

PREHISTORIC ANNALS AND EARLY MEDIEVAL MONASTICISM: DANIEL WILSON, JAMES YOUNG SIMPSON AND THEIR CAVE SITES

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To deepen our understanding of early medieval exile, the present study characterizes ways in which scholars have studied cave use in Britain and Ireland. As key figures in the history of archaeology, Sir Daniel Wilson and Sir James Young Simpson were crucial for establishing Scotland's cave sites as subjects for study. Triggered by these two, a century and a half of research has related these places to the flowering of Gaelic monasticism. Nonetheless, fundamental similarities between early Christian communities in Britain and Ireland are at odds with this northern distribution, and bring the question of cave use beyond Scotland sharply into focus. Our paper therefore targets two questions: (1) to what extent were cave sites used by early Christian communities elsewhere in the Insular world; and (2) is our perception of cave use as a particularly north British phenomenon skewed by the long history of Scottish interest in the topic?

Caves marked with early Christian motifs on Scotland's western and eastern coasts have attracted scholarly attention for over a hundred years, where they have been associated with early medieval monastic communities. As a consequence of this work, cave use may be identified as an aspect of 'northern' Christianity. Our study challenges this idea in two ways: firstly, by looking at cave use more widely in Britain and Ireland; and secondly, by characterizing the long history of scholarship in Scotland and Canada that has led us to our current thinking on the early Christian use of these sites. For instance, the site of St Molaise's Cave on Holy Island, off the coast of Arran, has long been identified as what we may call a medieval sacred place. First studied in the mid-nineteenth century by Daniel Wilson, this cave's cross sculptures may be divided into two phases: an initial phase of large simple cross carvings and small graffito crosses associated with early medieval religious use; and a later phase of thirteenth-century Norse runic inscriptions and graffito crosses.¹

As a measure of current thinking, we may look to Ian Fisher's characterization of the site type as a whole in his important *Early Medieval Sculpture in the West Highlands and Islands*. In that work, he classes cross-marked cave sites under his 'small monasteries and

1. Wilson 1851b, 531–3; Fisher 2001, 61–5.

eremitic sites' category, which he identifies as individual or community hermitages. In this way, Fisher sees that:

Throughout the area [i.e. Scotland's West Highlands and Islands] there are several enclosed sites, often containing remains of chapels and hut circles or stances, and in some cases carved stones, which closely resemble sites in such areas as the Dingle and Iveragh peninsulas in Co. Kerry. Some of these may be classified as small monasteries, but others are in situations so remote, inaccessible, or lacking in any hinterland that they may reasonably be described as individual or communal hermitages or 'eremitic monasteries'. The solitary life of meditation was highly valued in the Irish church, and its exponents included the hermit Beccán of Rum, a poet and leading scholar of the Iona community in the seventh century, and the anchorite Cilléne Droichtech who was abbot of Iona from 727 to 752.²

He continues, sketching a model for relating the different grades of monastic sites:

A classic model ... is provided in Adomnán's account of Virgno or Fergnæ, an Irish monk who passed his latter years in the dependent community of *Hinba*, some of them 'in isolation' in the place of the anchorites in *Muirbolc Már* ... The ultimate 'desert place in the ocean' was the tiny island of North Rona, 70km from the nearest habitable land, with its small oval enclosure and a slab-lintelled oratory and simple crosses which resemble those of such Irish sites as Skellig Michael. The penitential nature of this site, and of the one that probably existed on St Kilda, was enhanced by their location far beyond the limits of Irish settlement.³

Focusing upon Argyll, however, there is a problem with the 'classic' model in that the area's small enclosed sites and cave sites do not share the inaccessibility of North Rona, Skellig Michael or St Kilda – as Fisher himself stresses.⁴ Nevertheless, on Eilean Mór, Fisher points to

a small cave among cliffs in the south part of the island, now entered by an opening in the roof but originally almost completely dark ... [that] bears on the east wall a rock-cut Chi-Rho cross and a marigold, both of early type, and it may be identified as a place for ascetic meditation'.⁵

