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Benjamin T. Hudson

Historical Literature of Early Scotland

As the birds gather at their feast in Sir Richard Holland's *The Buke of the Howlat*, they are joined by the Rook, representing a Gaelic bard, who irritates the company with his monologue of genealogies, lists of kings and constant demands for food.¹ Finally he is driven away by popular demand, but not before "making many lies." The student of early Scottish history can sympathize with the Rook's audience as the records of Gaelic Scotland occasionally resemble productions from the Tower of Babel. Otherwise sober historical documents are embellished with myths, legends and literary allusions. They suggest a flourishing tradition of historical and pseudo-historical writing in early Scotland that would continue to, and find expression in, the historical writings of the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Yet there has been little effort to identify extant pieces of the earlier Scottish secular literature and less consideration of the influence of those writings on later medieval, or even Renaissance, Scottish literature.

Notice of early Scottish historical writing as a guide for a later work is found in the tract *De Situ Albanie*, written during the twelfth century. There the story of the naming of Britain after Brutus and the naming of Alba after his younger brother is introduced by the statement, "We read in the histories and chronicles of ancient Britain and in the ancient tales and annals of the

¹Printed in *Scottish Alliterative Poems in Riming Stanzas*, ed. F. J. Amours, STS 27 (Edinburgh, 1897), 74-5.

Scots and Picts. . . ."² Following that fabulous history of Britain is a useful geographical survey of Scotland together with valuable historical pieces concerning the Picts and Scots. The confusion and conflation of history and legend as part of a synthesizing approach to Scottish history can be seen in the works of later Scots writers. When John of Fordun began his *Chronicle of the Scottish Nation*, in the fourteenth century, he alerted the reader to the synthesizing nature of his work with the opening statement, "We gather from various writings of old chronicles."³ That Fordun was attempting to reconcile his sources is seen when he later complains that his sources fail to agree on certain points and he is unable to decide among them. A generation later, Andrew of Wyntoun would include in the opening section of his *Original Chronicle* notice that he, too, was following older histories.⁴

Both Fordun and Wyntoun have been held to have been too gullible in their choice of material; Fordun has been criticized for the obvious literary embellishments to his narrative⁵ while Wyntoun's account of the contest between Macbeth and Malcolm Canmore has been described as, "practically a catalogue of early Scottish legend."⁶ They serve notice, however, that the earlier historical literature was important to the Scots. That importance is best witnessed by the inclusion of *ollamh*, the highest grade of poet who was also a master of learning, and his harpist, or *clàrsach*, on a seal of King Alexander III.⁷ They were not the only guardians of traditional lore, For-

²Ed. by M. O. Anderson in *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1974), p. 241: *Legimus in historiis et in cronicis antiquorum britonum et in gestis et annalibus antiquis Scottorum et Pictorum. . . .*

³*Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, ed. W. F. Skene, *Historians of Scotland*, I (Edinburgh, 1871), i.1 [all references to Fordun's chronicle will be by book and chapter]: *Ex variis quippe veterum scriptis chronographorum colligitur.*

⁴*Andrew of Wyntoun's Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland*, ed. David Laing; *Historians of Scotland*, III (Edinburgh, 1872), Prologue [references to Wyntoun's chronicle will be by book and chapter].

⁵See James Anderson, "William Forbes Skene," *Scottish Historical Review*, 46 (1967), 145.

⁶Nora Chadwick, "The legend of Macbeth," *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 6 (1949), 192.

⁷John Bannerman, "The King's Poet and the Inauguration of Alexander III," *Scottish Historical Review*, 68 (1989), 134.

dun's account of Alexander's inauguration mentions the recitation of the king's genealogy extending back to Adam by a *senchaid*, an historian.⁸

The initial modern effort to identify systematically the historical literature of the earlier period was made by Thomas Innes in his *Critical Essay*.⁹ His study of the origin legends of the Picts and Scots set out the basic principles necessary for a study of early Scottish historical literature. For almost 150 years, however, his ground-breaking work stood alone. To some extent that was the result of political circumstances as Scottish history before the twelfth century, with its place in Gaelic culture, was viewed as suspect after the failure of the Jacobite risings. That, in turn, led to a scholarly climate unsympathetic to the history of early Scotland. Some historians, such as John Pinkerton, were openly anti-Celtic. Others, such as George Chalmers, took English historical records as the standard by which all others must be measured; hence the interest in medieval Scottish historiography was confined to the period after the "Normanization" of the Scottish court in the twelfth century by the sons of Malcolm Canmore and St. Margaret. Concentration on what was essentially Lowland history continued to the later nineteenth century when John Hill Burton would claim that the victory of the Lowland regiments over the Highland clans at the battle of Harlaw was more glorious for Scottish history than the victory at Bannockburn.¹⁰

