*Pixti/*Pexti, Picti?  
The Name ‘Picti’ Revisited

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1. Introduction

According to Gaelic tradition, Pictland once comprised seven kingdoms. This is to be found in a Gaelic quatrains, attached to Lebor Bretnach sometime between 862 and 876 (Broun 2007, 78), concerning Cruithne’s seven sons, given here after Watson (1926, 107):

Mórseiser do Chruithne claind  
raindet Albain i seacht raind  
Cait Cé Cirig cethach clann  
Fíb Fidach Fotla Fortrenn  
ocus is e ainm gach fir dib fil for a fearand

(‘Seven of Cruithne’s offspring / divided Alba into seven divisions: / the portion of Cait, of Cé, of Círech, children with hundreds of possessions; / the portion of Fíb, of Fidaid, of Fotla, of Fortriu / and it is the name of each man of them that is on his land’) (Watson, ibid.)

1 This article results from a ‘Pictish Mini-Conference’ held in the Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, Aberystwyth, during the morning of Friday, 21 March, 2014, at which John Koch’s paper presented the notion that the discovery of the Gaulish Rezé form pixte ‘a fifth’ had provided new evidence for the Celticity of the Palaeohispanic Pint-/Pent- personal-names, a new etymology for the Gaulish group name Pictones, and possibly for Picti. I am grateful to Alexander Falileyev and Peter Schrijver for helpful comment in the preparation of this article.

2 The name Cruithne means ‘Pict’. This form derives from *Priteni (PCelt. *Quriteni), Welsh derivatives of which in Priten- are used to refer to the peoples of Britain north of the Roman province beyond the Antonine Wall, i.e. in northern Britain, while the similar form Pritani would refer to those Britons within the Roman province. The Irish knew only the form Priteni which comes out as Cruithin, Cruithmi in Old Irish. The Cruithin, largely of northern Ireland, were likely P-Celtic-speaking pre-Roman immigrants from Britain. The Irish also used the form Cruithni for the peoples of northern Britain, then later for the Picts (cf. Jackson 1954, 16–18).

3 Also in Broun (2007, 78–79), but minus the fifth line.

4 Here, Watson (1926, 107) notes, Cait, Cirig, Fortrenn ‘are all in the genitive case, and the same forms are used in the prose text which amplifies the statement of the quatrains. We may infer that the other names are also meant to be genitives, depending on nunn, a division, understood. We may infer too that the verse is older than the prose […].’ Watson (1926, 108) locates the various names as follows: Cait – Caithness and SE Sutherland, Cé – Marr and Buchan, Círech – Angus and the Mearns, Fíb – Fife, Fidach (?) – Moray and (Easter) Ross, Fotla – Atholl. Watson (ibid.) has Strathhearn and Menteith for Fortrenn, but this is now believed to refer to an area encompassing Forres and Inverness (cf. Woolf 2006, Fraser 2009, 50). For a discussion of Pictish territories in Irish and Scottish sources, see Evans (2013).
The literary device of giving lands to eponymous ancient founders was common in Antiquity and in Medieval times. However, the common idea that there were seven Pictish kingdoms\(^5\) or provinces from early times, as noted in the poem, may just be imaginary, or an exercise in poetic licence, or as Fraser (2009, 46) would have it, ‘stands on shaky ground’.\(^6\)

The name *Picti* has traditionally been taken as Latin *picti* ‘the painted people(s)’ from their perceived practice of adorning themselves with warpaint or of indulging in various forms of body-art, e.g. tattooing etc. (cf. Jackson, §3.5, below), which still finds supporters even today (cf. Fraser 2009), or that the Latin form may ultimately derive from an unknown native original (cf. Watson, §3.3, and O’Rahilly, §3.4). Then there developed the view that the basis for the origin of the name lay in the form *Pecht*, as believed by Rhŷs (§3.2), followed by Watson (§3.3), O’Rahilly (§3.4) and Nicolaisen (§3.6). In this article we will take a look at the situation of the Picts, but particularly with regard to the name ‘Picti’ and offer a suggestion within a Celtic framework.

2. **The Name *Picti* in the Historical Record**

2.1. **In Antiquity**

2.1.1. So far as is known, the name *Picti* first appears in the historical record in a Latin panegyric by Eumenius to the Emperor Constantius dated AD 297 who associates the *Picti* with the *Hiberni* as enemies of the *Britanni*:

> Ad hoc natio etiam tunc rudis et solis [Britanni] Pictis modo et Hibernis assueta hostibus, adhuc semi-nudis, facile Romanis armis signisque cesserunt, prope ut hoc uno Caesar gloriari in illa expeditione debuerit quod navigasset Oceanum (Incerti panegyricus Constantio Caesari VIII (V), d. 11, 4 [an. 297]; also Holder II, 993–94).

(‘In addition to that, a nation which was then primitive and accustomed to fight, still half-naked, only with Picts and Hiberni, easily succumbed to Roman arms and standards, almost to the point that Caesar should have boasted about this one thing only on that expedition, that he had sailed across the ocean’) (Rodgers).

\(^5\) For details of the various Pictish king-lists and comparative material, see M. O. Anderson (1980, 1–202).

\(^6\) As does, in Fraser’s (ibid.) view, the twelfth-century tract *De situ Albanie* ‘on the situation of Alba’. This also notes the sevenfold division of Pictland (cf. Broun 2000). For a discussion of the Poppleton manuscript and on the use of Alba see Broun (2005). For full details of this period of Scottish history see Woolf (2008), Broun (2007), Fraser (2009).
2.1.2. In a slightly later panegyric, this time to the Emperor Constantine (AD 310), reference is made to ‘the woods and marshes of the Caledones and other Picts’, indicating that Caledones were seen as Picts:

\[\text{Neque enim ille tot tantisque rebus gestis non dico Caledonum, Pictorum aliorumque silvas et paludes, sed nec Hiberniam proximam nec Thylen ultimam nec ipsas si quae sunt [...]}. \) (Incerti panegyricus Constantino Augusto VI (VII), d. 7, 2 [an. 310]; also Holder II, 994).

(‘For it was not that he who had accomplished so many great feats thought it worthwhile to acquire – I won’t mention the forests and swamps of the Caledonians and the other Picts – either nearby Hibernia or Farthest Thule, or the Isles of the Blest themselves, if they exist (...)’) (Nixon).

2.1.3. From AD 360 onwards the references become more numerous and the Picts are usually associated with the Scotti and Saxones as forces attacking Roman Britain. The Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus (c.330–c.395) tells us that the Scots and the Picts ravaged the areas near the Roman frontier:

\[\text{Consulatu vero Constantii deciens terque Iuliani in Brittanniis cum Scottorum Pictorumque gentium ferarum excursus rupta quiete condicta loca limitibus vicina vastarent et implicaret formido provincias praeteritarum cladium congerie fessas} \) (Ammianus Marcellinus XX, 1, 1 [an. 360]; also Holder II, 994).

(‘But in Britain in the tenth consulship of Constantius and the third of Julian raids of the savage tribes of the Scots and the Picts, who had broken the peace that had been agreed upon, were laying waste the regions near the frontiers, so that fear seized the provincials, wearied as they were by a mass of past calamities’) (Rolfe).

2.1.4. A little later Ammianus Marcellinus speaks of the Pecti,\(^7\) the Saxones, the Scotti and the Attacotti incessantly harassing the Britons:

\[\text{Pecti Saxonesque et Scotti et Attacotti Britannos aerumnis vexavere continuis} \) (Ammianus Marcellinus XXVI, 4, 5 [an. 365]; also Holder II, 994).

(‘the Picts, Saxons, Scots, and Attacotti were harassing the Britons with constant disasters’) (Rolfe).

\(^7\) Note the spelling here with <e> (cf. also Watson, §3.3, below).
2.1.5. Ammianus Marcellinus also informs us that the Picts were seemingly divided into two groups, viz Dicalydones and Verturiones:

*Illum tamen suffcient dici, quod eo tempore Picti in duas gentes divisi, Dicalydonas et Verturiones, itidem-que Attacotti, bellicosa hominum natio, et Scotti, per diversa vagantes, multa populabantur [...]* (Ammianus Marcellinus XXVII, 8, 5 [an. 368]; also Holder II, 994).

(‘It will, however, be in place to say, that at that time the Picts, divided into two tribes, called Dicalydones and Verturiones, as well as the Attacotti, a warlike race of men, and the Scots, were ranging widely and causing great devastation (...)’) (Rolfe).

