

SIR JOHN RHÛS MEMORIAL LECTURE

## Gaelic in Medieval Scotland: Advent and Expansion

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OVER THE PAST TWENTY-FIVE years, there has been a very considerable amount of change in the way scholars regard the evolution of Scotland in the early Middle Ages, and in particular the Celtic aspects of the Scottish past. Many of the views which I inherited on entry into the field in the mid-1980s have gradually been overturned, or shaken up; paradigms have been shifted, terminology reviewed and refined; new perspectives opened up. All of this has been for the better, even if not every challenge should be sustained or even welcomed. It speaks of a healthier field of enquiry, in which a much greater number of voices than before, new and old, have been prepared to debate and reconsider this most perplexing of times and locations. For let us be clear, this is a perplexing area of study. Only for a few brief periods of time—the seventh and eighth centuries, and then the later eleventh and twelfth—do we have anything approaching good historical data for early medieval Scotland, and many of the major developments happen in the shadows of a virtual evidence blackout. For certain areas, like the island of Lewis, that blackout is pretty much total. I note here Sir John RhÛs's still valid description of working on this period: 'The difficulty of writing anything intelligible on the subject arises not only from the scarcity of the data ... but also in a great measure from the absence of the information necessary to enable one rightly to connect those data with one another.'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J. RhÛs, *Celtic Britain*, 3rd edn. (London, 1904), pp. iii–iv.

The topic of this lecture pays tribute to the interests—capacious as they were—of Sir John Rhŷs himself. The lecture engages with some of his keen, if understandably preliminary and often problematic, interests in the early languages and ethnology of Britain; in particular those which gave rise to his 1890 Rhind Lectures to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland on that subject, and especially the Fifth Rhind Lecture, ‘The spread of Gaelic in Scotland’.<sup>2</sup> My main focus will be the study of Celtic place-names, another area in which Rhŷs was a pioneer, out there before the great Gaelic scholars Alexander MacBain or William J. Watson, and a frequent, often flawed predecessor against whom they could sharpen their tools.<sup>3</sup> Unlike many other authors on place-names, for whom neither had much time, Rhŷs was a linguist at the forefront of his field, and his mistakes, as MacBain and Watson often rightly saw them, were of a different order than some others who came under their fire. As Sir Ifor Williams put it:

He was a pioneer hacking his way through virgin forests. There was for him no abiding city of a final conclusion: an open mind had to be kept, and he had to push on into a second theory, and then into a third. Flexibility and a readiness to learn—these were his virtues, the indispensable requisites of a pioneer. It was easy for another generation, which profited by his labours, to complain of his changes of mind. The experience of those who have attempted to carry on his research is that the marks of his axe are to be found in every part of the forest.<sup>4</sup>

An awareness of the way in which in the 1880s and 1890s someone of the intellect of Rhŷs could still be casting about trying to find a clear path through the mirkwood of Scotland’s early languages and history is a necessary preparation for this lecture, since it addresses the establishing of paradigms, of consensual academic approaches to the Scottish past, and the gradual crumbling of these in the face of uncertainties and new perspectives. During the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, building on the bedrock of the linguistic and textual advances of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, two generations of Celtic scholars of great status, and their

<sup>2</sup>Published in *The Scottish Review*, 1890–1, and later under one cover as *The Rhind Lectures in Archaeology in connection with the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, delivered in December, 1889, on the Early Ethnology of the British Isles* (s.l., s.n., [1891?]), repr. as *The Early Ethnology of the British Isles* (Lampeter, 1990); Fifth Rhind, ‘The spread of Gaelic in Scotland’, *The Scottish Review*, 17 (1891), 60–84; for related work by Rhŷs, see his *Celtic Britain*.

<sup>3</sup>A. MacBain, *Place Names of the Highlands & Islands of Scotland*, with notes and a foreword by William J. Watson (Stirling, 1922); W. J. Watson, *A History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926); *idem*, *Scottish Place-Name Papers* (London, 2002).

<sup>4</sup>Ifor Williams, ‘Rhŷs, Sir John (1840–1915), Celtic scholar’, *Dictionary of Welsh Biography*, accessed through National Library of Wales, ‘Welsh Biography Online’ <<http://wbo.llgc.org.uk>>.

allies in fields such as history and archaeology, laid the foundations for a certain level of ‘consensus’ on aspects of early medieval Scotland. The Rhys lectures played some part in this: I think here particularly of Kenneth Jackson’s important 1951 Lecture on ‘Common Gaelic’ to which the current contribution obliquely responds.<sup>5</sup> Here, as with so much of Jackson’s prodigious scholarship, his views came to colour all that was subsequently written on the subject. Younger colleagues of Jackson’s in the University of Edinburgh, such as John MacQueen, W. F. H. Nicolaisen and John Bannerman, would later be particularly influential in shaping our understanding of how Gaelic came to be in Scotland, how it related to the languages round about it, and the chronology and nature of its expansion. The world-view they helped to create (which included nostrums on, for instance, the Pictish language, which are not the subject of our scrutiny but which have also been subject to sweeping review in recent years<sup>6</sup>) held and to some extent still holds sway.

What I intend to do in what follows is first to outline—no doubt too starkly and with less nuance than one might like—the prevailing paradigms within which the arrival of Gaelic in Scotland and its expansion throughout it during the course of the early Middle Ages has been envisaged; then to explain, necessarily briefly, some of the challenges that have been put to the foundations of these paradigms over the past quarter century; and then finally to focus in on four main topics within the overall problem of understanding the development of Gaelic in early medieval Scotland by way of finding new ways forward.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup>K. H. Jackson, ‘“Common Gaelic”: the evolution of the Goidelic languages’ (The Sir John Rhys Memorial Lecture 1951), *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 37 (1951), 71–97.

<sup>6</sup>See for instance, K. Forsyth, *Language in Pictland: the Case against ‘Non-Indo-European Pictish’* (Utrecht, 1997); S. Driscoll, J. Geddes and M. Hall (eds.), *Pictish Progress: New Studies on Northern Britain in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden and Boston, 2011).

<sup>7</sup>Some of the noticeably shifting paradigms have been received quizzically and perhaps misinterpreted outwith Scotland. One such is the increasing use within Scottish scholarship of the term ‘Gaelic’, as I have employed it in my title and throughout this lecture. Over the course of the past two decades, scholars in Scotland, particularly of a younger generation, have taken to using the terms ‘Gaels’ (in preference to ‘Scots’ or ‘Irish’) and ‘Gaelic’ (in preference to ‘Irish’) in relation respectively to the people and language during this period. The reason has been to avoid the confusion and potential political charge of modern, ambiguous or too unambiguous terminology, such as Scots or Irish, to say nothing of the confusion inherent in descriptions of the period which have the ‘Irish’ turn into the ‘Scots’ after c.850, who speak Gaelic (but then start speaking ‘Scots’ in the later middle ages!); or have the same essential people referred to as ‘Scots’ when in Britain but ‘Irish’ when in Ireland (all memorably sent up by W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and all that* (London, 1936), p. 5). ‘Gaelic’ works reasonably well in print, but orally one is

## Review

The basic outline of the arrival and expansion of Gaelic in Scotland as traditionally received can be briefly described: in AD 500, the Irish Fergus Mór mac Eirc arrived as king of Dál Riata in northern Britain, effectively shifting the centre of gravity of this early medieval cross-channel kingdom from Ireland to Scotland. Dál Riata may have been in existence for some time; Argyll may have been Gaelic-speaking for some time, but in this year the dynasty moved east.<sup>8</sup> Whenever it had been first established, though, this was a Gaelic colony, like those in southern Wales and Cornwall and Devon to which some historical data and a considerable number of ogham inscriptions in the south-west of Britain testify. The advent of Gaelic in Scotland can thus be described in terms of a migration, though that could be placed any time in the early centuries AD.<sup>9</sup> Dál Riata was one of four different linguistically determined polities in early medieval northern Britain, and lasted up to the ninth century, when a Gael, Cinaed mac Ailpín (usually referred to as Kenneth mac Alpine), effected what has come to be known as ‘the Union of the Picts and Scots’. Cinaed’s descendants continued to rule their new joint-kingdom of Alba until and beyond the great changes of the twelfth century. Their ninth-century ‘Union’, with Gaelic as the upper partner, led inevitably to the demise of Pictish, certainly by 1100, and most probably by 1000.<sup>10</sup> Gaelic continued to expand, as did the core kingdom of the Scots; first intruding

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forced to choose a pronunciation, and this has caused some problems. Irish scholars have increasingly seen this as a sort of Scottish imperialism, a colonising of the Irish past with an implicit Scottishness, or at the very least an attempt to divest the Scottish past of its Irish roots. Pronouncing ‘Gaelic’ as it is pronounced in Ireland does not help, as the term has largely negative or old-fashioned resonances in Ireland. Despite this, I, and others, have seen it rather as an attempt to keep terminology clear, and to shy away from the straightjackets of ‘Scots’, ‘Irish’. I will use ‘Gaelic’ and ‘Gaels’ throughout this lecture, except where I wish to refer only to Ireland or only to the high medieval Scottish kingdom.

<sup>8</sup>See for instance, John Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh and London, 1974), p. 1, and also *passim*.

<sup>9</sup>See for instance Charles Thomas, ‘The Irish settlements in post-Roman western Britain: a survey of the evidence’, *Journal of the Royal Institution of Cornwall*, ns 6 (1969–72), 251–74; *idem*, *Britain and Ireland in Early Christian Times, A.D. 400–800* (London, 1971), pp. 53–70.

<sup>10</sup>See for instance E. James, *Britain in the First Millennium* (London, 2001), pp. 138, 230. For a review of further literature on this topic, see D. Broun, ‘Alba: Pictish homeland or Irish offshoot?’, in P. O’Neill (ed.), *Exile and Homecoming. Papers from the 5th Australian Conference of Celtic Studies* (Sydney, 2005), pp. 234–75, at 236–8. This article is now revised and republished, minus the section just noted, in *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain from the Picts to Alexander III* (Edinburgh, 2007), pp. 71–97; subsequent references are to the later version, where possible.

their power into Strathclyde; then making conquest of the Lothians; and Gaelic place-names in these areas are a natural consequence of this.<sup>11</sup> The twelfth century saw a gradual infiltration of French and English influence into the Scottish court, and the establishment of burghs and new monasteries, and these began to have a strong and negative effect on the Gaelic language, which began to recede from the eastern and southern lowlands during the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; a relatively stable 'highland line' roughly coterminous with the area of Gaelic speech had emerged by c.1400.<sup>12</sup> The 'heartland' of Gaelic increasingly became the Western Highlands and Islands; the latter, though conquered and settled by Scandinavians and under Norwegian rule until 1266, saw a re-emergence of Gaelic under the descendants of Somerled, the future 'Lords of the Isles', who were to provide the main prop for the continuance of Gaelic language and culture into the early modern period.<sup>13</sup>

To this overall scenario, leading Scottish academics, including language specialists, of the 1950s and 1960s added some considerable definition. First, Kenneth Jackson in 1951 made a strong case, only really challenged directly nearly fifty years later by Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh and Breandán Ó Buachalla, for the notion that the Gaelic of Scotland was the 'Common Gaelic' of Ireland, and that there was no sign of differentiation until at least the tenth century, and more probably the thirteenth: well into the later Middle Ages.<sup>14</sup> It should be said that in so doing Jackson was laying to rest definitively some long-standing red herrings, in particular the idea that Scottish Gaelic had grown up indigenously and had no real linguistic connection with Irish or Ireland. It is easy now to forget how prevalent this view had been amongst respected scholars in the previous century.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance W. F. H. Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names: their Study and Significance* (London, 1975; rev. edn., Edinburgh, 2001), pp. 173–5; M. O. Anderson, 'Lothian and the Early Scottish Kings', *Scottish Historical Review*, 39 (1960), 98–112.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance T. C. Smout, *A History of the Scottish People 1560–1830* (London, 1969), pp. 39–46, and map p. 518; Charles W. J. Withers, *Gaelic in Scotland, 1698–1981: the Geographical History of a Language* (Edinburgh, 1984), pp. 16–27.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance John Bannerman, 'Historical background', in K. Steer and J. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1977), pp. 201–2; R. Andrew McDonald, *The Kingdom of the Isles: Scotland's Western Seaboard, c.1100–c.1336* (East Linton, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Jackson, 'Common Gaelic'; R. Ó Maolalaigh, 'The Scotticisation of Gaelic: a reassessment of the language and orthography of the Gaelic notes in the Book of Deer', in K. Forsyth (ed.), *Studies on the Book of Deer* (Dublin, 2008), pp. 179–274; B. Ó Buachalla, '“Common Gaelic” revisited', in C. Ó Baoill and N. McGuire (eds.), *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000. Papers read at the Conference of Scottish Gaelic Studies 2000 held at the University of Aberdeen 2–4 August 2000* (Aberdeen, 2002), pp. 1–12.

Second, John MacQueen began a process of seeing place-name elements, in their distribution, as barometers of linguistic expansion, in particular in his influential work on Gaelic in the south-west of Scotland.<sup>15</sup> This process was brought to fruition by W. F. H. Nicolaisen, the dominant Scottish place-name scholar of the past fifty years, whose pioneering use of distribution maps allowed for a sense of ‘seeing’ Gaelic emerge and expand on the map.<sup>16</sup> MacQueen and Nicolaisen both also produced work that was influential in seeing the south-west of Scotland as having played host to a very early colony in the Rhinns of Galloway (as evidenced above all by place-names containing the Gaelic place-name element *sliabh* ‘moor, hill’), with a subsequent small-scale infiltration of the south-west through the medium of the church (borne out by the smattering of Gaelic place-names employing *cill* ‘church’).<sup>17</sup> Nicolaisen was also influential in seeing the language situation of some of the Hebrides and western seaboard being one in which Norse place-names show in many places only a transitory connection, not permanent settlement. A great number of place-name scholars have viewed Gaelic in the Hebrides and elsewhere as a survivor language, one which *re-emerged* consequent on political distractions elsewhere. And this has been the prevailing view underlying much research by, for instance, scholars of Norse place-names in Britain.<sup>18</sup> It is worth noting the straightforward eastwards and southwards expansion of

<sup>15</sup> J. MacQueen, ‘Welsh and Gaelic in Galloway’, *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 32 (1953–4), 77–92; ‘Kirk- and Kil- in Galloway place-names’, *Archivum Linguisticum*, 8 (1956), 135–49; *idem*, *St Nynia* (Edinburgh, 1961), pp. 45–7; ‘The Gaelic speakers of Galloway and Carrick’, *Scottish Studies*, 17 (1973), 17–33.

<sup>16</sup> See his *Scottish Place-Names* and his own earlier work there cited, pp. xi–xiii. See also *idem*, ‘Place-names, Gaelic in Scotland’, in D. S. Thomson (ed.), *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, rev. edn. (Glasgow, 1994), pp. 231–3, with maps on p. 232; also P. G. B. McNeill and H. L. MacQueen (eds.), *Atlas of Scottish History to 1707* (Edinburgh, 1996), pp. 58–60, and for ‘*pit*’, 50–1.

<sup>17</sup> Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, pp. 51–60, and see his earlier ‘Scottish Place-Names: 24. *Slew-* and *sliabh*’, *Scottish Studies*, 9 (1965), 91–106; MacQueen, ‘Welsh and Gaelic’. MacQueen’s case also drew on the evidence of the element *carraig*, ‘rock’, which, though a highly localised toponymic element in Scotland, cannot be shown to be early, rather than just limited in extent (see below).

