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## The Tribes of Ancient Scotland

### Authors note:

*Before we proceed, we would like to offer a quick explanation of the title of this article and the thoughts driving the articles production. Scotland is an ancient country, older than most other modern European countries -including England- but as an understood named identity early Scotland (Alba-pronounced Alpa) did not exist till King Constantine IIs reign sometime around 920 AD, some 840 years after 79 AD when Agricola and his legions marched over the line of the modern border between England and Scotland intent on conquest, glory and assimilation. The term Scotland, like England is used in this work as a convenience to enable the reader to readily locate the places being described within the text.*

*Roman Scotland as a web based resource is primarily focussed on the Roman impact on and in their infrastructure within Scotland. However for balance we must address the reason Roman Scotland persisted and why the diverse peoples here did not culturally crumble as cultures did elsewhere under the imperial heel and continued to prove a trial and often a thorn in the Empires side for over three hundred years. Anglo-centric histories continue to be perversely dismissive of these peoples, a visitors notice for instance at Vindolanda on the Stanegate still persists in arrogantly describing them with a faux pas deserving of televisions comedy character Blackadder as "revolting barbarians".*

*This article takes a brief look therefore at the ancient peoples who lived, toiled, loved and fought in the area now geographically and politically known as Scotland and it is to the shades of these worthy souls that this article is respectfully dedicated.*

That history is "written by the victor" is a well understood modern maxim. In respect of the inhabitants of ancient Scotland we are forced to rely on the accounts of others to understand these people and who they were. This does not necessarily imply the ancient tribes of Scotland were defeated, far from it. On the contrary, their survival highlights the tenacity and staying power in these people that would consistently manifest itself, the tangible results of which would be the undoing of other would-be conquerors in later ages.

In the later post Roman so called "Dark Ages" we commonly learn about the inhabitants of early Scotland from surviving Irish and Saxon sources. Of the earlier Roman period however we are entirely reliant on what the Romans themselves wrote on the subject - predictably this is rarely an impartial record - and with the meagre and scanty findings archaeology provides us with.

### Who were these people?

The ancients in Scotland around this time were modelled in what is recognisable as a "Celtic" tribal society. However recent DNA testing proves the ethnic stock of the inhabitants of Scotland then was the same as that of the original hunter gatherers who inhabited Scotland after the retreat of the glaciers and ice caps at the end of the last ice age.



Interestingly this same DNA is still prevalent in the indigenous population proving the incoming named elites who settled over the eras - Irish Scots, Angles, Danes and Normans for instance were a hierarchical imposition over a pre existing population base that survives in many ways little altered to the present day. When picturing in your minds eye the peoples of ancient Scotland therefore we do not have to imagine a "different" people, but those intrinsically the same as now only living in a different period, under different conditions and in the Roman period under a Celtic style of society imposed no doubt by an incoming or conquering elite in the first millennium BC.

These people are in one authors excellent expression "removed from ourselves only in time".

Celtic society did not in general record their history in writing, the recollection of events and deeds was the preserve of the bard. As such the bard would recount- or more accurately recall- history and tales of great deeds, all interwoven and embroidered together as one. This was verbally delivered and passed from one generation down to the next by word of mouth. This cultural practice survived to relatively modern times in the Highlands and Islands.

It is however probable that some written records may have been made at the time of late Roman interaction with the peoples of ancient Scotland, particularly the fledgling kingdoms of southern Scotland. This was a time when Roman military prowess no longer reigned supreme and the greater influencing power was now that of Christianity. All such records were lost, alongside later documents during the spiteful pillaging undertaken by Edward 1st of England at the end of the 13th C AD.

This period saw Scotland's historical repositories infamously plundered and their records deliberately destroyed. This was done with the coldly premeditated aim of eradicating a sense of Scottish national identity - which historical records would only bolster - during a determined attempt of national take-over by a larger and well organised predatory southern neighbour that would probably have been instantly recognisable to the tribes of Scotland in the late 1st C AD Scotland.

Notwithstanding record that the British isles were known by its inhabitants as Albion, before the conquest period the Romans knew of the British isles as "Pretani" and the inhabitants as "Pretannikai". By the time of Julius Caesar's forays in Britain the "P" had been replaced with a "B" to give the more familiar sounding "Britannia". It is recorded that Pretani means "people of the designs", and it will be a recurring theme for tattooing to be a notable influence on the Romans when naming later peoples.

