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THE "IONA CHRONICLE" AND IRISH POLITICO-ECCLESIASTICAL
CONNECTIONS: THE TRANSMISSION OF A TEXT RECONSIDERED

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of
Arts with Honors in History from the College of William and Mary in Virginia,

by

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The Iona Chronicle is an important source of chronology for the history of early medieval northern Britain and Ireland, given the prominence of the ecclesiastical center in several spheres of influence. In the mid-eighth century, a copy of the chronicle appears to have been transferred to a monastic house within the Ionan familia in Ireland. This work will explore the reasons for the transfer using both the early chronicle evidence (preserved in the later surviving manuscripts collectively termed the Irish Annals) as well as the seventh- and eighth-century geopolitical and ecclesiastical context of northern Britain and Ireland. In doing so, it will contend that the transfer was part of an Ionan assertion and extension of influence in Ireland, in conjunction with secular kin ties, as opposed to the scholarly view that some outside militaristic pressure necessarily encouraged the transfer of an Iona Chronicle copy to Ireland. On a larger scale, it will illustrate the complexity and sophistication of ecclesiastical and political affairs in the early medieval period, in contrast to the common depictions of northern Britain and Ireland as remote, insignificant or “savage,” based on their distance from the center of the Christian world.

The Monastery on Iona and the Socio-Political Landscape of its *Paruchia*

The early medieval monastery on Iona, founded in 563 by Crimthann son of Feidlimid, later remembered as St. Columba or Colum Cille, constituted a significant extension of Irish ecclesiastical influence into Britain. At the same time, though, the monks on Iona retained strong links to their Irish homeland; indeed, the isle’s location within the Inner Hebrides enabled the monastery there to be influential with both Ireland and northern Britain through the eighth century. When undertaking the difficult and ambiguous process of reconstructing the history surrounding this monastery, one must rely partly on texts written on the isle itself. Fortunately, Iona has a respectable corpus of such texts, especially relative to other ecclesiastical foundations of the time. In addition, there is a body of panegyric literature emanating from the cult of Colum Cille, dating from soon after the saint’s death to several centuries later; this body of literature can occasionally be collated with the earlier material and invoked to fill in the gaps in the early Ionan writings. Regardless, the

contemporary material remains central to reconstructing history during Iona's ecclesiastical primacy.

Much of this earlier material was probably written in the later seventh and early eighth centuries, a particularly evidence-rich period for Iona. One of the more influential figures in Iona's history, Adomnán mac Rónáin, wrote several significant works as the monastery's ninth abbot (679-704). Among these, the hagiograph *Vita sancti Columbae* constitutes one of the key illustrations of Iona and its spheres of influence. It is most immediately important for the later seventh century, when Adomnán composed it, and to a lesser degree for the sixth and early seventh centuries, about which he primarily writes. Indeed, the work is a composite text and includes the material both of earlier source texts and later insertions. Thus, one cannot attribute all of the *Vita* to Adomnán's authorship; yet, much of the material that did take shape under his hand, both original and derived, represents his adaptation of it to his own time.¹ In short, events in this piece of hagiography serve to confirm Colum Cille's sanctity and Iona's place in Adomnán's world, and they represent stories relevant to the hagiographer.

Another set of texts written during the late seventh century is what scholars have termed the *Iona Chronicle*. This reconstructed body of annals, survives (at least partially) in the later group of manuscripts called the Irish Annals. The process of reconstructing this chronicle maintained on Iona involves a careful comparison of the later versions, most notably the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Annals of Tigernach*, to peel back later textual additions

¹ On the composition of *Vita sancti Columbae*, see especially M. Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry: The History and Hagiography of the Monastic Familia of Columba*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988, 134-50; A. O. Anderson and M.O. Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), liv-lxxii.

and reveal the earliest original version.² The laudable effort of Thomas Charles-Edwards in his reconstruction of the “Chronicle of Ireland,” a body of annals including the Iona Chronicle and maintained up to the year circa 911, has furthered the process of uncovering these earlier chronicles.³ The theory behind the Iona Chronicle with which this paper engages is that it was continued on the island until sometime around 740, when a copy was transferred to a monastic house in the midlands of Ireland and continued as the “Chronicle of Ireland” until about 911. Subsequently, it circulated among various Irish monasteries, from whence came the present versions of the Irish Annals.⁴ The seventh- and eighth-century annals dealt with in this paper display, in their material, an implicit attention to and familiarity with Iona, its immediate surroundings within Dalriada, and its interests in Pictland, Northumbria, and especially Ireland.⁵ In particular, from the last third of the seventh century to the end of the Iona Chronicle c.740, the annals are very detailed, both overall and

² See S. Mac Airt, and G. Mac Niocaill (eds.). *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*. (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1983), [henceforth AU], and W. Stokes (ed.), *The Annals of Tigernach*. Felinach: Llanerch, 1993 [henceforth AT].

³ T.M. Charles-Edwards (trans), *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 2 vols., (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006).

⁴ For this theory on the “Iona Chronicle” and the complexities of the Irish Annals, see especially E. Mac Neill, “Authorship and Structure of the ‘Annals of Tigernach,’” *Ériu* 7 (1914): 30-113; T.F. O’Rahilly. *Early Irish History and Mythology* (Dublin, 1946) [henceforth *EIHM*], 235-59; J. Bannerman “Notes on the Scottish Entries in the Early Irish Annals,” *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 11.2 (1968): 149-70 [reprinted in *idem*, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1974), 9-26]; A.P. Smyth, “The Earliest Irish Annals: Their First Contemporary Entries, And the Earliest Centres of Recording.” *The Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C* 72 (1972), 1-48; K. Hughes, *Early Christian Ireland: introduction to the sources* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972), 99-159; K. Grabowski and D. Dumville, *Chronicles and Annals of Medieval Ireland and Wales: the Clonmacnoise-group texts* (Woodbridge, 1984); T.M. Charles-Edwards (trans), *The Chronicle of Ireland*, vol.1 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 1-59; D.P. Mc Carthy, *The Irish Annals: their genesis, evolution, and history* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2008).

⁵ On the familiarity of the scribe with his subjects in the annals, see Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 9; Hughes, 117-9; Smyth, “The Earliest Irish Annals,” 30-1, 35-7.

specifically in their attention to Iona-related events in Britain. This, along with similarities with other late seventh-century texts, points to the conclusion that the chronicle was *composed*, presumably from existing records, in the last third of the seventh century.⁶ Thus, this “layer” of the annals represents a contemporary record of events as written by an Iona chronicler and therefore can be trusted as an authentic Ionan source during this period.⁷

Iona had spheres of influence, usually in the form of dependent monastic houses (its *familia* or *paruchia*), primarily in the northern half of Ireland, Dalriada, Pictland, and for a brief time Northumbria; likewise, the Iona chroniclers continuously followed events of these regions while writing annals. The geopolitics of this period was very dynamic; fluid regional boundaries and irregular royal reigns pervaded throughout. Ruling dynasties were often upset through ever-present warfare, stemming from kindred politics between or even within such dynasties. Thus, the socio-political situation was highly subject to fragmentation, which further facilitated the interrelation of these regions. Exiled elites found sanctuary in “foreign” royal courts, and subordinate rival kindreds might seek alliances with “foreign” peoples to overthrow the current potentate; occasionally a returning exile saw the two working together.

⁶ For this composition period, see J.E. Fraser, “The Iona Chronicle, the Descendants of Áidán mac Gabráin, and the ‘Principal Kindreds of Dál Riata,’” *Northern Studies* 38 (2004): especially 81-2. This evidence for the composition date could even indicate that Adomnán himself encouraged the composition of the chronicle, following D. Woods (and Hughes), “Acorns, the Plague, and the Iona Chronicle,” *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland* 18 (2004): 501. That the sources for the composition included contemporarily kept records from c.550 up to the time of the actual composition, see Smyth, “Earliest Irish Annals,” 10, and Liam O Buachalla, “Notes on the early Irish annals 467-550’,” *Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society* 64 (1959): 73-81. Such records may indeed have originated as marginal entries in Easter tables; see D. Ó Cróinín, “Early Irish Annals from Easter Tables,” *Peritia* 2 (1983): 74-86, who points to these records while acknowledging that they do not necessarily represent a continuous contemporary *body* of annals during the sixth century.

⁷ Here I use T. Charles-Edwards’ definition of contemporary annals, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 8, where he also accounts for problems arising from different kinds of annalistic habits.

Similarly, on a larger scale certain territories of Ireland or northern Britain, subjugated by a potentate exercising overlordship through a large area, might unite to cast off an overlord's rule and the associated payment of tribute to him. One example is the battle of Nechtansmere in 685, when the Dál Riata and Picts successfully rose up against the overlordship of Ecgrith, an Anglo-Saxon king of Northumbria. This indirect rule was a way for magnates of the time to extend rule beyond their own area of influence or over foreign peoples; its stability rested in the overlord's ability to receive or force consent of the subjugated region, yet its volatility lay in the ability of the subjugated regions to unite with others or to play upon the dynastic fragmentation within the overlord's own realm.⁸

A brief definition of the term "foreign" is necessary to fully illustrate these points. The distinguishing factors between people in this period were mostly linguistic and genealogical. The latter is especially apparent in Ireland, where kindreds were defined by descent from a common individual. This genealogical awareness emerges in the names of kindreds and larger related populations, employing terms such as (though not limited to) *Uí* 'descendants' (the predecessor of modern *O'*, as in O'Neill), *Cenél* 'kindred,' *Síl* 'seed,' and *Corcu* 'race' followed by the name of the ancestor. The seventh and eighth centuries in the northern half of Ireland saw a web of fragmentary geopolitics between the kindreds of the Uí Néill, the Airgialla, and the Ulaid, among several other subordinate or minor lineages. The prominence and location of such peoples was far from constant in the two centuries discussed here, but a general representation of the socio-political landscape will be helpful. The *Cenél Conaill* and *Cenél nEógain* were the main kindreds of the northern Uí Néill in northwest

⁸ See especially the following survey studies of Ireland and northern Britain in the pre-Viking Age period; G. Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1972); T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 2000); J.E. Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland, Scotland to 795* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009).

Ireland, while Cland Cholmáin and Síl nÁedo Sláne were the later prominent southern Uí Néill kindreds in the midlands of Mide and Brega. To the north of the midlands and slightly east of the northern Uí Néill were the Airgialla, and in the northeast of Ireland were the Dál Fiatach, Dál nAraide, and Dál Riata (the principal kindreds of the Ulaid). What scholars now call Dalriada is a name for the diphyletic kingdom located in both northeast Ireland and many of the Hebridean isles on the west coast of Scotland, inhabited by the Dál Riata. Adomnán describes the Dál Riata in the isles as the “Irish of Britain” (*Scotorum Britanniae*). The chief kindreds of those in the isles were Cenél nGabraín, Cenél nÓengusa, and Cenél Loairn, along with several lesser and rival kindreds.

This intricate web of lineages is a glimpse of the socio-political situation in which fictitious genealogical connections were contrived by lesser kindreds to emphasize their importance within or alliance to rising hegemonies of more powerful ones. Yet there was an ecclesiastical component to this as well. Such imagined ties surface in hagiography such as *Vita sancti Columbae*, which depicts not only an ecclesiastical institution’s patron saint, but also actual and fictitious ties to various ruling and subjugated kindreds. Indeed, ecclesiastics engineered these connections with mutual politico-ecclesiastical alliances in mind. Although the authors of such hagiography wrote about the (often distant) past, the works reveal more about the time in which they were written. So while it can be difficult at times to pin down historical events and connections, the claims made in genealogy or hagiography indicate various political goals, which help in reconstructing this “evasive” period of history. Iona asserted its role in Ireland through periodic visitations there by the abbot, which here will be

termed *itinerant abbotship*.⁹ In 673, the Iona annals record *naugatio Faelbei abbatis Iae in Hiberniam* and three years later *Faelbei de Hibernia revertitur*. The Iona chronicler records a similar event for Abbot Faílbe's successor, Adomnán, in 692: *Adomnanus xiiii anno post pausam Failbei ad Hiberniam pergit*.¹⁰ In recalling Faílbe within this later entry, the chronicler reveals his contemporaneity with the previous abbacy and indicates Adomnán's journey is of a similar kind as before. This itinerant abbotship was part of the way in which Ionan abbots asserted their role as the successor of Colum Cille among the Ionan *familia* in Ireland. At the same time, though, it enabled them to reassert ties to their kin. The overwhelming majority of Ionan abbots were from the Cenél Conaill, who were sometimes overkings of the northern Uí Néill and other times high-kings of Tara, overlords over all the Uí Néill (if not also kindreds in surrounding regions). The ecclesiastical "dynasty" of Cenél Conaill abbots on Iona sustained these ties with Ireland; the interest in their homeland appears in such texts as the Iona Chronicle and *Vita sancti Columbae*. These dynastic connections to Ireland and the issue of the Iona Chronicle's transfer have been considered independently of each other, yet the former has not been explored extensively as a cause for the latter, which is the purpose of this paper.