<sup>18</sup> Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, pp. 109–55, esp. 122; Ian A. Fraser, *The Place-Names of Arran* (Glasgow, 1999), pp. 52–60, esp. 59 for Nicolaisen’s description of Norse names there as ‘onomastic graffiti’; for argument for Gaelic survival in Manx context, see G. Fellows-Jensen, ‘Scandinavian settlement in the Isle of Man and north-west England: the place-name evidence’, in C. Fell, P. Foote, J. Graham-Campbell and R. Thomson (eds.), *The Viking Age in the Isle of Man* (London, 1983), pp. 37–52, who there summarises the earlier debate between Basil Megaw and Margaret Gelling about survival. I should note that there has been considerable awareness of the potential for complete Scandinavian linguistic dominance, at least in Lewis, among scholars: see, e.g. B. E. Crawford, *Scandinavian Scotland* (Leicester, 1987), p. 97.

Gaelic these researches and the maps derived from them seem to imply. With the exception of the seemingly proleptic ‘colony’ in Galloway, Gaelic in this analysis proceeds from Dál Riata up and out and down.

## Revisions

At both micro- and macro-level, these paradigms have been subjected to considerable scrutiny over the past twenty-five years. This lecture cannot cover every challenge in depth, but I will discuss a number of the major ones.

### The origins and nature of Dál Riata

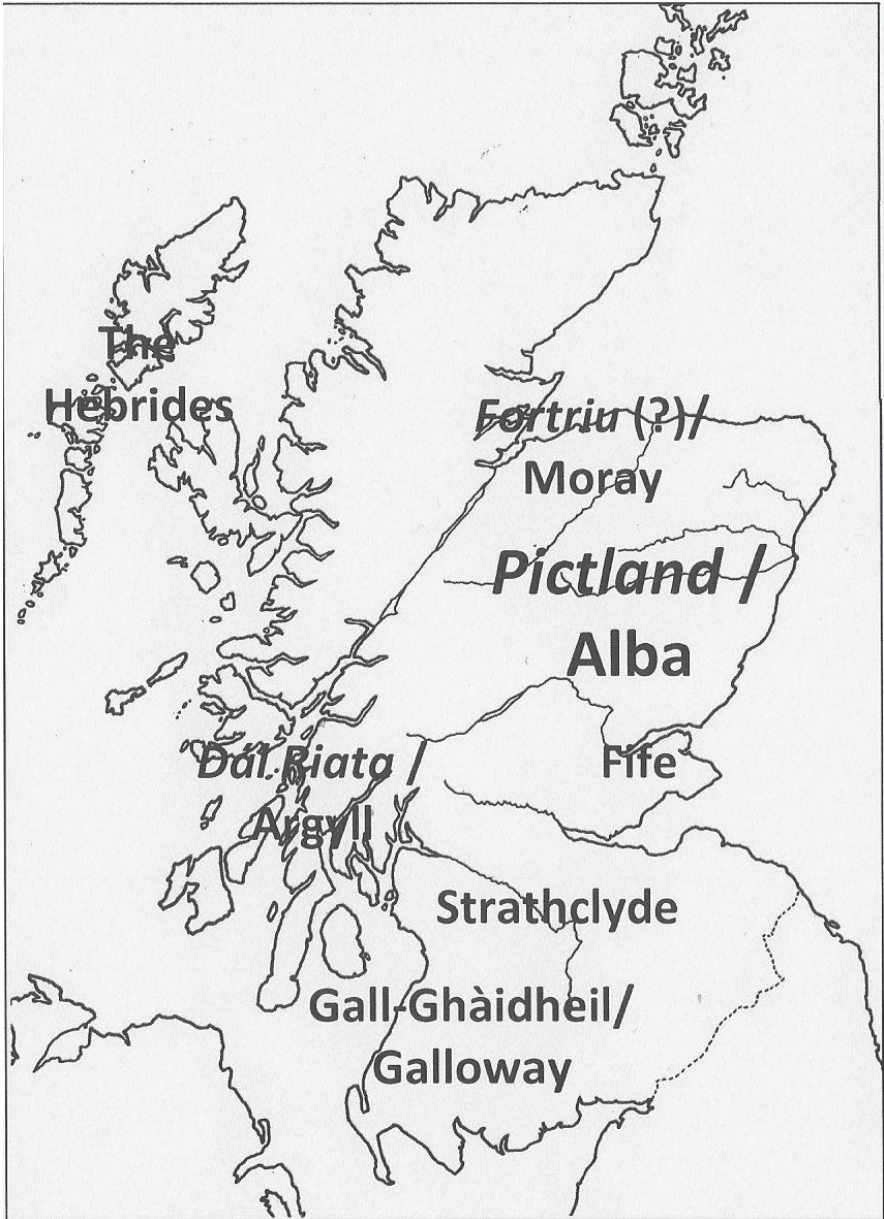
Recent years have seen considerable challenges to the received notion of a Gaelic colony in Argyll, from a number of angles. The political nature of Dál Riata, as a single kingdom ruled over by a series of related and competing kindreds, established by John Bannerman in his important studies of the late 1960s, has been subjected to considerable scrutiny recently.<sup>19</sup> The fundamental text on which Bannerman’s model was built, the text formerly known as *Senchus Fer nAlban*, has been vigorously dismantled by David Dumville.<sup>20</sup> Dauvit Broun, in as yet unpublished work, has recently supported that act of deconstruction, while arguing strongly that one can, nonetheless, trace at least some of the stages by which this complex text was assembled into the form we now have, and returning cautiously towards Bannerman’s original formulation of a core dating from the 640s and a final phase in the tenth century, but with key and identifiable modifications in between.<sup>21</sup> The result is that the text becomes a window on the shifting

<sup>19</sup> See Bannerman, *Studies*; and see also R. Sharpe, ‘The thriving of Dalriada’, in S. Taylor (ed.), *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500–1297* (Dublin, 2000), pp. 47–61.

<sup>20</sup> David N. Dumville, ‘Ireland and North Britain in the earlier Middle Ages: contexts for *Miniugud senchasa fher nAlban*’, in Ó Baoill & McGuire, *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000*, pp. 185–211, republished in D. N. Dumville, *Celtic Essays, 2001–2007*, vol. II (Aberdeen, 2007), pp. 35–71. Page numbers are cited from the republished article. Although I accept Dumville’s argument that the description of the text as ‘*Miniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban*’ (‘The relating of the [genealogical] lore of the men of Alba’) is significant, I have nonetheless opted to use the title that had previously been conventional.

<sup>21</sup> D. Broun, ‘*Miniugud Senchusa fher nAlban* and the History of Dál Riata’, Morgyn Wagner Memorial Lecture, University of Edinburgh, 11 Feb. 2009; ‘The Arrival of the Gaels in Pictland’, unpublished conference lecture, Scotland’s Global Impact, Inverness 21 Oct. 2009. I am grateful to Professor Broun for allowing me to see a copy of the text of this material.





**Figure 1.** Regions mentioned frequently in the text. Names in italic obsolete by c.900; non-italic names occur from 900 onwards.



political fortunes over time of the kindreds it describes, rather than a freeze-frame political geography of Dál Riata. Most radically Broun has recently and tentatively proposed it as a text reflecting in one phase the interests of overlords under whose sway Dál Riata had fallen by the mid-eighth century.

Following a related line of enquiry, James Fraser, in a series of probing articles and in his recent book, has argued against reading Dál Riata as a unified kingdom or strong polity, and has tried to deconstruct some of the terminology with which modern scholars have become perhaps too familiar. He has pointed cogently to the fact that our sources are much more heterogeneous in terms of the kindreds they think are important at any given time, and indeed the names they give them; and Dál Riata itself is by no means a constant either in its appearance in sources, or in its meaning. In his view we are dealing with a collection of kindreds, with their own kingships, who only fitfully coalesce into anything we might wish to term an over-kingdom.<sup>22</sup>

Of greatest relevance for our current purpose is the argument put forward by the Glasgow archaeologist Ewan Campbell, first in 1999 and then more fully in 2001, that most of the received view of the Gaelic 'colony' cannot be demonstrated from reliable evidence. Fergus Mór's emigration from Ireland looks to be an origin-legend<sup>23</sup> (and indeed, as Dumville and Broun have subsequently shown, Fergus Mór himself seems to be a late entrant into the traditions of the region in any case). The migrationist paradigm has come under attack in archaeological circles in general. In the case of Dál Riata, there is no archaeological evidence for any migration at all; and there is no reason linguistically why Gaelic could not have developed concurrently on both sides of Sruth na Maoile. As Campbell shows, there is no reason why the cultural and linguistic dividing line should not have been at Drumalban, the mountainous massif of the central highlands, rather than at the North Channel. Languages are not afraid of the water, and the role of the North Channel in particular as a uniter rather than a

<sup>22</sup> James E. Fraser, 'The Iona Chronicle, the descendants of Áedán mac Gabráin, and the "Principal Kindreds of Dál Riata"', *Northern Studies*, 38 (2004), 77–96; *idem*, 'Dux Reuda and the Corcu Réti', in W. McLeod, J. E. Fraser and A. Gunderloch (eds.), *Cànan & Cultar / Language and Culture: Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 3* (Edinburgh, 2006), pp. 1–9; *idem*, *From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795* (Edinburgh, 2009); *idem*, 'The Three Thirds of Cenél Loairn, 678–733', in W. McLeod *et al.* (eds.), *Bile ós Chrannaibh. A Festschrift for William Gillies* (Ceann Drochaid, 2010), pp. 135–66.

<sup>23</sup> E. Campbell, *Saints and Sea-Kings: the First Kingdom of the Scots* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 11–15; *idem*, 'Were the Scots Irish?', *Antiquity*, 75 (2001), 285–92.

divider of culture is well known from the early Middle Ages at least. Although Dumville, badly misreading I think both the scholar and the argument, castigated Campbell's viewpoint as 'a strongly nationalist account', in the same work he himself went on to espouse most of these main points, though to some extent on other grounds.<sup>24</sup>

We are thus left with the bare fact of Argyll in the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries as a region of Gaelic-speakers with intense and important connections to Ireland through both political and ecclesiastical channels. It is emerging as a much more diverse and dynamic polity than in the previous formulation, and the recent work on the *Senchus Fer nAlban* indeed reads that text as a representation of that dynamism, an attempt to sort out a complex collection of traditions from different sources. We can no longer be sure when Gaelic 'arrived' in Scotland, and increasingly one feels that even to pose the question may be to anticipate a wrong answer.

### 'The Union of Picts and Scots'

Despite its longevity in the popular imagination, the so-called 'Union of the Picts and Scots' is a modern (or perhaps early modern) confection;<sup>25</sup> scholars have long since abandoned seeing the reign of Cinaed mac Ailpín (Kenneth mac Alpine) as in and of itself a turning point in Scottish his-

<sup>24</sup>Dumville, 'Ireland and North Britain', pp. 49, 68–9. Dumville's text is worth quoting *in extenso*, as many of the views here expressed have become so closely associated with Campbell's thesis and with archaeological methodology, and it is important to stress their bolstering from this different quarter: 'Thanks to the questions being asked nowadays, we find ourselves liberated from following literally the discourse of our source-texts. ... [W]e have no reason to place the gaelicisation of what we know as Dál Riata in Britain in close proximity to the first historical notices of its existence; there is nothing in the written or, apparently, the archaeological evidence to cause us to separate the gaelicisation of that part of western Scotland from the gaelicisation of northern Ireland. I therefore reject absolutely the following proposals advanced by John Bannerman as at the time of writing essentially uncontroversial: that someone called Fergus Mór mac Eirc was the founder of Dál Riata; that "in the person of Fergus Mór ... the Dalriadic dynasty removed from Ireland to Scotland"; that "Fergus Mór may be considered the earliest historically authenticated figure" mentioned in *Miniugud senchasa fher nAlban* (Bannerman 1974, 73) and that "Fergus himself flourished towards the end of the fifth century" (Bannerman 1974, 70). Further, concerning what was in the 1960s and 1970s a slightly less uncontroversial issue, I reject the need to argue for a political separation of Irish and British Dál Riata in the seventh century. ...' To be fair, it does seem that Dumville's initial criticism of Campbell's thesis, with which he then conversely agreed in spirit, was advanced without his having yet been able to read the main article on which Campbell's arguments were based (only the popular précis in Campbell, *Saints and Sea-Kings*, was cited).

<sup>25</sup>On this topic, see Broun, 'Alba: Pictish homeland or Irish offshoot?', esp. pp. 236–43; C. Kidd, 'The Ideological Uses of the Picts, 1707–c.1990', in E. J. Cowan and R. J. Finlay (eds.), *Scottish History: the Power of the Past* (Edinburgh, 2002), pp. 169–90.

tory. What gives him his key significance is as an ancestor figure for the rulers of Pictland in the late ninth century, rulers whose kingdom would be ‘rebranded’ Alba by c.900.<sup>26</sup> It is in such a context that collocations such as ‘the MacAlpine dynasty’ and more recently, courtesy of Alex Woolf’s taste for exoticism, ‘the Alpinids’, have been formed—none of these has any historical attestation in their current meaning, it should be cautioned.<sup>27</sup> Scholarly attention, best exemplified perhaps by Alex Woolf’s superb and stimulating recent history of the period, has begun to focus instead on the reigns of Cinaed’s grandsons, Domnall and Consantín (particularly the latter), as well as the period in between (a period of considerable upheaval), as providing the context for the creation of a ‘new order’ benorth the Forth. That new order was a new kingdom territorially based on the old Pictland, but now named Alba, and possessed of rulers with Gaelic names, who seem to have espoused Gaelic language and laws.<sup>28</sup>

That said, prior to 1998 a great variety of scholars, such as A. A. M. Duncan, Marjorie Anderson, Alfred P. Smyth, Benjamin Hudson and John Bannerman, were urging that the Gaelicisation of the Pictish polity began *before* Cinaed’s time, indeed, that a series of kings from Gaelic Dál Riata, starting with one Custantin son of Fergus (†820), had imposed their power over the strongest of the Pictish polities, Fortriu.<sup>29</sup> For those

<sup>26</sup> See for instance D. N. Dumville, *The Churches of North Britain in the First Viking-Age*. Fifth Whithorn Lecture (Whithorn, 1997), pp. 34–6; D. Broun, ‘The Origin of Scottish identity in its European context’, in B. E. Crawford (ed.), *Scotland in Dark-Age Europe* (St Andrews, 1994), pp. 21–31, esp. 33. Note, however, his change of mind on the significance of the name-change to *Alba*, in his article ‘Alba’, p. 243; and in *Scottish Independence*, p. 74, and his apology to authors who have followed him in his earlier view. As one of those apologised to, I should note that I concur with his earlier view, and with other scholars, in seeing the name-change of c.900 as highly significant, and an alteration of meaning (see below). I am unconvinced by his more recent arguments concerning it.

<sup>27</sup> For Alpinids, see A. Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba, 789–1070* (Edinburgh, 2007). We might wish to begin to use the term employed in the *Genealogia Albanensium* in the Book of Lecan (f. 110r39–41), *Clann Chinaeda meic Ailpín*, also referred to as *in rígrad* ‘the royal line’ (text also in Book of Ballymote, 149a31–2). I am grateful to Dauvit Broun for access to his edition and translation of this text; see also his *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 173, n. 35. Thomas Charles-Edwards has made a start on employing the term ‘Clann Chinaeda’: ‘Picts and Scots’, *Innes Review*, 59 (2008), 168–88.