2.1.6. Other references to the Picts from Latin sources, many of which postdate Roman Britain, can be found in Holder (II, 994–99). The Picts depart from the historical record c.900 (Dumville 1996, 36, fn. 106). As noted by Woolf (2008, 320, fn. 18), the term Alba to signify the kingdom of the Scots first appears in the Annals of Ulster for AD 900: Domnall m. Caustantin, ri Alban, moritur.9

2.2. GILDAS (497–570)

Gildas wrote his work *De excidio Britanniae* ‘on the ruin of Britain’ c. AD 540 (Winterbottom 2002, 1). It concerns the fall of Britain into Anglo-Saxon hands. In this work Gildas mentions the Picts three times:

2.2.1. In the first piece Gildas XIV talks of Britain, robbed of all her rulers, soldiers and youth, suffering under the depredations of the Scots and Picts:

*Exin Britannia omni armato milite, militaribus copiis, rectoribus licet immanibus, ingenti iuventute spoliata ..., duabus prinum gentibus transmarinis10 vehementer saevis Scotorum a circione, Pictorum ab aquilone calcabilis, multos stupet gemitque annos* (Gildas XIV).

(‘After this, Britain is robbed of all her armed soldiery of her military supplies, of her rulers, cruel though they were, and of her vigorous

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8 Alan Bruford (2000, 45, note 5) suggests that the first syllable of *Dicalydones* may be a scribal ditography from the previous word, *diuisi*.

9 For details of the history of the transition from Pictland to Alba, see Woolf (2008, 87–121 and 312–350).

10 *transmarinis* ‘from across the sea’. O’Rahilly (1946, 530–532) refutes Gildas’s contention that the Picts came into Britain from outside.
youth (...), she is, for the first time, open to be trampled upon by two foreign tribes of extreme cruelty, the Scots from the north-west, the Picts from the north; and for many years continues stunned and groaning’) (Williams).

2.2.2. In the second, Gildas XIX,1, tells of the attack by Scots and Picts, after the withdrawal of the Romans, on the Britons as far as the frontier (Hadrian’s Wall). Here Gildas seems to be quoting in part from Ammianus Marcellinus (cf. §2.3.1., above):

> Itaque illis ad sua remeantibus emergunt certatim de curucis, quibus sunt trans tithicam vallem evecti, quasi in alto Titane incalescentque caumate de artissimis foraminum caverniculis fusci vermiculorum cunei, tetri Scottorum Pictorumque greges, moribus ex parte dissidentes, sed una eademque sanguinis fundendi aviditate concordes furciferosque magis vultus pilis quam corporum pudenda pudendisque proxima vestibus tegentes cognitaque condebitorum reversione et reditus denegatione solito confidentiores omnem aquilonalem extremamque terrae partem pro indigenis muro tenus capessunt (Gildas XIX, 1).

(‘As they (the Romans) were returning home, the terrible hordes of Scots and Picts eagerly come forth out of the tiny craft (coracles) in which they sailed across the sea-valley, as on Ocean’s deep, just as, when the sun is high and the heat increasing, dark swarms of worms emerge from the narrow crevices of their holes. Differing partly in their habits, yet alike in one and the same thirst for bloodshed – in preference also for covering their villainous faces with hair rather than their nakedness of body with decent clothing – these nations, on learning the departure of our helpers and their refusal to return, became more audacious than ever, and seized the whole northern part of the land as far as the wall, to the exclusion of the inhabitants’) (Williams).

2.2.3. In the third and final mention, Gildas (XXI,1) tells of the Irish returning home after an attack on the Britons and of Pictish settlement in the area of Hadrian’s Wall for the first time:

> Revertuntur ergo impudentes grassatores Hiberni domos, post non longum temporis reversuri. Picti in extrema parte insulae tunc primum et deinceps requieverunt, praedas et contritiones nonnumquam facientes (Gildas XXI,1).

(‘The shameless Irish assassins, therefore, went back to their homes, to
return again before long. It was then, for the first time, in the furthestmost part of the island,\footnote{11} that the Picts commenced their successive settlements, with frequent pillaging and devastation’) (Williams).

2.3. Adomnán (628–704)\footnote{12}

Adomnán wrote his Life of Columba c.697 in which Columba sought to preach Christianity among the inhabitants of the northern Pictish territories of Britain.\footnote{13}

2.3.1. In the first quote, Adomnán (II, 32) tells us that Saint Columba, while in Pictish territory, preached the word of life to a local family through an interpreter, indicating that the Pictish family he was preaching to at any rate, but implying the (northern) Picts in general, did not understand Irish.

\textit{Illo in tempore quo sanctus Columba in Pictorum prouincia per aliquot demorabatur dies, quidam cum tota plebeius familia uerbum uitae per interpretatorem sancto predicante uiro audiens credidit, credensque habitizatus est maritus cum marita liberisque et familiaribus} (Adomnán II, 32).

(‘At the time when Saint Columba passed some days in the province of the Picts, a certain layman with his whole household heard and believed the word of life, through an interpreter, at the preaching of the holy man; and believing, was baptized, the husband, with his wife and children, and his servants’) (Anderson).

2.3.2. In the second quote, Adomnán (II, 27) refers to the River Ness (which flows between Loch Ness and Inverness, i.e. the Pictish kingdom of Forthriu\footnote{14} in northern Pictish territory):

\textit{Alio quoque in tempore, cum uir beatus in Pictorum prouincia per aliquot moraretur dies, necesse habuit fluium transire Nesam} (Adomnán II, 27).

(‘Also at another time, when the blessed man was for a number of days in the province of the Picts, he had to cross the river Nes [Ness]’) (Anderson).

\footnote{11}{I.e. by Hadrian’s Wall.} 
\footnote{12}{For details of Adomnán and his life and times, see Anderson (1991, xxxix–xliii).} 
\footnote{13}{For details of Christianity in the northern Pictish area see Carver (2008).} 
\footnote{14}{Or \textit{Waerteras}, an OE form of the polity-name \textit{Uerturiones} (cf. Fraser 2009, 50).}
2.3.3. In the next quote, Adomnán (II, 34) refers to the ‘long lake of the river Nes [Ness]’, i.e. Loch Ness (in Fortriu):

Sanctus die eadam sicut corde proposuit ad lacum Nisæ fluminis longum multa prosequente caterua uenit (Adomnán II, 34).

(‘On the appointed day as he had intended the saint came to the long lake of the river Nes [Ness], followed by a large crowd’) (Anderson).

2.3.4. In the final quote, Adomnán (II, 46), in the context of a plague that ravaged large parts of Europe, including Britain and Ireland (686–688), refers to the boundary between the Irish inhabitants in Scotland and the territory of the Picts:

[...] oceani insulae per totum, uidelicet Scotia et Brittannia, binis uicibus uastatae sunt dìra pestilentia, exceptis duobus populis, hoc est Pictorum plebe et Scotorum Britanniae inter quos utrosque dorsi montes Brittannici disterminant (Adomnán II, 46).

(‘the islands of the Ocean, namely Ireland and Britain, were twice ravaged throughout by a terrible pestilence, excepting two peoples only, that is the population of Picts, and of Irish in Britain, between which peoples the mountains of the spine of Britain are the boundary’) (Anderson).

2.4. The Venerable Bede (672/673–735)

2.4.1. The Venerable Bede in his Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum (731) clearly states that, in addition to Latin, four peoples and languages existed in Britain in his time:

Haec in præsentia iuxta numerum librorum, quibus lex diuina scripta est, quinque gentium linguæ [...] Anglorum uidelicet, Brettoum, Scottorum,

15 See also Fraser (2009, 241–42). An earlier plague of 644 is mentioned in connection with a solar eclipse by Bede (HE III, 27) and in the Annals of Ulster s.a. 663–64.
16 dorsum Britanniae – druinn nAlpan (Drumalban), the high region of central Scotland separating east from west, Picts from Scots. The route through the Great Glen was largely navigable by boat (cf. Anderson 1991, 62, note 73).
17 For details of Bede and his life and times, see Spitzbart (1997, 1–8).
18 Henry of Huntingdon (c.1088–c.1156/64) in his *Historia Anglorum* (c.1125–1155) (I, 8) includes this passage from Bede, but then adds re the Picts: *Quamuis Picti iam uideantur deleti, et lingua eorum omnino destructa, ita ut iam fabula uideatur, quod in ueterum scriptis eorum mentio inuenitur* (HA I, 8) (‘The Picts, however, appear to have been annihilated and their language utterly destroyed, so that the record of it in the writings of the ancients seems like fiction’) (Greenway). Henry’s information about the Picts may be due to the fact that Huntingdon formed one of the seemingly many possessions of the crown of Scotland in England (1114–1165) (cf. Greenway 1996, fn. 110).