The language spoken by these tribes was old British, correctly known as "Brythonic" or commonly now as "Old Welsh". It is of note that for long the inhabitants of Wales and southern Scotland refused to recognise the name "Wales", it being the name given to the remaining free indigenous population in Britain in the post Roman period by the

Germanic (ultimately English) invaders and means "Land of Romanised foreigners". On the contrary they knew themselves as the "Brythonaid" - the "British". Modern era English pretensions therefore to be the quintessential "British" could not be fabricated on shakier foundations!

In post Roman Scotland the Brythonic language was to be submerged as the language of the common people under the languages of the conquering elites: Gaelic speaking Scots from Ulster in the north west, old English by Anglian invaders in the south east though Brythonic survived well into the 11th C AD in the militarily powerhouse that was the British Kingdom of Strathclyde.

Even within this Brythonic language however, there seems to have been variations and the tribes in northern Scotland appear to have been culturally distinct from those of southern Scotland, speaking a different dialect. Gaelic shared some core similarities with Brythonic, the main difference being in the use of P in Brythonic being replaced with Q in the Irish Gaelic. While the later Gaelic speaking monks of Iona had no difficulty communicating with the Britons of Strathclyde, Gaelic speaking Saint Columbus on the other hand we are told required a translator when visiting the Pictish King Bridei at Urquhart near Inverness around 560 AD.

Echoes of the old Brythonic language however can still be gleaned in the landscape with some old Brythonic place-names still existing in the lowlands or in those "adapted" in some instances by later Gaelic.

The old English of the acquisitive invading Saxon and Anglian elite however was less culturally sympathetic and locations were usually simply renamed to identify the new German overlord/owner. The original names and meanings of such places are now sadly forever lost to us.

The religious practices of the tribes, and the Druids are known by reference to other Celtic cultures. Of Druidism in Scotland little can be said with real authority. Ruthlessly stamped out in conquered areas it has been claimed that ancient Scotland could have become a natural retreat and haven for Druids, and by default a centre of Druidic opposition to the Romans though there is little of record to this effect. Celtic headhunting cults, common on the continent appear nowhere with certainty in Scotland.

The great religious festivals of the tribes were of ancient origin, and while the four great festivals are commonly supposed to be based on equinoxes, the timing of these celebrations in fact was linked more prosaically to the peoples more practical agricultural connection with farming and animal stock husbandry: the means of growing and rearing foodstuffs, the core employment and the staff of life.

The new year for the tribes began with the festival of "Samhuinn", meaning originally "end of summer" and a date now known as Hallowe`en. Unsurprisingly this was a fire festival long before Guy Fawkes and after which the tribes would in one authors words "hunker down to wait out the winter".

Next in early February came "Imbolc" and this coincided with Ewes lactating in anticipation of lambing and their milk provided welcome nourishment after the long fast of winter. This festival later became Christianised as the Feast of Saint Bride then Candlemass Eve.

Following this came Beltane, now May day. This marked the time of transhumance, the annual passage of flocks and herds to upland pasture, with young lads setting off to look after them. This feast carried on to modern times, was a fire festival and an act of propitiation for Gods, spirits, nature and all creatures.

Lastly, at the start of August came "Lughnasa", which in later Scotland carried on as the "Lammas". This is the traditional time for cattle and sheep fairs with grass fattened beasts sold for breeding or slaughter. It has been rightly speculated that these cattle gatherings will have taken place in the immediate environs of the large mighty

oppidium size hill forts of ancient kings such as Eildon Hill north in the borders, Traprain Law in the Lothians and the Brown Caterthun in Angus.

These large hillforts are the minority, the great majority being smaller and most were originally built in the first millennium BC in the "Celtic takeover" noted above, an indication of warlike and troubled times.

Hillforts occur across Scotland but the majority are in southern Scotland, the traditional location for most warfare and invasion throughout the eras. All will have been places of refuge in times of trouble. Vitrification, or at least signs of conflagration occur at many suggesting long and violent histories.

Logic suggests that the tribes will have prudently melted away and vanished into the mist in the face of an invading well organised Roman army and it seems likely that this indeed did happen and prevented easy and rapid ironfast conquest by the legions. Clearly not always, notable hills -often crowned by forts- appear to have been focal mustering points for the tribes in Scotland and many of the known Roman marching camps record that Roman armies on campaign in Scotland frequently and ominously head to and pitch up aggressively at the base of such hills. This confirms that historical confrontations or negotiations did indeed take place in front of both sides marshalled manpower as clearly happened between the Emperor Septimus Severus and the Caledonians at Mither Tap - Bennachie in 209 AD (link to the [Timeline 208-210AD](#)) or led to bloodshed as at [Mons Graupius in 83 AD](#).