⁹ See especially Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 36-59, 62. I do not employ this term to imply that Ionan abbots had direct headship over the daughter-houses they visited; however, as the successors of Colum Cille, they did have some measure of indirect headship over the abbots of the daughter-houses within the Columban *familia*.

¹⁰ AU entries 673, 676, 692. Throughout, I use the corrected the *anno domini* years (adding a year) in the Annals of Ulster.

In 1968, John Bannerman put forth the question, “how or why did a version [of the Iona Chronicle] come into the hands of an Ulster annalist about 740?”¹¹ He follows his question with a suggestion:

The fact is that at no time in the recorded history of Dál Riata, before or since, were its affairs at such a low ebb. The Picts, under the leadership of their king, Oengus, son of Fergus, had inflicted a series of defeats (734, 736) on the Dál Riata, culminating in the emphatic “Percutio Dal riatai la Oengus mac Forgguso” in 741 AU.¹²

On the contrary, the answer given here is that in the first half of the eighth century, the Dalriadic political situation constituted a separate sphere from Iona to such a degree that the increasing Pictish military aggression then would not have significantly affected affairs on the island monastery. Instead, the more probable answer is that the transfer of a copy of the Iona Chronicle entailed another step in the reassertion and extension of Iona’s ecclesiastical authority in Ireland. Such a transfer of the chronicle was deeply entangled within the politics of seventh- and eighth-century Ireland, notably the Ionan kinship ties with secular rulers and the ecclesiastical competition with other monastic federations. The particularly intimate kinship connection of Adomnán with the Cenél Conaill ruling dynasty enabled the success of his promulgation of the *Lex Innocentium* in 697, and in doing so he established an *additional* Ionan tradition to cultivate ties with secular rulers and further the monastery’s interests, as the successor of Colum Cille. Within this politico-ecclesiastical dynamic, this paper will argue both that a copy of the Iona Chronicle constituted part of this tradition that Abbot Cilléne Droictech continued in the eighth-century and that the location of the daughter-house in southern Brega (at which it was maintained as the Chronicle of Ireland) reflected that Ionan abbot’s kinship ties to the southern Uí Néill in Ireland at the time of the transfer.

¹¹ Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada*, 26.

¹² *idem*.

The Seventh Century: Adomnán's Life in Ireland

Spheres of Influence: Adomnán's Tripartite Regional Conception

In answering the above question, it will be useful to start on the isle of Iona during Adomnán's abbacy in the last part of the seventh century, especially if it represents the most probable time of the Iona Chronicle's emergence as a comprehensive text. The glimpse the annals yield of seventh-century Iona and its surrounding spheres must be thoroughly fleshed out with various contexts to illustrate the historical situation. Among these is Adomnán's own writing, *Vita sancti Columbae*, a key illustration of Ionan perspectives, notably the ecclesiastical and political dynamics of the monastery in *Ioua insula*.¹³ Iona, located across from the Ross of Mull, lies seemingly remote in the western isles of Scotland once part of the kingdom of Dalriada. However, the monastery's ecclesiastical connections linked it to a widespread network both within northern Britain and Ireland. Gilbert Markus has explained Adomnán's portrayal of these connections by isolating miracles involving animals in VC that differ according to region. While Adomnán writes of the animals Colum Cille meets in Pictland as hostile encounters, those in Dalriada involve rights of hospitality and respect in

¹³ G. Markus, "Iona: Monks, Pastors, and Missionaries." *Spes Scotorum, Hope of Scots: Saint Columba, Iona and Scotland*, Eds. D. Broun and T.O. Clancy (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 121-2, discusses how any given passage in Adomnán's writing could indicate either how things actually were on Iona in Colum Cille's lifetime, how Adomnán *thinks* sixth-century Iona was, how things were in the seventh century during his lifetime, or how he prescriptively wishes things were on Iona during that time. To these possibilities can be added two more: how Cumméne represented Colum Cille's life in terms of the saint's time or his own abbacy (657-69) since Adomnán likely used the former abbot's book to write his *Vita*, or how Dorbéne's eighth-century insertions of Cumméne's *liber de virtutibus sancti Columbae* into VC reflect the former's invocation of the past in light of his own eighth-century events. See Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, lxi-lxv.

return for blessings of abundance of fish and fertility of cattle.¹⁴ However, on Iona the stories concerning animals represent something of a “biblical harmony,” such as the horse weeping over Colum Cille, his blessing of Iona nullifying poison of snakes, and the blessing on the knife to prevent it from harming living creatures.¹⁵ These “political animals” can be taken to represent roughly Adomnán’s “mental map” of Iona’s role in its various spheres, with increasing geographical distance and conceptual space from Christian holiness: monks on Iona, pastors in Dalriada, and “missionaries” in Pictland.¹⁶ Certainly it is significant that the Iona Chronicle entry for 671 has “*Mael Rubai in Britanniam navigat*,” which seems to indicate that the chronicler viewed Britain, like Ireland discussed above, as a separate region from itself.¹⁷ Likewise, in the last chapter of *Vita sancti Columbae* lies an Ionan perspective of itself within the wider world *illo tempore*, when Adomnán argues for the renown owed to Columba:

his name has earned such illustrious merit that it has been spread not only throughout all our Ireland, and in Britain, the greatest of all islands of the entire world, though having lived on this remote and small island in the Britannic ocean, but also has reached all the way to triangular Spain, and into Gaul, and to Italy positioned beyond the Penine Alps, and also to the Roman city itself, which is the head of all cities.¹⁸

¹⁴ Markus, “Iona: Monks, Pastors, and Missionaries,” 117-8; For the Pictish miracles, see A. O. Anderson and M.O. Anderson, *Adomnán’s Life of Columba* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), [henceforth VC, except for introduction or notes] ii.26, 27, and those in Dalriada see VC ii.19, 20, 21.

¹⁵ Markus, “Iona: Monks, Pastors, and Missionaries,” 118-9; VC iii.23, ii. 29.

¹⁶ See Markus, “Iona: Monks, Pastors, and Missionaries,” 116-20 on these animal stories and others that support his interpretation of the VC perspective. The term “missionaries” might represent a strong term, and one that Bede uses to characterize Colum Cille’s activity in Pictland (Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, [henceforth HE] iii.4). See Markus, 132-5. For the idea and further discussion of Adomnán’s mental maps, with regard to the larger Christian world, see T. O’Loughlin, “The View from Iona: Of Adomnán’s Mental Maps.” *Peritia: Journal of the Medieval Academy of Ireland* 16 (2002): 98-122.

¹⁷ AU 671.5, AT 671.4.

¹⁸ “...*nomen ejus non tantum per totam nostram Scotiam, et omnium totius orbis insularum maximam Britanniam, clare divulgari promeruit, in hac parva et extrema oceani Britannici*

So indeed, the author here emphasizes the geographic remoteness of *hac parva et extrema insula* while stressing its prominent presence within the Christian world.

In the same passage, Ireland bears the endearing *nostram*. Whether Adomnán uses the term *Scotia* for both Ireland and Gaelic-speaking Dalriada is subject to debate, though within Adomnán’s regional conception Ireland would most closely fall, like Dalriada, within that where Ionan “pastors” journey. However, more intimate representations of Ireland can be drawn from *Vita sancti Columbae* than Dalriada ever receives. A passage in Book I of the *Vita* recounts Colum Cille’s prophecy concerning a crane (*grus*) driven to Iona by contrary winds (*ventis agitate*). This *guest (hospita)* from the northern region of Ireland (*de aquilonali Hiberniae regione*) Colum Cille instructs a fellow monk to treat carefully (*diligenter*), for it came “from the land of our fathers” (*de nostrae paternitatis regione*).¹⁹ This prophecy illustrates the importance of and attention to Ireland as the homeland of much of Iona’s monastic community, and here specifically not just Colum Cille but also Adomnán, who like the former was descended of the Cenél Conaill in northwest Ireland. So in this period, although Colum Cille and Adomnán share a common language with the people in Dalriada, they additionally share a common culture with their kin in Ireland, where much of the Ionan community seems to have spent their youth. As will be seen, they maintained contact not only among the monasteries of the Ionan *familia* in Ireland, but also with secular rulers in their respective extended families. Thus, Ireland represents the sphere of influence most familiar to Iona and the relationship with it surfaces as more than just a “pastor” one; in essence, it denotes a sphere where Iona has special ecclesiastical interests.

commoratus insula; sed etiam ad trigonam usque Hispaniam, et Gallias, et ultra Alpes Peninas Italiam sitam pervenire, ipsam quoque Romanam civitatem, quae caput est omnium civitatum.” VC iii.23.

¹⁹ VC i.48.

The Cenél Conaill: Adomnán's Life in Ireland

The Iona Chronicle retrospectively records Adomnán's birth in 624, though recent study has placed it closer to 627.²⁰ Despite pseudo-historical kinship claims to the Síl Lugdach, Adomnán was most likely descended from Ronnat of the Cenél nÉndai and Rónán of the Cenél Conaill.²¹ The evidence of a passage in the *Vita* suggests that he grew up in the region of Tír Áeda in southeast Donegal; in this passage, Adomnán relates a story of an old monk, Ernene, who at Adomnán's time of writing was buried at Druim Tuama (*in Dorso Tomme*, currently Drumhome). In the story, this monk told Adomnán, "a youth in that time" (*illo juveni in tempore*) of a vision he experienced while fishing "in the valley of the fish-filled river Finn" (*in valle piscosi fluminis Fendae*).²² The fact that he preserves the specific *piscosi fluminis*, a place at least familiar to the monk to whom the young Adomnán was speaking, and that he knew where the monk was later buried attests to the general area where Adomnán spent his youth.²³ Living in southeast Donegal, he was well within Cenél Conaill territory. A closer examination of his genealogy shows that he was a distant cousin of Domnall mac Áeda, a Cenél Conaill King of Tara, through a common ancestor Sétna, himself an uncle of Columba.²⁴

²⁰ AU 624.2, AT 625.3; B. Lacey, "Adomnán and Donegal," *Adomnán of Iona: Theologian, Lawmaker, Peacemaker*, ed. J. Wooding (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010): 28.

²¹ Lacey, "Adomnán and Donegal," 22.

²² VC iii.23; Lacey, "Adomnán and Donegal," 20.

²³ The church at which the monk was buried could be the Columban monastery of Sirdrumm. See *idem*.

²⁴ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 310; See P Ó Riain, *Corpus Genealogiarum Sanctorum Hiberniae*. (Dublin: Dublin Inst. for Advanced Studies, 1985) [henceforth CGSH], 1. 340.

The Iona Chronicle begins following Domnall mac Áeda in 628, and henceforth does so intimately.²⁵ Following the battle of Both against the King of Tara, at that time Suibne Menn of the Cenél nEógain (the traditional rival lineage to Cenél Conaill), and his *vastatio* of Leinster, Domnall *regnare incipit*.²⁶ It is not certain from the annals whether his kingship then was just over the Cenél Conaill, or if the ‘killing’ (*occisio*) of Suibne Menn earlier in the same year by Congal Cáech of the Ulaid enabled Domnall to seize the high kingship of Tara, giving him the overlordship of the Uí Néill.²⁷ Regardless, the chronicle records that Domnall *regnauit Temoriam in illó tempore* in the 637 entry for the battle of Mag Roth, so he certainly had attained the high kingship by then if not as early as 628. This battle, along with that of Dún Cethirn in 629, displays the tensions between the Cenél Conaill and Ulaid in this time.²⁸ In a larger sense, they represent events during Adomnán’s youth that he later recalled when writing “fulfillment” sections of Colum Cille’s prophecies (or selecting them from Cumméne’s *liber de virtutibus sancti Columbae*).²⁹ For example, notably placing Colum Cille in the background of the convention at Druim Cett between Domnall’s father Áed and the Dalriadic king Áidán mac Gabráin, Adomnán writes of the saint prophesizing to Comgall of a battle near Dún Cethirn (*in hac vicina munitione Cethirni*) in which will fight Colum

²⁵ The number of entries concerning him, the entry in 639 recording the death of his wife Duinsech, and precisely dated entries all support this assertion. See AU, 628, 629, 637, 639, 641, and 642; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 42-3.