Neglect of pre-Norman Scottish literature was helped by the controversy sparked by James Macpherson's *Ossian* poems; afterwards, efforts to recover the records and literature of early Gaelic Scotland were considered suspect at best and completely fraudulent at worst. The earlier historical literature was saved from neglect by the historian William Forbes Skene. His monumental works, *Chronicles of the Picts*¹¹ and *Celtic Scotland*,¹² followed the path set out by Innes in using the records of early Scotland written in Latin or Gaelic in order to compose a narrative history of Scotland prior to the twelfth century. Skene, however, had a mission; he wished to minimize

⁸*Op. cit.*, *Annals*, chapter 48.

⁹Thomas Innes, *A critical essay on the ancient inhabitants of the Northern parts of Britain or Scotland*, *Historians of Scotland*, VIII (Edinburgh, 1885).

¹⁰John Hill Burton, *History of Scotland*, 8 vols. (Edinburgh, 1873), II, 394.

¹¹*Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots and other early Memorials of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1867).

¹²*Celtic Scotland*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1876-90).

Ireland's influence on Scotland.¹³ For the records of early Scotland, this meant that Skene had to explain why so many of his materials were found in Irish manuscripts and written in Middle Irish. Thus his works on the early historical writings are a mixture of genuine insight, such as his collection of the available materials, and unfortunate theorizing, as in his views on the movement of languages within Northern Britain.

None of the previous studies, however, has attempted to distinguish those pre-twelfth century texts of Scottish provenance from those texts in which Scottish material was incorporated into Irish literature. While any discussion at this time must be merely a consideration of probabilities, the advances in lexicography, textual criticism and textual editing to the present day allow for some observations. Two problems need to be considered: which texts seem to indicate a Scottish origin, for which a preliminary bibliography is provided in the appendix; and why is so much of the material extant only in Irish manuscripts or in copies made by Irish scribes?

Historical writing among the Scots had begun well before the Scottish conquest of Pictavia in the mid-ninth century. The foundation of a monastery on Iona by St. Columba led to the setting-up of a *scriptorium*; there were written biographies, such as the *Life of Columba*, monastic annals and copying of Biblical texts.¹⁴ Iona was within the kingdom of Dál Riata and ruled by the ancestors of the later Scottish kings, one of whom, Áedán mac Gabráin, was the ancestor of Kenneth Mac Alpin and the friend of St. Columba. The tract "History of the men of Britain," *Senchus Fer nAlban*, was composed there in the early eighth century.¹⁵ The tract is a naval muster roll in which the obligations of each of the kindreds in Scottish Dál Riata are noted. Thus, from that early date, a text of obvious Scottish origin survives.

Attached to that tract are several genealogies for the royal dynasties of Dál Riata. The maintenance of those genealogies would continue unabated throughout the medieval period. The earliest stratum in those genealogies is contemporary with the "History of the men of Britain," but it was kept up to date, as can be seen by texts revised in the late tenth century, the mid-

¹³Anderson, "William Forbes Skene," p. 147.

¹⁴For a survey of the Iona *scriptorium* see A. O. & M. O. Anderson, *Adomnán's Life of Columba* (London, 1961), pp. 18-30.

¹⁵In John Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh, 1974), p. 119.

eleventh century and the twelfth century.¹⁶ Those lists of names also enjoyed a demonstrable oral tradition, their recitation at the inauguration of a king was essential for the proper performance of the ceremony.¹⁷ The right of a king to rule was determined by his relationship to previous kings and the necessity for those lists is apparent in the recitation by the *senchaid* at the coronation of King Alexander III. Genealogies allowed little room for literary embellishment in themselves, but they did provide the material for performance on less solemn occasions. The Rook's recitation in the *Buke of the Howlat* echoes a ninth century poem that lists the entertainments at a banquet: "At ale poems are chanted; fine [genealogical] ladders are climbed; melodious bardisms modulate through pools of liquor the name of Áed."¹⁸ Later writers would incorporate those lists into their own writings; Fordun used a genealogy for King David I that is also found in the twelfth century Irish encyclopedia *The Book of Leinster*.¹⁹ He received his copy of the genealogy from Walter Wardlaw, the Bishop of Glasgow (1367-1387); evidence that the poets were not the only antiquarians interested in the earlier genealogical traditions.

