Reviews


The publication of *The Problem of the Picts* in 1955, edited by F.T. Wainwright, brought together the skills of art historians, archaeologists and linguists, and was a turning-point in the scholarly study of the Pictish people. But the title said a great deal about the approach to the topic: it stressed the problematic, the puzzling, the difficult. In particular it stressed the question of the origin of the Picts: ‘Who were the Picts? And where did they come from? These questions lie at the heart of the Pictish problem ...’, as Wainwright observed in his Preface to the 1955 volume (p.v). While the ‘problem’ so stated did not prevent the authors of that volume from exploring a far wider range of topics, or using the evidence to shed light on other questions, this ‘problem’ did rather haunt the book and has haunted scholarship to some extent for decades.

But the landscape of Pictish studies has been greatly transformed since 1955, through the emergence of new archaeological and art-historical evidence and through new theoretical ways of reading that evidence. The historical sources have also been re-examined in ways which have radically changed our perception: the entire kingdom of Fortriu has been transplanted from Strathearn in the south to Moray in the north by Alex Woolf,1 while the traditional historiography of the ‘union of Picts and Scots’ in which Gaelic Dál Riata simply got up in the 840s and conquered the Picts has been fatally undermined by scholars, notably Dauvit Broun.2 Surprisingly, given their implications for the field, neither of these two fairly recent transformations of Pictish historiography is mentioned except in passing in this volume.

The professions of the three editors of the volume (two archaeologists and an art historian) might raise the expectation that there would be a stress on material culture in the essays it contains, and that expectation is fully met. All but three of the 14 chapters are contributions from these disciplines, broadly speaking.

In ‘The Problems of Pictish Art’, Jane Geddes reviews developments in scholarly approaches to Pictish art since Wainwright’s book. The inherited

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notion of this tradition as shrouded in obscurity as to its meaning (as well as artistically deficient) has been subjected to vigorous critique. It must be understood in the context of other early Christian cultural expressions; its meanings must be framed in the context of what we know about liturgy, theology and literature (something that Kellie Meyer addresses later in the volume); the Pictish stones must be understood in the context of their siting in a medieval landscape, rather than simply as isolated objects (a point explored in depth by other contributors).

Mark A. Hall explores the landscape around Forteviot and the sculpture located there, deploying the insights of the ‘cultural biography’ approach to monuments. In this approach a monument is understood not solely in terms of the intention of the designer or maker (the ‘death of the author’ as Barthes might have approvingly remarked), nor of its patronage, nor of its original location in a landscape. It is conceived of as an object with a lifetime of centuries during which it may be relocated or re-contextualised by changes in the surrounding landscape; it will be re-interpreted by new generations of owners, users and witnesses, acquiring a constantly shifting set of social meanings, a ‘biography’, which may shed light on all the periods of its existence. This is an enriching approach to the monuments and their landscape and points towards a new set of questions which might be asked of this landscape (pp. 163–64). It is worth correcting here, however, the oft-repeated view, which Hall seems to share (p. 138), that the record of David de Bernham’s marathon of church dedications in the 1240s tells us which saints the churches were dedicated to. It does not. Bishop David’s Pontificale, the manuscript known as Paris BN Latin 1218, contains a list of the churches he dedicated as well as the days on which the dedications were carried out, but not the patron saints of those churches. Neither does version B of the St Andrews Foundation Legend state that Forteviot kirk was dedicated to St Andrew – though it may very well have been.

There is little in the volume which focusses on Pictish Christianity or the Pictish church – though there is plenty of evidence which might help to draw a picture, both archaeological and literary (Adomnán’s Vita Columbae, Cáin Adomnán, Bede’s Historia Ecclesiastica and the Annals, to name but a few). Kellie Meyer makes a brave attempt to interrogate the monuments of the Pictish monastic landscape around Portmahomack for evidence of Pictish liturgical practice. The interrogation is, in principle, well conceived: close study of ecclesiastical imagery in a piece of Pictish art might reveal something of the liturgical practice (and thus of the belief) of those who made and used that artwork. In ‘Saints, Scrolls and Serpents’, however, her interrogation is flawed in various ways. Her initial question begins with the observation that
'which sect of Christianity [the Pictish church] followed at particular periods is somewhat unclear' (p. 169). The ‘sects’ she has in mind are the ‘Irish’ and ‘Roman’ forms of Christianity. She wants to know which of these the Picts followed. But to couch the question in this way is to assume that the Picts had to choose between any two such ‘sects’, and Meyer paints a picture of an artificially polarised church in which a Columban monastery has to share its space in Ross with Curetán, a ‘Roman-style bishop’ (whatever that is and however it might differ from a Columban bishop – which he may very well have been). This polarised and rather outdated view of the church provides the underlying conceptual structure for Meyer’s attempt to use the sculpture of the Pictish monastic community on the Tarbat peninsula to discover what kind of liturgy they celebrated. But on the Nigg cross-slab the fragment broken from the loaf of bread which is being delivered to Paul and Anthony by a raven is over-interpreted. Even if it is not accidental damage (which it may well be) and even if it was intended to evoke the breaking off of part of the host during the Eucharist, this cannot be used to point towards a Céli Dé liturgical rite (p. 181) or a ‘reaffirmation of loyalty to the Columban familia’ as Meyer suggests. This is simply because both the Céli Dé and the Roman liturgies have a ritual in which a fragment of the host is broken off and separated from the whole, as the Ordo Romanus Primus indicates: the bishop rumpit oblatam ex latere dextro et particulam quam ruperit super altare relinquit.³

