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## A Fragmented Masterpiece

Recovering the Biography of the Hilton of Cadboll Pictish Cross-Slab

Heather F James, Isabel Henderson, Sally M Foster and Siân Jones

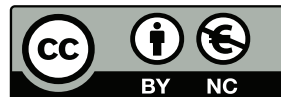
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## A Fragmented Masterpiece



# A Fragmented Masterpiece: recovering the biography of the Hilton of Cadboll Pictish cross-slab



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FRONT COVER IMAGE

Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab: the front of the mid-portion

BACK COVER IMAGES

Hilton of Cadboll cross-slab *in situ* in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh (courtesy of Kevin Hicks)  
View of the Hilton of Cadboll chapel site from the north-east

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## Summary

The cross-slab from Hilton of Cadboll in Ross and Cromarty is one of the best-known and most beautiful early medieval sculptures in Britain. It is displayed in the National Museums of Scotland in Chambers Street, Edinburgh, and the medieval chapel site from which it came is cared for by Historic Scotland (NGR NH 8731 7687). The original Pictish carving is preserved on one side, including ornate Pictish symbols, a hunting scene that includes a female rider and a panel of spiral ornament, the whole enclosed within a border of animal-inhabited vine-scroll. The other face, on which it was assumed there would have been a Christian cross, was chipped off and replaced by a memorial inscription bearing the date 1676. Excavations close to the chapel in 1998 yielded carved fragments from the missing cross-face, and further excavation in 2001 revealed not only more carved fragments but also the lower portion of the slab still in a setting in the ground. This lower portion is exceptionally well preserved and carved on both sides. There is a gap between the lower portion and the upper portion, but parts of this missing mid-portion have been recognised among the fragments. This important discovery led to a multi-disciplinary project involving art history, archaeology, scientific analysis, ethnography and cultural history.

The archaeological excavations revealed that the cross-slab had been broken twice early in its life, the first time when the tenon broke and the second time when the upper portion fell, leaving the lower portion (the new tenon) in the ground. Its original location was probably close to where it was re-erected in the mid-12th century, and it is likely that there was a Pictish church here, accompanied by burials and in some way linked to the Pictish monastery at Portmahomack. The medieval context for the second setting of the cross-slab, possibly slightly pre-dating the construction of a medieval chapel and children's graveyard, has showed the continued importance of the site to medieval society and the desire to express veneration and respect for this Christian monument. Despite the small area of the graveyard that has been examined, it can be seen that its use changed after the Reformation to include the adult population. The surrounding deposits are not rich with artefacts but are consistent with a site

that was in the vicinity of medieval and post-medieval settlement.

The excavations yielded 11,252 fragments of stone, of which 7497 belong to the cross-slab, and of these 3370 fragments bear traces of carving. The digital database of all the carved fragments may be consulted online from the Arts and Humanities Data Service, University of York (<http://ahds.ac.uk/>). Detailed studies concern the cross-slab itself (geology, toolmarks, the way in which it became fragmented, the epigraphy of the inscription), scientific dating, environmental evidence and other artefacts discovered during the excavations, including part of a medieval relief cross and a stone with a simple incised cross. A potential source for the Middle Old Red Sandstone of the cross-slab is the foreshore at nearby Jessie Port.

The Hilton of Cadboll slab is now seen to have been profoundly Christian, drawing on venerable Early Christian imagery to convey its message of Salvation. The uniquely architectural, embossed stepped base preserved on the front of the lower portion, confirms Pictish sculptors' knowledge of the representation of the jewelled cross erected at Golgotha in the fifth century. Elements of this imagery are found elsewhere in Ross-shire, on the Shandwick cross, on a cross-slab at Rosemarkie and on the Edderton cross-slab. The reconstruction of the mid-portion showed that a cross-head of a distinctly Pictish design was set at the centre of the spiral panel on the reverse of the slab. This glorified cross can be compared to the vision of the cross set against the sun experienced by Constantine the Great before the battle at the Milvian Bridge around AD 312 and associated with Conversion and the Triumph of Christianity. The cross and the Eucharistic vine-scroll which borders the reverse of the slab allow a reappraisal of the famous image of a female rider. It is argued that this dominant Christian context and the frontal pose of the mounted figure suggest that, like the male riders on Pictish slabs, the figure is not a specific contemporary aristocrat but rather an idealisation of female authority and Christian integrity. The figures on the front face of the mid-portion are seen as concerned with Death, Judgement, Heaven and Hell. The heavy fleshy creatures that flank the cross-base can be related to the

