

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

Introduction

The Method of the Enquiry

This is an essay which has less defence than some against charges of over-reliance on uncertain sources. There is little enough we can know about sixth- and seventh-century Scotland: it is uncertain whether the Irish Annals' Iona source was being written as early as the reign of Áedán, from 574 to 608 (Bannerman 1974 pp. 9-26),¹ and all our other records are certainly much posterior to it. Since, in what follows, I make use of a great deal of later evidence, and place heavy reliance on the testimony of the Annals, I must freely own that the conclusions can only be tentative, and that alternative ones may be as valid.²

My justification for the free use of suggestion and hypothesis is that, in this state, there is no other way to advance our awareness. When, as Sherlock Holmes might have said, you have exhausted the possible, all that remains is the probable. Perhaps, as some might argue, the proper historian should stop with the possible, but a poor and empty picture of early mediaeval Scotland, and not just Scotland, will result from such limits. Of course, speculation cannot give us certainty as its upshot, even if, as here, it is evidentially based. But to bridge that gap of knowledge with a structure of hypothesis seems to me worthwhile. Such a structure may be examined for what it is, tested, contested, and possibly demolished. If on the other hand it survives this examination, perhaps then it may be admitted as probable, even if no more. With this paper I am assembling the first pieces of this structure. Some I have gathered from elsewhere and some are my own construction. But I hope, with this warning, to ensure that anyone placing weight on it does so at their own risk.

The Sources

Although the sources for Áedán's reign are few, he is the first king of Dál Riata to have much more than an obituary in any record,³ it may be as well to begin with a summary of them (others may be found in Bannerman 1974 pp. 80-90, Sharpe 1995 pp. 270-271 & with fuller reference to later material in Macquarrie 1997 pp. 103-109). Áedán is referred to in the sources of four different countries, in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (ASC *s.a.* 603) and the Ecclesiastical History of Bede (*HE* I 34) in England; in two of the Welsh Triads (Bromwich 1978 pp. 57, 147), the poem *Peiryn Vaban* (Jarman 1955), and

the genealogical tracts *Bonedd Gwŷr y Gogledd* and *De Situ Breicheiniog* in Wales (Bromwich 1978 pp. 238-239; Wade-Evans 1944 pp. 315-317); in a number of tales from Ireland, of which most are probably thirteenth-century but the Preface to the poem *Amrae Coluim Cille* is eleventh-century and its core possibly older (Herbert 1988 p. 180),⁴ and the tenth-century-or-later Life of St. Laisren (Heist 1965 p. 340-341). Most importantly of all he is mentioned in a number of the Irish Chronicles, of whose Scottish entries most for this period as Bannerman has shown originate from the Dál Riata monastery of Iona (1974 pp. 9-26). He is also the subject of several stories in Adomnán's *Vita Columbae* (see Sharpe 1995 pp. 268-269), and is featured in the Scottish *Senchus fer nAlban*, which is a list of the genealogies of the families of the Scottish Dál Riata and their military strength, dating as we have it from the tenth century, though based on seventh- or eighth-century information (Bannerman 1974 pp. 27-67). The notes in the Annals and Adomnán form the backbone of the record of Áedán's reign, and since they require some detail I shall summarise the others first.

Genealogical traditions

A great deal of the tradition regarding Áedán seeks to make him part of one or other genealogical tradition. The Welsh tracts trace his descent from the Roman Emperor Maxen Wledic through Dyfynwal Hen, in the case of *Bonedd Gwŷr y Gogledd*, and through a daughter of Brychan Brycheiniog who is said to have married his father Gabrán in the case of *De Situ Breicheiniog*. The former is late and seemingly garbled,⁵ but though the latter conflicts with none of our Scottish information, Brychan's supposed nine daughters are made to originate almost every royal line of Britain. Since the other genealogy and the Triads show that Áedán had achieved renown in story in Wales possibly as early as the ninth century, that he should be included among Brychan's descendants need imply no more truth to the record than the claims for the others (see Bromwich 1978 pp. 288-289).

The Life of St. Laisren makes only a passing mention of Áedán; he is said to be the father of the saint's mother by a British wife. This is a claim intended presumably to give a memorable pedigree to the saint, and though there is nothing impossible about the idea that Áedán should have had a British wife (see Bromwich pp. 264-266, Ziegler 1999 n. 14), I shall suggest later that at least one of his wives was of different extraction.⁶ The *Senchus* is more trustworthy, and many of its featured persons can be found in the Irish Chronicles, but it centers on the kindred descending from Áedán's father Gabrán, the Cenél nGabráin, and seems to descend all the Scottish houses from Fergus mac Erc, who is said to have founded the Scottish kingdom around 500 by the Irish Chronicles (AU *s.a.* 502). It has been suggested that the open enmity between the Cenél nGabráin and another house, the Cenél

Loairn, and the apparent occurrence of multiple kingships from the end of the seventh century to the mid-eighth may show that this picture is over-simple, an origin myth akin to that of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Bannerman 1974 pp. 108-132; Hudson 1994 pp. 17-20). Though its motives are therefore possibly political and the *Senchus* has something of the pseudo-historical about it, its information is detailed and since we are principally concerned with the Cenél nGabráin, its focus is not so serious an issue. On the other hand, such material can seek to portray a fictive unity under a settled kingship belonging to the interested kindred; the Irish lists of the Kings of Tara have such a function for the Uí Néill (O’Rahilly 1946 *passim*), and the testimony of the Scottish regnal lists to a steady descent of the kingship through the Cenél nGabráin conflicts rather with the royal obits of the Chronicles, which seem to hint at a much more complex and fragmentary kingship (see Anderson 1980 pp. 44-76). Bannerman suggests that the different kindreds named in the *Senchus* may have been reluctant to give their allegiance to the Cenél nGabráin (1974 pp. 108-118), and we must be wary of believing that Áedán’s range necessarily bespoke a natural hegemony over these groups. When Adomnán mentions the Cenél Loairn he gives no suggestion that they were under outside control (VC II.45). This is the kind of agenda which may be present in the *Senchus*’s use of its material.

Poetic material

The Welsh mentions of Áedán in non-genealogical contexts are but three. The Triad of the Famous Warbands mentions “the band of Gavran son of Áedán, who went to sea for their lord” (Bromwich 1978 p. 47), and the Triad of the Unrestrained Ravagings tells of his raid on the court of Rhydderch Hael King of Dumbarton, after which “there was nothing left alive there” (*ibid* p. 147). This raid is the subject of the poem *Peiryn Vaban* (Jarman 1955), and it is presumably from this story that Áedán got his Welsh epithet ‘*Uradawc*’,⁷ ‘wily’, for Adomnán makes a point of Columba’s friendship with Rhydderch (VC I.15). Once again it is impressive that Áedán, as a non-Welsh ruler, had made such an impact into the stories to which the Triads represent a kind of mnemonic index (Bromwich 1978 pp. lxiii-lxxxii), but the tradition of the Strathclyde attack is all that has survived in detail, and is hardly without bias. It seems unlikely that anything more can be made of it.

The Prophecy of Berchan

There is also one Scottish piece of verse, the Prophecy of Berchan.⁸ This obscure poem purports to be a prophecy of the fortunes of the Kings of Ireland and Scotland by the tenth-century Bishop whose name it bears, and has short verses on several of the *Cenél nGabráin*, though the entries are pseudonymous and difficult to identify. The content of the prophecies is

allusory and now largely obscure; parts can be identified with the record of other sources, but parts are apparently independent. The work is undoubtedly polemical, but its agendas are difficult to plumb and its sources, if not purely the somewhat visionary invention of its writers, unknown. It was apparently composed in three portions, the opening few stanzas quite possibly being the actual work of Berchan represented as foretelling the invasions of the Vikings, but the latter portions which concern us are probably much later (Hudson 1996 pp. 14-20). One might assume that in order for the work to be appreciated it would have to seem to refer to events in the kings' histories which were well known, but since we do not know what audience the work was intended to reach this assumption avails us little.

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

Little enough is known of Causantín mac Fergusa, anyway; what legendary material there may have been would probably have been assimilated with stories of the first Christian Emperor or the British saint of the same name. Hudson suggests that the known details of his career fit the figure described, but this relies on a very personal interpretation of the evidence of the king-lists, which conflicts noticeably with Anderson's interpretation of those testimonies (1980 pp. 190-193). Her explanation is intended to save the lists as evidence at this point, but Hudson's strategy of selecting by interpretation is perhaps more questionable. This does not matter for our purposes, but the point is that while there is at least a shred of evidence for the identification of the stanzas's subject with Áedán in the thinking of the glossator, there is none bar Hudson's suggestion for Causantín.

Furthermore, we have already observed that by the eleventh century, when Hudson believes that this section of the Prophecy was written, Áedán mac Gabráin was a subject of many stories and legends. The *Scela Cano mac Gartnáin* was already two hundred years old, and Irish tales of him abound from this period and even later. Fordun also mentions Áedán in a similar way to 'Berchan'; whether he was using the Prophecy itself or simply accessing similar stories is unclear however (Fordun III.27). If, nonetheless, a Scottish poet were selecting a king of Dál Riata on whom to compose verses to precede those on Cináed mac Alpín, there can hardly have been a more obvious candidate, and one whom strong parallels, due to the patronage of the cult of Columba and the conquest of the Picts of which the poem and Fordun speak, would have made a worthwhile choice to anchor the possibly somewhat shaky succession of Cináed. The glossator may have had good reasons for his suggestion.