Similarly, he lists cave sites of what he calls 'eremitic character', such as:

St Columba's Cave on the shore of Loch Caolisport, which again bears early rock-cut crosses above a medieval altar. St Ciaran's Cave, on the foreshore of the east coast of Kintyre, contains a boulder carved with an elaborate marigold. Similar coastal caves, with numerous crosses, which may testify to later pilgrimage to places of ascetic retreat, are found at Carsaig and Scoor in the Ross of Mull, and on Holy Island (Arran).⁶

Along these lines, we may also note Jerome's *Life of St Paul, the first hermit*, since St Paul spent his eremitical life in what is called a cave.⁷ This St Paul is significant, given

2. Fisher 2001, 3.

3. Ibid, 3.

4. Ibid, 4.

5. Ibid, 4.

6. Ibid, 4.

7. Migne 1844–64, c 5, cols 20–1.

the early medieval sculptural evidence for his popularity in northern Britain (eg, the Nigg cross-slab).⁸ In Scotland, then, ideas surrounding early Christian cave use may be perceived as firmly rooted within archaeological and wider scholarship, with these sites posited to have held significance in early medieval landscapes.

Given the fundamental similarities between early Christian communities across Britain and Ireland, such well-established work in Scotland brings the question of cave use *beyond Scotland* sharply into focus. For instance, despite its rarity, the medieval literature suggesting the monastic use of cave sites is of a comparable sort throughout the Insular world. In other words, texts such as the *Miracula Nynie Episcopi* may describe how, in what is now south-west Scotland, 'Ninian studied heavenly wisdom with a devoted mind in a cave of horrible blackness';⁹ yet literature of this sort is at least equal in its occurrence elsewhere. Thus, in his pioneering work on the early medieval use of some of Scotland's caves, James Young Simpson drew upon the authority of the *Annals of the Four Masters*, which refer to cave use in Ireland. In this way, under the year 898, Simpson suggested that 'probably we have the obit of [a self-denying and secluded anchorite] ... under the designation of "Caenchombrac of the caves of Inis-bo-fine", as these early ascetics sometimes betook themselves to caves, natural or artificial, using them for their houses and oratories'.¹⁰ Similarly, Conleth Manning has recently called attention to references in Irish literature, including the twelfth-century story of Bishop Erc, St Brendan's tutor, sending Brendan to a cave in penance, and the ninth- or tenth-century *Tripartite Life of St Patrick*, which refers to St Fiacc of Sletty spending Lent in a cave at Cnoc Dromma Coblai.¹¹ Early Christian cave use is also described in Wales and Cornwall. For instance, Peter Rose highlighted a number of examples, including references to cave use by St Samson and St Illtud.¹² As archaeologists, Manning and Rose are exceptional in turning their attentions to the early medieval monastic use of caves – in this way, their archaeological work has identified and contributed to our understanding of caves in Ireland and Cornwall.

Certainly, the written evidence suggests that caves were used by monastic ascetics. In the *Lives* of the British saints Samson, Ninian and Illtud, the saint's use of a cave is normally something that marks his manner of life as exceptionally austere compared with that of ordinary monks.¹³ Three theoretically possible reasons suggest themselves for the use of a cave within a life of unusual austerity: the desire for seclusion; the desire to live a life of exceptional poverty; and the desire to imitate the burial of Christ in a tomb carved in the rock, so as to 'die with Christ' in this world and then rise with him into the life of heaven.