<sup>28</sup> See Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba*, esp. pp. 126–76; and sources cited above, n. 26. For Consantín as the ‘new Cinaed’ in modern scholarship, see Broun, *Scottish Independence*, p. 73, and n. 14, who credits Ted Cowan as the first to spot Consantín’s pivotal status: ‘Myth and identity in early medieval Scotland’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 63 (1984), 111–35.

<sup>29</sup> A. A. M. Duncan, *Scotland: the Making of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1975), pp. 54–9; Marjorie Anderson, ‘Dalriada and the Creation of the Kingdom of the Scots’, in D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick and D. Dumville (eds.), *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes*

seeking a founding ‘moment’ for the Gaelicisation of the Scottish kingdom, attention had shifted back before Cinaed’s time. Taking a prompt from Patrick Wormald, Dauvit Broun challenged this view in 1998 in the conference on the St Andrews Sarcophagus, and his elegant solution to the contradictions of the frankly pretty messy and measly evidence was to see Custantin and his offspring as first and foremost Pictish kings of Fortriu, and only secondarily kings over Dál Riata.<sup>30</sup> This solution seems to have found very rapid favour, but has recently been subject to an implicit challenge in a recent review article by Thomas Charles-Edwards.<sup>31</sup> As I will explain below, in some sense it does not matter who is right about the ancestry of the individuals concerned. Whether Gael or Pict or both by descent, Custantin and his family drew their power from their control of Pictish territory. The main thing we take away from the evidence, and there seem to be few folk now willing to disagree on this point, is that Dál Riata had become inextricably linked with, indeed absorbed into, Pictland, at least in political terms, by the period around 800.<sup>32</sup> Crucial here has been a parallel process of revision within Scottish historiography, by which the kingdom of the Picts has become recognised as by far the dominant power in northern Britain after 685, and an expansionist one at that. In this context, whatever Cinaed mac Ailpín’s ancestry (Dumville has suggested, without to date providing supporting discussion, that he was a Pict; recent work has supported the perspective of the chronicles at least that he was king of Picts, and that Gaelic ancestry is not an overt feature of his profile at the time, though it would be a feature during his descendants’ time<sup>33</sup>),

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(Cambridge, 1982), pp. 106–32; A. P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men. Scotland AD 80–1000* (London, 1984), pp. 177–85; B. T. Hudson, *Kings of Celtic Scotland* (Westport, CT, 1994), pp. 34–6; John Bannerman, ‘The Scottish takeover of Pictland and the Relics of Columba’, in D. Broun and T. O. Clancy (eds.), *Spes Scotorum, Hope of Scots. Saint Columba, Iona and Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1999), pp. 71–94.

<sup>30</sup> D. Broun, ‘Pictish kings 761–839: integration with Dál Riata or separate development?’, in S. Foster (ed.), *The St Andrews Sarcophagus: a Pictish Masterpiece and its International Connections* (Dublin, 1998), pp. 71–83; and see P. Wormald, ‘The emergence of the *Regnum Scotorum*: a Carolingian hegemony?’, in B. E. Crawford (ed.), *Scotland in Dark-Age Britain* (St Andrews/Aberdeen, 1996), pp. 131–53.

<sup>31</sup> Charles-Edwards, ‘Picts and Scots’; and see my own anxieties about the swift consensus that had grown around Broun’s argument: T. O. Clancy, ‘Review of Sally Foster (ed.), *The St Andrews Sarcophagus*’, in *Innes Review*, 52 (2001), 109.

<sup>32</sup> For instance, Duncan, *Scotland: the Making of the Kingdom*, p. 54; Dumville, *Churches of North Britain*, pp. 35–6.

<sup>33</sup> Dumville, *Churches of North Britain*, pp. 35–6; Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba*, pp. 93–6 explores the possibility further on his own terms. See however the references to Cinaed in ‘The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba’, as *primus Scotorum* (M. O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*

he was ruling over a Pictish kingdom that had expanded its domination to include the formerly Gaelic polity of Dál Riata. It is also worth noting at this juncture the most momentous paradigm shift of recent years, Alex Woolf's bold and convincing suggestion that the kingdom or region of Fortriu, to judge by the Irish annals the most important part of the Pictish kingdom(s) from the late seventh to the ninth centuries, was not, as previously envisaged, in Strathearn, but was rather north of the Grampians. This 'turning of the world upside down' has implications that are still being worked out, but it has been conducive to much recent free-thinking.<sup>34</sup>

The most important historical text to bear witness to the Gaelicisation of Pictland remains the text known amongst different scholars as 'The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba' (Dumville's term, followed by the majority of Scottish historians since he proposed it) or as 'The Scottish Chronicle', a term used by Ben Hudson and recently championed anew by Thomas Charles-Edwards.<sup>35</sup> The last word has not yet been said on this crucial but complex text, preserved in a fourteenth-century manuscript now in Paris. Although both Dumville and Woolf have rightly cautioned that this text may contain adaptations and insertions as late as the reign of William the Lion (1165–1214),<sup>36</sup> the text on the whole seems to have been composed during the reign of King Illulb (954–62), and updated up to the reign of Cinaed mac Maile Choluim (971–95).<sup>37</sup> At any rate, its perspective may be held to be largely that of the rulers of tenth-century eastern Scotland, of the kingdom called *Alba*, named as such (taking over in terminology from *Pictavia*) around 900 in the text. This is a name-change known also from

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(Edinburgh and London, 1980), p. 249), and in the 'Synchronisms' as *in cétrig rogab rige Sgóinde do Gaidhelaib*, a slightly ambiguous phrase, perhaps to be translated 'the first king to have taken the kingship of Scone for the Gaels' (alternatively, 'the first king of the Gaels ...'): Broun, *Irish Identity*, p. 173, n. 35.

<sup>34</sup> A. Woolf, 'Dún Nechtain, Fortriu and the geography of the Picts', *Scottish Historical Review*, 85 (2006), 182–201.

<sup>35</sup> For the text, see Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, pp. 249–53; Dauvit Broun has provided a good translation in C. Erskine, A. R. MacDonald and M. Penman (eds.), *Scotland: the Making and Unmaking of the Nation c.1100–1707*, vol. v, *Major Documents* (Dundee, 2007), pp. 8–14. There is also an edition and translation in B. T. Hudson, 'The Scottish Chronicle', *Scottish Historical Review*, 77 (1998), 129–61. For comment, see D. Broun, 'Dunkeld and the origin of Scottish identity', in Broun and Clancy, *Spes Scotorum*, pp. 95–111; D. N. Dumville, *Churches of North Britain*, p. 36, n. 107; *idem*, 'The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba', in Taylor, *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles*, pp. 73–86; Charles-Edwards, 'Picts and Scots', 174–5; and the astute discussion, tinged with despair, of Alex Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba*, pp. 88–91, and elsewhere.

<sup>36</sup> Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba*, p. 90; Dumville, 'Chronicle', p. 86, and 84 for an example of potential late aspects to the text.

<sup>37</sup> Broun, 'Dunkeld', 98.

contemporary Irish annals. As Thomas Charles-Edwards has recently emphasised, whatever the origins of the term *Alba*, this name change is also roughly coincident with a shift of terminology amongst English chroniclers, who begin to use the term *Scottas* 'Scots' for the inhabitants of *Alba* from the 920s; Archie Duncan has noted that poetic evidence from Æthelstan's reign suggests they were using the Latin term *Scotti* as well.<sup>38</sup> All of this fits the avowedly Gaelic perspective of the Chronicle, even if we cannot determine when some of that perspective dates from. It is pretty clear that, at least among the rulers of *Alba* and also the arbiters of information among their neighbours, things had changed. The tenth century may be seen, then, as the century during which we may be certain that a necessary component of the Gaelicisation of the east had occurred: the reorientation of the ruling elite in terms of language and identity. It bears emphasising, as Alex Woolf has repeatedly done, that this in itself is, however, not sufficient to explain the linguistic change of the period.

### **The use of distribution maps and dating horizons**

So far the perspective of this discussion has been largely that generated by the historical sources, such as they are. These sources can tell us about the shifting fortunes of kings belonging to Gaelic and Pictish elites. To a certain extent they shed light on the ideologies of these elites, and as we can see they also include some crucial comment on shifting identities, linguistic and ethnic as well as political. They are, however, not a precise witness to the progress of Gaelic as it spread into eastern Scotland, or the means by which this happened.

Into this breach the study of place-names has stepped, and has been a mainstay of Scottish historical enquiry for some considerable time. The reasons why place-names have been seen in a Scottish context as being capable of providing a substitute for a historical narrative of the interaction among language groups are not hard to find: Scotland is almost uniquely possessed of a linguistic history of great complexity, and that complexity is displayed overtly in the stratigraphy of our place-names. In several recent introductory articles Simon Taylor has helpfully clarified that linguistic complexity as it relates to place-names, dividing Scotland into zones of linguistic content: mapped, this allows us to see the different linguistic layers one might expect in any given region, though the precise

<sup>38</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Picts and Scots', 170; A. A. M. Duncan, *The Kingship of the Scots 842–1292: Succession and Independence* (Edinburgh, 2002), pp. 3–4; see also Dumville, 'Chronicle', p. 85.



nature of the layers and interactions among the languages in certain regions remain to be determined.<sup>39</sup> Bill Nicolaisen's pioneering distribution maps seemed to promise the ability to see the spread of Gaelic through the use of particular common generic elements, that is, the key referent noun in a place-name. In particular, in his work on the generic element *sliabh*, 'moor, hill', following John MacQueen, he seemed to have identified, solely through the use of toponymy, an otherwise unknown early Gaelic settlement in south-west Scotland: this argument staked the claim, more than any other, for the study of place-names as able to contribute independently of textual histories or archaeology, to the history of Scotland.<sup>40</sup>

Nicolaisen's work has been frequently republished and remains the mainstay for the study of Scottish place-names. And yet the methodological flaws of these distribution maps, acknowledged by Nicolaisen in a number of places, as artefacts in themselves, and in the way they have been employed as tools in the construction of historical narratives, have not really hit home as yet.<sup>41</sup> Without doubt we can concur that the distribution maps of *achadh*, 'field, farm', and *baile*, 'farm(toun)', are crucial in mapping, through the use of Gaelic place-names, those parts of Scotland where Gaelic was at some stage spoken sufficiently to leave behind it a toponymic footprint. But there are problems with using these distributions to construct a narrative of linguistic change. To give an illustration of the problems, we may take each of Nicolaisen's key Gaelic elements in turn.

### *Sliabh*

As noted already, John MacQueen proposed in 1954 that the highly restricted, but very productive use of *sliabh* as a place-name generic in the Rhinns of Galloway (in names like Slewfad, Slewhable) suggested a Gaelic settlement there of very early date, contemporary with the migration of Gaels to Dál Riata.<sup>42</sup> The argument was developed by Nicolaisen,

<sup>39</sup> S. Taylor, 'Place-names', in M. Lynch (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Scottish History* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 479–84; *idem*, 'Reading the map: understanding Scottish place-names', *History Scotland*, vol. 2, no. 1 (Jan./Feb. 2002), 13.

<sup>40</sup> Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, pp. 51–60, esp. 59–60.

<sup>41</sup> For Nicolaisen's notes of caution, see, e.g. *ibid.*, p. 45; see especially his 'Place-name maps: how reliable are they?', *Namn och Bygd*, 79 (1991), 43–50.

<sup>42</sup> He also proposed the element *carraig* 'rock' as being also early, something he has recently restated (*Place-Names in the Rhinns of Galloway and Luce Valley* (Stranraer, 2002), pp. 33–7; *Place-Names of the Wigtownshire Moors and Machars* (Stranraer, 2008), pp. 68–73). The proposal regarding *carraig* has yet to be further discussed by other scholars, but many of the names cited

and became a point in favour of seeing the difference between the representation of Gaelic generics on distribution maps as being one of time. Yet in a recent article Simon Taylor has comprehensively dismantled this argument, both on methodological grounds (for instance the data collection underlying the distribution map of *sliabh* used the Ordnance Survey 6-inch map for the Rhinns, but the 1-inch for the rest of Scotland), and on the grounds that *sliabh* is, in fact, more widely distributed, once the record is combed more widely (see Fig. 2). Most cogently, however, he disputed a key plank in the argument: that the meaning of the term in the Rhinns was closer to Irish than to later Scottish Gaelic usage.<sup>43</sup> Despite some rear-guard action by both Nicolaisen and MacQueen, it is hard to see how the argument can now be sustained, particularly in the absence of any other reason to expect a Gaelic colony in the Rhinns this early.<sup>44</sup> Of course, it will be impossible to completely dismiss Gaelic settlement in the Rhinns at any point in history, since they are so close to Ireland. Gaelic settlement in the south-west seems logical, and that logic may, after all, turn out to be correct. But the *sliabh* names simply do not demonstrate this. It is worth remembering that before the 1950s no one much thought that there had been Gaelic settlement in the south-west at an early period: it would be good to return to that situation.

### *Cill*

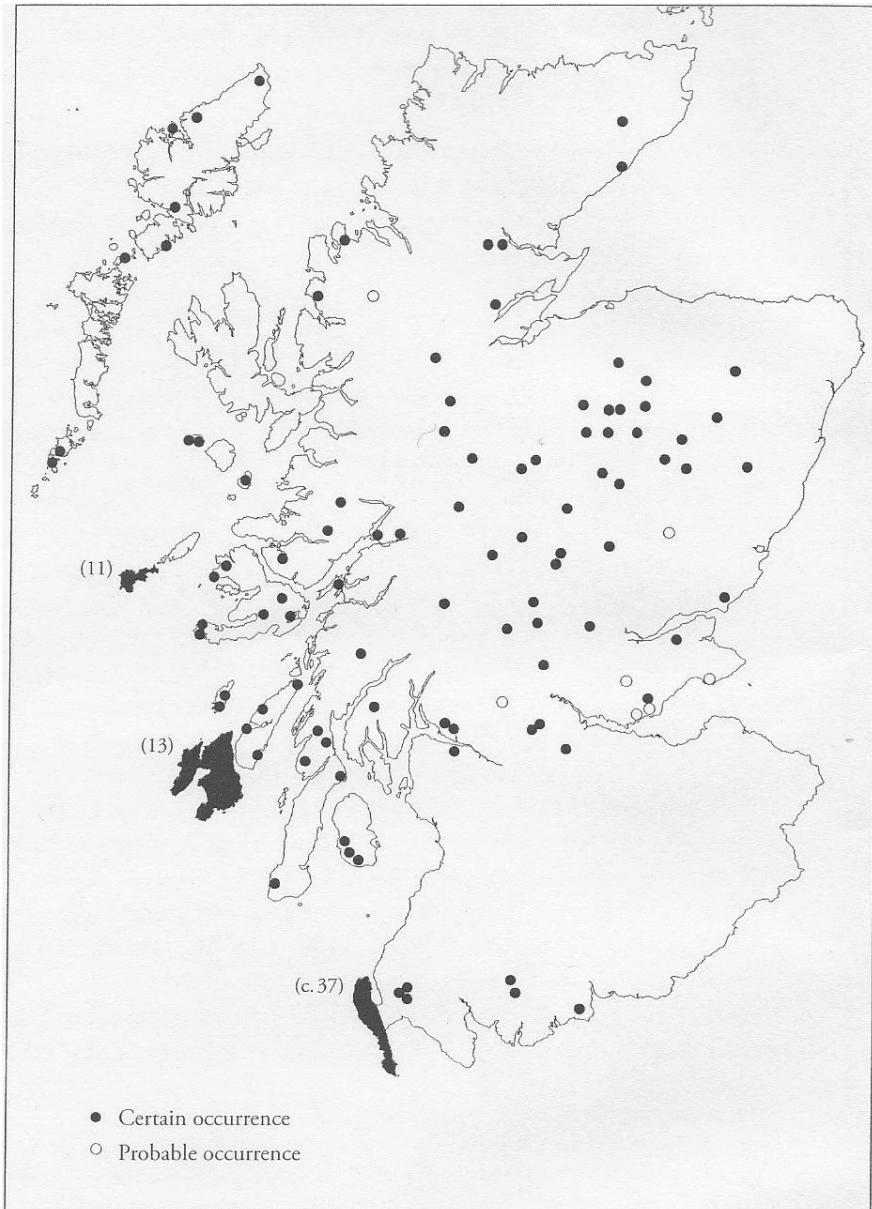
For the Gaelic place-name element *cill*, ‘a church’ (originally *cell*, from Latin *cella*), it was proposed that we were seeing, by and large, the infiltration of Gaelic during a missionary phase, stretching eastwards, but only fitfully. Nicolaisen put more precision on this, noting that such names

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are manifestly late, containing syntax (noun plus article plus noun formations), personal or kindred names, and perhaps items of vocabulary which belong in some cases to the later middle ages.

