

"Shared Space" in Context

Featuring surfaces without boundaries, not segregated, no demarcation - enabling co-existence.

"Shared Space" usually refers to mixed pedestrian and vehicle surfaces in urban areas which are sometimes referred to as "shared surfaces".



This is Exhibition Road, London taken from an article in the 7 December 2011 Evening Standard.

Perhaps Pictish Symbol Stones can be considered in a similar way. With carved objects on their surfaces having minimal boundaries, segregation and demarcation - the Stones seem to have provided a Shared Space that variously accommodated expressions of Celtic, Mithraic and Christian beliefs. The range of carvings expanded beyond beliefs to record hunting and battle scenes; over time there were additions of Ogham script. In many instances priority is not given to where different symbols are placed - for others, such as small carvings of Pictish-Mithraic objects on slabs with large Christian Crosses, there may have been an underlying reason for placing carvings in close proximity. A clear distinction needs to be made between the general name of Pictish Stones which may or may not have the well known (typically described as enigmatic) "symbols" and the more precisely labelled **Pictish Symbol Stones** which most definitely are carved with the "symbols".

From the almost total lack of defacing, disfiguring or otherwise damaging them the Stones look little different today as they would have done when they were originally carved. If these Stones did enable a truly "shared" space, why was this so successful?

Primarily the Investigations in this website are into prospective relationships between the depictions of religious beliefs. There are different mixes of carvings - Mithraic with Celtic, Mithraic with Christian, Celtic with Christian and Mithraic, Celtic & Christian together. Where there are two beliefs represented then the carved symbols may be on just one vertical surface. Typically, where Christianity is represented with a Cross the symbols for other beliefs are carved on the reverse surface - but not always.

To add to the flexible and efficient use of a Stone some have carvings - decorative or representative - on the short vertical sides. This maximum use of available space is very apparent on the larger slabs with military or hunting scenes and complex, often indeterminate, patterns. From the type and style of the carving different texts appear to be additions not part of the original carving scheme. Ogham is usually in "spare" and deliberately selected space but scripts such as miniscule are more randomly placed.

This website starts by explaining how Mithraism developed into Pictish-Mithraism™ (detailed by the author in *The Religious Purpose of the Pictish Symbol Stones* published by Austin Macauley), outlining aspects of Celtic animals, birds and fish that have been revered and commenting on styles of Christian Crosses and biblical stories. Investigations into different combinations of beliefs are detailed followed by Observations and Discussion. The objective is to gauge the degree of acceptability of portraying different beliefs on the same surface to see if the Stones have actually enabled a compatibly Shared Space.

What is immediately apparent is that there seems to have been a high degree of acceptable, if not deliberate, co-existence of symbolic carvings from different beliefs.

What was not looked into by the author in his previous publications are the carvings of those animals, birds and fish that had Celtic meanings. For some of these objects there was an additional strand - a potentially Roman relationship - adding to the complexity of decoding and interpretation in a wider range of contexts. These aspects have been evaluated and proposals made, by Stone, for either Celtic aspects (beliefs or personal attributes) or Roman context, neither or both. Assessing which of these has been a precursor to understanding prospective connections with Mithraic and Christian symbols.

An example of a Stone with carvings identified as having Celtic aspects but with perhaps Roman context (as well, or instead), Pictish-Mithraic symbols, a Christian Cross plus a scene with people and some undecoded objects is Cossans, St Orland's (in-situ between Kirriemuir and Forfar in Angus). Because of the large number of different objects on this Stone interpretation of possible relationships is challenging. However, Stones with a narrow range of depictions can also be difficult to interpret - not least in deciding if the meaning of carvings in the same space are actually "complementary" or simply represent "implied acceptance" of beliefs.



