.2, we come across an abbot of Connor, Co. Antrim, and Lynally, Co. Offaly: 875 saw two bishops of Kildare pass away, each being the princeps of a different monastery, Cell Achaid [Killeigh?] and Ferns respectively.59 One could go on: non-contiguous pluralism was clearly in vogue in the later ninth century.60

The Irish chronicle-tradition provides us with no unambiguous pointers to the location of Fortriu. Irish literary sources make frequent use of the term but rarely in a way which allows one to pin it down to more than a name for all or part of the Pictish world. One rather troublesome text may give us a more substantial clue when taken together with the Scottish regnal lists belonging to the group which Marjorie Anderson labelled X. This family of king-lists gives the place of death of the kings from Cinaed mac Alpín onwards, and Dauvit Broun has demonstrated the strong likelihood that the prototype of this list, which he labels τ, was composed very shortly after the death of Alexander I (1124).61 The troublesome text is The Prophecy of Berchan, a pseudoprophetic work that is, principally, a metrical regnal list presenting first Irish and then Scottish kings.62 What makes the text particularly problematic is that almost none of the kings is named and their identity must be guessed at by sequence, reign-length and occasionally by a detail recognisable from other sources. The problems are particularly acute because the reign-lengths

57 Anderson, Kings and Kingship, 250.
58 In later medieval terms Dunkeld lay in Stormont, a smallish province sandwiched between Gowrie and Atholl with its political centre at Clunie.
59 AU 875.1.
62 The most recent edition and translation is B. T. Hudson, Prophecy of Berchán: Irish and Scottish High Kings of the Early Middle Ages (Westport, Conn., 1996). Hudson argues that the text is essentially a product of the eleventh century, but since all the manuscript witnesses are much later this must remain open to doubt.
frequently do not match up with the annalistic evidence or other surviving regnal lists and, for Scotland at least, there appear to be too many kings. The most recent editor, like others before him, has been forced to assume that the sequence is flawed in places. The last king mentioned is named explicitly as Domnall Bán who was ousted from the Scottish kingship in 1097, and it has been argued that the poem dates from his reign; but it is only recoverable from medieval fragments and early modern versions. All this makes Berchan very unpromising, but for our purposes we need only note one king of whose identity we can be fairly certain. Stanzas 164 to 168 tell of two kings who contest the kingship, perhaps sharing it at first. The kings are identified as the ‘white and the black’, fionn agus dubh, and are said to reign cumulatively for nine years, one being ousted by the other part way into the reign. The surviving king, ‘the white’, is then killed by the Britons. This description matches what we know of Scottish succession between 962 and 971.

CKA tells us that, after the death of Illulb:

Niger son of Mael Coluim reigned five years. […] between Niger [and] Caniculus beyond Dorsum Crup in which Niger obtained the victory where Du[n]chad abbot of Dunkeld and Dubdonn mormaer of Atholl were slain. Niger expelled from the kingdom, Caniculus held it for a brief time… Cúlen ríg reigned five years… Cúlen and his brother Eochaid were killed by the Britons.63

The relevant entries in AU are:

AU 965.4 A battle between the men of Scotland themselves where many were killed including Donnchad, i.e. abbot of Dunkeld.

AU 967.1 Dub mac Maíl Choluim, king of Alba, was killed by the Albanians themselves.

AU 971.1 Culén mac Illuilb, king of Alba, was killed by the Britons in a battle rout. 65

There is no doubt that this period is that referred to in Berchan stanzas 164-8. Surprisingly, the poet called one of these kings, Dub mac Mail Choluim, by his correct name, while equally unusually the author of CKA at this point has disguised him as Niger, both of course meaning ‘black’. Berchan’s Fionn was in fact AU’s Culén and CKA’s Caniculus,
meaning ‘little dog’. What concerns us here is Berchan’s account of Dub’s death in stanza 166:

One of the kings goes on a useless expedition
across the Mounth to the plain of Fortriu;
though he may have gone, he does not return,
Dub of the three dark secrets will fall.\(^{66}\)