<sup>43</sup>Simon Taylor, ‘*Sliabh* in Scottish place-names: its meaning and chronology’, *Journal of Scottish Name Studies*, 1 (2007), 99–13. See also now Paul Tempan, ‘*Sliabh* in Irish place-names: its meaning, distribution, chronology, and some implications for Scotland and the Isle of Man’, *Scottish Place-Name News*, 27 (Autumn, 2009), 3–8; *idem*, ‘*Sliabh* in Irish place-names’ *Nomina*, 32 (2009), 19–41.

<sup>44</sup>W. F. H. Nicolaisen, ‘Gaelic *Sliabh* revisited’, in S. Arbuthnott and K. Hollo (eds.), *Fil súil nglais, A Grey Eye Looks Back: a Festschrift in honour of Colm Ó Baoill* (Ceann Drochaid, 2007), pp. 175–86; J. MacQueen, *Place-Names of the Moors and Machars*, p. 69. The most cogent rebuttal regards Taylor’s use of some names in which *sliabh* is the specific element, rather than the generic. This, to be fair, makes his own new map not a direct comparison with Nicolaisen’s, but omitting these names does not substantially change the force of his argument.



**Figure 2.** Distribution map of Gaelic element *sliabh* 'hill or moor, upland' in Scottish place-names. (From S. Taylor, 'Sliabh in Scottish place-names: its meaning and chronology', *Journal of Scottish Name Studies*, 1 (2007), 102. Reproduced by permission of the author.)

demanded more than just individuals; they demanded Gaelic-speaking communities to establish them.<sup>45</sup> Again, more detailed analysis of sources by Simon Taylor changed the overall pattern of distribution significantly, revealing in particular three clusters of *cill* place-names in eastern Scotland (see Fig. 3).<sup>46</sup> In Nicolaisen's view the distribution of *cill* in eastern Scotland suggested that the term must have died out of use before the Gaelic take-over of Pictland, or else it would be more widespread; therefore it has a rough *terminus ante quem* of *c.*800.<sup>47</sup> This reasoned date of *c.*800 was subsequently transferred from eastern Scotland onto the presence of *cill* in other regions, to some extent by Nicolaisen, but more often and more bluntly by other writers; it influenced Taylor's analysis of *cill* names in 1996. Neither the date for the east, nor its imposition elsewhere, can be sustained. We know of names in *cill* being coined in the west much later: as Aidan Macdonald pointed out in 1979, Killantringan in Ayrshire was shown by Watson to be later medieval; the date of the death of its referent, King Olaf of Norway, makes Cill Amhlaigh in Lewis and Uist no earlier than 1030, and more likely some considerable time after. The cult of St Catherine looks to be a late medieval phenomenon in Scotland, and so churches named *Cill Chaitriona* (on Colonsay and Loch Fyne) are almost certainly fifteenth-century in coinage.<sup>48</sup> The point is that in those areas that remained Gaelic-speaking into the later Middle Ages it appears to have been possible to use *cill* for naming new churches all through that period. If this is so, we cannot tell when a given name has been created—it could be fairly recent. That said, I would still support the view that the majority of *cill* names were generated before 1100, in the west as in the east.

There is another way to look at the problem, however. Why is *cill* not as widespread in eastern Scotland as it is in Argyll or the south-west? Is it because neither Christianity nor Gaelic had reached that far to the east at the time they were coined (the received wisdom)? Or is it rather because there were other available options for naming churches in the east; indeed,

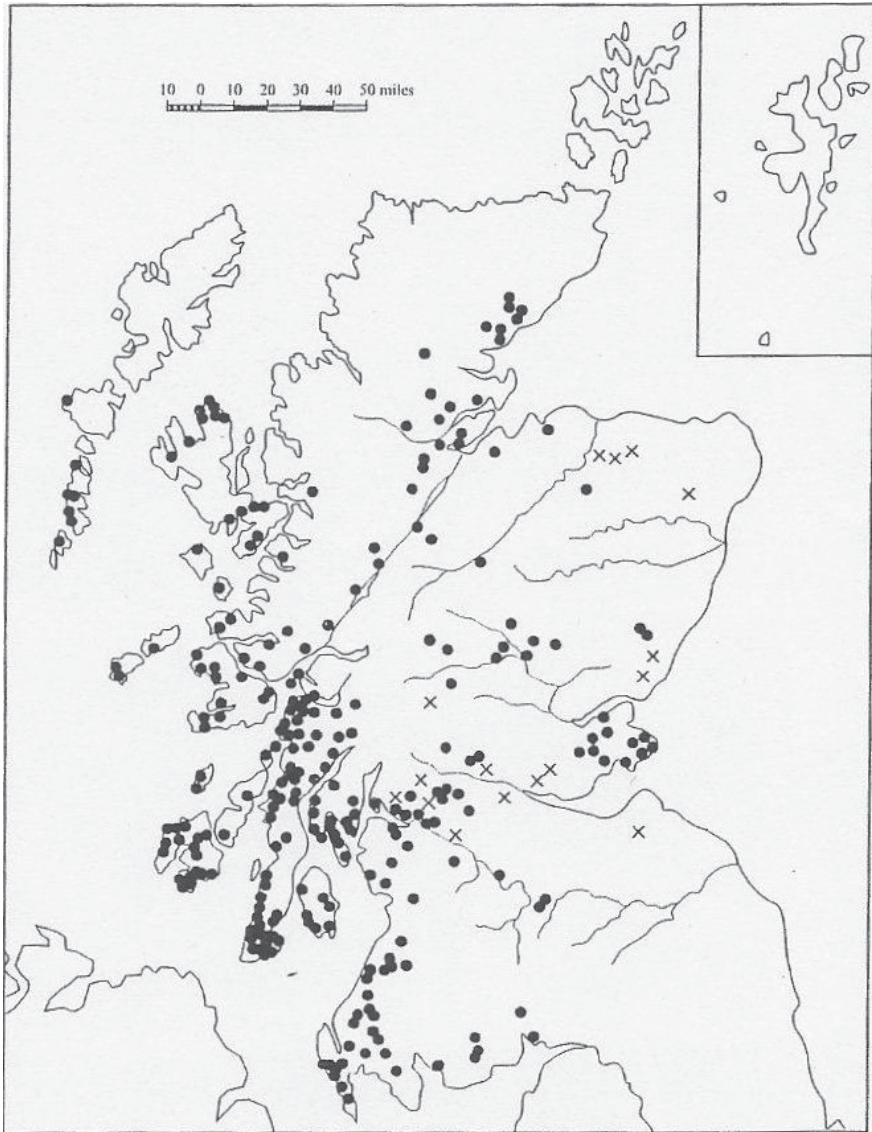
<sup>45</sup> Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, pp. 165–7, 183–6; see also A. Macdonald, 'Gaelic *Cill* (*Kil*(1)-) in Scottish place-names', *Bulletin of the Ulster Place-Name Society*, Series 2, 2 (1979), 9–19.

<sup>46</sup> S. Taylor, 'Place-names and the early church in Eastern Scotland', in Crawford, *Scotland in Dark-Age Britain*, pp. 93–110.

<sup>47</sup> Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, pp. 167, 183.

<sup>48</sup> See Macdonald, 'Gaelic *Cill*', 16. For further explorations of the problems of the element, see Rachel Butter, 'Cill- names and saints in Argyll: a way towards understanding the early church in Dál Riata?', Ph.D. thesis, University of Glasgow, 2007, p. 207.





**Figure 3.** Distribution map of Gaelic elements *cill* 'church' and *both* 'hut, church' (X) in Scottish place-names. (From S. Taylor, 'Place-Names and the Early Church in Eastern Scotland', in B. E. Crawford (ed.), *Scotland in Dark-Age Britain* (St John's House, St Andrews, 1996), p. 96. Reproduced by permission of the author and editor.)

because many other churches had already been named, using other ecclesiastical place-name generics? Here we must consider the presence in the east, though not in the Gaelic west or in the south-west, of a range of ecclesiastical place-name generics. Some of these have been explored in detail by Simon Taylor. They include the Gaelic element *both*, usually 'hut', but in many instances in the east clearly 'church', perhaps a calque on a Pictish term; and the word *lann*, 'enclosed ground > church site'. Both terms are distinguished by their broadly 'Pictish' distribution, *lann* more so than *both*.<sup>49</sup> A further term *\*eclés* is more complex, but in its usage north of the Forth it is comparable to these others.<sup>50</sup> In addition, in a forthcoming article I explore a further ecclesiastical generic, *\*locin*, '(holy) place > church', an element which contributes the names of fourteen parishes in eastern Scotland (examples include Logierait, Logie-Murdo).<sup>51</sup> Superimposing the distribution of these other ecclesiastical generics over the map of *cill* allows one to see a fairly crowded landscape in eastern Scotland of churches with a variety of name types. Factors other than purely linguistic may be at work here, manifestly. Two possibilities emerge from this consideration: the employment of *cill* for naming churches might be generated in eastern Scotland from particular ecclesiastical centres, employing distinct naming strategies (this has been suggested by Taylor as a cause of his notable *cill* clusters in Easter Ross, Atholl, and Fife). It may well be that those centres which gave rise to *cill* were dominated by Gaelic-speaking churchmen. A second possibility, however, is that it might instead have something to do with the type of church the term describes (*cill*, *both*, *lann* and *\*eclés* may not be synonymous, in other words).<sup>52</sup>

### *Achadh* and *baile*

As noted above, we can probably concur at the least that the distribution maps of *achadh* and *baile* (see Figs. 4 and 5) give a vivid picture of those places where Gaelic was spoken sufficiently to create and sustain place-names at some point during the Middle Ages. After this there are

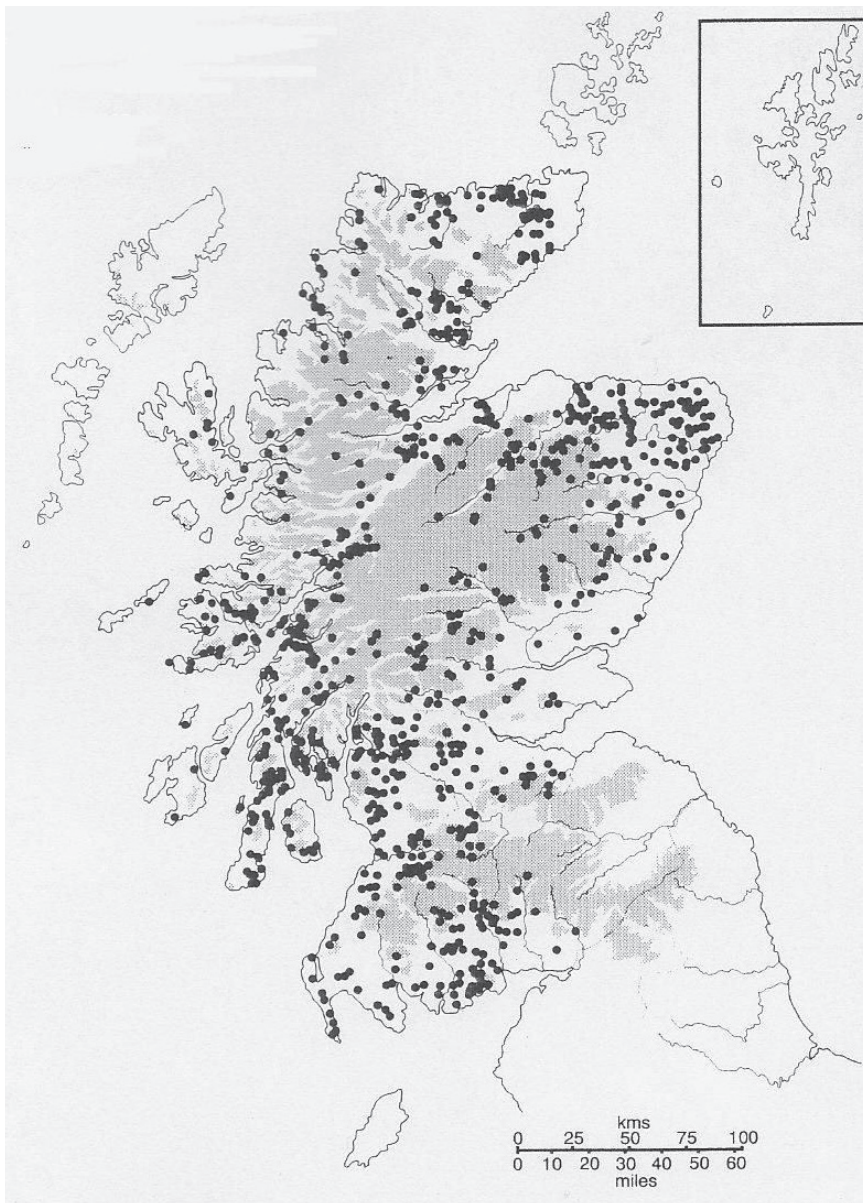
<sup>49</sup>Taylor, 'Place-names and the early church in Eastern Scotland', pp. 95–8, map at p. 96; *idem*, 'Place-names and the early church in Scotland', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, 28 (1998), 1–22, map at 22.

<sup>50</sup>See *ibid.*, pp. 3–7.