The *Life of St Samson* is both the earliest and the most informative source. The saint decides to inhabit a cave on two separate occasions. On the first, the cave is the culmination of two acts of separation. Samson has been the abbot of Ynys Bÿr, but he decides to leave the monastery and withdraw to 'a suitable desert'. He and three other companions first find a *castellum* near the Severn; there he left his companions and, 'as he

8. Mowbray 1936.

9. MacQueen and MacQueen 2005, 101.

10. Simpson 1857, 522.

11. Manning 2005, 110; Plummer 1910, 100; Mulchrone 1939, 143.

12. Rose 2001, 112.

13. Flobert 1997, 204–6, 218–21; Taylor 1925, 42–3, 50–2; MacQueen and MacQueen 2005, 101; Wade-Evans 1944, 220–7.

wandered through the forest, he found a very spacious and very lonely cave', with its mouth opening towards the east. The cave is, as it were, a desert within the desert. On the second occasion, Samson has just triumphed over 'a poisonous and very vicious serpent', which lived in a cave in Cornwall.¹⁴ The saint then takes over the serpent's cave, ordering his men to build a monastery nearby. The cave is, therefore, an ascetic satellite settlement close to a monastery; subsequently it would be a site that recalled the saint's 'heavenly life'. In the Northumbrian *Miracula Nynie Episcopi*, dated to the late eighth century,¹⁵ the saint is portrayed as a great teacher rather than an outstanding ascetic. In accordance with this central theme, he 'studied heavenly wisdom with a devoted mind in a cave of horrible blackness'.¹⁶ Seclusion of a bishop for biblical study, rather than of a monk for exceptional austerity, is what the cave offers here. *The Life of St Illtud* portrays the saint's seclusion in the cave in yet another light: Illtud was in conflict with Meirchion, king of Glamorgan, who proposed to kill the saint and destroy his monastery. When the king's army was at the gates of the monastery, Illtud fled from the king's men and from 'the excited people, who caused hindrance to his prayers',¹⁷ and took up residence in a cave by the River Ewenni. The flight was from the violence and the disturbance of the world.

The other two possible motives are not made evident in the texts. St David's community renounced the use of the plough, thus placing themselves among the contemporary poor – those confined to using the spade. If contemporary monasticism had thought of the cave as the resort of the very poor, this form of habitation might have had the same significance. But the texts never advert to any such conception. Similarly, the insistence of Adomnán's *Life of Columba* that the saint was buried *in sindonibus*, in linen cloths, echoes the gospel accounts of the burial of Christ: Columba was buried in a Christ-like manner. One might have supposed that such imitation of Christ could have been taken further. In baptism the Christian died with Christ; and, indeed, the baptized descended into the baptismal pool recalling not only Christ's baptism but his burial. The *Life of St Samson* describes his first cave as being underground and also, like the second cave, as being miraculously provided with a spring of water; but, if this was intended to remind the reader of the baptismal pool and of the tomb of Christ in the rock, it was all left implicit. The choice of words for the cave avoids the *monumentum* of the gospel narratives, partly no doubt because that was a word of much wider meaning than *spelunca* and *specus* (it would give Welsh *mynwent* 'cemetery').¹⁸

Seclusion was, therefore, the dominant theme, although it could be given different twists according to the context. Correspondingly, though uniformly sparse across Celtic Britain and Ireland, the medieval literature describing early Christian cave use emphasizes seclusion and crucially does not suggest that using caves was a particularly 'northern' thing to do.

Additionally, we may also be concerned about using the presence of sculpture as an accurate measure of early Christian activity. This is because, though sculpture is distinctive

14. Taylor 1925, 50–2.

15. MacQueen and MacQueen 2005, 3–4.

16. Ibid, 101.

17. Wade-Evans 1944, 221.

18. See, for instance, the Santon inscription on the Isle of Man – AVITI MONOMENTI – probably datable to the 7th century: Macalister 1945, 482–3; Tedeschi 2005, 302, clxx.

to many Scottish caves (as well as a number of Icelandic sites),¹⁹ it is lacking at Irish and other British sites, which have been ascribed early Christian associations by other means. Manning, for instance, bases his identification of rock shelters and caves associated with Irish saints upon a combination of medieval literature, place-names, folklore and archaeological survey.²⁰ Yet, the sculptural element distinctive to Scottish cave sites may be important (and has long been understood as contemporary with comparable rock-cut and carved stone sculpture):²¹ eighth-century Irish canon law describes the fundamental significance of the cross symbol as well as hierarchies of sacred precincts or places;²² and the creation and display of largely anonymous simple, cross-decorated stones have been proposed to reflect a *change* in monument use from earlier periods, marking out 'protected' spaces,²³ proclaiming holy ground and the community of the Christian dead or defining church landownership.²⁴