animal art of the other tall slabs of Easter Ross, the St Andrews Sarcophagus and to a number of Insular works of art of the second half of the eighth century, in particular the Anglo-Saxon Gandersheim Casket. This Casket was made in Mercia in the late eighth century and provides the most secure approximate date for the Hilton cross-slab. The condition of the carving on the hitherto unknown bottom edge of the Hilton vine-scroll shows that the same animal style was used both for the inhabitants of the scrolls and for animals on the upper portion, a uniformity of style that was the creation of the Hilton sculptor. The art of the Hilton cross-slab underscores the relationship between the sculpture north and south of the Grampians evident in the other tall slabs of Easter Ross.

A biographical approach to the history of the Hilton cross-slab has enabled the changing meanings and values of the monument to be traced through time and has contributed to a wider understanding of attitudes towards early medieval sculpture. For the early medieval and medieval periods the sources are often remote from the cross-slab and its Tarbat environment, but for more recent phases in its biography, historical sources pertaining directly to the monument or its immediate context have been enlightening. The discovery of George Mackenzie's

letter of 1675 about a storm on 21 December 1674 that toppled a large obelisk has been important to the interpretation of 17th-century events surrounding the cross-slab. Later documents have enabled a much fuller picture to be drawn of the monument and the various people who have engaged with it, including a rich body of documentary sources relating to events in 1921 when the upper portion was sent to the British Museum in London and later that year returned to Scotland. Ethnographic research, involving interviews and participant observation, has also proved to be important in revealing the depth and range of meanings and values attached to the monument in contemporary society. Together, the historical and ethnographic evidence shows that the specific religious meanings surrounding the cross-slab prior to the Reformation declined from the Enlightenment onwards. In their place, the monument became involved in a complex body of symbolism relating to national, community and class identities.

At local initiative, a replica of the cross-slab has been erected close to the chapel site at Hilton of Cadboll, a project that commenced before the discovery of the lower portion, and the original lower portion is now in the Seaboard Memorial Hall in neighbouring Balintore.

## Résumé

La 'cross-slab' de Hilton of Cadboll dans le comté de Ross et Cromarty est l'une des sculptures du haut Moyen-Âge les plus connues et les plus belles de Grande-Bretagne. Elle est exposée au National Museums of Scotland, Chambers Street, à Édimbourg, et le site de la chapelle médiévale dont elle est issue est entretenu par l'association Historic Scotland (NGR NH 8731 7687). La gravure picte d'origine est préservée sur un côté, avec notamment des symboles pictes richement ornés, une scène de chasse comprenant une cavalière et un panneau ornemental en spirale, le tout se trouvant à l'intérieur d'une bordure en vigne habitée par des animaux. L'autre face, sur laquelle on a supposé qu'il devait y avoir une croix chrétienne, a été écaillée et remplacée par une inscription commémorative portant la date de 1676. Des fouilles effectuées près de la chapelle en 1998 ont produit des fragments sculptés de la face à la croix manquante, et d'autres fouilles menées en 2001 ont révélé non seulement d'autres fragments sculptés mais également la portion inférieure de la

Pierre qui était encore enterrée dans le sol. La portion inférieure est exceptionnellement bien conservée et est sculptée de part et d'autre. Il y a une partie manquante entre la partie inférieure et la partie supérieure, mais des morceaux de la portion médiane manquante ont été reconnus parmi les fragments retrouvés. Cette importante découverte a donné lieu à un projet pluridisciplinaire faisant intervenir l'histoire de l'art, l'archéologie, l'analyse scientifique, l'ethnographie et l'histoire culturelle.