Meyer has further speculations about the role of serpents in the Tarbat sculptures and of other animal and human figures. She offers some interesting ideas about liturgy, church architecture and its cosmic symbolism, all of which may enlarge our understanding of some of the Tarbat stones and their meanings in some way. The difficulty – or perhaps the promise – of such exercises lies in the fact that no sign has only one meaning. The sheer excess of possible interpretations of any given symbol makes it hard to know how much of our ‘interpretation’ is exegesis and how much is eisegesis – reading our own meanings into the sign.

Archaeologists shed light on Pictish culture and society. Stevick offers a study of two crosses on Pictish cross-slabs which are revealed to be ‘exercises in constructional geometry within a culture whose artists understood profoundly the thorough geometrical bonding of line and area’ (p. 216). Heald’s study of non-ferrous metalworking (a high-status skill) at low-status sites challenges received opinion and raises interesting questions about the mobility of skilled workers, the sometimes privileged place of the smith in early medieval society, the relationship between patron and craftsman, and the importance of place as an expression of power in such a relationship.

³ ‘breaks the host on the right side and leaves on the altar the fragment which he has broken.’
Four chapters form a section entitled ‘Landscape for the Living and the Dead’. Stephen Driscoll’s wide-ranging survey of ‘Pictish Archaeology’ raises many of the central questions and sets the tone, stressing the importance of viewing and interrogating whole landscapes rather than merely individual objects within those landscapes. This insight underlies the current work of the SERF project, of which Driscoll is a director. SERF is undertaking an integrated landscape study of Forteviot and the surrounding area and is beginning to shed new light on Pictish politics, economy, settlement patterns and the exploitation by Picts of pre-historic monuments in their landscape.

In a more localised study, Gondek and Noble explore the landscape and symbol stones at Rhynie. Among other things they explore the possible meaning of Class I symbol stones as ‘a reassertion of existing ideological and social identities in the face of new Christian ideology in Pictland’ (p. 290), drawing on the recent work of David Clarke. Fraser and Halliday, in their chapter on the early medieval landscape of Donside, also invite us to understand symbol stones as the reaction to a social crisis or upheaval brought about by the encounter with Christianity (pp. 327–30). But it seems to me that there are good reasons to question this kind of interpretation of symbol stones. Firstly the symbols themselves cannot be intrinsically reactionary, the expression of an old system defending itself against a new Christian ideology, since they are soon incorporated into explicitly Christian monuments. Secondly, there is no reason to assume that Christianity posed a threat to the traditional exercise of power in Pictland: it is equally likely that Pictish élites who accepted Christianity did so because they thought it might enhance their power and prestige and that it (and the romanitas which was its political-cultural matrix) might provide ideological and technological resources which they could use. Among these resources may have been a tradition of the use of stone-carved monuments to articulate power-relationships in a landscape.

A more promising line of enquiry is suggested by Fraser and Halliday’s ‘working hypothesis’ that ‘the stones are set up not so much to mark the boundaries of territories as to mark particular locations at the edges of territories ... cemeteries, cult centres, routeways, or possibly even hosting grounds’ (p. 322).

Sarah Winlow’s ‘Review of Pictish Burial Practices in Tayside and Fife’ is more agnostic than the previous two chapters about what archaeology can tell us at present about the impact of Christianity on pre-Christian ideologies and structures in Pictland. In a thorough, clear and nuanced interrogation of the burial sites in her chosen area, examining the locations, sizes, arrangements and types of burials, and the changes over time in burial practices, she concludes that ‘Christianity is not the impetus for the change in the burial tradition observed’ (p. 356) and urges us to look for explanations of variation and change.
in matters of settlement, use and control of land, kinship, status, gender – though the adoption of Christianity may still play a role.