Here Dub is explicitly said to have fallen in *Mag Fortrenn*, the ‘Plain of Fortriu’. Now the X-group of regnal lists, the prototype of which, τ, dates from 1124 or shortly thereafter, states that Dub was slain at Forres and adds, curiously, that his body was hidden under the bridge at Kinloss:

Dub mac Maíl Choluim reigned four years and six months and was slain at Forres and was hidden under the bridge of Kinloss.\(^{67}\)

Forres and Kinloss lie north of the Mounth in Moray, beside the estuary of the northern Earn, now called Findhorn. If both accounts are correct, then it might suggest that Moray lay in Fortriu (*or vice versa*). If Fortriu did indeed lie north of the Mounth, then that would certainly explain how Ecgfrith was forced into narrow places among inaccessible mountains when attacking its king.

Indeed, returning to Bredei son of Beli, we might note that before his victory over Ecgfrith he appears first in the chronicle-record attacking Orkney:

AU 682.4 The Orkneys were destroyed by Bredei.\(^{68}\)

Such an expedition would make more sense if Bredei’s heartland lay in the north, rather than the south of Pictland. Isabel Henderson was clearly aware of this problem when she noted that Bredei was called by the annals ‘king of Fortriu’ at his death, ‘an indication that his administration after 685 must have been centred on the south’.\(^{69}\) She was clearly happier with a northern origin for Bredei but was unable to escape Skene’s location of Fortriu. The association of Bredei with Orkney should also remind us of Adomnán’s account of the Orcadian *subregulus* at the court of Bredei son of Meilocon a century earlier.\(^{70}\)

\(^{66}\) *Rachaith ri dhiosbh for fecht fann
dor Múina i Mugh Fortrenn
cia dig nocha ttig for cál
docfoeth Dubh na tri ndubhrún*

Hudson, *Prophecy of Berchán*, 49. Hudson’s translation and text with minor amendments (i.e., *múina* and *dubh* have been taken as proper, rather than common, nouns).

\(^{67}\) E.g., regnal-list D, Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, 287. *Dub mac Maíl Choluim iii a. reg. et mensibus sex et interfectus est Forres et absconditus est sub ponte de Kynloss.*

\(^{68}\) AU 682.4 *Orcades delete sunt la Bruide.*


presumption of the earlier Bredei’s domination of the Northern Isles may have been influenced by his experience of his contemporary Bredei son of Beli. Adomnán, famously, locates the court of the rex potentissimus, ‘most powerful king’, close to the River Ness.\footnote{71 Adomnán, \textit{VC}, II.xxxiii.}

Evidence that Fortriu lay in the North is not confined to \textit{The Prophecy of Berchan}. A Brittonic (Pictish or Cumbric?) form of the name Fortriu is accepted to lie behind a place-name found in the account in \textit{Historia Regum Anglorum} of Æthelstan’s expedition into Scotland in 934.\footnote{72 Arnold (ed.), \textit{Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia}, ii. 3-283, at 93 and 124.}

Deinde hostes subegit, Scotiam usque Dunfoeder et Wertermorum terrestri exercitu uastauit, navali uero usque Catenes depopulatus est.\footnote{73 ‘After this he subdued his enemies and wasted Scotland as far as Dunottar and Wertermor, and with his navy depopulated as far as Caithness’. The identification of Catenes with Caithness was disputed by Hudson, \textit{Kings of Celtic Scotland}, 77.}

Werter, the first element of Wertermorum, has been recognised as deriving from a Brittonic development of ancient \textit{Uerturiones}.\footnote{74 \textit{CPNS}, 68-9 and 71; H. M. Chadwick, \textit{Early Scotland}, (Cambridge, 1949) 44 n.1, Anderson, \textit{Kings and Kingship}, 140. Skene has an ingenious, if thoroughly implausible, alternative interpretation of the name in \textit{Celtic Scotland}, i. 352.} The second element is Old English \textit{mòr} which can bear the meaning of either ‘a moor, waste and damp land’ or ‘high waste ground, a mountain’, glossing either Latin \textit{palus} or \textit{mons}.\footnote{75 Joseph Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller (ed.), \textit{An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary based on the Manuscript Sources}, (Oxford, 1898), s.x. \textit{mòr} at 997.} The modern English ‘moor’ and Scots ‘muir’ can both bear this duel meaning. Thus Wertermor might mean either the ‘swamp of Fortriu’ or the ‘mountain of Fortriu’. Recent scholars, influenced by the apparent proximity of Dunottar, have tended to regard Wertermor as the Braes of Angus or the eastern end of the Mounth in Kincardineshire.\footnote{76 But Hudson, \textit{Kings of Celtic Scotland}, 77, interprets it as a name for the region around the Forth. He attributed this interpretation to Watson, though without reference, and I have been unable to track it down; it runs counter to other discussions by Watson (e.g., \textit{CPNS}, 68-9).} This may be correct, but if we were to consider a Fortriu in the neighbourhood of Forres then the Laigh of Moray, particularly the low-lying lands around Loch Spynie, might fit the first definition of mòr.

