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James E. Fraser

Strangers on the Clyde: Cenél Comgaill, Clyde Rock and the bishops of Kingarth

The historiography of Early Christian Atlantic Scotland – and indeed one is tempted to forego ‘Atlantic’ here – has been dominated by the monastery of Iona. There can be little so uncontroversial in this period than that the monks of Iona and their achievement before 802 are fully deserving of our interest, perhaps even our admiration. For all of the monastery’s intrinsic appeal, however, its domination of the historiography has stemmed from one factor above all others: uniquely among the Early Christian monasteries of northern Britain, the tales Iona told itself in this period, including its own history and its sense of its place in the political, ecclesiastical and social spheres beyond its *vallum*, have not been entirely lost. What survives is unequivocal in demonstrating that these tales were not told by idiots, and that it cannot be said that they signify nothing. Yet neither do they signify everything. This article represents an attempt to show that, among other things, the fragmentary documentary record surviving from Early Christian Iona shows that the monastery was engaged in debate with other political and ecclesiastical points of view in Argyll now lost to us, save for what can be recovered from how Iona writers engaged with such views. It seeks to reconstruct from such evidence something of the regional politics of Argyll in the seventh century, and suggests that Iona, for all its international interests, remained at the same time – perhaps even principally – a Dalriadic monastery keenly interested in, and affected by those regional politics. As such it is necessary to treat its testimony with considerable circumspection: in no other dynamic early medieval context would historians feel at ease entrusting their reconstructions of the past to the material generated by a single monastic community, and it would be naïve to treat Iona any differently. At particular issue here are the Gaelic kindred Cenél Comgaill, the British kingdom of Clyde Rock and the episcopal church of Kingarth: three very near neighbours in the firthlands of the Firth of Clyde, each of which has sometimes been understood as being intimately connected with Iona in this period. A detailed examination of the written evidence tends to militate against such premises, and to suggest instead that the treatment of these communities in Ionan texts reveals that it was dynamism and heterogeneity, rather than uniformity, that characterised the regional politics of southern Argyll.

The Cenél nEchdach dynast Ferchar Fota mac Feradaich, who died in 697,¹ was presumably the Cenél Loairn over-king in 677 when he and the folk of Lorn suffered the setback described in the Irish chronicle record as *interfectio generis Loairnn i Tirinn*, ‘a slaughter of Cenél Loairn in Tiriú’, the Annals of Tigernach adding *eter Ferchair Fotai 7 Britones qui uictores erant*, ‘between Ferchar Fota and the Britons, who were the victors’.² Ferchar ‘the Tall’ would recover sufficiently from this curious clash with a British army to establish himself as paramount king among the Dál Riata after the killing of the Cenél nGabráin dynast Domnall mac Conaill Crandamnae in 695.³ After Ferchar’s death in 697 his son Selbach managed eventually to succeed to the kingships of Cenél nEchdach and Cenél Loairn, as well as his father’s dominion over the Corcu Réti – the Cenél nGabráin and Cenél Comgaill kindreds of Kintyre and Cowal.⁴ Also like his father, Selbach would eventually do battle against a British army, in his case at *Lorg Ecclet*, thirty-four years after the *interfectio i Tirinn*, if we may take it that it was he who led the Dalriadic warriors who defeated the

¹ Annals of Ulster [S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (eds.), *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)* (Dublin 1983), henceforth AU], 697.2; Annals of Tigernach [W. Stokes (ed.), *The Annals of Tigernach*, Vol. I (Felinfach 1993), henceforth AT], 697.2. The text formerly known as *Senchus Fer nAlban*, now more properly called *Miniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban* [D. N. Dumville (ed.), ‘Ireland and North Britain in the Earlier Middle Ages: contexts for *Miniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban*’, in *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000*, ed. C. Ó Baoill and N. R. McGuire (Aberdeen 2002) 185-211, at 201-03], §41, divides Cenél Loairn into three *cenéla*: Cenél Salaig, Cenél Cathboth, and Cenél nEchdach. The tractate *Cethri Prímchenéla Dáil Riata* [D. N. Dumville, ‘*Cethri Prímchenéla Dáil Riata*’, *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 20 (2000) 170-91, at 175-82], §§25-32, traces the lineage of Ferchar Fota to Eochaid mac Muiredaich, thus placing this man and his family within Cenél nEchdach. The use of terminology that highlights the political heterogeneity of Argyll in this period is to be encouraged; cf. J. E. Fraser, ‘The Iona Chronicle, the Descendants of Áedán mac Gabráin, and the “Principal Kindreds of Dál Riata”’, *Northern Studies* 38 (2004) 77-96.

² AT 678.4; AU 678.3 shortens this record (*interfectio generis Loairnn i Tirinn*). Throughout this study I have adjusted chronicle dates to reflect the fact that, where they can be checked against other evidence, the Irish chronicles seem to be one year out in the period roughly 670–697; I am grateful to Nick Evans for discussing this phenomenon with me on several occasions.

³ AU 696.1; AT 696.1; *Chronicon Scotorum* [W. M. Hennessy (ed.), *Chronicon Scotorum: a chronicle of Irish affairs from the earliest times to A.D. 1135* (London 1866), henceforth CS], 696.1. ‘Dalriadic king-list’ [M. O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh and London 1973) 44-76, 228-29], §16.

⁴ The ethnonym *Corcu Réti* is attested by Adomnán, *Vita Sancti Columbae* [A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson (eds.), *Adomnán’s Life of Columba* (2nd edn., Oxford 1991), henceforth Adomnán, *VSC*], i.47. It will be used here to differentiate the descendants of Domangart Réti (Cenél nGabráin and Cenél Comgaill) from the rest of the Dál Riata; that this reflects seventh-century practice is discussed by J. E. Fraser, ‘*Dux Reuda* and the Corcu Réti’, *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 3: Cultar & Cànan*, ed. W. McLeod, et al. (Edinburgh, forthcoming).

Britons at this unidentified place in 711.⁵ It is probably significant that the very next year saw Dunaverty (*Aberte*) besieged in southernmost Kintyre by the same Cenél nEchdach king, and we may understand this campaign to represent a heavy blow against Cenél nGabráin.⁶ Given Cowal's situation between Lorn and Mid-Argyll to one side and the Lennox and Clydesdale to the other, it is probably also significant that the year prior to *Lorg Ecclet* saw Cenél Comgaill gripped by dynastic in-fighting. The principal victim of this internecine violence was apparently the Pictish king Naiton m. Der-Ilei,⁷ and in 711, like the Britons at *Lorg Ecclet*, a Pictish army was defeated in battle in the plain of Manau.⁸ The chronicle evidence thus suggests that, in this period, the rise to prominence of a Cenél nEchdach dynast in Lorn was inclined to bring that man into conflict with the Clyde Rock (now Dumbarton Rock) Britons, whose warriors got the better of such a foe in 677, but were beaten by one in 711. The events of 710–12 suggest, moreover, that the tribulations of Naiton m. Der-Ilei in Cowal and Manau, districts to either side of Clyde Rock, may not have been unrelated to the British defeat at *Lorg Ecclet* that seems to have unleashed Selbach mac Ferchair upon Cenél nGabráin.⁹ After all, in addition to our capacity to link the sons of Der-Ilei by marriage with Cenél Comgaill, we know that their predecessor in the kingship of Fortriu, Bridei m. Beli, had been the son of a king of Clyde Rock.¹⁰

