

Associations between the Pictish Beast and Other Symbols

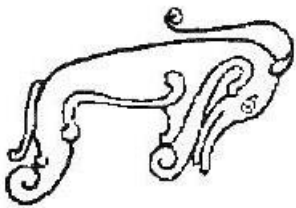
Relative Positioning - leading to “prospective associations”

A debate in a 2013 Forum on the Megalithic Portal Website prompted the data gathering, analyses, views and resultant conclusions in this PDF. An early output reinforced the relevance of Capricorn(us) in decoding the Pictish Beast followed by its prospective association with the decode for the V-Rod & Crescent.

Exploring the position of the Pictish Beast (PB) relative to other carvings on Symbol Stones prompted looking for influences or prospective associations based on decodes in a Pictish-Mithraic context. Investigations focused specifically on those Mirror, Z-Rod & Double-Disc, Arch / Horseshoe and V-Rod & Crescent carvings where the Pictish Beast appeared either above, below or alongside.

The Pictish Beast (PB) – a review of its decode

Discussed in the [main text](#) was the possible connection with the Babylonian mythological Sarrush or Mushhushshu or furious snake which has an association with the constellation Hydra. This seemed reasonable as the first form of Mithraism was Persian (in the time frame of the Sarrush as the protector of Marduk) and the author’s suggestion is that the Symbols on the Pictish Stones were used for the pursuit of, in essence, a derivative, indirectly via Roman Mithraism, from that religious belief.



However, it is difficult to make a sound argument for the PB being the Sarrush as there is about a 2000 year gap between the example on the Ishtar Gate in Babylon and the creation of the Pictish Symbol Stones – how could the knowledge have travelled?

Moving forwards from Persian to Roman Mithraism, it is tempting to think of the PB shape prospectively fitting a choice of the Leontocephalous (lion-headed beast), the serpent (with a constellation connection to Hydra and/or Serpens) or as a Lion which could align with the Mithraic Leo Grade. The most attractive fit is the Leontocephalous which in Mithraism stands alongside the so-called eighth gate, the entry to heaven on the soul’s return journey following death. This previously drew the author to settle for the PB being a representation of the Leontocephalous which, additionally, represents Mithraic Kronos - endless time. However, that conclusion (partly influenced by a seeming association with the V-Rod & Crescent) has been reconsidered as the PB has 4 legs and the Leontocephalous has 2 (but we need to remember that the Symbols could be deeply coded deliberately to disguise them from the novice).



Broadening the scope of candidates for the PB the author has further researched the hippocamp which appears only on Class 2 (relief) Stones. On the Maiden Stone, Largo and Meigle (1) there are hippocamps on the Cross side and a PB on the reverse, the Aberlemno Church and Logierait slabs have hippocamps on the Cross side, Skinnet Chapel has Crosses



on both faces with hippocamps on one side, Ulbster has Crosses on both faces with a single hippocamp and PB on one side and the Brodie slab has hippocamps and a PB on the non-Cross side. The intent was to see if the hippocamp and PB could be different carvings for the same Symbol due to their general similarity. However, some hippocamps are intertwined or opposing pairs, the PB is never shown that way. There is a similarity, however, between the hippocamp and some representations of the so-called “sea goat” astrologically represented as Capricorn. With such similarities of design among these three objects definitive decodes are made even more difficult. If the PB was, in fact, a depiction of the sea goat it would lend another astrological angle as it could be construed to make a linkage with the

constellation Capricorn. Additionally, there is a Hindu mythology creature called the Makara or sea dragon – front part terrestrial mammal, hind part aquatic animal (typically fish tail). Makara is the astrological sign of Capricorn, the tenth of the twelve symbols of the Zodiac. Vedic Hinduism has links with the original version of Mithraism.

The story of the sea goat would explain why the PB could be a representation of the sea goat – in mythology the children of the original sea goat adapted to move on land with the fish like rear transforming to legs. The PB design has legs (highly stylised) and what has been referred to as a lappet on its head looks very much like swept back goat horns. Goats often have long



heads which, allowing for artistic licence, inaccuracy or clever obscuring, could equate to the dolphin-like head of the PB – albeit rather elongated. Furthermore, maybe there is hidden meaning in the mythological story about the sea goats becoming four-legged (some form of transformation). Also, the first sea goat – Pricus – was created by Chronos.

