pictish arts society

journal 17

Apologia

At long last we are able to deliver *Pictish Arts Society Journal*, 17.

PAS is a fairly small organisation which relies heavily on an even smaller number of people to voluntarily carry out the work of the society. We have never lacked ambition, and have often bitten off more than we could chew with a sometimes over-optimistic programme.

Our main events – lecture series, conferences and field-trips – continue to be successful and well supported, however, our timetable for the Journal, and indeed the regularity with which we anticipated its production, did not match what we could in fact deliver.

That and a series of unfortunate mishaps (both technological and human), including the loss of illustrations, resulted in a longer than acceptable delay in the delivery of this issue. Your committee decided that in order to progress matters an editorial rescue team was required, and to that end John Borland and David Henry joined Niall Robertson to salvage what they could of the contents. We are all extremely in their debt for what they have achieved – more than I can say in print!

Unfortunately, several authors withdrew articles, principally due to the long wait, and I cannot fault them, but I would like to pay tribute to those authors who stayed with us, and I do hope that all readers appreciate the articles which have finally been published.

PAS has learned a very valuable lesson in all this, and we took the decision to cease production of the Journal after this one. Instead, we have increased the scope of the quarterly Newsletter and improved its content, thanks to the efforts of its editor David Henry.

While we cannot commit to producing a Journal in the foreseeable future, we may, from time to time, publish occasional papers, conference proceedings, field guides and the like.

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Norman Atkinson
President, Pictish Arts Society
December 2007

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The Political Range of Áedán mac Gabráin, King of Dál Riata

Jonathan Jarret

INTRODUCTION

The Method of Enquiry

This essay has less defence than some against charges of over-reliance on uncertain sources. There is little enough we can know about 6th and 7th century Scotland: it is uncertain whether the *Irish Annals'* Iona source was being written as early as the reign of Áedán, 574–608 (Bannerman 1974, 9–26), and all our other records are certainly much posterior to it. Since, in what follows, I make use of a great deal of later evidence, and place heavy reliance on the testimony of the *Annals*, I must freely own that the conclusions can only be tentative, and that alternative ones may be as valid.

My justification for the free use of suggestion and hypothesis is that, in this state, there is no other way to advance our awareness. As Sherlock Holmes might have said, when you have exhausted the possible, all that remains is the probable. Some might argue that the proper historian should stop with the possible; but an impoverished picture of early medieval Scotland (and not just Scotland) would result. With this paper I am assembling the first pieces of this structure. Some I have gathered from elsewhere and some are my own construction. But I hope, with this warning, to ensure that anyone placing weight on it does so at their own risk.

The Sources

Although the sources for Áedán's reign are few, he is the first king of Dál Riata to have much more than an obituary in any record. It may be as well to begin with a summary of the various sources (cf. Bannerman 1974, 80–90, Sharpe 1995, 270–1; with fuller reference to later material Macquarrie 1997, 103–9). Áedán is referred to in the sources of four different countries. In England in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (*ASC s.a.* 603) and the *Ecclesiastical History* of Bede (*HE* I 34). In two of the *Welsh Triads* (Bromwich 1978, 57, 147), the poem *Peiryan Vaban* (Jarman 1955), and the genealogical tracts *Bonedd Gwŷr y Gogledd* and *De Situ Brecheniawc* in Wales (Bromwich 1978, 238–9; Wade-Evans 1944, 315–7). In a number of tales from Ireland. Most are probably 13th-century, but the *Preface* to the poem *Amra Choluimb Chille* is 11th-century, and its core can be convincingly dated to soon after Columba's death (Herbert 1988, 10, 180). Ireland also provides the 10th-century or later *Life of St. Laisrén* (Heist 1965, 340–1). Most importantly of all, Áedán is mentioned in a number of the *Irish Annals*, most of whose Scottish entries for this period, as Bannerman has shown, originated from the monastery of Iona (1974, 9–26). Áedán is also the subject of several stories in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* (Sharpe 1995, 268–9), and is featured in the Scottish *Senchús fer nAlban*, a list of the genealogies of the families of the Scottish Dál Riata and their military strength. This dates in its present form from the 10th century, but is based on 7th- or 8th-century information (Bannerman 1974, 27–67). The notes in the *Annals* and Adomnán form the backbone of the record of Áedán's reign, and since they require to be discussed in some detail, I shall summarise the other sources first.

Genealogical Traditions

Many of the sources mentioning Áedán seek to make him part of one or other genealogical tradition. The Welsh tracts trace his descent from the Roman Emperor Maxen Wledic (Maximus), through Dyfnwal Hen, in *Bonedd Gwŷr y Gogledd*, or through a daughter of Brychan Brycheiniog, said to have married Gabrán (Áedán's father), in the case of *De Situ Brecheniawc*. The former source is both late and seemingly garbled, but although *Brecheniawc* conflicts with none of our Scottish information, Brychan's supposed nine daughters are made to originate almost every royal line of Britain. Since the other genealogy and the *Triads* show that Áedán had achieved renown in story in Wales possibly as early as the 9th century, that he should be included among Brychan's descendants need imply no more truth to the record than the claims for the others (Bromwich 1978, 288–9).

The *Life of St. Laisrén* makes only a passing mention of Áedán, who is said to be the father of the saint's mother by a British wife. This is a claim intended presumably to give a memorable pedigree to the saint, and though there is nothing impossible about the idea that Áedán should have had a British wife (Bromwich, 264–6, Ziegler 1999, n. 14), I shall suggest later that he had at least one wife of a different extraction. The *Senchús Fer nAlban* is more trustworthy, and many of its featured persons can be found in the *Irish Annals*, but it centres on the kindred descending from Áedán's father Gabrán, the Cenél nGabráin, and seems to descend all the Scottish houses from Fergus mac Eirc, supposed founder of the Scottish kingdom around 500 (*AU s.a.* 502). It has been suggested that the emnity between the Cenél nGabráin and another house, the Cenél Loairn, and the apparent occurrence of multiple kingships from the end of the 7th century to the mid-8th may show that this picture is over-simple, an origin myth akin to that in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Bannerman 1974, 108–32; Hudson 1994, 17–20). Though its motives are therefore possibly political and the *Senchús* has something of the pseudo-historical about it, its information is detailed. Since we are principally concerned with the Cenél nGabráin, its focus is not so serious an issue. On the other hand, such material can seek to portray a fictive unity under a settled kingship belonging to the interested kindred; the Irish lists of the Kings of Tara have such a function for the Uí Néill (O'Rahilly 1946, *passim*), and the testimony of the Scottish regnal lists to a steady descent of the kingship through the Cenél nGabráin conflicts rather with the royal obits of the *Annals*, which seem to hint at a much more complex and fragmentary kingship (Anderson 1973, 44–76). Bannerman suggests that the different kindreds named in the *Senchús* may have been reluctant to give their allegiance to the Cenél nGabráin (1974, 108–18), and we must be wary of believing that Áedán's range necessarily bespoke a natural hegemony over these groups. When Adomnán mentions the Cenél Loairn he gives no suggestion that they were under outside control (*VC*, II.45). This is the kind of agenda which may be present in the *Senchús's* use of its material.

Poetic Material

The Welsh mentions of Áedán in non-genealogical contexts are but three. The *Triad* 'Three Faithful War-Bands of the Island of Britain' mentions: 'the War-Band of Gafran son of Aeddan, who went to sea for their lord', with obvious confusion between the father and the son (Bromwich 1978, 57, 264). The *Triad* 'Three Unrestrained Ravagings of the Island of Britain' tells of his raid on the court of Rhydderch Hael, King of Dumbarton, after which: 'he left neither food nor drink nor beast alive' (*Ibid*, 147). This raid is the subject of the poem *Peiryan Vaban* (Jarman 1955), and it is presumably from this story that Áedán got his Welsh epithet *Bradawc*, 'the Wily', for Adomnán makes a point of Columba's friendship with Rhydderch (*VC*, I 15; Bromwich 1978, 505). It is impressive that Áedán, a non-Welsh ruler, had made such an impact into the stories to which the *Triads* represent a kind of

mnemonic index (Bromwich 1978, 264), but the tradition of the Strathclyde attack is all that has survived in detail, and is hardly without bias. It seems unlikely that anything more can be made of it.

THE *PROPHECY OF BERCHÁN*

There is also one Scottish piece of verse, the *Prophecy of Berchán*. This obscure poem purports to be a prophecy of the fortunes of the kings of Ireland and Scotland by the 10th-century bishop whose name it bears, and has short verses on several of the Cenél nGabráin, though the persons involved are pseudonymous and difficult to identify. The content of the 'prophecies' is allusory and now largely obscure; parts can be identified with the record of other sources, but parts are apparently independent. The work is undoubtedly polemical, but its agendas are difficult to plumb and its sources, if not purely the somewhat visionary invention of its writers, unknown. It was apparently composed in three portions, the opening few stanzas being quite possibly the actual work of Berchán, represented as foretelling the invasions of the Vikings, but the latter portions which concern us are probably much later (Hudson 1996, 14–20). One might assume that in order for the work to be appreciated it would have to seem to refer to events in the kings' histories which were well known, but since we do not know what audience the work was intended to reach this assumption avails us little.

The first few verses of the section on the Scottish kings are, according to the glosses of the 18th-century antiquaries who copied out the texts (*Ibid,* 4–6), descriptive of Áedán (stanzas 115–120). However, this is obviously shaky grounds for an otherwise unevidenced identification and it is the opinion of Hudson that: 'the information here makes little sense for him. A more likely candidate is Causantín mac Fergusa, (d. 820), a descendant of Áedán, who is styled *rex Fortrenn* in his obit in the *Annals of Ulster'* (*Ibid,* 83, n. 71). In this case we have first to ask ourselves, before we consider if the *Prophecy* tells us anything about Áedán, whether it is about him at all. Hudson contends for Causantín against the glossators' admittedly unsourced identification on the grounds that Áedán is long prior to the period covered by the equivalent section on Irish affairs, which opens with Máel Sechnaill mac Máele Ruanaid (d. 862). The next king the Scottish section mentions is fairly certainly Cináed mac Alpín, however, and so whoever precedes him is out of the chronological gate Hudson seeks to set. Once this motive for selection is lost, one has to ask why a figure would be selected in the 11th century as a precursor to the reign of Cináed.

Little enough is known of Causantín mac Fergusa, in any case. What legendary material there may have been would probably have been assimilated with stories of the first Christian Emperor, or the British saint of the same name. Hudson suggests that the known details of Causantín's career fit the figure described. However, this relies on a very personal interpretation of the evidence of the king-lists, which conflicts noticeably with Anderson's interpretation of the same evidence (1973, 190–3). Her explanation is intended to save the lists as evidence at this point, but Hudson's strategy of selecting by interpretation is perhaps more questionable. This does not matter for our purposes, but the point is that while there is at least a shred of evidence for the identification of the stanzas's subject with Áedán in the thinking of the glossator, there is none bar Hudson's suggestion for Causantín.

Furthermore, we have already observed that by the 11th century, when Hudson believes that this section of the *Prophecy* was written, Áedán mac Gabráin was a subject of many stories and legends. The *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin* was already two hundred years old, and Irish tales about Áedán abound from this period and even later. Fordun also mentions Áedán in a similar way to 'Berchán'. Whether he was using the *Prophecy* itself, or simply accessing similar stories, is however unclear (Fordun, III.27). If, nonetheless, a Scottish poet were selecting a king of Dál Riata on whom to

compose verses to precede those on Cináed mac Alpín, there can hardly have been a more obvious candidate. One whom strong parallels (the patronage of the cult of Columba and the conquest of the Picts of which the poem and Fordun speak), would have made a worthwhile choice to anchor the possibly somewhat shaky succession of Cináed. The glossator may have had good reasons for his suggestion.

It cannot, however, be denied that the identification is not proven. In any case, as just suggested, the portrayal of Áedán in the poem may owe more to the way that Cináed mac Alpín was perceived in the 11th century than any historical basis for the tales that clearly circulated about Áedán. I do not therefore at any point rest on the *Prophecy* alone, but where it seems to support the case I wish to make, I have thought it as well to mention it.