There is another Old English witness to Fortriu, which H. M. Chadwick was clearly aware of, although he does not seem to have discussed it anywhere.\footnote{77 Chadwick, \textit{Early Scotland}, 44 n.1.} The ‘Northern Recension’ of the \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle} is the term applied to a hypothetical text reconstructed on the basis of features common to the versions of the chronicle in its D, E and F manuscripts.\footnote{78 G. P. Cubbin (ed.), \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition}, vi, MS. \textit{D} (Cambridge, 1996); Susan Irvine (ed.), \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition}, vii, MS. \textit{E} (Cambridge, 2004); and Peter S. Baker (ed.), \textit{The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition}, viii, MS. \textit{F} (Cambridge, 2000).} These three versions shared an exemplar, up to and including the annal for 1031, which diverged from the common stock after the annal for 892. In the intervening period this exemplar seems to
have spent a considerable period, probably beginning in the mid-tenth century, being maintained in or near York. As well as contemporary records from a Northern perspective, additions made to the ‘Northern Recension’ included translations from Bede’s *Historia Ecclesiastica* and from a Latin annalistic-chronicle continuing it and closely related to those found in part I of *Historia Regum Anglorum* attributed to Simeon of Durham. It is with a passage translated from Bede that we are concerned here. Under the year 565 the E-text contains a translation into Old English of Bede’s account of the conversion of the Picts.

\[\text{An. dxxx.} \quad \text{Her feng Æðelbriht to Cantwara rice 7 heold .lii. wintra. On his dagum sende Gregorius }\us/\text{ fulluht, 7 Columba messaprest com to Pyhtum }\text{ 7 hi gecyrde to Cristes geleofan} - \text{bet sind }\text{ bone weæteres }\text{ be norðum moru }\text{ mo}\text{t}\text{i} - \text{7 heor cyning him gesealde }\text{ þet egland }\text{ þe man nemnad li, }\text{ þær sindon }\text{'v. hida }\text{ þe men cwedab…Suðpyhtas wæron mycle ær gefullode: heom bodade fulwiht Nimia bishop…}^{20}\]

The key word here is *weæteres*. Plummer, in the first modern scholarly edition, glossed this word as follows:

*Wegettere*, sb.m.stx a warder, occupier, dweller. pl. (*weartæres*) 565 F.\(^{81}\)

All subsequent translations of the chronicle have followed this reading, yet there is no other attestation of it with this sense. Interestingly, as Plummer noted, the Latin translation which accompanies the version of this passage in manuscript F does not attempt this word, suggesting that the early twelfth-century translator had no idea what it meant.\(^{82}\) Whitelock in her translation followed Plummer but notes:

The unusual word, *weæteres*, used here seems to be taken from the place-name which occurs in Simeon of Durham in the form *Wertermorum*.\(^{83}\)

This note seems to have been ignored by subsequent chronicle editors, although, as noted above, Chadwick had already seen that this was


\(^{80}\) Irvine, (ed.) *MS. E*, 20. ‘Here Æðelberht obtained the sovereignty of the Cantwara and held it fifty-three winters. In his days Gregory sent us baptism and Columba, a mass-priest, came to the Picts and they chose to believe in Christ — that is then, *Wegetteres* benorth the ‘moors’ — and their king gave to him that island which men call Iona, which comprises, men say, five hides… The southern Picts were baptized much earlier, Bishop Nimia had preached their baptism…’ (my translation). The corresponding text in MS. D is missing due to the loss of a gathering.