Three chapters in the collection are more properly described as historical. James Fraser deals with Wainwright’s ‘Problem’ (Who were the Picts? Where did they come from?) by arguing that there is no problem, because it is a non-question. Indeed his language about some of those who have in the past sought to answer this non-question is sometimes rather dismissive: their quest has ‘passed into absurdity’ and they were ‘obsessed’. Instead Fraser asks of those who thought of themselves as Picti: when and why did they do so and what did their ethnic identity mean to them? The conclusion entails the delightful irony that the Picti defined themselves in their own origin legend as barbarians, as people who traced their origins to a non-Romanised Scythian past; but they were only able to do so because they had drunk deeply from the wells of Latin literature, including Vergil’s Aeneid (perhaps via Servius), which referred to the pici Agathyrsi (‘painted Agathyrsi’) as Scythians, and possibly Isidore’s Etymologiae which associated the terms Scythiae, Albani and picta (albeit with no intended connection to Scots, Alba or Picts).

Nicholas Evans outlines the approaches of earlier scholars to the medieval texts which have provided the foundation for our understanding of Pictish origins and history to date, in particular the Pictish king-lists, but placing these in the context of other medieval sources. Evans considers the character of the king-lists, their multiple versions (and editions of them) and the ideological interests that lay behind the creation of variant versions. Origin legends have been heavily quarried by scholars – among other things to argue for and against the supposed matriliny of the Picts – and Evans points out useful avenues for future research in this field. He concludes with interesting reflections on the extent of Pictish literacy, offering a picture of something more sophisticated, deeply rooted and widespread than has been commonly recognised (especially since Kathleen Hughes’ important contributions to the discussion), but the survival of whose texts depended in many ways on their continued usefulness to post-Pictish societies.

For readers of this journal it may be Simon Taylor’s chapter which will arouse most interest: ‘Pictish Place-Names Revisited’ is the longest piece in the book by a good margin. It is good to see the editors including such a substantial work on place-names in a volume of this kind. Taylor’s contribution undertakes to define what a Pictish place-name is and to investigate the distribution of place-names containing some P-Celtic (i.e. Pictish or British) elements in northern Britain. At the outset Taylor makes important distinctions between (a) wholly Pictish names and (b) those which contain words borrowed from Pictish into Gaelic but which do not appear as common nouns, and (c) those elements
borrowed from Pictish into Gaelic which are also attested as common nouns in the latter language. Finally (d) there are place-names containing Gaelic words which have Pictish cognates which may have influenced the ways in which the Gaelic words were used in place-names. This set of rigorous distinctions underlies the following treatment of the toponymic record.

One of the important insights arising from the distribution of place-names containing Pictish elements is that ‘of all the elements considered thoroughly Pictish ... the bulk of them ignore the Firth of Forth as the great frontier’, the body of water which is supposed to divide Pictish from British polities and speech (p. 76). Almost all Taylor’s maps (pp. 86, 90, 94, 98 and 104) show distributions with healthy presences on both sides of ‘the great frontier’. This is surely a major contribution to the vexed question (though rather less vexed in recent years) of the relationship between Pictish and Northern British and unpacking these and similar maps will shed useful light on the question.

A useful excursus on *pett*-names places them in their proper place as Gaelic artefacts, using a term borrowed from Pictish (pp. 77–79). This is an important antidote to the still oft-repeated use of *pett*-names to indicate Pictish settlement and Taylor rightly associates it with Gaelic settlement. His argument lends itself to misunderstanding at one point, however: the statement that the distribution of *pett*-names depicts ‘not the settlement area of the Pictish people ... but rather the extent of Gaelic-speakers in the tenth century’, and the expansion of Alba, (p. 79) might suggest that Gaelic speakers were restricted to the areas of *pett*-names, which certainly was not the case. The distribution of *pett*-names does not extend to swathes of Gaelic-speaking territories on the west coast or in south-west Scotland.

But given that *pett*-names are an essentially Gaelic phenomenon, it is remarkable that there is a fairly close correspondence between the distribution of *pett*-names and the territory that we regard as having been Pictland (a handful of *pets* on the west coast notwithstanding). This does not make the names Pictish, but the correspondence does ask us to imagine why Gaelic-speakers adopted this word and used it to name farms in just those areas where Pictish had once been spoken and hardly at all elsewhere. The answer may lie simply in the inertia of estate-administration. *Pett*-names were part of the vocabulary of the management of land, and presumably the raising of tribute or render from tenants or subjects, and it is likely that *pett* served to label certain farms or settlements in Pictish times. The continued use of *pett* in the Gaelic-speaking period to give names to settlements is likely to reflect a continuation of some aspects of land-management from Pictish into Gaelic times: farms which retained their identities, renders which remained the same or demands by Pictish lords which were later made by Gaels. Indeed it may have been the
continuity of estate administration from the Pictish into the Gaelic period in these territories that encouraged (or even required) the borrowing of *pett* from Pictish into Gaelic.