THE ENGLISH INFORMATION

Bede refers to Áedán only once, as the opponent of King Æthelfrith at the battle of Degsastan in, as he has it, 603 (cf. Duncan 1984, 15–7). We shall discuss this later, as its variance with the Irish record is important, but Bede's (mere) hundred-year distance from events sadly makes him one of our better sources. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's* only mention of Áedán is also in connection with the battle, and the E manuscript adds apparently independent information on it, presumably from the Northumbrian chronicle that appears to have informed it (Whitelock 1976, 109–25, 127–8). That he should thus have achieved mention is unsurprising, and we shall return to its import later.

CHRONOLOGY AND THE IRISH CHRONICLES

Our principal source is however, as we have said, the Irish chronicles, and these are a very complex series of texts. While we may be fairly sure that the bulk of the early Scottish entries in the principal texts, the *Annals of Ulster* (*AU*) and the *Annals of Tigernach* (*AT*), are of a close-to-contemporary origin based on records made in the monastery of Iona, the earliest manuscript of *Ulster* is of 15th-century origin and is covered in secondary annotations (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1973, viii–xii). This was the case when it was transcribed by Hennessy in the 1880s, when four centuries had elapsed for the manuscript to acquire these extra strata, although many are admittedly in identifiable and recent hands. We may imagine that the eight centuries that elapsed from the Iona records being transcribed into what Hughes called 'The Chronicle of Ireland' and its transcription into this manuscript also left their mark (Bannerman 1974, 9–26). The scope for hundreds of years of editing to remove the politically unsuitable and the no-longer comprehensible is also frightening. O'Rahilly stressed that the source chronicle which lies behind the various chronicles probably already had a number of secondary annotations when it was first divided (1946, 259). This means that even where an annal occurs in several or all of the surviving texts (the *Chronicon Scotorum* at least is in an 11th-century manuscript, though brutally abbreviated, and the defective *Annals of Tigernach* in one of the 12th), we cannot be sure that it is of original provenance. Factors like language and focus are of some use in narrowing the possibilities down (Dumville 1982), though ultimately, as Dumville warns us, we cannot be sure that any one annal is older than the 911 date at which the manuscripts diverge (1984c, 223 and *passim*). Equally, it is unlikely that what remains is anything like the whole story. Editorial error and misunderstanding are well-evidenced (O'Rahilly 1946, 235–43), and each editor may have had his own axe to grind. What is left is what has not been chopped away by any of them. The editors' motives can rarely be detected. The *Annals of the Four Masters* and the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, for example, show distinct signs of having been arranged and in parts fabricated in the interests of the families of their compilers. In the case of *Clonmacnoise* the source text appears to have been fuller

than any other surviving manuscript, before its translation (Grabowski 1984, 43; Dumville 1984a). Where, as in the case of the *Annals of Ulster*, the *Chronicon Scotorum* or the *Annals of Innisfallen*, the manuscript is an abbreviation of its source, it is very difficult to say for what purpose this abbreviation was carried out. *Innisfallen* and *Ulster's* remaining entries show very different interpretations of the political situation in Ireland at points of conflict between the Kings of Cashel and the Uí Néill (Hughes 1972, 135–7). This represents each text's development after their divergence from the main 'Chronicle of Ireland', but between this and the surviving manuscripts, the number of editorial stages and their motivations is impossible to guess at. Ultimately one has what has survived, and each annal must be treated on its merits. As to why the entries which concern us were ever recorded, we know that Iona was interested in the Cenél nGabráin. We may also suspect that Pictish and Scottish affairs were of concern to the monastery because of Iona's monks' work and the monastery's daughter houses in those areas. The information this has left us is so tiny a fragment of what presumably could have been recorded, that detecting a significance to the selection is impossible. What we have was not only thought of interest at the time, that time being anything between contemporaneous and fifty years later, but retained that interest up to the redaction of the surviving manuscripts.

There are obvious problems of dating within these restrictions. Furthermore, the original manuscripts of the *Annals* did not have *anno domini* dates, though in the *Annals of Ulster* they were added later, with the loss of a year early on in the manuscript. These are by and large fairly accurate, and from them the dates intended by the other chronicles, which lack such pointers, can often be inferred. The manuscripts of *AT* and *CS* mark their years with a note of the Kalends, but such an abbreviated signpost is frequently omitted in transcription and the layers of transmission involved with these texts multiply the possibility of error. With *Ulster* to cross-check, points of error can often be identified, but sometimes the differences of chronology between the records cannot be reconciled. A particularly severe example is the obit of Columba, which Adomnán's *Life* and Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* place in 597. *AU* and *AT* both record this under 594, which allowing for the one-year loss should be 595. Could this momentous event for his community have been recorded in so substantial a way that its position in the record was ambiguous to a later transcriber? However, Bannerman raises the awkward possibility that, since the chronicles may have been little more than notes before their compilation in *c*.740, the dating of other events may have been anchored on this. One is therefore left to wonder whether to trust the dating or the chronology of the annals. Is the death of Áedán's brother Eoganán placed *sub anno* 594 because it was known that he died shortly after Columba went to the Lord, or because that was the date by which it had been noted, on an Easter Table or list of years on which the chronicles' information may have been first set down? And if the former, in how many other cases may it apply? There is no way of telling, and this further increases our difficulties. If I proceed without constantly repeating these cautions, it is not because I am unaware of the problems, but only to stop the burden of repetition bringing us to a complete halt.

It is worth listing the relevant events from the Irish Chronicles, since we shall refer to them repeatedly. These are the entries in the *Annals of Ulster*. The extra information in square brackets is, unless otherwise stated, what the *Annals of Tigernach* add. I include several Irish events which I believe significant, and these will shortly receive attention. The years have had *AU's* one-year loss corrected.

560 Death of Gabrán mac Domangairt, King of Alba. Flight [of the Albannaich] before Bruide mac Maelchon.

574 Conall mac Comgaill, King of Dál Riata, who gave Iona to Columba, died.

575 The Convention of Druim Cet, at which were Columba and Áed mac Ainmirech.

577 Battle of Teloch [Delgu] in Kintyre, in which fell Dúnchad mac Conaill and many others of the followers of the sons of Gabrán.

577 The first venture of the Ulaid to Man.

578 Retreat of the Ulaid from Man.

580 The Battle of Druim Meic Erce, in which Áed mac Ainmirech emerged victor. Áedán mac Gabráin went on an expedition to Orkney. Cennalath, King of Picts, died.

581 Baetán mac Cairill, King of the Ulaid died. Áedán went on an expedition to Orkney.

582 Áedán mac Gabrán won the Battle of Manann.

583 Áedán mac Gabrán won the Battle of Manand.

584 Bruide mac Maelchon, King of Picts, died.

586 Baetán mac Ninnid meic Daui, King of Tara, was killed. The battle of Druim mac Erca, in which Áed mac Ainmirech was victor.

587 Battle of Daethi, in which Colmán Bec mac Diarmait was killed; Áed mac Ainmirech was victor. Baetán mac Cairill, King of the Ulaid, died [there].

590 Áedán mac Gabráin won the Battle of Lethreid.

595 Columba died. Eogán mac Gabráin died.

596 The Battle of Ráith in Druad and the Battle of Ard Sendaim. The slaughter of the sons of Áedán, that is, Brán and Domangart [and Eochaid Find and Artúr, in the battle of Circhenn, in which Áedán is defeated, and] the battle of Corann.

[**599** Gartnait, King of Picts, died.]

600 Áedán fought the Battle of the Saxons [where there fell Eanfrith brother of Æthelfrith King of the Saxons], in which Áedán was defeated.

606 Áedán mac Gabráin died [in the 38th year of his reign, in the 74th year of his life].

622 Conaing mac Áedáin maic Gabráin drowned.

629 Máel Cáith mac Scandláin, King of the Cruithin, won the Battle of Fid Eoin, Connad Cerr, King of Dál Riata, fell there [and Dicuill mac Eachach, King of the Cenél Cruithne, and the *nepotes* of Áedán, that is, Rígullán mac Conaing, Failbe mac Eachach and Oisiric mac Albruit, *rigdomna Saxan*, with a great slaughter of their men].

Some extra material is added by Adomnán. Among other things he has Áedán as another participant at the Convention of Druim Cet, as does the 11th-century *Preface* to the *Amra Choluimb Chille* (Stokes 1899, 1900; Sharpe 1995, 270–1), probably on the basis of the *Vita Columbae*, and mentions a battle against a people called the *Miathi* (*VC* I.8), who may be related to the people Dio Cassius mentions and that Watson placed near Stirling, the *Maeatae* (Watson 1926, 9). It is this battle, according to Adomnán, at which Brán and Artúr were killed; however, he says that Domangart was killed in a battle with the Saxons (*VC* I.9). We shall return to this shortly. It is also Adomnán who places on record the friendship between Columba and Rhydderch Hael of Dumbarton (*VC* I.15), with which the Welsh tales of Áedán's aggression so strongly conflict. Adomnán's *Life* has a number of levels: its most obvious one is hagiographical, to prove the saintliness of Columba by enumerating some of his miracles, but there is also seemingly an attempt to identify the fortunes of the Cenél nGabráin with that of Columba's kin, the Cenél Conaill, of whom the Irish King Áed mac Ainmirech, also seen at Druim Cet, was one (Herbert 1988, 9–56). On the other hand, Adomnán wrote using information that had been gathered within living memory of some of these events, as Herbert shows, and any distortion he might have attempted would have been limited. Furthermore, his purpose would perhaps have been better served by applying a hagiographical interpretation to well-known events rather than to make the events fit a pattern which is, if there at all, a secondary one in the work. The wealth of detail and the emphasis on witnesses in the *Vita Columbae* has inspired a great deal of faith in its

incidental information, and though subtexts have been located, its testimony has yet to be seriously questioned.

Áedán's later fame then was truly international, and when the chronicles were compiled, possibly on the basis of contemporary records, he was believed to have been active over an area which included eastern Ulster, the Irish Sea, Argyll and Kintyre, Stirlingshire, Angus and the Orkneys. This sphere of activity cannot be simply explained, even though Dál Riata boasted a developed system of military service (Bannerman 1974, 146–54). In this paper I attempt to provide some further explanation by placing Áedán's activity in the context of politics across the north of Britain, thus showing in slightly more detail than usual how the business of kings may have been conducted in those times.

THE FIRST YEAR OF ÁEDÁN'S REIGN

Áedán acceded to the kingship of Dál Riata as second successor to his father Gabrán, the intervening king having been Conall mac Comgaill, the benefactor of Columba. This is the testimony of both the Scottish regnal lists and, more reliably, of Adomnán. Interestingly, Adomnán records that Columba did not at first favour Áedán for the succession, preferring his brother Eoganán (Bannerman 1974, 81–2). Only after three punitive visits from an angel did the saint agree to ordain the younger brother (*VC*, III.5). There is obviously here a strong sub-text of Iona's right to approve the Dál Riata succession, and the early appearance of ordination has been held to invalidate the story as Adomnán's invention, or at least that of Cumméne, his predecessor in hagiography (Enright 1985, 5–78). Certainly, what little remains of Cumméne's work as quoted by Adomnán has a strong political motive, for it includes a famous prophecy of loss of power for the Cenél nGabráin if they ever break faith with Columba's kin, and the Old Testament language of priestly ordination is perhaps an indication of the rôle Cumméne and indeed Adomnán may have seen for themselves in the Scottish succession. But what the story contains of interest for our purpose is the hint that Áedán was not the only candidate for the throne. Eoganán is not recorded again until what is probably his death in 595 (AU *s.a.* 594, as 'Eogán'; Anderson 1922, 118). What he did in this time is unknown.

In the light of this hint of opposition at the outset, the almost immediately following Battle of *Teloch* (*Delgu* in *AT*), in Kintyre, is of special interest. This conflict is recorded in the *Annals of Ulster, sub annis* 575 and 576, split over two annals which are continuous in the *Annals of Tigernach* (*s.a.* 575; Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 81). Opponents and victors are not specified. All that is recorded is that Dúnchad mac Conaill, presumably the son of Áedán's predecessor, and 'other companions of the sons of Gabrán' fell there. The possibilities of this are numerous. Dúnchad was not a descendant of Gabrán, but of his brother Comgall. Áedán may perhaps have been facing his brother (in which case the supporters of the sons of Gabrán might have been ranged on both sides), the son of his Cenél Comgaill predecessor, or even both. Broader contexts have also been suggested. Henderson saw this as a battle against nearby Picts in the light of the expansionist policy suggested by the 10th-century *Prophecy of Berchán's* record of Áedán's thirteen years of warfare against them (Henderson 1967, 48). That it was against the forces of King Bruide seems unlikely, as his focus appears to have been further north, Bede notwithstanding, but the shadowy King Cennalath might owe his record in the chronicles to some such contact, or some more local group might have been contesting Áedán's expansion. That the battle was fought in Kintyre need not indicate the boundaries of this expansion, since warfare was very much an affair of raid and counter-raid at this time (Alcock 1987, 295–309), but it does seem rather close to home for Áedán. This led Bannerman to suggest that the opposition was Irish (1971, 230), and a plausible context for this can also be suggested. To do so, however, leads us into the wider question of Áedán's involvement in Ireland, which although it will not solve for us the enigmatic *Teloch*, is of great relevance for Áedán's rule and should therefore be taken separately.