Les fouilles archéologiques ont révélé que la «cross-slab» avait été cassée deux fois dans sa vie, la première fois lorsque le tenon s'est brisé et la seconde fois lorsque la portion supérieure est tombée, laissant la portion inférieure (le nouveau tenon) dans le sol. Son site original était sans doute près de l'endroit où elle a été remplacée au milieu du XXIIe siècle, et il y a des chances qu'il y ait eu une église picte à cet endroit, accompagnée de tombes pictes et liée d'une certaine manière au monastère picte de Portmahomack. Le

contexte médiéval de la deuxième mise en place de la «cross-slab», qui a peut-être eu lieu avant la construction de la chapelle médiévale et du cimetière des enfants, a montré l'importance continue du site dans la société médiévale et le désir d'exprimer une vénération et un respect pour ce monument chrétien. Malgré la faible superficie de cimetière examinée, on peut voir que son utilisation a changé après la Réforme pour accueillir la population adulte. Les dépôts alentours ne sont pas riches en objets fabriqués mais correspondent à ceux d'un site situé près d'un village médiéval et post-médiéval.

Les fouilles ont produit 11 252 fragments de pierre, dont 7497 appartiennent à la «cross-slab» et parmi eux, 3370 fragments portent des traces de sculpture. La base de données numérique de tous ces fragments sculptés peut être consultée en ligne auprès du Services des données des Arts et Humanités (Arts and Humanities Data Service), de l'université de York (<http://ahds.ac.uk/>). Des études détaillées concerne la «cross-slab» elle-même (géologie, marque d'outils, la façon dont elle s'est fragmentée, l'épigraphie de l'inscription), les datations scientifiques, les preuves environnementales et d'autres objets découverts durant les fouilles, notamment une partie d'une croix médiévale de relief avec une croix incisée simple. Une source potentielle du vieux grès rouge moyen utilisé pour la «cross-slab» est la laisse de mer au site voisin de Jessie Port.

La dalle de Hilton of Cadboll est maintenant considérée comme étant profondément chrétienne, basée sur les imageries vénérables du début de l'ère chrétienne pour transmettre son message du Salut. La base architecturale unique échelonnée et estampée conservée sur le devant de la portion inférieure, confirme la connaissance des sculpteurs pictes de la représentation de la croix ornée de pierres précieuses érigée à Golgotha au Ve siècle. Des éléments de cette imagerie se retrouvent ailleurs dans le comté de Ross-shire, sur la croix de Shandwick, sur une «cross-slab» de Rosemarkie et sur la «cross-slab» de Edderton. La reconstruction de la portion médiane a montré qu'une tête de croix de conception clairement picte était placée au centre du panneau en spirale au dos de la dalle. Cette croix glorifiée peut se comparer à la vision qu'eut Constantin le Grand de la croix de lumière superposée sur le soleil avant la bataille de Milvian Bridge aux alentours de 312 av J.-C. et associée à la Conversion et au triomphe du christianisme. La croix et la vigne eucharistique qui borde le dos de la dalle permettent une réévaluation de la fameuse image de la cavalière. On prétend que ce contexte chrétien

dominant et la pose frontale du personnage à cheval suggèrent que, comme les cavaliers des dalles pictes, le personnage n'est pas une aristocrate contemporaine précise mais plutôt une idéalisation de l'autorité féminine et de l'intégrité chrétienne. Les personnages de la face frontale de la portion médiane sont analysés comme ayant trait à la mort, au jugement, au paradis et à l'enfer. Les créatures charnues qui flanquent la base de la croix peuvent être reliées à l'art animalier des autres dalles de Easter-Ross, du sarcophage de St Andrews et à plusieurs œuvres d'art des îles de la seconde moitié du VIIIe siècle, en particulier le cercueil anglo-saxon de Gandersheim. Ce cercueil fut réalisé en Mercie à la fin du huitième siècle et fournit la date approximative la plus fiable pour la «cross-slab» de Hilton. L'état de la gravure sur le bord inférieur jusqu'ici inconnu de la vigne de Hilton montre que le même style d'animal a été utilisé à la fois pour les habitants des volutes et pour les animaux de la portion supérieure et cette uniformité de style a été la création du sculpteur de Hilton. L'art de la «cross-slab» de Hilton souligne la relation entre les sculptures au nord et au sud des Grampians évidente dans les autres monolithes de Easter Ross.