If the PB were in fact a depiction of a sea goat then an association with the Capricorn figure and the constellation of Capricorn could be proposed. Perhaps there is a much older relationship between this Symbol (whether, PB, sea goat or Capricorn) – in Sumeria

Capricorn mythology was associated with the Planet Saturn and Saturn is the Planet associated with the Mithraic 7th (and highest) grade of Pater (Father). In conclusion, perhaps a constellation “figure” is indeed a better contender than any other for the PB decode. This view is reinforced when the VRC Symbol is further analysed – see below.

Data Gathering - relative positions of Symbols on surfaces of Stones

The scope was restricted to these Symbols - the Pictish Beast (PB) with Mirror, Z-Rod & Double Disc (ZDD), Arch / Horseshoe and V-Rod & Crescent (VRC). Hence why there are only 40 instances recorded in the table below, the remaining instances are not associated with these specific Symbols. The numbers are those known in June 2015 when this investigation was first recorded.

Number of Stones with PB = 49. Class 1 = 29; Class 2 = 20.

2 Stones have 2 PB on each. Therefore, total number of PB Symbols = 51.

Pictish Beast > Other Symbol ∨	Above		Below		Alongside	
	Class 1 (incised)	Class 2 (relief)	Class 1 (incised)	Class 2 (relief)	Class 1 (incised)	Class 2 (relief)
Mirror	6	2	2		1	
Z-Rod & Double Disc	2	2	1	3		
Arch / Horseshoe			4			
V-Rod & Crescent	2	2	8	4		1
Total	10	6	15	7	1	1

For Class 1 (incised) Stones a pattern of relative positions between the Pictish Beast Symbol and some other specific Symbols – Mirror, Z-Rod & Double Disc, Arch / Horseshoe and V-Rod & Crescent - is apparent. For Class 2 (relief) Stones the Pictish Beast seems almost, on first look, to have been allocated a spare space in with many other Symbols. However, on some Stones e.g. Shandwick, it is given clear prominence. Assuming that Class 2 succeeded Class 1 (which seems reasonable as Class 2 are arguably “transitional” from pre-Christian to Christian beliefs) then the importance of the PB on the earlier Stones could be greater in the context of Pictish-Mithraism such that associations with and positioning versus other Symbols may have greater meaning. For later Stones (Class 2) the PB is perhaps present as part of the transition from one religious belief to another (making a connection) but the earlier relationship with other Symbols may have either less, different or no continued meaning – these are explored below. Overall (for Classes 1 and 2) the relative positioning of Symbols is probably by design but our interpretation over 1500 years on could be considered speculative.

Analyses & Views

As the PB in itself is one of the most difficult Symbols to interpret there is the question whether its position versus another Symbol makes it more difficult to interpret or less difficult should the other Symbol provide a key or pointer. These are the author's analyses and views:

- 1) The PB appears directly above, below and alongside a **Mirror** in 9 instances on Class 1 Stones and above in 2 instances on Class 2 Stones. In the main text, the Mirror is

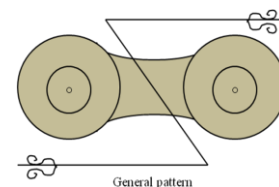


decoded as depicting relationships between the Zodiac, Planets and Earth. In each case the large circle is the Zodiac and the smaller ones are in some cases the Earth and Planets or Earth, Planets and Celestial Sphere – dependent on layout. The design of the smaller circles, especially where there are concentric ones, is very similar to the circles on the ZDD Symbols.

The proximity of the Mirror and PB perhaps suggests a commonality of meaning related to an astronomical or astrological aspect. In Mithraic terms, the Mirror is a Symbol associated with the Nymphus grade which has Venus as its associated Planet. Venus is known as the morning star and relates to Cautes. It appears with several constellations during its orbit. Astrologically mirrors are considered to be portals into another dimension so maybe there are several decodes for the Mirror Symbol – again reinforcing the prospect of Mithraic symbolism having multiple purposes.

With the PB most likely representing Capricorn, as explored above, arguably the association with the Mirror Symbol relates, for the example alongside, to the point where the Double Disc component overlaps or “gates” into the Zodiac at Capricorn.