Taylor criticises and corrects various earlier distribution maps of P-Celtic elements, adds some new names and removes others, refining our picture of the character of the elements concerned and of their spread. All this provides useful data but also vital guiding principles for future discussion of Pictish toponymy.

This new collection of papers is of great importance in advancing our understanding of Pictish history and it should have had a wide readership. It is a pity therefore that the editors chose Brill as their publisher, whose €130 price tag for the book makes it unlikely in the extreme that most of this wide potential readership will ever lay hands on the book. Other publishers who know the Scottish medieval history market well are capable of selling a book of this size and production quality for £40 or £50 (and making a paperback for less than half that). I can see no good reason why they would not have published this book at that kind of price, and it is a pity that they didn’t.

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Professor John MacQueen has long made one of the most important scholarly contributions to our understanding of south-western Scotland and the region of Galloway in particular. His researches of the 1950s and 1960s saw pioneering publications on Galloway’s place-names and the watershed study of Scotland’s earliest known saint, *St Nynia*, first published in 1961. The latter has been incrementally augmented over successive republications in 1990 and 2005; his published work on place-names has continued intermittently over the decades, including recent comment in the revised versions of *St Nynia*. The two volumes under review are welcome as representing a partial summation of his work on the place-names of the area over more than 60 years; recent presentations suggest that there may be more to come, in work on the place-names of Carrick.¹

¹ See Michael Ansell’s summary of his talk at the 2009 Scottish Place-Name Society conference in New Galloway: <www.spns.org.uk/CtWigtown.html>.
Whilst making a contribution towards a full survey of the place-names of Wigtownshire, these two modestly priced paperback volumes do not aim to be that survey, in either format or style. Instead, they belong to a genre of local place-name studies familiar to the readers of this journal; yet they are distinct in two respects. On the one hand, the author brings a linguistic and scholarly authority to bear on his many years of collecting and considering the names he discusses. On the other hand, he eschews an alphabetical approach, embarking instead on two rather different tours of the linguistic landscape, reminiscent in many ways of the great W. J. Watson’s chapter surveys in his *History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, such as that of ‘Dumfries and Galloway’. The two volumes approach this tour from opposite trajectories, the earlier volume on the Rhinns beginning very locally with the town of Stranraer and its environs and more or less examining the linguistic contribution to the toponymicon sequentially back in time (Scots and English; Gaelic; Norse and British), whilst the 2008 volume on the Moors and Machars proceeds forward from the earliest names to the most modern, again with some diversions en route.

The 2008 volume shows some marked improvements on the earlier one. The Rhinns volume began with no explanation of what it was or what it intended to do, a problem exacerbated somewhat by a meandering format and sometimes inexplicable structure. In it, early forms were given very fitfully, as also references to sources for names (an interesting but confusing section discussing names in late medieval and early modern charters is to be found from p. 60 on in the 2002 volume, but it is badly signposted and interspersed with other material). More frustrating still was the absence of grid references, which, given the volume is not laid out geographically in any other way, makes it often difficult to find a given name if you don’t already know where it is (though parishes are often given after newly mentioned names). MacQueen’s preface to the 2008 volume shows some reconsideration of approach or perhaps response to feedback: on the whole he provides grid references; there are many more early forms and cited sources; the approach is better explained and the tour of languages and names better controlled. The print is also bigger (perhaps in response to feedback from some of the intended readership) and the colour pictures provided in the 2008 volume are not only of good quality and well reproduced, but often nicely illustrative.

One could still wish for better provision of sources and early forms and MacQueen’s reasoning concerning this in his 2008 preface is a scandal to all place-name scholars: ‘Early forms are sometimes helpful, but in Scotland, for the most part, they depend on scribes who did not know the language of the place-name, or were not literate in it; the earlier form is often no more helpful than the modern. Local pronunciation is often the best clue.’ (p. 3). Though
there are plenty of forgivable reasons (e.g. genre of publication, lack of time) to explain the paucity of early forms, this excuse simply will not do. Early forms so frequently reveal a different story from modern forms and also often correlate in useful ways with pronunciation. As a local example, one might cite the case of Kirkcolm (NX031684). MacQueen gives this as ‘almost certainly “Columba’s (Colum’s or Calum’s) church”’ (2002, 50), but Daphne Brooke showed some years ago that early forms (going back to the 13th century, e.g. Kirkcum 1275) and local pronunciation suggest this as more probably ‘the church of St Cumméne’, something seemingly confirmed by papal correspondence in 1395. And what to make of the tension between early forms (which support MacQueen’s analysis) and the second element stress in the local pronunciation (which does not) in the case of Monreith (2008, 12–13)? In any case, local pronunciations are only helpful if they are given, which they rarely are in either of these volumes.