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

The English Information

Bede refers to Áedán but once, as the opponent of King Æthelfrith at the battle of *Degsastan* in, as he has it, 603 (cf. Duncan 1984 pp. 15-17). We shall discuss this later, as its variance with the Irish record is important, but Bede's hundred-year distance from events sadly makes him one of our better sources. This is also the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle's only mention of him, and the E manuscript adds apparently independent information on it, presumably from the Northumbrian chronicle that appear to have informed it (Whitelock 1976 pp. 109-125, 127-128). That he should thus have achieved mention is unsurprising, and we shall return to its import later.

Chronology and the Irish Chronicles

Our principal source is however, as we have said, the Irish Chronicles, and these are a very complex series of texts. While we may be fairly sure that the bulk of the early Scottish entries in the principal texts, the Annals of Ulster and the Annals of Tigernach as they are known, are of a close-to-contemporary origin based on records made in the monastery of Iona,⁹ the earlier manuscript of the Annals of Ulster is of fifteenth-century origin and is covered in secondary annotations (see Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1973 pp. viii-

xii). This was the case when it was transcribed by Hennessy in the 1880s, after four centuries had elapsed for it to acquire these extra strata, although many are admittedly identifiable and at the time recent hands. We may imagine that the eight centuries that had elapsed between these Iona records had been transcribed into what Hughes called 'The Chronicle of Ireland' and its transcription into this manuscript had also left their marks (Bannerman 1974 pp. 9-26). The scope for hundreds of years of editing to remove the politically unsuitable and the no longer comprehensible is also frightening. O'Rahilly stressed that the source chronicle which lies behind the various chronicles probably already had a number of secondary annotations when it was first divided (1946 p. 259); this means that even where an annal occurs in several or all of the surviving texts (of which the *Chronicon Scotorum* at least is in an eleventh-century manuscript, though it is brutally abbreviated, and the defective Annals of Tigernach in one of the twelfth) we cannot be sure that it is of original provenance. Though factors like language and focus are of some use in narrowing the possibilities down (see Dumville 1982), ultimately as Dumville warns us we cannot be sure that any one annal is older than the 911 date at which the manuscripts diverge (1984c p. 223 and *passim*). Equally, it is unlikely that what remains is anything like the whole story; editorial error and misunderstanding are well-evidenced (O'Rahilly 1946 pp. 235-243), and each editor may have had his own axe to grind. What is left is what has not been chopped away by any of them. The editors' motives can rarely be detected. The Annals of the Four Masters and the Annals of Clonmacnoise for example show distinct signs of having been arranged and in parts fabricated in the interests of the families of their compilers; but in the case of Clonmacnoise the source text appears to have been fuller than any other surviving manuscript, before its translation (Grabowski 1984 p. 43; Dumville 1984a). Where, as in the case of the Annals of Ulster, the *Chronicum Scotorum* or the Annals of Inisfallen, the manuscript is an abbreviation of its source, it is very difficult to say for what purpose this abbreviation was carried out. Inisfallen and Ulster's remaining entries show very different interpretations of the political situation in Ireland at points of conflict between the Kings of Cashel and the Uí Néill (Hughes 1972 pp. 135-137); this represents each text's development after their divergence from the main Chronicle of Ireland, but between this and the surviving manuscripts the number of editorial stages and their motivations is impossible to guess at. Ultimately one has what one has and each annal must be treated on its merits. As to why the annals which concern us were ever recorded, we know that Iona was interested in the Cenél nGabráin; we may also suspect that Pictish and Scottish affairs were of concern to the monastery because of its monks' work and the monastery's daughter houses in those areas, but what information this has left us is so tiny a fragment of what presumably could have been recorded that detecting a significance to the selection is impossible. What we have was not only

thought of interest at the time, that time being anything between contemporaneous and fifty years later, but retained that interest through till the redaction of the manuscripts we have.

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

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

560 Death of Gabran mac Domangart King of Alba. Flight [of the Albannaich] before Bruide mac Maelchon.¹⁰

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

- 575 The Convention of Druim Cet, at which were Columba and Áed mac Ainmirech.¹¹
- 577 Battle of Teloch [Delgu] in Kintyre, where there fell Dúnochadh mac Conaill and others of the followers of the sons of Gabrán.¹²
- 577 The first venture of the Ulaid to Man.
- 578 Retreat of the Ulaid from Man.
- 579 The Battle of Druim mac Erca, in which Áed mac Ainmirech was victor. Áedán mac Gabrán went on an expedition to Orkney. Cendalaeth King of Picts died.
- 581 Baetán mac Cairill King of the Ulaid died. Áedán went on an expedition to Orkney.
- 582 Áedán mac Gabrán won the Battle of Manann.
- 583 Áedán mac Gabrán won the Battle of Manand.
- 584 Bruidei mac Maelchon King of Picts died.¹³
- 586 Baetán mac Ninnid maic Dauí King of Tara was killed. The battle of Druim mac Erca, in which Áed mac Ainmirech was victor.
- 587 Battle of Doethra, in which Colmán Bec mac Diarmait was killed; Áed mac Ainmirech was victor. Baetán mac Cairill, King of the Ulaid, died [there].¹⁴
- 590 Áedán mac Gabrán won the Battle of Leithreid.¹⁵
- 594 Columba died. Eogán died.
- 595 The Battle of Ráith in Druad and the Battle of Ard Sechain. The slaughter of the sons of Áedán, that is, Brán and Domangart [and Eochaid Find and Artur, in the battle of Circhenn, in which Áedán is defeated, and] the battle of Corann.
- [599 Gartnait King of Picts died.]
- 600 Áedán fought the Battle of the Saxons[, where there fell Eanfrith brother of Æthelfrith King of the Saxons], in which Áedán was defeated.
- 606 Áedán mac Gabrán died [in the 38th year of his reign in the 74th year of his life].
- 622 Conaing mac Áedáin maic Gabráin drowned.
- 629 Máel Cáith mac Scandláin, King of the Cruithin, won the Battle of Fid Eoin, Connadd Cerr King of Dál Riata fell there[, and Dicuill mac Eachach of the Cenél Cruithne, and the *nepotes* of Áedán, Rigullan mac Conaing, Failbe mac Eachach and Oisiric mac Albruit, *rigdomna Saxon*, with a great slaughter of their men].

Some extra material is also added by Adomnán. Among other things he places Áedán as another participant at the Convention of Druim Cet, as does the eleventh-century Preface to the *Amrae Coluim Cille* (edited in Stokes 1899 & 1900; see Sharpe 1995 pp. 270-271), probably on the basis of the *Vita Columbæ*, and mentions a battle against a people called the *Miathi* (VC I.8), who may be related to the people Dio Cassius mentions and that Watson placed near Stirling, the *Meatae* (Watson 1926 p. 9). It is this battle, according to Adomnán, at which Brán and Artur were killed, but he says that Domangart was killed in a battle with the Saxons (VC I.9). We shall return to this shortly. It is also Adomnán who places on record the friendship between Columba and Rhydderch Hael of Dumbarton (VC I.15), with which the Welsh tales of Áedán's aggression so strongly conflict. Adomnán's Life has a number of levels: its most obvious one is hagiographical, to prove the saintliness of Columba by enumerating some of his miracles, but there is also seemingly an attempt to identify the fortunes of the *Cenél nGabráin* with that of Columba's kin, the *Cenél Conaill*, of whom the Irish King Áed mac Ainmirech also seen at Druim Cet was one (see Herbert 1988 pp. 9-56). On the other hand, Adomnán wrote using information that had been gathered within living memory of some of these events, as Herbert shows, and the amount of distortion he could have got away with would have been limited. Furthermore, his purpose would be better served perhaps by applying a hagiographical interpretation to well-known events rather than to make the events fit a pattern which is, if there at all, a secondary one in the work. The wealth of detail and the emphasis on witnesses in the *Vita Columbæ* has inspired a great deal of faith in its incidental information, and though subtexts have been located the testimony has yet to be seriously questioned.

Áedán's later fame then was truly international, and even when the Chronicles were compiled, possibly on the basis of contemporary records, he was then believed to have been active over an area which included Eastern Ulster, the Irish Sea, Argyll and Kintyre, Stirlingshire, Angus and the Orkneys. This sphere of activity cannot be simply explained, even though Dál Riata boasted a developed system of military service (Bannerman 1974 pp. 146-154). In this paper I attempt to provide some further explanation by placing Áedán's activity in the context of politics across the North of Britain, and thus, I hope, showing in slightly more detail than usual how the business of kings may have been conducted in those times.