19 In 634 (Fraser 2009, 166).

20 According to Fraser (2009, 46), the ‘steep and rugged mountain ridges’ probably refer to the Mounth (Grampian Highlands), called *mons Bannauc* ‘peaky mountain’ by the Welsh hagiographer Lifris in his *Vita sancti Cadoci* ‘Life of St Cadog’ (c.1200), said by him to be *in medio Albanie* ‘in central Alba’, i.e. Scotland north of the Forth.
ipsi australes Picti, qui intra eosdem montes habent sedes, multo ante tempore, ut perhibent, relicito errore idolatriae fidem ueritatis acceperant, praedicante eis Verbum Nynia episcopo reuerentissimo et sanctissimo uiro de natione Bret-tonum, qui erat Romae regulariter fidem et mysteria ueritatis edoctus; [...] (HE III, 4).

(‘(...) there came from Ireland to Britain a priest and abbot named Columba, a true monk in life and no less than habit; he came to Britain to preach the word of God to the kingdoms of the northern Picts which are separated from the southern part of their land by steep and rugged mountains. The southern Picts who live on this side of the mountains had, so it is said, long ago given up the errors of idolatry and received the true faith through the preaching of the Word by that reverend and holy man Bishop Ninian, a Briton who had received orthodox instruction at Rome in the faith and the mysteries of the truth’) (Colgrave and Mynors).

2.4.4. In addition, Bede (HE IV, 26) was quite clear in his statement that the southern limit of Pictish territory c.730 lay at the Firth of Forth, the creation of which Fraser (2009, 44) dates to the years after 698.

Vbi inter plurimos gentis Anglorum uel interemtos gladio uel servitio addictos uel de terra Pictorum fuga lapsos, etiam reuerentissimus uir Domini Trumuini, qui in eos episcopatum acceperat, recessit cum suis, qui erant in monasterio Aebbercurnig, posito quidem in regione Anglorum, sed in uicinia freti, quod Ang-lorum terras Pictorumque disterminat [...] (HE IV, 26).

(‘Many of the English were either slain by the sword or enslaved or escaped by flight from Pictish territory; among these latter was Trumwine, a reverend man of God who had been made bishop over them and who retired with his companions from the monastery of Abercorn, which was in English territory but close to the firth which divides the lands of the English from that of the Picts (...’)’ (Colgrave and Mynors).

2.4.5. In this context, Bede (HE I, 1) states quite clearly where the boundary between the territory of the southern Picts and that of the Britons stood:

Est autem sinus maris permaximus, qui antiquitus gentem Brettonum a Pictis secernebat, qui ab occidente in terras longo spatio erumpit, ubi est ciuitas Brettonum munitissima usque hodie, quae vocatur Alcuith; ad cuius uidelicet sinus partem septentrionalem Scotti [...] aduenientes sibi locum patriae fecerunt (HE I, 1).
(‘There is a very wide arm of the sea which originally divided the Britons from the Picts. It runs far into the land from the west. Here there is to this day a very strongly fortified British town called Alcuith. The Irish whom we have mentioned settled to the north of this arm of the sea and made their home there’) (Colgrave and Mynors).

2.4.6. Northern Pictish territory, on the other hand, according to Fraser (2009, 47), was understood by Bede to constitute a number of sovereign kingdoms, in contrast to a perceived unified south. Fraser (2009, 47) adds:

Thus, although Bede and his contemporaries regarded the *gens Pictorum* as a single nation, one ought not to push too far any suggestion of homogenity or antiquity within this notion. Whatever we make of the appearance of *Picti* in our sources in late Antiquity, then, we may feel assured that the term does not refer to a single political community or ethnic solidarity. There is no convincing evidence that it did so much before 700. The earliest surviving use of the term was regarded as self-explanatory. As far as Tacitus, Dio and Herodian were concerned, the peoples of northern Britain had been, collectively, *Britanni*. How did some of them become *Picti* in the century after the death of Severus? Gildas’s notion of a great migration from over-seas cannot be supported from other evidence. Disagreement persists among scholars about whether the term represents a latinisation of some native name, or whether it is entirely Roman, but the latter notion has always seemed most convincing (Fraser 2009, 47).

We shall return to this notion later.

3. Post-antiquarian hypotheses regarding Pictish and the name *Picti*

A number of scholars have sought to unlock the mysteries of the Pictish language and the meaning of the name *Picti*, in recent times, particularly from the latter part of the nineteenth century down to the present day. The main protagonists include the following:

3.1. Stokes’s hypothesis (1888–90)

Whitley Stokes (1830–1909), in Stokes (1888–90, 390–418), under the section entitled ‘Pictish names and other words’, presents the four known hypotheses regarding the Picts then current during his time (my paragraphing – GB):

As to the linguistic and ethnological affinities of the Picts, four irreconcilable hypotheses have been formed, three of which are still upheld.
The first, due to Pinkerton [...], is that the Picts were Teutons and spoke a Gothic dialect:

(2) the second, started by Prof. Rhŷs, is that the Picts were Non-Aryan, whose language was overlaid by loans from Welsh and Irish:

(3) the third, the property of Mr. Skene, is that they were Celts, but Gaelic Celts rather than Cymric:

(4) the fourth, and, in my judgment, the true hypothesis, favoured by Prof. Windisch and Mr. A. Macbain, is that they were Celts, but more nearly allied to the Cymry than to the Gael (Stokes 1888–90, 392).

Here Stokes decidedly supports the notion that the Picts were P-Celtic.

3.2. Rhŷs’s hypotheses (1890–91, 1897–98)

3.2a. John Rhŷs (1840–1915) in his Rhind Lectures in Archaeology of 1889 (Rhŷs 1890–91, 103–10) meanders quite a fair bit in his argument, but begins by suggesting that the basic form is Pecht, a thesis later taken up by Watson and Nicolaisen (below):

The word [Pict] is familiar here in Scotland in its various forms, one of which I understand to be Pecht, and it is hard to believe that it is merely a term borrowed from Latin literature. We may go further and state that on the historical side, so to say, there is very good evidence that Pecht cannot have been derived from the Romans [...] (Rhŷs 1890–91, 103).

3.2b. Rhŷs (1897–98) withdrew his conjecture that Pictish was related to Basque, made in Rhŷs 1891–92, but restated his view that he still regarded Pictish as non-Indo-European:

As regards those, however, who believe the Picts to have spoken as their native language a Celtic dialect, either like Goidelic or Brythonic, my position is unchanged: I still regard the Pictish language as not Celtic, not Aryan (Rhŷs 1897–98, 324–25).

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21 Eoin MacNeill (1939, 3–45), in studying the names in the Pictish king-list, identifies what he thought was a strong non-Indo-European component in Pictish, though he recognised the presence of British as far as the Moray Firth. Macalister (1940, 184–226) (p. 223) concluded that Pictish was non-Celtic from his study of the inscriptions: ‘But for me one thing is absolutely certain. The language of which a few disconnected scraps are recorded in the inscriptions studied in these pages, whatever it may be, is altogether independent of Celtic; if that language was Pictish, then the Picts were no Celtic speakers.’
Here Rhŷs regards the language of the Picts as ‘not Aryan’, i.e. non-Indo-European.

3.3. Watson’s hypothesis (1926)

W. J. Watson (1865–1948) in Watson (1926, 67–68) has this to say:

As to the name Picti, the forms in which it has been transmitted have to be kept in view. In Old Norse it is Pettr, in Old English Peohta, in Old Scots it is Pecht. These all suggest an original Pect-, and in Ammianus [Marcellinus] the term occurs once as Pecti [cf. §2.1, above]. There are further the Welsh Peithwyrr, meaning ‘Pict-men,’ and the personal name Peithan. ‘Peith’ comes from ‘Pect,’ like ‘Gueith’ from ‘ Vectis’ (Wight), and peithyn, a slab or slate, from Latin pecten, a comb. An original ‘Pictos’ would yield ‘Pith’ in Welsh, like brith, speckled, from briktos. It would thus seem that, while the form ‘Picti’ is certainly Latin, it is based on a genuine native form, and we may compare the Welsh place-name Peithnant, of unknown meaning. There is also the Gaulish Pictones, the name of a tribe on the Bay of Biscay, south of the Loire, near the Veneti, whose name appears also as Pectones (Watson 1926, 67–68).

