

Was a Shared Space Successfully Enabled ?

Having now explored reasons how and why a space "would have been shared, the impact and the consequences" the final assessment is whether this was actually successful. With limited existence of relevant historical material, interpretation has been necessary applying logically thought through analyses. We do not know, definitely, that carvings of objects associated with beliefs were actually used, for example, to explain and bridge the differences (or similarities) between such beliefs so this concluding section is evaluating whether the ability to do that was enabled. Hence the use of the word "enabled" in these final conclusions.

By considering the seemingly uncontroversial functions that would have been enabled suggests success in that the Stones have generally remained unadulterated for over a thousand years. Having objects associated with more than one belief on individual Stones, often in a common carving style, suggests success in people with different beliefs prepared to share them in a common surface space. Attempting to transition thinking from one belief to another (most notably Mithraism to Christianity) without a prior need to remove symbols from earlier Stones suggests a successful strategy. So it seems that not only was Shared Space successfully enabled it was also successfully used. In the next paragraphs enough justification for these successes should appear.

Objects potentially with a Celtic meaning have been challenging to interpret. On the Symbol Stones there are widespread carvings of animals, birds and fish from Stones carved only with these objects to various combinations with items associated with Mithraic and Christian meaning to hunting scenes where the context is arguably not related to a type of belief. It has become clear that it is the context of animals, birds and fish that determines the interpretation - they do not appear to have been randomly placed. Why Celtic objects with associated "attributes" and not deities are represented has been explored; these attributes were mainly to do with an individual's physical aspects (such as strength or endurance) and softer skills (such as wisdom or faithfulness) but extended to aspects of beliefs (such as eternal life).

Seeking better understanding of the Celtic objects

Further analysis based on output from the Investigations is explored below.

Investigation 1 looked into the 28 Stones where Celtic and Pictish-Mithraic beliefs are represented. All objects are incise carved and each Stone appears to have been carved "by the same hand". Three quarters of these Stones are considered to act as a Shared Space for both beliefs with 7 in the Complementary category and 15 evaluated as Implied Acceptance.

Having clear Celtic and Mithraic meaning the Serpent object on 5 Stones has been particularly difficult to assess. Eternal life, regeneration and life beyond the grave as Celtic meanings for the Serpent are consistent, in terms of belief, with the P-M Symbol decodes of heaven beyond the tangible universe, steps to heaven and the Capricorn gateway to heaven. Mithraic explanations for the serpent include alluding to the Milky Way and the Hydra Constellation.



Evaluations in Investigation 1 range from P-M only to Implied Acceptance to the mutually supportive Complementary classification with context always being the key decider in each case, for example proximity of carvings in a space.

Investigation 3 detailed the two Stones each evaluated as a Shared Space more with Implied Acceptance of **Celtic and Christian** beliefs than symbols being Complementary. Both - Latheron (in Caithness) and Mortlach (Dufftown, Moray) - have, most unusually, a mix of carving methods each with a low relief cross with an incise eagle. St Columba's visit to Inverness in 565 is supposedly the start point for Christianity in Pictland presumably further reinforced by St Drostan who became abbot at Deer, Buchan. This tends to suggest a timeframe of later sixth / early seventh century for these Stones. Having objects with Celtic "attributes" carved on them - collectively eagle, salmon, dog/hound and serpent - prompts whether these carvings were intentional (not least as these are the only Stones with Christian and Celtic objects) or not but serving some other purpose.

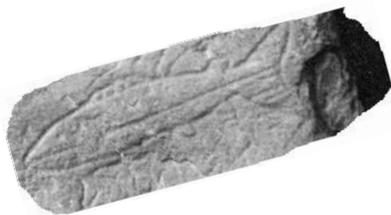
All Stones with hunting scenes other than Mortlach have Mithraic and Christian carvings i.e. in Investigations 2 and 4. Coupled with the style of the fish monsters being a "one off" maybe there is a possibility that the Mortlach Stone has been inspired by seeing and copying from more standard examples. Although the Latheron Stone appears to have a Cross maybe it is not - Canmore entries refer to rectangle shapes. Both of these Stones serve to illustrate - albeit in the extreme - the difficulty in understanding the relevance of the carvings.