²⁶ AU 628. Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings*, 95, identifies Both with Raphoe in Donegal.

²⁷ AU 628. Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings*, 95, indicates that the killing of Suibne along with Domnall’s devastation of Leinster probably led to his accession to the kingship of Tara. Similarly, the Andersons suggest that the verb *sublimatus est* applied to Domnall in VC i.49 indicates that he did indeed ascend to the high-kingship. See Anderson, *Adomnán’s Life of Columba*, 89 n119.

²⁸ AU 629.2, AT 631.3, AT 639.1.

²⁹ Even though he was very young for the battle of Dún Cethirn, he would have heard about it, especially given the renewed tensions in 637.

Cille's kin (*mei cognitionales amici*, the *Nellis nepotes*) and Comgall's kin (*tui secundum carnem cognati*).³⁰ Using the Andersons' translation of *Vita sancti Columbae*, Lacey has brought to light that Colum Cille's portrayal of the Uí Néill (*Nellis nepotes*) as "friends by kinship" (*cognitionales amici*) might easily represent a "fictitious consanguinity" of Cenél Conaill (Colum Cille's actual *cognitionales*) towards the Uí Néill, in the spirit of an Irish kinship treaty known as *cairde*.³¹ Does this instance represent a separate though linked relationship between the Cenél Conaill and Uí Néill as well as Adomnán's consciousness of this relationship? Certainly such a contrived kinship link would help support the overlordship of a Cenél Conaill high king of Tara over lineages of the Uí Néill. Adomnán would have known of such connections during his time in Donegal. As they were meaningful to him, he included a representation of them in the *Vita*, exhibiting his "contemporary influence on hagiography."³²

Domnall's obit at the end of January (*in fine Januari*) in 642 gives him a title of *regis Hiberniae*.³³ This title recalls an apparently longstanding tradition of divinely sanctioned kingship (through the church), perhaps even designating an epithet of legendary provenance. In the present context, the title is either an aspirational one awarded to high kings of Tara, or the term "Hibernia" is specific just to the northern part of Ireland, symbolic of the high kings' extensive rule. The two are not mutually exclusive, the former representing the theoretical

³⁰ VC i.49. The Comgall here is abbot of Bangor and founder of Cambas. On the significance of placing the prophecy at the convention at Druim Cett, see VC iii.5; J.E. Fraser, "Strangers on the Clyde: Cenél Comgaill, Clyde Rock and the bishops of Kingarth," *The Innes Review* 56, no. 2 (Autumn 2005): 102-20; *idem*, "St Columba and the Convention at Druimm Cete: peace and politics at seventh-century Iona," *Early Medieval Europe* 15.3 (2007): 315-34.

³¹ Lacey, "Adomnán and Donegal," 23-4; T.M. Charles-Edwards. *Early Christian Ireland*, 584-5; Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, 89.

³² Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 25.

³³ AU 642.1; AT has *ríg Erenn*, 643.2.

and the latter the actual; however the evidence of the *Vita* supports the former. Grandiose titles appear in two separate chapters involving two sixth-century Uí Néill ancestral rulers, a father and son. Diarmait mac Cerbaill is the first, styled as “ruler of all Ireland, ordained with God’s authority” (*totius Scotiae regnatorem Deo auctore ordinatum*). In a stronger sense, Adomnán’s portrays his son Áed Sláne (the ancestor of the Síl nÁedo Sláne, a southern Uí Néill lineage) as possessing the “prerogative of monarchy over all Ireland predestined by God” (*a Deo totius Hiberniae regni praerogativam monarchiae praedestinatum*).³⁴ Such verbal patronizing does seem to represent, as Herbert suggests, Adomnán’s vision of an Ionan presence within Ireland as “a Christian kingship held by Uí Néill rulers with the successors of Colum Cille, their kinsmen and allies, exercising a beneficent influence over them.”³⁵ Looking again at the events of Adomnán’s life in Ireland, he writes of Colum Cille’s prophecy on the career of a young Domnall, asserting that the boy “shall survive all his brethren, and be a very famous king (*rex valde famosus*), nor shall he be ever delivered into the hands of his enemies (*nec unquam in manus inimicorum tradetur*); but in his old age, in his own house, and with a crowd of his familiar friends around him, he shall die peacefully in his bed.”³⁶ Such ecclesiastical benevolence to a secular ruler displays how Adomnán charitably looked back at Cenél Conaill rulers he knew or knew of in his time in Ireland. Beside his kin connections, it reveals his view of the role of the church in Irish politics, especially when coupled with his assertion of this ancestral tradition of divinely ordained kings and awareness of earlier ties between Iona and Ireland.

³⁴ VC i.36, i.14.

³⁵ See Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 52, who acknowledges that while Adomnán could have acquired the tales from Cumméne’s book, his selection of them bespeaks his “concurrence” with their attitude toward kings.

³⁶ VC i.10.

Where Adomnán went after his youth in Donegal or the time at which left Ireland is not certain, though there are some clues. Smyth argues that Adomnán studied at Durrow, the most important monastic house of the time within the Columban *familia* in Ireland, before going to Iona. As well as citing Adomnán's detailed topographic knowledge of Durrow in the *Vita*, compared to another Columban house in Ireland, Derry, Smyth argues that the ecclesiastic mostly likely received his education in biblical criticism (evinced in his famous *De Locis Sanctis*) at the paramount Durrow (surfacing as *Roboreti Campi*).³⁷ Adomnán's additional ties to the monastery make Smyth's contention more likely: that Durrow's founding was made possible by the link between Domnall's father Áed (recorded in the *Annals of Roscrea* as *rí Herend*) and Colum Cille, and his kindred ties to Laisrén (a distant cousin), who was later in charge of the community of Durrow.³⁸

Adomnán does not seem to have arrived on Iona at least until the abbacy of Cumméne, but more likely during that of Faílbe, since he shows intimate knowledge of no Ionan abbot except the latter, his immediate predecessor. For example, he often relates hearing stories from Abbot Ségéne (*qui haec omnia suprascripta verba Segineo abbati de se prophetata enarraverat*) through Faílbe (*meo decessore Failbeo intentius audiente, qui et ipse cum Segineo praesens inerat*), and it seems he learned much from his predecessor (*cujus revelatione et ego ipse cognovi haec eadem quae enarravi*).³⁹ As Herbert has advanced, it could be that Faílbe "recruited" Adomnán during his itinerant abbotship to Ireland (673-6) in

³⁷ A.P. Smyth, *Warlords and holy men: Scotland AD 80-1000*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989, 126.

³⁸ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 32-3, 35; On Áed's title, see D. Gleeson and S. Mac Airt, "The Annals of Roscrea," *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, Section C*, vol. 59 (1957-9): 149 (compare with Domnall's *ríg Erenn* in AT 643.2); For Laisrén see VC i.29.

³⁹ VC i.3; see also i.1.

order to preserve the “ecclesiastical dynasty” of the Cenél Conaill abbots of Iona.⁴⁰ Indeed, a consideration of linguistic evidence lends weight to this probability. The Irish system of royal succession involved a king selecting a *tánaise rí* “second to a king” from a pool of *damnae rí* or *adbar rí*, those of the “material of a king,” who often were from the current king’s kindred, though not necessarily his immediate family. On these royal terms are modeled *damnae n-abbad* and *adbar abbad*, the pool of those who were “material of an abbot,” from whom a *secundus abbas* or *seclap* was chosen.⁴¹ While this reveals an interesting connection between lay and ecclesiastical rule discussed more fully below, it also illustrates the structure of the Cenél Conaill dynasty on Iona. So during his journey to Ireland, Fáilbe quite possibly identified Adomnán as *damnae n-abbad* and named him as *seclap* after the latter’s arrival on Iona.

The Abbacy of Ségéne (623-652)

Dynastic Connections Between Secular and Ecclesiastical Rulers

This dynastic relationship between abbots of Iona and the Cenél Conaill kings can further be explored by reviewing such events during Domnall’s reign. The abbot of Iona during that time was Ségéne, son of Fiachnae. He was a nephew of Laisrén, third abbot of Iona, and was descended from Ninnid of the Cenél Conaill, a brother of Sétna.⁴² Thus, he was slightly more removed from Domnall than was Adomnán; however, it does not appear to have impeded his influence with the king. AT records *Séigine abb Íe eclesiam Rechrann*

⁴⁰ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 47; AU 673, 676.

⁴¹ See D.A. Binchy (ed.), *Críth Gablach*. (Dublin: Institute for Advanced Studies, 1979), especially §29, 107-8; Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 90-3; *idem*, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, vol. 2, 1, 9-12; AT 760.4; AU 796.4. The early modern English term “tanist” comes from *tánaise*.

⁴² Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 310; Ó Riain, CGSH 337.

fundauit in 635. Herbert points to the isle of Lambay over Rathlin as the more likely location, in particular citing the Middle Irish *Betha Coluim Cille*'s description of Rechra in *Oirthir Breg* (Eastern Brega).⁴³ Since the evidence indicates that Domnall reigned as King of Tara at this time, this expansion of Columban influence represents collaboration between him and the Cenél Conaill abbot Ségéne. The founding of this monastery continued the support of Ionan interests by a Cenél Conaill overking through grants in southern Uí Néill lands, initiated with the role of Áed (Domnall's father) in Durrow's founding. Indeed, Domnall's grant of land to Ségéne could have had practical benefits for the king as well. Irish kingship in this period was highly fragmentary; competition for the kingship ensued not only between dynasties but also between rival branches of a single dynasty. Thomas Charles-Edwards and Melanie Maddox have illustrated how over-kings in Ireland often redistributed lands of client-kings, and how granting them to a church could limit the power of the client-king's kindred.⁴⁴ Indeed, this likely was the case of Iona itself: Conall mac Comgaill (based in Kintyre), over-king of Dalriada, in an attempt to sustain control over Cenél Loairn lands (in which Iona is situated), is said to have *obtulit insulam Iae Columbe Cille*.⁴⁵ Colum Cille, although not related to Conall, may have capitalized on a political affiliation (perhaps even a *cairde* relationship) between the Cenél Conaill and Conall's kin in Dalriada. However, if ecclesiastical elites of the overking's kindred "ruled" the church, it would even further help stabilize the over-king's rule. This seems the course of action Áed pursued in granting land

⁴³ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 42; AT 637.2.

⁴⁴ M. Maddox, "Early Irish Monasteries and their Dynastic Connections," *Studia Celtica Fennica* IV (2007): 64.

⁴⁵ *idem*; For the sources on Iona's founding and commentary, see A. Ritchie, *Historic Scotland: Iona* (London: Batsford, 1997), who argues for Conall's overlordship role in the process.

for Durrow, thereby limiting the influence of the Cenél Fíachach.⁴⁶ So Domnall, in giving land for Rechra's foundation, may have stabilized his overlordship over the Síl nÁedo Sláne in eastern Brega such that he was able to garner their support in the battle of Mag Roth against Dál nAraidi (allied with Dalriada).⁴⁷

The Easter Controversy and Ecclesiastical Competition in Ireland

Ségéne's long abbacy took place during rising tensions in Ireland over the calculation of Easter. One Cummian, perhaps abbot of Clonfert, wrote a letter to Ségéne concerning these issues (*De controversia Paschali*), in which he describes a synod of southern Irish ecclesiastics who gathered c.630 at Mag Lene (Old Leighlin, Co. Carlow) and agreed "that they would celebrate Easter with the Universal Church in the following year (*ut pascha cum uniuersali aecclesia in futuro anno celebrarent*).⁴⁸ Cummian's letter, heavily imbued with scripture, emphasizes the gravity of the Easter issue in several ways. First, he separates those of the universal church, *Haebrei et Greci et Latini et Aegyptii*, "who are united in their observance of the principal solemnities" (*simul in obseruatione precipuarum solennitatum uriiti*), from *Britonum Scottorumque particula*, "who are almost at the end of the earth" (*qui sunt pene extreme*) and who, in a humbling remark, are "if I may say so, but pimples on the face of the earth" (*ut ita dicam, mentagrae orbis terrarium*).⁴⁹ Similarly, he warns Ségéne, "for you are the heads and the eyes of the people, and if they are led into error because of

⁴⁶ Maddox. "Early Irish Monasteries and their Dynastic Connections," 64.