Here Watson takes Pect- as a base form for the name and discusses possibilities.

3.4. O’Rahilly’s hypothesis (1946)

T. F. O’Rahilly (1883–1953), in O’Rahilly 1946, 532–33, restates the opinions held by Stokes and Macbain and views the situation as follows:

The question of the origin of the name Picti is still sub judice. Some have seen in it a purely Latin name; others with less probability, have taken it to be Celtic. On the ground of late borrowings like the Welsh Peithwyrr, ‘Picts’ (where Peith- comes from Pect-), Watson has argued that the original form must have been *Pktī, so that the name could not have been Latin. In that case, however, the name lost its Celtic character when the Romans took it over, for they turned it into Picti,

22 O’Rahilly (1946, 532, note 4): ‘But the idea of Zimmer and others that it is a Latin translation of Pritani or Priteni is not to be taken seriously.’
23 O’Rahilly (1946, 532, note 6): ‘[...]. Watson is here following Rhys, who has argued to the same effect in his Rhind lectures on Archaeology (1889), 103ff.’.
24 O’Rahilly (1946, 533, note 1): ‘But may not Pecti for Picti reflect the change of short i to close e in vulgar Latin? There appear to be traces of this in some Latin-borrowed words in Irish, e.g. trebunn < Lat. tribūnus (unless Ir. treb has influenced). So Pictavi became in late Latin Pectavi (whence ‘Poitiers’ ‘Poitou’); see numerous examples in Holder, II, 987ff.’
which by speakers of Latin would inevitably be understood to mean ‘the painted men’. In Caesar’s day the painting or tattooing of the body was practised by all the inhabitants of Britain (omnes Britanni, De Bello Gallico v, 14); but by the time the Picts are first heard of (AD 297) this practice had doubtless been long abandoned in Roman Britain. From this time onwards Picti, whatever its ultimate origin may have been, must have seemed to the Romans a very convenient collective nickname for their enemies beyond the northern border; and one may suggest that it is to this circumstance, and not to any conquests made in northern Scotland by the Picts of the Isles, that we are to attribute the extension\textsuperscript{25} of the name among Latin writers to all the tribes of non-Roman Britain (O’Rahilly 1946, 532–33).

Elsewhere in EIHM, O’Rahilly (1946, 353–84, 529–38) refutes other theories in detail.

3.5. Jackson’s hypotheses (1955)

3.5.1a. Kenneth H. Jackson (1909–1991). Up until Jackson’s time, discussions on the Picts and their language etc. seem to have been somewhat piece-meal in their deliberation. Jackson was seemingly the first to take a serious look at all the evidence. In discussing the various hypotheses concerning the provenance and designation of the Pictish language Kenneth Jackson (1955, 132) notes that the communis opinio held by scholars since Stokes was ‘that Pictish was a P-Celtic language.’ In a well-argued thesis Watson (1926, esp. 70–72, 126–27) has it, as Jackson (ibid.) puts it, ‘that Pictish was simply a northern Brittonic offshoot of British.’ In another expression of the same thesis by Watson, Jackson adds (ibid.) ‘that Pictish was a separate speech of Gallo-Brittonic origin, allied both to Gaulish and to British but distinct from both. This was also the view, according to Jackson (ibid. and fn. 5), promoted by Stokes (1890 and Macbain (1892, 287–88, 1897, 211, 1902, 389–401).\textsuperscript{26} In his own examination of the matter Jackson (1955, 152) took the view, on the basis of the Celtic words and names found, that the P-Celtic language of Northern Scotland

\textsuperscript{25} O’Rahilly (1946, 533, note 2): ‘The word “extension”, however, begs the question. Actually there is no evidence that the name Picti was ever confined to a single tribe. It is true that the author of a panegyric on Constantius, AD310, appears, according to one text, to distinguish the Picts from the Caledones: Caledonum Pictorum aliorumque silvas (Holder, II, 994), but the alternative reading Caledonum aliorumque Pictorum silvas is undoubtedly to be preferred.’

\textsuperscript{26} For a detailed assessment of Pictish and the likelihood of its being totally a P-Celtic language, see Forsyth (1997a). However, in a recent re-assessment of the Dunadd ogam inscription Forsyth (forthcoming) regards the language as Q-Celtic, i.e of the Goidelic language of Argyll, no longer Pictish territory. For details of literacy in Pictland see Forsyth (1997b).
had certain affinities with Gaulish which were lacking in Brittonic, though in most matters it cannot be said to be distinguishable from Brittonic. If so, it would have to be recognised as a third dialect of the P-Celtic family parallel to the other two, neither Gaulish nor Brittonic, though Gallo-Brittonic in descent and closely related to both (Jackson 1955, 152).

3.5.1b. However, in 1980 Jackson (1980, 175–76) modified his view slightly regarding Pictish and its affinities to other P-Celtic languages thus:

[...]

3.5.1c. In 1993 Jackson (1993, 250) supplied further modified details:

It [Pictish] is likely an offshoot from the Continental Celts settled in northern Scotland some centuries BC. Whether these were a simple extension of the British occupiers of Britain up to the Forth and Clyde [...] or whether a rather more separate Celtic nation, is uncertain, but perhaps the second. Bede treats their language as different from that of the Britons, and there is some linguistic evidence which supports this, though whether it was more than a matter of dialect is not really clear (Jackson 1993, 250).

3.5.2a. On the other hand, on the basis of apparent non-Celtic elements on a number of the Pictish inscriptions,27 Jackson (1955, 152–54) took the following view:

There were at least two languages current in northern Scotland before the coming of the Irish Gaels in the fifth century. One of them was a Gallo-Brittonic dialect not identical with the British spoken south of the Antonine Wall, though related to it. The other was not Celtic at all, nor apparently even Indo-European, but was presumably the speech of some very early set of inhabitants of Scotland [...]. Various other explanations might be found, all equally speculative, but the existence in some form of a pre-Celtic language in historical Pictland seems reasonably clear (Jackson 1955, 152–54; also Jackson 1983, 224–25).

3.5.2b. In 1983 Jackson (1983, 224–25) reiterated his two-language thesis: There were apparently two Pictish languages. One was P-Celtic, brought from Europe in the first millennium BC by Gallo-Brittonic settlers, ancestors of the historical aristocracy of Pictland. It is known from place-names and names of historical kings, etc. The other was not even Indo-European, being the language of the predecessors of the Celts of Scotland [...]. It is preserved in the early inscriptions of Pictland [...]. Its survival in inscriptions could be due to the Celts regarding it as a prestigious language of magic and using it for learned purposes [...]. Examples of non-Celtic Pictish personal names are Bliesblituth, Canutulachama and, in the St. Ninian’s treasure, Spusscio [...] (Jackson 1983, 224–25).

3.5.2c. And again in 1993:
Mingled among them [P-Celtic Picts] there seem to have been descendants of a more ancient race, not Celtic at all. We know this not only from non-Celtic personal names in early sources, and from a few apparently non-Celtic place-names, but more strikingly from over 30 inscriptions carved on stone in the Ogam alphabet learned from the Gaels of Dál Riada. These are in an unintelligible language, not Celtic and not even Indo-European (with [...] names like Nanammovvez) [...]. Thus the ‘Picts’ would represent a mixed people, of both Celtic and pre-Celtic antecedents (Jackson 1993, 250).

3.5.3a. With regard to the meaning of the name ‘Pict’, Jackson (1955, 159–60) proffers that the Romans from the late third century onwards, if not before, came to use a single term for all the peoples north of the Antonine Wall, namely Picti. He goes on the say:

Whether this was ever really some native word or not, the Romans who used it obviously understood it to mean ‘the Painted People’, a reference to the custom of painting and tattooing, which had survived among these remote northern tribes long after it had died out farther south. The probability is that it was always simply the Latin verbal adjective picti, and it is not impossible that it was first used as a translation of Priteni. Since there is good reason to think that the Gallo-Brittonic element among the proto-Picts were Priteni, and since it is desirable to find a convenient name for them to distinguish them from the composite Picts of history, one may suggest that they might in future be called Priteni
(not *Pritani*) and their language and culture *Pritenic*. We do not know what they called themselves, nor do we know what name the historical Picts used of themselves either (Jackson 1955, 159–60).