Investigation 4 covered the most diverse collection of carvings on the Symbol Stones - **Celtic, Mithraic and Christian**. All have relief carvings. These 24 Stones have clear examples of Mithraic and Christian beliefs, in effect expanding on Investigation 2 with the addition of carvings representing Celtic "attributes". Adding to the complexity of selecting what relates to a belief and what does not there are additionally "seemingly non-religious carvings" - 19 noted as People / Scene and 19 as Undecoded / Ogham objects. From the analyses 10 of the Stones are considered to have enabled Shared Space for Complementary P-M, Christian and Celtic beliefs - 9 of these also had seemingly non-religious carvings. They are considered here in more detail:

St Vigean 2 is the Stone evaluated as a Shared Space for Complementary P-M, Celtic and Christian beliefs without any non-religious carvings; the back is totally worn - there is nothing discernible. Because of the decode in P-M terms for the Z-Rod & Serpent, Mirror and Comb plus the clear symbolism of the Cross, St Vigean 2 (as with St Vigean 1) is a "transition" Stone for P-M and Christian beliefs. However, it could be argued that the Eagle which is included as having Celtic "attributes", could have a biblical connotation (hope and strength, for example) and could have been included to directly complement the Cross. This gives an example of the difficulty in evaluating the meaning of individual carved objects yet alone whether there can be associations across different beliefs.

Revisiting the further 9 Stones in Investigation 4 that have carvings assessed as being complementary across three beliefs, it is useful to test the evaluations involving those items seen as having Celtic "attributes". Collectively these Stones have serpent, deer's head, salmon, dog/hound, horse head, eagle boar and stag carvings. Taking St Vigean 1, both the boar and stag are in hunting scenes; the eagle looks as if it is biting the salmon but this represents no apparent significance. A serpent is on each of Glamis Hunter's Hill, Glamis Manse and Ulbster - the Glamis Stones appear to be re-used Class 1 with the incise Serpents on the reverse side to the Crosses, Ulbster's Serpent is on the same side as the Cross.

Salmon carvings are on Glamis Manse, Meigle 1, St Vigean 1 and Ulbster Stones - all in differing styles and positioning. As with Glamis Hunter's Hill, the incise Salmon on Glamis Manse is on the reverse side from the Cross and this Stone, too, appears to be reused Class 1.



Meigle 1 has a relief Salmon high up on the reverse of the Cross slab with a variety of carvings assessed as P-M, Christian (an angel), hunting scene and indecipherable animals. St Vigean 1 has a salmon on the reverse side to the Cross above a hunting scene with a selection of animals and P-M objects. Relief and incise methods are used on Ulbster - the salmon seems to be incise next to a relief Cross.

Taking just the Serpent and Salmon carvings a pattern of style, position or carving technique is not apparent. Further objects such as the dog/hound on Golspie and Nigg, the horse lying down on Meigle 1, the various heads - horse, deer and hound (maybe) are even more difficult to assign a meaning. Overall for this set of 9 Stones establishing a rationale for placing objects evaluated as having Celtic "attributes" on these predominantly Christian slabs is elusive. Celtic attributes are unchanged but maybe these animals, birds and fish listed in the section on "Carvings" were more revered as attributes displayed by a person than a religious belief, as such.

The final Investigation listed all of the 19 **single belief - Celtic only** stones which are incised carved variously with animals, birds and fish whose Celtic "attributes" are described in the section on "Carvings". Ackergill 1, Blackford and Grantown additionally have rectangle objects that are undecoded. Arguably these stones, except the three mentioned, should be beyond the accepted use of the term "Pictish Symbol" stones as they do not have any of the so-called "enigmatic" carvings which generally encompass the geometrical designs (decoded or not) and Pictish Beast. However, the style of the carvings is not dis-similar to that of the "single belief - Pictish-Mithraic only" Stones listed in Investigation 5 - incised on undressed stone - perhaps a pointer to a similar timeframe.

Of specific note is that from the P-M / Celtic Shared Space incised Stones to the comprehensively carved relief Stones covering three beliefs each Stone has the majority of its elements carved by the same hand; this prospectively has sociological impacts beyond the scope of these current investigations e.g. who hired whom to carry out the carving, a seeming acceptability by a person with one belief carving objects belonging to a potential "rival" belief, physical placement in a locality following different beliefs.

Taken together, the analyses above have re-affirmed the initial interpretations for the meaning and inclusion of carvings with Celtic "attributes" on the Symbol Stones and have clarified that there is no further interpretation when animals, birds and fish appear in hunting scenes than being part of that scene and no more.

A significant prospect is that whilst the animals, bird and fish objects are considered to be in a Celtic context the purpose may be less "belief or mythology" in the way we generally consider beliefs in having a spiritual meaning and more "reverence", alternatively "respect", for people having the "attributes" as described in "Carvings". However, any change in interpretation from "belief" (spiritual) to "revered" (personal characteristics) does not detract from the objects being in a successfully shared space. This re-positioning goes a long way towards understanding why depictions of, or references to, Celtic deities have not been seen on the Pictish Symbol Stones.