After the Scottish conquest of the Picts in the mid-ninth century, literature from a distinctly Scottish point of view can be identified from the late-tenth century. An early chronicle of Scots provenance is the *Old Scottish Chronicle*, found among the Scottish materials in the Paris manuscript popularly known as the "Poppleton Manuscript."²⁰ The extant chronicle was

¹⁶The tenth century list was brought up to date during the reign of Causantín mac Cuilén (d. 997) and is printed in Bannerman, *Studies*, pp. 65-66. The eleventh century lists are in the Oxford MS Rawlinson B.502, f. 162c-3, and introduced as *Genelach Ríg nAlban*, printed in M. A. O'Brien, *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae* (Dublin, 1976), pp. 328-330. The twelfth century re-working of those list is in the *Book of Leinster*, f. 336a-b, and their continuations are noted in the notes in O'Brien's *Corpus Genealogiarum*, pp. 328-30, and additional material is given on page 426.

¹⁷Bannerman, "The King's Poet," p. 120 ff.

¹⁸Printed in W. Stokes and J. Strachan, *Thesaurus Paleohibernicus*, 2 vols. (Dublin, 1975), II, 295: Oc cormaim gaibtir dúana/ drengaitir dreppa dáena/ arbeittet bairtni bindi/ tri laith linni ainm nAeda.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, IV, 8; the list is extended to David I and beyond Erc in v. 50.

²⁰Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale MS Lat. 4126, f. 28 v.a, - f. 29 v.a; printed by M. O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*, pp. 249-52.

written *circa* 973 probably in eastern Scotland.²¹ The narrative begins with the conquest of the Picts by Kenneth Mac Alpin and is concerned mainly with the activities of his descendants, both in Scotland and in Ireland; it is, with several exceptions, largely a sober listing of notable events.²²

Those exceptions give an indication of conflicting traditions about certain events and imply an already existing Scottish historical literature. One example is the chronicle's account of a raid made by King Malcolm I into Northumbria *circa* 951. At that time the kingdom of Northumbria was controlled by the vikings of York and the Scottish invasion, called the "raid of the white ridges" was a great triumph, penetrating as far as the river Tees. Yet the chronicle notes that another version of the raid, introduced by the phrase *alii dicunt*, claimed that the initiative for the raid came from Malcolm's predecessor Constantine II and implies that a lengthy tale was behind that notice. A second example of literary remembrance in the *Old Scottish Chronicle* is its version of the Scottish triumph over the Picts and the reason for that victory. There it is claimed that the Picts were completely subdued by Kenneth after a series of battles that continued into his reign in Pictavia; the Scots were assisted by divine malevolence directed towards the Picts. A longer version of that same story, with the additional information that Kenneth's father Alpin was slain by the Picts, is found in the *Chronicle of Huntingdon*, one of the many histories that were used by Edward the First to establish his claims to lordship of the Scots.²³ As has been convincingly demonstrated, that story came into England in the twelfth century, through the connection of the Scottish royal house with the Honour of Huntingdon.²⁴ The story had a wide circulation and was repeated by both John of Fordun and Andrew of Wyntoun.²⁵

A second late-tenth century document is a verse list of the kings of Scotland, Ireland, England, the Emperor and the king of the West Franks that was interpolated in the versified Biblical history known as the "Psalter of

²¹See E. J. Cowan, "The Scottish Chronicle in the Poppleton Manuscript," *Innes Review*, 32 (1981), 3-21, for a discussion.

²²B. T. Hudson, "Elech and the Scots in Strathclyde," *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 15 (1988), 148.

²³Sir Francis Palgrave, ed., *Records and Documents Illustrating the History of Scotland* (London, 1837), p. 98.

²⁴Cowan, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-6.