⁵ AU 711.5; AT 711.5. Possibly the Dalriadic warriors massacred in 704 in *Ualle Limnae* (AU 704.1), i *nGlenn Lemnae* (AT 704.2) died fighting Britons, but the Vale of Leven in the Lennox was *Magh Leamhna*; W. J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* [henceforth Watson, *CPNS*] (Dublin, 1986, originally Edinburgh, 1926), 119. The topography implied by *glenn* in any case suggests that this encounter took place on the Lochaber Leven, which empties into Loch Linnhe. In that event the victors may have been Picts. The agreement between AU and AT here seems to invalidate CS 704.1, '*ic linn limniae*'

⁶ AU 712.5.

⁷ AU 710.4; for the identification of Nechtan mac Doirgarto as Naiton m. Der-Ilei, see T. O. Clancy, 'Philosopher-King: Nechtan mac Der-Ilei', *Scottish Historical Review* 83 (2004) 125–49, at 131–33. I am grateful to Professor Clancy for having allowed me to read this article in advance of publication. Much has been made of this last (and only) explicit mention of Cenél Comgaill in the Irish chronicles; yet next to nothing has been made of the last explicit mention of Cenél nGabráin just nine years later at 719.7 (AT 719.5).

⁸ AU 711.3; AT 711.3. Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* [B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds.), *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969); henceforth *HE*], v.24 furnishes us with an English notice of this battle, and further details are added by the Peterborough MS ('E') of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* [M. Swanton (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicles* (revised edn, London 2000)], s. a. 710.

⁹ The Dál Riata would enjoy a further victory over the Britons enemies at the obscure 'stone that is called *Minuirc*' in 717; AU 717.5; AT 717.4.

¹⁰ The *floruit* of Bridei's father, Beli map Neithon, is uncertain, but he is placed in the kingship of Clyde Rock by *Betha Adamnáin* [M. Herbert and P. Ó Riain (eds.), *Betha*

The Irish chronicles exhibit direct interest in Fortriu alone among the Pictish kingdoms of the last quarter of the seventh century, and this is to be understood as reflecting the attentions of the monastery of Iona.¹¹ Similarly, among the British kingdoms only Clyde Rock attracted the direct interest of the Iona chroniclers of this same period. Our earliest royal obit is that of Guret *rex Alo Cluaithe* in 658,¹² followed thirty-five years later by the obit of Dumngual map Eugein *rex Alo Cluaithe* in 693, a grandson of the same Beli who is conventionally identified as the father of this latter king's Pictish contemporary Bridei m. Beli.¹³ The gap between these two obits is considerable: either Dumngual reigned for an impressive thirty-five years, or Iona's attention was intermittent. In another parallel with Fortriu, such Ionan interest in Clyde Rock was made manifest in *Vita Sancti Columbae*, in which St Columba is said to have been an *amicus* of Riderch map Tutgual, king of Clyde Rock (*petra Cloithe*). Adomnán here relates that the saint prophesied that his friend Riderch 'will never be delivered into the hands of his enemies; but will die in his own house, on his own feather pillow.'¹⁴ The political point here may not presuppose friendship between Iona and the kings of Clyde Rock, for Welsh genealogical sources locate Riderch in a different lineage – though they shared a common ancestor – from that represented by Beli and his descendants, kings at Clyde Rock both during Segéné's abbacy (623–52), during which it has been determined that Cumméne Find, later abbot himself, composed his lost *liber de uirtutibus sancti Columbae*,¹⁵ and also during Adomnán's own tenure of the office (679–704).¹⁶ In the former case the king in question was Eugein map Beli, whose son Dumngual was king in Adomnán's time, and whose forces slew the Cenél nGabráin king Domnall Brecc mac Echdach in

Adomnán: the Irish Life of Adomnán (London, Irish Texts Society, 1988)], §14. His great-grandson, Beli map Elphin *rex Alo Cluaithe*, died in 722 (AU 722.3; AT 722.2); *Beli map Elfin map Eugein* is thus the first member of the 'Strathclyde' genealogy (other than Coroticus) who can be identified with Clyde Rock with complete certainty; cf. Harleian MS 3859 [P. Bartrum (ed.), *Early Welsh Genealogical Tracts* (Cardiff 1966) 9-13], §5.

¹¹ J. Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh 1974) 9-26; K. Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: introduction to the sources* (Ithaca, NY 1972) 117-19; see also M. Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry: the History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba* (Oxford 1988) 22-23. Fuller references to the various contributions that have shaped the important Iona Chronicle thesis may be obtained from these studies. The veracity of the thesis has further explored by Evans, 'Sources for Northern Britain', (forthcoming).

¹² AU 658.2.

¹³ AU 694.6; AT 694.2.

¹⁴ Adomnán, *VSC* i.15.

¹⁵ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 23-26.

¹⁶ Harleian MS 3859, §§ 5-6.

Strathcarron in December 642.¹⁷ Given Iona's partisan tendencies regarding Cenél nGabráin, about which more will be said below, it is therefore possible that the hagiographical decision to link St Columba with Riderch map Tutgual associated the saint (and Iona) not with Eugene map Beli and his son, but with a rival Clyde Rock lineage.

Famously, Cumméne Find lamented in his lost work that, as a result of the folly of Domnall Brecc, the descendants of Áedán mac Gabráin 'are still held down by outsiders (*extranei*), which fills the breast with sighs of grief'.¹⁸ The hagiographer did not link this subjugation of Áedán's descendants with the disaster in Strathcarron in 642, but rather with the battle of Mag Roth five years earlier, noting that they had been held down 'from that day to this'. It may be noted that the British poet who described the battle of Strathcarron from a Clyde Rock perspective, stating that 'I saw a war-band, they came from Kintyre' (*gweleis y dull o benntir adoyn*), apparently associated Domnall Brecc with his home territory, but not necessarily with any wider power or authority in Argyll.¹⁹ It seems unlikely that the *extranei* in question were Eugene and the men of Clyde Rock, for it appears that they simply administered the *coup de grâce* to a king who had already suffered humiliation. The fact that the Irish chronicles contain no obit of Eugene may perhaps reinforce this conclusion that he had not subjugated the Corcu Réti. The implications of Cumméne's testimony are rather that it was at or very soon after the battle of Mag Roth, fought principally between Cenél Conaill and the Dál nAraidi in 637,²⁰ that the descendants of Áedán mac Gabráin 'through ill counsels [lost] their power over this kingdom'.²¹ It is a good fit with this information that the chronicles inform us within about a year of this battle, that Domnall Brecc and his *muindter* were defeated and put to flight by unnamed foes, presumably Cumméne's *extranei*, in the unidentified *Glenn Mureson* (or *Mairison*).²²

¹⁷ AU 642.1; AT 642.2 adds that Domnall Brecc was killed *ab Ohan reghe Britonum*. A *Gododdin* elegy [I. Williams (ed.), *Canu Aneirin* (Cardiff 1938) ll. 966-71, repeated ll. 972-77], sometimes referred to as 'the Strathcarron Interpolation', identifies the victor of Strathcarron as a grandson of Nwython (*eir nwython*, ll. 969, 975); for recent editions see G. Gruffydd, 'The Strathcarron Interpolation (*Canu Aneirin*, Lines 966-77)', in *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 17 (1996) 172-78, at 174-76; J. T. Koch (ed.), *The Gododdin of Aneirin: Text and Context from Dark-Age North Britain* (Cardiff and Andover 1997), §A.78.