Likelihood and Impact of any Roman Context

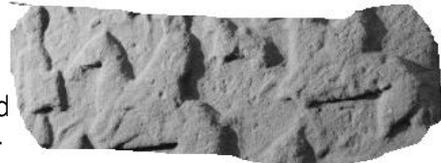
Having clarified that Celtic "attributes" variously represent personal characteristics that might be revered or a religious/mythology belief any Roman context is re-examined in a similar way. Of the 10 animals, birds and fish with Celtic "attributes" there is a potential Roman context (military or mythology) for 3. Specific Legion and army-wide emblems included the boar, bull and eagle; snakes (or serpents) in Roman mythology were seen as tokens of life beyond the grave. In Investigations 1, 3 and 4 the first task was to determine whether the animals, birds and fish were in Celtic or Roman context, neither or both. Serpents have Roman, Celtic and Christian relevance but for carved serpents to have Roman context the time period for their carving is arguably just after the Roman withdrawal for inclusion to have been influenced. This tends to eliminate their having a Roman meaning on Christian era Stones. A similar rationale would apply to the boar, bull and eagle objects.

Restricting the time period to pre-Christian there is an argument that the serpents on Stones such as at Glamis (which started as incise Class 1) could have had a valid Roman context. Turning to the Legion emblems of the boar and bull plus the Eagle on the ubiquitous Roman Army Standard, if their presence on Symbol Stones is in a Roman context and the time period is favourable (i.e. incise Class 1) then a case opens up for suggesting a Roman influence (if not remnant presence) in locations beyond what is generally accepted. If a Roman Eagle representation was intended perhaps that could encompass these geographies:- Birnie, Brough of Birsay, Dandaleith, Fyvie, Inveravon, Knowe of Burrian, Strathpeffer, Tillytarmont and Tyrie; plus Knocknagael and Dores (Clune Farm) for Boar carvings.

Adding to a prospective direct Roman influence or one that can be related to recent withdrawal Birnie and Tyrie have a depiction of a Mithraeum as well as the Eagle.

Combinations of Carvings - interpretation and some numbers

When any two, or more, beliefs are represented on a Symbol Stone it becomes a Shared Space for beliefs that have Implied Acceptance or are Complementary. In addition, grouped as "seemingly non-religious", are People and Scenes (biblical, military and more), Ogham (seemingly added as graffiti) and undecoded objects where a belief representation is unclear they are, nonetheless, accommodated in a Shared Space.



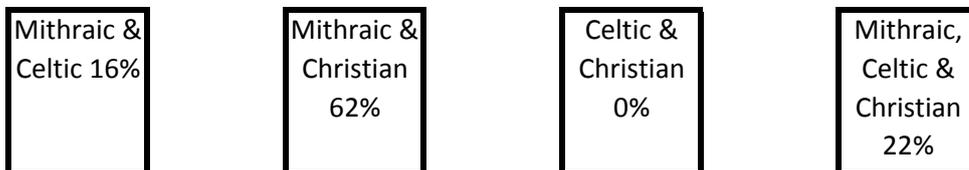
During the Investigations several patterns of geographic closeness between so-called Class 2 and Class 1 Stones were becoming apparent. This prompted research into the possibility of carvers placing P-M symbols onto Stones with Christian Crosses being influenced by seeing P-M objects nearby and copying them. Instances of such proximity are in Appendix D. In part 3 of Observations and Discussion five examples were explored in detail.

It seems that proximity was not the only way by which P-M Symbols came to be on Christian slabs. For example, Golspie Class 2 Stone has eight Class 1 Stones in close proximity with a full range of P-M carvings except the Pictish Beast and Double Disc Alone which are on the Class 2 Stone - maybe this suggests that sometimes the inclusion of P-M symbols on Christian slabs was more distantly influenced. Likewise, the Class 2 Stones in the area between Dingwall and Wick (Examples 2 & 4) seem less influenced by geographically close Class 1 Stones compared with those in the general area of Forfar (Examples 1 & 3) - perhaps there was a different mechanism for prompting the carving of the older Symbols e.g. by sea from across the Moray Firth rather than by land. These examples seem to be the exception, however.

Two general outcomes emerged from this additional research 1) specific objects on Class 1 Stones are apparent on nearby Class 2 Stones suggesting a carver being influenced by them and 2) perhaps the close proximity of Stones in a small geographic area enabled P-M to be followed using the existing Class 1 Stones and the newer Class 2 one which also had some P-M symbols. Often being executed in a similar style, the Christian and P-M carvings are well integrated on Class 2 Stones suggesting design, planning and execution in using the surfaces as a Shared Space.