The first year of Áedán's reign

Áedán acceded to the kingship of Dál Riata as second successor to his father Gabrán, the intervening king having been Conall mac Comgaill, the benefactor of Columba. This is the testimony both of Scottish regnal lists and

more reliably, of Adomnán. Interestingly, Adomnán records that Columba did not favour Áedán for the succession, preferring his brother Eoganán (Bannerman 1974 pp. 81-82). Only after three punitive visits from an angel did the saint agree to ordain the younger brother (VC III.5). There is obviously here a strong sub-text of Iona's right to approve the Dál Riata succession, and the early appearance of ordination has been held to invalidate the story as Adomnán's confection, or at least that of Cumméne, his predecessor in hagiography (Enright 1985 pp. 5-78). Certainly what little remains of Cumméne's work as quoted by Adomnán has a strong political motive, for it includes a famous prophecy of loss of power for the *Cenél nGabráin* if they ever break faith with Columba's kin, and the Old Testament language of priestly ordination is perhaps an indication of the rôle Cumméne and indeed Adomnán may have seen for themselves in the Scottish succession. But what the story contains of interest for our purpose is the hint that Áedán was not the only candidate for the throne. Eoganán is not recorded again until what is probably his death in 595 (AU *s.a.* 594, as "Eogán"; see Anderson 1922 I p. 118): what he did in this time is a mystery.

In the light of this hint of opposition at the outset, the almost immediately following Battle of *Teloch*, in Kintyre, is of special interest. This conflict is recorded in the Annals of Ulster *sub annis* 575 and 576, split over two annals which are continuous in the Annals of Tigernach (AT *s.a.* 574; see Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983 p. 81). Opponents and victors are not specified; all that is recorded is that Dunchadh mac Conaill, presumably the son of Áedán's predecessor, and "other companions of the sons of Gabrán" fell there.¹⁶ The possibilities of this are therefore almost numberless. Dunchadh was not a descendant of Gabrán, but of his brother Comgall. Áedán may perhaps have been facing his brother (in which case the supporters of the sons of Gabrán might have been ranged on both sides), the son of his *Cenél Comgaill* predecessor, or even both. Broader contexts have also been suggested. Henderson saw this as a battle against nearby Picts in the light of the expansionist policy suggested by the 10th-century Prophecy of Berchan's record of Áedán's thirteen years of warfare against them (Henderson 1967 p. 48). That it was against the forces of King Bruide seems unlikely, as his focus appears to have been further north, Bede notwithstanding, but the shadowy King Cendalaeth might owe his record in the Chronicles to some such contact, or some more local group might have been contesting Áedán's expansion. That the battle was fought in Kintyre need not indicate the boundaries of this expansion, since warfare was very much an affair of raid and counter-raid at this time (Alcock 1987 pp. 295-309), but it does seem rather close to home for Áedán. This has led Bannerman to suggest that the opposition was Irish (1971 p. 230), and a plausible context for this can also be suggested. To do so however leads us into the wider question of Áedán's involvement in Ireland,

which although it will not solve for us the enigmatic *Teloch*, is of great relevance for Áedán's rule and should therefore be taken separately.

Áedán and the rulers of Ireland

In an examination of this subject it must be remembered at all times that Dál Riata was a two-headed beast. With a kingdom of greater antiquity than his Scottish domain in the area of the modern County Antrim Áedán could not treat the Irish kings as distant foreign potentates, he was one of them and among them. Dál Riata had to beware threats to its independence, and claims for tribute and military service, from not only those who would be overlords of the north, at this time principally the Cenél Conaill of the Northern Uí Néill, Columba's kin, but also the more local rulers of Ulster's other tribes, including the Dál Fhiatach and the Dál nAraide, also known as Ulaid. It was Baetán mac Cairill of the Ulaid who dominated this area in the early years of Áedán's reign (Bannerman 1968). The question of what claim overlords in Ireland might have over the Scottish province was at this stage an open one. The important events in this connection are however of uncertain sequence. Rising figure of the Northern Uí Néill at this time was Áed mac Ainmirech, first seen in the Annals of Tigernach in 570; he met with Áedán at the Convention of Druim Cet, which the Annals of Ulster date to 575. There it was decided, or so later sources claim, that Áed should have the military service of the Irish province but that Áedán should levy tribute on it from Scotland (Sharpe 1995 pp. 270-271). Such an alliance, as Bannerman points out, is plausible enough, for Báetán was certainly in a position to threaten the newly-succeeded Áedán, who indeed is said by the twelfth-century Book of Leinster to have submitted to him (LL 330ab 45).¹⁷ For a vulnerable king with interests he wished to pursue overseas (for as we shall see Áedán was active in Scotland in 580 or 581, and possibly also in 582 or 583), an alliance with the Uí Néill might have been very attractive, particularly if his succession had not gone unchallenged. Its compatibility with his most famous ecclesiastic's views must also have been a factor (Herbert 1988 p. 29 & n. 66).

However, as has been said, there are problems with this analysis, not least that of the Book of Leinster's recorded submission. This would seem to conflict with the picture of unbroken loyalty to the Cenél Conaill presented by Cumméne through Adomnán in VC III 5. It could be argued that after eighty years a temporary breach might have been forgotten, but when it is noted that the Annals of Ulster do not record Áed in action until 579, and his first victory as King of Cenél Conaill *sub anno* 586 (AU *s.a.* 578, 586), the suspicion must arise that a dislocation of some sort has occurred (Byrne 1973 pp. 110-111; Sharpe 1995 p. 313). The Annals of Ulster at this point suffer from frequent

duplication of events, and often supply alternative dates some years apart, seemingly the result of collation of two variant sources (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983 p. x). Druim Cet is not one of these, but the victory of Áed is, being entered *sub annis* 585, 586 and 592. Moreover, the assassination of Áed's predecessor, Báetán mac Ninnedo, is only recorded *sub anno* 585. Sharpe therefore suggests that Druim Cet must be dated between Áed's probable accession in 586 and Columba's death in 597, since all records of the conference agree that both these two were present, and the former as king: he favours 590. Macquarrie points out that if the date is 594, its record *sub anno* 575 admits of explanation by a misplacement from one 19-year Easter cycle to the previous one (1997 pp. 112-113), but this is a question for experts in chronology. The precise year is less important than the removal of the event from the confused period at the beginning of Áedán's reign.

If Druim Cet is to be dated later, this leaves us a much simplified picture of the North of Ireland at Áedán's accession. In it there are for Dál Riata only two major figures, Áedán and Báetán mac Cairill. The sequence laid out is far simpler than the chopping and changing alliances ingeniously hypothesised by Bannerman. Báetán becomes more powerful, and at some point Áedán is perhaps forced to offer him submission. This may even have been the result of the Battle of *Delgu*, if it was not an internal affair. Since Áedán was active in the Orkneys in 581 or 582 (AU *s.aa.* 580, 581), which suggests it was safe to leave his kingdom, I would suggest that any settlement had by then been made. 581 is also the year first given by the Annals of Ulster for the death of Báetán; its second, 587, is noticeably the year that Áed achieved dominance over the North of Ireland, and this may be what has induced the addition. This connection is also shown by the Annals of Inisfallen, which record that Báetán's death was in battle against Áed (*s.a.* 581). The *Chronicum Scotorum*, which otherwise covers very few of the events with which we are concerned, dates Báetán's death to 580. Áedán's activity in the following years may also lend weight to the earlier date.¹⁸ This activity however is not without confusions of its own.

Man or Manau?

In 581, and possibly again in 582, Áedán is recorded to have won the battle of "Manau".¹⁹ As was set out by Watson, this could mean either the Isle of Man or a region of the same name in the Forth area (Watson 1926 pp. 103-104). Philologically, there is no distinction between the names. In default of any more help from the evidence, one must attempt to evaluate the alternatives in their historical context, and the trouble here is that both are plausible. In 577 the Ulaid attacked Manau, and this at least must have been the island (AU *s.a.* 576). However, for 578, the Annals of Ulster record, "The

retreat of the Ulaid from Man" (s.a. 577, trans. Mac Niociall). No hint of a battle is given, but in a record so bald as that of the Chronicles argument *e silentio* is risky. It is best to say that we simply cannot tell what occurred. Then, in 581 and 582, it is recorded that Áedán won this "Battle of Manau" (AU s.aa. 580, 581; cf. AI s.a. 583). It is noticeable that AT uses different languages for the Ulaid's attacks on Man, and Áedán's fight or fights at Manau. The former are recorded in Latin and the latter in Irish, suggesting the use of two different sources (cf. Dumville 1982, 1984a p. 119). This battle is also recorded in the *Annales Cambriæ*, sub anno 584, without a victor, but at this period their record is of no independent value for events recorded in the Irish Annals (Hughes 1973 pp. 69-72; Dumville 1984c).²⁰ It is also the only mention of Áedán made by the Fragmentary Annals (FA I 3), but they appear to be related to the same Clonmacnoise-group text as AT (Radner 1978 p. xviii), so this must be the focus of a later editor, not the original text.