¹⁸ Adomnán, *VSC* iii.5b.

¹⁹ *Gododdin*, ll. 966-71, 972-77; the translation is J. P. Clancy's; *The Triumph Tree: Scotland's Earliest Poetry, AD 550-1350*, ed. T. O. Clancy (Edinburgh 1998) 114. *Penntir* is a Welsh translation of *Cenn Tíre*, but it is possible that the *penntir* in question here was some other 'headland' than Kintyre.

²⁰ AU 637.1; AT 637.1.

²¹ Adomnán, *VSC* iii.5b.

²² AU 638.1; AT 638.1 adds that 'the household of Domnall Brecc was put to flight'.

In order to appreciate who might and might not have been regarded by Cumméne Find as ‘outsiders’ or ‘strangers’ in this context, it is important to recognise that there is no suggestion in his language of the subjugation of the Dalriadic peoples as a whole, nor even more narrowly of the entire Corcu Réti in the south of Argyll. The fragment of Cumméne’s *liber* says only that the descendants of Áedán were held in subjection by outsiders. The likeliest candidate for this achievement is Ferchar mac Connaid, whom a group of misplaced annals in the Irish chronicles suggest died about eight years after Domnall Brecc, therefore c.650; the surviving Dalriadic king-list thus seems to err in placing Ferchar’s reign before Domnall’s.²³ The king-list also assigns Ferchar a reign of thirteen years;²⁴ a backwards count from c.650 gives a reign beginning c.637, and this is a good fit with our other evidence that Domnall Brecc lost the *sceptrum* of the Corcu Réti around the time of the battle of Mag Roth. It may therefore be proposed with some confidence that it was Ferchar mac Connaid who fought and defeated Domnall Brecc in 638, thus depriving him of his paramountcy, and proceeding to hold down the descendants of Áedán mac Gabráin. Ferchar’s credentials as an *extraneus* stem from the sources that maintain that his father Connad Cerr had been a grandson of Comgall mac Domangairt Réti, the eponymous ancestor of Cenél Comgaill, rather than a descendant of Gabrán mac Domangairt Réti like Domnall Brecc.²⁵ It seems likely that the descendants of Domangart Réti, the Corcu Réti, had only recently begun to form self-conscious kindreds of political significance when Cumméne wrote.²⁶

The evidence suggesting that the downfall of Domnall Brecc was brought about through a combination of Cenél Comgaill opportunism and the military might of Clyde Rock is striking when considered alongside the foregoing discussion of the apparent links between these same two peoples (and the kings of Fortriu) a generation or two later, when trouble for the men of Cowal and a Pictish defeat in Manau coincided with a British defeat at *Lorg Ecclét*. In both 637–42 and 710–712 we have indications of cooperation between the leaders of Cenél Comgaill and Clyde Rock in pursuing their foreign policies, sharing an enemy in common in the earlier case, and latterly a common

²³ AU 686.2; AT 686.3; AU 694.5 *recte* c.650, see Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, 30–31. For further discussion of these annals see now Evans, ‘Sources for Northern Britain’.

²⁴ ‘Dalriadic king-list’, §§ 9–10.

²⁵ Not all of the sources agree on this point; for a discussion, see Fraser, ‘Iona Chronicle’, 92–93. The contextual argument raised in the present study may be taken as further support of the preference for trusting those sources that attach Connad Cerr to Cenél Comgaill.

²⁶ For further discussion of this point, see Fraser, ‘Iona Chronicle’, 91–92.

ally. If this connection serves to emphasise the possibility raised above that St Columba's regard for Riderch map Tutgual in *Vita Sancti Columbae* need not necessarily presuppose friendship between Adomnán's Iona and Clyde Rock, it may also offer a context for understanding the British battles fought by Cenél nEchdach kings of Lorn as they sought to extend their influence in Argyll. The idea of cooperation between Cenél Comgaill and Clyde Rock²⁷ may also explain another very striking example of British aggression in the Clyde estuary in the last quarter of the seventh century. The Irish chronicles tell of a British incursion in 681 into Mag Line, the plain to the east of Lough Neagh in north-east Ireland, home territory of the Uí Chóelbad, the dominant kindred among the larger polity of the Dál nAraidi Cruithin. Here, four years after Ferchar Fota's decisive defeat at British hands in *Tiriu*, a British force of unknown provenance attacked the stronghold of *Ráith Mór* and won a major victory in which the new Uí Chóelbad king was slain.²⁸ It is arresting that these two British victories over Cenél Loairn and the Uí Chóelbad were won over peoples situated to either side of the Corcu Réti in south Argyll, and whose kingdoms moreover were certainly rivals of the Corcu Réti at various points in the seventh and eighth centuries. As regards the Uí Chóelbad, a particularly important example of such rivalry consists in the death of the Corcu Réti king Connad Cerr mac Conaill, the father of Domnall Brecc's nemesis Ferchar mac Connaid, in battle with the Dál nAraidi in 629 at the unidentified battle-site of *Fid Euin*.²⁹ Connad gave battle on this fateful occasion alongside a *rí ceneoil Cruithne*, 'king of a Cruithin *cenél*', called Dícuill mac Echach, apparently an Uí Nindeada dynast whose base was at Latharnae on the south Antrim coast, and who fell with him in the battle.³⁰ It is thus notable that a son of a certain

²⁷ The frontier between the two kingdoms may have been at Loch Long; cf. S. Taylor, 'Early history and languages of West Dunbartonshire', in ***, ed. I. Brown (Edinburgh, forthcoming). I am grateful to Dr Taylor for access to this essay in advance of publication.

²⁸ AU 682.2; AT 682.3. This is the first in the series of engagements involving Britons in eastern Ireland whom A. P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000* (London 1984) 25-26, has suggested were exiles from a 'collapsed' kingdom of Rheged.

²⁹ AU 629.1; AU 629.3; AT 629.1; CS 629. For a generation after this battle Connad's successors suffered losses of territory and prestige in Antrim at the hands of the Uí Chóelbad; see T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge 2000) 54-55.