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ÁEDÁN AND THE RULERS OF IRELAND

In an examination of this subject it must always be remembered that Dál Riata was a two-headed beast. With a kingdom of greater antiquity than his Scottish domain in the area of the modern County Antrim, Áedán could not treat the Irish kings as distant foreign potentates: he was among them and one of them. Dál Riata had to beware threats to its independence, and claims for tribute and military service, not only from those who would be overlords of the north of Ireland, at this time principally the Cenél Conaill of the Northern Uí Néill, Columba's kin, but also the more local rulers of Ulster's other tribes, including the Dál Fiatach and the Dál nAraide, also known as the Ulaid. It was Báetán mac Cairill of the Ulaid who dominated this area in the early years of Áedán's reign (Bannerman 1968). The question of what claim overlords in Ireland might have over the Scottish province was at this stage an open one. The important events in this connection are however of uncertain sequence. The rising figure of the Northern Uí Néill at this time was Áed mac Ainmirech, first seen in the *Annals of Tigernach* in 570. He met with Áedán at the Convention of Druim Cet, which *Ulster* dates to 575. There it was decided, or so later sources claim, that Áed should have the military service of the Irish province but that Áedán should levy tribute on it from Scotland (Sharpe 1995, 270–1). Such an alliance, as Bannerman points out, is plausible enough, for Báetán was certainly in a position to threaten the newly-succeeded Áedán, who indeed is said by the 12th-century *Book of Leinster* to have submitted to him (LL 330, ab. 45). For a vulnerable king with interests he wished to pursue overseas (for as we shall see Áedán was active in Orkney in 580 or 581, and possibly also in the Isle of Man in 582 or 583), an alliance with the Uí Néill might have been very attractive, particularly if his succession had not gone unchallenged. Its compatibility with his most famous ecclesiastic's views must also have been a factor (Herbert 1988, 29 & n. 66).

However, as has been said, there are problems with this analysis, not least in the *Book of Leinster's* recorded submission. This would seem to conflict with the picture of unbroken loyalty to the Cenél Conaill presented by Cumméne through Adomnán (*VC*, III 5). It could be argued that after eighty years a temporary breach might have been forgotten, but when it is noted that the *Annals of Ulster* do not record Áed in action until 579, and his first victory as King of Cenél Conaill *sub anno* 586 (*AU s.a.* 578, 586), the suspicion must arise that a dislocation of some sort has occurred (Byrne 1973, 110–1; Sharpe 1995, 313). The *Annals of Ulster* at this point suffer from frequent duplication of events, and often supply alternative dates some years apart, seemingly the result of collation of two variant sources (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, x). Druim Cet is not one of these, but the victory of Áed is, being entered *sub annis* 585, 586 and 592. Moreover, the assassination of Áed's predecessor, Báetán mac Ninnedo, is only recorded *sub anno* 585. Sharpe therefore suggests that Druim Cet must be dated between Áed's probable accession in 586 and Columba's death in 597, since all records of the conference agree that both these two were present, and the former as king: he favours 590. Macquarrie points out that if the date is 594, its record *sub anno* 575 admits of explanation by a misplacement from one 19-year Easter cycle to the previous one (1997, 112–3), but this is a question for experts in chronology. The precise year is less important than the removal of the event from the confused period at the beginning of Áedán's reign.

If Druim Cet is to be dated later, this leaves us a much simplified picture of the north of Ireland at Áedán's accession. In it there are for Dál Riata only two major figures, Áedán and Báetán mac Cairill. The sequence laid out is far simpler than the chopping and changing alliances ingeniously hypothesised by Bannerman. Báetán becomes more powerful, and at some point Áedán is perhaps forced to offer him submission. This may even have been the result of the Battle of *Teloch/Delgu*, if it was not an internal affair. Since Áedán was active in the Orkneys in 581 or 582 (*AU s.a.* 580, 581), which suggests it was safe to leave his kingdom, I would suggest that any settlement had by then

been made. 581 is also the year first given by the *Annals of Ulster* for the death of Báetán; its second, 587, is noticeably the year that Áed achieved dominance over the North of Ireland, and this may be what has induced the addition. This connection is also shown by the *Annals of Innisfallen*, which record that Báetán's death was in battle against Áed (*s.a.* 581). The *Chronicon Scotorum*, which otherwise covers very few of the events with which we are concerned, dates Báetán's death to 580. Áedán's activity in the following years may also lend weight to the earlier date. This activity however is not without confusions of its own.

MAN OR MANAU?

In 581, and possibly again in 582, Áedán is recorded to have won the battle of *Manau*. As Watson pointed out, this could mean either the Isle of Man or a region of the same name in the Forth area (Watson 1926, 103–4). Philologically, there is no distinction between the names. In default of any more help from the evidence, one must attempt to evaluate the alternatives in their historical context, and the trouble here is that both are plausible. In 577 the Ulaid attacked Manau, and this at least must have been the island (*AU s.a.* 576). However, for 578, the *Annals of Ulster* record: 'The retreat of the Ulaid from Man' (*s.a.* 577, Mac Airt & Mac Niociall, 1983, 89). No hint of a battle is given, but in a record so bald as that of the *Annals* argument *e silentio* is risky. It is best to say that we simply cannot tell what exactly occurred. Then, in 582 and 583, it is recorded that Áedán won this 'Battle of Manau' (*AU s.a.* 581, 582; cf. *Innisfallen s.a.* 583). It is noticeable that *Tigernach* uses different languages for the Ulaid attacks on Man, and Áedán's fight or fights at Manau. The former are recorded in Latin and the latter in Irish, suggesting the use of different sources (cf. Dumville 1982; 1984a, 119). This battle is also recorded in the *Annales Cambriae*, *sub anno* 584, without a victor; but at this period this record is of no independent value for events recorded in the Irish Annals (Hughes 1973, 69–72; Dumville 1984c). It is also the only mention of Áedán made by the *Fragmentary Annals* (I, 3), but they appear to be related to the same Clonmacnoise-group text as *AT* (Radner 1978, xviii), so this must be the focus of a later editor, not the original text.

Which Manau Áedán was fighting in is unclear. As will be seen, he certainly had interests in the area of the British province, and Welsh sources do not remember him kindly. It is certainly not impossible that he could have been fighting there, but a battle on the Isle is equally plausible. The control over the sea between Áedán's two provinces which could be asserted from Man is obvious. Báetán's Ulaid were certainly active there, possibly even settling on Man, and Manx linguistic evidence suggests a lasting Irish settlement on the Isle (Cubbon 1982, 259–60). It may therefore be imagined that Áedán might have wished to take control there to prevent the link between his provinces being broken. He might also have seized the opportunity presented by Báetán's death to do so. The Orkneys campaign and the *Senchús fer nAlban* illustrate the ability of Dál Riata to carry out naval operations, which is also implied in the *Triad* of the 'Faithful War-Bands' (Bromwich 1978, 57). Furthermore, though it is late, the statement of the genealogy in the *Book of Leinster* which records Áedán's submission is of interest. It says of Baetán: 'It was by him that Manu was cleared; and in the second year after his death the Irish abandoned Manu' (*LL* 330, ab. 45, O'Rahilly 1946, 504; cf. Dobbs 1921, 324, 328). That there was another 'venture' into Man by the Ulaid is implied by the *Annals*' description of the 577 endeavour as the 'first', though if there were others, the sources no longer record them. It seems clear that here at least the relevant chronicles were being written up some time after the events, and subsequent 'ventures' may never have been recorded. The date implied for the following evacuation would moreover be 582 or 583, which coincides nicely with Áedán's victory. However, evidence of the 12th century should not be allowed to clinch the debate.

With all these possibilities for confusion the actual events of the 6th century are probably forever lost to us. It is certainly possible that Áedán attacked Man but, as we shall see, the east of Scotland would also attract his attention. To my mind, the fact that most battles of Áedán's that can be located in Scotland east of Dál Riata are somewhat later in his reign makes Man slightly the more likely, as does the suggestion that control over it was being contested by the Ulaid, and the immediately previous endeavour in Orkney (see below), which confirms that the resources for a naval campaign were available at that time. However, these are no more than probabilities. Let is therefore turn our attention to the east.

Áedán in the East

Once again, the key data here are several battles in the *Annals*. They are only four (not counting Manau), but I hope to show that a great deal can be extrapolated from them with the aid of other testimony. The first is the campaign in the Orkneys, in 581 (*AU s.a.* 580). In 590 Áedán fought the Battle of *Lethreid*, which has not been located (*AU s.a.* 589), and in 596 at *Circhenn* (*AU s.a.* 595; *AT's* entry is more extensive). Adomnán records, without date, a battle against the *Miathi* (*VC*, I 8, 9), and there is *Degsastan* against Æthelfrith King of Bernicia in 603 (*HE*, I 34). Adomnán also mentions that Áedán's son Domangart died fighting against the Angles, but *Ulster* and *Tigernach* place him among the casualties of the battles of 596. Before we go further let us examine this question in detail.

THE DEATHS OF THE SONS OF ÁEDÁN

First, it will be as well to remind ourselves exactly what the sources say. Among the annalistic texts, only *Ulster* and *Tigernach* mention the deaths of Áedán's sons. Of these, *AU* is typically brief, recording of 596: 'The Battle of Ráith in Druad. The Battle of Ard Sendaim. The slaying of Áedán's sons, that is, Brán and Domangart. The battle of Corann' (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 97). *Tigernach* is however more expansive, recording among the other events: 'The slaughter of the sons of Áedán, that is, Brán and Domangart and Eochaid Find and Artúr, in the battle of Circhenn, in which Áedán is defeated, and the battle of Corann' (Stokes 1896, 120). It is clear here that either the wording of *AT* is a gloss on that preserved by the *Annals of Ulster*, or *AU* has lost information in its brevity that *Tigernach* has preserved. Normally *Ulster* is regarded as the purer reflection of the original 'Chronicle of Ireland', but Dumville warns us against assuming that *AT* is always the poorer transmitter of information (1984a, 127), and it is notable that here *AT* preserves the place-name Circhenn. This is recorded later in the collection of materials in the Poppleton Manuscript in a tract called *De Situ Albanie* (Miller 1982, 137–42), where it is the name of a Pictish province approximately covering Angus and the Mearns (Broun 2000, 34–41, esp. 40–1). Broun has shown good reason to suppose this text is for the most part a 12th-century confection according to the political geography of the time, but admits that this name, along with the others it preserves, are probably early. Even though part of the evidence is *AT's* testimony, which cannot be earlier *per se* than 911 (Dumville 1984a, 119–24), this might justify a reckoning of its information here.

The testimony of Adomnán on the matter complicates things considerably, however. The deaths of three of Áedán's sons are the subject of one of Columba's prophecies, and thus recorded in detail, although Brán is not mentioned (*VC*, I 9). The story itself has more than slight Old Testament overtones as Sharpe points out (1995, 271), but it seems unlikely that the ends of the unlucky sons have suffered from this. According to Adomnán, Artúr and Eochaid Find were killed in the battle against the *Miathi* which only he records, and Domangart died later fighting the Angles. It is noticeable however that in Áedán's only known battle with the Angles, *Degsastan*, the only dead man named, both in English and Irish sources, is a brother of the Northumbrian King Æthelfrith, and where the Irish sources

record the death of a Saxon, we might expect a Gaelic prince to be mentioned also if he had fallen there.