That hillforts could and would be defended however is recorded at Burnswark near Ecclefechan in the Scottish borders and possibly also elsewhere. Here the large oppidium hillfort is invested by two Roman siege camps, one bristling with artillery platforms in advance of the ramparts from which the hillfort was bombarded. The small fortlet here suggests a continuing Roman caretaker presence, clearly this is an ancient training camp like its modern equivalent at Warcop firing ranges in Stainmore. The chilling probability however is that at Burnswark the Romans simply continued to re-use the remains of the camps from an original earlier action, proving the tribes could put seemingly outdated old forts to good use and that the Romans in Scotland did - and subsequently kept their skills up to scratch- in the methodical process necessary of leaguering, bombarding and assaulting native forces ensconced within such potentially problematic nuts to crack.

Most of the tribes however lived in small scattered communities. Roundhouses were the habitation of choice generally and these often cluster in small, probably family groupings. These often have a slight ditch and rampart around them but these are domestic in function and scale, being designed to deter predators, they were not designed nor used to primarily stall Roman invaders who would have overcome them without major difficulty.



In the Roman period souterrians or weems associated with roundhouses are known. These are underground stone lined passages, generally curved to assist structural stability which were used to store foodstuffs in a cool dry environment. As such they probably belong to tribal chiefs, whose tenants would pay rents and dues in kind and who required suitable storage for these goods.

Another notable construction was the broch, a large tower structure usually - but not exclusively- found in the far



north. Shaped like an upturned plant pot these impressive drystone structures again probably acted as positions of refuge in times of trouble and their great height would allow lookouts good views allowing plenty of warning when coastal raiders and Roman slavers approached. This is confirmed by their often prominent coastal locations and the clusters of habitations around their base.



In war the tribes of ancient Scotland fought much like Celts had elsewhere and before. Tribal warfare was an endemic but accepted natural part of Celtic life. For the majority who worked the land war had little direct impact on them aside from the depredations of predatory raids from neighbours. Fighting off such enemies was the task of the tribal chief and his immediate family elite and their personal retinues of henchmen. Young males, if contemporary Irish practice was followed were either fostered out or roamed in predatory bands until old enough to take their proper place in society.

The scale of the Roman invasion was hitherto unparalleled and to face such numbers the usual tribal chiefs individual warbands numbering dozens would be swelled by a general mass call out to hundreds. All able bodied males between sixteen and sixty were liable for service in medieval Scotland in similar circumstances, similar if not more extreme age limits may have been applied in-extremis in the face of approaching overwhelming Roman forces in urgent defence of kith and kin, hearth and home and the tribal homeland.



The well armed would be equipped with spear and shield, the exceptionally fortunate would have a sword. Axes, primarily functional would be pressed into effective service. Ancient sources tell us that the tribes allegedly valued iron above gold or silver as iron was the metal with which weapons were made (link to [Inchtuthil nail hoard article](#)).

The foundry at Culduthel near Inverness shows that weapons smithing took place in some volume (link to [Newsbite: Iron masters of the Caledonians](#)).

More simple weapons, probably large fire hardened timber staves may have equipped mass call outs and may explain Tacitus comment on the "unweildy weapons" carried by the tribesmen.

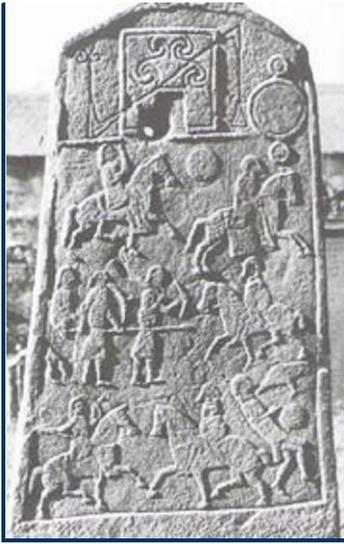
At Mons Graupius Tacitus reveals in good detail the fighting techniques of the Caledonians and it can be readily assumed that in most respects this would be the same as those of the rest of Scotland (link to [The Agricola chapter 36](#))



Chariots, an archaic form of warfare were used by the Caledonians on the battlefield, at least as late as Mons Graupius. This was used to unsettle the opposition and from it a hail of missiles could be launched at the ranks of static opponents. Scythes attached to wheels is however a later literary invention.