³⁰ This information appears only in the Clonmacnoise group of chronicles (AT 629.1; CS 629); for Dícuill's genealogy, see D. Dumville, 'Cath Fedo Euin', in *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 17 (1996) 114-27, at 120-21. It seems to me that the sense of the annal supports Bannerman, *Dalriada*, 5, in seeing Dícuill as 'Connad Cerr's Irish ally in the battle'; but see Dumville, 'Cath Fedo Euin', 117-18, for a note of caution about this. Annals of Clonmacnoise [D. Murphy (ed.), *The Annals of Clonmacnoise, being annals*

Dícuill, namely Ultán mac Díccolla, was killed in the British assault upon *Ráith Mór* in 681; unfortunately we have no way of knowing on which side he fought.³¹ It is nevertheless a possibility that these two attacks upon the Dál nAraidi launched in 629 and 681 were both connected in some way with the aspirations of Uí Nindeada among that people. In that event, cooperation between Cenél Comgaill and Clyde Rock in this period, and in particular a tendency to share enemies and allies in common, would help us in identifying the origins of the British warriors who invaded Mag Line, but this string of possibilities is too easily unwound to be thought securely binding.

Mutual support between Cenél Comgaill and Clyde Rock offers us a context for understanding how the Clydesdale Britons, seemingly alone among the major British kingdoms of the north, managed to stave off the oblivion visited upon their neighbours by the Bernician Aethilfrithings as the seventh century progressed.³² That the kings of Fortriu in Pictland forged links with both kingdoms in the decades to either side of the battle of Dún Nechtain in 685 only serves to deepen the impression of alliances forged in part in reaction to Bernician expansion. In contrast, Segéné's approach to the Bernicians on Iona was to forge strong links with them through missionary activity and ecclesiastical jurisdiction, an additional potential factor in understanding the outlandishness of the descendants of Comgall from that monastery's perspective. Cumméne Find placed in the mouth of St Columba a prophecy pronounced before Áedán mac Gabráin that 'none of your opponents shall be able to stand against you', outlining a covenant with the saint which the king was to entrust to 'your sons' and 'their own sons and grandsons and descendants', and which Domnall Brecc was portrayed as having broken at Mag Roth.³³ This link between Iona and the descendants of Áedán mac Gabráin is reflected in the evidence of the Iona Chronicle that survives in later Irish chronicles, which seems to have been sufficiently interested in this family to keep track of several segments in the seventh century, while paying no comparable attention to the descendants of Comgall over the same

of Ireland from the earliest period to A.D. 1408 (Felinfach, 1993), henceforth AClon], 627, connect Connad's victory over the Dál Fiatach two years earlier at *Ard Corann* to a Dál nAraidi defeat at the hands of the Dál Fiatach in the previous year, alleging that *Ard Corann* was in revenge thereof, but without help from elsewhere it is difficult to assess this evidence.

³¹ AU 682.2; AT 682.3.

³² The Aethilfrithings, or descendants of Aethilfrith, in question are Oswald (634–42), Oswig (642–70), and Ecgfrith (670–85); for an overview of their achievement, see D. P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (2nd edn, London and New York 2000) 73–93.

³³ Adomnán, *VSC* iii.5b. Here, as elsewhere in this study, the translation follows that of the Andersons, with some minor adjustments.

period.³⁴ Similarly, *Vita Sancti Columbae* attributes the victory of the Bernician king Oswald Aethilfrithing over Caedualla, upon which the subsequent expansion of Bernician power was ultimately built, to the support of St Columba,³⁵ and in addition maintains that the father of the unfortunate Domnall Brecc demonstrated that God had appointed him to succeed his own father by rushing without delay to the saint's knee (*subito super meum inruet gremium*), and sinking into his bosom (*in sinu eius recubuit*).³⁶ By embracing the idea of Oswald as *imperator totius Britanniae* – and indeed placing it in the opening chapter of *Vita Sancti Columbae* – Adomnán was therefore giving voice to a pro-Bernician political doctrine that the leaders of Cenél nGabráin are likely to have shared through their Iona connections. That doctrine probably differed significantly, however, from the attitudes underlying cooperation between Cenél Comgaill and Clyde Rock, and latterly with Fortriu.

The conventional model for understanding political developments in seventh-century Argyll consigns Cenél Comgaill to 'oblivion at an early date'.³⁷ Nevertheless, the Iona Chronicle was apparently interested in two men in the 680s and 690s who have been convincingly identified as Cenél Comgaill dynasts: Dargart mac Finnguine, who was killed in 685, and the man who was probably his father, Finnguine Fota, who died in 689.³⁸ The Iona Chronicle does not seem otherwise to have noticed Cenél Comgaill dynasts who were not also the paramount kings of the Corcu Réti, suggesting that Finnguine and his son were major political figures of the period, though of course neither is named in the Dalriadic king-list. If we have read the evidence correctly above, it seems that his rivals in Argyll were forced to contend not only with Finnguine, but also (until his death in 693) with Dumngual map Eugein at Clyde Rock, in the same way that Domnall Brecc seems to have struggled with Ferchar mac Connaid and Dumngual's father Eugein between 638 and 642. It has been observed above that the Iona Chronicle's interest in Clyde Rock in the seventh century may have

³⁴ Fraser, 'Iona Chronicle', 81-90.

³⁵ Adomnán. *VSC* i.1; it was of course ultimately Oswald himself who made this claim. In naming Oswald's foe *Caedualla* I follow A. Woolf, 'Caedualla *Rex Brettonum* and the Passing of the Old North', *Northern History* 41 (2004) 5-24, where caution is urged in identifying him with Catguollaun of Gwynedd.

³⁶ Adomnán. *VSC* i.9.

³⁷ R. Sharpe, 'The thriving of Dalriada', in S. Taylor (ed.), *Kings, clerics and chronicles in Scotland 500-1297: essays in honour of Marjorie Ogilvie Anderson on the occasion of her ninetieth birthday* (Dublin 2000) 47-61, at 59; see also Anderson & Anderson, *Life of Columba*, xvii.

³⁸ AU 686.3; AT 686.4; AU 690.3; AT 690.3; CS 686. For their connections with Cenél Comgaill, and uncertainties surrounding name-forms, see Clancy, 'Philosopher-King', 131-33.

been sporadic; if that is so, one explanation of such intermittent attention could be that the kings of Clyde Rock tended to attract the particular interest of the monastery of Iona only when its attention was being attracted by the activities of the Cenél Comgaill leadership in neighbouring Cowal.