Nevertheless, despite preliminary or speculative discussions by Manning or Rose, we may perceive that early Christian cave use remains a topic largely unexplored outside Scotland.²⁵ This unequal distribution of scholarship and focus upon the caves of northern Britain may be credited to the dedicated interests of two key figures: Daniel Wilson and James Young Simpson. These two men were multi-faceted scholars of great significance. In his seminal 1851 publication, *Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland*, Wilson coined the English word 'prehistory' and brought important ideas from Scandinavian scholarship to Britain, and later to Canada. Simpson, in turn, is most widely known for his discovery of the merits of chloroform as an anaesthetic and his advocacy of its medical applications; less well known is his role as a leading figure in Scotland's archaeological community, bringing a wealth of wide-ranging knowledge and fresh perspectives to the field.

We propose that, by explicitly considering an early Christian use for Scottish caves, Daniel Wilson and James Young Simpson broke with earlier interpretations of these sites. For instance, George Chalmers, in 1807, glossed over the potential early Christian use of caves, instead focusing upon his idea that cave use was an aspect of primitive society.²⁶ Wilson's *Archaeology and Prehistoric Annals of Scotland* differed from Chalmers in proposing that some caves 'are the retreats which the primitive confessors of Scotland

19. Recent study posits a wider north Atlantic context for Scotland's cross-marked sites. Comparable examples have been identified along Iceland's southern coast, such as at the Seljaland site in Eyjafjallasveit: Ahronson 2002, 2003b and 2003c; Smith and Ahronson 2003. See also Holt and Guðmundsson 1980, 16–18, 23; Hjartarson and Gísladóttir 1983; Hjartarson *et al* 1991.

20. Manning 2005.

21. For example, Simpson 1865; Fisher 2001, 11–18.

22. Wassersleben 1885, 175, pl XLIV 3 and 5.

23. Davies 1996.

24. Edwards 2001.

25. Of course, there has been some awareness of cave use outside Scotland, one example being Doble's association of Southill (Cornwall) with St Samson, based in part on the presence of a cave: Jankulak 2009, 116; Doble 1935, 19.

26. In the first volume of *Caledonia* (Chalmers 1807, 97–9), Chalmers writes: 'In every part of North-Britain, there are natural caves, which have been improved into hiding places, by artificial means ... Such, then, were the sad expedients, to which a rude people were obliged to recur, for safety, before society had collected men into regular tribes; and it had become the duty of government to protect the few, by the efforts of the many'. Similarly, when describing his survey and excavation work at the caves of Caiplie in 1831 (or 1839) and in 1841, John Mackinlay appears to omit potential early Christian use of those Fife caves, though this is difficult to assess from the apparently unique survival of Mackinlay's report(s) within Stuart's *Sculptured Stones of Scotland*: Stuart 1856–67, II, lxxxviii–xc; Le Bon and Darrington 1998, 10.

excavated or enlarged for their oratories or cells'.²⁷ Wilson then continued to suggest specific early Christian associations for a number of sites:

Of the latter class are the caves of St Molio, on the little island of Lamlash, or the Holy Isle, on the east coast of Arran; of St Columba and St Cormac, on the Argyleshire coast; of St Ninian, in Wigtownshire; of St Serf, at Dysart, on the Fifeshire coast ... Others of the Scottish caves and oratories are less artificial in their character. They are especially abundant in the Western Isles, and on the neighbouring coast, where the waves of the Atlantic have wrought out caverns far surpassing in extent and magnificence the largest in the interior of the country. Few of these, however, possess such marked features as to distinguish them from similar relics pertaining to no definite period, which are to be met with on every rocky coast exposed to the rude buffets of the ocean waves.²⁸