Between the writings of Tacitus, and the carvings on the



later Pictish Aberlemno stone showing Picts defeating Northumbrian Angles at Linn Garan (Dunnichen) a tolerable picture of the tribes fighting arrangement can be gleaned.

At the front of the infantry formation - Cassius Dio tells us their strength was in infantry which was very solid-were the more experienced elite and their retainers and the Aberlemno battle scene show this rank wielding the rare and expensive swords and small shields with which the tribesmen were adept at parrying incoming missiles. These swords were long slashing weapons with hilts of anthropomorphic form though some later records relate the tribes use of small pony sized horses, probably for speed in a raid with the tribesman then dismounting to fight or pillage.

Behind them is a figure representing a body of troops with spears levelled and projecting beyond and protecting the first rank of swordsmen.

Behind is another figure again suggesting a body of men (or youths?) this time equipped with lighter spears, no doubt javelins and other missiles which could be thrown over the heads of and behind the protection of the front bodies of warriors. This is classically what Tacitus describes Agricola encountering at Mons Graupius.



## The Tribes

We do not know how much the Romans knew of the lands and inhabitants of Scotland when Claudius first ordered the invasion of Britannia in 43 AD. Pytheus had famously sailed Britain's waters in 325 BC (link to [Timeline 325 BC](#)) and Claudius would have been well aware of his findings.

The reliable Pliny the Elder suggests that historical mapping expeditions in the vicinity of the "Caledonian forest" took place near the time of Claudius invasion and that the Romans will indeed have undertaken such exploration from the sea is entirely plausible (link to [Timeline 77 AD](#)).

Records from antiquity note the King of the Orkneys was among the various magnates who travelled to Claudius's stage managed submission of the southern tribes of England at Colchester. This was claimed to be an error by southern academics for many years until archaeology unearthed Roman goods of the Claudian era on Orkney.

These academics had not embraced the historic fact that the English channel was not the main communication route between the Mediterranean basin and Britain and that "remote Orkney" was in fact directly on the ancient maritime trading route that led from the Mediterranean and Spain, a route long used by Phoenician traders. This well used route beat around the west coast of Ireland following the good sailing provided by the gulf stream, then passed up around the north west coast of Scotland before making its way across the north sea for the tribes of Scandinavia.

While not individually named, this Orcadian king is by reference the earliest recorded person from ancient Scotland. He will- as indeed will a great many others from tribes located in areas outwith the immediate path of the advancing Roman columns- have been fully and cogently aware of the Romans and of the need for political expediency in 43 AD.

Claudius however appears to have underestimated the extent of Britain and the gravity

of the task of conquest. After the tribes of Belgic cultural origin in lower England - who had trading links in Roman Gaul and were those most culturally susceptible to "Romanisation" (link to [The Agricola chapter 21](#)) - had fallen in less than a year, it seems that Claudius deceived himself into believing that the lions share of the work was done. The new governor Aulus Plautius was left with the order to "conquer the rest".

However it is noteworthy that this job however was never completed because of the tribes of ancient Scotland, though many Romans actively attempted it.

By Agricolas tenure in 77 AD only minor mopping up was required in Wales and in the north of England, both areas had been effectively brought to heel by previous governors. It was Agricola who set his sights on Scotland, though it should be noted that Bolanus and Cerealis may have made minor inroads within southern Scotland prior to this. One of the events that may have brought the tribes of the north to Romes attention could have been an alliance that tied them to the powerful Brigantian warlord Venutius. He was crushed finally by Cerealis, most probably at Stanwick around 71 AD and the Roman record tellingly refers to his allies -"new peoples", probably from southern Scotland.

Agricolas advance through the eastern lowlands of Scotland in 79 AD was according to Tacitus more notable for the difficulties caused by what appears to have been a particularly wet summer than by any hostile reaction to the Romans. Tacitus alludes to downcast tribes however this is a stock phrase to conceal the fact that the local tribe - the Votadini - are generally not considered at this time to have been hostile to the Romans. Clearly the tribal elders had concluded a form of treaty agreement with the Romans, a fact that Tacitus celebratory eulogy for his deceased father in laws "conquests" glossed over for better effect.