\(^{81}\) Charles Plummer and John Earle (eds), *Two of the Saxon Chronicles Parallel: with supplementary extracts from the others*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1892-9), i. 412.

\(^{82}\) Plummer (ed.), *Two of the Saxon Chronicles*, 19 n.20. Baker (ed.), *M.S. F*, 27.

indeed a reference to Fortriu. At this point it will be instructive to look at the passage of Bede’s Latin which has here been translated:

there came from Ireland to Britain a priest and abbot named Columba, a true monk in life no less than in habit, to preach the word of God in the lands of the Northern Picts, these are by steep and rugged mountain separated from their southern regions. The Southern Picts, who have their own seats within those same mountains, a long time before, they say, had abandoned the errors of idolatry and accepted the true faith through the preaching of the Word by bishop Nynia…84

It can be seen that Wærteres in the English stands for provinciis septentrionalium Pictorum and that morum must here stand for montium. We have here an explicit statement that in tenth-century Northumbria Fortriu was thought to be the land of the Northern Picts, north of the Mounth.

The passage from Bede states that the Southern Picts had their sedes ‘intra eodem montes’, ‘within those same mountains’, which surely points to Atholl. Atholl, as Athfoitle (gen.), is the only Pictish kingdom, other than Fortriu, to be named in contemporary sources.85 We thus have names for two Pictish kingdoms, Fortriu and Atholl, and locations for two Pictish kingdoms, north and south of the Mounth. One implication of the identification of the Southern Picts with Atholl might be that we should have been looking for evidence of the Nynianic ‘mission’ in the region of Dunkeld.86 One function, or result, of the translation of Columban relics to Dunkeld in the ninth century may have been to effect a damnatio memoriae of an earlier Nynianic connection.87

Remaining within the ecclesiastical sphere we might turn our attention to the guarantor list of Cáin Adomnáin.88 Cáin Adomnáin, the ‘Law of Innocents’, appears to have been proclaimed at a Synod at Birr in AD

84 HE III.iv; Colgrave and Mynors (eds), 220-3: … venit de Hibernia presbyter et abbas habitu et uita monachi insignis, nomine Columba, Brittaniam praedicatus urbebam Dei provinciis septentrionalium Pictorum, hoc est eis quae arduis etque horrentibus montium iugis ab australibus eorum sunt regionibus sequestratae. Namque ipsi australes Picti, qui intra eodem montes habitant sedes, multo ante tempore, ui perhibent, recto errore idolatriae falem ueritatis acceperant, praedicante eiue Verbum Nynia episcopo… I am very grateful to James Fraser for discussing this passage in depth with me and for drawing my attention to its subtleties.

85 AU 739.7 Talorggan m. Drostain, rex Athfoilte, dimersus est, i.e., by Unust’. See also AT 739: Tolarcan mac Drostan, rex Athfoilte, a bathadh la hAengus.

86 For recent contributions to the Ninian debate see T. O. Clancy, ‘The real St Ninian’, Innes Review 52 (2002) 1-28, James E. Fraser, ‘Northumbrian Whithorn and the making of St Ninian’, Innes Review 53 (2003) 40-59, and Geoffrey Barrow, St Ninian and Pictomania, 12th Whithorn Lecture (Whithorn, 2004). Readers should also be aware that the most recent edition of John MacQueen’s St Ninian (Edinburgh, 2005), includes a survey and assessment of recent literature in a special supplement, pp. 150 ff.


Appendix to it is a list of contemporary rulers, lay and clerical, who are said to guarantee its observance. Ninety-one individuals are named, most of them identifiable Gaelic kings and churchmen. Two individuals seem to be from Pictland. One of these is the king, Bredei son of Derile, whose obit is noted in AU 706.2, and who seems to have succeeded to the kingship on the expulsion of Taran son of Entifidich in 697. His appearance in the regnal lists make it likely that he was a king of Fortriu (all four kings identified as such appear in the regnal lists while the one king of Atholl whose name we know is conspicuous by his absence). The other character from Pictland to appear in the guarantor list is Curetán episcop, `bishop’. This rather shadowy figure, also known as Boniface, has long been associated with Rosemarkie in the Black Isle, on the Moray Firth. Whilst the evidence is circumstantial it would seem likely that the pairing of king and bishop on the guarantor list might suggest that they both represented the same portion of the Pictish nation.