Une approche bibliographique de l'histoire de la 'cross-slab' de Hilton a permis aux significations et valeurs changeantes du monument d'être retracées à travers le temps et a contribué à une meilleure compréhension des attitudes vis-à-vis des sculptures du haut Moyen-Âge. Pour les périodes du haut Moyen-Âge et du Moyen-Âge les sources sont souvent éloignées de la 'cross-slab' et de son environnement Tarbat, mais pour les phases plus récentes de sa biographie, les sources historiques appartenant directement au monument ou à son contexte immédiat ont été instructives. La découverte de la lettre de George Mackenzie de 1675 à propos d'un orage le 21 décembre 1674 qui a fait basculer un grand obélisque a été importante pour interpréter les événements du XVIIe siècle entourant la 'cross-slab'. Des documents plus tardifs ont permis de dresser un portrait plus complet du monument et des diverses personnes qui y ont été lié, notamment un riche corpus de sources documentaires datant d'événements de 1921 époque à laquelle la portion supérieure a été envoyée au British Museum de Londres puis renvoyée en Écosse plus tard dans la même année. La recherche ethnographique, qui a fait intervenir des entretiens et des observations de participants, s'est également avérée importante pour révéler la profondeur et l'éventail des significations et valeurs attachées au monument dans la société contemporaine. Ensemble, les preuves historiques et ethnographiques montrent que les



significations religieuses spécifiques qui entourent la 'cross-slab' avant la Réforme ont décliné à partir du Siècle des lumières et par la suite. Au lieu de cela, le monument a été associé à un corps complexe de symbolisme lié aux identités nationales, locales et aux classes sociales.

Sur une initiative locale, une réplique de la «cross-slab» a été érigée près du site de la chapelle de Hilton of Cadboll. Ce projet a débuté avant la découverte de la portion inférieure, et la portion inférieure originale est maintenant au Seaboard Memorial Hall dans la commune voisine de Balintore.

## Zusammenfassung

Der aus Hilton of Cadboll in Ross and Cromarty stammende Kreuzstein gehört zu den bekanntesten und schönsten frühmittelalterlichen Skulpturen in Großbritannien. Er ist im National Museums of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, ausgestellt und der Standort der mittelalterlichen Kapelle, an dem er seinen Ursprung hat, wird von Historic Scotland (NGR NH 8731 7687) betreut. Auf einer Seite wurde die original piktische Steinzeichnung erhalten, die kunstvolle piktische Symbole, eine Jagdszene mit einer Reiterin sowie eine Platte mit spiralförmigen Verzierungen umfasst. Das Ganze wird von einer von Tieren bewohnten Weinrebe umgeben. Die andere Seite, von der man annahm, dass darauf ein christliches Kreuz abgebildet war, wurde abgetragen und mit einer auf das Jahr 1676 datierten Gedenkschrift versehen. Bei 1998 in der Nähe der Kapelle durchgeführten Ausgrabungen, fand man behauene Teile der fehlenden Seite des Kreuzes und bei weiteren, 2001 durchgeführten Ausgrabungen, förderte man nicht nur mehr dieser Fragmente, sondern auch den unteren Teil des Steins zutage, der sich dort immer noch im Boden befand. Dieser untere Teil ist außergewöhnlich gut erhalten und auf beiden Seiten behauen. Es fehlt ein Stück zwischen dem unteren und dem oberen Teil, jedoch wurden Teile dieses fehlenden Mittelstücks unter den Fragmenten ausgemacht. Dieser bedeutende Fund führte zu einem fachübergreifenden Projekt, das unter anderem Kunstgeschichte, Archäologie, wissenschaftliche Analyse, Ethnographie und Kulturgeschichte umfasst.