Which Manau Áedán was fighting in is unclear. As will be seen, he certainly had interests in the area of the British province, and Welsh sources do not remember him kindly, though they do so very vaguely. It is certainly not impossible that he could have been fighting there, it is even plausible, but it is equally so for a battle on the Isle. The control over the sea between Áedán's two provinces that could be asserted from Man is obvious, and Báetán's Ulaid were certainly active there, possibly even settling there, and linguistic evidence from Man suggests a lasting Irish settlement on the Isle (Cubbon 1982 pp. 259-260). It may therefore be imagined that Áedán might have wished to take control there to prevent the link between his provinces being broken. He might also have seized the opportunity presented by Báetán's death to do so. The Orkneys campaign and the *Senchús fer nAlban* illustrate the ability of Dál Riata to carry out naval operations, which is also implied in the Triad of the Faithful Warbands. Furthermore, though it is late, the statement of the genealogy in the Book of Leinster which records Áedán's submission is of interest. It says of Baetán, "It was by him that Manu was cleared; and in the second year after his death the Irish abandoned Manu" (LL 330ab 45, trans. O'Rahilly 1946 p. 504; see also Dobbs 1921 pp. 324, 328). That there was another "venture" into Man by the Ulaid is implied by the Chronicles' description of the 577 endeavour as the first. It seems clear that here at least the relevant Chronicles were being recorded some time after the events,²¹ and possibly the compiler never managed to record the "second venture". The date implied for the following evacuation would moreover be 582 or 583, which coincides nicely with Áedán's victory. However, evidence of the twelfth century should not be allowed to close the debate.

With all these possibilities for confusion the actual events of the sixth century are probably forever lost to us. It is certainly possible that Áedán attacked Man, but as we shall see the East would also attract his attention. To

my mind, the fact that most battles of Áedán's that can be located in Scotland east of Dál Riata are somewhat later in his reign makes Man slightly the more likely, as do the suggestions that control over it was being contested by the Ulaid,²² and the immediately previous endeavour in Orkney which confirms that the resources for a naval campaign were available at that time. However, these are only small probabilities, and irresolvable. Let us therefore turn our attention to the East.

Áedán in the East

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

The Deaths of the Sons of Áedán

First, it will be as well to remind ourselves exactly what the sources say. Among the annalistic texts, only the Annals of Ulster and those of Tigernach mention the deaths of Áedán's sons. Of these, AU is typically brief, saying of 595 (as it has it), "The Battle of Ráith in Druad. The Battle of Ard Senchain. The slaying of the sons of Áedán, that is, Brán and Domangart. The battle of Corann" (trans. Mac Niocaill 1983). AT is however more expansive, recording among the other events, "The slaughter of the sons of Áedán, that is, Brán and Domangart and Eochaid Find and Artur, in the battle of Circhenn, in which Áedán is defeated, and the battle of Corann".²³ It is clear here that either the wording of AT is a gloss on that preserved by the Annals of Ulster, or AU has lost information in its brevity that Tigernach has preserved. Normally Ulster is regarded as the purer reflection of the original Chronicle of Ireland, but Dumville warns us against assuming that AT is always the poorer preserver of information (1984a p. 127), and it is notable that here AT preserves the place-name *Circinn*. This is recorded later in the collection of materials in the Poppleton Manuscript in a tract called *De Situ Albanix* (Miller 1982 pp. 137-142), where it is the name of a Pictish province approximately covering Angus and the Mearns (Broun 2000 pp. 34-41, esp. 40-41). Broun has shown good reason to suppose this text is for the most part

a 12th-century confection according to the political geography of the time, but admits that this name, along with the others it preserves, are probably early. Even though part of the evidence is AT's testimony, which cannot be earlier *per se* than 911 (Dumville 1984a pp. 119-124), this might justify a reckoning of its information here.

The testimony of Adomnán on the matter complicates things considerably, however. The deaths of three of Áedán's sons are the subject of one of Columba's prophecies, and thus recorded in detail, although Brán is not mentioned (VC I 9). The story itself has more than slight Old Testament overtones as Sharpe points out (1995 p. 271), but it seems unlikely that the ends of the unlucky sons have suffered from this. According to Adomnán, Artur and Eochaid Find were killed in the battle against the *Miathi* that only he records, and Domangart died later fighting the Angles. It is noticeable however that in Áedán's only known battle with the Angles, *Degsastan*, the only dead man named, both in English and Irish sources, is a brother of the Northumbrian King Æthelfrith,²⁴ and where the Irish sources record the death of a Saxon, we might expect a Gaelic prince to be mentioned also if he had fallen there.²⁵

There are a number of ways to attempt to reconcile these records (Bannerman 1974 pp. 84-86). Broun, as did O'Rahilly, suggests that the battle against the *Miathi* is to be identified with Circinn (2000 p. 41). Adomnán however says that the battle against the *Miathi* was a victory, albeit a costly one (VC I 8), and AT is unambiguous in saying that Áedán was defeated at Circinn. Perspectives may differ, of course, but since the Scottish annals in both texts most probably originated in Iona perhaps this is less the case than it might be otherwise. Neither are the *Miathi* likely to have been the enemy at Manau, for Adomnán calls them "barbarians" and we believe the British Gododdin of the area to have been Christian (Sharpe 1995 pp. 268-269). In any case it seems unlikely that the battle against the Angles in which Domangart met his end would have been fought in Pictish, *Miathi* or even Gododdin territory.

Something has therefore got to give. If Adomnán is correct, then the Annals of Tigernach are wrong, and vice versa. That Adomnán should fail to mention Brán is at least explicable, for his probable model, I Samuel 16, names four sons of Jesse, of whom three die and the youngest succeeds to Israel. According to the *Senchus fer nAlban* Áedán had seven sons, Gartnait and Conaing also being left out by Adomnán (Bannerman 1974 p. 66), who had only room for four if his parallel were to be maximally effective. Both these two are mentioned in the Chronicles (AT *s.a.* 599 and AU *s.a.* 622 respectively), so they are more than a genealogical fiction. But the confusion of the Chronicles may be irresolvable. Tigernach has seemingly preserved a note of the battle of Circinn which Ulster has dropped, and possibly, once,

also a record of the battle with the *Miathi* from which at some point in its history the deaths of Artur and Eochaid Find have been moved to join their brothers (Anderson 1980 pp. 146-147). If this be so we must accept the possibility that Circinn has also been moved, but in the context of Áedán's reign the date is not implausible, as a move eastwards appears to be indicated by the probable locations of these battles.

Áedán and the Picts: thirteen years of warfare?

Such a movement inevitably brings us to the Picts. Of Áedán's campaigns, at least two (Orkney and Circinn) were in Pictish territory, and two more may have been, the unidentified *Leithreid*, and possibly the battle against the *Miathi*, depending on that people's exact status with regard to any Pictish overkingship. Now, Áedán was later to be remembered as the enemy of the Picts: the Prophecy of Berchán says of him that he spent thirteen years in warfare against them, "not satisfied that an Irishman should have been king in the east in subjection to Picts" (Berchan 114-118, trans. Anderson 1922 I p. 76), and Fordun has a similar record of him (III.27). The former, of itself, is more obscure even than the rest of Berchan, and before trying to fit it in it may be as well to set out what we can say about Áedán and the Picts. Even in this a certain amount of hypothesis is necessary, but I feel that the gaps in the evidence can in this case to a large extent be bridged thus.

Orkney and Bruide

The only secure point in Áedán's Pictish chronology is in fact the Orkney campaign. We have seen that the annal in AT that records the battle of Circinn is at the very least altered, and moreover at this point in the history of Scotland we cannot be sure, without considerably more evidence on the structure of Pictish kingship than we possess, that in 596 (or thereabouts) that area was part of any wider Pictish kingdom (Anderson 1980 pp. 103-118; Hudson 1994 pp. 8-11). The nearest obit for a potential king of such a realm given by the Chronicles is the king whose name is given in what Anderson called the B-version of the Pictish king-list as Gartnait mac Domelch (AU *s.a.* 600; Anderson 1980 pp. 77-102), but for reasons I shall shortly explain I think a battle between him and Áedán unlikely.

What then of the Orkney campaign? In 581 there is no doubt of the identity of at least one King of Picts, for the formidable Bruide mac Maelchon was not to die until 584 (AU *s.a.* 583). Furthermore we know that the Orkneys owed him allegiance, for Adomnán records Columba visiting his court when the under-king of the Orkneys was there, and has the saint persuade Bruide to order the under-king to look to the safety of Columban monks there. Bridei's overlordship was seemingly secured by hostages (VC II 42). Now, I find it

very difficult to believe that Áedán should have thought it worthwhile to attack Bruide in Orkney. Áedán was undoubtedly more powerful than the Dál Riata had been in 558, when the Annals of Ulster and Tigernach both record their flight before Bruide,²⁶ but Bruide must still have been formidable to command obedience as far as Orkney. It is significant that Columba chose him to go to on his mission. Even if it had been an attack on Bruide, why Orkney? It was not Bridei's heartland, for as we know from the *Vita Columbæ* he was based at the mouth of Loch Ness (VC II 33-34). Orkney has never been the richest of targets and livestock are not easily transported by sea. The only other possibility in this vein is an attempt to detach the *regulus* of Orkney from his allegiance to Bruide, an uncertain venture whose benefit to the Scottish king is difficult to assess. In all ways, therefore, if Áedán had wished to attack Bruide, it seems more likely that he would have done it overland. That he should have chosen to do so at all, even if he had just had his hands freed in Ireland, is still difficult to believe.²⁷

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

'Fortriu' in the late sixth century - "a king in the east"

It may be asked, then, what did Bruide gain from this alliance? The first and most obvious answer is the use of Áedán's navy against a presumably recalcitrant Orkney, possibly even giving Bruide the hostages that Columba found at his court. But there may have been further benefits too. We may ask ourselves what Bruide controlled. He is the first King of the Picts who features in records other than Pictish regnal lists, and his career has been regarded as the emergence of the Pictish peoples into early medieval history (Henderson 1967 pp. 34, 42). From the military successes recorded in the Chronicles and Adomnán's testimony it is clear that he was a ruler of considerable power and over a wide area. Nonetheless, an important contrast has been drawn between him, located in a Highland fastness, and the Pictish

rulers of equal importance in the following centuries, whose base appears to have been further south in what is usually called *Fortriu*.²⁸ This area does not however emerge into the sources until the next century. There is no indication that Bruide held sway there.