What makes Galloway’s place-names so interesting is the sheer number of languages to which they give evidence. The phasing and stratification of the linguistic history of Galloway, and the south-west in general, remains in some particulars uncertain. The presence of a substratum of British (and perhaps earlier) names is not in doubt, something MacQueen tackles more clearly in the 2008 volume (interestingly the Moors and Machars have better evidence of British names in any case). The duration of British in the area is less certain and more attention could perhaps have been given to this issue, though key evidence, present in, for example, the cluster of trev names in nearby Carrick, is lacking from Wigtownshire (though he has a speculative discussion of the nature of the trev whilst discussing names such as Threave (High, Middle, Low, Threave Hill), Ochiltree, and Monreith (2008, 12–16)). He nonetheless ends up overstating British presence by mistakenly assigning some names to British. A number of clearly Gaelic names employing G. eaglais ‘church’ are assigned to British (as if they contain Br. *eglēs) on highly dubious grounds: examples include a lost Kerneheglis, also lost Slewnagles (in Leswalt parish) and Bareagle (2002, 96, cf. p. 69), the last of which may not even contain eaglais (see 2008, 22, for discussion of Dalreagle for better derivation). The motivation behind this – also to be found in recent republications of St Nynia – is to demonstrate

2 D. Brooke, ‘Kirk- compound place-names in Galloway and Carrick’, TDGNAHS 3rd Series 58 (1983), 56–71: 61 and 70; see also eadem, Wild Men and Holy Places (Edinburgh, 1994), 75–76. It seems inexplicable that MacQueen apparently fails to cite Brooke’s work at all in the 2008 volume, although she is mentioned in the 2002 one (her name misspelled as ‘Brook’ in the Bibliography, p. 105). It is odd to me that the main other recent commentator on Galloway names, one whose contribution on, for instance, the English stratum was so distinctive, should get so little mention.
that there were *eglēs names in Galloway proper (he even invokes annaid to try to make good their lack: 2008, 74) in order to shore up his view of Nynia and the early church.\textsuperscript{3} The evidence does not support this, however: these are Gaelic names with eaglais as specific, very distinct from the names on which discussion of Br. *eglēs has been founded. We should also dispense with a lurking Br. coed ‘wood’ in Knockcoid (2002, 93): the name is Gaelic, and the second element probably coimhead, the meaning probably ‘watch-hill’. The intriguing set of names based on Torhouse (2008, 19) also do not belong here: whilst the first element, here the specific, may well be Br. tor ‘flank, hill’ (though one shouldn’t exclude OE torr), the generic is on MacQueen’s analysis Eng. or ON, and so the name is also.

More controversial over the years has been the contribution of Old English, Old Norse and Gaelic to Galloway’s toponymy. On the whole MacQueen’s handling of the potential Old English evidence is solid and sensitive, with a good sense of the difficulties of conclusively distinguishing names deriving from Old English from those coined in the period after 1100, which we might more readily assign to ‘Older Scots’. This is true also of his discussion of Old Norse names; the only real controversies in regard to them have been the fact that ON is so fitfully evidenced in Galloway and the persistence in mis-assigning certain types of name to ON influence. So, for instance, scholars have been tempted in recent years to treat names in G. àirigh (OG áirge) ‘shieling’ as pertaining in some way to ON influence, on the rather syllogistic grounds that that word was borrowed into ON as erg and used to coin place-names in ON. MacQueen ignores this tendency, sensibly, though notes a name which may come from ON erg, Arrow (High and Low) (2008, 68). On the other hand, he comes to an unnecessary conclusion that since áirge was adopted by ON speakers, and since this must have been happening after c. 850, therefore the use of àirigh in Gaelic place-names in Scotland must predate 850. This is, to say the least, questionable and there is to date no clear evidence that it was; on

\textsuperscript{3} He does this by reference to the 2005 version of St Nynia, p.154. The fuller discussion of putative ‘new *eglēs names’ in Galloway in that book is on pp.134–35, where in addition to those mentioned here he discusses the lost name Ecclislands. As noted above, I think his description of Slewnagles and Kerneheglis as ‘hav[ing] taken Gaelic form and been compounded with a Gaelic first element’ is tendentious and wrong: these are simply Gaelic names with a very common Gaelic word (eaglais ‘church’) as a specific. Ecclislands must also be rejected. Eccles is attested as a surname in the vicinity in the late middle ages (see Reid, Wig. Chrs, pp. 176, 216, 248) and this would be a more plausible origin for a place-name in -land (these are often compounded with surnames in the late medieval and early modern period), only appearing in the early modern period once. The consequent remaining absence of *eglēs names from Galloway does not justify the strained argument MacQueen builds on these names in the 2005 St Nynia, pp.135–44.
the other hand, MacQueen himself provides good grounds for treating some of the Wigtownshire àirigh names as later. None of this justifies grouping names in àirigh under ‘Early Names’ (2002, 38–40). MacQueen is also cautious on whether to consider names in Kirk- as signs of ON influence, but largely excludes them from treatment in this context. He notes (2008, 145) that the ON names in the Moors and Machars differ in a number of ways from those in the Rhinns, a topic which would be worth following up. The main distinction is apparent in the appearance in the former area of a series of names from ON by ‘settlement’; these extend also into Kirkcudbrightshire and further east, but are absent from the Rhinns. Where MacQueen’s treatment of ON names is somewhat problematic is in conflating ON loanwords into Scots (e.g. ON múli and sker, found in, for example, Mull of Galloway, The Scares) with names more certainly coined in ON.

