

Birnie Symbol Stone Translation

Stuart Harris, Mallaig, Scotland, July 2014

Birnie Symbol Stone: 'Tuori, Hand of the Realm'

The Birnie Symbol Stone is the first Pictish writing ever translated.

Found in the churchyard wall of Birnie Kirkyard near Elgin was a Pictish class-I symbol stone with three pecked images that covered an entire face down to the ground. The shape of the stone resembles a torso when seen three-quarter view. It is the memorial stone of Tuori, Hand of the Realm.



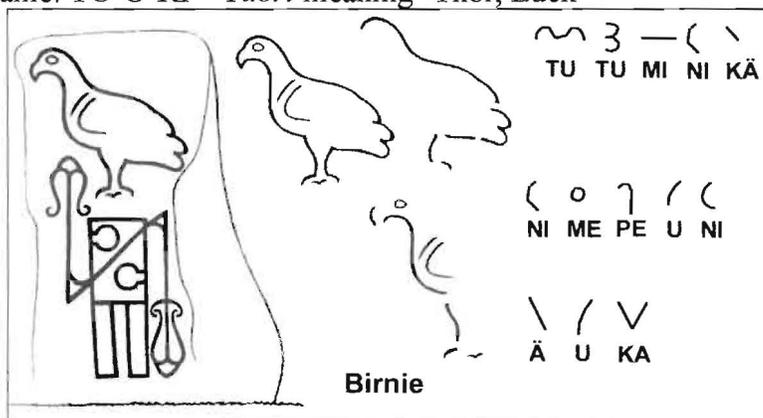
The topmost image is an *eagle* in profile. It surmounts a headless body with arms folded across the chest in death, called a *divided rectangle*. Lying across the body is a broken spear called a *Z-rod*. Each image is a rebus, comprised of many syllables that form two or three phrases.

The reason for twin images of *divided rectangle* and *Z-rod* is that the first was sung by the deceased, while the second was the response from onlookers. At the funeral ceremony, an appropriate person might sing the part of Tuori.

The syllabary and imagery originated in Val Camonica, an alpine valley north of Bergamo, Italy, where Finnish-speaking people pecked hundreds of thousands of pictographs into smooth, black sandstone high above the valley floor. About a third of these pictographs are rebuses, made from letters arranged to look like an everyday object like a house or deer. This technique was transported to Scotland by Roman cohorts from Val Camonica, some of whose members must have been captured or otherwise joined the Picts, who spoke the same language. The people of Val Camonica cremated their dead, not buried, so similar memorial stones are absent.

Eagle symbol: 'Tuori - Provider of thousands of men as Hand'

The *Eagle* symbol describes the prowess of Tuori, Hand of the Realm, who provided thousands of men as Hand, then became clan champion, the greatest of men. Initial letters of all three images spell his name: TU-O-RI = *Tuori* meaning 'Thor, Luck'



Pictish

TU-O-RI
 TU TU MI NI KÄ,
 NI ME PE U NI;
 Ä U KA.

Finnish translation of Pictish

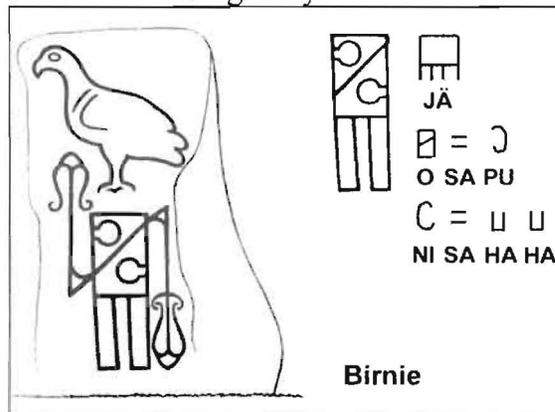
Tuori
 Tuoja tuhan'en miehien niin Käen,
 niin meiän pe'en urhon niin;
 äjän uron kai'en.

English translation of Pictish

Tuori
 Provider of thousands of men as Hand,
 then our family champion as well;
 the greatest man of all.

Divided Rectangle symbol: 'Farewell! I am to walk naked'

The *divided rectangle* inscription is drawn like a body lying on its back with both arms folded across the chest. In place of a head is an eagle. It is a farewell song from Tuori, who jokes that by lying here naked he must indeed be fading away.



Pictish

JÄ!

O SA PU.

NI SA HA HA.

Finnish translation of Pictish

Jää!

Oo saa'aa puhas.

Niin saa'a haihu han.

English translation of Pictish

Farewell!

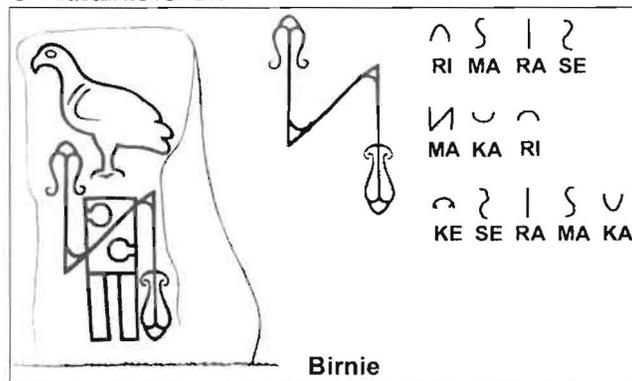
I am to walk naked.

Then I will begin to fade away indeed.

Z-rod symbol: 'You court a land of treasure'

The *Z-rod* inscription, a broken spear placed on the body of Tuori, is a response to Tuori's song, a eulogy sung by onlookers. It calls Scotland 'a land of treasure, a land of rainbows'.

'You court a land of treasure, a land of rainbows, summers of peace on earth forever.'



Pictish

RI-MA RA-SE,
MA KA RI,
KE-SE RA MA KA.

Finnish translation of Pictish

Riiaat maan rahaisen,
maan kaarien,
keseä rauhan maahan kai'en.

English translation of Pictish

You court a land of treasure,
a land of rainbows,
summers of peace on earth forever.

Correspondence address:

stuhar@onlymyemail.com