With this passage, Wilson sparked research into early Christian cave use. Furthermore, both he and Simpson, as Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland,²⁹ went on to establish this topic within that society's canon by building upon existing interest in early Christian Scotland – interest evidenced, for instance, by one of that society's earliest excursions: in 1848 to the island of Inchcolm near Edinburgh, a site associated with St Columba.³⁰ Thus, the *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* were soon established as the leading forum for Scotland's cave-use research, with Simpson turning his pen to the topic in the second volume.³¹ The two scholars were friends and, bearing in mind that Wilson's second edition of his *Prehistoric Annals* was dedicated to Simpson,³² we may presume that this aspect of their printed output captures stages of an evolving discussion. In this way, Wilson developed Simpson's 1857 discussion and Simpson, in his 1865 study, in turn developed Wilson's ideas.

At the same time, however, Wilson and Simpson also gained impetus from high-profile contemporary scholarship in England, which brought attention to the prehistoric human use of cave sites. For instance, Wilson referred to such leading figures as Buckland, Owen, Prestwich, Falconer and MacEnery – and he himself contributed to meetings

27. Wilson 1851b, 89. Along these lines, we can also think of Saints Cuthbert and Guthlac, where the eremitical cell was partly made by digging, or using previous digging, and partly made by building above the excavated hole. From the anonymous *Life of St Cuthbert* (Colgrave 1940, 96–7), on his hermitage on the Farne Island: 'But he fearlessly put them [namely, the devils] to flight and, digging down almost a cubit of a man into the earth, through very hard and stony rock, he made a space to dwell in. He also built a marvellous wall another cubit above it, by placing together and compacting with earth stones of such great size as none would believe except those who knew that so much of the power of God was in him; therein he made some little dwelling-places from which he could see nothing except the heavens above.' From Felix's *Life of St Guthlac* (Colgrave 1956, 92–5): 'Now there was in the said island a mound built of clods of earth which greedy comers to the waste had dug open, in the hope of finding treasure there; in the side of this there seemed to be a sort of cistern, and in this Guthlac the man of blessed memory began to dwell, after building a hut over it.'

28. *Ibid.*, 89–90.

29. Wilson was first proposed for Society Fellowship alongside Simpson in 1846, and elected a Fellow of the Society in that year and Honorary Secretary the next, while Simpson was not elected until 1849: Ash 1981, 100; Stevenson 1981, 87; Graham 1970, 283.

30. Ash 1981, 106.

31. Simpson 1857, 522–6. As an instigator and co-editor, Wilson was a key figure in bringing *Proc Soc Antiq Scotl* into being in 1852: Stevenson 1981, 81–4; Ash 1981, 107; Clarke 1981, 121.

32. Wilson 1863.

of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, where many of these scholars were especially active and where key sites such as Brixham Cave and Kent's Hole held special prominence in the playing out of ideas challenging Biblical conceptions of the antiquity of man.³³ The extent to which Wilson engaged with geological and archaeological explorations of the antiquity of man is noteworthy, and suggests that Bruce Trigger's influential analysis of Wilson's thinking could be profitably revisited. For instance, Trigger perceived Wilson to have resisted arguments for the great antiquity of human origins until 1864.³⁴ Yet, as Wilson discussed 'the presence of the British Troglydite and the practice of his simple arts contemporaneously with some at least of the long-extinct fossil mammals' *before* 1864,³⁵ we may instead identify an earlier date and geological focus (rather than Darwinian) for his challenges to Biblical chronologies.³⁶ Wilson and Simpson engaged with these important ideas,³⁷ and we may suggest that English research into prehistoric cave use focused Wilson's attention upon the site type, and consequently helped to spur study of Scotland's caves. In particular, the idea of cave art resonated with Simpson: he felt that 'in his earliest and rudest times, man has been a sculpturing and painting animal; and his old attempts in this way may yet possibly be found upon the walls of those ossiferous English caves'.³⁸ Summing up then, by broaching the question of cave use in his *Prehistoric Annals*, Wilson sought to establish the merits of that topic for archaeological research and, in particular, to understand early Christian Scotland.