²⁵Fordun, *Chronica*, iv.4; Wyntoun, *Original Chronicle*, VI, 8.

the Quatrains" or *Saltair na Rann*, composed circa 988.²⁶ The kingly poem within a poem is at lines 2333-2388; the first king in the list is the reigning Scottish monarch, Kenneth II (reigned 971-995), while the final king is the reigning monarch of the Britons of Strathclyde, Malcolm son of Dyfnal. Both Kenneth and Malcolm receive generous estimations and it has been noted that the appearance of the kings in the poem strongly suggests it was composed by someone who was a Scot, that is, someone by whom the Scottish monarch naturally would be considered first.²⁷ The poem in the "Psalter of the Quatrains" gives some indication of the world-view of its author and his desire to set the Scottish king in a European context.

By the late tenth century, those who would write on Scottish history had three sets of kings to consider: the kings of the Picts; the kings of Dál Riata; and the descendants of the Dál Riata kings, the Scottish kings after Kenneth Mac Alpin. The Scots had taken their lands in Britain by force within the era of historical records and, unlike the Irish or the Welsh, there could be no recourse to semi-mythical ancestors battling giants or monsters. The military conquest of Pictavia, for example, was remembered in some place-names; the area round Fetteresso was called "the sword-land."²⁸ A curious flexibility is evident in the contest into which the Scottish kings were set.

So by the eleventh century the king-lists composed in Scotland represented the Scottish kings variously as the heirs of the Dál Riata kings and as the heirs of the Picts. Written king-lists had been kept in Scotland since the seventh century. Adomnán notes that St. Columba refused to assist in the coronation of Áedán mac Gabráin until an angel showed him Áedán's name in a list of kings written in a book with an enameled cover.²⁹ Two king-lists have survived from the reign of Malcolm Canmore (1058-1093) and they given an impression of the pre-occupations of the *literati*. The only surviving copies of the two texts are to be found in Irish manuscripts, the

²⁶Ed. Whitley Stokes, *Saltair na Rann (Anecdota Oxoniensis)*, Mediaeval and Modern Series, I, iii.

²⁷G. Mac Éoin, "Saltair na Rann" in *Zeitschrift für celtische Philology* 28 (1960-61), 60.

²⁸The *claideom* is mentioned in the *Old Scottish Chronicle*, Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, p. 251; it may be the same as the *claideam-thír* located in Pictavia in *Lebor Gabála Éirenn*, ed. R. A. S. MacAlister, Irish Texts Society, 5 vols. (1938-56), V, 18.

²⁹Andersons, *Adomnán*, book iii, chapter 5.

king-list B³⁰ and the "Scottish Poem,"³¹ survive only in Irish manuscripts, among collections of Irish materials. King-list B begins with the kings of the Picts, with a Brude *urum*, and is merely a list of kings with the length of their reign. The Scots appear in that list in the ninth century with Kenneth Mac Alpin and the list ends with the reign of Malcolm Canmore, who is described as reigning at the time of the list's composition. King-list B may represent a continuation of ninth century historical tradition; Kenneth Mac Alpin, his sons and his brother are all described as *reges Pictorum* by a contemporary Irish chronicle and early historical writing may have attempted to present the Scottish kings as the heirs of the Picts.³² Later writers would use the information found in the list in their works; Fordun, for example, incorporated into his chronicle a version of the Pictish king-list³³ and would follow a king-list for the Scots in his narrative, as did Wyntoun.³⁴

The second list is a verse history popularly known as the "Scottish Poem" or *Duan Albanach*. That poem begins with a summary of the arrival of various peoples in Britain beginning with Brutus, the legendary ancestor of the Britons, after whom arrive the Picts followed by the emigration of the Scots from Ireland. The list of the kings of Dál Riata follows the introductory stanzas beginning with Fergus, Loarn and Oengus, the sons of Erc, who, according to legend found also in "The History of the men of Britain," led the Scots into Britain. The list ends with the reign of Malcolm Canmore, whose time "no one knows except the One who is learned," that is, God. The presentation of the kings in the "Scottish Poem" is not dissimilar to the scene described in the ninth century feasting entertainment and in the fifteenth century description of the Rook's performance in *Buke of the Howlat*; the "Scottish Poem" obviously was intended as a performance piece. A sim-

³⁰Ed. M. O. Anderson in *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*, pp. 261-3.