There are a number of ways to attempt to reconcile these records (Bannerman 1974, 84–6). Broun, as did O'Rahilly, suggests that the battle against the *Miathi* is to be identified with Circhenn (2000, 41). Adomnán however says that the battle against the *Miathi* was a victory, albeit a costly one (*VC*, I 8), and *AT* is unambiguous in saying that Áedán was defeated at Circhenn. Perspectives may differ, but since the Scottish annals in both texts most probably originated in Iona, perhaps this is less relevant than it might otherwise be. Neither are the *Miathi* likely to have been the enemy at Manau, for Adomnán calls them 'barbarians' and it is believed the British Gododdin of the area were Christian (Sharpe 1995, 268–9). In any case, it seems unlikely that the battle against the Angles in which Domangart met his end would have been fought in Pictish, *Miathi* or even Gododdin territory.

Something has therefore got to give. If Adomnán is correct, then the *Annals of Tigernach* are wrong, and vice versa. That Adomnán should fail to mention Brán is at least explicable, for his possible model, I Samuel 16, names four sons of Jesse, of whom three die and the youngest succeeds to Israel. According to the *Senchús fer nAlban* Áedán had seven sons, Gartnait and Conaing also being left out by Adomnán (Bannerman 1974, 66), who had only room for four if his parallel were to be maximally effective. Both these two are mentioned in the *Annals* (*AT s.a.* 599 and *AU s.a.* 622 respectively), so they are more than a genealogical fiction. But the confusion of the *Annals* may be irresolvable. *Tigernach* has seemingly preserved a note of the battle of Circhenn which *Ulster* has dropped, and possibly, once, also a record of the battle with the *Miathi* from which at some point in its history the deaths of Artúr and Eochaid Find have been moved to join their brothers (Anderson 1973, 146–7). If this is so, we must accept the possibility that Circhenn has also been moved, but in the context of Áedán's reign the date is not implausible, as a move eastwards appears to be indicated by the probable locations of these battles.

ÁEDÁN AND THE PICTS: THIRTEEN YEARS OF WARFARE?

Such a movement inevitably brings us to the Picts. Of Áedán's campaigns, at least two (Orkney and Circhenn) were in Pictish territory, and two more may have been, the unidentified *Lethreid*, and possibly the battle against the *Miathi*, depending on that people's exact status with regard to any Pictish overkingship. Áedán was later to be remembered as the enemy of the Picts: the *Prophecy of Berchán* says of him that he spent thirteen years in warfare against them, 'not satisfied that an Irishman should have been king in the east in subjection to Picts' (*Berchán* 114–8, trans. Anderson 1922, I, 76), and Fordun has a similar record of him (III, 27). The former is, of itself, even more obscure than the rest of *Berchán*, and before trying to fit it in, it may be as well to set out what we can say about Áedán and the Picts. Even in this a certain amount of hypothesis is necessary, but I feel that the gaps in the evidence can in this case to a large extent be bridged.

ORKNEY AND BRUIDE

The only secure point in Áedán's Pictish chronology is in fact the Orkney campaign. We have seen that the annal in *AT* that records the battle of Circhenn is at the very least altered, and moreover at this point in the history of Scotland we cannot be sure, without considerably more evidence on the structure of Pictish kingship than we possess, that in 596 (or thereabouts) that area was part of any wider Pictish kingdom (Anderson 1973, 103–18; Hudson 1994, 8–11). The nearest obit for a potential king of such a realm in our sources is the king whose name is given in what Anderson called the B-version of the Pictish king-list as Gartnait mac Domelch (AU *s.a.* 600; Anderson 1973, 77–102). However, for reasons I shall shortly explain I think a battle between him and Áedán unlikely.

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What then of the Orkney campaign? In 581 there is no doubt of the identity of at least one King of Picts, for the formidable Bruide mac Maelchon was not to die until 584 (*AU s.a.* 583). Furthermore we know that the Orkneys owed him allegiance, for Adomnán records Columba visiting his court when the under-king of the Orkneys was there, and has the saint persuade Bruide to order the under-king to look to the safety of Columban monks in his islands. Bruide's overlordship was seemingly secured by hostages (*VC*, II 42). I find it very difficult to believe that Áedán should have thought it worthwhile to attack Bruide in Orkney. Áedán was undoubtedly more powerful than the Dál Riata had been in 558, when *Ulster* and *Tigernach* both record their flight before Bruide, but Bruide must still have been formidable to command obedience as far as Orkney. It is significant that Columba chose to visit him on his mission. Even if it had been an attack on Bruide, why Orkney? It was not Bruide's heartland, for as we know from the *Vita Columbae* he was based at the mouth of Loch Ness (*VC*, II 33–4). Orkney has never been the richest of targets and livestock are not easily transported by sea. The only other possibility in this vein is an attempt to detach the *regulus* of Orkney from his allegiance to Bruide, an uncertain venture whose benefit to the Scottish king is difficult to assess. In all ways, therefore, if Áedán had wished to attack Bruide, it seems more likely that he would have done it overland. That he should have chosen to do so at all, even if he had just had his hands freed in Ireland, is still difficult to believe.

It is this that has led to the suggestion that Áedán was in fact operating in concert with, or on behalf of, the Pictish king (Henderson 1967, 48). This is a far more plausible strategic context since, though the Picts were no strangers to the sea, we have seen that Dál Riata was well-equipped for a rapid naval campaign. Moreover, it is easy to see that Áedán would have had far more to gain by co-operation with Bruide than by opposition. Though Bruide could undeniably have mounted a serious attack on Dál Riata it is a long way from the territory we associate with him, and wherever it was Áedán was attacking in 582 he would surely have desired to be free of the need to guard against Pictish attack while he did so. The peaceful relations of the two kings are also a necessary context for Columba's visit to the Pictish ruler, although this of course is not dated by Adomnán, or Bede, and might have been earlier than the events we are discussing. Some kind of alliance is therefore the most plausible interpretation of the two kings' relations.

FORTRIU IN THE LATE 6TH CENTURY – 'A KING IN THE EAST'

It might be asked what Bruide would gain from such an alliance. The first and most obvious answer is the use of Áedán's navy against a presumably recalcitrant Orkney, possibly even giving Bruide the hostages that Columba found at his court. But there may have been further benefits. We may ask ourselves what Bruide controlled. He is the first King of the Picts who features in records other than Pictish regnal lists, and his career has been regarded as the emergence of the Pictish peoples into early medieval history (Henderson 1967, 34, 42). From the military successes recorded in the *Annals*, along with Adomnán's testimony, it is clear that he was a ruler of considerable power and over a wide area. Nonetheless, an important contrast has been drawn between him, located in a Highland fastness, and the Pictish rulers of equal importance in the following centuries, whose base appears to have been further south in what is usually called *Fortriu*. This area does not however emerge into the sources until the next century. There is no indication that Bruide held sway there.

The question follows, if not Bruide, then who? The proper answer is, we do not know that anyone did, and if they did we do not know who they were. However, the incautious historian may make a suggestion. Perhaps the best way to approach the question is to ask who the inhabitants of *Fortriu* were at this time. The answer would appear to be that some of them at least were Gaels. This is not a

new suggestion: in the 1920s Watson drew attention to a number of place-names around the Forth area of Gaelic origin, in which he saw Munster influence which he allied to traditions of Eoganacht kings in Scotland. Atholl, *Athfothla*, 'New Ireland' should also be considered (1926, 108–13; Broun 2000, 31–2). In recent years archaeological opinion has also begun to accept at least the general outlines of this Gaelic presence in notionally Pictish territory (Proudfoot 1995, 29–30; Foster 1996, 111). Further support might be adduced from two other factors. Firstly, there is the long-debated fact that the Irish sources refer to both the Picts and the Dál nAraide of Ulster as Cruithni (O'Rahilly 1946, 342; Anderson 1973, 129–30; Sharpe 1995, 322). It has long since been accepted that there is no proof at all of Picts in Ireland, but I have not found any discussion of the alternative suggestion! Then, there is the equally unexplained fact of the Pictish use of the ogam script on their symbol stones. This must be an Irish import, although in the current uncertainty over the date of the script it is difficult to say when it should be expected to have arrived (Harvey 1987; Forsyth 1995, 9). Forsyth has suggested that Pictish may never really have been a written language, which strongly suggests that such writing as was done in Pictland was Gaelic in origin.

Then, there is the testimony of 'Berchán' to an Irish king in the east. *Berchán's Prophecy* has been accused of being both late and strongly subjective, though Hudson has made some attempt to rehabilitate it as a source (1996, 93–103), but this reference can be interpreted to explain a great deal. One of the things it may explain is why one, possibly two, sons of Áedán were recorded as Kings of the Picts at their deaths. Let me explain my reasoning. If there was, as there seems to have been, a community or communities of Gaels in the central and eastern Lowlands, they presumably answered to some kind of leadership. I would suggest that Áedán's eastern moves are best seen as an attempt to bring this under some kind of Dál Riata control; perhaps this is the root of *Berchán's* 'thirteen years of warfare'. It is possible that the author of *Berchán* is here making claims for the ancient extent of Gaelic rule in Pictish Scotland as befits the following entry on Cináed mac Alpín, but the context is not implausible and may be based on a real presence in the east, as the *Annals* and some other sources seem to indicate (Watson 1926, 112–4). If the battle of Circhenn was as late as 596 it would seem that by then Atholl was no longer the war-zone, and we may also perhaps assume that the *Miathi* had accepted a Dál Riata supremacy. In the title of Áedán's successor Eochaid Buide, called *rex Pictorum* at his death in 628 in *AU* and *AT*, we may see the result of an attempt to sustain this hegemony.

We must wonder what the stance of Bruide might have been on this Gaelic advance of control into territory which would have been considered Pictish, at least to outside observers such as the Northumbrians. I would argue that it would in fact have been favourable. As has been said, there is no indication that Bruide exercised any control in the southern half of Pictland. If Áedán, as a hypothetical ally, were able to gain some this would be preferable to someone less friendly doing so. Indeed, *AT* record *sub anno* 752, a date probably misplaced by two 84-year Easter cycles from 584 (O'Rahilly 1946, 508; cf. Duncan 1984, 8–9), the death of Bruide in a war 'between the Picts themselves' at Asreith in Circhenn (the name again), suggesting, if it is a misplacement and not a garbled record of a contemporary battle as Dumville warns it may be (1984a, 123–6), that Bruide died attempting to bring this area under control by force. However, it would seem from the title given Eochaid that the Gaelic rule in Pictland was not a simple Dál Riata conquest. Some right to rule is implied, and not just over Gaels.

At this point it is impossible to avoid raising the ancient debate over the Pictish succession. Of old, on the basis of a passage in Bede, it has been asserted that the Picts had a practice of royal descent through the female line. I am not myself sure that the historiography of this debate has ever been adequately unpicked, and there is certainly not space to do it here. It will be as well to attempt to limit

the debate however. The problem is twofold: firstly, that because matriliny is not a practice documented elsewhere among the Celts, the theory that the Picts included a pre-Indo-European ethnic stratum has been used to explain its apparent occurrence among them. At the same time, the evidence for matriliny has been used to support the pre-Indo-European thesis (Jackson 1955, 130–1). As this latter theory has been defeated so that of matriliny has come under fire. Its defenders have used anthropology in support (Gray 1999, 15–6), and as a result all kinds of evidence, perforce literary for lack of much else, has been used to find a much more general matrilineal society whose extent goes far beyond the evidence in favour, and whose various supposed aspects are then used to support each other (*Ibid*, 23–4). It is worth observing that matriliny even for anthropologists is a very vague term, and it has been argued useless as a definition for a whole society rather than any single characteristic of a society. Societies can be matrilineal in few or many aspects, but societies either completely without or fully equipped with these characteristics are rare (Radcliffe-Brown 1965, 32–48). We are arguing here only about royal succession, not family inheritance or the importance of women in Pictish society. This latter aspect may be what has given the debate its recent new flames: there is now a feminist agenda (Gray 1996).