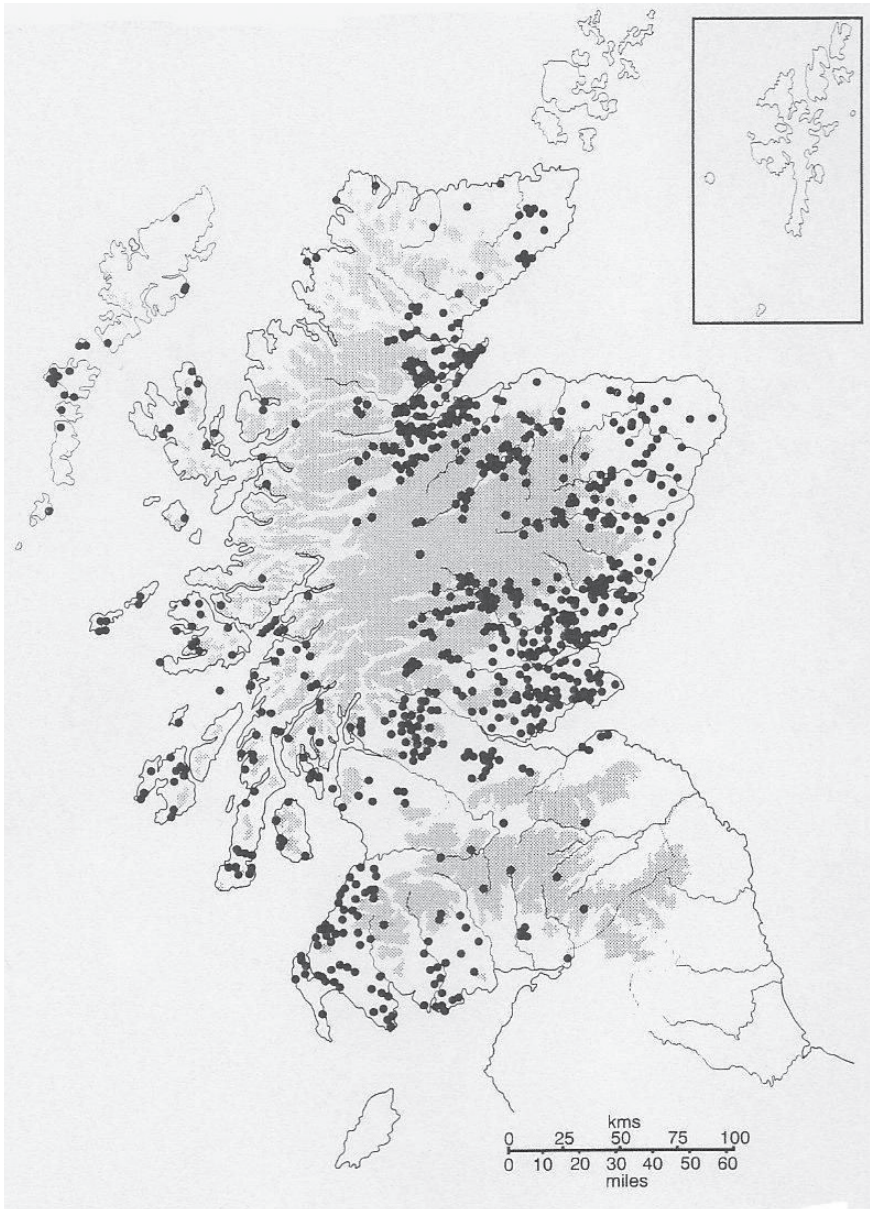
<sup>51</sup>T. O. Clancy, 'Logie: an ecclesiastical place-name element in eastern Scotland', *Journal of Scottish Name Studies* (forthcoming).

<sup>52</sup>I will explore some of these issues in the published version of my 2004 *Groam House Lecture* (forthcoming).





**Figure 4.** Distribution map of Gaelic element *achadh*, 'field, settlement, fermtoun', by W. F. H. Nicolaisen. (From P. G. B. McNeill and H. L. MacQueen (eds.), *Atlas of Scottish History to 1707* (Edinburgh, Scottish Medievalists and Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh, 1996), p. 60. Reproduced by permission of the editors.)



**Figure 5.** Distribution map of Gaelic element *baile*, 'settlement, fermtoun', by W. F. H. Nicolaisen. (From P. G. B. McNeill and H. L. MacQueen (eds.), *Atlas of Scottish History to 1707* (Edinburgh, Scottish Medievalists and Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh, 1996), p. 60. Reproduced by permission of the editors.)

considerable problems with the received view of these, only a few of which can be explored here. The distribution patterns need some revisiting as has been shown in the case of Fife by Simon Taylor (there are no certain *achadh* names in Fife), and as is also the case in Cunninghame in northern Ayrshire, where all the supposed *baile* names that have been mapped have proved to be misleading. The new gaps that appear create evident problems of interpreting what the distribution means, problems that the previous understanding of the terms did not cover. We need to add to these problems issues with dating. For instance, *achadh* as an active element in creating new names can be shown to be post-Norse in Caithness (a series of *achadh* place-names incorporate existing Norse place-names such as Achvarasdal and Achsteenclate<sup>53</sup>) and so probably here belongs, at the earliest, to the thirteenth century. There are a number of *baile* names in the south-west, in the Western Isles, and other places which may be shown to be later medieval, or modern. Ian Fraser's sensitive discussion of the *baile* names on the Isle of Arran is sobering: in his view they 'all date from the period post 1600'. The main reasons behind this late development are the conservatism of land-holding, and a late flourish of the division of farms.<sup>54</sup> Peter McNiven discusses in his forthcoming doctoral dissertation one *baile* name in Kilmadock parish in Menteith that can be securely dated to the 1480s.<sup>55</sup> Equally important, scholarship has gradually realised that the coining of most *baile* names can scarcely be much older than 1100, though at least one, Balchrystie, dates to 1058 × 1093.<sup>56</sup> In Ireland, such names are thought to belong to the twelfth century and later; in Fife, the data suggest that most of those that can be dated belong to the later twelfth and early thirteenth centuries.<sup>57</sup> What I would suggest is that we are dealing here with social contingency, not chronological or linguistic factors as such. The creation of *baile* and *achadh* names represents a change in the landholding patterns of the locale they are in, sufficient to create new farm names. That change was put into effect in a Gaelic-speaking environment, but it does not need to have been consequent on

<sup>53</sup> Doreen Waugh, 'Settlement names in Caithness with particular reference to Reay Parish', in B. E. Crawford (ed.), *Scandinavian Settlement in Northern Britain* (London, 1995), pp. 64–79, at 77–8.

<sup>54</sup> Fraser, *Place-Names of Arran*, p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> P. McNiven, 'Gaelic settlement-names of Menteith' (University of Glasgow).

<sup>56</sup> Simon Taylor with Gilbert Márkus, *The Place-Names of Fife*, vol. 2: *Central Fife between the Rivers Leven and Eden* (Donington, 2008), pp. 477–8.

<sup>57</sup> Liam Price, 'A note on the use of the word *baile* in place-names' *Celtica*, 6 (1963), 119–126; D. Flanagan and L. Flanagan, *Irish Place Names* (Dublin, 1994), pp. 20–6. S. Taylor with G. Márkus, *The Place-Names of Fife*, vol. 5 (Donington, 2011: forthcoming).



the *introduction* of Gaelic. The different patterns of *baile* v. *achadh* may indeed have some chronological dimension, but this may just as easily be to do with the type of land, or the type of land-holding, involved.

Recent research on the Gaelic place-name element *gart*, ‘enclosed field’, gives a flavour of this change in perspective, from the chronological to the social and contextual. Peter McNiven has advanced the view that *gart*, which has a very constrained distribution pattern within central Scotland, is a record not of the Gaelicisation of that region, but rather of the socio-economic changes implied by the clearing of woods to make new fields. He associates the *gart* names of Clackmannanshire particularly with the activities of forestry and assarting within Clackmannanshire.<sup>58</sup> He is not proposing this as a global solution, but his perspective points the way forward to a way of approaching distribution maps partly as a record of social developments, rather than simply linguistic ones.

In fact, if one were to seek for a distribution map to tell a narrative of Gaelic expansion into eastern Scotland, the one which does this most eloquently is the map of the place-name generic *pett*, ‘a portion of an estate’ (in names like Pitlochry, Pittenweem), which misleadingly continues to be used by scholars as a map displaying the extent of Pictish.<sup>59</sup> This is a word borrowed from Pictish into Gaelic to describe, as it would seem, a specific type of landholding unit. The context of that borrowing is almost certainly the centuries during which Gaelic superseded Pictish in the east, and this map bears testimony to one of the vectors by which it did so: the takeover of the major productive properties in the east by Gaelic-speakers. For almost all the *pit-* names on this map were coined by Gaels: they have Gaelic specifics, and these are frequently personal names or family names. It may be important also that the use of this element has been closely associated with major ecclesiastical establishments.<sup>60</sup>

The purpose of my discussing these distribution maps has not been to denigrate the advances they undoubtedly made, but rather to indicate that we must be alive to the different ways in which the data might be interpreted, and that, except at a very general level, we are hard pressed to use them to create models of Gaelicisation over time.

<sup>58</sup> P. McNiven, ‘The *Gart-* names of Clackmannanshire’, *Journal of Scottish Name Studies*, 1 (2007), 61–76.

<sup>59</sup> See, e.g. *Atlas of Scottish History*, p. 51 where it is listed under ‘British and Pictish Place-Names’.

<sup>60</sup> For full discussion, see Taylor, *Place-Names of Fife*, vol. 5, forthcoming; *idem*, ‘Pictish place-names revisited’, in Driscoll, Geddes and Hall, *Pictish Progress*, pp. 67–118, at 77–80.

Before leaving this aspect of my lecture, I should simply note that many of our problems are caused by the absence of a full and detailed historical survey of Scottish place-names. Although such a survey is a long way off, advances have been made on this front, most notably, recently, by Simon Taylor in the five-volume *The Place-Names of Fife*, produced with Gilbert Márkus, the first three volumes of which have already appeared.<sup>61</sup>

### Gaelic and Southern Scotland

It is clear that the extension of Gaelic speech into south-eastern Scotland, probably never in any magnitude, happened on the heels of conquest of the region by the kings of Alba, the staging-posts for which are usually seen as the seizure of Edinburgh in the 960s and the battle of Carham in 1018.<sup>62</sup> For a long time it was thought that the most reasonable explanation for the expansion of the Gaelic language into other parts of the south, those parts that had once formed the kingdom of Strathclyde, likewise owed something to the takeover by kings of Alba of the kingdom of Strathclyde, something held to have happened from the early tenth century. This has been shown to be wrong on several counts; the basic narrative derives from a later medieval source seeking to mirror later power relationships in the distant past.<sup>63</sup> The only fundamental piece of contemporary evidence on which modern scholars depended for the whole episode, a brief entry in the Chronicle of the Kings of Alba, was shown by Ben Hudson in a still neglected article in 1988 to have been a misreading.<sup>64</sup> Strathclyde clearly did come under the sway of the kings of Alba sometime in the eleventh century, but it seems likely that Gaelic had already made inroads in parts of the kingdom through other means. There may well, nonetheless, have been some influence on the linguistic balance of this region accruing from the takeover.

As already noted, the dismantling of the argument for an early colony of Gaelic-speakers in the Rhinns of Galloway, as well as the need for caution in exporting a false horizon of before *c.*800 for *cill* place names, means

<sup>61</sup> This was work conducted as the major tranche of an AHRC-funded project for which I was the Principal Investigator, which will attempt also to use the evidence made available by the Fife volumes to try to understand better the situation of the rest of Scotland. We are grateful to the AHRC for its support for this project.

<sup>62</sup> For the problems associated with Carham, see Duncan, *Kingship*, pp. 28–31.

<sup>63</sup> D. Broun, 'The Welsh identity of the kingdom of Strathclyde, c.900–c.1200', *Innes Review*, 55 (2004), 111–80, at 125–35.

<sup>64</sup> B. T. Hudson, 'Elech and the kings of Strathclyde', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 15 (1988), 145–9.

that we are no longer certain of how Gaelic came to south-western Scotland. In any case, the apparent history of the area, as a British zone subject to Northumbrian English conquest and settlement during the late seventh and eighth centuries, has left little room for Gaelic development, even were its roots to be early. I have recently argued, carrying forward work by Andrew Jennings and others, that Gaelic receives its first substantial foot in the south-west with the Gall-Ghaidheil.<sup>65</sup> These are the people or polity who gave their name ultimately to Galloway. Initially, c.900, we can see them as located in the Firth of Clyde area. The expansion from there, probably over the course of the tenth and more probably the eleventh centuries, to take over the south-west, so that ‘*Galwedía*’ and variants are used of places as diverse as Renfrewshire and Annandale in the twelfth century,<sup>66</sup> takes place in unknown circumstances, but by the time we begin to have access to decent documentation, in the later twelfth century, Gaelic is demonstrably the major underlying language in the landscape of the south-west. Galloway becomes fixed as a name for what is now Wigtownshire and Kirkcudbrightshire only really around 1200, owing to the royal conquest and settlement of Kyle, Cunninghame and Renfrewshire, the solidifying of the core assets of the Lords of Galloway, and the hiving off of the earldom of Carrick. The significance of all this is that we must readdress the sequencing of languages in the south-west, allowing now for Gaelic as a successor language to British and English, and thus probably only on the scene from c.900.

In this context the Irish Sea dimension is crucial, as scholars such as Seán Duffy, Ben Hudson and Fiona Edmonds have shown that Galloway is part of that world, with the Rhinns at least being a segment of a multi-site kingship during the eleventh century.<sup>67</sup> One ruler of this world, Echmarcach mac Ragnaill, has been seen as emblematic in several respects: he ruled only briefly over Dublin, Man, the Isles and the Rhinns, but his

<sup>65</sup>T. O. Clancy, ‘The Gall-Ghaidheil and Galloway’, *Journal of Scottish Name Studies*, 2 (2008), 19–50. See also A. Jennings, ‘Galloway, origins of’, in Lynch, *Oxford Companion*, pp. 257–8.

<sup>66</sup>On which see G. W. S. Barrow, *Regesta Regum Scotorum, vol. I: The Acts of Malcolm IV, King of Scots 1153–1165* (Edinburgh, 1960), p. 38.

<sup>67</sup>S. Duffy, ‘Irishmen and Islesmen in the kingdoms of Dublin and Man, 1052–1171’, *Ériu*, 43 (1992), 93–133; B. T. Hudson, ‘The changing economy of the Irish Sea province, AD 900–1300’, in B. Smith (ed.), *Britain and Ireland 900–1300: Insular Responses to Medieval European Change* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 39–66; and also his *Irish Sea Studies* (Dublin, 2006); F. Edmonds, ‘Hiberno-Saxon and Hiberno-Scandinavian Contact in the West of the Northumbrian Kingdom: A Focus on the Church’, D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 2005; *eadem*, ‘Saints’ Cults and Gaelic-Scandinavian influence around the Cumberland coast and north of the Solway Firth’, in T. Bolton (ed.), *Celtic/Scandinavian Interaction by the Irish Sea* (Leiden, forthcoming).



career saw his territory expand and contract, and he was ruler over different combinations of these regions at different times. His own name was a Gaelic one, his father's Norse, and so he bears testimony to the rise of Gaelic by the early eleventh century as a status language within the Scandinavian dominated Irish Sea world.<sup>68</sup>

### Norse and the Hebrides; the 'Irish Sea World'

It is of course a fact that Gaelic is now most widely spoken as a community language throughout the Hebrides; and in the later Middle Ages the western seaboard and the Isles became most closely associated with Gaelic. I suspect that it is partly because of this that scholars have had difficulty dissociating the zones of later medieval Gaelic speech from those areas likely to have been Gaelic-speaking in the early Middle Ages. There is no doubt that Argyll, including the islands of the southern Hebrides (that is from Ardnamurchan south), was Gaelic in speech from the seventh century at the latest; but equally there is good reason to exclude what became northern Argyll, Sutherland and Caithness, and the Western Isles, from any *assumption* of Gaelic having been spoken there in the period before the arrival of Scandinavians, the Vikings, in the period around 800. Increasingly, spearheaded lately by the joint work of Andrew Jennings and Arne Kruse, scholars have been emphasising the lack of any good evidence for Gaelic having been the language of the Outer Hebrides during this earlier period.<sup>69</sup> The same holds good for large parts of the northern mainland, especially Sutherland and Caithness, conquered by Scandinavians before there is any reason to believe Gaelic can have made inroads on them. We should rather presume that these areas were Pictish-speaking for the most part: certainly the name-evidence from Ptolemy suggests these areas were Celtic, and probably Brittonic, in speech in the second century AD, and there are good suggestions of cultural affinities

<sup>68</sup> Echmarcach has been much commented upon, but see my summary in 'Gall-Ghàidheil and Galloway', 28–9, and references there cited.