Since the bulk of the place-names in Wigtownshire were created in Gaelic, the bulk of the discussion of both books is reserved for Gaelic names. This is, of course, the area where MacQueen has in the past made his most noted toponymic contribution, in particular advancing his theory, built on by Nicolaisen, that names in sliabh in Galloway, and in the Rhinns in particular, suggest a very early settlement by Gaels in this area. This idea has come under what is to my mind fatal attack recently, by Simon Taylor in the first volume of this journal. MacQueen’s treatment of this challenge is not convincing. He fails to engage with Taylor’s core argument, dismissing his views because Taylor does not ‘make any distinction between sliabh as a defining and as a qualifying element’ (2008, 69). This is his sole criticism and, whilst it is true that Taylor’s distribution map does not distinguish between these, MacQueen does not take account of the many additional names employing sliabh as a generic that Taylor has amassed, the smaller proportion of the additional names Taylor has found where sliabh is the specific, or his nuanced treatment of these names (where often the presence of the element in the specific implies a lost sliabh name in the vicinity). The fact is that the names in sliabh in the Rhinns are likely to be late and some must be later than the proposed early settlement period (e.g. names containing the definite article which have the later formation of noun + article + noun, e.g. Sleunagles (2002, 96), Sloehabbert (2008, 70). MacQueen also persists in his earlier view that names employing G. carraig are early. Again, his own examples show this cannot be true of some of these names (e.g. Carrickclunachon, which seems to contain a late medieval surname: 2002, 36), and we must ask, if some names are demonstrably late (as late as the later middle ages), why need any be early? Arguments from restricted

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distribution are insufficient to demonstrate the chronology of names. I should note that I had not noticed before reading these volumes the lateness of some of the comparable Islay names which supposedly provide the justification for the Galloway ones being very early, e.g. Carraig na h-Acarsaid (discussed 2002, 34, where the specific is a G. loanword from ON).

It is worth noting that there are unconvincing discussions of a number of other major generic elements. Treatment of *achadh* is problematic (2008, 49–52) – he regards this as early because attested early in Ireland (though surely he must know that the Irish annals are not contemporary before the late 6th century at the earliest? So why cite AU entries at AD 130 and 487 to support the earliness of the element?). But it is not clear that it was in use so early in place-names in Scotland. He takes preposed adjectival forms as evidence of early date (2008, 50), yet some of these adjectives regularly preceded nouns in place-name compounds, e.g. *garbh*, and names containing these can be of any date. He tries to create an idealised explanation for *baile* vs *achadh*, as a distinction between free and unfree farms (2002, 75) – but his discussion is very much out of date and relies on these two terms being contemporary in usage, which seems unlikely now. He oddly treats *peighinn* ‘pennyland’ as an ‘early’ Gaelic element (2008, 52). His analysis of *cill* (2008, 75) is based on Nicolaisen and has not been updated to take the work of, for example, Simon Taylor into account. His description of this element as missing entirely from ‘Lewis, Harris … and much of the east coast’ is erroneous. In 2002 he employs Macdonald for his explanation of *annaid*, as an abandoned church site; by 2008 (74–75) he had clearly come across my 1995 article on the term, which he cites approvingly alongside Macdonald: but my analysis disagreed with Macdonald’s and I do not think they are compatible.

All this said, his maintenance of his view that there may have been early Gaelic settlement in Wigtownshire (which, of course, on the basis of simple geography is entirely plausible, however lacking in evidence it may be) seems not to unduly affect his general view of Gaelic, which healthily treats it as a phenomenon largely of the period after 900 in Galloway; MacQueen is also aware, though less interested than he might be, of its reasonably long persistence. He calls our attention to, but does not sufficiently highlight, a number of names which show Gaelic incorporating words from Scots, e.g. *Balyett* (2002, 11, 74), *Balsmith* (2008, 64);⁵ there are others where he seems to miss the

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⁵ He suggests Sc. *yett* ‘gate’ for Balyett, though does not further elaborate. It may be that we are dealing here either with *yett* in the sense of ‘passage between two hills’ (or here, perhaps, between Loch Ryan and the Black and White Lochs), as seen in the Yets o’ Muckart; or perhaps in the sense of the gate of a town or burgh, noting the proximity of Balyett to the outskirts of the lost town of Innermessan. Balsmith he derives from a surname, but Balyett encourages the view that it may be the common noun.
significance of his own interpretation, e.g. Culgrange (2002, 62–63), and one might add Dargodjel (2008, 25), which one might suspect incorporates Sc. cudgel in something like daire na gcudgel ‘oakwood of the cudgels’.