The chronicle evidence relating to Clyde Rock may be contrasted with the greater interest shown in Fortriu, which seems to include among other things a complete king-list. We may be certain of direct connections between Iona and these Picts,³⁹ and comparison tends to speak against similar connections with Clyde Rock, and the idea that clerics from the British kingdom were involved in missionary work on Iona's behalf throughout the previous century.⁴⁰ Moreover, the idea imbedded in *Vita Sancti Columbae* that fitness to rule, whether within Argyll or across a hegemony, went hand-in-hand with obeisance before Columba need not have been embraced by the leaders of Cenél Comgaill. Indeed, if this kindred represent the *extranei* of Cumme's famous lament, the ecclesiastical allegiances of Ferchar mac Connaid and his family will have lain elsewhere than Iona. A reference in *Míniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban* to the land of Cowal (*crích Comgaill*) 'with its islands' (*cona insib*) implies that the island of Bute lay within Cenél Comgaill territory in the seventh and eighth centuries.⁴¹ In the south of that island in this period lay the church of Kingarth (*Cenn Garadh*), about which we hear for the first time in the chronicles through the obit of a certain Daniél *episcopus Cinn Garadh*, who died in 660.⁴² The chronicles name only one other bishop of Kingarth, Iolán *episcopus Cinn Garath*, who died in 688.⁴³ These two bishops, like the two kings of Clyde Rock whose obits are recorded in this period, Guret and Dumngual map Eugein, were the contemporaries of Ferchair mac Connaid and Finnguine Fota respectively, two Cenél Comgaill dynasts who in one case succeeded in becoming king of the Corcu Réti, and in the other case is likely at least to have contended for the kingship. This pattern of chronicle-interest on Iona may be illusory, and may not show that it was the existence of a prominent Cenél Comgaill dynast that roused such interest in certain kings of Clyde Rock and bishops of Kingarth. Even so, it seems at least that we may conclude that Cenél

³⁹ Such certainty depends upon the important argument of A. Woolf, 'Dún Nechtain, Fortriu and the Geography of the Picts', *Scottish Historical Review* (forthcoming), regarding the location of Fortriu.

⁴⁰ See Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 306-08, though Clyde Rock is not explicitly identified as participating in the proposed co-operative evangelising effort.

⁴¹ *Míniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban* [D. N. Dumville (ed.)], 'Ireland and North Britain, 201-03; henceforth *MSFA*], §50. On *Crích Comgaill*, see Bannerman, *Dalriada*, 111.

⁴² AU 660.1; AT 660.2.

⁴³ AU 689.1; AT 689.2.

Comgaill kings and over-kings did not give to Iona anything like the allegiance it received from Cenél nGabráin leaders,⁴⁴ and it is therefore likely to have been to Kingarth in their own kingdom that the men of Cowal offered their principal ecclesiastical allegiances. Certainly no seventh-century church in the Hebridean zone other than Iona attracted as much chronicle attention in the seventh and eighth centuries as this one, and this perhaps is to be expected of a church that we may suspect of having been a counterpart to Iona – even a rival – within the other main division of the Corcu Réti.⁴⁵

The ruins of the twelfth-century church of St Blane's, long the parish kirk, stand not far to the south of modern Kingarth within a landscape long associated with the Early Christian monastic community of *Cenn Garad*.⁴⁶ The material evidence from St Blane's, including ecclesiastical sculpture, 'testifies to the existence of an active Christian community by the end of the sixth century', situated in a fertile area of Bute, and implies links with potentates of some considerable means.⁴⁷ Recent archaeological investigations on Inchmarnock, the small island off the west coast of Bute, have confirmed that monastic activity, including literacy, was vibrant in the Firth of Clyde in the Early Christian period, acting as a valuable corrective to the paucity of textual evidence.⁴⁸ William F. Skene was in 'no doubt' that Kingarth possessed wider associations, namely with the community of St Columba on Iona, to the authority of whose abbot, he believed, the Kingarth community

⁴⁴ Partisanship towards Cenél nGabráin on Iona may explain why, despite the implication of the chronicles that Áedán mac Gabráin was succeeded as king of the Corcu Réti by Connad Cerr, who died at Fid Euin, *Vita Sancti Columbae* speaks only of Eochaid Buide's succession to his father's (not necessarily high) kingship; for a discussion see Fraser, 'Iona Chronicle', 92-4.

⁴⁵ It is possible, but hardly necessary, that a certain Nóe mac Danel (AU 675.3; AT 675.2) and his son (?) Murgal mac Nóe (AU 711.6) had links with Kingarth. Nóe's father need not have been Bishop Daniél.

⁴⁶ The results of excavations in 1896 and 1997 are summarised by Ll. Laing et al., 'The early Christian and later medieval ecclesiastical site at St Blane's, Kingarth, Bute' [henceforth Laing et al., 'Kingarth'], *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* [henceforth *PSAS*] 128 (1998) 551-65; see also D. Pringle, 'The medieval parish churches of the Isle of Bute: St Blane's, Kingarth and St Mary's Rothesay', in *Scottish Archaeological Journal* 22 (2000) 123-54, at 124-5. I am grateful to Dr Stephen Driscoll for having provided me with an advance off-print of the latter. For the corpus of sculpture from the site see I. Fisher, *Early Medieval Sculpture in the West Highlands and Islands* (Edinburgh 2001) 73-7. On the toponymic and dedication evidence relating to St Blane's, see Watson, *CPNS*, 273; J. M. MacKinlay, *Ancient Church Dedications in Scotland: Non-Scriptural Dedications* (Edinburgh 1914) 111.

⁴⁷ Pringle, 'Medieval parish churches', 122-4; Fisher, *Early Medieval Sculpture*, 73-7.

⁴⁸ I am very grateful to Chris Lowe and Headland Archaeology for their kind invitation to the 'Inchmarnock Research Seminar' on 22 March 2003, where their excavations and finds to date were made available for consideration and discussion.

was subject from its foundation.⁴⁹ Such centralist thinking as regards the ecclesiastical landscape of Argyll is open to considerable question. There is not a single reference to Kingarth or Bute in *Vita Sancti Columbae*, and the case outlined above gives us no other reason to assume that Kingarth was a daughter-house of Iona or any other Columban monastery. A succession of abbatial obits in the middle and last thirds of the eighth century suggests the possibility that Kingarth and Iona became more closely associated in this period, but that possibility, arising within a very different political landscape, need not detain us here.

In contrast to our little known or knowable seventh-century bishops, Daniél and Iolán,⁵⁰ the more famous saint commemorated at St Blane's makes no appearance in the chronicles. He is earliest attested in the ninth-century Irish martyrologies of Óengus and Tallaght, which reveal that 'fair Bláán of *Cenn Garad*' was by then being commemorated as a saint on 10 August by the *Céli Dé*.⁵¹ Padraig Ó Riain's work on the provenance of the Tallaght martyrology suggests, however, that St Bláán was in fact being commemorated by the community of Iona rather earlier, probably by the middle of the eighth century.⁵² The establishment of this cult on Iona is further illustrative of links with Kingarth in our period, but does not require those links to have been entirely without strain.⁵³ The presence of the cult of Bláán at

⁴⁹ W. F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland: A History of Ancient Alban: Vol. II Church and Culture* (2nd edn, Edinburgh 1887) 133.