As long ago as 1958 Isabel Henderson argued, on art-historical grounds and distributional statistics, that the original home of the distinctive Pictish sculptural tradition should be sought around the heads of the Moray and Dornoch Firths. She pointed to the location which Adomnán gave Bredei son of Meilocon, near the River Ness, as a context. The spread of the symbols across Scotland north of Fothriff and Menteith would seem to point to `Moravian’ influence spreading south of the Mounth, perhaps in the wake of Dún Nechtain. The only problem with the model, as she conceded, was the apparent pre-eminence of Fortriu, given its supposed location. Perhaps that need no longer be a problem.

Conclusion

This survey began with a question about the topography of Dunnichen, whether the rolling downs of Forfarshire really matched Bede’s description of inaccessible mountains. An alternative Dún Nechtain was identified at Dunachton which fitted the topographical constraints somewhat better but which seemed geographically very distant from the leading Pictish kingdom in Fortriu. This led to an examination of the basis for


Anderson, Kings and Kingship, 175, 232 and 248.

Aidan MacDonald, Curetán, Boniface and the Early Church of Rosemarkie (Rosemarkie, 1992).

I would like to thank Dauvit Broun for drawing my attention to this after an early presentation of this paper to the Medieval Scottish Studies Seminar at the University of Glasgow and Gilbert Márkus for reminding me of it when he read an early draft of the paper.


Though Chadwick had made the same criticism of Dunnichen in his Early Scotland, 44.
the view that Fortriu was in the south of Pictavia; that basis was found to be very slight. Further investigation seems to have turned up sources which unequivocally place Fortriu north of the Mounth. Should this surprise us?

It has long been suspected that Iona’s chief sphere of influence among the Picts lay north of the Mounth. In the eleventh century, Irish chroniclers recorded provincial events from Moray but not from Angus, Fife and Strathearn. It would not be a surprise if the best lines of communication between Pictavia and the Gaelic world lay along the Great Glen, and perhaps up the Spean and through Badenoch, and that if any constituent province of Pictavia should grab more than its fair share of attention in the Iona chronicle it should be that which lay closest to the mouth of the River Ness. The precise extent of Fortriu must remain a mystery. What we can say is that Picts seem to have been divided into two groups from the days of Ammianus Marcellinus, in the later fourth century, to the eighth century at least. Ammianus wrote of the *Uerturiones* and *Dicalydones* while Bede and his contemporaries described the Mounth as the division between two peoples. Since the name of the *Dicalydones*, of *Caledones* (as they appear elsewhere), is preserved in places south of the Mounth such as Schiehallion, Rohallion and Dunkeld (and possibly Kirkcaldy), we should probably seek the *Uerturiones* to the north. As the present article has sought to demonstrate the few explicit references in the early medieval sources would seem to confirm this. Beyond this it is hard to say save that Adomnán places the court of Bredei son of Mailocon near the mouth of the Ness. If this court were relatively central to the *regnum* then we might suppose that Nairnshire and the Black Isle lay at its heart, by how far beyond these limits it stretched, into Ross, Inverness and Moray it would be hard to hazard. One might hypothesise, on the basis of analogy, that there was a relatively small core territory but that as its hegemony became more secure so more of the surrounding districts which fell under its sway came to be regarded as within Fortriu. To speculate further would be unwise. The complete disappearance of the name Fortriu might suggest that it was broken up in the course of the tenth century and that its successor polities, such as Moray and Ross, originated as local divisions within the broader kingdom. These latter provincial names appear to be purely topographical in origin, meaning ‘coastland’ and ‘headland’, respectively, and it may be, as Dauvit Broun has suggested to me, that they were originally qualified as *Muréb Fortrenn*, *Ros Fortrenn* (which suggests a Gaelic *Monaid Fortrenn* lying behind *Wertermorum*), but if this was the case no evidence survives.

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96 *CPNS*, 21-2.
97 *Adomnán, Vita Columbae*, II.xxxiii