3.5.3b. Jackson (1983, 224) reiterates his tattooing thesis in 1983:


3.5.3c. And again in 1993, but developing the name ‘Priteni’ from a convenient label for present-day Celticists to a speculative suggestion that this is what the proto-Picts perhaps called themselves:

[...]. They [the Picts] perhaps called themselves Priteni, ‘The People of the Designs’, referring to their having tattooed themselves, possibly with the famous ‘Pictish symbols’; certainly the Romans called them Picti, ‘The Painted People’ (Jackson 1993, 250).

3.5.4. As we have seen, the traditional meaning of ‘Pict’, given expression in Jackson (1954, 1955, 1983, 1993) and harking back to Latin *pictus* ‘painted’, pl. *Picti* ‘the painteds’, still finds support today, most recently in Fraser (2009, 47) who cautiously sees it as

a Roman nickname arising from an actual tendency among northern peoples to apply pigment to their skin [...]. This conclusion seems broadly satisfactory, but may fail fully to appreciate the social context of the origins of *Picti*, and what it meant to Romans at a more fundamental level (Fraser 2009, 47).

3.5.5. In the context of painting and tattooing, Helmut Birkhan (2007a, 32) demonstrates that body art was not purely a British preserve. Quoting first century AD Classical authors, he makes clear that the practice was fairly widespread. Pliny (*Naturalis Historia* XXII, 2) notes that the Dacians (*Daci*) and Sarmatians (*Sarmatae*) also indulged in body paint (*inscribunt*) and Tacitus

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28 Alan Bruford (2001, 45, note 4) echoes Jackson in suggesting that *Picti* may be a rough translation of *Priteni* and asks why Nicolaisen (below) did not consider this possibility?

29 For a different view, see Guto Rhys (2015, 343–44).

30 *Inlinunt certe alis aliae faciem in populis barbarorum feminae, maresque etiam apud Dacos et Sarmatas corpora sua inscribunt* (Pliny *Nat. Hist.* XXII, 2, quoted after Birkhan 2007a, 32, fn. 27).
For an in-depth discussion of Insular Celtic tattooing see MacQuarrie (1997). It might be added here that Fraser (2009, 335) notes that in the latter part of the eighth century the Northumbrians apparently indulged in tattooing, a habit long associated with the Picts and which they may have obtained from them. If so, then this would suggest that the Picts continued a tradition of tattooing well into the early medieval period. Either that, or the Northumbrians indulged in body-art of their own accord?


In 1976 (pp.150–151) and again in 2001 (pp. 193–195), but more succinctly in 1996 (pp. 4–6), Wilhelm Nicolaisen challenged Jackson’s thesis regarding the meaning of the name ‘Pict’. In his challenge Nicolaisen also harks back to Watson’s suggestion of Pect- as a base form:

The ‘Picts’ [...] are not mentioned by name until the end of the third century AD, and the first reference to the meaning of their name is recorded at the end of the fourth century when the classical writer Claudian [c.370–c.410] refers to them as nec falsa nomine Pictos ‘the well-named Picts’ thus perpetuating what is likely to have been a Roman soldiers’ folk-etymology, deriving the name from, or at least equating it with, the Latin adjective pictus ‘painted, tattooed’. Whether this derivation also led to the belief that the Picts painted or tattooed themselves or whether they actually did so and therefore reinforced the Romans’ linguistic perception, is another interesting question which does, however, not concern us here, as the link with Latin pictus is at best a secondary reinterpretation in the medium of another language. We have no evidence what the Picts called themselves but the exonyms which their neighbours had for them confirm that the name underlying Latin Picti was certainly the name by which other people knew and referred to them. In Old Norse they are called Pettar or Pettir (Historia

31 For an in-depth discussion of Insular Celtic tattooing see MacQuarrie (1997). It might be added here that Fraser (2009, 335) notes that in the latter part of the eighth century the Northumbrians apparently indulged in tattooing, a habit long associated with the Picts and which they may have obtained from them. If so, then this would suggest that the Picts continued a tradition of tattooing well into the early medieval period. Either that, or the Northumbrians indulged in body-art of their own accord?

32 Claudian. paneg. de III. cons. Honorii 54–58: ille leves Mauros nec falsa nomine Pictos / edomuit Scottumque vago mucrone secutus / fragit Hyperboreas remis audacibus undas / et geminis fulgens utroque sub axe trophaeis / Tethyos alternae refutas calcavit harenas (Panegyricus de tertio consulatu Honorii Augusti 54–58; also Holder II, 994) (he conquered the fleet Moors and the well-named Picts; his roaming sword pursued the flying Scot; his adventurous oars broke the surface of the northern seas. Crowned with the spoils of triumphs won beneath the northern and the southern sky he trod the wave-swept strand of either Ocean’) (Platnauer).
Norwegica: Peti), and in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle they appear as Pehtas, Pihtas, Pyhtas, Peohtas and Piohtas, and there are related Anglian personal names on record such as Peothhelm, Peothred, Peohtwealt, Peohtwine, and Peohtwulf. In Old Scots they are known as Pecht, and the Welsh called them Peith-uyr. The name is also contained in the name Pentland Firth (Old Norse Petlandsfjordr, Latin Petlandicum Mare) and possibly in that of the Pentland Hills,\(^{33}\) potentially, and very roughly, the northern and southern boundaries of ‘Pictland’, i.e. the Picts were understood to live to the south of the one and [to] the north of the other [...].

If the Roman etymology were correct, Pict-, or rather Pect-, would go back to PIE *peik- ‘painted’ [cf. IEW 794] but if that were so, the Celtic derivative would have lost its initial p-, thus leaving us with something like *-ekt-.\(^{34}\) A p-Celtic Pict (< *Pekt-) would, however, have started out as something like *Quekt-, whatever that may have meant, and a meaning like ‘painted’ is unacceptable. The most closely related names are Poitiers and Poitou in France, which started out as Pictones and Pictavi respectively [...]. The earliest classical writers who otherwise tend to have the most reliable information about Scotland in Roman Times – Tacitus, Lucan, Martial, Ptolemy, and Cassius Dio, for instance – use the term Caledonii [or Caledones – GB] for the tribe and Caledonia for their territory although it is, of course, difficult to say whether Caledonia is really congruent with ‘Pictland’, and not just one part of it (Nicolaisen 1996, 4–6).

3.7. Isaac’s hypothesis (2005)

In his discussion of river-names in Scotland, Graham Isaac (2005, 211–12) supports the thesis of a non-Indo-European language once spoken in North-East Scotland. He notes that

within the limitations of the survey based on Ptolemy’s data, the non-Indo-European RNN of Britain are concentrated in North-East Scotland. In the terminology introduced [...], as compared with the rest of Britain, with overwhelming dominance of linguistic Celticity, North-East Scotland, on the other hand, is a region in which the historical proximity to us of a non-Indo-European speech community, or speech communities, is given.

\(^{33}\) Despite Nicolaisen’s claim, the Pentland Hills are unlikely to attest a form of Pict (cf. BLITON: <http://www.spns.org.uk/bliton/BLITON2014ii elements.pdf> (s.n.n. pant, pen[n]).

\(^{34}\) Nicolaisen’s (Nicolaisen 1996, 5) *-ekt may be problematic here in that the full-grade would have given /e:/ (< /ej/) and that the zero-grade would have given /i/. Also /kt/ > /xt/.
There is no direct step from this conclusion to the belief in the existence of non-Indo-European speakers in the region at the time, since the RNN could be archaisms preserved in a Celticised society. Nevertheless, there is an unmistakeable ‘enclave’ of non-Indo-European names in the region as recorded in a source of the second century AD, and, continuing the assumption of the representativeness of Ptolemy’s data, that requires that two issues be addressed; not only their presence in North-East Scotland, but also their absence in the rest of Britain.

I propose the following argument towards a working hypothesis. Given that the speech communities in Britain in the second century AD were such as to use non-Indo-European names for major rivers with sea estuaries in North-East Scotland, as opposed to the rest of Britain, where such names are uniformly Celtic (or at least, analysable as Celtic), then I conclude that the speech community/ies of North-East Scotland was/were different from those of the rest of Britain, which was/were not Celtic or Indo-European (Isaac 2005, 211–12).

Isaac (2005, 212) issues the caveat that, because the names of the rivers with major sea-estuaries in North-East Scotland bear non-Indo-European names, it does not follow that the communities there spoke a non-Indo-European language. Nevertheless, he adds (ibid.):

Granted that this is not quite a reductio ad absurdum, I do not think it leads to a contradictio in adiectis, in so far as the major RNN in the region are of a different character from those of the rest of Britain, and that does constitute a difference in language, if not a difference of language (Isaac 2005, 212).