Four combinations of beliefs were identified either as **Complementary** (where there is a correlation between religious beliefs that have similar or identical meanings) or **Implied Acceptance** (the meanings of the carvings are related so, at minimum, they do not clash but are perhaps not sufficiently strongly linked to be harmonised).

For those 45 Stones found to have carvings portraying **Complementary** beliefs the percentages of combinations are:-



Additionally, "seemingly non-religious" objects are on 73% of these Stones and 7% have objects that could relate to Roman mythology. Maybe not unexpectedly, there are exceptions, each with a Roman mythology context, which are seen as either a Shared Space for Complementary Celtic & Mithraic beliefs or Pictish-Mithraic only because of the P-M serpent decode - they are not included in the summary.

A common thread for this outcome is that Complementary beliefs always include Pictish-Mithraic. Christian and Mithraic together account for 84% of the 45 Stones. This tends to suggest a conscious effort was made for symbols of these religious beliefs to be placed on common surfaces which, in turn, arguably reinforces Class 2 Stones performing a transition function from Class 1, i.e. from Mithraic to Christian. Of the 10 objects that have Celtic "attributes" 9 of these relate more to personal characteristics than spiritual ones but the label of "belief" has been used throughout the book as those attributes considered to be personal may well have resulted in reverence of an individual therefore giving some form of belief in them.

The percentages of combinations for those 41 Stones found to have carvings suggesting that there was **Implied Acceptance** of beliefs are:-



Additionally, "seemingly non-religious" objects are on 41% of these Stones but only on those depicting Mithraic & Christian beliefs. Objects that could relate to Roman military only - 7% - are on Mithraic & Celtic belief Stones.

Whilst more than half, 56%, of these Stones have Mithraic and Christian objects their inclusion on common surfaces seems to be less deliberate than for those Stones where beliefs are considered to be Complementary. Nonetheless, they have occupied surfaces as a Shared Space.

Although the purpose of the Investigations was to see where there might be "shared" spaces for different beliefs, 144 Stones were found to have carvings with relevance only to a **Single Belief**.

Types of Carved Objects	Pictish - Mithraic	Celtic	Celtic &/or Roman	Christian
No. of Single Belief Stones	124	10	9	1

A broad brush picture could be based on the total number of Stones in the Investigations i.e. Single Belief, Complementary and Implied Acceptance together which suggests that the surfaces of just over 37% were used to carve objects from two or more different beliefs. However, this is neither a helpful nor relevant statistic because different Stones aimed to convey different messages over different timeframes.

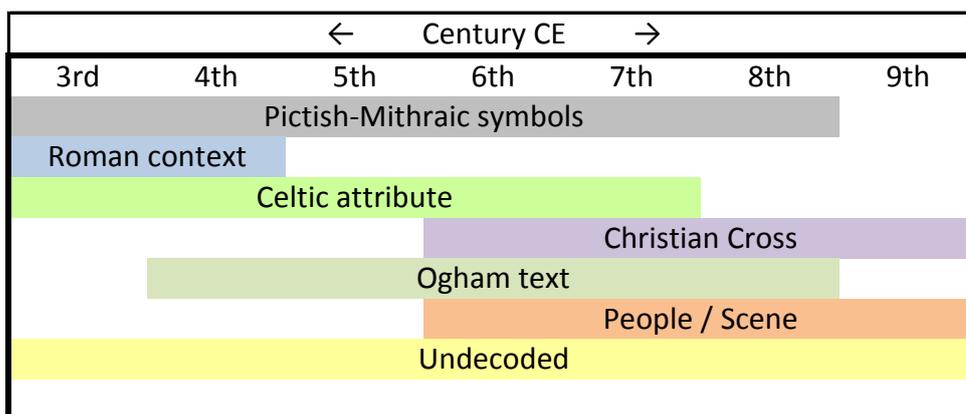
Timeframes

Shown below are the prospective periods when objects were carved and, consequently, are the time frames for the pursuit of Mithraic, Celtic and Christian beliefs in Pictland.