The question follows, if not Bruide, then whom? And the proper answer is, we do not know that anyone did and if they did we do not know who they are.²⁹ However, the incautious historian may perhaps make a suggestion. Perhaps the best way to approach the question is to ask who the inhabitants of 'Fortriu' were at this time. To which, the answer would appear to be that some of them at least were Gaels. This is not a new suggestion. In 1926 Watson drew attention to a number of place-names around the Forth area of Gaelic origin, in which he saw Munster influence which he allied to traditions of Eoganacht kings in Scotland, and of course there is the obvious Atholl, *Áth Fotla* or 'new Ireland' (Watson 1926 pp. 108-113; see Broun 2000 pp. 31-32). In recent years archaeological opinion has also begun to accept at least the general outlines of this Gaelic presence in notionally Pictish territory (Proudfoot 1995 pp. 29-30; Foster 1996 p. 111). Further support might be adduced from two other factors. Firstly, there is the long-debated fact that the Irish sources refer to both the Picts and the Dál nAraide of Ulster as Cruithni (O'Rahilly 1946 p. 342; Anderson 1980 pp. 129-130; Sharpe 1995 p. 322). It has long since been accepted that there is no proof at all of Picts in Ireland, but I have not found any discussion of the alternative suggestion! Then, there is the equally unexplained fact of the Pictish use of the ogam script on their symbol stones. This must be an Irish import, although in the current uncertainty over the date of the script it is difficult to say when it should be expected to have arrived (Harvey 1987; Forsyth 1995 p. 9). Forsyth has suggested that Pictish may never really have been a written language, which strongly suggests that such writing as was done in Pictland was Gaelic in origin.³⁰

Then, there is the testimony of Berchan to an Irish king in the east. It is easy to reject Berchán's Prophecy as being late and of a strong subjectivity, although Hudson has made some attempt to rehabilitate it as a source (1996 pp. 93-103), but this reference can be interpreted so as to explain a great deal. One of the things it may explain is why one, and possibly two sons of Áedán were recorded as Kings of the Picts at their deaths by the Chronicles.³¹ Let me explain my reasoning. If there was, as there seems to have been, a community or communities of Gaels in the central and eastern Lowlands, they presumably answered to some kind of leadership. I would suggest that Áedán's eastern moves are best seen as an attempt to bring this community under some kind of Dál Riata control; perhaps this is the root of Berchan's "thirteen years of warfare". It is possible that the author of Berchan is here making claims for the ancient extent of Gaelic rule in Pictish Scotland as befits the following entry on Cináed mac Alpín, but the context is not implausible

and may be based on a real presence in the East which the Chronicles and some other stories seem to indicate (see Watson 1926 pp. 112-114). If Circinn is as late as 596 it would seem that by then Atholl was no longer the war-zone, and we may also perhaps assume that the *Miathi* had accepted a Dál Riata supremacy. In the title of Áedán's successor Eochaid Buide, who is called *rex pictorum* at his death in 628 in AU and AT, perhaps we see the result of an attempt to sustain this hegemony.

We must of course ask what the stance of Bruide may have been on this Gaelic advance of control into territory that would have been considered Pictish, at least to outside observers like the Northumbrians. I would argue that in fact it would have been favourable. As has been said, there is no indication that Bruide exercised any control in the southern half of Pictland. If Áedán, as a hypothetical ally, were able to gain some this would surely be preferable to someone less friendly doing so. Indeed, AT record *sub anno* 752, a date probably misplaced by two 84-year Easter cycles from 584 (O'Rahilly 1946 p. 508; cf. Dumville 1984a pp. 123-126, Duncan 1984 pp. 8-9), the death of Bruide in a war "between the Picts themselves" at Asreith in Circenn (the name again), suggesting, if it is a misplacement and not a garbled record of a contemporary battle as Dumville warns it may be, that Bruide died attempting to bring this area under control by force. However, it would seem from the title given Eochaid that the Gaelic rule in Pictland was not a simple Dál Riata conquest. Some right to rule is implied, and not just over Gaels.

At this point it is impossible to avoid raising the ancient debate over the Pictish succession. Of old, on the basis of a passage in Bede, it has been asserted that the Picts had a practice of royal descent through the female line.³² I am not myself sure that the historiography of this debate has ever been adequately unpacked, and there is certainly not space to do it here.³³ It will be as well to attempt to limit the debate however. The problem is twofold; firstly, that because matriliney is not a practice documented elsewhere among the Celts, the theory that the Picts included a pre-Indo-European ethnic stratum has been used to explain its apparent occurrence among them. At the same time the evidence for matriliney has been used to support the pre-Indo-European thesis (Jackson 1955 pp. 130-131). As this latter theory has been defeated so has that of matriliney come under fire. Its defenders have used anthropology in support (Gray 1999 pp. 15-16), and as a result all kinds of evidence, perforce literary for lack of much else, has been used to find a much more general matrilineal society whose extent goes far beyond the evidence in favour, and whose various supposed aspects are then used to support each other (*ibid.* pp. 23-24). It is worth observing that matriliney even for anthropologists is a very vague term, and it has been argued useless as a definition for a whole society rather than any single characteristic of a society; societies can be matrilineal in few, some or many aspects, but societies either

completely without or fully equipped with these characteristics are rare (Radcliffe-Brown 1965 pp. 32-48). We are arguing here only about royal succession, not family inheritance or the importance of women in Pictish society. This latter aspect may be what has given the debate its recent new flames: there is now a feminist agenda (e.g. Gray 1996).

The strongest assault has been Smyth's, and the matching and largely successful defence most notably marshalled by Sellar. A recent contribution has been that of Woolf, who has suggested both that the succession may have been limited within patrilineal kindreds more than has been previously accepted by the defending side, and that there are Welsh parallels to the sort of succession described by Bede (1998 pp. 153-154). Further sallies have come from the pens of Gray (1999) and Ross (2000), and there is more to be said yet.³⁴ For the moment it must be said simply that no-one has managed to explain away Bede's statement. It is assuredly vague: he says merely that, "in case of a dispute they choose their kings from among the mother's kin rather than the father's", but what happened in normal succession he does not make clear (*HE* I 1).³⁵ Nonetheless, he, probably having information from Bishop Pechthelm of the Pictland see of Abercorn and access to the letter of King Nechtan to his old Abbot Ceolfrith (Duncan 1984 pp. 20-23, 30-32), was conscious that the Picts did something differently. Then, we have Eochaid, whose descent as we know from Adomnán was assuredly from Áedán, called King of the Picts. It must be obvious where I am leading: is this not explained most easily if we assume that, in order to further their amity, Bruide and Áedán cemented their alliance by finding Áedán a Pictish royal bride? Not only would Bruide by the alliance have secured the allegiance of a portion of Pictland which may have been well out of his control before, and Áedán the safety of a Pictish alliance and a free hand in the east, as well as territory to aid the division of his rule between his numerous sons, but by the marriage both parties might hope to see the rule of this part of Scotland remain in friendly hands. The policy of the manoeuvre is obvious to us, and it was presumably also obvious to Áedán and Bruide.

Gartnait King of Picts

However, chronology threatens to wreck this theory. Eochaid Buide was among the younger of Áedán's sons, possibly the youngest, though Adomnán's story of him running to Columba, the focus of the anecdote which gives us the stories of the deaths of Áedán's other sons, is undated and there is nothing to say that Áedán had by then stopped fathering children (*VC* I.9). However, the story must be dated before the battles against the *Miathi* and of Circinn and Corann, and of course before Columba's death, in 597. The battle against the *Miathi* is said by Adomnán to have happened 'many years after' Columba's initial departure from Ireland, but this is very vague. We know

that the battles took place in Áedán's reign and we may perhaps assume that they were after his bout of Western involvement of 582. Even if it was as early as this, however, it is clear from the story that Eochaid was not yet of age, was no more than a child indeed, and Bruide was to die in 584. It would seem therefore that Eochaid cannot have succeeded to any kind of Pictish rule for some time after Bridei's death. Who then ruled these lands?