The Votadini, located on the coastal Lothians (link to [Ptolemy`s map](#) - Votadini) will have been already well aware of the Romans either directly or through contact in trade. It is also possible the Votadini were one of the tribes who aided Venutius eight years earlier and who had time to reconsider the stance they should take with Rome following its victory over the powerful Brigantian confederacy.

The Votadini lands extended to the Ochil hills north of the Forth and probably into parts of Fife and it is in Agricolas first season that he makes this huge leap forward making some limited contact Tacitus tells us with the tribes beyond (ie to the north). Without doubt this latter exercise will have been a smaller mobile column operating beyond "friendly" territory and this may have been a flying column consisting of cavalry only - a reconnaissance only though Tacitus alludes to "ravaging", classic cavalry tactics. How far they reached in the first year is open to speculation, the "Taus" river recorded by Tacitus is nowhere else recorded and it is more likely to have been the Teith at Doune where an early Agricolan bridgehead fort was built. The crossing point of the Teith should not be underestimated. It was a vital and key strategic location right in the middle of the difficult waist of Scotland and the junction between several tribal lands.

Tacitus tells us the majority of Agricolas troops spent their time in his first season building forts, not campaigning and the philo - Roman approach of the Votadini is borne out by the sparsity of fort building in its very heartlands. Agricola had overstretched his flank though. Suggestions that Agricola may have initially advanced in two prongs, one in the west, one in the east are not borne out by his later actions or the locations of forts dateable to his earliest years in Scotland. Doune as noted above, complimented by Camelon provided larger bases at the furthest extent of northward penetration. With his immediate north reconnoitred and fixed with forts, he spent the next years fixing his attention on the more troublesome tribes to the west of his gains in Votadini controlled south east Scotland.

The next year - 80 AD -sees Agricola encountering the Selgovae, a tribe who appear to have inhabited the hilly marches of central southern Scotland (link to [Ptolemy`s map](#) - Selgovae) . The fort at Oakwood near Selkirk, and a string of marching camps along the Tweed and Lyne valleys suggest Agricolas movements in this year as well as the likely

heartlands of this tribe.

To the north west of the Selgovae were the Dumnonii - the "diggers". Their lands spread from the Ayrshire coast to the foot of Loch Lomond (link to [Ptolemy's map - Dumnonii](#)). Seats of power in later years for this resilient tribe include Dumbarton Rock, Govan and latterly Glasgow.

It has been suggested that the Dumnonii may also have taken a philo- Roman approach though the matter is less than clear cut. At the end of Agricolas second season of campaigning he certainly had a series of forts built across the Forth - Clyde isthmus, many of these forts are within the northern reaches of Dumnonian territory.

Next year however -81 AD- sees further expansion into the southwest of Scotland, aimed ultimately to control the Novantae in mountainous Galloway - very difficult country (link to [Ptolemy's map - Novantae](#)). In so doing he appears to have campaigned in dual prongs along both the south coast of Galloway as well as campaigning west through Dumnonian territory from Castledykes towards the coast at Ayr. Marching camp(s) at Girvan point to where these separate battlegroups may perhaps have met.

This confirms that operations against the tribes in central and southern Scotland were more prolonged than many simplistic modern renderings of Tacitus account allow, these usually in error focus purely on Agricolas lightning advance through Votadini territory in 79 AD, a seemingly brilliant and rapid advance that Tacitus was clearly keen to make the most of.

The historical record does not recall any singular large battle between the Romans and the tribes of southern Scotland, however active campaigning clearly lasted three long years and saw a large expenditure of effort building both forts and roads to hold down the newly subjugated peoples.

Roman success at this early stage of contact with the tribes can be attributed to the tribes not yet having learnt the lesson of unifying and acting together against the common threat. Lingering fall-out from probable involvement in the Brigantian debacle of 71 AD probably undermined the confidence of certain tribes to take the field en-mass, probably in the event a wise decision by the tribal elders.

The tribes of southern Scotland therefore varied from hill folk like the Selgovae and Novantae to lowland coastal tribes like the Votadini and Dumnonii. The coastal tribes will have had greater contact with foreign traders and possibly Roman embassies prior to invasion. The hill tribes, possibly of a less centralised and more troublesome nature did not benefit from such prior contact and we can imagine that these tribes were by their very nature less easy for the Romans to assimilate into their culture. This process, well documented elsewhere in the Empire and successful south of the border relied on maintaining tribal magnates - obviously those willing to bend the knee to the conquering Romans- and use their current tax raising infrastructure to rule the population, all in return for protection by the army in the "Pax Romana".