There is, however, a persistent problem with the mode of explanation in both volumes. On the whole, MacQueen resorts to assertion, rather than explanation, that is, he doesn’t show his work. This is, of course, in keeping with the genre: lack of footnotes or apparatus make it difficult for those working in this mode to show the details of early forms, pronunciations and linguistic data on which an etymology might be based. But it means that the uninformed reader will need to take these explanations on faith (or not – this mode encourages a rather relativist attitude towards explanation, since anyone can assert anything!); the place-name scholar will simply have to try to uncover the thought process behind the proposed etymologies, on many occasions. There are exceptions to this: interesting discussions of terms such as fey (2002, 4) and several (2002, 25–26). But the assertive mode becomes particularly problematic in the Gaelic sections. Here, often, MacQueen’s proposals do not work, sometimes in minor, sometimes in major ways, but he has not explained his reasoning. Since he is an authority, and a scholar of what he writes about, this is a particular problem.

An example might be the place-name Auchrocchyr, surviving in Auchrochar Bank (2002, 6). Despite providing early forms as above (from Blaeu 1654, which MacQueen persists in calling ‘Pont’s map’) and also Auchrothry from a 1531 charter, MacQueen gives this as “(in)field of the hangman” (achadh a’ crochadair). On the basis of the forms given this is unlikely, if not impossible – we need an explanation for the fact that no forms give any evidence for the medial voiced dental towards the end of crochadair. This is not a sound likely to have been elided. In fact, the translation of the name may be sound, but MacQueen has given the wrong G. word; instead of ScG crochadair, he should have had recourse to the earlier form crochaire, which means the same thing (it is given by Dwelly also, but as an obsolete term). This discussion is in MacQueen’s chapter on Stranraer and environs. His derivation for Stranraer (2002, 10) goes against the general consensus, and also against the evidence of early forms, such as they are. These suggest that the name is G. sròn reamhar ‘large nose / headland’. MacQueen tacitly rejects this, asserting ‘The first element represents one of two related Gaelic words, sruthán “streamlet, burn”, or sruthán “current-place” “stream-place”’, a view derived from a somewhat

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6 On several, however, MacQueen is wrong to state this element is unique to Scottish place-names: several several are discussed in John Field, English Field-Names: A Dictionary (David Charles: Newton Abbot, 1972), 198; idem, A History of English Field-Names (Longman: London, 1993), 19.
confused passage in Watson (1926, p. 350). Leaving aside the problem of what he/Watson is thinking of with this second word, and the fact that the ScG form of both these (if they really are two words) should be *sruthan*, it is characteristic that he does not mention *sròn* at all, although phonologically it is the obvious etymon here and had previously been proposed by Maxwell.\(^7\)

There are other etymologies where the mismatch between current and/or historical form and proposed etymology would warrant explanation; without it, it seems no better than not suggesting a derivation at all. An example is **Balgreggan**, derived here (2002, 19) from *baile a' ghragain* ‘fermtoun of the manor’, which is possible, but ScG *gragan*, OG *grágán* is a rare word, and has -a- not -e-, which demands some explanation; *baile na gcreagan*, with the eclipsis frequently shown in Galloway after gen. pl. articles, and with loss of the article in anglicisation (again, pretty frequent), might explain the modern form better. Some of the proposed etymologies are exotic, unnecessary or just wrong, e.g. **Derskelpin** (2002, 68, citing Blaeu *Dirskulbeyne*), for which MacQueen proposes *doire [nan] spailpean* ‘oak-grove of the migratory workers’, but never explains why the name would have -skelp-, if the derivation were from a word in *spailp*-. Better surely to invoke OG *scolb*, *scealb* ‘splinter, wattle, piece of wood used in thatching’ (see **DIL**); ScG *sgolb*, *scealb* perhaps here in a diminutive form, e.g. *sguilbin* or *sgealban*? For **Kilstay** (2002, 82) the discussion is nonsensical, grasping at an impossible derivation from *a-staigh* ‘inside’ (given as *staigh* and *anns an taigh*, neither quite accurate) and leading to the odd conclusion based on the topography of the site, ‘The phrase “church within” thus defines the actual position. If this is so the name is not likely to be early.’ Almost all names in *cill* in Scotland contain saints – one might wish to hunt for one of these instead of an impossible adverbial phrase, but in any case we may be more likely to be dealing with *coille* than *cill* here. Perhaps more plausible (though still needing a bit of work) would be a derivation from OG / ScG *stagh* ‘stay’ (as in the rigging of a ship), itself an ON loanword. **Portavaddie** (2002, 52) is given as *port a’ bhàta* ‘harbour of the boat’, despite the many cognates throughout Scotland where this name or ones like it are *port a’ mhadaidh* ‘harbour of the (wild) dog’ (e.g. Port a’ Mhadaidh in Cowal), and the fact that this better explains the form of the name. For **Muntloch** (2002, 84), he proposes derivation from *maol-chnuachd*, even though early forms (e.g. *Mulknok*, Blaeu) more or less demonstrate that it is *maol-chnoc* (which at least here MacQueen gives as an alternative). Sometimes, whilst giving a sensible etymology, he gets distracted by fanciful and irrelevant ones, cf. his discussion of **Baltersan** (2008, 58–59), which he rightly gives as ‘fermtoun of the crossing’.

