PART ONE

NAMES AND TEXTS
Who were the Picts? And where did they come from? These questions lie at the heart of the Pictish problem, and we have not set ourselves to answer them. We have not shied away from them when they impinge upon our theme, as they do, but as a general rule we have kept our eyes on the historical Picts, and we have tried to isolate the various features characteristic of them and of the area occupied by them...That has been our aim—not to write a volume which might be entitled *The Origins of the Picts*, though we hope we have brought a little nearer the day when such a volume can be written. (Wainwright 1955a, v)

With these words, F. T. Wainwright laid down his mission statement for *The Problem of the Picts*, the proceedings of a Summer School hosted by him in Dundee in 1952. The School’s objective had been “to isolate the various features characteristic of [the Picts] and of the area occupied by them” during the period in which the ethnonym *Picti* was certainly applied to them. Here in the preface to this landmark volume of essays, Wainwright established a framework for thinking about Pictish origins which has remained with us ever since. He and his colleagues took “the historical Picts” as a single identifiable group, with “characteristic features” which could be “isolated”. To that end, Stuart Piggott examined the prehistoric archaeology of north-east Scotland, Dick Feachem examined its Early Historic hillforts, Wainwright himself examined settlement and burial archaeology, Robert Stevenson examined “Pictish art”, and Kenneth Jackson examined language.

This cadre of impressive scholars took it for granted that the discrete “historical” period from 300 to 850 had intrinsic research validity, though they anticipated potential significant links with prehistory, terming the antecedents of the “historical Picts” the “proto-Picts” (Wainwright 1955b: 14–5, 48–53). Wainwright and his colleagues were, after all, chiefly concerned with origins. Indeed, they regarded the subject as central to Pictish studies, seeing movement towards a volume addressing it as the field’s most desperate requirement. Social, institutional and political developments, including ecclesiastical ones, Wainwright regarded as secondary and (comparatively) minor