⁴⁷ AU 637.1, AT 639.1. On the participation of Dalriada, see VC iii.5; Fraser, "Iona Chronicle;" *idem*, "Strangers on the Clyde."

⁴⁸ A.A.M. Duncan, "Bede, Iona, and the Picts," *The Writing of History in the Middle Ages; essays presented to Richard William Southern* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 23-4; Cummianus Hibernus. *Cummian's letter De controversia Paschali*, ed. M. Walsh, D. Ó Cróinín, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988) [hereafter *De controversia Paschali*], 92.

⁴⁹ *De controversia Paschali*, 72.

your obstinacy you shall answer...to the strict Judge.’⁵⁰ Cummian derives one problem with celebrating Easter on the incorrect day from scripture, concluding, “heretics and all conventicles of perverse doctrines who do not eat the Lamb in the one Church do not eat the flesh of the Lamb, but that of the dragon” (*heretici et omnia conuenticula dogmatum peruersorum qui agnum in una aecclesia non comedunt, non eos agni comes comedere sed draconis*).⁵¹ So Cummian essentially expresses his fear that the Ionan *paruchia* could be termed heretical, if (in Cummian’s words) Ségéne insists that “Rome errs, Jerusalem errs, Alexandria errs, Antioch errs, the whole world errs; the Irish and British alone know what is right.”⁵² The rhetorical weight of this letter is immense; surely it spelled out to the Ionan abbot the greater consequences of Cummian’s fear: the tarnishing of Colum Cille’s sanctity and a loss of Ionan influence.

If Ségéne received the letter before 634, the evidence indicates that he focused on the immediate concern, to defend the sanctity of Colum Cille, which at this time also entailed upholding the saint’s paschal calculation. He pursued this concern by furthering Columban influence both through using links to the Bernician king Oswald to send monks for the establishing of Lindisfarne (discussed below) and through founding Rechra. These vindictive attitudes on Iona could have spurred Ségéne’s nephew and a later abbot of the monastery, Cumméne Ailbe, to write his *liber de virtutibus sancti Columbae* during this time, a written confirmation of Colum Cille’s sanctity.⁵³

⁵⁰ *ibid.* 74.

⁵¹ *ibid.* 72.

⁵² *ibid.* 80.

⁵³ Here I find more compelling Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 24-5, 43, who argues that it was probably at this time, working with his uncle Ségéne, that Cumméne wrote the work, over Duncan, “Bede, Iona, and the Picts,” 5, who suggests he wrote the *liber* in his own

Following his description of the southern Irish synod, Cummean relates that a “certain whited wall” (*quidam paries dealbatus*) caused friction amongst the churches that had agreed to follow the orthodox Easter.⁵⁴ Archibald Duncan has linked this allusion to *Acts* 23:3 with the bishop-abbot of Armagh, suggesting it was a subtle remark against the ecclesiastical hegemony Armagh (the monastery associated with St. Patrick) claimed in this time.⁵⁵ The *Liber Angeli* tract preserved in the *Book of Armagh*, along with the writings of Patrician hagiographers Tírechán and Muirchú, largely illuminate Armagh’s contrived hegemony and ecclesiastical tensions of the seventh century. D.A. Binchy argues that these hagiographers’ “main object was to buttress the claims made by the contemporary monastic community of Armagh to supremacy over the remaining Irish foundations.”⁵⁶ In his *Collectanea*, Tírechán states, *quia Deus dedit illi totam insulam cum hominibus per anguelum Domini*. As Binchy has shown, this passage is summarized from a section of *Liber Angeli*, which includes the sentence *donavit tibi Dominus Deus universas Scotorum gentes in modum paruchia*.⁵⁷ Essentially, Armagh’s claim in *Liber Angeli* was, since Patrick (the *illi and tibi*) had converted the whole island to Christianity, and since God had thus given the all of Ireland into the jurisdiction of Patrick, that jurisdiction belonged to Armagh and the Heirs of Patrick there.⁵⁸ In particular, this jurisdiction entailed two parts: the *terminus uastissimus* and the surrounding *paruchia*. The former refers to the immediate area around Armagh subject to its

abbacy; however, the prudent (and general) view is that it was written during the middle third of the seventh century.

⁵⁴ *De controversia Paschali*, 92.

⁵⁵ Duncan, “Bede, Iona, and the Picts,” 24.

⁵⁶ D.A. Binchy, “Patrick and His Biographers: Ancient and Modern,” *Studia Hibernica* 2, (1962): 59.

⁵⁷ Binchy, “Patrick and His Biographers: Ancient and Modern,” 60.

⁵⁸ C. Stancliffe. “‘Charity with Peace’: Adomnán and the Easter Question,” *Adomnán of Iona: Theologian, Lawmaker, Peacemaker*, Ed. J.M. Wooding (Dublin: Four Courts, 2010), 55.

abbot, while the latter term entails the daughter-monasteries or other foundations over which Armagh established headship. The area of the *terminus* described in the *Liber Angeli* roughly correlates to the region of Ireland dominated by the Airgialla, suggesting dynastic connections between them and Armagh.⁵⁹ The *Liber* claims that the *paruchia* is the rest of Ireland. Since Tírechán writes of Patrick's deeds mostly in the *paruchia* (rather than in the *terminus*) with the intent of justifying Armagh's new claim to ecclesiastical overlordship over all Ireland, Binchy concludes that the *terminus* probably represents the actual *paruchia* of Armagh at the time (where Tírechán would not have to justify a claim).⁶⁰

This model of ecclesiastical headship is very similar to that of lay rule, correlating to the direct rule of a local king (*rí tuaithe*) and indirect rule of an overlord (*ruiri*).⁶¹ Indeed, Muirchú's writing focuses on two key points: the dealings of Patrick with the kings of Tara and the founding of Armagh. This collation of these two issues lends additional weight to Armagh's conscious use of the secular model.⁶² Armagh seems to have appropriated this pseudo-historical claim of the kings of Tara, *totius Scotiae regnatorem, Deo auctore ordinatum*—discussed above in Iona's annals and the *Vita*—for its own mode of rule, *donauit tibi Dominus Deus universas Scotorum gentes in modum paruchiae*.

Likewise, Tírechán advances another pseudo-historical position that the *familia* of Clonmacnoise, Ardstraw, and Colum Cille had *subtraxerunt ab eo quod ipsius [Patricii] erat*, essentially “unjustly detaining ecclesiastical property which should by right belong to Armagh.”⁶³ This part of the *Collectanea* illustrates the tensions and competition between Iona

⁵⁹ Binchy, “Patrick and His Biographers: Ancient and Modern,” 61.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* 60-1.

⁶¹ *idem.*

⁶² *ibid.* 59-61.

⁶³ *ibid.* 61.

and Armagh in the seventh century. Interestingly, in the only hint Adomnán gives of the Easter issue in the *Vita*, he significantly places a “prophecy” of Colum Cille concerning the future controversy within *Clonoensi coenobio*:

Sed et multa alia iisdem diebus quibus in Clonoensi coenobio Sanctus hospitabatur, revelante prophetavit Sancto Spiritu; hoc est, de illa, quae post dies multos ob diversitatem **Paschalis festi** orta est inter Scotiae ecclesias, discordia.⁶⁴

Besides portraying a harmonious relationship with Clonmacnoise, this juxtaposition appears very deliberate, since these are precisely the monastic federations that the Patrician propagandists depict as usurpers. It likely discloses Adomnán’s awareness of the competition with Armagh and of the hagiographical claims to ecclesiastical overlordship. Regardless of when exactly in the seventh century these tracts of Armagh were written, they reveal the dynamic of ecclesiastical politics at this time, which Ségéne, Cumméne, and Adomnán experienced in their respective associations with Ireland.

Armagh still preserved the “traditional” Irish Easter in 640, on the evidence of a papal letter from John IV. Yet at some point after this and before 688, Armagh conformed to the *Romani* party of the paschal observance.⁶⁵ Indeed, Armagh seems to have recognized that it could further extend its own influence in Ireland by conforming, in opposition to the Columban *paruchia*. Those of Armagh may have even done so with a law in mind from the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* that stated, “all heretics, once their heresy is laid bare, should be expelled from their seats by synodal agreement, although they may be the heads of major monasteries.”⁶⁶ Thus, it could represent an attempt to protect itself at least with the knowledge and perhaps even with a claim that abbots of the Columban *familia* should be

⁶⁴ VC i.3.

⁶⁵ Stancliffe, “Charity with Peace,” 55; Duncan “Bede, Iona, and the Picts,” 24.

⁶⁶ *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* XXXVII.35, ed. H. Wasserschleben (Leipzig 1885), 140; Stancliffe, “Charity with Peace,” 55.

dislodged.

The Easter Controversy and Ecclesiastical Competition in Northern Britain

At the end of Book II of the *Vita* (which primarily concerns miracles of the saint), Adomnán describes how the plague has swept across Europe, excepting only two peoples, *Pictorum plebe et Scotorum Britanniae*, on account of Colum Cille's sanctity. However, in Adomnán's time:

Sed hoc quod nunc dicturi sumus, ut arbitramur non sine gemitu audiendum est, quia sunt plerique in utrisque populis valde stolidi, qui se Sanctorum orationibus a morbis defensos nescientes, ingrato Dei patientia male abutuntur.⁶⁷

Adomnán adopts here a tone of exasperation towards the reception of Colum Cille's sanctity and of Ionan influence in Dalriada and Pictland, for the "[Columban] monasteries lie within the territories of both these peoples, and have been regarded by both with the greatest respect up to the present time" (*monasteria intra utrorumque populorum terminos fundata ab utrisque ad praesens tempus valde sunt honorificata*).⁶⁸ It is not entirely clear what exactly Adomnán means by *praesens tempus*, yet an examination of the Ionan presence in northern Britain before Adomnán's abbacy will help illustrate the course of events that probably led him to express such frustration.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ "Yet this which we now have said, as we think must be heard not without groans, because a great part of very stupid folk of both peoples, who do not acknowledge that they have been protected from disease by the prayers of their own saints, and the thankless ones abuse God's patience," VC ii.46; Markus, "Iona: Monks, Pastors, and Missionaries," 136.

⁶⁸ *idem*. This statement mirrors Bede's portrayal of the monastery as *in cunctis pene septentrionalium Scottorum, et omnium Pictorum monasteriis non parvo tempore arcem tenebat*. See Bede, HE III.3.

⁶⁹ On Adomnán's conception of time, see O'Loughlin, "The View from Iona: Of Adomnán's Mental Maps," 116-7.

Another one of the instances where Adomnán records knowledge related to him by Fáilbe notes a connection between Iona and Northumbria:

Hanc mihi Adamnano narrationem meus decessor, noster abbas Failbeus, indubitanter enarravit. Qui se ab ore ipsius Ossualdi regis, Segineo abbati eamdem enuntiantis visionem, audisse protestatus est.⁷⁰

This *visio* that the Bernician king Oswald afterwards related to Ségéne was of Colum Cille, who instructed him thus:

Hac sequenti nocte de castris ad bellum procede; hac enim vice mihi Dominus donavit ut hostes in fugam vertantur tui, et tuus Catlon inimicus in manus tradatur tuas. Et post bellum victor revertaris, et feliciter regnes.⁷¹

Following the battle against the British overking Catlon (Bede's *Cadualla*), he received his divinely sanctioned kingship, as Colum Cille prophesized (*totius Britanniae imperator a Deo ordinatus est*).⁷² So just as Iona endorsed kings of Tara as *ri Herend*, this idea surfaces again in the concept of a *Bretwalda* (high-king of Britain), to use the Old English term. Ségéne's connections to Oswald to hark back to the former's exile in Dalriada, where from *maiores Scottorum* he and those with him had received the sacrament of baptism (*baptismatis sacramenta*).⁷³ Shortly after Oswald began his reign in 634, his Ionan ties came into play when he petitioned the monastery to send a bishop (*antistes*), by whose "teachings and ministry" (*doctrina ac ministerio*) those he ruled in Northumbria could gain the blessings of

⁷⁰ "This was confidently narrated to me, Adamnan, by my predecessor, our Abbot Fáilbe. He asserted that he had heard the vision from the mouth of King Oswald himself, relating it to abbot Ségéne." VC i.1.