It was however to be 82 AD before Agricola was in a position to undertake serious campaigning north of central Scotland, Camelon probably being his forward mustering point. Once his forces had advanced beyond the bridgehead fort at Doune his forces will have been in new - and fabled territory - the land of the Caledonians.

Who were the Caledonians?

To understand the Caledonians better we have to look more closely at [Ptolemy's map](#). Although published in 140 AD it is fairly certain that the evidence of the tribes shown in Scotland was based on information from before this time and probably relates to information brought together in the Flavian period.

While the over-run tribes of southern Scotland were well known to the Romans through long contact - not always cordial - the tribes above the Forth-Clyde line - what we shall term northern Scotland were not. The garrisons of outpost forts such as at Doune will

have come to know tribal groups nearby through contact. Ptolemy's map however in the north tellingly shows two things.

The first point is that the map of Scotland is generally reckoned to have been put together from information surveyed from the sea, an event used to explain the false right hand bend of Scotland when these coordinates were aligned with separate information from more southerly mapping done on land. The tribes noted in northern Scotland are clearly the names of those coastal peoples, not necessarily large tribal groupings who the Roman navy encountered during exploration. This was probably done in several stages, Agricola had ordered one such exploration of the western seaboard in 81 AD, and also seems to have looked to complete the exploration from the east after Mons Graupius in 83 AD. At this time the Romans inexplicably enough as yet do not seem to have been entirely certain that Britain was an island, or how far it extended, compelling proof indeed that Mons Graupius did not take place in the extreme far north - all but in sight of the waves.

Occupying Strathmore were the Venicones and to their immediate north but below the Mounth the Vacomagi (link to [Ptolemy's map](#)- Venicones & Vacomagi). These will have been settled lowland tribes farming the rich lands thereabouts. The Venicones, later the Verturiones of Fortrui are academically known as the southern Picts.

Beyond the Mounth the Taexali (link to [Ptolemy's map](#) - Taexeli) held sway over the wide rich farmlands of Buchan, Strathspey and the Garioch. Beyond their lands we know in detail only of the smaller coastal tribal groupings of the Decantae and Carnonacae in Ross, beyond them the Lugi, the Cornovii, Smertae and Caereni quartering Caithness while the Creones and Epidii of Kintyre faced the Atlantic (link to [Ptolemy's map](#) ). These peoples as a single entity are later academically known as the northern Picts.

The second point is where Ptolemy notes the highland massif as the Caledonius Saltus and the inhabitants thereof are generalised as Caledonii. The Celtic word caled can be rendered as hard or rocky and it is still aptly remembered in the place name Dunkeld, and in the mountains of Schiehallion and Rohallion. Clearly then the Celts themselves, from whom the Romans took their cue looked to the "rocky mountainous" place and named the many diverse scattered tribes and septs (later known as clans) who lived there after it. This is the same generalised linguistic treatment the area receives in modern times being referred to in both Scots and English as the "Highlands" with the inhabitants known as "Highlanders".

Similarly, in common current conception (if not strictly in geographical or topographical correctness) many think of the lands north of Stirling as the Highlands, with the land south of it as the Lowlands. This echoes exactly how the lands to the north were viewed in the Roman period. Notwithstanding the fact that the powerful (strictly speaking) lowland Venicones and Vacomagi probably bore the brunt of Agricola's devastating campaign of 82 AD and probably fielded their elite as the tribal front rank in the battle of Mons Graupius the following year, it is under the generalisation of Caledonian -in strictest terms the appellation for the scattered septs and clans of the Highland zone - that they are collectively grouped by Tacitus and commonly thereafter as such known.

At the end of the second century, following the governor Clodius Albinus death across on the continent trouble flared up with a new tribal confederacy, the Maetae (link to [Timeline 208 AD](#)).

The Maetae, who were apparently causing the garrison of Hadrian's wall all sorts of trouble are best thought of as a confederation of hill tribes in southern Scotland probably centred or focussed around the Selgovae. The Votadini are unlikely to have been part of this grouping, and perhaps insufficiently powerful to deal with this combined threat for the Romans. It is singular to note how large the confederation and the threat they posed may have been, marching camps attributable to the Emperor Septimus Severus Maetae campaigns in 209 in Lowland Scotland are the largest known anywhere in Britain.