Die archäologischen Ausgrabungen zeigten, dass der Kreuzstein bereits während seiner frühen Existenz zweimal gebrochen war, das erste Mal, als der Verbindungzapfen brach und das zweite Mal, als der obere Teil zu Boden stürzte, wobei der untere Teil (der neue Verbindungzapfen) im Boden verblieb. Sein ursprünglicher Standort befand sich vermutlich in der Nähe desjenigen, an dem er Mitte des 12. Jahrhunderts wieder aufgestellt wurde und es ist sehr wahrscheinlich,

dass sich dort eine piktische Kirche mit angeschlossener Begräbnisstätte befand, die auf irgendeine Art und Weise mit dem piktischen Kloster in Portmahomack in Verbindung stand. Der mittelalterliche Kontext für den zweiten Aufstellungsort des Kreuzsteines, der vermutlich etwas vor dem Bau einer mittelalterlichen Kapelle sowie eines Kinderfriedhofs ausgewählt wurde, wies auf die anhaltende Bedeutung des Standorts für die mittelalterliche Gesellschaft sowie das Verlangen hin, diesem christlichen Monument Verehrung und Respekt entgegenzubringen. Trotz der Tatsache, dass bisher nur ein kleiner Teil des Friedhofs untersucht wurde, kann man erkennen, dass dieser nach der Reformation auch als Begräbnisstätte für Erwachsene benutzt wurde. Die in der Umgebung zu findenden Ablagerungen beherbergen nicht viele Artefakte, entsprechen jedoch einer sich in der Nähe mittelalterlicher und nachmittelalterlicher Ansiedlungen befindenden Stätte.

Bei den Ausgrabungen fand man 11.252 Steinfragmente, von denen 7.497 zum Kreuzstein gehören. Von diesen wiederum, weisen 3.370 Teile Spuren einer Behauung auf. Auf der Website des Arts and Humanities Data Service der Universität York (<http://ahds.ac.uk>), können Sie online auf die digitale Datenbank aller behauenen Fragmente zugreifen. Detaillierte Studien hinsichtlich des Kreuzsteines selbst (Geologie, Werkzeugspuren, die Art und Weise auf die er in Teile zerfiel, die Epigraphik der Inschriften), wissenschaftlicher Datierungen, umfeldbedingter Anhaltspunkte sowie weiterer während der Ausgrabungen entdeckter Artefakte, einschließlich eines Teils eines mittelalterlichen Reliefkreuzes und eines Steins mit einem einfachen, eingeritzten Kreuz. Als potentielle Quelle des Middle Old Red Sandstone (mittelalten Rotsandsteins) des Kreuzsteins, gilt das sandige Ufer des nahegelegenen Jessie Port.

Der Stein aus Hilton of Cadboll wird mittlerweile als tiefgründig christlich betrachtet, wobei er sich ehrwürdiger frühchristlicher Symbolik bedient,

um seine Heilsbotschaft zu übermitteln. Das architektonisch einzigartige, geprägte, stufige Fundament, das auf der Vorderseite des unteren Teils erhalten geblieben ist, bestätigt, dass piketische Bildhauer über Kenntnisse bezüglich der Darstellung des im 5. Jahrhundert bei Golgotha errichteten, mit Edelsteinen besetzten Kreuzes verfügten. Elemente dieser Symbolik finden sich auch anderswo in Ross-shire, so z.B. auf den Kreuzsteinen von Shandwick und Edderton und auf einem Kreuzstein bei Rosemarkie. Die Rekonstruktion des Mittelstücks zeigte, dass sich in der Mitte der sich auf der Rückseite des Steins befindlichen spiralförmigen Platte der obere Teil eines eindeutig piketisch aussehenden Kreuzes befand. Dieses glorifizierte Kreuz kann mit der Vision des gegen die Sonne ausgerichteten Kreuzes verglichen werden, mit dem Konstantin der Große vor der Schlacht an der Milvischen Brücke um 312 ad herum konfrontiert wurde und mit einem Wandel sowie dem Triumph des Christentums in Verbindung gebracht werden. Das Kreuz und die eucharistische Weinrebe, welche die Rückseite des Steins umgibt, ermöglichen eine Neubeurteilung des berühmten Abbilds einer Reiterin. Es wird argumentiert, dass dieser dominante christliche Kontext sowie die Frontaldarstellung der reitenden Person andeuten, dass es sich bei der Figur, wie bei den auf piketischen Steinen abgebildeten männlichen Reitern, nicht um eine bestimmte zeitgenössische Adlige, sondern eher um die Idealisierung der weiblichen Autorität sowie der christlichen Integrität handelt. Die auf der Vorderseite des Mittelteils abgebildeten Figuren werden als für den Tod, den jüngsten Tag sowie Himmel und Hölle zuständig betrachtet. Die schweren fleischigen Geschöpfe, die das Fundament des Kreuzes flankieren, können mit der Tierkunst in Verbindung gebracht werden, die auf den anderen großen Steinen in Easter Ross, dem St. Andrews Sarkophag sowie auf einer Reihe der von den Inseln stammenden Kunstwerken der zweiten Hälfte des 8. Jahrhunderts zu sehen ist. Insbesondere ist hier der angelsächsische Gandersheim Casket zu erwähnen. Dieser Schrein wurde im späten 8. Jahrhundert in Mercia hergestellt und gilt als der sicherste ungefähre Anhaltspunkt zur Datierung des Kreuzsteins von Hilton. Die Beschaffenheit der bislang unbekanntem Behauung am unteren Ende der Weinrebe von Hilton zeigt, dass sowohl für die Bewohner der Reben als auch für die auf dem oberen Teil abgebildeten Tiere ein einheitlicher Stil angewandt wurde, der auf das Werk des Bildhauers von Hilton zurückzuführen ist.