In a footnote to his contribution Isaac (2005, 213, fn. 12) notes that ‘The relationship of this data with “The Problem of the Picts” will have to await treatment in a study with the appropriate scope.’


3.8a. Katherine Forsyth queries Jackson’s thesis of a non-Indo-European language among the Picts. In 1997 she has this to say:

Towards the end of his 1955 article, Prof. Jackson made an attempt to link his linguistic conclusions with the archaeological evidence for Scottish prehistory, admitting that his thoughts on the archaeology of the linguistic situation were ‘purely speculations’, and ‘put forward with the greatest
reserve’ (p. 155). A comparison with the archaeological framework outlined by Stuart Piggott in his contributions to *The Problem of the Picts* shows the extent to which Jackson was influenced by Piggott [...]. It is clear enough from Jackson’s text that he was heavily indebted to Piggott for his understanding of Iron Age archaeology [...]. Jackson held the then prevalent view that they [the brochs] were the architectural manifestations of a recent migration of ‘broch-builders’ from southern Britain; it is now abundantly clear that they are an indigenous development [...].

Of course, it would be unfair to criticize Jackson for his adherence to a now superceded model [...]. Nor would it matter particularly if Jackson’s linking of archaeology and philology were merely a tail-piece to his main argument, but it is not, it is the very basis of it. Only after working back through Jackson’s argument in detail does it become apparent to which extent his cumulative linguistic argument in favour of non-Indo-European is dependant on an archaeological framework which has long since been abandoned. With this underpinning removed the argument starts to unravel (Forsyth 1997a, 11–12).

3.8b. Forsyth (1997a, 13–36) then proceeds to unravel the various arguments. In taking stock she contends that (my paragraphing – GB)

Jackson’s argument was based on a now abandoned archaeological framework and that his model of a Celtic superstratum holding down a large pre-Celtic population was unacceptable. I went on to identify three main problems with Jackson’s handling of the data:

(1) his misinterpretation of the significance of pre-Celtic survivals;
(2) his confidence in dismissing doubtful forms as ‘not Celtic’;
(3) his failure to take into account the widespread geographical distribution of Celtic names.

Re-examining the evidence in the light of these, I am led to conclude that, contrary to Jackson’s argument, there was only one language spoken in northern Britain during the Roman period, the [British] language Pritenic. While there is indeed evidence of place-names surviving from earlier linguistic strata, it has yet to be demonstrated that these survivals are more significant north of the Forth-Clyde line than south of it, and in any case, for present purposes they are of minor importance in a total picture which is overwhelmingly Celtic (Forsyth 1997a, 26–27).
3.8c. In conclusion, Forsyth (1997a, 37) claims:

For forty years the existence of non-Indo-European Pictish has been taken for granted, with [...] serious and unfortunate consequences. In this study I have attempted to refute Prof. Jackson's argument point by point, and to show that on current evidence the only acceptable conclusion is that, from the time of our earliest historical sources, there was only one language spoken in Pictland, the most northerly reflex of Brittonic [...]. The Picts have languished in the non-Indo-European ghetto long enough, it is high time they were acknowledged as being as fully Celtic as their Irish and British neighbours, and studied accordingly (Forsyth 1997a, 37).

3.8d. Again in 2006, Forsyth (2006 IV, 1444) was equally forthright:

In the absence of any corroborative evidence a few unintelligible inscriptions are insufficient grounds for positing the survival of a non-Indo-European language into the early medieval period. On the other hand, several Pictish inscriptions may be understood as containing Brythonic forms [...] (Forsyth 2006 IV, 1444).

As can be seen from the foregoing, two theses come to the fore: (1) that the name 'Picti', as promoted by Rhŷs, Watson, O’Rahilly and Nicolaisen (qv), seems to derive from an original ‘Pecht-', and (2) that the overriding contention that comes across from the various protagonists is whether the main P-Celtic feature of Pictish is accompanied by a non-Indo-European component or not. In this regard two camps are discerned: those in favour of such a component and those against. At the present time those against are in the ascendant.

4. The Gaulish inscription from Rezé

Matters took a decisive turn in 2012 when Pierre-Yves Lambert and David Stifter (2012) published a recently discovered two-sided Gaulish inscription from Rezé on a lead tablet found during excavations in Saint Lupien (Loire Atlantique) in 2008 and dating between the last quarter of the first and the first half of the second century AD (Lambert 2012, 139). The text is in the form of an account, receipt or related type of document found in the sphere of trade and business, with format similar to that of a Roman payroll, as found in the Chartae Latinae Antiquiores (Stifter 2012, 155).
4.1. The matter of surprise here is the form of the Gaulish ordinal for ‘fifth’, viz *pixte*,\(^{35}\) hitherto *pinpetos* (DLG 247, Hamp 2012, 131). Stifter’s contribution to the Lambert-Stifter joint article (pp. 155–62) provides a linguistic commentary on the text. In his discussion of *pixte* Stifter (2012, 157–58) has the following to say:

A derivation of *pixte* from zero-grade *ₚ母校-* (as Avest. ṗuxda, Ved. PN Paktha) is excluded by the standard rules of Celtic historical phonology. *ₚ母校-* would have resulted in *panχtos*, which should have surfaced as Gaul. <pan(c)tos>\(^{36}\) or – at best – <pen(c)tos>, if there was raising of a before nC.\(^{37}\) It is much more economical to derive *pixte* from a reshaped full-grade PIE *penχ母校-,*which is the pre-form underlying the ordinal ‘5th’ in most Indo-European languages: Lat. quintus, Gr. πέμπτος, Toch. B pünkte, Proto-Germanic *fimfita-,* Slav. peto, OPr. pięncts, Lith. peńktas. The *e* was then regularly raised to [i] = <i> before the tautosyllabic nasal, and the nasal was effaced in a further step (Stifter 2012, 158).

4.2. Stifter (2012, 158) then discusses this form in the context of the *Pictones*, later *Pictavi*, a Gallic polity that in Antiquity once lived in the area where the Rezé text was discovered:

As for the possible etymology of *Pictones* from *ₚ母校ọ- ‘5th = middle’, cp. semantically Toch. B epünkte ‘middle’ < *ŋ-ₚ母校ọ- ‘in the fifth place’ (Pinault 2008, p. 559; Winter 1992, p. 137).\(^{38}\) A phonological difficulty resides in the fact that from the development of post-PIE *ₚ母校ọ- >* post-Proto-Celtic *kʷenχto- > Gaul. *pₚ母校ọ- > *pixto- [...],* the *i* of *pixte* should be expected to be long. The medieval development of Pictāui > Pectāui > Peχtau- > OFr. Peitou > ModFr. Poitou, however, shows that the vowel was short in this name. On the other hand, in CIL 13,

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\(^{35}\) Lambert (2012, 152) notes that this element appears in the Gaulish personal-names PIXTILOS, PICTACVS, and PIXTICENVS for ῥίχ-γενος. For comment on Rezé in the context of Palaeohispanic evidence, see Koch (2015).


\(^{37}\) Stifter (2012, 158, note 18) is not at all happy with ‘this notion of raising’, but acknowledges the instance of ouinco- ’young’ which would be the only good piece of evidence for *ŋ > *an > *en > *in.’ He adds: ‘I am considering to derive it from a full-grade formation *juyenko- that replaced inherited *juyanko- (as in OIr. oac, MW iuanc) under influence from forms with full grade of the suffix, like hysterokinetic *h₁u- (Ved. yuvan-).’

\(^{38}\) Stifter (2012, 158, note 19): ‘See now Mac Cana 2011 for comparativist considerations about the centre in a quinquepartite worldview.’
an inscription that dates to the beginning of the 2nd century
and that marks length consistently, *ī longa* is used for *Plictonum*, as well
as in CIL 13 1697 *Plectau* (2nd century). If these spellings reflect the
original length of the vowel,40 the obvious solution is that the short *i*
underlying *Poiton* was acquired secondarily after that period, and both
*pixte* in Rezé and the ancient *Pictones* could have had a long *ī*. If the
development *penkʷ tô- >* Gaul. *pixto-* is accepted, it is more troubling
to find at the same time names with the element *pento-* (interpreted as
‘5th’ in Delamarre 2007, 148, 229), which presumably should derive
from the very same protoform. This divergence may indicate dialectal
differences in Gaulish [...] (Stifter 2012, 158).

In considering the above I asked myself whether this scenario could also apply
to the Scottish Picts.