⁷¹ "this coming night, go forth from the camp to battle; for the Lord has granted to me that at this time your enemies shall be turned to flight, and your adversary Catlon shall be delivered into your hands. And after the battle you will return victorious and reign happily." *idem*.

⁷² *idem*. For the identity of Catlon, see A. Woolf, "Caedualla Rex Brettonum and the Passing of the Old North." *Northern History* XLI (2004): 5-24.

⁷³ HE III.3; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 41-2.

Christianity (*dominicae fidei et dona*).⁷⁴ This is Bede's representation of the see established at Lindisfarne, where Aidan took up the bishopric and administered, with his Irish companions from Iona, such Christian instruction.

However, Bede does not tell of any such vision Oswald experienced before the battle, detailing instead Oswald's fervent prayer to God with a wooden cross.⁷⁵ Since Bede's narrative is filled with similar types of visions, this discrepancy in hagiographical material either conveys that Bede did not know of the story or he did not wish to recognize Iona's ties to Oswald.⁷⁶ If he did know of the Columban story, it displays the lack of Ionan influence within Northumbria in his time, the early eighth century. Indeed, this loss to Iona of influence in Northumbria can be traced back to the Synod of Whitby in 664, where the disputes over Easter flared up between those following the Irish bishop of Lindisfarne Colmán (asserting the traditions of his ancestors and Colum Cille), and those allied with Wilfrid, priest of Ripon, who had studied in Rome.⁷⁷ According to Bede, this confrontational meeting, further complicated by linguistic barriers, ended with the approval of the Roman observance. Subsequently, Colmán *relinquens Britanniam* with all the Irish there (*omnes, quos in Lindisfarnensium insula congregauerat Scottos*) and thirty English of his training (*de gente Anglorum uiros circiter XXX, qui utrique monachicae conuersationis erant studiis inbuti*).⁷⁸

Four years later, the annals record "the voyage of Bishop Colmán with the relics of the saints

⁷⁴ HE III.3. For the appeal of Christianity during the conversion of Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, see H. Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1991).

⁷⁵ HE III.2.

⁷⁶ On Bede's possible Irish sources, see Duncan, "Bede, Iona, and the Picts."

⁷⁷ HE III.25.

⁷⁸ HE IV.4. On the linguistic barriers, see HE III.25, where Bede describes Cedd (Bishop Coeddi of the Mercians, originally from Iona) as *interpres in eo concilio uigilantissimus utriusque partis extitit*.

to Inis Bó Finde [an island off the west coast of Ireland] in which he founded a monastery” (*nauigatio Colmáni episcopi cum reliquis sanctorum ad Insulam Vacce Albe in qua fundauit ecclesiam*).⁷⁹ So the evidence from Bede and the annals indicates that the Easter controversy led to a decline of Ionan influence in Northumbria. Along with the aforementioned letter of Cumnian, these events represent another blow to Iona concerning the paschal controversy. That Colmán went back first to Iona and from there to found a monastery in Ireland perhaps signifies a reactionary Ionan attitude of the time—one which ascribed to more strongly pursuing ecclesiastical influence in Ireland, a place less hostile than northern Britain to the “traditionalist” Easter observance.

Ionan competition in Dalriada and Pictland during this time is largely obscured by Adomnán’s selectiveness in the *Vita*. Markus has drawn attention to how Adomnán scarcely mentions the monasteries that were established in the two regions of northern Britain, which doubtless formed some sort of “ecclesiastical infrastructure” prior to Iona’s founding.⁸⁰ His hagiographical attention seems mostly limited to the secular and ecclesiastical foci that served Iona’s interests.⁸¹ However, there are a few hints to the presence of rival institutions in the *Vita*. For one, there is the monastery of Ardchain on Tiree (*Ethica terra*) which Findchanus founded.⁸² It is one of the *ceteris monasteriis* when disease ravages Tiree, in contrast to Colum Cille’s daughter-monastery on the island that alone sustains just one death, while the others suffer greatly (*Nam cum multi in ceteris ejusdem insulae monasteriis eodem morbo morerentur, nemo, nisi unus de quo Sanctus dixit, apud Baitheneum in sua est*

⁷⁹ AU 668.3, AT 668.1; See also HE IV. 4.

⁸⁰ Markus, “Iona: Monks, Pastors, and Missionaries,” 126-37. This especially seems the case for Dalriada in the sixth century.

⁸¹ Fraser, “Strangers on the Clyde,” 105.

⁸² VC i.36.

mortuus congregatione).⁸³ Markus even suggests this passage implies that the monks of the other Tiree monasteries deserved their fate.⁸⁴ Moreover, Adomnán does not even mention the ecclesiastical foundations on Lismore or Eigg. While the Iona chronicler notes both Máel Rubai's journey to Britain in 671 and his foundation of *Apor Crosan* (Applecross, dependent on Bangor) in 673, Adomnán is again silent.⁸⁵

James Fraser has shed light on the relationship between Iona and the church at *Cenn Garad* (Kingarth) by the Firth of Clyde. Citing Cumméne's lament in *liber de virtutibus sancti Columbae*, that the Cenél nGabráin in his time "are still held down by outsiders, which fills the breast with sighs of grief" (*proclivo sunt ab extraneis: quod suspiria doloris pectori incutit*), he attempts to identify these *extranei* who had overlordship over the Cenél nGabráin in Kintyre after 637.⁸⁶ Both in its chronicle and the *Vita sancti Columbae*, Iona casts a favorable eye on Cenél nGabráin. Yet this favor is especially apparent in the same chapter containing the insertion of Cumméne's book, where Colum Cille, following the divine bidding of an angel bearing a "glass book of ordained kings" (*vitreum ordinationis regum librum*), consecrates Áidán mac Gabráin as king.⁸⁷ Fraser points to the rival kindred Cenél Comgaill in Cowal as the *extranei*, and their use of an alliance with the Britons of Clyde Rock (*Alt Clut*) to force Cenél nGabráin into subjection. It seems that Kingarth lay within Cenél Comgaill territory and carried on the common mutual relationship described above between lay and ecclesiastical institutions; in essence, the Cenél Comgaill looked upon

⁸³ VC iii.8.

⁸⁴ Markus, "Iona: Monks, Pastors, and Missionaries," 137.

⁸⁵ AU 671.5, 673.5, AT 671.4, 673.4.

⁸⁶ VC iii.5; Fraser, "Strangers on the Clyde," 102-20.

⁸⁷ VC iii.5; See Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 25, on the likelihood that this first part of the chapter was also in Cumméne's work. Again in yet another region, Iona's role of conferring divine kingship is fulfilled.

Kingarth rather than Iona as their principal church.⁸⁸ Thus, Fraser concludes that Iona participated in the regional politics of Dalriada, specifically with Cenél nGabráin, in competition with a seventh-century Kingarth-Cenél Comgaill-Clyde Rock axis.⁸⁹

Furthermore, Cumméne's characterization of the Cenél Comgaill as *extranei* emphasizes the abbot's separation from those in Dalriada who do not recognize Iona's authority.⁹⁰ So these *extranei* who follow Iona's rival monasteries represent a part of Adomnán's *valde stolidi*, who do not recognize Colum Cille's sanctity in his time. Whether the competition with Kingarth can be linked with the Easter issue is a question largely for speculation, yet considering Armagh's use of the controversy in its competition with Iona, it would not be a far leap to make.

The hagiographical reason Cumméne poses for Cenél nGabráin's subjection lies in Colum Cille's prophecy upon ordaining Áidán as king. There Colum Cille asserts that none of the king's enemies will be able to resist him (*nullus adversariorum tuorum tibi poterit resistere*) until he or his descendants engage in hostilities against the saint's kin in Ireland (*cognatos meos qui sunt in Hibernia*). Cumméne confirms this prophecy by relating to such an event in his own time, the battle of Mag Roth in 637, in which *Domnail Brecco, nepote Aidani, sine causa vastante provinciam Domnill nepotis Ainmuireg* [Domnall mac Áeda].⁹¹ Cumméne's vindictive language, especially *sine causa*, may represent a hagiographical reconfiguration of Domnall Brecc's part in these hostilities, stamping him as an outright

⁸⁸ Fraser, "Strangers on the Clyde," 111-2, 118.

⁸⁹ *ibid.* 119.

⁹⁰ *ibid.* 118.

⁹¹ VC iii.5.

aggressor as opposed to a mere ally of the Dál nAraidi.⁹² So while the chapter portrays Cenél nGabráin links, this reconfiguration reveals a greater emphasis on Ionan kinship ties to Ireland. Therefore, like Adomnán's regional conception described above, it highlights an Ionan favoring of *Scotti Hiberniae* over *Scotti Britanniae*.

Preserving Ionan Influence: Adomnán's Principatus

Adomnán's Political Career and the Paschal Controversy

It was into this world of ecclesiastical competition and tensions concerning Easter that Adomnán grew up and assumed the abbacy of Iona. Given his experience of the ecclesiastical and political situation in Ireland already discussed, he was well aware of Iona's place in its spheres of influence by the time he took up the *principatus* in 679. His immersion with political affairs in these spheres and awareness of the present direction of the greater Christian world would mark a shift on Iona that would ultimately help preserve its position and that of its *familia*. The Iona annals highlight this political immersion from the first noted event of his abbacy, when he *captiuos reduxit ad Hiberniam .lx.*⁹³ This was part of what Bede describes as Adomnán "having been sent by his own nation on a mission to Aldfrith, king of the Angles" (*cum legationis gratia missus a sua gente...ad Aldfridum, regem Anglorum*).⁹⁴ Aldfrith's predecessor and brother-in-law, King Ecgfrith, seems to have taken captives during his raid on Brega in 685. Indeed, among them could have been clergy, given

⁹² The absence of any mention of Dalriada in the annalistic entry for the battle further indicates the insignificance of its participation in the battle. See AU 637.1, AT 639.1.

⁹³ AU 687.

⁹⁴ HE V.15.

that the raid included *aeccllesias plurimas*.⁹⁵ Thus, in leading the hostages back to Ireland, Adomnán was responding to the appeals of the southern Uí Néill and possibly even from some of the Columban *familia*, if Ecgfrith's raid included Rechra.⁹⁶ It speaks of his influence as the successor of Colum Cille just as much as his relationship with Uí Néill rulers, though the King of Tara was not from the Cenél Conaill then.

However, Adomnán himself writes of this *prima visitatione* to Northumbria as one to *regem Alfridum amicum*, revealing his personal relationship to the king.⁹⁷ Genealogical evidence indicates Aldfrith was an illegitimate son of Oswy from Fína daughter of Colmán Rímid of the the Cenél nEógain.⁹⁸ There is some debate concerning the authenticity of these genealogies; however, the evidence at least indicates that Aldfrith had an Irish mother and was raised and educated in Ireland.⁹⁹ His Hibernian provenance lies partly in an Irish tract called *Bríathra Flainn maic Ossu* ('Sayings of Fland Fína son of Oswy'), which indicates he authored some Irish texts.¹⁰⁰ More significantly, the *Vita Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Anonymo* relates that he was on Iona soon before he began to reign in Northumbria.¹⁰¹ Whether Adomnán knew Aldfrith as *amicus* from Ireland or later on Iona is uncertain, yet some

⁹⁵ AU 685; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 48.

⁹⁶ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 48-9. Bede's account on this matter can hardly be doubted, since this event took place in his youth and Adomnán even visited Yarrow in 686, during his trip to escort back the hostages. See Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland, Scotland to 795*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2009, 217-8.

⁹⁷ VC ii.46.

⁹⁸ B. Yorke, "Adomnán at the court of King Aldfrith," *Adomnán of Iona*, 36-7.

⁹⁹ Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, 216-7, argues that the genealogy portraying him as *Flann Fína* is pseudo-historical in nature. Cf. *ibid.* 36-7; C. Ireland, "Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Irish Genealogies," *Celtica* 22 (1991); M. Grimmer, "The Exogamous Marriages of Oswiu of Northumbria," *A Journal of Early Medieval Northwestern Europe*, Issue 9 (Oct 2006): especially N35.