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\(^7\) There is, of course, a topographical issue – what headland is being referred to? The problem is discussed by Maxwell, *Place-Names of Galloway*, p. 254.
but then goes on into an involved discussion of Manx and Irish names that look a bit like this, and where other proposals exist for the specific – none of them plausible here. He concludes bizarrely with a glance at Ballytrustan, Co. Down, where a derivation from ON Thorsteinn has been proposed, and concludes, ‘If this applies to Baltersan also, it probably indicates the presence of the Gall-Gaidhil.’ It is hard to know what to make of this, except hankering for the exotic despite the pedestrian being correct.

There are other, deeper signs of insecurity with handling the Gaelic evidence. There is a tendency to propose gen. pl. derivations for specifics where the evidence might suggest gen. sg. (e.g. Gabarunning, 2002, 21; Culmick, 2002, 63), and, more frequently and with less reason, gen. sg. derivations for specifics where the evidence suggests gen. pl. In many of these cases gen. pl. is virtually guaranteed not only by lack of palatalisation of final consonants, but by the ‘Irish eclipsis’ following the gen. pl. article which is a feature of Galloway names. Examples include Marklach (2002, 22 < marg clach, not marg na cloiche); Ballinclach/Ballingclach (2002, 66 < baile na gcloch, not baile na cloice); a lost name Barnavanak (2002, 79–80, < barr na bhfeannag ‘hillock of the crows’, not barr in mhanaich ‘hill of the monk’). The interesting feature of ‘Irish eclipsis’ is not well treated the one place it is cited (2002, 69), despite Maxwell’s hyper-awareness of it and the excellent recent treatment by Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh. There is also a tendency to supply unnecessary definite articles in the derivations – this is confusing, as noun + article + noun forms in Gaelic tend to be later, and the impression thus given is of a later landscape than is often necessary. It may, however, be that MacQueen is here simply trying to give the name as it would be were it coined in modern ScG, where an article would be the norm. He is inconsistent in this, however, often supplying Irish spellings, Old Irish spellings, nonce spellings (e.g. mon for monadh) and occasionally what one might call ‘Watsonisms’ – detectable by an inappropriate diacritical mark, e.g. in discussion the Lairey Burn (2002, 6) where the form labharág shows his form to be an uncorrected Watson derivative (see Watson 1926, 433).

In a similar vein, the foundations of the research here seem a mixture of the dated and the quite recent. He relies on Kneen for his Manx names (ignoring Broderick), yet his Northern Irish material employs volumes of the NI Place-Name Survey. Joyce’s Irish Place-Names is much in evidence, as is Hogan, but none of the volumes of the recent Hogan-update from the Locus project in

8 ‘Place-Names as a Resource for the Historical Linguist’, in S. Taylor, ed., The Uses of Place-Names (Edinburgh, 1998), 12–53, esp. 23–30; MacQueen nowhere cites this book, though the articles by both Ó Maolalaigh and Barrow contain much he should be expected to be aware of in regard to the place-names of Wigtownshire.
Cork. For English place-names, Ekwall and other dictionaries of English place-names are in use, but oddly neither Smith’s *English Place-Name Elements* nor *VEPN*. I suppose this speaks of books written from a personal library, but it nonetheless marks the work in various ways.

I am conscious of having emphasized the negative in a review of books which, for the present, will still be essential reading for anyone interested in the place-names, or indeed the cultural history, of south-west Scotland. Essential as it will be for people to read these volumes, however, it will be just as essential for them to be aware of their weak points, especially, as noted above, because of the authority with which MacQueen writes, and which his long contribution to scholarship in Scottish Studies reinforces. Despite these deficiencies, Prof. MacQueen’s works highlight the richness of the place-name material in Wigtownshire and provide important steps on the way towards surveying and understanding that county.

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