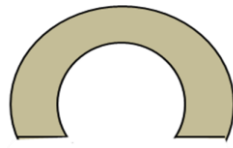
- 2) The **Z-Rod & Double Disc (ZDD)** is directly above and below the PB for both Class 1 and Class 2 Stones – with a total of 8 instances – therefore no set rule seems apparent. However, from the main text decodes, the symbolism of the ZDD with the outermost circles in the discs i.e. the Celestial Sphere, and the notion that the line of the “Z” connecting the representations of Cautes and Cautopates (the arms of the “Z”) could be time, a linkage with the PB is a possibility on several levels. The Zodiac in the Celestial Sphere has constellations and the PB may represent a constellation – Hydra and Serpens have already been considered but do not fit well.



With the discovery that the Symbols on the Pictish Stones are the terrestrial part of the “Open-Air” Mithraeum and in some cases pointers to the skyward view, then the prospects for astronomical and / or astrological purposes for the Symbols are reinforced.

Currently the only solution to the reason why the PB and DDZ are in these 8 cases closely positioned is the Capricorn constellation with a connection between the Double Disc and Zodiac.

- 3) Each of the 4 instances of the **Arch or Horseshoe** on Class 1 Stones in close proximity to the PB Symbol has the PB below the Arch Symbol. This could represent the arc of a planet's orbit, the entrance to a cave, the general shape of the inside of a

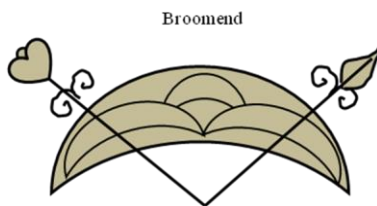


General pattern

Roman Mithraeum or the Celestial Sphere etc. Taking the example of the inside shape of a Mithraeum, an initiate could be told about the contrast between iconography in the indoor Mithraeum versus the lack of such iconography in Pictish-Mithraism when one can see the Planets and some components of the Celestial Sphere (e.g. constellations) when looking up

from a Symbol Stone. In effect, the iconography of a Mithraeum is replaced by the skyward view when standing by a Pictish Stone with the Symbols on the Stones prospectively acting as pointers or keys. There is no readily explained reason for the proximity between PB and Arch Symbols unless it is the Capricorn connection and the notion of looking into a gateway i.e. the gate (Capricorn) the soul goes through to heaven.

- 4) Taking the **V-Rod & Crescent** (VRC) related to the PB, there are 12 instances (8 for Class 1 and 4 for Class 2) where the PB is below the VRC. Given that the Stones are religious in nature (the early ones specifically to pursue Pictish-Mithraism) it is suggested that there is significance when the VRC is at the top of a Symbol Stone despite more than 50% not being at the top (which may be for other reasons). VRC objects appear at the top of 20 Class 1 Stones – arguably placed there deliberately so the viewer looks up from the Stone to the sky (for smaller Stones) or across the top to the sky (for taller Stones). The object is a crescent representing the firmament with the



Broomend

crescent representing the firmament with the V-Rod not being a rod but two directional arrows. In Mithraism and Astrology the soul comes into mortality from heaven at birth and returns to immortality at death.

Each example of the VRC object very clearly shows the direction of soul travel (generally in from the left hand side and out from the right) to a central point (the viewer) with the crescent representing the sky-ward view.

So, could the PB when specifically positioned below the VRC add to the decoding of the VRC Symbol? In Mithraism the soul travels via the seven Planets in its journey to and from heaven (the Celestial Sphere) with the Leontocephalous alongside the eighth gate (heaven). The soul travel is consistent with the concept of the VRC Symbol and the gates through which the soul leaves and re-enters heaven are Cancer and Capricorn. The PB placed below the VRC would then reinforce the soul travel concepts and prospectively add another astrological dimension as the Leontocephalous is a Lion headed beast (Leo grade in Roman Mithraism) encircled in a corkscrew fashion by a serpent/snake arguably linking to the constellations Serpens or Hydra.

However, with the greater likelihood of the PB being Capricorn then the close association with the VRC is the upward arrow representing the soul's travel after death and entering heaven via the gate that is Capricorn.

Conclusions

In many religious beliefs there is a great concern about life after death with an expectation of immortality and how it can be achieved. In Astrology and Mithraism there is a balanced explanation to both birth and death in terms of the travel of the soul.

The Capricorn constellation is said to be one of the two Gates of the Gods where the Milky Way and the Zodiac intersect. Astrologically souls descend on birth through the Gate of Cancer and ascend after death through the Gate of Capricorn and into immortality.