In answer to this there is the fact that Eochaid is not the first king of Picts whose death is recorded after Bruide; that honour goes to one Gartnán, in 599 (AT *s.a.* 598; cf. Anderson 1992 I p. 121).³⁶ And we have already seen, from the *Senchus fer nAlban*, that Áedán was believed in the mid-seventh century (following Bannerman's suggested date) to have a son called Gartnait. I am of course very far from being the first to attempt this connection: Alan Anderson indeed supposed that the Pictish king-lists, which note this king variously as Gartnait mac Domech, Garnán mac Domech, Gartnait *filius* Dompnach, Sauíach *filius* Domath and Garnald *filius* Dompnach (Anderson 1980 pp. 262, 266, 272, 280, 287), have here preserved a maternal name, as may have happened elsewhere (Anderson 1922 I p. 122; Woolf 1998 p. 149). This elsewhere is the case of Nechtan *nepos* Uerbi (Anderson 1980 p. 262); also noted as Nechtan mac Fide, or *filius* Ub, Yrb or Fode (*ibid* pp. 266, 272, 280, 287). Evidently, there is confusion here, and although the "*nepos*" of Anderson's List B suggests something non-standard about the relationship, the others have either accepted it or followed a different tradition recording Fide, who was perhaps the other half of Nechtan's parentage. It is certain that Verb is paralleled in Gaelic as a female name (Anderson 1980 pp. 91-93), but it also appears earlier in some of the king-lists as a filiation, apparently, or so suggests comparison with List B, in confusion with the name Erp. Since List B does not share this error, we may perhaps attribute this to textual corruption. Woolf suggests, in another possible case (1998 p. 150), that of Nechtan mac Derile or Dergart, that the record of a female parent may indicate the special claim to legitimacy that might be required by a change of ruling kindred, and this of course suits this case well also.

Further support is however needed, and since we have plumbed all the evidence there is on the Pictish side, it will have to come from the Irish. Here indeed there is little more, but among it there is a sequence of confusing annals about the "sons of Gartnán".³⁷ This unfortunate group (who have space left for them in the manuscript of the *Senchus fer nAlban* which is now empty (Bannerman 1974 p. 48)) appear to have been parties to a feud with the main body of the Cenél nGabráin, and we see Iarndbob mac Gartnait burnt *sub anno* 642 in AU.³⁸ Then in 649 the Annals of Ulster note "the warfare of the descendants of Áedán and of Gartnait, son of Accidán" (*s.a.* 648, trans. Mac Niocaill 1983).³⁹ They would seem to have lost, for the next we hear of them is that in 668 they left Skye for Ireland (AU *s.a.* 667). Skye as we know from

Adomnán was in Pictish territory (VC I 33), and these men appear to have been exiles in a foreign land. However, it is noticeable that in the Annals of Clonmacnoise, where this is the only annal of the sequence that is preserved, Gartnait is further qualified as, “of Pictland” (s.a. 666). It is tempting to think that the Annals of Clonmacnoise might here have preserved part of a longer identification from the exemplar it most vexingly abbreviates (Hennessy 1866 pp. xxxii-xli), but on the other hand what I am suggesting here may have occurred to an Irish editor before me, or there may have been confusion with a later king of the same name.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, it is there. Whatever their ancestry, by 670 they were on the move again: AU says that “the sept of Gartnait came back from Ireland” (s.a. 669), the wording of which suggests that this was an Iona-made entry. What happened to them we do not know. One Cano mac Gartnait is noted dying in AU *sub anno* 687, but this seems very late for a direct line to be drawn from him to a father who may have died in 599, and was certainly out of the picture by 649. I prefer to think that this is an unconnected Gartnait, whose son may perhaps be identified with the man of the same name whom the Annals of Clonmacnoise record entering religion in 683. Perhaps indeed, the existence of both men in the text caused the specification of Pictland referred to earlier.

This is not the end of the Irish material on the sons of Gartnán, for there evolved from this story a prose saga, *Scela Cano mac Gartnáin*,⁴¹ which tells the tale of the hero, Cano, who is son of one Gartnán mac Áed mac Gabrán, and thus Áedán’s nephew. He contends with Áedán for the kingship and loses. Thurneysen pointed out that this tale has more than a look of an early version of Tristan and Isolde about it (1924; see also Bromwich 1978 p. 444), and we know from the *Senchúis* that whereas there probably was a son of Áedán’s called Gartnait, there was probably no son of Gabrán called Áed (Bannerman 1974 p. 48). It is possible to see a number of ways how the names might have become confused in this story, but rather than explore its complexities it may be best to stick to the apparently Iona-recorded annals. Can we suggest a context for the sons of Gartnait in our picture of the politics of the area in the early seventh century? I believe we can.

How could Gartnait mac Áedán become a king of Picts? I have already suggested that he may have had a Pictish royal mother, so that if the matrilineal theory be accepted he had some kind of title to the succession. But to what kingship? Despite the single line of kings plotted by the king-lists, it seems clear from the obituary of Cendalaeth in 580 (AU s.a. 579), and the uneasy allegiance of the *regulus* of the Orkneys, that Pictland was far from being a unified monarchical entity.⁴² Though the Chronicles and the king-lists make him the next king after Bruide, we have no evidence to suppose that Gartnait actually succeeded him in his kingdom. Indeed, after Bruide mac Maelchon we can place no ruler in the North of Pictland with certainty for

some time (cf. Kirby 1976 pp. 293-296). On the other hand, we have the fierce activity of Áedán in the central and eastern lowlands. I would suggest that Áedán's battles were intended to establish a province for his son, or sons. It is notable that Gartnait's brothers were so forward in the fighting: they must have expected part of the rewards. In the event, the only survivors were Eochaid Buide, who succeeded to Áedán in Dál Riata and apparently to Gartnait in whatever Pictish province was subject to the sons of Erc, Gartnait himself, dead early on, and Conaing, dead by drowning in 622, whose sons appear only in Ireland.⁴³ This is consistent with a three-way partition of Áedán's provinces, which would imply that each son had a clear idea of what he was fighting for.

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

Over his reign, then, I see Áedán fighting at *Teloch* in 576; and possibly being forced to submit to Báetán mac Cairill shortly before the latter's death in 581. Had he already defended himself with Bruide's friendship? It seems likely that he had, for if Gartnait was of any age at his death in 601 he must have been born very early in, or even before Áedán's reign. If as the Annals of Tigernach say Áedán died at the age of 74 (*s.a.* 606), he must have been 40 when he succeeded, and this leaves an ample time not only for campaigns in the East as in Berchan, but also a marriage and a substantial family. Could Columba's disfavour for Áedán's candidacy for the Dál Riata throne have been based on a pagan Pictish consort? Can we perhaps see the angel that scourged Columba as a parallel to that which beat the second Archbishop of Canterbury (*HE* II 6), Laurentius, to drive him back to the mission? Whatever the case here, in 581 we see Áedán in the Orkneys, which I have argued must have been at Bridei's behest. The year before the Annals of Ulster record the death of King Cendalaeth of the Picts. Kirby sees him as a ruler of Fortriu; if this be correct then perhaps the eastern expansion had already begun, for I

think he must have been in some kind of contact with the Gaels to reach their annals.⁴⁴

In 582 Áedán won the Battle of Manaw; I prefer to see this as the expulsion of the Ulaid from the Isle of Man, but it may instead, or even also, have been an eastern battle in the territory of the Gododdin.⁴⁵ Now the dates become uncertain. I should like to place the battle against the *Miathi* early on, for Eochaid Buide was still a child shortly before it and by Áedán's death in 606 he was presumably of an age to succeed. There is also the matter of Bridei's death, in 584 (AU *s.a.* 583, also 504 & 752). This must have created a number of opportunities for expansion as those who wished to take over jostled for position. Whether one believes the Scottish campaigns started before it, with his blessing, or after it in his wake, is a matter of choice. I think they had already begun, but Bridei's death may have been the spark. With the *Miathi*, of whatever allegiance they were, secured albeit at heavy cost, the move east continued. In 590, probably having concluded a treaty with the now ascendant Áed mac Ainmirech at Druim Cet, Áedán fought at the unidentified *Leithreid*. Then, in 596 if the Annals of Tigernach may be believed, but presumably not long before or after even if they are in error, was fought the battle of Circinn, which Bruide may already have died attempting to reduce. Áedán seemingly had no more luck, even though the fact that he should be campaigning so far east speaks impressively of his domain. This must have been a severe blow, and may represent that domain's limits. Perhaps at this point Gartnait was installed, with the two smaller provinces promised to Eochaid and Conaing. If so, he did not rule long. On his death his sons (whose names were seemingly recorded where the manuscript of the *Senchus* is now lacunose) cannot have found themselves unopposed; Kirby indeed sees the whole of their story as the results of a battle between them and the Pictish sons of Fide, Nechtan (whose mother as we have seen may have been a Gaelic woman, possibly even a daughter of Áedán if one requires that succession be transmitted down the female line) and his presumed brothers Gartnait and Talorcan. The former of the two's name cannot be without significance if his mother were indeed a Gael,⁴⁶ but even if we have here another marriage pact, it seems not to have availed the sons of Gartnait much. Driven out of their father's kingdom, to which of course if the succession were disputed Bede's testimony would suggest they had no title, they would seem to have found no refuge in Dál Riata, where Eochaid Buide can hardly have welcomed the scions of a rival line. But it is nonetheless wherever Domangart died that is the more significant battle, because it must have announced the presence of new players in the North, the Angles, whose impact was to be made at *Degsastan*.