The strongest assault has been Smyth's (1984), and the matching and largely successful defence most notably marshalled by Sellar (1985). A recent contribution has been that of Woolf (1998), who has suggested both that the succession may have been limited within patrilineal kindreds more than has been previously accepted by the defending side, and that there are Welsh parallels to the sort of succession described by Bede (1998, 153–4). Further sallies have come from the pens of Gray (1999) and Ross (2000), and there is more to be said yet. For the moment it must be said simply that no-one has managed to explain away Bede's statement. It is assuredly vague. He says merely that: 'in case of a dispute they choose their kings from among the mother's kin rather than the father's', but what happened in normal succession he does not make clear (*HE*, I 1). Nonetheless Bede, probably having information from Bishop Pecthelm of the Pictish see of Abercorn and access to the letter of King Nechtan to his old Abbot Ceolfrith (Duncan 1984, 20–3, 30–2), was conscious that the Picts did something differently. Then we have Eochaid, whose descent as we know from Adomnán was assuredly from Áedán, called King of the Picts. It must be obvious where I am leading: is this not explained most easily if we assume that, in order to further their amity, Bruide and Áedán cemented their alliance by finding Áedán a Pictish royal bride? Not only would Bruide by the alliance have secured the allegiance of a portion of Pictland which may have been well out of his control before, and Áedán the safety of a Pictish alliance and a free hand in the east, as well as territory to aid the division of his rule between his numerous sons, but by the marriage both parties might hope to see the rule of this part of Scotland remain in friendly hands. The policy of the manoeuvre is obvious to us, and it was presumably also obvious to Áedán and Bruide.

GARTNAIT, KING OF PICTS

However, chronology threatens to shipwreck this theory. Eochaid Buide was among the younger of Áedán's sons, possibly the youngest, though Adomnán's story of him running to Columba, the focus of the anecdote which gives us the stories of the deaths of Áedán's other sons, is undated and there is nothing to say that Áedán had by then stopped fathering children (*VC*, I 9). However, the story must be dated before the battles against the *Miathi* and of Circhenn and Corann, and of course before Columba's death, in 597. The battle against the *Miathi* is said by Adomnán to have happened 'many years' after Columba's initial departure from Ireland, but this is very vague. We know that the battles took place in Áedán's reign and we may perhaps assume that they were after his bout of eastern involvement of 582. Even if it was as early as this, however, it is clear from the story that Eochaid

was not yet of age, was no more than a child indeed, and Bruide was to die in 584. It would seem therefore that Eochaid cannot have succeeded to any kind of Pictish rule for some time after Bruide's death. Who then ruled these lands?

In answer to this there is the fact that Eochaid is not the first king of Picts whose death is recorded after Bruide; that honour goes to one Gartnán, in 599 (*AT s.a.* 598; cf. Anderson 1992, 121). And we have already seen, from the *Senchús fer nAlban*, that Áedán was believed in the mid-7th century (following Bannerman's suggested date) to have a son called Gartnait. I am of course far from being the first to attempt this connection: Alan Anderson indeed supposed that the Pictish king-lists, which note this king variously as Gartnait f[ilius] Domech, Carnac f. Dormach', Garnat fil. Domnach, Savíach filius Donath and Garnald fitz Dompnach (Anderson 1973, 262, 266, 272, 280, 287), have here preserved a maternal name, as may have happened elsewhere (Anderson 1922, 122; Woolf 1998, 149). Elsewhere, this is the case with Nectan nepos Uerb (Anderson 1973, 262); also noted as Nech[t]an f[ilius] Fide, or *filius* Fottle, Yrb or Fode (*Ibid*, 1973, 266, 272, 280, 287). Evidently, there is confusion here, and although the *nepos* of Anderson's List B suggests something non-standard about the relationship, the others have either accepted it or followed a different tradition recording Fide, who was perhaps the other half of Nechtan's parentage. It is certain that Verb is paralleled in Gaelic as a female name (Anderson 1973, 91–3), but it also appears earlier in some of the king-lists, apparently as a filiation, or so comparison with List B suggests, in confusion with the name Erp. Since List B does not share this error, we may perhaps attribute this to textual corruption. Woolf suggests, in another possible case (1998, 150), that of Nechtan mac Derile or Dergart, that the record of a female parent may indicate the special claim to legitimacy that might be required by a change of ruling kindred, and this of course suits this case well also.

Further support is needed, however, and since we have plumbed all the evidence there is on the Pictish side, it will have to come from the Irish. There is little enough, but it includes a sequence of confusing annals about the 'sons of Gartnán'. This unfortunate group (who have space left for them in the manuscript of the *Senchús fer nAlban* which is now empty (Bannerman 1974, 48)), appear to have been parties to a feud with the main body of the Cenél nGabráin, and we see Iarnbadb mac Gartnait burnt *sub anno* 643 in *AU*. Then in 649 the *Annals of Ulster* note: 'The warfare of the descendants of Áedán and of Gartnaith, son of Accidán' (*s.a.* 648, Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 127). The latter would seem to have lost, for the next we hear of them is that in 668 they left Skye for Ireland (*AU s.a.* 667; *Ibid*, 139). Skye as we know from Adomnán was in Pictish territory (*VC*, I 33), and these men appear to have been exiles in a foreign land. However, it is noticeable that in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, where this is the only annal of the sequence preserved, Gartnait is further qualified as 'of Pictland' (*s.a.* 666). It is tempting to think that the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* might here have preserved part of a longer identification from the exemplar it vexingly abbreviates (Hennessy 1866, xxxii–xli), but on the other hand what I am suggesting here may have occurred to an Irish editor before me, or there may have been confusion with a later king of the same name. Nevertheless, it is there. Whatever their ancestry, by 670 the kindred was on the move again: *AU* says: 'The sept of Gartnaith came back from Ireland' (*s.a.* 669), the wording of which suggests that this was an Iona-made entry. What happened to them is not known. One Cano mac Gartnait is noted dying in *AU sub anno* 687, but this seems very late for a direct line to be drawn from him to a father who may have died in 599, and was certainly out of the picture by 649. I prefer to think that this is an unconnected Gartnait, whose son may perhaps be identified with the man of the same name whom the *Annals of Clonmacnoise* record entering religion in 683. Perhaps indeed, the existence of both men in the text caused the specification of Pictland referred to earlier.

This is not the end of the Irish material on the sons of Gartnán, for there evolved from this story a prose saga, *Scéla Cano meic Gartnáin*, which tells the tale of the hero, Cano, who is son of one Gartnán, son of Áed mac Gabráin, and thus Áedán's nephew. He contends with Áedán for the kingship and loses. Thurneysen pointed out that this tale has more than a look of an early version of Tristan and Isolde about it (1924; cf. Bromwich 1978, 444), and we know from the *Senchús* that whereas there probably was a son of Áedán's called Gartnait, there was probably no son of Gabrán called Áed (Bannerman 1974, 48). It is possible to see a number of ways how the names might have become confused in this story, but rather than explore its complexities it may be best to stick to the apparently Iona-recorded annals. Can we suggest a context for the sons of Gartnait in our picture of the politics of the area in the early 7th century? I believe we can.

How could Gartnait mac Áedáin become a king of Picts? I have already suggested that he may have had a Pictish royal mother, so that if the matrilineal theory is accepted he had some kind of title to the succession. But to what kingship? Despite the single line of kings plotted by the king-lists, it seems clear from the obituary of Cennalath in 580 (AU *s.a.* 579), and the uneasy allegiance of the *regulus* of the Orkneys, that Pictland was far from being a unified monarchy. Though the *Annals* and the king-lists make him the next king after Bruide, we have no evidence to suppose that Gartnait actually succeeded him in his kingdom. Indeed, after Bruide mac Maelchon we can place no ruler in the north of Pictland with certainty for some time (Kirby 1976, 293–6). On the other hand, we have the fierce activity of Áedán in the central and eastern lowlands. I would suggest that Áedán's battles were intended to establish a province for his son, or sons. It is notable that Gartnait's brothers were so forward in the fighting: they must have expected part of the rewards. In the event, the only survivors were Eochaid Buide, who succeeded to Áedán in Dál Riata and apparently to Gartnait in whatever Pictish province was subject to the descendants of Erc; Gartnait himself, dead early on, and Conaing, dead by drowning in 622, whose sons appear only in Ireland. This is consistent with a three-way partition of Áedán's provinces, which would imply that each son had a clear idea of what he was fighting for.

There are many imponderables here. What authority have we for saying that Gartnait's and Eochaid's titles had any territorial meaning? Did Gartnait or Eochaid Buide ever leave Dál Riata? We cannot say. But the political landscape I have depicted allows us to suspect that the land as far as Circhenn at least presented Áedán with no opposition by 596, and that for that time at least, if no longer, a Cenél nGabráin kingdom of the Picts is a plausible reality. If accepted, this explains Gartnait's title, and if my estimate of the strength of Áedán's position at the end of his reign is accepted, we may perhaps allow that Eochaid Buide succeeded in these lands after Gartnait's death. This is not to argue for acceptance of the Pictish regnal lists' story of orderly single succession; if Kirby's analysis of the sons of Foith is correct there will very probably have been multiple claimants and a political landscape much less simple than our later sources describe. It is only in this complex situation that I think my suggestions may be found plausible, but I think that to envisage anything less complex is probably unrealistic.

Over his reign, then, I see Áedán fighting at *Teloch/Delgu* in 576; and possibly being forced to submit to Báetán mac Cairill shortly before the latter's death in 581. Had he already defended himself with Bruide's friendship? It seems likely that he had, for if Gartnait was of any age at his death in 601 he must have been born very early in, or even before Áedán's reign. If, as the *Annals of Tigernach* say, Áedán died at the age of 74 (*s.a.* 606), he must have been 40 when he succeeded, and this leaves an ample time not only for campaigns in the east as in *Berchán*, but also for marriage and a substantial family. Could Columba's disfavour for Áedán's candidacy for the Dál Riata throne have been based

on a pagan Pictish consort? Can we perhaps see the angel that scourged Columba as a parallel to that which beat the second Archbishop of Canterbury, Laurentius, to drive him back to the mission (*HE* II, 6)? Whatever the case here, in 581 we see Áedán in the Orkneys, which I have argued must have been at Bruide's behest. The year before the *Annals of Ulster* record the death of King Cennalath of the Picts. Kirby sees him as a ruler of Fortriu; if this is correct, then perhaps the eastern expansion had already begun, for I think he must have been in some kind of contact with the Gaels to reach their *Annals*.

In 582 Áedán won the Battle of Manaw. I prefer to see this as the expulsion of the Ulaid from the Isle of Man, but it may instead, or even also, have been an eastern battle in the territory of the Gododdin. Now dating become uncertain. I should like to place the battle against the *Miathi* early on, for Eochaid Buide was still a child shortly before it and by Áedán's death in 606 he was presumably of an age to succeed. There is also the matter of Bruide's death, in 584 (AU *s.a.* 583, also 504, 752). This must have created a number of opportunities for expansion as those who wished to take over jostled for position. Whether one believes the Scottish campaigns started before it, with his blessing, or after it in his wake, is a matter of choice. I think they had already begun, but Bruide's death may have been the spark. With the *Miathi*, of whatever allegiance they were, secured albeit at heavy cost, the move east continued. In 590, probably having concluded a treaty with the now ascendant Áed mac Ainmirech at Druim Cet, Áedán fought at the unidentified *Lethreid*. Then, in 596 if the *Annals of Tigernach* can be believed, but presumably not long before or after even if they are in error, was fought the battle of Circhenn, which Bruide may already have died attempting to reduce. Áedán seemingly had no more luck, even though the fact that he should be campaigning so far east speaks impressively of his domain. This must have been a severe blow, and may represent that domain's limits. Perhaps at this point Gartnait was installed, with the two smaller provinces promised to Eochaid and Conaing. If so, he did not rule long. On his death his sons (whose names were seemingly recorded where the manuscript of the *Senchús* is now lacunose) cannot have found themselves unopposed. Kirby indeed sees the whole of their story as the results of a battle between them and the Pictish sons of Fide, Nechtan (whose mother as we have seen may have been a Gaelic woman, possibly even a daughter of Áedán if one requires that succession be transmitted down the female line) and his presumed brothers Gartnait and Talorcan. The former of the two's name cannot be without significance if his mother were indeed a Gael, but even if we have here another marriage pact, it seems not to have availed the sons of Gartnait much. Driven out of their father's kingdom, to which of course if the succession were disputed Bede's testimony would suggest they had no title, they would seem to have found no refuge in Dál Riata, where Eochaid Buide can hardly have welcomed the scions of a rival line. But it is nonetheless wherever Domangart died that is the more significant battle, because it must have announced the presence of new players in the North, the Angles, whose impact was to be made at *Degsastan*.