¹⁰⁰ Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, 217.

¹⁰¹ Yorke, "Adomnán at the court of King Aldfrith," 36.

scholars argue that he played a part in negotiating Aldfrith's succession.¹⁰² Indeed, this additional "royal intermediary" role would fit with Adomnán's sense of divinely sanctioned kingship, such as how he would later portray Colum Cille's role in the *Vita*, most significantly in the vision that Oswald (Aldfrith's uncle) experienced.¹⁰³ Thus, it correlates with his traditional view of Iona's influential place within secular politics.

Adomnán might have negotiated Aldfrith's kingship with several motives in mind. For one, it would inaugurate an "Irish" (at least in a cultural sense, if not also genealogical) ruler to the Northumbrian kingship, who would be far less likely to engage in hostilities against Ireland, a primary Ionan concern echoed by various "authors" throughout *Vita sancti Columbae*.¹⁰⁴ That this accession was the result of an Uí Néill-Dalriadic-Pictish alliance is less clear. While there may have been a joint effort between the discontented Dál Riata and Picts to cast off the overlordship of Ecgrith in 685, the only direct evidence indicating that there was an Irish axis to this is based on a more detailed entry in the *Annals of Clonmacnois* (a seventeenth-century translation of the Clonmacnoise-group chronicles). The 685 entry in this recension of the Irish chronicles claims that Ecgrith's raid on Brega was because of "the alliance of the Irish with the Brittaines."¹⁰⁵ This very tenuous evidence is not helped by its lone survival in a very late redaction of the annals. It is not impossible that some collaboration between the Uí Néill, Dál Riata and Picts may have urged Ecgrith to undertake

¹⁰² Notably H. Moisl, "The Bernician royal dynasty and the Irish in the seventh century," *Peritia* 2 (1983): 120-4.

¹⁰³ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 48; VC i.1. See also Colum Cille's role at the convention of Druim Cett, VC i.10, i.49; Fraser, "St Columba and the Convention at Druimm Cete: peace and politics at seventh-century Iona," 315-34.

¹⁰⁴ For example see, VC iii.5, which portrays a prophecy of Colum Cille concerning preserving peace with his kin, which was written by Cumméne in the seventh century and probably inserted by Dorbéne in the eighth century.

¹⁰⁵ See Moisl, "The Bernician royal dynasty," 123.

a raid on Brega, thereby discouraging any alliance with his unsettled opponents in northern Britain.¹⁰⁶ However, there is hardly any indication that such an alliance sought to install Aldfrith subsequently as king.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, there is no evidence for Aldfrith as being “beholden to Irish or Pictish support after his accession,” which might have been the case if Adomnán’s *sua gente* petitioned Aldfrith directly about the hostages rather than through the Ionan abbot. Using the *Vita Sancti Cuthberti Auctore Anonymo*, Barbara Yorke has illuminated the probable role of Æfflæd, Ecgrith’s sister and Abbess of Whitby, and Cuthbert, whom Ecgrith appointed as bishop on Lindisfarne.¹⁰⁸ This hagiographical evidence, Aldfrith’s residence on Iona, and the former close connections between it and Lindisfarne imply a negotiation involving Adomnán, Æfflæd, and Cuthbert.¹⁰⁹ With Iona no longer having a presence on Lindisfarne, Adomnán’s part in securing kingship for a culturally Irish figure who had spent time on Iona was significant. It led to Iona’s deeper immersion in secular politics and therein a firmer confirmation of its influence in the light of the Easter controversy.

On Adomnán’s second trip to Northumbria, *interjectis duobus annis* the first, Ceolfrith relates that he visited Jarrow.¹¹⁰ There he saw and studied the Northumbrian Easter

¹⁰⁶ This is indeed what Moisl argues, 123-4.

¹⁰⁷ Yorke, “Adomnán at the court of King Aldfrith,” 39. See also Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 165, who questions why the northern Uí Néill (with whom Aldfrith was allegedly involved) would enter into a coalition with the Picts in response to a raid on the southern Uí Néill.

¹⁰⁸ Yorke, “Adomnán at the court of King Aldfrith,” 36-9. In particular, Æfflæd’s motive for securing Aldfrith’s succession may be to preserve Ecgrith’s particular line of the Bernician dynasty and thus avoid what might happen to her and Ecgrith’s family otherwise.

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* Aldfrith was probably far from having a legitimate claim by himself to the kingship. See Moisl, “The Bernician royal dynasty and the Irish in the seventh century,” 121-3.

¹¹⁰ VC ii.46. Ceolfrith’s letter in Bede, HE V.21.

calculations for himself, which were legitimized by Northumbrian visits to Rome.¹¹¹ Ceolfrith had done his part to show how the Dionysian 19-year Easter cycle (the later “orthodox” Easter calculation) was compatible with the “Celtic” 84-year Easter cycle.¹¹² Given the mutual respect between Ceolfrith and Adomnán and that the latter was in the kingdom of his friend Aldfrith, the abbot of Iona may have been remarkably receptive to the “opposing” view.¹¹³ Furthermore, his conciliatory nature would have urged him to rebuild the ecclesiastical relations with Northumbria disturbed after the Synod of Whitby; perhaps he lacked enmity concerning the event since he did not experience it (being in Ireland) but doubtless heard about it later.¹¹⁴ Thus, bearing in mind the retaining of important secular ties in and ecclesiastical harmony with Northumbria, Adomnán may have recognized the *diversitatem Paschalis festi* as a “diversity of practice and understanding, rather than in terms of orthodoxy and heresy.”¹¹⁵ In simply accepting that the Dionysian observance was more accurate, Adomnán reveals his awareness of the wider Christian world (embodied in *De Locis Sanctis* and parts of *Vita sancti Columbae*) and particularly its present direction.¹¹⁶ It would have helped prevent Iona from being labeled a Quartodeciman heretical institution by Rome, defend it and its *familia* from Armagh’s appropriation of the Easter controversy for its own justification of ecclesiastical hegemony in Ireland, and protect his own seat as abbot,

¹¹¹ Ceolfrith himself had taken a trip to Rome with Benedict Biscop. See Stancliffe, ““Charity with Peace”: Adomnán and the Easter Question,” 56.

¹¹² *ibid.* 56-9. Stancliffe tellingly highlights the fact that the two calculations coincided in 690, which would present an opportune time to switch from one to the other.

¹¹³ *ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 49.

¹¹⁵ Stancliffe, “Charity with Peace,” 62. This would align with Ceolfrith’s charitable view at least when he discusses the tonsure issue, in particular, *neque uero me haec ita prosecutum aestimes, quasi eos, qui hanc tonsuram habent, condemnandos iudicem*. See HE V.21.

¹¹⁶ In particular, see VC iii.23.

given the law presented above from the *Collectio canonum Hibernensis*.¹¹⁷ Thus, Adomnán was probably not quite so *converted* to the Roman Easter, which speaks more to Bede's hagiographical agenda, as just *receptive* to it.¹¹⁸

In viewing this *diversitas* on a practical level and resolving it in his own mind, Adomnán perhaps saw at this time that he could maintain Colum Cille's sanctity while observing the Roman Easter. Such an achievement would separate the issues that had been so entwined and would relieve tensions so pronounced during Ségéne's abbacy, when Cumméne had written his *liber de virtutibus sancti Columbae*. Adomnán accomplished this through his own hagiography on Iona's patron saint.¹¹⁹ However, Bede indicates that he was unsuccessful in persuading his own monastery as a whole to change their Easter observance. Herbert notes that Adomnán must have been aware of the gravity on Iona of altering Colum Cille's ancestral observance and that not everyone there would have found it easy to separate his sanctity from his paschal observance. Thus, he may have not pushed the touchy matter very far on Iona in order to maintain harmony within the monastery, thereby following the final words he attributes to Colum Cille: *ut inter uos mutuam et non fictam habeatis caritatem cum pace*.¹²⁰

Lex Innocentium

¹¹⁷ *Collectio canonum Hibernensis* XXXVII.35, ed. Wasserschleben, 1885, 140; Stancliffe, "Charity with Peace," 55.

¹¹⁸ HE V.15, 21; Fraser, *From Caledonia to Pictland*, 217-8; Stancliffe, "Charity with Peace," 53; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 49.

¹¹⁹ J. Picard, "The purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*," *Peritia*, vol. 1 (1983): 160-77; T.M. Charles-Edwards, "The structure and purpose of Adomnán's *Vita Columbae*, *Adomnán of Iona*, 205-18.

¹²⁰ Herbert 49-50; VC iii.23; See Stancliffe, "Charity with Peace," 62.

Adomnán's sensitivity to the current atmosphere of ecclesiastical and secular politics, which partly served to sustain the influence of Iona, surfaced in other ways. Perhaps Ecgfrith's *uastant aecclesias plurimas* in Brega inspired the Abbot of Iona to advocate for the prevention of future church violence. His *Lex Innocentium*, preserved in the later *Cáin Adomnáin* text, highlights similarly his concept of the church's role in society, his investment with secular politics, and his attention to the interests of his own *familia*. He promulgated his *lex* at a synod at *Birraib* (Birr, Co. Offaly) in 697, where he presented it to at least some ecclesiastics of *hErenn* and *Alban*.¹²¹ In asserting Iona's role of extending *snádud* (a legal concept of protection) to clerics, women, children, and church property, Adomnán accomplished several things in his legal appendage.¹²² At the foremost, he displays his idea of the intermediary role of the church, whether surfacing in issues of legitimizing kingship, settling local legal disputes, or negotiating peace between two kings.¹²³ Indeed, the synod at Birr seems to resemble the *regum conductum* at Druimm Cett where Adomnán portrays Colum Cille as the intermediary figure between Áed mac Ainmere and Áidán mac Gabráin.¹²⁴ Adomnán further sought to legitimize this intermediary role by protecting the church itself (and its inhabitants). With that in place, extending the concept of *snádud* to all women and children furthered goals of social harmony with countless scriptural precedents, notably the Virgin Mary as mother of Christ. However, in establishing "the community of

¹²¹ AU, AT 697.3; M. Ní Dhonnchadha, "The *lex innocentium*: Adomnán's law for women, clerics and youths, 697 AD," *Chattel, Servant or Citizen: Women's Status in Church, State and Society*. Eds. M. O'Dowd and S. Wichert. (Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, 1995) [henceforth *Cáin Adomnáin*], §28; *idem*, "The Guarantor List of *Cáin Adomnáin*," *Peritia* 1 (1982): 182, points to the evidence indicating that the synod itself was probably attended only by ecclesiastics.

¹²² See Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 5 (l. 114), 106; Mac Niocaill, *Ireland before the Vikings*, 148.

¹²³ For example, see VC ii.17, i.49.

¹²⁴ VC i.49; See Fraser, "St Columba and the Convention at Druimm Cete: peace and politics at seventh-century Iona," 315-34.

Iona” (*muntir Iae*) as the overall authority for this jurisdictional role, Adomnán required in the *lex* that at least a portion of the *eraic*—if not the full amount of the payment—for assaulting women, children, or the church be paid to his community. Significantly, Irish equivalent for *lex*, *cáin*, has the meaning both of “tribute” and, like *rechtge*, “law.”¹²⁵ The sections of the law giving Adomnán’s *muntir* the power to choose judges for cases of its infraction additionally attests to how it yields influence to Iona.¹²⁶ The larger significance of the law is that, being a concrete reflection of Adomnán’s own experiences and his vision for Iona’s place in seventh-century Ireland and Britain, it gave the monastery this responsibility of enforcing this *snádud* and therein additional influence throughout its spheres. Thus, it ensured the legitimacy of the Ionan *familia* in light of the Easter controversy and confirmed the sanctity of its patron saint Colum Cille.

Of course, it is the guarantor list that speaks for the legitimization of the law, containing leading ecclesiastics as well as contemporary and future kings. Máirín Ní Dhonnchadha has illuminated the issues and possible later insertions of titles into the list; given his work and that the synod was probably only comprised of ecclesiastics, it remains likely that Adomnán obtained some support from guarantors during his itinerant abbotship in 692, *xiii anno post pausam Failbei*.¹²⁷ The presence of Loingsech mac Óengusso in the list

¹²⁵ *Cáin Adomnáin*, especially §43, 44. *Eraic* is the payment made for injuries to a person; an Old English parallel would be *wergild*. See Binchy, *Críth Gablach*, 86. For the terms *cáin* and *rechtge*, see *ibid*, 79, 104. It may be notable that both AT 697.3 and *Críth Gablach* refer to the *lex* as *recht Adomnáin*, *ibid*, 1. 524.