<sup>69</sup> A. Jennings and A. Kruse, 'An Ethnic Enigma—Norse, Pict and Gael in the Western Isles', in A. Mortensen and S. V. Arge (eds.), *Viking and Norse in the North Atlantic: selected papers from the Proceedings of the Fourteenth Viking Congress, Tórshavn, 19–30 July 2001* (Tórshavn, 2005), pp. 284–95; A. Kruse, 'Explorers, raiders and settlers. The Norse impact on Hebridean place-names', in P. Gammeltoft, C. Hough and D. Waugh (eds.), *Cultural Contacts in the North Atlantic Region: the Evidence of Names* (Lerwick, 2005), pp. 141–56; Jennings and Kruse, 'One coast—three peoples: names and ethnicity in the Scottish West during the early Viking period', in A. Woolf (ed.), *Scandinavian Scotland—Twenty Years After* (St Andrews, 2009), pp. 75–102.

thereafter. We can be less sure of Lewis and Harris, having really no evidence on which to go. But Gaelic was probably not what they were speaking, at any time before (and probably for some considerable time after) the settlement of Scandinavians there. I should note here that Richard Cox has pointed to some evidence for Gaelic-Norse contact in the form of Gaelic loan-words into Norse and Norse names loaned into Gaelic at an early stage, as well as suggesting taxonomies that would allow certain Gaelic names to be classified as early.<sup>70</sup> Part of the problem with the first of these proposals is that the location of the loaning activity cannot be securely determined, only their application to Lewis nomenclature. The ‘early Gaelic names’ likewise depend on a presumption of early syntax which is far from certain. Nonetheless, a number of his examples are worth bearing in mind as a caution that things may be more complex than they currently seem and, as Cox rightly points out, if it cannot be proven that Gaelic was spoken in the Western Isles before the Scandinavian settlements, neither can it be definitively proven that it was not. Likewise, the cult of saints and the seeming continuity of church-sites with Gaelic names from the earlier through to the later Middle Ages hold out one venue in which Gaelic speech might have been introduced and sustained prior to and during Scandinavian dominance of the region.<sup>71</sup>

No matter what language was spoken originally in the Western Isles, Scandinavians may still have created a ‘tabula rasa’ linguistic effect: the lack of clear evidence of linguistic continuity remains striking, and even Cox admits ‘there is general agreement that no Gaelic names can be shown to be pre-Norse creations’.<sup>72</sup> It should be noted that Alan Macniven in his 2006 doctoral thesis has argued that Islay, too, suffered almost total linguistic replacement of Gaelic by Norse, before the gradual reintroduction of Gaelic.<sup>73</sup> Whether Gaelic is a new introduction, or whether it was starting afresh, the proposal then is that Norse represents a clear linguistic line after which the Gaelic of the Hebrides predominantly dates.

<sup>70</sup>R. Cox, ‘Notes on the Norse impact on Hebridean place-names’, *Journal of Scottish Name Studies*, 1 (2007), 139–44; *idem*, *The Gaelic Place-Names of Carloway, Isle of Lewis: their Structure and Significance* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 111–18.

<sup>71</sup>Cf. Cox, *Gaelic Place-Names*, p. 115 for some examples. See also the comments of Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, pp. 185–6, though this is also a good example where the reasoned date of ‘before 800’ devised for eastern Scotland is invoked inappropriately elsewhere.

<sup>72</sup>Cox, ‘Notes on the Norse impact’, 142. See also Barbara Crawford’s earlier comments, *Scandinavian Scotland*, p. 97.

<sup>73</sup>A. Macniven, ‘The Norse in Islay. A settlement historical case-study for medieval Scandinavian activity in western maritime Scotland’, Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2006.

The effect of this realignment is dramatic, and has I think still not been sufficiently absorbed. If it was either not already there, or had been extinguished, where, then, did the Gaelic later spoken in these areas come from? This, it seems to me, is not a question that has been posed as yet. We cannot resort, as one perhaps can in other areas such as the Argyll mainland, or possibly further south in the Isle of Man, to the notion that Gaelic 're-emerged' autochthonously after Norwegian rule came to an end.

A further and very important development that space does not allow me to explore properly here was sparked by Barbara Crawford's observation that topographical names employing elements like *dalr*, 'dale, strath', which Nicolaisen took to be evidence only of a very fleeting and tenuous connection between Scandinavians and certain parts of Scotland, were elsewhere (as in Iceland and Orkney) given to early and important farms or landholding units. This observation has been developed by her in respect of the north and north-east of Scotland, and recently by Andrew Jennings in an important article on Norse names in Kintyre.<sup>74</sup> This work leads to the possibility that we may be seeing Norse topographical nomenclature at work identifying primary settlements within areas where Gaelic remained the predominant language of those who worked the land: a situation which then may have applied to much of Argyll and the north-west seaboard, for instance, if we may go by the distribution of *dalr* names.<sup>75</sup> There is much further work to do in this area: a Glasgow doctoral student, Anne Bankier, is at present working on trying to wed these insights to archaeological evidence on the western Scottish mainland.<sup>76</sup>

An important feature of our changed understanding of the situation of the Hebrides during the Viking ages is a very profound augmentation

<sup>74</sup>B. Crawford, 'Introduction', in Crawford, *Scandinavian Settlement*, pp. 12–13; see also in general her *Earl and Mormaer. Norse-Pictish Relations in Northern Scotland* (Rosemarkie, 1995); *eadem*, 'Earldom strategies in north Scotland and the significance of place-names', in G. Williams and P. Bibire (eds.), *Sagas, Saints and Settlements* (Leiden, 2004), pp. 105–24; B. E. Crawford and S. Taylor, 'The southern frontier of Norse settlement in north Scotland', *Northern Scotland*, 23 (2003), 1–76; A. Jennings, 'The Norse place-names of Kintyre', in J. Adams and K. Holman (eds.), *Scandinavia and Europe 800–1350. Contact, Conflict and Coexistence* (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 109–19. See also A. Kruse, 'Norse topographical settlement names on the western littoral of Scotland', in Adams and Holman, *Scandinavia and Europe*, pp. 109–19. For a an important cautionary view, see James Graham-Campbell, 'Some reflections on the distribution and significance of Norse place-names in northern Scotland', in P. Gammeltoft and B. Jørgensen (eds.), *Names through the Looking Glass. Festschrift in honour of Gillian Fellows-Jensen* (Copenhagen, 2006), pp. 94–118.

<sup>75</sup>See Nicolaisen, *Scottish Place-Names*, p. 123 for distribution map.

<sup>76</sup>A. Bankier, 'Norse settlement in Western Argyll and Ardnamurchan, Scotland' (University of Glasgow).

and revision of our understanding of the interaction of the Irish Sea zone. Scholarship in this area was probably heralded by the work of A. P. Smyth in the late 1970s and 1980s, but it has been the considerable volume of work carried out from 1992 to the present by scholars such as Seán Duffy, Colmán Etchingham and Ben Hudson, and more recently Alex Woolf, Clare Downham and Fiona Edmonds, that has really transformed our perspectives.<sup>77</sup> While this has, as we have seen, some profound implications for our analysis of the evolution of south-west Scotland, it also has an impact on how we see the Isles evolving. The Isles are ostensibly ruled by kings based in Dublin for large parts of the tenth and eleventh centuries. In the eleventh and even the twelfth century Irish kings, even ones based in Munster, attempted to exert their domination over Dublin and the Isle of Man, and also over the Hebrides.<sup>78</sup> The need to have a weather-eye on all sides of the Irish Sea in order to achieve a significant integration of knowledge has been amply demonstrated by the work of Duffy and Etchingham, and most recently Downham; and the well-known case of Echmarcach mac Ragnair (†1064), mentioned above, ruler at various points in the Rhinns of Galloway, the Isles, Dublin and Man, illustrates it well. The porousness of this zone politically has far-reaching implications for our understanding of its development in linguistic and in ethnic terms.

### The twelfth-century ‘native v. newcomer’ model

Echmarcach mac Ragnair’s ultimate successors in the south-west were the kings and Lords of Galloway, starting in mid-twelfth century with Fergus, and continuing with his sons and grandsons.<sup>79</sup> This family of Gaelic-speaking nobility, of unknown origins but with widespread and multi-cultural marital links over several generations subsequently, illustrates

<sup>77</sup> A. P. Smyth, *Scandinavian York and Dublin: the History and Archaeology of Two Related Viking Kingdoms* (Dublin, c.1975–9); *idem*, *Warlords and Holy Men*, ch. 5; Duffy, ‘Irishmen and islesmen’; C. Etchingham, ‘North Wales, Ireland and the Isles: the insular Viking zone’, *Peritia*, 15 (2001), 145–87; Hudson, *Irish Sea Studies*; A. Woolf, ‘Amlaíb Cuarán and the Gael, 941–81’, in S. Duffy (ed.), *Medieval Dublin III: Proceedings of the Friends of Medieval Dublin Symposium 2001* (Dublin, 2002), pp. 34–43; *idem*, *From Pictland to Alba*; C. Downham, *Viking Kings of Britain and Ireland. The Dynasty of Ívarr to A.D. 1014* (Edinburgh, 2007); Edmonds, ‘Hiberno-Saxon and Hiberno-Scandinavian contact’; *eadem*, ‘History and names’, in J. Graham-Campbell and R. Philpott (eds.), *The Huxley Viking Hoard. Scandinavian Settlement in the North West* (Liverpool, 2010), pp. 3–12.

<sup>78</sup> See Duffy, ‘Irishmen and islesmen’.

<sup>79</sup> R. Oram, *The Lordship of Galloway* (Edinburgh, 2000), is the most thorough survey.

well the problems with one further dominant paradigm for examining the history of Scotland, this time in the twelfth century: the seeming polar opposition between ‘native’ and ‘newcomer’, between ‘Celtic’ and ‘Norman’ attributes. This essentialist paradigm relies on inherent Celtic conservatism and opposition to Anglo-Norman social and cultural changes, and leaves little room for the complex and nuanced world of negotiated identities and porous language zones that was twelfth-century Scotland.<sup>80</sup> The Lords of Galloway were major landholders in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries; they adopted many of the distinctive attributes of the Europeanised world of Scotland during those centuries; and yet their charters for certain areas, such as properties in Kirkcudbrightshire, show them to be Gaelic-speaking lords, even down to the coining of a new Gaelic place-name during the settlement of a boundary dispute in the early thirteenth century.<sup>81</sup> This situation, and analogous ones, can be replicated in various other parts of Scotland. We owe to Geoffrey Barrow’s research a much more complex understanding of where the ‘Gàidhealtachd’ of the Scottish Middle Ages in fact was; as well as to Steve Boardman’s recent research a much more nuanced picture of the Scottish Crown’s relationship with Gaelic Scotland in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and of the multifaceted background of emergent Gaelic kindreds like the Campbells.<sup>82</sup> Matthew Hammond has recently written of the need to abandon unhelpful polarisations in our approach to the period, and the recently completed AHRC-funded project on ‘The Paradox of Medieval Scotland’, through its prosopographical approach to the period,

<sup>80</sup> Two recent bodies of otherwise important scholarship seem to me to be beset by the problems of seeing the world through this paradigm: the work of R. Andrew McDonald, e.g. *The Kingdom of the Isles*, and *idem*, *Outlaws of Medieval Scotland: Challenges to the Canmore Kings, 1058–1266* (East Linton, 2003); and that of Cynthia Neville, *Native Lordship in Medieval Scotland: the Earldoms of Strathearn and Lennox, c.1140–1365* (Dublin, 2005).

<sup>81</sup> For the Lords of Galloway’s charters, see K. J. Stringer, ‘Periphery and core in thirteenth-century Scotland: Alan son of Roland, Lord of Galloway and Constable of Scotland’, in A. Grant and K. J. Stringer (eds.), *Medieval Scotland: Crown, Lordship and Community. Essays Presented to G. W. S. Barrow* (Edinburgh, 1993), pp. 82–113; ‘Acts of Lordship: the records of the Lords of Galloway to 1234’, in T. Brotherstone and D. Ditchburn (eds.), *Freedom and Authority: Historical and Historiographical Essays presented to Grant G. Simpson* (East Linton, 2000), pp. 203–34. For the new name of the burn, see *ibid.*, §50, issued 1209 × 1234 (p. 229): ‘qui rivulus de nouo a nobis propter prehabitam contencionem uocatus est Pollenchosnewa’.

<sup>82</sup> G. W. S. Barrow, ‘The lost Gàidhealtachd of medieval Scotland’, in W. Gillies (ed.), *Gaelic and Scotland/Alba agus a’ Ghàidhlig* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 67–88; S. Boardman, ‘The Gaelic world and the early Stewart court’, in D. Broun and M. MacGregor (eds.), *Miorun Mor nan Gall, The Great Ill-Will of the Lowlander: Lowland Perceptions of the Scottish Highlands* (Glasgow, 2005), pp. 83–109; *idem*, *The Campbells, 1250–1513* (Edinburgh, 2006).



should shed much needed light on these issues of identity, language and status.<sup>83</sup>

### ‘Common Gaelic’

As one final note on shifting paradigms, there has been considerable, though not greatly noticed, movement on the question of the relationship of Scottish Gaelic and Irish. I have alluded already to Kenneth Jackson’s influential Rhÿs Lecture on ‘Common Gaelic’, which held sway for half a century. Along the way there was some fretting about the approach he took, most notably by David Greene and Donald MacAulay.<sup>84</sup> Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh cogently laid out the linguistic case for revisiting the received view in 1998, and consolidated further thinking along these lines in his work on the Gaelic notes in the Book of Deer.<sup>85</sup> In 2000, Professor Breandán Ó Buachalla launched a devastating critique on the premises and conclusions of Jackson’s paper.<sup>86</sup> In a nutshell, these critiques made it clear that the principal dialectal division in the Gaelic languages was north–south, not east–west; that linguistic analysis makes it necessary for the medieval and modern dialects to be have been evolving out of a common ancestor all the time—aside from the standardised written form of the language, there was no linguistic stasis during our period. Fundamental changes in Scottish Gaelic must predate the twelfth century, and not be later developments. Scottish Gaelic therefore has much to tell us about the evolution of Gaelic as a whole—it is not just a late offshoot, but rather can help explain features of the earlier language that were subsequently lost in the major dialects of Irish, for instance.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>83</sup>M. Hammond, ‘Ethnicity and the writing of medieval Scottish history’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 85 (2006), 1–29; *idem*, ‘Ethnicity, personal names, and the nature of Scottish Europeanization’, *Thirteenth-Century England*, 11 (Woodbridge, 2007), 82–93; *idem*, ‘Domination and conquest? The Scottish experience, 1100–1286’, in S. Duffy and S. Foran (eds.), *The First English Empire?* (Dublin, forthcoming). See <[www.poms.ac.uk](http://www.poms.ac.uk)> for further details of this project, and the online prosopographical database.

<sup>84</sup>D. Greene, ‘Review of K. Jackson, *Gaelic Notes in the Book of Deer*’, *Studia Hibernica*, 12 (1972), pp. 167–70; D. MacAulay, ‘Review of K. Jackson, *Gaelic Notes*’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 54 (1975), pp. 84–7.

<sup>85</sup>R. Ó Maolalaigh, ‘Place-names as a resource for the historical linguist’, in S. Taylor (ed.), *The Uses of Place-Names* (Edinburgh, 1998), pp. 12–53, esp. 12–15; ‘Scotticisation of Gaelic’.

<sup>86</sup>Ó Buachalla, ‘“Common Gaelic” revisited’.

