

Observations - Set 4

Despite being very weathered the **Elgin** slab is an excellent example of a Transition Stone showing complementary Pictish-Mithraic and Christian beliefs clearly carved in an integrated style. Fundamental beliefs about the travel of the soul, the construct of the tangible universe and heaven beyond are embodied in the V-Rod & Crescent and Z-Rod & Double Disc Symbols. Not only are the three aspects being sought to call a Class 2 Stone a Transition Stone apparent but carving in an integrated style perhaps has an underlying reason. One subtle way of transitioning people's existing beliefs and practices is to absorb them into the "new" belief. In the case of Pictish-Mithraism placing the Symbol iconography for the belief in with the same surface space as the Christian Cross leads to absorption - an approach arguably more acceptable than outright substitution. Through the transition period the Pictish-Mithraic belief can still be practiced whilst the case for the new belief is made. A very good way of working towards some form of seamlessness (at minimum, early introduction) can be seen in those Stones where the format and style of, for example, the V-Rod & Crescent and the Z-Rod & Double Disc are the same as the Christian Cross and biblical stories. Elgin can be seen as a clear example. Taking this line of thought a step further it could be that those wanting to introduce the new belief recognised elements of the existing belief that could be assimilated to their advantage.

In contrast to an extent with Elgin, the Z-Rod & Serpent Symbol at **Gask** is between a person on horseback and an unidentified animal - possibly suggesting that the carving was not planned in with prominent profile. Christian iconography is reinforced with what is seemingly David the Lion-killer, maybe there are other relevant depictions.

With original carving only visible now on the non-Cross side of **Hilton of Cadboll** it cannot be assumed that carvings associated with the two beliefs were done at substantially the same time or if at different occasions. However, all of the Pictish-Mithraic symbols on the Stone have decodes that suggest they are complementary to Christian beliefs.

If the "strength" of the relationship between carvings for Pictish-Mithraic and Christian beliefs can be deduced from their relative positioning then **Kinneddar**, with the carvings on the same surface should fall into the "strong" category - very much complementary.

St Paul and St Anthony meeting in the desert and scenes from the story of David reinforce the Christian message on the **Nigg** slab. In terms of Pictish-Mithraic belief, this is complemented by the Pictish Beast (marking the Capricorn gate to heaven for the soul's return after mortal death).

Collectively the selection of carvings on **Rosemarkie** show a complementary approach to representing Pictish-Mithraic and Christian beliefs - a fine example of a Transition Stone. There are Crosses on each main surface. On one side there is multiplication of Pictish-Mithraic Symbols - the V-Rod & Crescent (3 times) and the Mirror (twice). Additionally, the format and style of carving is of one type resulting in its use prospectively having the same attributes as Elgin (as described above).

Large compared with other animal carvings on **Shandwick**, the Pictish Beast is given prominence high up on the reverse side - just beneath a Double Disc. Integration of the style

across all the objects suggest this slab was designed and executed as a single piece with a complementary approach to representing Pictish-Mithraic and Christian beliefs - a fine example of an artistically notable Transition Stone.

Not all Stones in this Set portray "complementary" belief. Some have been evaluated as showing "implied acceptance" but that is generally because there are fragments only or broken Stones limiting evaluation. **Pabbay** is the exception - all the objects are incised including the Cross that seemingly was added in the 6th century. Given its prominence at the top of the slab and depth of incise it perhaps indicates a less than benign transition.