DEGSASTAN – THE CULMINATION OF A CAREER

I do not propose to give an analysis of the battle of *Degsastan* here: it has already been done elsewhere (Bannerman 1974, 84–9, Duncan 1984, 15–7). It gives some sense of the complexity of the politics of northern Britain to briefly examine its participants. Áedán himself was at this point probably the most powerful ruler in the North. He was evidently able to call upon aid from Ireland, for the man the *Annals of Tigernach* name as the killer of Æthelfrith's brother Eanfrith is one Máel Umai mac Báetáin (*s.a.* 599), who was of the Cenél Conaill (Bannerman 1974, 87–8). The whole battle is said by Bede to have been at the behest of the Britons of the North, terrified by Æthelfrith's expansion, summoning Áedán to their aid. Fordun picks up on this, saying that Áedán's defeat was due to the Anglian host

surprising him before he had been able to rendezvous with the Britons. However, it is unclear where he got this information from, and it may be no more than an unjustified expansion of Bede. Then, there is Hering son of Hussa, whom text E of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reports led the Scots host onto the English (*ASC s.a.* 603). Whether he was doing this as part of a tactic of the Northumbrians, or as a renegade in Áedán's service is unclear, and an equally good case can be made for either side. He was of royal blood, Hussa being a previous King of Bernicia. This could weigh both ways: was Hering a hungry *æþeling*, or a loyal ally of noble blood?

It seems clear that *Degsastan* was a battle of several kingdoms, and one that lived on in the tales of Ireland and Wales and the histories of England. It also represents the apogee of Áedán's career. Once supreme in the Lowlands, now his hold on Pictland must have been shaky, possibly in the hands of Eochaid, and he faced a new enemy whom he seemingly could not master. For the sources are almost unanimous that he was defeated, and Bannerman interprets *Berchán* to say that Áedán was removed from the throne for his defeat (1974, 87), a suggestion which finds some corroboration in the Scottish regnal lists (Anderson 1973, 44–76).

Nonetheless, the cost to Æthelfrith seems to have been severe, and it is noticeable that for the rest of his reign his attention seems to have been concentrated southwards, including famously at Chester (*HE*, II 2). Moreover, the fact that the British kingdom of Elmet, in the uplands of Yorkshire, was not to fall until 617, and that even in the 670s British territory in the North had only recently fallen into English hands (as Eddius's *Life of Wilfrid* shows us (*VW*, 17)), suggests that northward Northumbrian expansion was checked for the time being. The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* are alone in recording a victory for the Scots at *Degsastan* (*s.a.* 603), but Duncan argues that this was the original reading of the 'Chronicle of Ireland' (1984, 16), and in truth the difference between the two readings is a matter of two letters.

There is even a single hint as to what the aftermath may have been, in the *Annals of Tigernach s.a.* 629. This annal records the defeat of the Dál Riata in Ireland at the Battle of Fid Eoin by Máel Cáith mac Scandláin, the King of the Cruithni. Though the continuing battle for freedom from Ulster over-rule is noteworthy, the real interest here lies in *Tigernach's* list of the casualties. The unlucky men on the Scots side were Connad Cerr, King of Dál Riata, and the descendants of Áedán, Rígullán mac Conaing, Failbe mac Eachach and Oisiric mac Albruit, *rigdomna Saxan*, 'with a great slaughter of their men'. The word used for descendants here, Latin *nepotes*, is of a wide meaning, but we can identify Rígullán and Failbe as grandsons of Áedán by means of the *Senchús fer nAlban*. How can a crown-prince of the Saxons be so explained, however? It would seem that the name given is intended to render the English name Osric son of Alhfrith, but no Alhfrith is known in the Northumbrian royal lines until two generations later. Bannerman therefore suggests that he be identified with Oslac son of Æthelfrith (1974, 98–9). However, since Oslac was brother of Oswald and Oswiu, the later kings of Northumbria, it seems unlikely that he could be described as a grandson of Áedán without their also being so, something not recorded at any of their appearances in Irish sources. The only name in the Northumbrian royal lines which could possibly give this patronymic is certainly Æthelfrith: Moisl however prefers to posit an unknown Ælfrith rather than so torture the Old English (1983, 115). This is linguistically sounder, but leaves us with the odd circumstance whereby after years of giving refuge to exiles from the rule of Æthelfrith (*Ibid*, 115–23), his sons were promptly given a warm welcome at his death. Yet a filiation to Áedán cannot easily be made to apply to Æthelfrith's successors to the throne of Bernicia, or it would surely have been mentioned in the case at least of Flann Fína, the Irish-educated son of Oswiu otherwise known as Aldfrith.

Can it therefore be that in the confused aftermath of *Degsastan*, with royal losses on both sides, yet another marriage pact was arranged? If a daughter of Áedán were married to Æthelfrith in 603 or shortly thereafter a son of theirs could be of fighting age by 629 without difficulty. This may be the explanation of the apparent lack of warfare between Angles and Scots for so long. If this is so, Áedán may not have given his last battle in vain.

CONCLUSION

I have here attempted to show the considerable political range from one end of Áedán's career to the other. If the events were as I have described them, his sway was felt all the way from County Antrim to the eastern lowlands of Scotland. He seems at various times to have been at war with the Dál nAraide, the Britons of Strathclyde, the Picts of Orkney, those of Circhenn, the *Miathi*, and of course the Angles of Bernicia. At other times he may have been alliance with at least some of these groupings, or even in subjection to them in the case of the Dál nAraide. Yet from what we can tell of his career, whether or not his impact in the East was as extensive as I have suggested, and whether his sons went on to rule in three provinces or only one, what we can safely state about him makes his successes sufficient to make him one of the most powerful princes of the North in his time. One whose career may be compared to that of his contemporaries Æthelfrith of Bernicia or Báetán mac Cairill, and not suffer by the comparison. I have tried to contextualise this status in contemporary politics and thereby illustrate several factors of this period of the history of the North which I think are under-appreciated, but even if all I have done is place Áedán firmly centre stage in his time for the modern reader, I will have done history no disservice.

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Climate Change in Pictish Scotland: Changing Views on Scale, Frequency, Intensity and the Human Context

Richard Tipping

INTRODUCTION

Interest in the physical environment surrounding past human communities has waxed and waned over the last few years as archaeologists have sought to answer questions that derive from anthropological rather than geographical concerns (Thomas 1990; Tilley 1994; Evans 1999). Climate is one of those physical variables that archaeologists and historians have been occasionally intrigued by (Huntington 1915; Parry 1978; Harding 1982; Lamb 1995; Burroughs 1997; McIntosh *et al* 2000), but increasingly the two disciplines of palaeoclimatology and archaeology/history have diverged rather than coalesced. My principal concern in this paper is to act as a 'bridge' between the two disciplines, and to focus attention on some important new work that is redefining the significance of climate change in human action. In particular, I will review the recent recognition of a series of major climatic events of hemispheric scale, and one within the first millennium AD that may have relevance for understanding society in Pictish Scotland.

The scale of these sudden shifts in climate should have had impacts on human beings – as I will attempt to demonstrate – but the relation between humans and external stresses is more complex than simple determinist models might suggest (Barber 1997). Stripped of the subtleties we suspect must have operated, climate deterioration is seen as periodically driving settlement abandonment in upland Scottish landscapes (Parry 1978; Burgess 1985; Barber 1997; McCullagh & Tipping 1998). This view has not found favour with archaeologists more interested in the internal dynamics of social systems, where change is internalised and external stresses are seen as minimal. But prompted by concerns about 'global warming' and future climate change, the science of palaeoclimatology has developed very rapidly (Bradley 1997), abandoning old paradigms of the pattern and chronology of climate change (Lamb 1977), but not yet replacing these with new syntheses.

Climate Change: Old Paradigms and New Concerns

There are several anxiously-asked questions about the nature of climate change. How frequently or rapidly do climates change? These pose questions concerning the regularity and predictability of the climate system. How extreme have past climates been? This problem has proved exceptionally difficult to answer because, for the most part, we use indirect or proxy data from different sources but often have no secure way of transforming these to quantitative measures like temperature, precipitation, wind speed etc. What were past climates like? The character of past climates is often difficult to define because associations between warmth and dryness, and *vice versa*, are not consistent. What are the causes of climate change? These have had to be re-examined with the astonishing wealth of data produced in the last decade.

Probably the best-known reconstruction of climate is the monumental work of Hubert Lamb (1977, 1995), combining a vast range of data from the natural sciences and the humanities. These data were combined to produce a generalised pattern of change over the last 11 500 years (last 10 000 C`rbon-

14 years), through the present interglacial (the Holocene period). Many features of this figure will be recognisable because they have become components of most reconstructions, such as (a) the climatic optimum in the middle of the present interglacial, (b) a late prehistoric climatic deterioration, (c) the Medieval Warm Period and (d) the Little Ice Age.

The over-riding impression of Lamb's reconstruction is a climate system experiencing relatively few changes and where changes between states are gradual, taking many hundreds of years to occur. Within any one comparatively short passage of time, such as the Pictish period, the climate system is seemingly slow-paced, with change hardly noticeable, and appearing almost predictable, to human beings living at the time.

This model has been dramatically revised in the last 10–15 years. In particular, workers have questioned the seemingly monolithic subdivisions of the Medieval Warm Epoch (Hughes & Diaz 1994) and the Little Ice Age (Bradley & Jones 1995) from data which stress the high temporal and spatial variability of past climates. Climate changes are now seen to be abrupt, not gradual, and shifts between states can occur over a few years. For example, the largest climate shift at the change from full-glacial to full interglacial conditions 11 500 years ago, probably occurred over a few decades at most (Alley *et al* 1997). The climate system does not appear to change gradually: it jerks from one state to another (Taylor *et al* 1993). We are only now recognising an equally important implication, that such abrupt changes would have been all too noticeable to human communities (Rahmstorf 1995).

Ice Core and Ocean Core Records

The ice sheets of Greenland provide some of our best evidence for the timing of climatic events in the Holocene period because of the annual record preserved in layers of compacted snow, providing proxy data on atmospheric composition, temperature, snow precipitation, thawing, wind directions and storminess (e.g. O'Brien *et al* 1995; Mayewski *et al* 1996). Ice core records were initially interpreted (Dansgaard *et al* 1969) as showing that the present interglacial was climatically stable, but although climate extremes are not as great as in the last glacial stage (Lowe & Walker 1997), there is marked variability in the last 11 500 years.

O'Brien *et al* (1995) suggested, however, that extreme climate excursions did not affect Greenland over the first 500 or so years of the first millennium AD. In Greenland the period up to 500–600 AD was mild, with atmospheric circulation and storm tracks, and probably strength of the westerly winds, not as intense as at the present day. Between *c*.500 and 1000 AD climate patterns became more unstable.

Linkages between the Greenland ice core record and new work from deep sea sediments forming in the North Atlantic Ocean are showing that the most extreme climate shifts impact across the Atlantic margin. Models also show that what happened in the North Atlantic Ocean will have affected Scotland (Rahmstorf 1995), in the Holocene as throughout our glacial history, because of the re-distribution of heat from the tropics through North Atlantic ocean currents, these currents also partly controlling the direction and track of atmospheric circulation and weather patterns (Hulme & Barrow 1997).

Gerard Bond *et al* (1997) analysed Holocene ocean sediments using a technique that had been used to define climate shifts within the last glacial phase (Alley & MacAyeal 1994). This approach analyses the composition of the sediments to indicate their sources, and distinguishes between micro-fossil rich sediment which accumulated in warm water and mineral sediment full of small rock fragments transported into the North Atlantic from high-latitude waters during intensely cold periods from the seas around Canada or Iceland. This mineral sediment is called 'ice rafted detritus' because icebergs

are the easiest way to transport this material without eroding and rounding the fragments. Bond *et al* (1997) identified seven occasions in the Holocene period when cold polar water penetrated below the latitude of Scotland, and these appear to occur at regular 1400–1500 year intervals: the reasons for this periodicity are not yet known. Their most significant sediment record is from ocean cores just offshore of the west Irish coast, and icebergs may have reached latitudes of 55°N or thereabouts. These discrete events are periods when significant numbers, described by Bond *et al* (1997) as 'armadas', of icebergs intruded into the mid-Atlantic. There is no source for icebergs to have been derived from terrestrial glaciers and ice sheets at this time, so that we probably need to assume that sea-ice formed extensively across the North Atlantic (Ogilvie & Farmer 1997). The last 500 years may have seen such activity, within the 'little ice age' (Bond *et al* 1999), but prior to this the period centred on AD 600 is the most recent such event, at approximately the same time that climate became unstable in Greenland (above). When this event began is not understood very well because these ocean records are not temporally well resolved. Equally when this event ended is not certain, although it probably persisted for less than several hundred years. These iceberg events are of exceptional importance because the likely proximal cause of these intrusions is that the northerly flow of the Gulf Stream was slowed, or was perhaps even shut down (Broecker 1994; Bianchi & McCave 1999). Bond *et al* (1997) estimate that the mean annual ocean temperature cooled by around 2° Centigrade, equivalent in the opposite direction to the total increase in global temperature in the late 20th century.