Degsastan - the culmination of a career

I do not propose to give an analysis of the battle of *Degsastan* here: it has already been done elsewhere (Bannerman 1974 pp. 84-89, Duncan 1984 pp. 15-17). It gives some sense of the complexity of the politics of the North to briefly examine its participants, however. Áedán himself was at this point probably the most powerful ruler in the North. He was evidently able to call upon aid from Ireland, for the man the Annals of Tigernach name as the killer of Æthelfrith's brother Eanfrith is one Máel Umai mac Báetán (*s.a.* 599), who was of the Cenél Conaill (Bannerman 1974 pp. 87-88).⁴⁷ The whole battle is said by Bede to have been at the behest of the Britons of the North, terrified by Æthelfrith's expansion, summoning Áedán to their aid. Fordun picks up on this, saying that Áedán's defeat was due to the Anglian host surprising him before he had been able to rendezvous with the Britons. However, it is unclear where he got this from, and it may be no more than an unjustified expansion of Bede. Then, there is Hering son of Hussa, whom the 'E' text of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle reports led the Scots host onto the English (ASC *s.a.* 603). Whether he was doing this as part of a tactic of the Northumbrians or as a renegade in Áedán's service is unclear, and an equally good case can be made for either side. He was of royal blood, Hussa being the previous King of Bernicia (although he is not linked to the known ruling families), but this could also weigh both ways, that of the hungry *ætheling* or that of the loyal noble retainer.

Nonetheless, it seems clear that *Degsastan* was a battle of several kingdoms, and one that lived on in the tales of Ireland and Wales and the histories of England.⁴⁸ It also represents the apogée of Áedán's career. Once supreme in the Lowlands, now his hold on Pictland must have been shaky, possibly in the hands of Eochaid, and he faced a new enemy whom he seemingly could not master. For the sources are almost unanimous that he was defeated, and Bannerman interprets Berchan to say that Áedán was removed from the throne for his defeat (1974 p. 87), which finds some corroboration in the Scottish regnal lists (Anderson 1980 pp. 44-76).

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

Ireland (1984 p. 16), and in truth the difference between the two readings is a matter of two letters.⁴⁹

There is even a single hint as to what the aftermath may have been contained in the Annals of Tigernach *s. a.* 629. This annal records the defeat of the Dál Riata in Ireland at the Battle of Fid Eoin by Mael Caíth mac Scandláin, the King of the Cruithni. Though the continuing battle for freedom from Ulster over-rule is noteworthy, the real interest here lies in Tigernach's list of the casualties. The unlucky men on the Scots side were Connad Cerr, King of Dál Riata, and the descendants of Áedán, Rigullan mac Conaing, Failbe mac Eachach and Oisric mac Albruit, "*rigdomna Saxan*", "with a great slaughter of their men". The word used for descendants here, Latin *nepotes*, is of a wide meaning, but we can identify Rigullan and Failbe as grandsons of Áedán by means of the *Senchus fer nAlban*. How can a crown-prince of the Saxons be so explained, though? It would seem that the name given is intended to render the English name Osric son of Alhfrith, but no Alhfrith is known in the Northumbrian royal lines until two generations later.⁵⁰ Bannerman therefore suggests that he be identified with Oslac son of Æthelfrith (1974 pp. 98-99), but since Oslac was brother of Oswald and Oswy, the later kings of Northumbria, it seems unlikely that he could be described as a grandson of Áedán without their also being such, which is not recorded at any of their appearances in Irish sources. The only name in the Northumbrian royal lines that could possibly give this patronymic is certainly Æthelfrith: Moisl however prefers to posit an unknown Ælfrid rather than so torture the Old English (1983 p. 115). This is linguistically sounder, but leaves us with the odd circumstance whereby after years of giving refuge to exiles from the rule of Æthelfrith (*ibid.* pp. 115-123), his sons were promptly given a warm welcome at his death. Yet a filiation to Áedán cannot easily be made to apply to Æthelfrith's successors to the throne of Bernicia, or it would surely have been mentioned in the case at least of Fland Fina, the Irish-educated son of Oswy otherwise known as Aldfrith.

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

Conclusion

I have here attempted to show a considerable political range from one end of Áedán's career to the other. If the events were as I have described them his sway was felt all the way from the County Antrim to the Eastern

Lowlands of Scotland. He seems at various times to have been at war with the Dál nAraide, the British of Dumnonia, the Picts of Orkney, those of Circinn, the *Miathi*, and of course the Angles of Bernicia. At other various times he may well have been alliance with at least some of these groupings, or even in subjection to them in the case of the Dál nAraide. Yet from what we can tell of his career, whether or not his impact in the East was as extensive as I have suggested, and whether his sons went on to rule in three provinces or only one, what we can safely state about him makes his successes sufficient to make him one of, if not the most powerful princes of the North in his time, whose career may be compared to that of his contemporary Æthelfrith of Bernicia or indeed Báetan mac Cairill and not suffer by the comparison. I have tried to contextualise this status in contemporary politics and thereby illustrate several factors of this period of the history of the North which I think are under-appreciated, but even if all I have done is place Áedán firmly centre stage in his time for the modern reader I will have done history no disservice.

NOTES

* This paper originated as part of my Masters thesis at Cambridge in 1999. It would never have done so without the contributions and support of my supervisors, Professor Rosamond McKitterick and Dr. Martin Brett, and I must thank Clive Trebilcock and the Fellows of Pembroke College and Dr. Michael Cahn of Plurabelle Books for enabling continuing work on it thereafter. This enabled me to present a reduced version at the EMERGE conference in September 2000 where Alex Woolf and Basil Megaw among many others gave me a far friendlier reception than I had dared hope for. A similarly warm welcome was given me by The Pictish Arts Society in February 2001 and I owe them thanks also. Professor David Dumville and Dr. Oliver Padel issued me with earnest and valuable criticisms at various stages of this process, and the paper's excesses are due to my having failed to adequately take their advice: Alex Woolf also offered comments on a late draft which have saved me from numerous errors. Those that remain are mine alone, however. I must also thank Mike Holmes of the University of Edinburgh, whose hospitality allowed me to attend both the Edinburgh presentations, and Kirsten Procter for ensuring I was able to work on it as much as necessary.

¹ For the position of wider debate on the Irish Annals see Anderson 1980 pp 1-42 and Grabowski & Dumville 1984. I use here the conventional sigils, AU for the Annals of Ulster (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983), AT for the Annals of Tigernach (Stokes 1896), CS for the *Chronicum Scotorum* (Hennessy 1866), AI for the Annals of Inisfallen (Mac Airt 1951), AClon for the Annals of Clonmacnoise (Mageoghan & Murphy 1896) and also AC for the Welsh Annals, *Annales Cambriæ* (Morris 1980 pp. 44-49, 87-92) and FA for the text known as the Fragmentary Annals of Ireland (Radner 1978). Other sigils used are: VC for the *Vita Columbæ* of Adomnán (Anderson 1991), HB for the *Historia Brittonum* of Nennius (Morris 1980 pp. 1-43, 50-86), HE for Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (Colgrave & Mynors 1969), ASC for the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (Swanton 1996) and VW for the *Vita Wilfridi* of Eddius Stephanus (Colgrave 1927). I also refer to Berchan, meaning the Prophecy of Berchan (Hudson 1996), and my one reference to the Chronicle of John of Fordun is as Fordun, and is indexed under Skene 1871.

Arguments on the date of the beginning of contemporary record in Iona submit of no conclusive explanation. Hughes favoured a mid-6th century date (1972 pp. 118-123), and is followed in this by Anderson (1980 pp. 6-14), but Smyth favours an earlier date (1972). Herbert prefers a date in the early 7th century (1988 pp. 22-23).

² I discovered at a late stage in the drafting of this paper, thanks to Alex Woolf, that I have been to an extent foreshadowed in some of its conclusions by Professor Alan Macquarrie (Macquarrie 1997). That he and I are not in full agreement illustrates the mutability of interpretation and also allows me to hope that continuing to offer this paper will be worthwhile.

³ His predecessor Conall mac Comgail is recorded at his death as the donor of Iona to Columba. I follow Sharpe (1995 pp 16-17) in thinking that Columba is more likely to have elicited a grant from a king whom he may have known and with whose kin he was acquainted than from Bruide King of the Picts, who was later so suspicious of the saint (VC II 35, 42). I suspect the Pictish king-lists' records to this effect stem from an evident Pictish tradition of Columba's foundation of their Church, on which Bede's record is probably also founded (Sharpe 1995 pp. 32-33).

⁴ The tales are listed by Macquarrie (1997 pp. 109-110), who gives *Scela Cano mac Gartnáin* (on which see later; Binchy in his edition (1963) suggests that its core is 9th-century), *Gein Brandub maic Echach ocus Áedáin maic Gabráin*, *Compert Mongáin* and the lost *Echtra Áedáin maic Gabráin & Orgain Sratha Cluada*, as well as the Life of St Berach and the *Acta Sancti Lasriani* (see reference in text).