More generally, Wilson argued that the materials of archaeological research allow us to learn somewhat of the habits, thoughts and even faith of Scotland's prehistoric peoples.³⁹ Furthermore, by charting how Christianity travelled from there to many Scandinavian places, such as Iceland, Wilson also sought to demonstrate the international relevance of early medieval Scotland – and he was reacting to contemporary beliefs that the country's native material must either be of foreign origin (by which was usually meant 'Viking' or 'Danish' origin) or else be inherently unremarkable.⁴⁰ Indeed, James Graham-Campbell underscores the significance of Wilson's objection to the way in which the vast majority of Scotland's 'native relics' had been assigned a Scandinavian origin and how 'this theory of a Danish origin for nearly all native arts, though adopted without investigation, and fostered in defiance of evidence, has long ceased to be mere popular error'.⁴¹ In this way, Graham-Campbell credits Wilson with reclaiming Scotland's past. He writes that: 'It was Wilson who threw out the Danes (even if on Norwegian advice), and Wilson who dismissed the numerous antiquarian fantasies concerning the supposed Scandinavian origins of much that has, ever since, been rightly accepted as of native construction or manufacture'.⁴² In contextualizing archaeological work, we should also remember the allure that Celtic languages, literatures and histories held in the later nineteenth century – exciting a range of

33. Wilson 1841; 1851a.

34. Trigger 1999, 93.

35. Wilson 1863, 122.

36. Alice Beck Kehoe discusses the influence of geology on the development of Wilson's archaeology in Kehoe 1998, 18–20, 33–4.

37. For example, Wilson 1863, 122–5; Simpson 1865, 140.

38. Simpson 1865, 140.

39. Wilson 1863, 486; Trigger 1989, 396.

40. Wilson 1851b, 483–6; Ash 1981, 108–9.

41. Wilson 1851b, xiv–xv (cited in Graham-Campbell 2004, 221).

42. Graham-Campbell 2004, 221.

scholars, such as the philologist Johann Caspar Zeuss, and even Karl Marx – as a forum for exploring critical and widely applicable ideas.⁴³ It may be that cave-use studies focusing upon the early medieval Celtic past resonated with this impulse.

In 1853, Wilson took up the Chair of History and English Literature at University College, Toronto, and later came to preside over that college and, eventually, over the newly federated University of Toronto.⁴⁴ Correspondingly, though Wilson did remain an important figure for Scottish archaeology, Simpson's continued presence in Edinburgh (where he held the Chair of Medicine and Midwifery) proved critical in bringing about and shaping sustained archaeological work on early Christian cave use, with F R Coles in 1911 clearly regarding Simpson's discussion of the topic as seminal.⁴⁵ In this way, soon after Simpson's death in 1870, John Stuart was able to reflect on his leadership of Scotland's archaeological community:

For many years the house of Sir James Simpson was the rendezvous of archaeological students; and it was one of his great pleasures to bring together at his table men from different districts and countries, but united by the brotherhood of a common pursuit, for the discussion of facts and the exchange of thought. The friends who were accustomed to these easy reunions will not soon forget the radiant geniality of the host, and his success in stimulating the discussions most likely to draw out the special stores of his guests. Others also, who were associated with Sir James in the visits to historical sites which he frequently planned, in the retrospect of the pleasant hours thus spent will feel how vain it is to hope for another leader with the attractions which were combined in him.⁴⁶

Simpson's influence was remarkably long-lasting. In particular, Joseph Anderson claimed not only the theoretical and methodological importance – fifty years on – of his inaugural address to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland,⁴⁷ but also his more informal significance. Simpson's inaugural address was

so notable, not only for its masterly grasp and clear statement of the true aims and objects of the science, and the means and methods by which alone they can be attained, that after the lapse of half a century it may be read with interest and profit as practically applicable to the study of Scottish archaeology to-day ... apart from his writings, however, the influence of his magnetic personality and contagious enthusiasm was perhaps more effective in diffusing a spirit of inquiry among his friends, his students, and even his patients.⁴⁸