5. Present proposals

The matter seems to me to be as follows:

5.1. As Stifter (2012, 158) has already noted, the Gaulish ordinal numeral
*pixte* ‘fifth’ derives from PIE *penkʷ tô-, and the Gaulish cardinal numeral *pempe*
(*pimpe*) ‘five’ (DLG 247) would derive from PIE *penkʷ e-*, giving also OInd.
However, as Ronald Emmerick (1992, 168) points out, ‘[b]esides *pāncā*, Old
Indian has *paŋkti*- fem. ‘group of five’ → ‘group’ [...]’, with which Old Church
Slavonic *pętī* (Russian *pjat*, etc.) ‘five’ is usually compared, both from PIE
*penkʷ ti-.*

5.2. Bearing all this in mind, if we opt for Emmerick and take PIE *penkʷ ti-
(PIE *penkʷto-, PCelt. *kwenkʷ to-*) as our base form and apply the expected
Celtic developments (cf. Stifter, §4.1, above), we would have the following:

(1) Regular (but not exclusive) raising of *e* to *i* before the nasal *nl*, viz
*kwenkʷti- → *kwinkʷti- (without raising *kwenkʷti-*) (LHEB 278–79,
GPN 392).

SCIL_13_01129.jpg>’.
40 Stifter (2012, 158, note 21): ‘Alternatively, the long *i* of these spellings could have been
transferred by folk etymology (or folk orthography!) from Lat. *pictus* which owes its long *i* to
the effects of Lachmann’s Law; cp. CIL 5, 5279 *Picti* (Como, 1st century; <http://www1.ku-
eichstaett.de/epigr/uah-bilder.php?bild=SCIL_05_05279.jpg>).'
In this regard Luján (2000, 63), in his discussion of the LN *Pintia* (Πιντία Ptol. II, 6, 23), a town in NW *Hispania Tarracensia* in the region of the Callaeci and categorised by Luján as ‘Celtic’, notes the following: ‘The name belongs to the series of personal- and place-names in *Pinti- (Pintus, Pintamus, Pentouius, etc.) which, according to [...] Villar (1994), cannot be Celtic. These names are best related to the Indo-European ‘five’, *penkʷe*, suffixed in -tos so as to derive an ordinal. In the names *Pintius* and *Pintia* we have yet another suffix -yos/ya. As Villar showed, these formations involve developments which are not expected in a Celtic language: lack of assimilation of the labial to the labio-velar, lack of suffix -eto- in the ordinal ‘fifth’, etc. [...]’. In this context see also Garcia Alonso (2003), Wodtko (2006), de Bernardo-Stempel (2009) and now Koch (2015).

(2) Loss of the labial aspect of the voiceless velar, viz *kwinkʷti- → *kwinkti- (*kwenkti-) (RCC 44).

(3) Loss of the nasal /n/ before the voiceless velar, viz *kwinkti- → *kwiki- (*kwekti-) (GPN 408).


That is to say, that in this way *pixti- (*pexti-) could be taken to mean ‘five, group of five; group’.\(^{41}\)

In commenting on this thesis Peter Schrijver (pers. comm. 03/08/2015) notes the following:

Now that we have Rezé Gaulish *pixte* ‘fifth’, your etymology of the name Pict makes sense (but as in almost all cases of names, it is hard to fully commit to the idea that it is correct). But to have a form *kwinxto- for ‘fifth’ at all raises all sorts of questions about the place of Rezé Gaulish (and if you’re right, also of the Celtic language that produced the name Pict) on the Celtic family tree.

The Celtic dialect that underlies Irish, British and Gaulish-minus-Rezé must have had a Proto-Celtic form of ‘fifth’ that was *kwenkweto-, which is basically *kwenkwe ‘five’ plus ordinal *-to-. By analogy, *kwenkwe-to- was reanalysed as *kwenkweto-, and the new ‘ordinal’ suffix -eto- then spread to *swexs-eto- ‘sixth’, *dekmeto- ‘tenth’, *sextameto- ‘seventh’ etc. Subsequently, -(a)me- became productive, whence Gaul. oxtumoeto-, Ir. ochtmad, W wythfed ‘eighth’. In other words, the existence of a suffix *-(a)me- is unthinkable without underlying *kwenkweto-. Rezé *pixte, however, looks like it continues *kwenkwo-to-, which is of respectable pedigree, given Greek *pemptos*, Lat. *quintus*, Avestan *puxda- < PIE *p(e)nkw-to-.*

\(^{41}\) In this regard Luján (2000, 63), in his discussion of the LN *Pintia* ([Πιντία Ptol. II, 6, 23), a town in NW *Hispania Tarracensia* in the region of the Callaeci and categorised by Luján as ‘Celtic’, notes the following: ‘The name belongs to the series of personal- and place-names in *Pinti- (Pintus, Pintamus, Pentouius, etc.) which, according to [...] Villar (1994), cannot be Celtic. These names are best related to the Indo-European ‘five’, *penkʷe*, suffixed in -tos so as to derive an ordinal. In the names *Pintius* and *Pintia* we have yet another suffix -yos/ya. As Villar showed, these formations involve developments which are not expected in a Celtic language: lack of assimilation of the labial to the labio-velar, lack of suffix -eto- in the ordinal ‘fifth’, etc. [...]’. In this context see also Garcia Alonso (2003), Wodtko (2006), de Bernardo-Stempel (2009) and now Koch (2015).
So before Rezé, we would have reconstructed the Proto-Celtic word for ‘fifth’ as *kwenkweto-. After Rezé, we know the PIE form survived into Celtic as *kwenkweto-, a dialectal Celtic innovation occurred which turned this into *kwenkweto-, and that innovation underlies Irish, British and non-Rezé-Gaulish. While only Rezé-Gaulish (?) held on to the original ordinal *kwenkweto- and perforce missed out on the productivity of ordinal *-(a)meto-.

The question is what all of this means for the affiliation of Pictish and whichever dialect underlies names like Pictavi, Pictones.

5.3. Bearing in mind the apparent archaic form of Rezé pixte, and now possibly of Scottish Picti, as featured in Schrijver’s foregoing comments, the appearance of *picti- (*pexti-) as a possible dialect form of some antiquity, similar to Gaulish pixte-, in Pictish, but with the meaning ‘five, group of five’, would therefore not be out of place.

In the context of the Scottish Picti, Pictish, according to Jackson (1955, 152), as we have already seen (§3.5, above) ‘had certain affinities with Gaulish ...’ Nevertheless, our main problem here is that we know very little about the Pictish language, and any attempt to postulate sound changes on the basis of Gaulish could be a hazardous undertaking, and therefore our attempts here can only be regarded as tentative at best. But if so, then what would this ‘five, group of five’ refer to?

5.4. It is suggested here that Picti means ‘five, group of five’ in the context of a conglomerate of five polities having come together to form a bulwark

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42 Nevertheless, both Jackson (1955, 156–57) and Koch (1983, 214–17) contend that, though only within dialectal confines at this point, Pritenic, or pre-Pictish, had begun to separate itself from British already by the first century AD or slightly earlier. By the eighth century AD, Bede (HE I, 1) regarded Pictish and British as separate languages, though Guto Rhys (2015, 347–48) regards Pictish as ‘the most northerly dialect of Brittonic [British]’ in its later developments (p. 347). He adds (p. 184): ‘The later, but admittedly restricted, evidence for early medieval Pictish demonstrates that it shared much with Brittonic at least on the lexical level and in many issues of phonetic and grammatical evolution, e.g. lenition, syncope and apocope.’

43 Alexander Falileyev (pers. comm. 28/04/2015).

44 In the later stages of Pictish Nicolaisen (1976, 149–72, but particularly 171–72; 2001, 192–221; 220–21) has shown that there is little to distinguish Pictish from Cumbric, and that perhaps Pictish should be regarded as a dialect of Northern Brittonic. See also Rhys (2015, 346–49).