<sup>87</sup>For detailed work in this direction, see for instance articles cited in Ó Buachalla, ‘“Common Gaelic” revisited’, p. 10, n. 7; Ó Maolalaigh, ‘Scotticisation of Gaelic’.

## Looking forward

I hope that up to this point this review has demonstrated, if nothing else, that the previous narrative of Gaelic expansion simply will no longer do. At several points most scholars working in the field have probably shifted ground, though the implications for the whole picture have not sufficiently been spelled out as yet. In what remains of this lecture, I will try to provide some sense from my perspective of what we can and should say about the advent and expansion of Gaelic. I will focus on four main issues, but my emphasis here is on one prevailing approach: we should be prepared for the expansion of Gaelic to be complex, multidirectional and multiphased, and to have lasted longer than has usually been allowed for.

### Origins

Gaelic was the language of Argyll by *c.* AD 600, so much we can probably agree. There is not room to explore this issue here, but our understanding of how it got there must take into account the recent views of some linguists that up until, say, the first century AD there is no clear evidence of formal distinction between Goidelic and Brittonic: the P-Celtic/Q-Celtic divide so often cited as a major distinctive feature is effectively merely an isogloss. The major developments which separate Brittonic from Goidelic belong largely to the next six centuries or so, and there is no good reason to imagine that Argyll's linguistic development would have followed that of eastern Scotland rather than that of the north of Ireland. Admittedly, Ptolemy shows us a polity with what looks to be a Brittonic name, the Epidii, present in Kintyre in the second century AD, but then he has ostensibly Brittonic tribes in Ireland too, and not in peripheral areas.<sup>88</sup> Of course, it would be surprising if there were not political and social change in Argyll, with concomitant linguistic development, in the period 400–600, since the whole of Britain and Ireland manifests this.<sup>89</sup> But there is no

<sup>88</sup> See A. L. F. Rivet and C. Smith, *The Place-Names of Roman Britain* (London, 1979), pp. 360–1; and see G. R. Isaac, 'Scotland', in J. de Hoz, E. R. Lujan and P. Sims-Williams (eds.), *New Approaches to Celtic Place-Names in Ptolemy's Geography* (Madrid, 2005), pp. 189–214; on Brittonic and other names in Ireland, see Patrizia de Bernardo Stempel, 'Pre-Celtic, Old Celtic layers, Brittonic and Goidelic in ancient Ireland', in P. Cavill and G. Broderick (eds.), *Language Contact in the Place-Names of Great Britain and Ireland* (Nottingham, 2007), pp. 137–63.

<sup>89</sup> See various studies in A. Bammesberger and A. Wollmann (eds.), *Britain 400–600: Language and History*, *Anglistische Forschungen* 205 (Heidelberg, 1990); T. Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society among the Insular Celts AD 400–1000', in M. J. Green (ed.), *The Celtic World* (London, 1995), pp. 703–36.

good reason to posit migration even of elites, in order to see a Gaelic-speaking Argyll come into being. Having said this, my own recent work on the earliest attested Gaelic place-names in the Scottish record does seem to suggest a more linguistically ‘shallow’ place-name landscape, one suggestive of a recent, and not very deep or developed, relationship between Gaelic and Argyll. It may be that here, as elsewhere, the study of place-names will cause us once more to revise our understanding.

### The Gaelicisation of Pictland

We are no longer at liberty to ascribe the Gaelicisation of Pictland to the ‘unionising’ activities of Cinaed mac Ailpín, or indeed to his predecessors. That said, the ruling elite of eastern Scotland, of the former Pictland, seems to have adopted Gaelic language and identity by the tenth century, and this was being observed by their neighbours as well, the English referring to them as *Scottas* and *Scotti*. Alex Woolf has made a cogent case for not thinking that elite emulation alone works as a vector for linguistic change.<sup>90</sup> His two alternative suggestions in his recent book seem to pull in different directions. One proposes an ‘Albanian’ language which emerged from the Gaelicisation of an underlying but fairly similar Brittonic language, Pictish: ‘the Gaelic and British dialects of Albania probably influenced each other enormously and probably began to converge into a single Albanian language’.<sup>91</sup> There seem to me a number of deep-seated difficulties with this proposal, not least of which is its downplaying of the very fundamental linguistic relationship between Irish and Scottish Gaelic; there is a drift eastwards here that is reminiscent of the work that Jackson was at pains to refute in his *Rhÿs* Lecture in 1951. Ultimately, although we can point to significant lexical import from Pictish into Gaelic, and suggest some other substrate influence of the sort that might be caused by Brittonic speakers adopting Gaelic as their language, it is this latter phenomenon which surely occurred in central medieval Scotland, rather than ‘convergence’.<sup>92</sup> Conversely, however, Woolf argued for political displacement and territorial redistribution on a very significant scale owing to the disruption of the first Viking age as the main underlying cause of the ‘Gaelic

<sup>90</sup> Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba*, pp. 291–2.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 340: the full discussion is pp. 322–40.

<sup>92</sup> For a further critique of this aspect of Woolf’s book, see Charles-Edwards, ‘Picts and Scots’, 186–7.

conquest of Pictavia'.<sup>93</sup> To my mind neither scenario seems sufficient as an explanation.

I would suggest a series of ways in which Gaelic was introduced into eastern Scotland in the period 550–900, at multiple social levels, preparing the ground for its dominance over Pictish. Prime among these from early on was the church. The conversion of Pictland, though not produced solely by Gaelic missionaries by any means, led to dominance over the Pictish church by Gaelic churchmen, and not just 'Columban' clergy, and this sort of influence can be seen at various points during the seventh and early eighth centuries.<sup>94</sup> One reflection of this may be the predominance of Gaelic saints in the dedications even of seemingly Pictish church place names such as those in *eccles*.<sup>95</sup> While this is hardly a transformative thing in itself, we should not underestimate the importance of Gaelic church culture. Most significant in this respect is the place accorded the Gaelic language within its church: already by the early seventh century we have ecclesiastical writing in the vernacular.<sup>96</sup> In Europe, the status of the vernacular within Gaelic Christian culture is only paralleled, and that partially, by the role of Anglo-Saxon in England. This gave Gaelic a status not shared by any of the Brittonic languages at this date. Within certain circles in Pictland, then, from the seventh century on, the order of status of languages may well have been Latin, Gaelic, and then Pictish (Thomas Charles-Edwards has argued something similar for the status of Welsh in Wales during the sixth and early seventh centuries).<sup>97</sup> This is far from saying Pictish had no status, of course, but the, admittedly very limited, evidence available to us makes it seem quite restricted. We may even wish to consider the fact that, even if some or most of the 'Pictish ogham' inscriptions should prove to be in the Pictish language, nonetheless the script chosen in which to write it was one with overt Irish associations.

There is also a whole series of minor incidents of interaction which we might see as reinforcing Gaelic's status within Pictland over this period:

<sup>93</sup> Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba*, pp. 340–2.

<sup>94</sup> For some preliminary discussion on these lines, see T. O. Clancy, 'Deer and the early church in the North-East', in Forsyth, *Studies in the Book of Deer*, pp. 363–97.

<sup>95</sup> On which see e.g. Taylor, 'Place-names and the early church'; G. W. S. Barrow, 'The childhood of Scottish Christianity: a note on some place-name evidence', *Scottish Studies*, 27 (1983), 1–15.

<sup>96</sup> See for instance T. O. Clancy and G. Márkus, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery* (Edinburgh, 1995). By the first half of the ninth century religious texts in Gaelic included hymns, prayers, sermons, commentaries, ecclesiastical legislation, monastic rules, advice literature, martyrologies, hagiographical texts and creative Christian literature. This was a powerful vernacular religious culture.

<sup>97</sup> Charles-Edwards, 'Language and society'.

marriage alliances, the potential exile of Pictish kings in Ireland and subsequent return. We should by no means think links with Gaelic need be confined to links with Argyll—the foundation legend of Abernethy suggests otherwise. There also may have been pockets of significant Gaelic settlement all through this period, allied either to the church, or to the introduction of Gaelic nobles into areas by Pictish kings as a means of dealing with opponents, or both. The region, probably at the time a kingdom or subkingdom, of Atholl springs to mind here. Although the derivation of the name as ‘New Ireland’ has been questioned from time to time, most recently by James Fraser, I find it difficult to see another clear explanation for the name.<sup>98</sup> It is probably no accident that this area has the clearest evidence of the cults of Iona personnel, both famous and obscure, as saints; and that it hosts one of the eastern clusters of *cill* names. I have also argued that a major sept of the Cenél Comgaill of Argyll were given land in what became Strathearn in the aftermath of the shattering of Northumbrian overlordship of southern Pictland in 685. This may have introduced Gaelic into this area: indeed, it is one potential explanation behind the term ‘Strathearn’ for the area (not, in fact, a contiguous block of territory) they seem to have controlled.<sup>99</sup>

Alex Woolf has additionally proposed that at some point between 700 and 900 we see an introduction of Gaelic kindreds into southern Pictland, those who would give rise to areas such as ‘Angus’ and ‘Gowrie’.<sup>100</sup> Certainly by the tenth century there is clear evidence that a series of Gaelic kindreds in the east were thought of as being descended from Argyll kindreds. Dauvit Broun has recently proposed the early ninth century as a significant moment in which we might imagine this happening: this makes more sense if we can see the dominant rulers of Pictland at the period, the rulers of Fortriu, being based north of the Mounth, as Alex Woolf has convincingly argued.<sup>101</sup> Introduction of Gaelic kindreds in order to settle

<sup>98</sup> Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, pp. 101–2; I explore the name in ‘Atholl, Banff, Earn and Elgin: “New Irelands” in the East revisited’, in McLeod *et al.*, *Bile ós Chrannaibh*, pp. 79–102. By a regrettable oversight I neglected to discuss Dr Fraser’s proposal for the name in this article. The suggestion merits deeper consideration than I can give here. He proposes, interestingly, an underlying Brittonic \**Atui Guocled* via a Gaelic \**Áth Fochla*, ‘north pass’ or ‘north way’. As I discuss, however (without direct reference to this proposal), the initial-stress pattern of the name probably rules this sort of derivation out; as also the unlikelihood of scribes mangling a familiar word like *fochla*, ‘north’, in the many ways they have—to say nothing of the modern form of the name.

<sup>99</sup> T. O. Clancy, ‘Philosopher-king: Nechtan mac Der-Ilei’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 83 (2004), 125–49, at 138–42; *idem*, ‘Atholl, Banff, Earn and Elgin’, pp. 88–90.

<sup>100</sup> Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba*, pp. 226–30.

<sup>101</sup> Broun, ‘Arrival of the Gaels’.



a problematic region after the round-robin warfare of the early eighth century has much to recommend it as a hypothesis. Such movement also makes a great deal of sense within the context of the incorporation of Argyll within the Pictish kingdom: by the early ninth century Loch Lomond and Iona could be described as being within or off the coast of Pictish territory.<sup>102</sup> As David Dumville has suggested, Pictland may have become completely porous to Gaels—a feature that undoubtedly would have had consequences in the period after the Viking incursions and settlements in the west, from *c.*800.<sup>103</sup> Whatever we conclude about this, we must leave room for the expansion of such kindreds, for ‘predatory kinship’, to borrow the term of Eleanor Searle, describing Norman expansion in Normandy,<sup>104</sup> leading to the displacement of previous landholders by Gaelic kindreds.

Finally, we should consider the role of ideology. Though its contemporaneousness has been cast into some doubt, ‘The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba’ displays a denigration of Pictishness, a linkage with injustice and unchristian activity that is easy to credit as belonging to the period. ‘The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba’ seems to suggest that, ideologically, Pictishness became equated with injustice and failings towards the church. Given the ravaging of Pictland in the mid- to late ninth century it is easy to see how this might be the case. Lest we forget in our focus on ‘the Pictish heartland’: a series of areas that had been, as far as we can see, prosperous and integral parts of the Pictish culture-zone (Shetland, Orkney, the northern mainland) had by *c.*900 been seized by Viking lords, and perhaps had been under Scandinavian dominance in some cases for some considerable time. These losses only increase if we think that Pictish kings had controlled Argyll for over half a century as well.

My solution then to the Gaelicisation of eastern Scotland is to see it as resulting from a combination of factors: church influence (giving the language significant status amongst Pictish elites from an early stage); the settling of and subsequent predatory expansion of landholding by important Gaelic kindreds in swordland over the course of the late seventh,

<sup>102</sup> T. O. Clancy, ‘Iona in the kingdom of the Picts: a note’, *Innes Review*, 55 (2004), 73–6.

<sup>103</sup> See Dumville, *Churches of North Britain*, pp. 35–6: ‘Pictland, by virtue of containing a Gaelic subkingdom, was open to Gaelic influence and settlement to a degree previously unimaginable.’ There is clearly convergence here with the views of Woolf and Broun, even if all three disagree with each other about particulars.

<sup>104</sup> E. Searle, *Predatory Kinship and the Creation of Norman Power 840–1066* (Berkeley, CA, 1988). I owe my awareness of this work to Alex Woolf. Woolf’s proposal, *From Pictland to Alba*, pp. 340–2, has this paradigm partially in mind.

eighth and perhaps early ninth centuries; the Pictish conquest of Dál Riata, and its consequent creation of a porous zone of movement for Gaelic-speakers within the same kingdom as Picts; the collapse of the status quo in the middle decades of the eighth century; and, ultimately, the domination of the Pictish kingship by a dynasty who espoused Gaelic language, law and identity, and within whose ideology Pictish attributes were rejected as having led to the mess that was the first part of the Viking age. This explanation feeds off breadcrumbs of information, but allows for multiple phases, multiple vectors, and a series of reinforcing mechanisms. This is not, I would stress, Gaelicisation by elite emulation, osmosis or trickle-down. It has teeth. People get hurt: they are displaced, disinherited and disenfranchised as part of the process of linguistic transformation. But it happens over an extended period, and the linguistic shift is adequately underpinned by a variety of transformations in the socio-linguistic context. This, I think, best accounts for the long-term interchange between Pictish and Gaelic that the place-name evidence of the east gives witness to.

That said, the distribution maps we have used probably do not map that process (although the map of place-names in *pett* may reflect it more than any other). Rather, what we see in the distribution maps of, for instance, *achadh* and *baile* are the consequences of a much longer period of Gaelic *internal* expansion and reinforcement, and landholding changes that belong to a later period. The map of *baile*, for instance, probably shows multiple, multiphased processes of reorganisation of landholding, the creation of the fermtouns in Gaelic-speaking contexts that necessitated use of the term *baile*. For my money, in eastern and central Scotland this is a phenomenon of the period 1050–1250, by and large; elsewhere it is something that could still be occurring in the fifteenth century, or indeed, as in Arran, much later.

### **The transformation of the south-west**

I have noted already some of the ways in which the south-west has come to be viewed in a very different light in recent years. The way is clear now to see the Gaelicisation of the south-west occurring from two distinct impetuses. First, the evidence of saints' cults suggests that Carrick was settled significantly from Kintyre. A series of dedications to saints in Kintyre is closely mirrored by the parish churches and other dedications of Carrick. This fed into my recent arguments for situating the Gall-

Ghàidheil in the Firth of Clyde region in the period around 900.<sup>105</sup> Second, Fiona Edmonds has recently argued convincingly, on the basis of evidence such as the culting in church dedications of localised Dublin and Leinster saints, that the Hiberno-Norse culture of Dublin and its hinterland had a strong effect on the settlement and toponymy of the Solway Firth littoral.<sup>106</sup> Although more investigation will no doubt solidify or refine these issues, this chimes well with linguistic evidence that the Gaelic of Galloway aligns itself with Irish in a number of key ways (notably eclipsis).<sup>107</sup> On the other hand we should not rule out influence from the Gaelic kingdom of Alba itself at various periods: clusters of names in Galloway employing elements like *dabach* and *earann* (both land-holding terms of different sorts, one associated with eastern Scotland, the other predominantly with the area of Menteith) suggest some such influences. These must be set against the manifest and fairly widespread use in the south-west of place-name terminology, such as land-assessment terms like *peighinn*, ‘pennyland’, or *ceathramh*, ‘quarterland’, terms associated strongly with the western seaboard, and not common in eastern Scotland (unknown indeed, for instance, in Fife).