Die Kunst des Kreuzsteins von Hilton unterstreicht die Verbindung zwischen der Bildhauerei nördlich und südlich der Grampians, die in den anderen großen Steinen von Easter Ross zutage tritt.

Ein biographischer Ansatz hinsichtlich der Geschichte des Kreuzsteins von Hilton ermöglichte die Nachverfolgung der sich im Laufe der Zeit verändernden Bedeutungen und Werte des Monuments und trug zu einem erweiterten Verständnis von Einstellungen zu frühmittelalterlichen Skulpturen bei. Was die Quellen der frühmittelalterlichen und mittelalterlichen Perioden betrifft, liegen diese oft weit vom Kreuzstein sowie seiner Umgebung in Tarbat entfernt, jedoch waren die das Monument direkt oder seinen unmittelbaren Kontext betreffenden historischen Quellen späterer Phasen seiner Biographie sehr aufschlussreich. Die Entdeckung des Briefes von George Mackenzie aus dem Jahr 1675 über einen Sturm am 21. Dezember 1674, der einen großen Obelisk zu Fall brachte, spielte bei der Interpretation der den Kreuzstein umgebenden Ereignisse des 17. Jahrhunderts eine wichtige Rolle. Aus späteren Jahren stammende Dokumente ermöglichten die Erstellung eines weitaus aufschlussreicheren Bildes des Monuments sowie der zahlreichen, damit in Verbindung stehenden Personen. Unter anderem entstanden umfangreiche dokumentarische Quellen, die in Zusammenhang mit den Ereignissen von 1921 stehen, als der obere Teil an das British Museum in London geschickt wurde, jedoch noch im selben Jahr nach Schottland zurückkehrte. Ethnographische Forschungen, die Interviews und Beobachtungen Beteiligter umfassen, haben sich bei der Enthüllung von Tiefe und Umfang der dem Monument von der zeitgenössischen Gesellschaft zugemessenen Bedeutungen und Werte ebenfalls als wichtig erwiesen. Zusammen zeigen die geschichtlichen und ethnographischen Nachweise, dass die den Kreuzstein vor der Reformation umgebenden, spezifischen religiösen Bedeutungen, mit dem Beginn der Aufklärung langsam abnahmen. An ihrer Stelle wurde das Monument in ein komplexes System von Symbolik eingebunden, das sich auf nationale, gemeinschaftliche sowie auf Identitäten gesellschaftlicher Schichten bezieht.

Aus einer lokalen Initiative heraus, wurde nahe dem Standort der Kapelle in Hilton of Cadboll eine Nachbildung des Kreuzsteins errichtet, ein Projekt, das vor der Entdeckung des unteren Teils begann. Das Original des unteren Teils befindet sich nun in der Seaboard Memorial Hall im benachbarten Balintore.