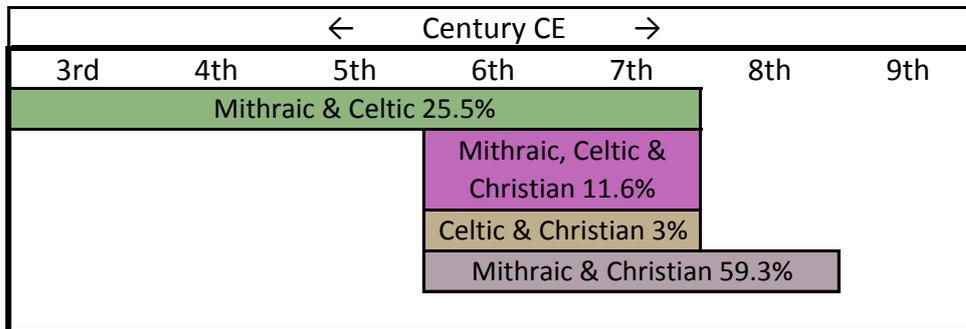
The People / Scene period is the same as that for Christian Cross as both are on the so-called Class 2 Stones.

For Ogham text the start period is when it was first known to have been used; the end period coincides with the estimated start point for Class 3 Stones as no Ogham texts are known on them.

Undecoded carvings have been noted across the whole timescale of the Investigations.



Taking all instances of Complementary and Implied Acceptance Shared Space evaluations together - covering 86 Stones - these are the combinations by percentages of the overall total and associated timeframes:-



Conclusions

From the investigations, assessments and further analyses the surfaces of the Pictish Symbol Stones have enabled seven broad functions as aids in:-

- Explaining Pictish-Mithraic religious beliefs using (in the main) V-Rod & Crescent, Mirror, Z-Rod & Double Disc, Pictish Beast and Comb Symbols.
- Connecting to the Roman predecessor of Pictish-Mithraism with Symbol shapes that are reminiscent of Roman Mithraea e.g. the Notched Rectangle and Horseshoe/Arch.
- Demonstrating acceptance of Celtic "attributes" (whether reverence for personal physical and softer skills or religious/spiritual beliefs) whilst introducing Pictish-Mithraism by placing Mithraic Symbols on Stones with Celtic icons (or vice-versa).
- Explaining Christianity using the Latin Cross, Beasts and Interlaced Animals (some perhaps to describe biblical stories), Ecclesiastic persons, Angels etc.
- Continuing the pursuit of Mithraic religious beliefs whilst transitioning to Christianity with Mithraic icons included on Stones with Christian ones.
- Commemorating events such as hunts, battle victories etc. – hence why so many objects are people and animals.
- Broadcasting information in Ogham - making use of existing surfaces.

Apart from those stones with carvings relevant to a single belief or reverence, the Pictish Symbol Stones have enabled a Share Space for not only different religious beliefs but accommodating commemorations, information and, as yet, undeciphered material.

What we cannot claim to know is exactly how or for what occasions the carved items were used - assembly for religious practice, commemoration etc. However, the ability to carry out the functions listed above - religious, secular or otherwise - was enabled.

From the high volume of instances where Pictish-Mithraic and Christian objects have appeared in the same Shared Space there is a strong case for these Stones, generally known from Anderson & Allen as Class 2, to be known as "Transition Stones".

Surfaces being used for different beliefs and reverences in the same timeframe suggests acceptance and tolerance. This could have facilitated, in time, transition from one belief to another – particularly from Mithraic to Christian. Inclusion of non-religious carvings in way of commemorations, such as hunts and battles, implies acceptability for multiple use. Carving a range of objects “in the same hand” (as can be seen on many Stones) suggests some form of peaceful co-existence, maybe integration.

Ultimately, success for an enduring Shared Space on Pictish Symbol Stones can be seen from the almost total lack of being defaced, disfigured or otherwise damaged – the Stones look little different today as they would have done when they were originally carved.

Overall “**yes**” a Shared Space was successfully enabled.

However, not only did the carvers create and collectively use that Shared Space on the surface of Symbol Stones, they arguably caused another Shared Space to be established - **Places for Worship**.

Whilst the author has described an Open-Air Mithraeum using the Symbols on the Stones with the skyward view in the context of pursuing a Mithraic belief, logically the principle could be applied to the pursuit of Christianity. Those Stones with a Christian Cross (and any biblically related items) would have served to explain the Christian belief with the addition of the skyward view to heaven beyond. With the components of the Open-Air Mithraeum deriving from what was physically seen in a Mithraic Temple perhaps, conversely, the outdoor Christian place of worship was the precursor to the indoor church. For the time period being considered there is no archaeological evidence of buildings for worship.

Use of the surface and location of Symbol Stones for pursuing Celtic, Mithraic and Christian beliefs is explored in this PDF:-

[Places for Worship](#)