⁵⁰ It is possible that the name and cult of St Lolan, patron of Kincardine in Menteith (see Watson, *CPNS*, 324-5), obscure an older cult of Iolán of Kingarth muddled by a misspelling of his name. In that event, toponymic evidence at Bonhill in Dumbartonshire indicates that Lolán, rather than Iolán, is to be preferred as the saint's name; cf. Taylor, 'Early history and language of West Dunbartonshire'. The feast day of Daniél of Kingarth was 18 February: W. Stokes (ed.), *Féire Húa Gomáin – The Martyrology of Gorman* (Henry Bradshaw Society, 1895).

⁵¹ *slúag slán sóer so-dath/ Bláán cáin Cinn Garad*; W. Stokes (ed.), *Féire Óengusso Céli Dé – The Martyrology of Oengus the Culdee* (London, Henry Bradshaw Society, 1905), 10 August; see also R. I. Best and H. J. Lawlor (eds), *The Martyrology of Tallaght* (London, Henry Bradshaw Society, 1931), 10 August.

⁵² P. Ó Riain, *Anglo-Saxon Ireland: The Evidence of the Martyrology of Tallaght* (Cambridge 1993) 8-13, 21. I am grateful to Professor T. M. Charles-Edwards for calling this work to my attention.

⁵³ It bears mentioning that by the twelfth century two saints called *Colum* occur in the Kingarth context (*Fél. Gormáin*, 1 March; 2 September), one of whom is glossed as 'Bláán's son' (*mac Bláan*). W. Bower, *Scotichronicon* [D. E. R. Watt (gen. ed.), *Scotichronicon* by Walter Bower], Vol. 6 (Aberdeen, 1991), xi.21, preserves a tradition relating to a 'Columba', an English boy whom Bláán raised from the dead, and who later became a saint buried at Dunblane. A. O. Anderson (ed.), *Early Sources of Scottish History, A.D. 500-1286*, vol. I [henceforth Anderson, *ES* i] (Edinburgh 1922) 177, was not unreasonable to regard Colum of Kingarth as 'another early bishop of Kingarth'. Neither would it be unreasonable, however, to regard his cult as having its

Dunblane north of Stirling, its later medieval centre, is first attested only in the tenth-century *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba*, in which it is said that *Dulblaan* was burned by Britons during the reign of the famous Cinaed mac Ailpín, who died in 858.⁵⁴ This shift in the focus of the cult of Bláán from Bute to Stirlingshire almost certainly arose from later processes, and tells us little about the seventh century. Similarly, no discrete work of hagiography dedicated to the life or miracles of St Bláán is now extant, and although the seventeenth-century Irish scholar John Colgan was aware of one that has since been lost, this *vita* was not of early provenance, having been composed by George Newton, archdeacon of Dunblane cathedral from 1521 until his death in 1533.⁵⁵ Both this lost text, which we may glimpse only through Colgan's short summary, and the seemingly earlier hagiographical fragments included in the office for St Bláán in *Breviarium Aberdonense*, published in 1509, bear witness to a dossier that had described Bláán as having been born on Bute of questionable – perhaps supernatural – paternity. His mother was thought to have been an Irish woman called Ertha, whose brother, a 'venerable old man' (*senex venerabilis*) called Cathan, was an Irish bishop who had retired to Bute to live out his life in eremitic solitude. Writing in the 1440s, Walter Bower was given to know that St Bláán was 'the nephew of St Katan by his sister',⁵⁶ indicating that Newton later drew to some extent upon earlier hagiographical material of fifteenth-century or earlier date. That this material is nevertheless unlikely to have much to say about the seventh century emerges from that fact that Newton's work outlined the saint's origins in terms reminiscent of the story of the birth of St Kentigern, patron of Glasgow, as presented in the twelfth-century fragmentary *Vita et Miracula Sanctissimi Kentegerni* and adopted by Jocelin a generation later in his *Vita Sancti Kentegerni*.⁵⁷ Kentigern too, according to the anonymous

ultimate roots in that of Colum Cille, despite the fact that *Vita Sancti Columbae* alone mentions nine men named *Columbus* or *Columbanus* in addition to St Columba.

⁵⁴ *Britanni...concremauit Dulblaan*; Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, 249-53, at 250. On the death of Cinaed, see AU 858.2.

⁵⁵ J. Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum Hiberniae* (repr. Dublin, 1948), 233. On Newton, who was commissary of Lothian before his archidiaconate, see D. E. R. Watt, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae Medii Aevi ad annum 1638* (St Andrews 1969) 91, 112, 330; I am grateful to Helen Brown for assistance in tracking down George Newton. The precise relationship between Newton's lost *Vita* and the office for Bláán published in 1509 in *Breviarium Aberdonense* is not altogether clear; for the Office for St Blane see A. Macquarrie, 'The Office for St Blane (10 August) in the Aberdeen Breviary', in *The Innes Review* 52 (2001) 111-35.

⁵⁶ Bower, *Scotichronicon*, xi.21.

⁵⁷ A. P. Forbes (ed.), *Lives of S. Ninian and S. Kentigern* (Edinburgh 1874) contains editions of both texts. For the fragmentary *Vita et Miracula Sanctissimi Kentegerni* [henceforth Anon., *VMSK*], see 243-52 ('*Vita Kentegerni Imperfecta*'); for Jocelin's *Vita Sancti Kentegerni* [henceforth Jocelin, *VSK*], see 159-242.

author of the earlier text, was conceived under unusual circumstances and set adrift in a boat with his mother, only to be conveyed in safety to shore, whence the saint entered into the tutelage of a kindly old cleric.⁵⁸ St Cuthbert too, according to the twelfth-century *libellus de navitate Sancti Cuthberti*, was set adrift in a boat as a boy and carried from Ireland to Galloway.⁵⁹ Similarly, Newton recorded that, having been set adrift from Bute in a boat, Bláán and his mother reached the coast of Ireland, where the saintly boy was to receive seven years' tutelage under Comgall of Bangor and Cainnech of Aghaboe before returning to Bute with his mother to become a pupil of his uncle Cathan.⁶⁰ It is particularly remarkable that neither Bower, nor Colgan's summary of Newton's text, nor *Breviarium Aberdonense* make reference to Kingarth, which again suggests a relatively late provenance originating, probably, from Dunblane.

This medieval tradition outlining St Bláán's life and career is well known, and has tended to dominate what little has been written about early Kingarth. It can only be thought to be of doubtful value to students of seventh-century Argyll. Without such evidence, we can say very little about Bláán save that a cult commemorating him had become established in the Hebridean zone in sufficient time to allow for his inclusion in a calendar of saints on Iona by the middle of the eighth century. It would seem to be reasonable to conclude that the cult had

⁵⁸ Anon., *VMSK*, §§2-8. The cleric was, of course, St Serf. The author was concerned in §§2-3 to establish that the saint's mother did not experience immaculate conception. For discussions of the hagiographical treatment of his birth, see R. Gardner, "Something Contrary to Sound Doctrine and to Catholic Faith": a new look at the Herbertian fragment of the Life of St Kentigern', *IR* 49 (1998) 115-26; A. Ross, 'The Parentage of Saint Kentigern', in Ó Baoill and McGuire, *Rannsachadh na Gàidhlig 2000*, 213-20.