By the end of the 3rd C AD another new name appears in the historical record- the "Picts."

Much unnecessary academic confusion surrounds the origin of the Picts, in the main due to fictional dark age Irish and medieval Scots foundation mythology. The word pict is a derivation of "picti" meaning "painted or figured" and was the expression Roman soldiers nick named those who tattooed themselves. Clearly then the traditional habit of body painting which gave Britain its original name had died out in much of Britain to the extent that its practice was noteworthy where it continued to flourish.

As noted above, modern historians focussing on later on dark age political structures refer to the tribes of the north east as the northern and southern Picts, but in Roman terms the name Pict was a generalised name for literally anyone north of Hadrians wall who tattooed themselves. More correctly then the original southern Picts will have been the old Maetae, the hill folk of southern Scotland as distinct from the fledgling military states of the Dumnonii (ultimately the Britons of Strat Clut - Strathclyde) and the Votadini (ultimately the Manau Goddodin) who would have been in either alliance or formal treaty of non aggression with Rome. The adoption and generalised use of the term Pict then explains the lack of any continued reference to the word Maetae at this time. To prove this point- as late as 1138 AD -medieval English chroniclers continued the names original generalisation when referring to the wild Gallovidian kerns (the old Novantae) as Picts.

Sometime around this time sea raiders from the west made sufficient impact on events to merit mention in the Roman sources. They were termed Scotti then Scots, the name possibly deriving from the word "sgod" meaning sail. They are traditionally thought to be Irish in origin - the later ruling elite under Fergus Mor Macerc's Dal Riata migration around 500 AD certainly were - principally as they later imposed "Q" Celtic Gaelic on the "P" Celtic Brythonaid.

However the Irish sea and the Isles have long been a two way street though and it is more than probable that flows and movements of peoples had been going in both directions for millennia, much as they would do in following eras. Early pan "Scottic" ethnicity and settlement in the west of Scotland is likely to have long preceded Fergus's famous settlement and this is recorded by the people the Romans knew as Attacotti, clearly a Scottic people who almost certainly inhabited the western seaboard of Scotland in the late Roman period.

## Epilogue

The Dalriadic Scots would, in a much later period achieve dynastic supremacy over the Picts following generations of conflicts and struggle and the pan northern power Alba was the child of this shotgun marriage. Pictishness, its language and culture were smothered under the Gaelic language, church and culture however the Scots in these areas were simply a dynastic elite. The Picts, Verturiones, Venicones or Caledonians - call them as you will- did not merely go away or vanish. Bump into someone in Brechin town centre today for instance and its a fairly good chance that you have just met a descendant of the Picts and the front ranks at Mons Graupius.

The British Kingdoms of southern Scotland were embryonically formed under the tutelage of the late Roman governor Magnus Maximus around 382 AD to act as a military bulwark to the Picts and Scots before he stripped the garrison of Britain bare to pursue his regal ambitions on the continent.

These kingdoms would long thrive. They had to be militarily successful to survive, not just to hold the warlike Scots and Picts in check but also to counter the growing and expansionist Germanic invaders who in the post Roman period had overrun the Britons of what is now England with what appears to have been consummate ease. It is to this period and these no nonsense British Kingdoms in Scotland that the Arthur figure of myth and the real recorded actions of the period belong.

The Manu Goddodin held sway over their ancient Votadini lands until eventually going down in red ruin at Catterick in around 600 AD while attempting to halt pernicious Anglian expansionism. The Northumbrian Angles would subsequently move into the dynastic void left by the Goddodins defeat and would give south east Scotland a Germanic ruling elite until the Northumbrian Angles in turn were bloodily eradicated by the Scots and Strathclyde Britons at Carham in 1018 AD.

With the return of Lothians to northern control after Carham, Alba's peaceful dynastic takeover of regal ancient Strathclyde and with the eventual expunging of Norse influence in the Western Isles and Argyll -ironically the original home of the Scots- Scotland took the political form now readily recognisable on the map today.

However, political boundaries on maps, the culture, changing religious practices and even the varying languages of the various elites through the intervening years serves only to mask -but not remove- the fact that the inhabitants of modern Scotland are in great part simply the same folk as those resilient Empire defying peoples that were the tribes of ancient Scotland.

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