³¹Ed. K. H. Jackson, "The Poem *A Eolach Alban Uile*," *Celtica* 3 (1955), 149-67 and edited and translated in *Scottish Historical Review*, 36 (1957), 125-37. Although Jackson suggests that the poem was composed by an Irish writer (*Duan Albanach*, p. 129), it is clear that the final quatrain on which he based his conclusion was an explanatory clause added prior to its inclusion in an Irish manuscript and that the poem itself required the explanation because it had been brought into the Irish literary canon from Scotland.

³²For the contemporary Irish chronicle see *The Annals of Ulster*, ed. Sean Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1984).

³³*Chronica*, iv. 10-12.

³⁴For the relationship of the list of kings in the works of Fordun, Wyntoun and other later historians, see M. O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*, p. 234.

ilar use of both genealogies and king-lists in the writing of later literature is clearly seen in a poem from the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*. The Dean's brother Duncan MacGregor, or Donnchadh mac Dubhghaill Mhaoil, in a praise poem for Eoin mac Pádraig (died 1519) of Clan Gregor states that he hunted through various books for his genealogical information and he compared that information with king-lists in order to enumerate the kings who were Eoin's ancestors.³⁵

An interest in the Picts was not confined to the king-lists. The account of the arrival in Britain of the Picts and their request to the Irish for wives is seen as early as Bede³⁶ and the "Scottish Poem" uses the same pseudo-historical traditions that were also used by writers from Geoffrey of Monmouth to the historians of the Renaissance. Both the "Scottish Poem" and Geoffrey imply that the Picts were fairly late arrivals in Britain and both note that the Picts went to Ireland for wives before settling in Northern Britain. That is somewhat different from the account given by Bede and it is quite clear a second tradition was being followed.

A fuller account of the story of the arrival of the Picts in Britain and their conquests comes from the poem "What assembled the Picts in Britain?"³⁷ The first stanza of the poem is also found in late versions of the Irish *Book of Invasions* although the extant version has been shown to be mid-eleventh century.³⁸ The poem is flattering to the Picts and describes them as conquering heroes. A verse found in some recensions of the poem names Macbeth as the current ruler of the Scots and the poem may have been intended for recitation at his court.³⁹

Not all eleventh century historical writing took the legendary past as its beginning. An approach to Scottish history that somewhat follows the style of the historical passage in the "Psalter of the Quatrains" is the verse history

³⁵*Bardachd Albannach, Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore*, ed. W. J. Watson, Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, I (Edinburgh, 1978), 212 ff.

³⁶In *Historiam Ecclesiasticam Gentis Anglorum*, i.1; *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, ed. C. Plummer (Oxford, 1975), pp. 11-12.

³⁷*Cruithnig cid dosfardlam*, ed. A. G. van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach, the Irish Version of Nennius* (Dublin, 1932), pp. 10-14.

³⁸Gearóid S. Mac Éoin, "On the Irish Legend of the Origins of the Picts" in *Studia Hibernica*, 4 (1964), 164.

³⁹*Ibid.* Although one late copy of the poem ascribes its authorship to the Irish poet Flann Manistrech, such an identification has been set aside as the type of attribution to a well-known poet that is common in medieval literature.

known as the *Prophecy of Berchán*.⁴⁰ In *Berchán* the Scottish kings are placed in a "pan-Gaelic" context and its 206 stanzas give a history of the kings of Ireland and Scotland from the mid-ninth to the mid-eleventh century with the two sections linked by a recitation of the saints venerated in both lands. The poem was composed by someone who was a Gaelic-speaker, but apparently not an Irishman, as is suggested by the difficulties that Irish geography produced for the author; he was under the impression that Cashel was on the southeast coast of Ireland and he was unable to locate correctly several of the important Irish dynasties. The poet had no such difficulties with Scottish geography and he was familiar with the location of battles, graves and fortresses, often referring to them by their physical geography rather than by name. The church to which King Constantine II retired, St. Andrews, is never identified by name, but only by its setting along the sea; the identification can be made only because of the notice of Constantine's retirement in other, more informative, records.