⁵⁹ *Libellus de Nativitate Sancti Cuthberti*; J. Raine (ed.), *Miscellanea Biographica* (London and Edinburgh, Surtees Society, 1838) §19; for discussion see T. O. Clancy, 'Magpie hagiography in twelfth-century Scotland: the case of *Libellus de nativitate Sancti Cuthberti*', J. Cartwright (ed.), *Celtic Hagiography and Saints' Cults* (Cardiff 2003), 216-31. I am grateful to Professor Clancy for calling my attention to this aspect of the *Libellus*. He attributes this story (p. 222) to the author's Gallovidian source; it is therefore notable that Aelred's twelfth-century *Vita Sancti Niniani* [Forbes (ed.), *Ninian and Kentigern*, 137-57] contained a story (§10) in which a pupil found himself adrift at sea in a *currach* off the coast of Galloway. That this story is twelfth-century in provenance is argued by J. E. Fraser, 'Northumbrian Whithorn and the making of St Ninian', *IR* 53 (2002) 40-59, at 45-46.

⁶⁰ Colgan, *Acta Sanctorum*, 233; Macquarrie, 'Office for St Blane', 122. The latter source makes no mention of questionable or miraculous paternity, which, one suspects, was borrowed into Bláán's dossier from Kentigern's. Bower, *Scotichronicon*, xi.21 notes an intriguing claim from the dossier of Bláán that 'the church of Dunblane has just title to the whole lordship of Appleby, Congere, Troclingham and Malemath in England, as the gift of the *regulus* and lord thereof whose son St Bláán raised from the dead'; this too may reflect influence from the Kentigern dossier.

arisen at Kingarth rather earlier than this, though we ought probably to keep an open mind as regards the circumstances surrounding the foundation of the monastery. Neither can students of the seventh century learn a great deal from the evidence of church dedications and other commemorative activities relating to St Bláán and other Kingarth-associated saints, though a consideration of that evidence does produce interesting results in the light of the foregoing analysis. Commemorations of St Bláán in the Perthshire parish of Balquhiddy and in Clackmannanshire east of Stirling no doubt stemmed from Dunblane, and the commemoration of St Catán in the Perthshire parish of Aberuthven is likely to be owed to the same process.⁶¹ With reference to our seventh- and eighth-century evidence, a more interesting pattern is to be found in commemorations of Kingarth-associated saints in the firthlands of the Clyde estuary: examples include dedications to St Bláán near Dunaverty in southernmost Kintyre, in Inverary parish in Cowal, and in Cardross parish in Dumbartonshire, dedications to St Catán on Bute and, again, near Dunaverty, and dedications to St Ernán, the saint of Inchmarnock (or a saint of similar name) at Kilarnock in Ayrshire, in Cowal at Kilarnock Hill on the east side of Loch Striven, at Ardmarnock House above Ardmarnock Bay on the east side of Loch Fyne, at Baldernock in Stirlingshire, at Dalmarnock, and at Paisley where the saint's fair was held.⁶² It may be tempting to see in this distribution pattern an echo of the seventh-century context outlined above, in which potentates in Cowal in particular, but also in Clydesdale, may be thought likely to have maintained close links with the bishops of Kingarth. Unfortunately, we have too little in the way of dating evidence to exert the kind of control upon this data that would be necessary to draw

⁶¹ MacKinlay, *Ancient Church Dedications*, 110-12. Similarly perhaps the commemoration of Modan at Falkirk (MacKinlay, *Ancient Church Dedications*, 148-49; Watson, *CPNS*, 289-90); cf. next footnote. Clancy, 'Philosopher-King', 140, has noticed that the cult of St Kessoc/Mo-Chessóc probably belongs in this same group. For different attempts to explain this phenomenon, see Clancy, 'Philosopher-King', 137-43 and A. Woolf, 'The Age of Sea-kings', in *The Argyll Book*, ed. D. Omand (Edinburgh 2004) 98-9.

⁶² MacKinlay, *Ancient Church Dedications*, 109-12; Watson, *CPNS*, 273, 277. For a discussion of the distribution of commemorations of St Catán, see E. G. Bowen, *Saints, Seaways and Settlements in the Celtic Lands* (2nd edn, Cardiff 1977) 99-102, where he is cast as a 'Columban saint'. The list of Kingarth-associated saints might include as well St Modan, commemorated at such places as Kilmodan in Glendaruel in Cowal, Rosneath in the Lennox, Troon in Ayrshire, and Falkirk; see MacKinlay, *Ancient Church Dedications*, 110, 148-9; Watson, *CPNS*, 277, 289-90. Watson's suggestion on the basis of comparatively recent Gaelic name-forms like *Cill Mhaodháin* that the saint was Mo-Áedán is problematic; that name ought to have contracted to M'Áedán, and so is unlikely to have produced a medieval name-form like *Modanus*. I am grateful to Professors W. Gillies and T. O. Clancy for their thoughts on this latter point.

decisive correlations with Early Christian devotional activity.⁶³ Perhaps this will not always be so. It may be possible to develop a clearer understanding of the commemorative predilections of the potentates and clerics of earlier times in the Clyde estuary, for example, through a detailed study of Stewart commemorative practices across the region after it had passed into their lordship, which extended from Renfrew to Bute in the twelfth century, and thence into Cowal in the thirteenth.⁶⁴ It would be particularly useful to know whether the Stewarts and other aristocratic families tended to reinforce, to suppress or to leave relatively undisturbed the saintly dedications of earlier times. In addition, ongoing excavations by Headland Archaeology on Inchmarnock have uncovered among other exciting finds an inscription that upon preliminary examination may show that the cult of St Ernán (who was to become *Marnocus*) was established in the Clyde estuary in the Early Christian period.⁶⁵ It perhaps bears mentioning that at least there is no reason to suppose that in the seventh century the cult of a saint could not have spanned the socio-linguistic frontier that apparently divided Gaelic Cowal north of Bute from the British territories to the east of the island. That frontier was certainly sufficiently permeable later to allow for Gaels to have produced art with ‘strong affinities’ with the ‘Govan school’ of sculpture.⁶⁶

Similarly tantalising, if no more decisive, is an episode of Jocelin’s *Vita Sancti Kentegerni* which takes on added significance alongside the argument that the seventh-century bishops of Kingarth not only cultivated relationships with the kings of Cenél Comgaill, but may also have done so with the Clyde Rock kings to the east. Jocelin relates a tale concerning a tyrannical king based on the lower Clyde and his counsellor (*auricularius*) and *secretus* called *Cathen*.⁶⁷ This Cathen

⁶³ The classic words of warning pertaining to this subject, albeit in a Welsh context, are those of O. Chadwick, ‘The Evidence of Dedications in the Early History of the Welsh Church’, in *Studies in Early British History*, ed. N. K. Chadwick (Cambridge 1954) 173–88.