45 If this is the case, then the Caledones would very likely have been one of the five, as being a serious opponent of the Romans in battle. In the second century AD the Caledones were situated in present-day Angus, near the Maiatai who were seemingly occupying the area of present Clackmannan and East Fife, both south-east of the Highland line (cf. Fraser 2009, 16 (map)).
against the Romans. That is to say, that earlier attempts by individual polities to be successful in battle against the Romans had largely proved elusive. But should a number of polities come together to form a large conglomerate (as had Germanic polities to form the larger groupings of the Franci and the Alemanni etc.), then perhaps they might be more successful in withstanding the Romans. As the various British polities, either in the Roman province of Britannia or in the grey zone of Outer Brigantia (i.e. between Hadrian’s Wall and the Antonine Wall, viz southern Scotland), were either under direct Roman control (Britannia) or in the pay of the Romans to keep the peace (Outer Brigantia), any formation of a conglomerate to oppose Roman power would, therefore, need to come from polities north of the Antonine Wall. Given that the earliest-known record of the Picts in history occurs AD 297, as we have seen, the forming of the conglomerate of ‘five’ would seemingly have taken place sometime during the years after the Severan frontier settlement of 209–211 (cf. Fraser 2009, 22–42), but before the year 297.

5.5a. The use of numerals in polity-names is not uncommon. De Bernardo-Stempel (2008, 109) draws our attention to such names as Coriondi, Coritani ‘those who lead/constitute an army’, Vocorii ‘those who lead/constitute two armies’, Tricorii ‘those who lead/constitute three armies’, Petrucorii ‘those who lead/constitute four armies’, Suessiones, Suessetani ‘the six tribes’, Novantai ‘the nine tribes’, Dekantai ‘the ten tribes’, Vocontii ‘the twenty tribes’ etc., though it is to be noted that many of the above names here are compound forms.

5.5b. But when a numeral is used on its own, it is perhaps tempting to look for another semantic motivation, and especially with the numeral ‘five’, given its other meaning as ‘middle’, as Stifter (above) has already shown. In addition, we know that ‘middle’ is found in ethnonym formations, such as in Mediomatrici ‘ceux qui habitent au milieu des fleuves’ or ‘ceux des Mères-Médianes’; ‘ceux-du-Milieu-des-Eaux-Maternelles’ (DLG 221), and a possible meaning for Picti as ‘those living in / occupying the middle’, in this case central Scotland, would also make sense.48

46 For details of the campaigns of Septimius Severus in Caledonia AD 209–211, see Birley (2010, 170–200).
47 For an alternative interpretation of Dekantai see Isaac (2005, 192).
48 I am grateful to Alexander Falileyev for this suggestion. Lambert (2012, 151) also takes up this theme for pixto- as an explanation for Pictones / Pictavi.
5.6. In this context we would need also to consider the notion of Irish cóiced ‘fifth, province’. This is taken up as follows by Proinsias Mac Cana (2011, 252) in the context of the ‘sacred centre’:

The structure comprising the central province Mide < *Medion ‘Middle, Centre’ and peripheral provinces, Ulster, Leinster, Munster and Connacht – cóiced nUlad ‘the fifth of the Ulaid’, cóiced Laigen ‘the fifth of the Laigin’, cóiced Muman ‘the fifth of the Mumu’, and cóiced Connacht ‘the fifth of the Connachta’ – has a much longer history than [...] originally supposed and has left an echo in the Modern Irish expression cúig cúigidh na hÉireann ‘the five fifths / provinces of Ireland’ which is still a familiar synonym for ‘the whole of Ireland’. As the fraction presupposes the whole, so throughout history the five provinces, however politically discrete, were conceived as mere fractions of a single all-embracing totality coterminous with the land of Ireland. The pattern of a central province enclosed by four others representing the cardinal points cannot be explained otherwise than as a historical reflex of an ancient cosmographic schema, one which has striking analogues in several of the ‘Great Traditions’ of the world. And as in those other traditions it is found to be intimately connected with the concept of the sacred centre (Mac Cana 2011, 252).

In this regard, the term ‘Pict’ may represent the concept of the ‘sacred centre’, in order to legitimise their purpose in ‘Inner Caledonia’ (i.e. that part of Scotland north of the Antonine Wall outside Roman control), in the exercise of power in that region, as possibly in the case of the Mediomatici in east central Gaul, or the Pictones or Pictavi in western Gaul (cf. Stifter, above). But in terms of Realpolitik the Picts would need to be seen as a conglomerate specifically created to oppose Roman power.

5.7. In the context of conglomerates Fraser (2009, 66–67) discusses the notion of ‘farmer republics’, i.e. small communities, such as single polities, which with other such ‘republics’ come together in times of danger to seek to withstand much greater and highly disciplined and organised forces, such as the Romans possessed, to form conglomerates. Such conglomerates may develop into

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49 For details of this and comparative traditions in African and Asian societies, see Mac Cana (2011, 65–90).
50 For this phrase see Fraser (2009, passim).
kingships, rather than break up and return to small ‘farmer republics’ once more, and seek to hold sway over other smaller units than themselves and over a wider area. Others form conglomerates for quite different reasons, as Fraser (2009, 67) notes:

The same sort [of] social shift occurred (for very different reasons) among the Romano-Britons when Britannia re-militarised and native dynasties and kings asserted themselves upon the dismantling of Roman Britain. It also occurred among the Anglo-Saxons who settled and expanded in fifth-century southern Britain. The processes involved in all cases are mysterious. It is likely that certain districts never threw up kings of their own before they became subjugated by growing kingdoms nearby, or incorporated within them [...] (Fraser 2009, 67).

5.8. With regard to the Picts, we have also seen that they were not regarded as a homogeneous group. As Fraser (2009, 47) puts it:

Whatever we make of the appearance of *Picti* in our sources in late Antiquity, then, we may feel assured that the term does not refer to a single political community or ethnic solidarity. There is no convincing evidence that it did so much before 700. The earliest surviving use of the term was regarded as self-explanatory (Fraser 2009, 47).

Fraser (2009, 51) then notes:

It is striking that in both fourth- and eighth-century sources Pictishness is envisioned as a product of a sense of common purpose among the peoples of [I]nner Caledonia as far north as Moray. In the fourth century, in Roman eyes the link seems to be reflected in a shared lack of *romanitas*. Pictish attacks on Britannia may have been an important stage in the development of a sense of common purpose among leaders to either side of the Mounth, largely exclusive of other neighbouring peoples (Fraser 2009, 51).

In other words, the Picts were not a polity that developed over time into a single political entity or with an ethnic cohesion and a world-view, but as a construct that met the needs of a given situation, a reaction to a set of circumstances that required attention and action. When the danger was past the conglomereration remained and, as noted above, developed into a kingdom with a power-wielding elite. That kingdom, i.e. the (southern part of the) Pictish kingdom, itself in time succumbed to a greater power, that of the Gaelic kingdom of Dál Riata, and in so doing the Pictish kingdom, relabelled Alba, seemingly vanished (as
noted earlier (§2.1)) from the historical record c.900, though the Pictish people and their language likely continued on until the complete integration of the Pictish people within the kingdom of Alba and the obsolescence of the Pictish language had taken place by the twelfth century or thereabouts at the latest.51

5.9. The tradition of the ‘seven kingdoms’ of Pictland, as demonstrated in the Gaelic quatrain we saw at the beginning, may not merely be an excursus into pseudo-history, but may very well reflect a memory of Pictland in its early stages (c.300 or so), when it comprised only five or so ‘kingdoms’, and that this tradition has been handed down over the generations to be enshrined in a Gaelic quatrain of mid-to-late ninth century date.

5.10. Otherwise the etymology is to date unknown.

ABBREVIATIONS

Claudian. paneg. – see Platnauer 1922 (1963).
CMCS – Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies (Aberystwyth).
DLG – Dictionnaire de la langue gauloise (Delamarre 2003).
EIHM – Early Irish History and Mythology (O’Rahilly 1946).
Gaul. – Gaulish.
GB – George Broderick.
Gk – Greek.
GPN – Gaulish Personal Names (Evans 1967).
HE – Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum (Bede AD 731) (Spitzbart 1997).
IE – Indo-European.
IEW – Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch (Pokorny 1959 (2005)).
Ir. – Irish.
Lat. – Latin.
LHEB – Language and History in Early Britain (Jackson 1953).
LN – Location Name.
ModFr. – Modern French.
OFr. – Old French.
OInd. – Old Indian.
OIr. – Old Irish.
OPr. – Old Prussian.
OW – Old Welsh.
PCelt. – Proto-Celtic.
PIE – Proto-Indo-European.

51 For an example of a now extinct older Celtic language in obsolescence, see Broderick 2014.
RCC – Towards a Relative Chronology of Ancient and Medieval Celtic Sound Change (McCone 1996).
RN(N) – River Name(s).
Toch. – Tocharian.
Ved. – Vedic.
W – Welsh.

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*Pixti/*Pexti, Picti? The Name ‘Picti’ Revisited


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