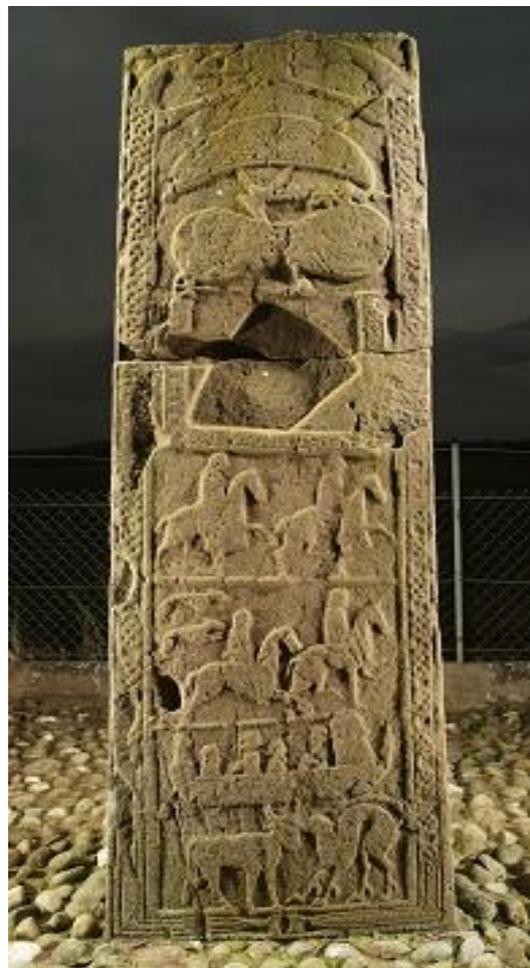
← *Cossans, St Orland's - Cross side*

With the V-Rod & Crescent and the Z-Rod & Double Disc having Pictish-Mithraic decodes and Christianity represented by the Latin Cross, this Stone indicates strong connections between these two beliefs. Fertility, wealth, status, strength & strong will are Celtic personal attributes associated with the bull which also has a Roman context being the emblem of several legions. However, the relevance of the inclusion of the bull is not clear - Celtic personal attributes are linked to human characteristics than to a religious type belief; a Roman context is not likely as Christianity arrived in Pictland several centuries after the Roman military withdrawal.

Hunting scenes are in two registers on the reverse side of the Stone - but not directly placed with the bull (a cow, perhaps) which itself is in a seemingly confrontational aspect with a beast with exaggerated claws. Maybe there is a biblical interpretation for the six figures in a boat. Adding to the complexity of the carvings, intertwined animals are alongside the sides of the Cross and geometric interlace on the reverse side.

[In the Belief Combinations - Investigation 4](#) in the Pictish Symbol Stones website, the evaluation for Cossans is that there is a Shared Space for P-M and Christian beliefs that are complementary to one another, that a Celtic belief relationship is not apparent and what the author has called "seemingly-non-religious carvings" are also accommodated.

Cossans, St Orland's - reverse side



Shared Space context has not just been constrained to religious beliefs - although that is a focus. Interaction of carved text, whether miniscule, Ogham or otherwise with any mix of Celtic, Mithraic or Christian symbols has been evaluated as has any identifiable reasoning behind adding in battle and hunting scenes. In many cases these scenes have been integral to the design and layout of a Stone suggesting a plan for a Stone's content in advance of carving.

In an attempt to pinpoint some broad timeframes for the carving of the range of Stones in these Investigations, Pictish-Mithraism is assessed as appearing after the withdrawal of Septimius Severus around 212 CE and Christianity becoming established during and after Columba's visit to Inverness around 570 CE. People staying in Caledonia continuing with their Mithraic beliefs were very likely isolated from the Roman Empire and their descendants not influenced by any Roman / Pictish clashes in the 4th century and Christianity becoming the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380. Arguably those practicing Mithraism in Caledonia (more precisely Pictland) would not have needed to readily give up their beliefs in favour of a religion that was being enforced in geographies far distant from them.

Overall, the purpose of this website is to explore reasons why a space would have been shared, the impact and the consequences.