⁵ It runs: “Gavran map Aedan Uradawc map Dyvynwal Hen map Iduguet map Maxen Wledic”. See Bromwich 1978 pp. 264-266 and Ziegler 1999 n. 16.

⁶ There is no direct evidence as to the number of Áedán’s wives, but as the attached family tree shows, Adomnán’s *Vita Columbæ* and the *Senchus fer nAlban* give us evidence for eight children alone, and these only sons; I myself argue for two extra daughters later on, and the British sources seem to require a further one, Laisren’s mother Maithgemma. This does not allow for children dead in infancy either. In the conditions of the Middle Ages that these could all be the offspring of one woman supposes an unusual amount of luck in childbirth. By contrast, Charlemagne’s 16 children were the offspring of at least nine different women (Nelson 1991 p. xi) and Charles the Bald’s 14, of whom few survived to adulthood, were born of at least two (*ibid* p. xii).

⁷ Alex Woolf has suggested to me, in his defence without seeing the text, that perhaps this might be rendered “*Werodawc*”, ‘of the Forth’. This would obviously make something of a difference to the traditional interpretation but I am not sufficiently well-versed in Old Welsh to evaluate the suggestion.

⁸ On this see the new edition, Hudson 1996. The contents are summarised in Anderson 1922, with the verses arranged with other data on the kings to whom Anderson took them to apply.

⁹ Herbert (1988 p. 23) notes the practice at Iona, apparently in the time of Columba, of noting down significant events on wax tablets (recorded in VC I 35).

¹⁰ The terminology is late; *Alba*, to mean Scotland only, is a tenth-century usage at earliest.

¹¹ This is the only entry in AU for this year, and as we shall see is probably misplaced, perhaps to fill a blank. It is not given in AT.

¹² This is split across two annals; AT’s version, which places it three years earlier, makes it clear they were once one so I have silently mended the break.

¹³ This and the preceding annal are in Irish, which in itself suggests they may be late additions (Dumville 1982); however, they are duplicated at 507 and 508, and Bruide’s death as we shall see is noted also at 752 in more detail in AT. O’Rahilly noted that these misplacements can be explained (with limited success) by the use of an 84-year Easter Cycle in whose year the original source dated the events (1946 pp. 235-240), suggesting that though the Irish language entries are late, the actual information was probably rather older, and apparently separate to the first redaction of the Chronicle of Ireland. An alternative explanation is offered in Dumville 1984a pp. 123-126.

¹⁴ The extra information is here supplied from AI.

¹⁵ Unidentified. Macquarrie suggests that this is the ravaging of Strathclyde or that against the *Miathi* (1997 pp. 108-110); the latter is chronologically plausible, and against the former is the fact that the place-name of Alt Cluit, or Dumbarton Rock, is used elsewhere by the same annalists who give us the name Leithred. It may of course be neither.

¹⁶ I follow the translation of Sharpe 1995 p. 270.

¹⁷ On the Book of Leinster see O’Rahilly 1946 pp. xv-xviii; the relevant text, a genealogy of the Ulaid, is printed in O’Sullivan 1983 p. 1441.

¹⁸ 581 is accepted as Báetán’s last year by Ó Cróinín (1995 p. 49).

¹⁹ It is notable however that unlike most of them this replication, including an extreme variant *s.a.* 503, is repeated in AT, *s.aa.* 508, 579 & 580.

²⁰ O’Rahilly thought that the mention in AC made it certain that the Isle of Man was intended (1946 p. 504) but he was unaware how much AC owes to the Irish Annals; see Hughes as noted above. Bromwich retains his point of view (1978 p. 543).

²¹ I am indebted to Dr. Oliver Padel for this point, which, worryingly, had escaped me.

²² Bromwich (1978 p. 396) uses an inscription on the Isle to suggest that the Kings of Dumbarton may have been vying for control there too within a short space of time. Given the numerous British raids on Ireland in the seventh and eight centuries this is certainly possible but cannot be proven with so little evidence.

²³ This is my translation from Stokes’s text.

²⁴ Note however Duncan’s suggestion that the obits are those of a later battle which has become misassociated with Áedán’s (1984 p. 17). While I do not, as does he, argue that Áedán should be regarded as the anachronism in the annalistic record, the possibility of confusion remains.

²⁵ Bede names the brother as Theodbald in HE I 34, but AT and AClon name him as Eanfrith. An Eanfrith was Æthelfrith’s son (HB 57, HE III 1) and should have been known in Scotland as he was married to a Pictish princess, but it is possible that he was named for an otherwise unknown uncle. Duncan’s explanation for the confusion explains this point but leaves many others uncertain (1984 p. 17).

²⁶ Albeit in what appears to be a late entry, since it calls the Scots *Albannaich*, but given the confused textual history involved, its source may still have been old.

²⁷ I should point out that Professor Macquarrie reaches a different conclusion on this matter (1997 p. 110), but his suggestion does not, for me, explain the factors I here outline.

²⁸ This term is, as Broun points out, a fictive nominative formed from the genitive Fortrenn that is all that the sources furnish us with. Nonetheless, it is an acceptable name, although see the important remarks of Broun as to where exactly it may or may not have been (2000 pp. 32-39). The contrast between the focuses of its rulers and Bruide son of Maelchon is most strongly drawn by Kirby 1976 pp. 308-313; see also Henderson 1967 pp. 34-36.

²⁹ Pace Kirby, who places one section of the Pictish royalty there even this early (1976 pp. 293-303).

³⁰ I am warned by Dr. Oliver Padel that this theory has not won complete acceptance.

³¹ Certainly Eochaid Buide, *s.a.* 628, and possibly Gartnait, AT *s.a.* [598], if my arguments below be accepted.

³² The fullest version of the theory is given in Miller 1982 pp. 150-153; see also Anderson 1980 p. 166 and Henderson 1982 p. 99 and refs. It is attacked by Smyth in his 1984 pp. 59-70, and defended dedicatedly by Sellar 1985.

³³ Gray 1999 pp. 13-14 has a fair summary of the contributions, but I do not agree with the conclusions.

³⁴ Woolf has another article forthcoming, and I hope to contribute myself if his conclusions do not pre-empt mine.

³⁵ Gray claims, using a highly legalistic analysis of the Latin, that this is intended to refer to all successions (1999 pp. 19-22); I remain unconvinced that the new rendering actually changes the meaning as it would have been understood.

³⁶ Bannerman 1974 pp. 92-94 gathers the information on Gartnait.

³⁷ Anderson 1922 I pp. 121-122 is a brave attempt to draw sense out of these passages; I rely on it heavily in what follows. See also Kirby 1976 pp. 293-296 and below.

³⁸ Iarndbob's link to the same Gartnait as the rest of the 'sons' cannot be proven but he is otherwise unplaced, and his unpleasant death fits well with the story.

³⁹ Note the similarity of the almost unparalleled name Accidán to the more usual one of Áedán; Alex Woolf has suggested to me however that perhaps it is Pictish for Eochaid.

⁴⁰ That a Gaelic and a Pictish king bore this name consecutively is of course interesting; see later. It has been suggested that another later King Gartnait also had a Scots father (Anderson 1980 p. 167).

⁴¹ Ed. Binchy 1963. My Gaelic is inadequate to tackle the original and I have relied on Anderson's abstract in 1922 I pp. 121-122 and the comments of Hudson 1994 pp. 21-22.

⁴² The political structure of Pictland has been most recently discussed in detail by Hudson in his 1994, pp. 23-29, but Kirby 1976 also puts forward a detailed breakdown of the possible Pictish provinces. See also the more critical remarks of Broun 2000.

⁴³ Rigullan mac Conaing, named by the *Senchús* (Bannerman 1974 p. 99), died in battle against Máel Caich King of Dál nAraide in 629 (AT): see below.

⁴⁴ It is possible that he was of Gaelic descent, however, as the *Senchus* notes one Galan mac Barrfhindo of the *Cenél nOengusa* as "son of a Pict"; this, when compared to the name Galam Cennaleph given this ruler in the Pictish king-lists, suggests an identification which might also make him worthy of Iona record. I am unsure whether this identification will hold water, however.

⁴⁵ Dumville 1988 pp. 2-3 argues that by this time the fateful battle of Catterick had already been fought and that the circumstances of the Gododdin were much reduced. I have some reservations with his argument, but the fact that Domangart could be killed fighting the Angles before *Degsastan* certainly suggests strongly that Dál Riata and Northumbria were already within attacking range of each other.

⁴⁶ Though it is possible, given the factors of n. 44 above, that this Gaelic link had already been forged by the *Cenél nOengusa*.

⁴⁷ This man's recorded presence is one of the things that inclines me to believe that Duncan's theory of confused battles is insufficient. Why would an Uí Néill scion be part of a civil war between English princes?

⁴⁸ Bromwich (1978 p. 57) argues that the reference to Áedán in the Triad of the Three Faithful Warbands is based on this battle because of its renown. This seems to me to require special pleading and I think if the reference, which is to a overseas conflict, is to any particular one of Áedán's battles it is to Man.

⁴⁹ Between *victus est* and *victor est*.

⁵⁰ These are given most conveniently in Morris's edition of the *Historia Brittonum*, HB 57 & 61.