¹²⁶ *Cáin Adomnáin*, §37, 39.

¹²⁷ AU 692; Ní Dhonnchadha, “Guarantor List,” 182-5. He has linked this time-computing phrase (*post xiii anno*) in the annals with an identical one in §33 of the *Cáin Adomnáin*, signifying the time at which Adomnán “requested this law from God,” thus signifying when he had formed it and begun to promulgate it. See also Duncan, “Bede, Iona, and the Picts,” 12-4.

of guarantors reemphasizes Adomnán's kin ties and the timeliness of the law's promulgation. More closely related to the ruling Cenél Conaill dynasty than any previous Ionan abbot, Adomnán was a fourth cousin of Loingsech, grandson of Domnall mac Áeda. This genealogical connection doubtless gave the abbot considerable sway with the king of Cenél Conaill, who likely was one of the first guarantors he visited during his visit to Ireland in 692, appearing first of the secular ones.¹²⁸ Loingsech's ascension to the high-kingship of Tara in 696 would have presented the abbot with an ideal situation to continue promoting his law.¹²⁹ In particular, Loingsech could have used his overlordship to encourage Uí Néill client-kings who appear on the guarantor list to support the *Lex Innocentium*. The ninety-one guarantors may bespeak both Adomnán's connections and influence in Ireland and Britain as well as the popularity of a measure forbidding church violence. Yet, it is still curious that the first guarantor listed is Fland Febla of Armagh, a monastery which at the time was not only in intense competition with the Columban *familia* but was also a proponent of the Roman paschal observance. However, the law's divine invocations, praising those who uphold it and bemoaning the fate of those who do not, may have left Fland Febla little choice in supporting the law to retain Armagh's status in Ireland. Perhaps, though, this "learned bishop of Armagh" (*sui-episcop Aird Machae*) viewed the law in terms of its valuable propositions rather than its tones of Ionan authority.¹³⁰ This presence of adherents both of the Celtic and Roman traditions on the guarantor list calls into question the extent to which Adomnán persuaded

¹²⁸ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 51, 310; Ní Dhonnchadha, "Guarantor List," 180.

¹²⁹ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 51. Of course, if he did begin promulgating it in 692, he probably would not have then known that Loingsech would succeed Fínnchta Fledach of Sí nÁedo Sláne as King of Tara.

¹³⁰ *Cáin Adomnáin*, §30, 31; Ní Dhonnchadha, "Guarantor List," 180.

monasteries on this trip to Ireland to accept the Roman Easter, as Bede relates.¹³¹ It remains a possibility, though a dearth of evidence on the matter, especially with regard to foundations that accepted the orthodox observance in this time, prevents anything beyond speculation encouraged by Bede. This dual presence in the list perhaps again exhibits Adomnán's open-mindedness and goal of ecclesiastical harmony.¹³²

For Ionan influence in Britain, it represents a solution to his exasperation expressed in VC ii.46, especially the hints of "encroaching" influence of institutions such as Kingarth and an attempt to emphasize Iona's place as the *monasteria* which *intra utrorumque populorum terminos fundata ab utrisque ad praesens tempus valde sunt honorificat*.¹³³ However, the actual stipulations of the law do appear far more contoured to fit Ireland's preexisting laws; this, along with the provenance of the majority of guarantors, reveals Adomnán's main intended supporters of it. As an illustrious successor of Colum Cille, his deep immersion in the political and ecclesiastical affairs of Iona's various spheres helped confirm its authority and extend the monastery's role with respect to ecclesiastical competition. Likewise, the material of the Iona Chronicle itself emblemizes the "international" focus reflected in his *Lex Innocentium*, his actions as abbot, and his mental map of the Christian world in *De Locis Sanctis*.

The Eighth Century: Easter Tensions on Iona

The Annalistic Record: Confused Abbatical Accessions or Strained Relations?

¹³¹ See HE, V.15.

¹³² Stancliffe, "Charity with Peace," 54.

¹³³ VC ii.46.

While the *muntir* of Iona may have been held together in *mutuam et non fictam caritatem cum pace* during Adomnán's *principatus*, the subsequent annalistic record hints that tensions reignited after the abbot's death in 704. In the early eighth century, there are several apparently overlapping abbatial reigns; unlike other abbacies in the annals, these accessions are specifically noted with the terms *kathedra* and *primatus*. While some scholars view these unusual and convoluted records as indicating early abbatial retirements, others argue that there were two abbots in this period, one supported by the party on Iona following the Roman Easter observance and the other supported by those following the "Hibernian" observance. Regardless, the consensus is that these successions indicate tension.¹³⁴ While the annals record *Dúnchad principatum Iae tenuit* in 707, they note *Conamail mac Failbi, abbas Iae pausat* in 710.¹³⁵ Dúnchad, closely related to Adomnán, may have shared his views regarding Easter and either Conamail was urged to resign or the two reigned conterminously.

The situation grows slightly more obscure in 713, when the annals note that Dorbéne obtained the *kathedram Iae* and held the *primatus* for five months until his death.¹³⁶ It is uncertain what Dúnchad's status was following these five months, or how Iona was run for the next three years, but 716 marks the date that both the annals and Bede record Iona as formally conforming to the Roman Easter. The latter writes that this change on the isle occurred when Dúnchad was abbot; however, Bede may have inferred this from his sources. In the same year, Fáelchú mac Dorbéni took up the "*kathedra* of Columba."¹³⁷ Charles-Edwards suggests that the unusual wording of this precisely dated entry indicates a

¹³⁴ In particular, see Duncan, "Bede, Iona, and the Picts," 26-7; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 57-9; Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, vol. 2, 5, 8.

¹³⁵ AU 707, 710.

¹³⁶ AU 713; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 57-8.

¹³⁷ AU 716; HE V.22; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 58-9.

settlement made in which Fálchú would preside over a community newly united under the sanctity of Colum Cille.¹³⁸ Whatever the case, Dúnchad died in the next year and Fálchú presided as abbot until 722, when the Iona Chronicle enters Feidlimid as taking up the *principatus*. Comparing this account with Feidlimid's absence in the eighth-century Salzburg list of Ionan abbots, Herbert thinks Feidlimid just functioned as an auxiliary (rather than a factional opposite) to the aged abbot Fálchú for the last two years of his abbacy. Finally, with the accession of *Cillenius Longius* upon Fálchú's death in 724, the abbatial succession of Iona seems to have returned to normal, in the wake of the resolved Easter debate.¹³⁹ Based on the account of the Iona chronicler, these tensions on Iona interrupted the usual contacts with Ireland, especially the itinerant abbotship of the successor of Colum Cille.¹⁴⁰ However, after the first quarter of the eighth century, another abbot would resume these visits and further the new role that Adomnán had initiated in his own *principatus*.

The Abbacy of Cilléne Droichtech (726-752)

The Renewal of the Law

Like Ségéne's abbacy a century earlier, Cilléne's was long and full of nurturing the dynastic connection between abbot and king while securing Ionan influence. This son of Dichlocha was descended from the southern Uí Néill, with Cerball as the common ancestor between his line and the midlands kindreds Cland Cholmáin and Síol nÁedo Sláine.¹⁴¹ However, early on in his abbacy, he seems to have become involved in the secular politics of the northern Uí Néill. Tensions surfaced between the previously allied Cenél Conaill and

¹³⁸ Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 190, n6.

¹³⁹ AU 717, 722, 724.

¹⁴⁰ Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 60-2.

¹⁴¹ CGSH 344.

Cenél nEógain in 727, continuing in the next decade.¹⁴² The battle of Druim Fornoct in that year might represent an initial challenge of the Cenél nEógain king Áed Allán to the Cenél Conaill King of Tara, Flaithbertach mac Loingsech, especially given the subsequent sustained aggression of Áed. This presented an opportune time for Cilléne to intervene during his itinerant abbotship in the same year. According to the annals, the *Adomnani reliquiae* were “carried over to Ireland” and the “law was renewed,” and though Cilléne’s place in this is implied, the direct evidence for it comes from a twelfth-century copy of a poem on the reliquary of Adomnán (preserved in the Book of Leinster).¹⁴³ He is recorded as conveying the relics in order “to make intercession of peace between Cenél Conaill and Cenél nEógain” (*do dénam síd ocus attaiḡ Ceneoil Conaill 7 Eogain*).¹⁴⁴ Although he probably did not come to Ireland then for this purpose alone, it was likely a significant stop on his circuit there. This view is especially supported given the royal intermediary role Adomnán had established for the successor of Colum Cille with the *Lex Innocentium*, for which Cilléne now had responsibility. Thus, as the saint’s successor though not of Cenél Conaill himself, Cilléne still preserved the traditional links with Colum Cille’s kin,

However, since the conflict that ensued between the two rival kindreds in 732, Cilléne did not succeed in securing peace for long; perhaps his lack of a genealogical connection to the northern Uí Néill, unlike Adomnán, somewhat hindered his intermediating ability or authority among them. However, in the greater outlook of his itinerant abbotship, choosing to renew the law at a time when the Cenél Conaill potentate was King of Tara

¹⁴² For a discussion of the Uí Néill conflict at this time and a reconstruction of alliances between northern and southern kindreds, see T.M. Charles-Edwards, “The Uí Néill 695–743: The Rise and Fall of Dynasties,” *Peritia* 16 (2002): 396–418.

¹⁴³ AU 727; L. Gwynn, “The Reliquary of Adamnan,” *Archivium Hibernicum* 4 (1915): 204.

¹⁴⁴ Glynn, “Reliquary,” 204.

echoes the situation of Adomnán's original promulgation. Cenél nEógain, though, seems to have had broader ambitions, explaining why they did not recognize Cilléne's peace or renewal of the law for very long. Charles-Edwards has linked the dynastic shift in northern Uí Néill hegemony to another shift in power from the Síl nÁedo Sláne to Cland Cholmáin further south.¹⁴⁵ These power shifts had ecclesiastical allegiances as well. While there do appear to be sustained "Patrician leanings" towards Síl nÁedo Sláne during this time and after, Armagh presently asserted stronger ties with Cenél nEógain, whose king, Áed Allán, had seized the high-kingship from Flaithbertach in 734. This new politico-ecclesiastical connection surfaces in the same year, with the "taking on circuit of the relics of Peter and Paul and Patrick to execute the law."¹⁴⁶ Three years afterward, a meeting (*dál*) took place between Áed Allán and Cathal mac Findguini (king of Munster) at Tír Da Glas and "the Law of Patrick was upheld throughout Ireland."¹⁴⁷ Indeed, the two events of 737 are probably connected. Furthermore, in an eighth-century poem, the Airgialla, the kindred traditionally associated with Armagh, contrived a *cairde* to the Uí Néill, with the Cenél nEógain in mind. This fictive kinship additionally stresses the politico-ecclesiastical link between Cenél nEógain and Armagh.¹⁴⁸

On the Columban side, the attention of two chroniclers partly illustrates the similar interests between the Cenél Conaill and Cland Cholmáin. While the Iona chronicler emblazons Murchad of Mide with the title *regis Nepotum Neill* (implying the southern Uí Néill) in 715, the Brega scribe of the Chronicle of Ireland bestows the title of *rex in Tuaiscirt*

¹⁴⁵ AU 732. See Charles-Edwards, "Uí Néill," especially 408-10.

¹⁴⁶ AU 734; Charles-Edwards, "Uí Néill," 398, 410.

¹⁴⁷ AU 737.9, 737.10.

¹⁴⁸ On the alliance between these two kindreds, see Charles-Edwards, "Uí Néill," 410-1.