Ocean-Terrestrial Links and Spatial Patterns in Scotland

The North Atlantic Ocean circulation system seems to have been destabilised at around 600 AD, the most recent of a succession of similar substantial climate excursions seen throughout the North Atlantic region. However, it is not easy to understand from these data how weather patterns to the east of the Atlantic, and in Scotland especially, will have been affected, because similar changes in the ocean may at different times have led to different atmospheric conditions.

The only terrestrial record equivalent in chronological precision to ice core records are tree ring sequences, and the most sensitive climatic record is from Scots Pine populations in northern Sweden (Briffa *et al* 1990; Briffa *et al* 1994): we have no such comparable record for Scotland. The growth of Scandinavian pine trees appears to be principally controlled by summer temperature (Briffa *et al* 1990). The record shows high temporal variability: climate is nowhere in the Holocene stable for significant lengths of time, and there are no prolonged phases of warmth or cold recognised, such as the Medieval Warm Epoch or the Little Ice Age.

Between 500–700 AD summer temperatures in Scandinavia appear to have been more stable than at any later time, and the number of extreme years – either very cold or very warm – were fewer than before or since, suggesting that there were quite predictable growing conditions for crops in northern Europe, perhaps with a lower risk of crop failure. This period ended in the mid-8th century AD, and a series of short-lived extreme excursions developed, lasting only for decades at most, when the climate was either as warm as the exceptionally warm last half of the 20th century, or markedly colder than the average for the period.

We have difficulties linking this detailed record to that from ocean sediments (Bond *et al* 1997), which is not as securely dated. It may be that ocean circulation disruption began to de-stabilise summer temperatures in Scandinavia after AD 750, although there is no consistent pattern of temperature change, only increased variability and – for human communities – increased uncertainty as to what would happen next.

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We have no good temperature records for Scotland in this period, but in several regions we can tentatively begin to reconstruct changes in precipitation. Rainfall need not be related to temperature, but in computer models of the changing Scottish climate, rainfall is the most sensitive part of the climate system (Hulme & Barrow 1997). One natural system that should reflect changing precipitation, and very common in Scotland, is peat, whether as blanket peat accumulations, or larger raised mosses.

These accumulations of organic matter show differences in waterlogging through time, either in changes in plant communities growing on the peat (Barber 1981; Barber *et al* 1994), or changes in how decayed the peat is (humification: Blackford 1993; Blackford & Chambers 1995). Waterlogging need not be induced through precipitation change, but can be, although interpretations are clouded by several uncertainties over the sensitivity to change of different sites and stratigraphies, and because shifts in peat surface wetness can be related to temperature as well as precipitation, through this governing rates of evapotranspiration from bog-forming plants.

There is quite abundant evidence for a significant increase in waterlogging in peats in northern Ireland, western Wales and northern England, and southern Scotland around the Solway Firth, between 550–700 AD (Blackford & Chambers 1991; Barber *et al* 1994; Tipping 1995; Mauquoy & Barber 1999; Hughes *et al* 2000), confirming that this period is one of quite dramatic climate shifts. The records are usually de-stabilised for several centuries after this, with both short-term dry and wet shifts.

In north-west Scotland there are several different, contrasting but complimentary records to suggest that in the same period, 500–700 AD, the climate became markedly drier. Anderson (1998) produced humification records from peat sequences in north-west Scotland comparable to those employed in southern Britain. Tisdall (2000) explored precipitation change using the rises and falls in a montane lake in Glen Affric as proxy measures of precipitation change as well as by developing peat humification records. This lake-level record, from Loch Coulavie, seems to confirm that many, but not all, of our major climate changes coincide with the major events detected in the North Atlantic Ocean by Bond *et al* (1997). The event at around AD 600 is thought to coincide with a significant reduction in lake-level, a markedly dry phase persisting for around 300 years. This possibly severe water-deficit affecting northern and western Scotland has been confirmed by analyses of the growth rate of annually layered stalagmites from cave systems at Inchnadamph (Charman *et al* 2001), when the dryest phase of the last 2500 years occurred between 500 and 700 AD, and was followed after 800 AD by increased wetness. It is the replication in different systems that gives these changes in northern Scotland their real value.

It seems at the moment that when icebergs in the Atlantic moved south to disrupt ocean circulation, there was a significant increase in rainfall in southern Britain, but in the north-west there was an abrupt and sustained reduction in rainfall. These contrasting spatial patterns might be because our current interpretations or chronologies are wrong or that climate was highly region-specific in its effects, so that major contrasts occurred within a country as small as Scotland. This north-south split may, very tentatively, have an added significance because similar reconstructions of precipitation-starvation in northern areas have been invoked to explain palaeoclimatic patterns at the end of the last glacial period (Ruddiman & McIntyre 1981; Lowe & Walker 1997), when we are confident that the Gulf Stream was disrupted and North Atlantic ocean circulation broke down. Might it be that, in the early historic period also, an ocean 'barrier' lay south and west of the Galloway coast, controlling westerly storm tracks, directing them across southern Britain but not across the north?

Some Suggested Implications for Human Communities in Pictland

Before proposing how these extraordinary climatic extremes might have impacted on settlement and human activities in Pictish-period Scotland, we should summarise our findings. Firstly, it has emerged only in the last decade that the mid-first millennium AD is one of only a few times in the Holocene when there was a major climatic disruption throughout the North Atlantic region. Secondly, this climatic shift probably happened very rapidly, and could have occurred within a single human generation. Thirdly, this event was probably characterised by high short-term climatic variability, making the weather within these phases much less 'predictable' to human communities. Fourthly, we should not necessarily expect climate to change in the same direction, such as to increasing precipitation, everywhere in Scotland. There seems to have been high spatial variability also, so that responses to these stresses by people will have been different throughout Scotland.

Fifthly, there is ocean core evidence to suggest that the North Atlantic Ocean itself, before or around 600 AD, became colder, and harboured periodical 'armadas' of icebergs. Interpretations that have not previously been developed is that these conditions were more hostile to sea travel and perhaps less productive in terms of natural resources. They may, for example, have intermittently represented an exceptional hazard to shipping, long-distance trade and maritime exploration, which makes both the timing of the Irish monastic traditions of the 5th to 7th century AD, and perhaps that of the Norse expansion itself (Dansgaard *et al* 1975; Cunliffe 2001), very interesting research areas for the future. We have no understanding as to whether or how these ocean changes, particularly in changing currents and temperature, impacted on coastal or deep-water resources. Often our archaeological records of fishing are inadequate to test this, but Barrett *et al* (2000) have suggested that expansion and commercialisation of the North Atlantic deep-sea fisheries occurred after this phase, perhaps only after AD 1000. Environmental triggers for this industrialisation of fishing have not frequently been evaluated, although Cushing (1967) established clear links between the stability and productivity of fish populations and ocean climate.

We have no clear understanding of the effects of this climatic excursion on our coasts. We might expect climatic extremes to be reflected most commonly in elevated storm magnitude and/or frequency (Burroughs 1997), again making travel by sea difficult. Potentially, the perceived risks of putting to sea may have led in coastal communities to an increasingly isolationist stance, the breakdown of existing contacts and the development of local traditions in the design of artefacts. Increasingly frequent or violent storms will have altered coastal geomorphologies, and large-scale accumulation and destruction of *machair* might be anticipated: our chronologies of sand-dune development are insufficient as yet to understand this within the Pictish period (Ritchie 1979; Gilbertson *et al* 1999; Sommerville *et al* 2001).

Currently, there is no serious attempt to link the large-scale folk movements of the 6th–8th centuries AD around the Atlantic and the North Sea to climatic deterioration (Cunliffe 2001), and we must be wary of 'sucking in' events which have no connection save seeming to have occurred contemporaneously, often using poorly defined chronologies (Baillie 1991). Within Scotland, cultural change in the Pictish period is not seen to be driven by external stresses (Foster 1996; Ralston & Armit 1997). However, estimates suggest that the magnitude of climate change was such as to make physical impacts severe, and it may be speculated that explanations for cultural change by political or other social behaviours has concealed a simpler motivation, that of the response to climate change.

At a local scale, within the climatically stressed highlands of Glen Affric, above 250m OD, the relation between climate deterioration and settlement stability has recently been examined (Davies 1999; Tisdall 2000; Davies *et al* in press). Although the aridity seen in lake-level falls and the drying

of peat surfaces (discussed above) at around 600 AD is clear, and probably represented a considerable stress on a pastoral population, there is no evidence from pollen analyses for abandonment by long-established farming communities. It is likely that upland farmers either rapidly identified adaptive solutions to this sharply applied external stress, or had retained adaptations from earlier times. The economic system was buffered against stress, but it is not known how. One solution might be to pare the system down to simple agricultural practices that offer little risk; another solution might be to diversify the system, and in this regard developments like dairying and transhumance, both argued to have developed in the Atlantic Iron Age (McCormick 1992; Craig *et al* 2000), might be significant.

Clearly, despite the new ideas concerning climatic stresses in the Pictish period that I have reviewed, we are a long way from understanding how, if at all, these impacted on human communities. The relation is unlikely to be simplistically determinist, but we have not yet reached a mature understanding of how adaptations were adopted, and what choices were made in developing or retaining a system resistant to these newly discovered, swift and dramatic stresses imposed by the natural environment.

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A Possible Battlefield Site

Stuart McHardy

> The battle of Druim Derg Blathug in the territory of the Picts between Aengus and Drust, king of the Picts, and Drust fell.

The above quote is from the *Annals of Ulster* for the year 729 (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 183). The corresponding entry in the *Annals of Tigernach* (Anderson 1990, 226) has:

> The battle of Druim-Derg-Blathuug between Picts, namely Drust and Angus, King of the Picts; and Drust was killed there, on the twelfth day of August.

This battle is one of a series reportedly fought at this time between Angus, Drust, Fergus and Nechtan. The possibility of some sort of dynastic struggle is clear, but my point here is that we may have a location for this battle, and one that might be testable.

I have examined elsewhere the possibility of utilising material from the oral tradition to further develop our understanding of the Pictish past (McHardy 1997), and this battle is a case in point. While compiling the book *Tales of the Picts*, I came across a local story in Strathardle (north-east Perthshire) that seems to refer specifically to this battle. It is said to have been fought on the slopes of Blath Bhalg (NO 014 611), a summit of 637m, south of the A924 that runs over the Moulin Moors from Pitlochry to Kirkmichael. The similarity between the names Blathug/Blathuug and Blath Bhalg is notable, but the story of the battle has more detail (Dixon 1925, 103):

> The bodies of those who fell in the battle were thrown in a small tarn or pond on the face of the hill about two hundred yards below the crest of the ridge. It is known to-day as "Lochan Dubh" and is still regarded as uncanny.

Lochan Dubh is found at NO 024 607. However, Dixon tells us more from the local tradition (ibid):

> The Bard of the Southern Picts, who predicted the victory, was killed at the beginning of the fight and was buried in the large corrie which opens out to Glenderby, and which is still called "Coire a' bhaird" or the "Bard's Corrie".

Dixon further tells us that the same battle is supposed 'by some persons' to have been in Forfarshire (Angus), and states that there too are the place-names Lochan Dubh and Coire a' bhaird (*sic*). This is doubtless the tradition mentioned by Jervise (1885, I, 148):

> Blathuig, between the Piccardach, between Drust and Angus, King of the Piccardach and Drust was slain ... The site of the battle had not been ascertained but it was probably at Kinblethmont, in the vicinity of St Vigeans.