The nineteenth century witnessed great changes in archaeological research and Simpson engaged with these transformations, perceiving how 'Archaeology, as tempered and directed by the philosophical spirit, and quickened with the life and energy of the nineteenth century, is a very different pursuit from the Archaeology of our forefathers'.⁴⁹ For instance, as a leader of the Scottish scene, he (and later Anderson) came to shape the

43. Charles-Edwards 2007, 17–20.

44. Averill and Keith 1999, 141, 159, 175–6.

45. Coles 1911, 300; Simpson 1857, 522.

46. Stuart 1872, 1, xix.

47. Simpson 1861.

48. Anderson 1911, 5–8.

49. Simpson 1861, 5–6.

form of archaeological research in Scotland, advocating the application of explicitly Baconian ideas of induction to archaeological problems.⁵⁰ Simpson elaborates:

answers, if ever obtained, will be obtained by no kind of magic except the magic of accumulated observations, and strict stern facts; by no necromancy except the necromancy of the cautious combination, comparison, and generalisation of these facts; by no enchantment, in short, except that special form of enchantment for the advancement of every science which the mighty and potent wizard – Francis Bacon – taught to his fellow-men, when he taught them the spell-like powers of the inductive philosophy.⁵¹

Only soundly refuted in the twentieth century,⁵² Bacon provided a well-established theoretical foundation for Simpson's influential methodology, which may in turn be responsible for the observation-led approach in Scottish archaeological studies.⁵³

Furthermore, both John Stuart and Joseph Anderson played key roles in recognizing and seeking to understand this site type. For instance, as Secretary of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland from 1855 to 1877,⁵⁴ Stuart worked from Wilson and Simpson's ideas in making his own contribution to the growing body of cave-use scholarship. Thus, though the first volume of his *Sculptured Stones of Scotland* did not touch upon cross-marked cave sites, his second volume did – and included an inventory of sites in its treatment of the topic.⁵⁵ Similarly, Anderson engaged with this research and, in his 1880 Rhind Lectures on *Scotland in Early Christian Times*, he concentrated on the significance of the early medieval sculpture present in a number of cave sites.⁵⁶ In succession, Wilson, Simpson, Stuart and Anderson set an agenda for research on early Christian cave use. Furthermore, for Wilson and Simpson, at least, high-profile cave research in England could have triggered their work. At the same time, however, a focus upon the early Christian, rather than the early prehistoric, may demonstrate a desire to distinguish Scottish from English research – and may also have served to challenge contemporary beliefs that Scotland's native (that is, non-'Danish') material must be inherently unremarkable.⁵⁷ Alternatively, Wilson and Simpson may have focused upon the early medieval use of caves because the presence of cross sculpture provided a chronological anchor, clearly identifying early Christian use of these sites. A further consideration concerns Wilson's religious beliefs,⁵⁸ which one might initially suppose may have directed his work away from the prehistoric and towards aspects of early Christianity; however, he also advocated a scientific research unshackled by creed.⁵⁹

At the outset, this article set out to assess the merits of characterizing early Christian cave use as having a predominantly 'northern' distribution. We targeted two interconnected

50. Simpson 1861; Anderson 1881; Clarke 2002, 7–8; Graham-Campbell 2004, 222. Here Simpson was preceded to a limited degree by W Lindsay Alexander and Neaves: Alexander 1857, 303–4; Neaves 1860, 329–30.

51. Simpson 1861, 27.

52. For example, Popper 1994, 86, 104–5, 195–201.

53. Anderson followed Simpson: he both advocated and put these Baconian ideas into practice. Correspondingly, in his discussion of Anderson's archaeological and historical work, Angus Graham perceived that Anderson's approach was 'to record facts and then to advance to the drawing of some wider conclusions': Graham 1976, 281.