In Pictish-Mithraism the V-Rod and Crescent (the most numerous Symbol) represents the view to heaven (the Celestial Sphere) and the directions of the arrival and departure of the soul through the Cancer and Capricorn “gates”. That Symbol’s association with the Pictish Beast Symbol (signifying Capricorn) on several Stones causes each to complement and reinforce the other’s meaning. Similarly, in the instances of proximity between the Pictish Beast and Mirror it is Capricorn that is the common feature – the “gate” point into the Zodiac.

Data - Positional Relationship between the Pictish Beast and Other Symbols

Pictish Beast Symbol – Stone & Location	Class Incised 1; Cross 2	Mirror	ZDD	Arch Horseshoe	VRC	Other
Aberlemno, Flem. Farm NO55NW 33	1			Below		
Ardlair, Kennethmont NJ52NE 3	1	Above				Tuning Fork beside
Balluderon NO33NE 2	2					Horsemen below & beside + Serpent/Z above
Brodie, "Rodney's Stone" NH95NE 3	2		Above			Fish Monsters
Broomend of Crichtie NJ71NE 8	1				Below	
Brough of Birsay HY22NW 1	1				Below	Mirror Case above; eagle & warriors below
Bruceton NO25SE 17	1			Below		None
Clatt NJ52NW 7	1			Below		None
Collace, Fairygreen NO23SW 4	1	Above				Mirror & Comb; Notched Rectangle
Congash NJ02NE 1 (Stone 1)	1			Below		
Dunfallandy NN95NW 29 (x 2 Beasts)	2				1 Above 1 Below	Many
Dyce NJ81 NE 8	1		Above			
Eassie NO34NE 4	2		Above			Many
Fyvie NJ73NE 1	1	Along			Below	
Gellyburn, Murthly NO03NE 1	2				Below	
Glenferness NH94SW 10 (x 2 Beasts)	2		Below		Above	Many
Golspie NC80SW 13	2					Many
Golspie NC80SW 9	1	Above			Below	Mirror & Comb
Inveravon NJ13NE 7 (Stone 3)	1					None - fragment
Inveravon NJ13NE 7 (Stone 4)	1				Below	
Kinblethmont NO64NW 12	1	Above			Below	Mirror & Comb
Kintore, Churchyard NJ1NE 33	1				Below	Salmon, triple disc & bar
Kintore, Castle Hill NJ17NE 32 (Stone 1 - front)	1		Above			
Kintore, Castle Hill NJ17NE 32 (Stone 1 - back)	1	Below				Inverted
Kintore NJ71NE 69	1	Below				Concentric square
Largo NO40SW 2	2		Below			Many
Linlathen NO43SE 1	1					Fragment - lost
Logie ElphinStone NJ72NW 7 (Stone 3)	1				Above	
Maiden Stone NJ72SW 1	2	Above				Many
Meigle NO24SE 25 (Stone 1)	2	Above				Mirror & Comb + Many
Meigle NO24SE 25 (Stone 5)	2					With Mirror Case – narrow side + Many
Mortlach NJ33NW 12 (Stone 2)	1					Curvilinear S
Navidale, St Ninian's Chapel ND01NW 23	1					Triple Disc
Nigg NH87SW 1	2					Many
Rhynie "Craw Stane" NJ42NE 35	1					Fish

Rhynie Mains NJ42NE 36	1	Above			Above	
Rhynie Barflat NJ42NE 53	1					Decorated rectangle + maybe Mirror
Rossie Priory NO23SE 4	2				Below	Many
Scoonie NO30SE 15	2					Hunting Scene
Shandwick NH87SE 4	2					Below DD + Many
St Madoes NO12SE 15	2		Below		Below	Many
Strathmartine Castle NO33NE 21	1				Below	
Strathmartine Kirkyard NO33NE 7 (Stone 1)	2					Below Step + Many
Strathmartine Kirkyard NO33NE 7 (Stone 2)	2					Fragment
Strathmartine Kirkyard NO33NE 7 (Stone 4)	2					Fragment
Tealing NO43NW 9	2					Fragment + Fish Monster & Serpent
Tillytarmon NJ54NW 20	1					Below Eagle
Tullich NO39NE 2	1	Above	Below			
Ulbster ND34SW 28.01	2				Along	Many