We cannot determine when between 900 and *c.*1050 the south-west came under the sway of Gaelic-speaking rulers, but by the twelfth century it is clear that Gaelic had been in the region long enough to give it a corporate identity (‘Galloway’), and to lay down a major infrastructure of Gaelic place-names.<sup>108</sup> It may not have been the only language in the region, however: Alex Woolf has proposed a linguistic ‘balkanisation’ of the region—the term may be problematic, but the idea has some force.<sup>109</sup> It might explain the clusters of distinct settlement name types in Ayrshire, for instance: Norse *bý* names in Cunninghame; Brittonic *\*trev* names in Carrick; and Gaelic *baile* names in Kyle and Carrick.<sup>110</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Clancy, ‘Gall-Ghàidheil and Galloway’, 44–5.

<sup>106</sup> Edmonds, ‘Saints’ cults and Gaelic-Scandinavian influence’.

<sup>107</sup> See Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh, ‘Place-names as a resource’, p. 30.

<sup>108</sup> See Clancy, ‘Gall-Ghàidheil and Galloway’; MacQueen, *Place-Names in the Rhinns*; *idem*, *Place-Names of the Moors and Machars*; and my forthcoming Whithorn Lecture for 2010, ‘Gaelic in Medieval Galloway: the Evidence of Names’.

<sup>109</sup> Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba*, p. 297.

<sup>110</sup> On the *bý* names, see Simon Taylor, ‘Scandinavians in central Scotland: *bý*-place-names and their context’, in Williams and Bibire, *Sagas, Saints and Settlements*, pp. 125–45; Alison Grant, ‘The origin of the Ayrshire *Bý* names’, in Gammeltoft, Hough and Waugh, *Cultural Contacts*, pp. 127–40; on *\*trev*, see recently Bethany Fox, ‘The P-Celtic Place-Names of North-East England and South-East Scotland’, *The Heroic Age (An on-line Journal of Early Medieval Northwestern Europe)*, 10 (2007), <<http://www.mun.ca/mst/heroicage/issues/10/fox.html>>; Carole

Parts of the south-west were to be strongly and permanently affected by the settlement of the area by Anglo-Norman nobles from King David I's time as Prince of Cumbria: this was particularly significant in Cunninghame, Renfrewshire and Annandale.<sup>111</sup> These regions seem to begin their reception of Older Scots during this period, a process that was never reversed. We should, of course, remember that in Annandale as perhaps in northern parts of Ayrshire, and indeed in Galloway proper, Scots was coming into an area which had had English settlements since the eighth century. We should allow for potential continuities from Old English to Older Scots in these areas, deepening the linguistic complexity of the region as a whole.

But this is not the full story of Gaelic in the south-west: we must leave room here, as elsewhere, for periods of internal expansion or re-expansion of Gaelic, the reinforcement of its standing amongst the local landholding elite with consequent effects on the place-nomenclature. The evidence is there, if as yet not studied sufficiently to bring it into focus, to suggest that this is precisely what happened in the south-west during the course of the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries, particularly in areas like Carrick and Kirkcudbrightshire, and Fiona Edmonds's recent work on Nithsdale suggests it was the case there too.<sup>112</sup> An example may be seen in one record from Kirkcudbrightshire of the settlement of a boundary dispute between Colvend and Kirkgunzeon, on 21 February 1289. The list of those present includes a fair slice of the 'Anglo-Norman' aristocracy of the area (Sir Thomas son of Gilbert de Culwenne, Michael son of Durand), but also a large number of individuals from Gaelic-speaking backgrounds (Patrick mac Coffoc, Patrick Magilboythin, Gilchrist mac Karnachan, Achyne mac Nele, Monc Macgilherine).<sup>113</sup> Many of these latter families came to prominence in this area in the period of the Wars of Independence, and their rise sees a concomitant rise in the landholding—and thus we might propose, land-naming—status of Gaelic families.

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Hough, 'P-Celtic *tref* in Scottish place-names', *Notes and Queries*, 48/3 (Sept. 2001), 213–15; Alan G. James, 'A Cumbric diaspora?', in O. J. Padel and D. N. Parsons (eds.), *A Commodity of Good Names: Essays in Honour of Margaret Gelling* (Donington, 2008), pp. 187–203.

<sup>111</sup> See for instance G. W. S. Barrow, *The Kingdom of the Scots* (London, 1973; repr. Edinburgh, 2003), chaps. 12, 15.

<sup>112</sup> F. Edmonds, pers. comm. I explore this issue further in my forthcoming Whithorn Lecture.

<sup>113</sup> F. Grainger and W. G. Collingwood (eds.), *Register and Records of Holm Cultram* (Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian & Archaeological Society, Record Series, 7: Kendal, 1929), no. 255. One might render these names Pádraig mac Gufóg, Pádraig mac Gille Baoithín, Gille Críst mac Carnacháin, Eachainn mac Néill, Mungo (?) mac Gille Chíaráin. Some of the patronymics may be surnames.

### The Hebrides and northern Scotland

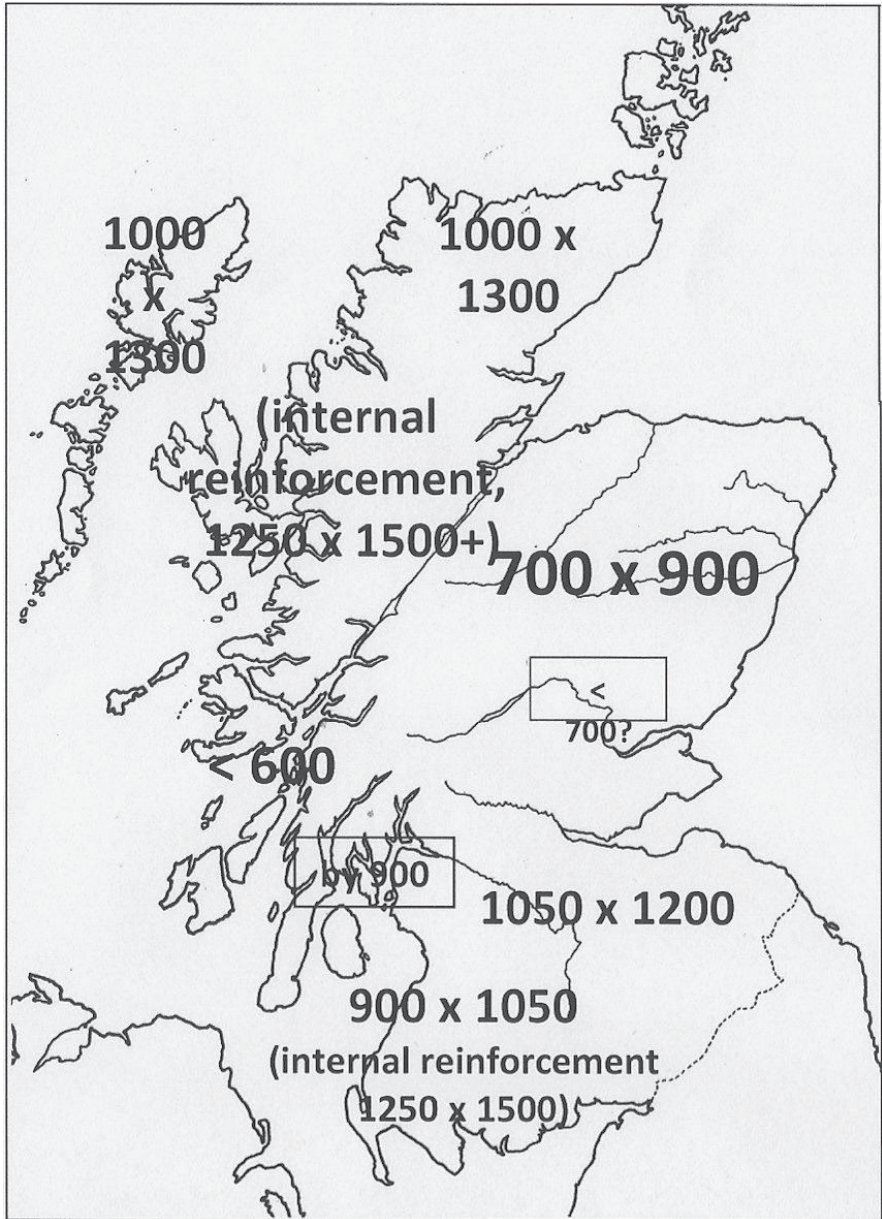
Finally, we must turn to the west and the north. Earlier, I noted that recent scholarship has presented us with a conundrum: if Gaelic was not spoken in the Western Isles or in Sutherland and Caithness before the Viking age (or even if it only had a limited presence there, for instance, in the form of the church) then where did the Gaelic spoken in these areas come from? Arne Kruse has presented us with the interesting notion that Gaelic was first spoken on Lewis by Gaelic slaves, introduced there by the Viking settlers just as they were introduced to the Faroes and Iceland (and presumably speaking a wide variety of Gaelic dialects).<sup>114</sup> I do not think these slaves will, however, provide the explanation for the Gaelicisation of the area. We have good evidence for the rising status of Gaelic amongst the Scandinavian elite of the Irish Sea zone: many of these men had Gaelic by-names, Gaelic foster-brothers, Gaelic forenames and by the late tenth century were having poetry composed for them in Gaelic. This is surely of great significance, but once again, though, this falls short of a full explanation. The engine-rooms for this elite Gaelicisation seem to be Dublin and Man, the key sites of dominance within the Scandinavian Irish Sea zone. This then may suggest Gaelic continuity in certain regions, like the Isle of Man and Islay, where a hiatus has been proposed. Argyll may be one key to the problem: Jennings' arguments anent Kintyre could be applied to much of Argyll, allowing us to see here prominent Scandinavian settlements amongst a majority Gaelic population. From Argyll was drawn one segment of the twelfth-century elite of the Irish Sea zone, that segment, with Somerled mac Gille Brighde at its head, which would progress to dominance of the Hebrides from the mid-twelfth century on. It may be that under this family and its allies, as it ramified and extended its control of the Isles, Gaelic speech from the mainland was brought to, or back to, the Hebrides.

Some indicators that actual westward migration of Gaelic-speaking settlers might be involved in the process comes from Caithness. Here a series of little signs seems to point to Gaelic, which here clearly was subsequent to Norse in Caithness and never completely replaced it throughout the territory, having come from the north-east mainland, from Moray. Doreen Waugh has suggested this tentatively, and it has considerable plausibility.<sup>115</sup> The evidence, which remains to be explored fully, includes

<sup>114</sup> Kruse, 'Explorers, raiders and traders'.

<sup>115</sup> Waugh, 'Settlement names in Caithness'; *eadem*, 'Caithness: another dip in the Sweerag well', in Woolf, *Scandinavian Scotland—Twenty Years After*, pp. 31–48, esp. p. 39. See also W. F. H. Nicolaisen,





**Figure 6.** Advent and expansion of Gaelic. Dates and date-ranges are estimates of when Gaelic became a major language in each region.

distinctive saints' cults shared between the regions (Drostan, Fergus), the presence in Caithness place- and kindred-names of rare personal names associated closely with major kindreds in Moray (Cano in Canisbay, Morgan in the eponym of the MacKays, the Clann Mhorgainn); and the historically attested fact that this was swordland given to the de Moravia family in the late twelfth century.<sup>116</sup>

As was the case with the south-west, however, we should make room for the incremental reinforcement of the status of Gaelic amongst the landholding classes in these areas during the course of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, and, indeed, beyond. A key point I am trying to make here is that linguistic 'expansion' happens internally within a region, as well as laterally, as the landscape becomes ever more filled-in with features named in that language, as the internal history of a region becomes tied ever more to people from a particular linguistic set, and the duration of settlement turns swordland into *dùthchas* (see Fig. 6).

## Conclusion

Our maps have tended to teach us that Gaelic's decline in Scotland began around 1093, never to be reversed. What I have been arguing in this lecture is that it was not so. The great, long century between 1093 and 1215 so closely identified with Gaelic's demise in fact sees Gaelic playing a major part in the naming of lands whose use and ownership was changing during the 'feudal' land redistribution of the period, in places such as Fife and Galloway. The twelfth century and later saw significant expansion of Gaelic into a number of areas later considered to be Gaelic heartlands, such as the Western Isles, Sutherland and parts of Caithness. This was a process which, if we consider the notion of internal Gaelicisation within regions, may well have been continuing into the fifteenth century and, perhaps in some areas like Sutherland, beyond. That makes the high Middle Ages, usually associated with Gaelic's decline, instead key centuries for Gaelic's expansion. This is a fundamentally different way to envisage the period.

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'Scandinavians and Celts in Caithness: the place-name evidence', in J. Baldwin (ed.), *Caithness: a Cultural Crossroads* (Edinburgh, 1982), pp. 75–85.

<sup>116</sup> Barbara Crawford, 'The Earldom of Caithness and the Kingdom of Scotland, 1150–1266', in Keith Stringer (ed.), *Essays on the Nobility of Medieval Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 25–43.

Sir John Rhŷs was as active in tracing the contemporary decline of the Celtic languages as he was involved in understanding their earliest presence and interaction in Britain and Ireland. What I hope I have managed to demonstrate in this lecture is that the way is open for us to have a different and more complex understanding of Gaelic and Gaelic-speakers in medieval Scotland, of mechanisms of expansion as well as contraction. We have by no means achieved a full understanding, but the shifting paradigms of the last quarter century have all had their part to play in allowing us to see more clearly what the most crucial questions are. Without doubt the greatest contribution to the expansion of our understanding will be made by the careful survey and analysis of the place-names of Scotland: there is rich evidence here, waiting to be worked through. Work like this demands the fruitful exchange of ideas between historians, linguists, onomasticians, archaeologists. If this lecture has demonstrated nothing else, I hope it has given a sense of the fertility of such interaction in early medieval Scottish studies. There is much to do.

*Note.* I am most grateful to the British Academy for their invitation to give this lecture, as also to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland who hosted two further events, in the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and at the University of Aberdeen, at which it was delivered. Audiences at all these events, as also at Comann Gàidhlig Ghlaschu in 2009, gave some stimulating and helpful feedback. The Arts and Humanities Research Council funded the four-year project 'The Expansion and Contraction of Gaelic in Medieval Scotland: The Onomastic Evidence' which prompted the topic of the lecture. I owe a particular debt of gratitude to my colleagues on that project, Dr Simon Taylor, Gilbert Márkus, and Peter McNiven; and to colleagues who commented on aspects of this work in draft, or provided other forms of encouragement: Professor Roibeard Ó Maolalaigh, Professor Dauvit Broun, Bronagh Ní Chonail and especially Simon Taylor for reading the final draft. Inevitably the lecture bears the stamp of many inspiring conversations with Dr Alex Woolf. The lecture is dedicated to the memory of my former teacher, colleague and friend, Dr John Bannerman.