54. Stevenson 1981, 84.

55. Stuart 1856–67, I and II, 41–4, 47, lxxxvii–xciv.

56. Anderson 1881, 183–7.

57. Wilson 1851b, 483–6; Ash 1981, 108–9.

58. On this topic, see Lubbock 1863; Ash 1999, 74.

59. Ash 1999, 74.

topics: namely, the extent of cave use by early Christian communities beyond northern Britain and a history of scholarship. As Fisher's work illustrates, cave use is currently understood to have been an aspect of early Christianity in Scotland. Given that this idea is not widespread elsewhere in Britain and Ireland, the evidence of medieval literature is significant, as it indicates a more extensive distribution. Yet, at a number of cave sites in northern Britain, early medieval use is distinctively marked by early Christian sculptural motifs. However, we may also be concerned about using the presence of these motifs as an accurate measure of early Christian activity – this practice may instead be related to impulses specific to northern Britain. Additionally, the relevance for Scotland of contemporary high-profile studies of cave use in England is a new discovery: this work challenged Biblical conceptions of the antiquity of man and may have spurred study of Scotland's caves. In short, then, there has been an unequal distribution of scholarship, with highly influential figures in the history of archaeology setting an agenda in Scotland, for research on the early Christian use of cave sites. This last point is important because, if unaware of the origins of our ideas, previous trajectories of scholarship risk entrenching potentially false ideas, such as the characterization of cave use as predominantly an aspect of 'northern' Christianity.

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RÉSUMÉ

Dans le but de mieux comprendre nos pensées à propos de l'exil au début du moyen-âge, cette étude caractérise des méthodes employées par les érudits pour étudier l'occupation des grottes en Grande-Bretagne et en Irlande. Etant donné qu'ils étaient des personnages clés de l'histoire de l'archéologie, le rôle de Sir Daniel Wilson et de Sir James Young Simpson fut d'une importance cruciale pour l'établissement des grottes en Écosse comme sujets d'étude. Lancées par ces deux hommes, des recherches d'un siècle et demi ont associé ces sites à l'épanouissement du monachisme gaélique. Néanmoins, les similarités fondamentales entre les premières communautés chrétiennes dans la Grande-Bretagne et l'Irlande ne concordent pas avec cette attribution septentrionale et nous amènent à nous concentrer sur la question de l'occupation des grottes au-delà de l'Écosse. Par conséquent, notre communication cible deux questions : 1) à quel point ces grottes avaient-elles été occupées par les premières communautés chrétiennes dans d'autres parties du monde insulaire; et 2) notre perception de l'occupation des grottes en termes de phénomène particulier au Nord de la Grande-Bretagne a-t-elle été déformée par le fait que ce sujet intéresse les Écossais depuis longtemps?

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In dieser Studie werden die Methoden von Wissenschaftlern unter die Lupe genommen, die die Siedlung von Höhlen im Großbritannien und Irland untersucht haben, um unser Verständnis vom frühmittelalterlichen Exil zu erweitern. Die wichtigsten Schlüsselfiguren in der Geschichte der Archäologie waren Sir Daniel Wilson und Sir James Young Simpson, beide Forscher waren ausschlaggebend bei der Erkenntnis von schottischen Höhlen als Forschungsobjekte. Diese beiden haben den Anstoß gegeben, daß nach über anderthalb Jahrhundert langen Forschungsarbeiten erkannt wurde, daß diese Plätze dem gälischen Mönchswesen zugehörig sind. Trotzdem stehen die fundamentalen Gemeinsamkeiten der frühchristlichen Gemeinschaften aus dem Großbritannien und Irland mit dieser für den Norden typischen Siedlungsverteilung im Konflikt, und stellen deshalb die Nutzung von Höhlen außerhalb Schottlands in den Brennpunkt. Diese Abhandlung hat deshalb zwei Ziele: (1) Inwieweit wurden Höhlen von frühchristlichen Gemeinschaften im übrigen Inselreich benutzt; und (2) ist unsere Vorstellung von der Siedlung von Höhlen als ein typisches nördliches Phänomen durch die lange schottische Forschungsgeschichte geprägt?