⁶⁴ The Paisley connection is interesting, since St Blane’s was given to Paisley Abbey in the thirteenth century; Laing *et al.*, ‘Kingarth’, 553. In considering the relevance of the Stewarts to this discussion I have profited greatly from haunting the steps of my colleague Steve Boardman.

⁶⁵ Discussed by Katherine Forsyth at the ‘Inchmarnock Research Seminar’ (see note 47 above). This find thus supports Fisher’s conclusion, *Early Medieval Sculpture*, 77, on art-historical grounds that the early medieval sculpture from Inchmarnock ‘suggests that a monastic settlement of some kind existed in the early Christian period’. Commentators have assumed that this Ernán is the Columban saint of that name, but the name was very common (*Vita Sancti Columbae* alone mentions five different men of that name) and we have seen that there is presently little reason to posit such connections between Iona and the Clyde estuary in the early Christian period.

⁶⁶ Laing *et al.*, ‘Kingarth’, 553.

⁶⁷ Jocelin, *VSK*, §§21–22.

urges his king to denounce Kentigern as a sorcerer and to forbid him from entering into the royal presence, and also physically attacks the saint. The king's punishment for preferring the advice and friendship of this miscreant to that of Kentigern is a terrible ailment of the foot, which afflicts not just the king himself, but all of his descendants. In this way, according to Jocelin, his line died out and *Rederech* – Riderch map Tutgual, the king of Clyde Rock named favourably in *Vita Sancti Columbae* (whose name will have been known to Jocelin himself through that text) – was able to bring about a providential change of dynasty on the lower Clyde, ushering in the age of kings friendly to Kentigern.⁶⁸ Does Cathen the ill-mannered *auricularius* represent a distant memory, however garbled, of *Cathan* of Kingarth, and this parable reflect a similar memory of a time when kings of the lower Clyde took counsel, as it were, with this saint or with his successors at Kingarth further down the firth?

The problematic testimony of later medieval hagiography and commemorative patterns notwithstanding, there remains a compelling case assembled from contemporary evidence for believing that the British enemies of the Cenél nEchdach dynasts of Lorn in 677 and 711, and perhaps of the Uí Chóelbad in Mag Line in 681, were Clyde Rock Britons who shared enemies and allies in common with the leaders of Cenél Comgaill in this period, much as Eugein map Beli had slain Domnall Brecc in 642. Such cooperation is likely to have given strength and comfort to both peoples in their respective struggles against regional rivals, and seems to have formed a political axis that came to include the kings of Fortriu, and was distinct from the axis represented by Iona, Cenél nGabráin and the Bernician English. The abbots of Iona in this period looked upon the men of Cowal as *extranei*, in part because of their rivalry with the more friendly kings of Cenél nGabráin, and in part, probably, because they looked upon Kingarth in their own territory as their principal church, rather than Iona. There are tantalising hints of different kinds – but nothing particularly firm – to suggest that Clyde Rock too maintained a relationship with Kingarth at this time. The suggested existence of such a cleavage within seventh-century southern Argyll, consisting of two *prímchenéla* each of which may be suspected of having maintained its own set of political and ecclesiastical relations within and outwith Gaelic northern Britain, complements the evidence of seventh-century genealogical information that undermines the centralist thesis regarding the nature of kingship in sixth- and seventh-century Argyll.⁶⁹ In particular, perhaps, the present

⁶⁸ Jocelin, *VSK*, §§22, 29-30; Adomnán, *VSC* i.15.

⁶⁹ D. N. Dumville, 'Cethri Prímchenéla Dáil Riata', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 20 (2000) 170-91, at 172; see also Dumville, 'Ireland and North Britain', 199. Here Professor

argument draws attention to the contrast between the dismissive attitude of *Míniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban* towards Cenél Comgaill,⁷⁰ and the view of *Cethri Prímchenéla Dáil Riata*, a text with Cenél Loairn sympathies, that the descendants of Comgaill were one of the ‘four principal kindreds’ of Dál Riata, and perhaps even more important than Cenél nGabráin.⁷¹ The argument also provides a context for understanding the survival of Clyde Rock in an era of Bernician expansion, during which nevertheless the stronghold of Clyde Rock itself appears to have reached its physical zenith.⁷² The kings here would appear to have managed this achievement in part through maintaining alliances that criss-crossed the Clyde estuary, involving a sometimes robust Cenél Comgaill dynasty and perhaps the Uí Nindeada Cruithin of south Antrim, and eventually involved the Pictish kindred with which Cenél Comgaill formed a marriage alliance in the last third of the seventh century.

The resulting power-block may be regarded as an axis of some significance within the region. In reference to this same period, Bede indicates in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* that ‘even some of the Britons in Britain’ (*nonnulla etiam de Brettonibus in Britannia*) gave themselves over to reformed Paschal and other observances in the 680s as an extension of a process experienced across the north of Ireland, and involving ‘nearly everyone who was free of the dominion of Iona’ (*pene omnes qui ab Hiensium dominio erant liberi*).⁷³ If it is accepted that Iolán, bishop of Kingarth at this time, was one of those who *ab Hiensium dominio erant liberi*, we ought perhaps to accept that his see could have followed this course of action at this time. The foregoing argument also provides a context which would allow for the further possibility that the Church of Clyde Rock was one of the British Churches that did the same. We are not likely to get very far through such speculations; it will be enough to underline the point that recognising the existence of a Kingarth-Cenél Comgaill-Clyde Rock axis in the seventh century invites re-assessments of conventional models which have presupposed uniformity of political and ecclesiastical thought and action among the Dál Riata in this period.

Dumville responds to Bannerman, *Dalriada*, 104, and more particularly to Sharpe, ‘Thriving of Dalriada’, 55. For further disquiet regarding the centralist thesis, see Fraser, ‘Iona Chronicle’, *passim*.

⁷⁰ *Míniugud Senchasa Fher nAlban*, §§ 50-3.

⁷¹ *Cethri Prímchenéla Dáil Riata* [Dumville, ‘*Cethri Prímchenéla*’, 175-82], §§ 46-58. Dumville, *ibid.*, 186-7 makes the point that this tractate hints at ‘elevating the descendants of Comgaill above those of Gabrán’ by providing them with a fuller pedigree. See also Fraser, ‘Iona Chronicle’, 90-1.

⁷² L. Alcock, *Kings and Warriors, Craftsmen and Priests in Northern Britain AD 550-850* (Edinburgh 2003) 42-3.

⁷³ Bede, *HE*, v.15.

The inclination to subordinate Kingarth into what is essentially Iona's history of the sixth and seventh centuries in this region, based upon the comparative wealth of source material that survives from Columba's monastery, is understandable. Unfortunately, it has encouraged centralist thinking about the lay and ecclesiastical politics of the region, and probably underestimates the contemporary significance of other regionally important communities.

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