(‘king in the North’) on Áed Muinderg of Cenél Conaill in 747.¹⁴⁹ Both Cenél Conaill and Cland Cholmáin were proponents of the Columban *familia*. Given the factors surrounding the Law of Patrick’s promulgation, if Charles-Edwards is right in asserting that these eighth-century laws were used as ways of securing new political orders near the accession of kings of Tara, then perhaps it is necessary to reinterpret Cilléne’s role as depicted in the twelfth-century copy of the reliquary. Certainly, Cilléne may have had a peace-making motive when negotiating with the two northern kindreds. Nevertheless, as successor of Colum Cille, he had the received responsibility of maintaining traditional kin ties with those who would support the monastery and help renew the law. Thus, he would have had to be accommodating to the Cenél Conaill king, especially since Flaithbertach was also the King of Tara and therefore hugely influential with renewing the law and reasserting Ionan authority, as was his father Loingsech. The fact that a significant number of the guarantors from Adomnán’s time were no longer living, and that Easter tensions on Iona had disrupted normal contact with Ireland, would have intensified the importance of Cilléne’s mission for Iona, in light of the ecclesiastical competition with Armagh.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, Flaithbertach, as overking, could easily impose his will over a client-king in negotiations of peace, which may have subsequently disenchanted Áed Allán with Iona’s sense of justice and nudged him towards Armagh.

¹⁴⁹ AU 715, 747. The latter occurred during the high-kingship of Domnall mac Murchada of Mide and suggests that Domnall upheld the Cenél Conaill king as *rex in Tuaiscirt*. The title also appears in AU 779 (there *rege Aquilonis*) attached to Áed Muinderg’s son. Domnall himself seems to have inherited his father’s role as *regis Nepotes Neill*, which he held during the high-kingship of Flaithbertach. On this alliance and the meaning of these titles, see Charles-Edwards, “Uí Néill,” 405-7.

¹⁵⁰ For the guarantors, see Ní Dhonnchadha, “Guarantor List,” 182-5. The fact that the Law of Patrick was promulgated just a few years after *Lex Innocentium* was renewed indicates it was a response to the Ionan innovation, which in turn implies the continuing competition between the two federations in this period.

The Iona Chronicle: A Relic of the Renewal?

Cilléne's trip to Ireland and renewal of the law with *Adomnani reliquiae* calls into question what these relics actually were. Certainly they were objects commanding authority to those in Ireland. The *reliquis sanctorum*, which Bishop Colmán took when left his see at Lindisfarne and used to found his monastery on Inis Bó Finde, included the bones of Áidán, according to Bede.¹⁵¹ The importance of relics specific to eighth-century Ireland needs hardly be stressed; Muirchú writes of "bitter contention for [Patrick's] relics" (*de reliquiis sancti Patricii dira contentio*) and the *Cáin Adomnáin* stresses that "full payment is made to any church for violating her relics (*fethaltae*)."¹⁵² Some of the objects Cilléne carried as relics to Ireland may be gleaned from the copy of the Irish verse on the Adomnán's reliquary. Among these are "Columba's tunic famous and blessed...in it is the lay Brendan made at sea."¹⁵³ This recalls a miracle in *Vita sancti Columbae* from Adomnán's own time, when some of the elder monks decided they should try to alleviate a drought by taking Colum Cille's *candida tunica* and "books written by his own pen" (*libris stylo ipsius discriptis*) into the fields where they would "three times raise and shake in the air that tunic" and "open his books and read from them." This commemoration of the saint's name, "remembered in his tunic and books" (*in tunica et libris commemorata*), strongly indicates the importance and holiness of texts written on Iona.¹⁵⁴ It also provides another example of Columba's tunic being accompanied by a relic of writing, as represented by Brendan's *láidh* in the reliquary. There is an additional curious

¹⁵¹ AU 668; HE IV.4.

¹⁵² L. Bieler (ed.). *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*. Dublin: Dublin Inst. for Advanced Studies, 1979. 120; *Cáin Adomnáin*, §36.

¹⁵³ Glynn, "Reliquary," 206, 210.

¹⁵⁴ VC ii.44. For the veneration of the Book of Kells as a relic on Iona, see G. Henderson, "The Book of Kells: The Making of a Relic," *From Durrow to Kells: The Insular Gospel-books 650-800*. New York, 1987, 178-198 and P. Meyvaert, "The Book of Kells and Iona," *The Art Bulletin* 71, no. 1 (1989); 6-19.

juxtaposition of texts with other relics in Tírechán's writings. When noting the gifts Patrick gave to Sachellus, he mentions that "he [Patrick] wrote for him a book of the Psalms (*scriptisit illi librum psalmorum*), and he received from him a portion of the relics of Peter and Paul...which are in Armagh."¹⁵⁵ It is noteworthy that these relics, along with those of Patrick himself, are indeed those mentioned used in promulgating the Law of Patrick.¹⁵⁶

Since the Iona Chronicle was probably composed during Adomnán's *principatus*, it could easily represent a relic of his abbacy or at least an object of authority. Indeed, since the philological studies of the annals strongly suggest that there was just one original mother-chronicle from this period maintained on Iona, it would be an enigma in its own right. This singularity would add a sacred quality to the chronicle and provide further incentive for this text to accompany the other *Adomnani reliquiae* that Cilléne took on tour in 727. The chronicle's preservation of ancestral history of Ireland, Britain, and the wider Christian world would indeed represent an authoritative *object*, if not relic, that would add weight to the reassertion of Ionan influence in Ireland, in the light of ecclesiastical competition. So, engaging with the view that this transfer of the chronicle involved a copy of it coming to a monastic house in Brega, it therefore must have been copied when Cilléne came to a monastery in that area.¹⁵⁷ It would only make sense for him to allow such a special text to be copied in a monastery that he especially favored. Rechra on Lambay Island, founded by Ségéne in 635 as an extension of Ionan influence, would constitute the most likely place. Not only was it a Columban monastery, but it also lay in southern Uí Néill lands, those of Cilléne's own kin. After it was copied sometime in 730, Cilléne returned home with the

¹⁵⁵ Bieler. *The Patrician Texts in the Book of Armagh*, 122.

¹⁵⁶ AU 734.

¹⁵⁷ On this view, see Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 9-16.

relics, already being on the Irish Sea. The original chronicle was then continued on Iona and eventually lost.

It will be necessary to reconcile this possible time and place of the transfer with the language and attention of the annals. Most immediately, the annals noting the transfer of the relics to Ireland in 727 and their return in 730 require scrutiny, being entries gathered by a scribe a few years after and then written down.¹⁵⁸ The phrase *transferuntur in Hiberniam* can easily translate to “were carried across into Ireland,” which conveys, if anything, the attention of a scribe writing in Ireland. In 730, the *reversio reliquiarum Adomnani de Hibernia in mense Octimbris* simply displays knowledge of the Columban scribe writing at Rechra that the relics originally came from Iona and thus were returned there. The precise dating then indicates that Cilléne’s last stop in Ireland was indeed Rechra and that he left in October. If this was the case, one would expect this abbot to have close contact with that house, which would be possible considering the easily reachable location just off the coast of Brega. This coastal location would facilitate a steady stream of news from Iona and Britain that would provide the Rechra annalist with enough material to account for the events 727-c.754, especially the Pictish harrying of Dalriada. The early annalistic attention towards Rechra appears in entries 739, 743, 769, and possibly 748.¹⁵⁹ Interestingly, the entry for 739 notes the death of Flann mac Cellach, *episcopus Rechrainne*. The episcopal see on Rechra may exemplify Cilléne’s favor of the monastery. In a larger light, it might reveal the abbot’s connection with Domnall mac Murchada of Mide, the Cland Cholmáin potentate whose growing influence would eventually culminate both with his victory over Áed Allán (and his

¹⁵⁸ For this model of contemporary recording, see *ibid.* 8-9.

¹⁵⁹ AT 748 records the obit of an abbot of *Rechland*, which may be Rechrann, as Charles-Edwards suggests, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 220 n2.

Airgialla allies) at Serethmag and his accession to the high-kingship of Tara in 743.¹⁶⁰ In fact, Domnall does appear to have had a genuine interest in the church, conveyed by his entering into the *clericatum* both in 740 and 744. Whether or not this indicates a joint status as lay and ecclesiastical magnate is unclear, but this interest does not make it implausible that he helped create a bishopric at Rechra in collaboration with Cilléne.¹⁶¹ Indeed, it would reiterate the politico-ecclesiastical cooperation echoed throughout the seventh and eighth centuries. This cooperation would jointly help secure Iona influence not far from Armagh and control the Cland Cholmáin rivals, Síol nÁedo Sláne, in eastern Brega.¹⁶²

Thomas Charles-Edwards suggests that one method of determining the monastic house maintaining the Chronicle of Ireland in southern Brega would be to examine the annalistic attention to lesser officeholders, such as the *scriba* and *sapientes*. He points to the relatively high volumes of these offices noted in Findglas, Lusca, and Treóit, advancing any one of them as a possible daughter-house.¹⁶³ One way to reconcile his views with those presented here would be to look at geography. Lambay Island is just off the coast from Lusca, little more than ten miles away. Treóit and Findglas are not much farther away, so Rechra would be able to receive enough information of these monasteries to record the *scriba* and *sapientes* appearing in the Chronicle of Ireland. To account for the shift of greater attention to Armagh near the end of the eighth century, one might turn to the entry for 795: “the burning of Rechrann by gentiles and its reliquary was broken open and despoiled” (*Loscadh*

¹⁶⁰ AU 743.12, AT 743.13. See also Charles-Edwards, “Uí Néill,” 411.

¹⁶¹ On Domnall’s clerical status, see AU 740, 744; Herbert, *Iona, Kells, and Derry*, 64-5; Maddox. “Early Irish Monasteries and their Dynastic Connections,” 67-8.

¹⁶² If Domnall ruled as *rex Nepotes Neill* over the southern Uí Néill, this would be particularly instrumental in his overlordship.

¹⁶³ Charles-Edwards, *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 9-11.

Rechrainne o geinntib do choscradh 7 do lomradh).¹⁶⁴ In this situation, the Chronicle of Ireland would have been saved by some monk who, escaping to the mainland, sought sanctuary in nearby Lusca. An alternate explanation might be that in response to the raid, the contents of Rechra's scriptorium was temporarily housed in Lusca while the monastery on Lambay was rebuilt, and during this time the chronicle was copied at Lusca. In any case, it was continued there until c. 911, with a greater focus on Armagh and its own scholars.

The Transfer of Texts in the Early Medieval Period

This case of the Iona Chronicle illustrates some of the larger issues for both the methodology and historiography of the early Middle Ages. This paper exhibits the importance of considering the context of the time and places as well as the agency of the people when reconstructing early medieval history, rather than just interpreting texts in abstraction. For example, the continuity of the successors of Colum Cille in maintaining and engineering kin ties to secular rulers, within the complex web of Irish geopolitics, represents a long-term trend. In turn, this serves to indicate their actions where they are not explicitly recorded. At the same time, there are occasionally shifts in these trends over a short period of time by particularly notable individuals, such as Adomnán. With respect to the Easter controversy and Iona's wavering influence (especially in its northern Britannic spheres), he reconfigured such trends by enlarging the role of Ionan abbots with the *Lex Innocentium*, thus confirming Ionan influence within the dynamic of ecclesiastical competition. When that influence was partly eroded in the first quarter of the eighth century, it was up to Cilléne to

¹⁶⁴ AU 795. See C. Downham, "An Imaginary Viking Raid on Skye in 795," *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 20 (2000): 192-6, for Charles-Edwards doubt on including *Sci* as a contemporary entry in 795, see *The Chronicle of Ireland*, 258.

revive it with the renewal of the law. Thus, he did so with all the tools available to him, using both traditional kin ties of the successors of Colum Cille as well as his own in southern Uí Néill lands. In addition, his use of tools of authority and influence available to him on Iona, in particular the relics and chronicle of Adomnán, resulted in the “transfer” of a chronicle to Ireland that might otherwise have been lost to later generations.

The actions of Ionan abbots in the seventh and eighth centuries display remarkable sophistication and denote a close relationship between secular and ecclesiastical politics, operating on a genealogical basis. Their educated careers counter any claim that peoples of Ireland and northern Britain had not changed much since pre-Roman times and were as savage and uncivilized as they were before. Indeed, such claims often indicate later racial tensions, exacerbated by colonialism, which have been passed down from the high medieval or early modern periods and evolved into disturbing misconceptions. Instead, the history that emerges from texts such as the Iona Chronicle is a constant reminder that much indeed was happening in the early Middle Ages, even on the *parva et extrema insula* of Iona.

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