Referring to the original name of the Battle, Druim-Derg-Blathuug, 'Red Ridge of Blathuug', Jervise writes further (ibid):

> It was on a ridge the colour of which is dark red and therefore answers the site of the battle, and Drosten, who fell in the battle, may have been interred at St Vigeans.

I have been unable to find any local place-names corresponding to Lochan Dubh, hardly a rare toponym, or Coire a' Bhàird near St Vigeans, but given both the extensive agricultural activity and the later building in the immediate area this is perhaps not surprising. However, there is further possible support for the Perthshire locale as a battle-site in the name of a rocky outcrop approximately

500m south-west of Coire a' Bhàird, Lamh Dhearg, the 'Red Hand' at NO 025 601. In the Strathardle story we have a specific piece of information that is perhaps checkable. The reference to the bodies being thrown into the Lochan Dubh suggests that an investigation of this Lochan might produce results. Whether the finding of human remains after so long is possible or not, remains of weapons, body armour and so on could have survived in Lochan Dubh's waters. Short of some piece or miraculous discovery, the location of such items would not definitively prove that the battle of 729 was fought nearby, but it would make it a strong probability.

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A Folklore Approach to a Pictish Symbol

Stuart McHardy

I have previously drawn attention to material surviving in the oral tradition that might have a bearing on how we understand the Picts (McHardy 1994, 1997). While I believe that Class I symbols in general can be interpreted through the process of comparative folklore analysis, the motif I wish to concentrate on here is on the cross side of the Glamis Manse Stone. It is the symbol or design in which two pairs of legs are seen sticking up from a cauldron (see front cover illus). This has been interpreted by various commentators as a reference to Pictish ritual drowning, the evidence for which is very slim. The only reference to drowning of which I am aware is from the *Annals of Ulster* for 739: 'Talorgan son of Drostan, king of Athfoitle, was drowned, i.e. by Aengus' (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 193).

This is hardly proof of a system of ritual drowning and I suggest there is a more likely explanation of what is being represented. The evidence comes primarily from the *Mabinogion*, the collection of early Welsh myth and legend, which includes the tale of 'Branwen, Daughter of Llyr'. The mythological King Bendigeidfran is discussing reparations with Matholwch for an insult done to him by Branwen (Jones & Jones 1993, 24):

> 'I will enhance thy reparation still further,' said Bendigeidfran. 'I will give thee a cauldron, and the virtue of the cauldron is this: a man of thine slain today, cast him into the cauldron, and by tomorrow he will be as well as he was at the best, save that he will not have the power of speech'.

The cauldron is said to have originated in Ireland (ibid, 25), and later in the tale we have a specific description of its use (ibid, 31):

> And then the Irish began to kindle a fire under the cauldron of rebirth. And then the dead bodies were cast into the cauldron until it was full, and on the morrow they would arise as good fighting men as before, save that they were unable to speak.

Another tale in the *Mabinogion*, 'Peredur Longspear', has the following (ibid, 174):

> And at the beginning of their converse he could see a horse coming and a saddle on him and a corpse in the saddle, and one of the women rose up and took the corpse from the saddle, and bathed it in a tub that was below the door with warm water therein and applied precious ointment to it. And the man rose up alive, and came to where Peredur was and saluted him and made him welcome.

These are clearly vessels of rebirth and reincarnation. I would suggest, given the original Scottish provenance of much of the material extant in early Welsh sources (Williams 1980, 70–88), that there is a strong likelihood there was a considerable amount of shared tradition, both legendary and mythological. This is something I have treated at length elsewhere (McHardy 2003). The traditions of the *Gwŷr y Gogledd*, the 'Men of the North' are accepted as referring to the Britons of Strathclyde and the Gododdin of south-east Scotland, both societies which were neighbours of the Picts (Koch 1997). Proximity and a related language reinforce the possibility of shared belief patterns.

However, it is not only in Welsh tradition we find parallels. Regarding the cauldron of rebirth in the story of Branwen, Matholwch tells Bendigeidfran (Jones & Jones 1993, 25):

> 'I was hunting in Ireland one day, on top of a mound overlooking a lake that was in Ireland, and it was called the Lake of the Cauldron. And I beheld a big man with yellow-red hair coming from the lake with

a cauldron on his back. Moreover he was a monstrous man, big and the evil look of a brigand about him, and a woman following him.'

He then goes on to recount a tale of the couple devastating the land after being given hospitality, as in the Irish tale of 'Da Derga's Hostel', the upshot of which is that the giant man and his wife escape from a white hot iron building while their children perish. After this Matholwch obtained the cauldron.

Many commentators have noted the resemblance of this motif to the Cauldron of the Dagda in Irish tradition. This vessel is mentioned in 'The Battle of Moytura', and it is noted that no one ever went away from it unthankful. This has led to some people seeing it too as a cauldron of regeneration, though the Dagda's power of rebirth is more properly associated with his staff (Dixon-Kennedy 1996, 100). However as Dixon-Kennedy points out, the Dagda: 'had an insatiable appetite, that resulted in his having an ugly and portly figure', reminiscent of the 'monstrous man' from whom Matholwch obtained his cauldron. And this did of course take place in Ireland. In *Pagan Celtic Britain*, Ross states that 'his [the Dagda's] great symbolic cauldron provided sustenance for his people, while restoring life to the dead' (1992, 233).

While it is possible that the story Matholwch tells Bendegeidfran refers to an original Irish source for the idea of the cauldron that brings dead warriors back to life, it is clear that the motif of the 'Cauldron of Abundance' was common to both cultures. I would therefore suggest that, given the nature of the various Celtic-speaking societies of early first-Millennium North Britain, their physical closeness and shared cultural heritage, such an idea might well be known among the Picts. It therefore seems that what we have on the Glamis Manse Stone could refer to ancient, originally pagan belief, rather than any specific notion of an unproven tendency among the Picts to drown people.

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The Dunadd Boar: A Note[1]

George Henderson

Members of the Pictish Arts Society will have read with interest the essays in *The Stone of Destiny: artefact and icon*, recently published in its Monograph Series by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, in which the Pictish antecedents and provenance of the Stone of Scone get, for what they are worth, a new airing. In his essay 'Royal Inauguration in Dál Riata and the Stone of Destiny', Ewan Campbell, of Glasgow University's Department of Archaeology, is the most specific commentator on the Stone's possible Pictish past, envisaging Pictish monks lifting and laying the Stone, furnished with rings, over a postulated relic collection. The whole scenario is, of course, entirely speculative. But it is Campbell's arguments (48–9) relating to the figure of the animal incised on the rock face at Dunadd, a well known 'outlier' from the Pictish series of incised animal designs, that most deserve the attention of students of Pictish art.
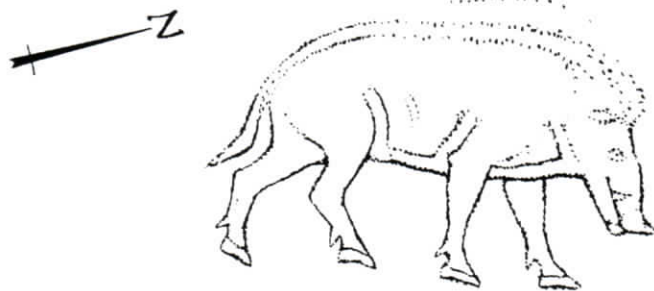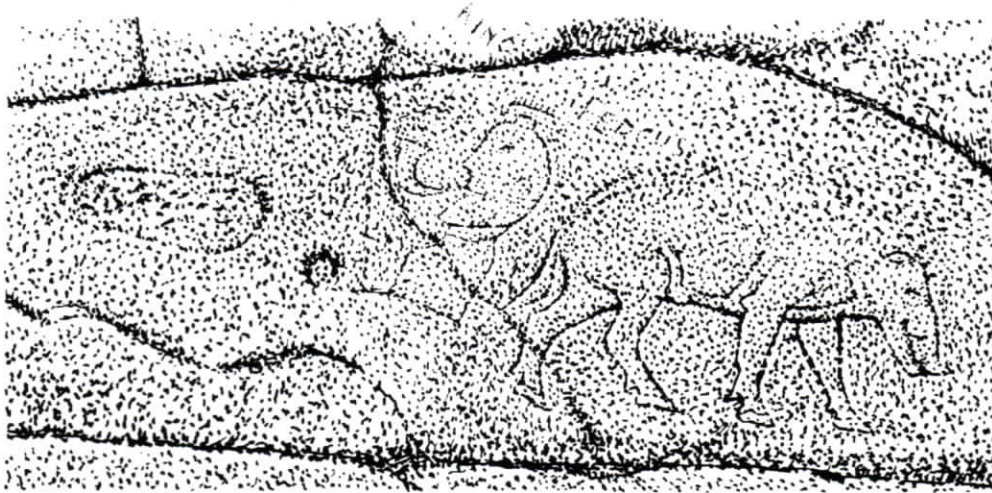
1   This note was offered to the *Pictish Arts Society Journal* in 2003, immediately upon the publication of *The Stone of Destiny: Artefact and Icon*, edited by Messrs Welander, Breeze, and Clancy.

   Separately from this longer exploration of the sculptured boar at Dunadd, George Henderson wrote to Ewan Campbell querying some of the very emphatic statements he made in his contribution to the Stone of Destiny volume, and he, in replying, very fully acknowledged mistakes in his text.

   Editorial problems, beyond the present editor's control, prevented the publication of Henderson's note until the present issue of the Journal, and it is not published now to cause anyone embarrassment, but simply to put on record the correct facts and correct valuation of the Dunadd sculpture, all too often slackly commented upon by non-art historians.

In Campbell's opinion: 'There is in fact little basis for this attribution'. His reasons are as follows:

i   '... it lacks some typical features of the Pictish examples, for example joint scrolls ...'. However, the the animal's belly and throat are articulated by inner lines, paralleling the convention used in the Burghead bulls (Scott 2005) and the Inverurie horse (Sutherland 1994, 101), examples of Pictish animals whose near side fore and hind legs approach one another.

ii   Campbell regards it as negatively significant that the legs of the Dunadd animal are positioned differently from those of the Pictish examples at Dores and Knocknagel [*sic*]'. It is the different pose of these animals which involves the more calligraphic body-markings, whose absence worries Campbell. However, the leg position of the Dunadd animal is, as stated above, a canonical, alternative, position adopted in other Pictish animals.

iii '... the fact that it walks to the right rather than the left'. This is inexplicable as an argument. All the Pictish incised animals do the same, the recently discovered Old Scatness (Shetland) bear adding its bulk to the statistics (Henderson & Henderson 2004, 229).

iv   Campbell affirms that the Dunadd animal is not a wild boar, simply a domestic pig. The relevance of this to its Pictishness is obscure, since the Pictish repertoire of animals is not defined and limited. The Old Scatness bear has added a new species to the series. Why should a pig or hog not also appear?

v   Campbell writes: 'As the Dunadd hog is unaccompanied by other symbols, it really belongs to a group of isolated animal representations which some authors consider not to be a 'symbol' at all ...'. The Ardross wolf (Sutherland 1994, 96), the individual Burghead bulls, the Inverurie horse, and the Old Scatness bear are isolated but nonetheless Pictish, so this argument, in which Pictishness is made to depend on some hypothetical status as a 'symbol', also falls.

vi   Campbell adopts from Carola Hicks the notion that the eye of the Dunadd boar 'is indicative of an Insular style rather than Pictish'. For a full assertion (evidently much needed) of the integral relationship of the Pictish and the Insular art styles, see Henderson & Henderson 2004, in particular Chapter 2.

Incidentally, with reference to Campbell's reason iii above, it is unfortunate that Professor Leslie Alcock, in *Kings and Warriors, Craftsmen and Priests in Northern Britain AD 550–850*, another recent Society of Antiquaries Monograph (2003), includes among his colour plates the Lion Evangelist symbol from the *Book of Durrow* in reverse, facing left instead of right (II.3). This can only confuse its historical connection with the Pictish incised animals. There is here, of course, no deliberate intention to mislead, any more than in Ewan Campbell's reference, in his co-authored book *Dunadd: An Early Dalriadic Capital* (2000, 153), to 'the Book of Durrow symbol of the Lion of St Mark [*sic*]'.

I disagree, therefore, with Campbell's view that the Pictish attribution of the Dunadd animal 'should be abandoned'. There is no doubt that the Dunadd animal was designed and executed in the Pictish manner, whatever the circumstances were that caused it to be placed where it is.

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