The confidence with which Scottish events are treated, in contrast to the confusion for the Irish kings, indicates that *Berchán* was written by a Scotsman in the mid-eleventh century, one with an interest in Irish history. *Berchán* and the king poem in the "Psalter of the Quatrains" both suggest that Scottish historical writing was not completely self-absorbed. The literary allusions in *Berchán* skip from early Irish literature to hagiography to contemporary affairs which, together with the identification of the kings not by name but by *sobriquet*, make *Berchán* a difficult text to use. Áedán mac Gabráin, for example, is identified as the first of the Scots to conquer the Picts, a piece of historical revisionism that comes from the *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick*, an early tenth century collection of earlier materials about the saint that was made under the patronage of an abbot of Armagh named Joseph of Dál Riata.⁴¹ The tradition of oblique reference to persons would continue in Scottish writing. In the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*, Alpín, father of Kenneth I, is described as brilliant and stern of temper.⁴² In the eighteenth century poem *Moladh na Sean Chànain Gàidhlig* by Alasdair

⁴⁰Currently the best available edition is by A. O. Anderson, "The Prophecy of Berchan" in *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 19 (1929-30), 1-50. A new edition, including older manuscript with additional verses unknown to Anderson, is being prepared by this writer.

⁴¹*The Tripartite Life of Patrick*, ed. Whitley Stokes, 2 vols., (London, 1887), I, 162.

⁴²Watson, *Bardachd Albannach*, p. 214.

MacDhomhnaill, Malcolm Canmore is referred to as *Calum, allail a' chinn mhóir*, "Colm, Famous the large head."⁴³

The extant versions of *Berchán* betray the process of addition and revision that historical writing inspired. The original poem apparently was completed during the reign of Malcolm Canmore.⁴⁴ Sometime in the late eleventh century, or early twelfth century, after the reign of Malcolm's brother Domnall Bán, verses were added to the end of the poem and within the poem. Thus the original verses about the king Domnall *dasachtach* (died 900 A.D.), "Donald the madman," severely criticize him for his oppression of his own subjects and state that he was slain by his nobles.⁴⁵ The "re-edited" verses, identifiable by their use of a later style, present Domnall merely as a powerful and successful warrior.⁴⁶ Domnall was not the only king whose reign received a re-assessment; one set of verses for King Duncan I, the father of Malcolm Canmore, suggests that he was a militarily successful king in opposition to another verse that portrays him as "King Log."⁴⁷

Berchán also provides early testimony for some of the historical traditions that later appear in the work of Andrew of Wyntoun. An example is the estimation of Macbeth as a good monarch. In *Berchán* Macbeth is called a good king whose death was a tragedy for the Scots.⁴⁸ That estimation is not repeated by Fordun, but it is found in Wyntoun's chronicle where Macbeth's reign is presented as a time of prosperity and righteousness.⁴⁹ Yet Wyntoun also repeats, in the same section, the unpleasant stories about Macbeth and serves notices that he is gathering various traditions in his statement "but as we find by some stories." For at least one of those stories, an earlier version is found in the eleventh century *Prophecy of Berchán*.

⁴³*Bardachd Ghaidhlig*, ed. W. J. Watson, 3rd edn. (Inverness, 1976), p. 99.

⁴⁴On linguistic grounds a date of 1060x1090 is most likely; the original poem probably ends at Stanza 198 when Malcolm Canmore's death erroneously is placed at Rome.

⁴⁵Stanzas 141-5.

⁴⁶The re-edited verses for Domnall are Stanzas 129-31.

⁴⁷The two sets of verses are 187-9 and verse 190. The matter is discussed in B. T. Hudson, "Senchus to histore: Legends of King Duncan I," in *Studies in Scottish Literature*, 25 (1990), 100-120.

⁴⁸Stanzas 191-3.

⁴⁹*Original Chronicle*, VI, 18.

Early Scottish history was remembered both in scholarly productions, such as Fordun's chronicle, and in more personal verse, such as the aforementioned poem by Donnchadh mac Dubhghaill Mhaoil. Yet the early Scottish historical texts cited in this survey are, with the exception of the *Old Scottish Chronicle*, extant in Irish manuscript collections. One possible explanation for that may be found in the ties between the Scottish and Irish aristocracy. The linguistic unity of the two peoples made contacts constant between them. Scottish clergy such as St. Cadroë, the famous abbot of Waulsorts, would be trained at the seminary at Armagh and Irish clergy would labor in Scotland, such as Máel Brigte the amanuensis of the Irish chronicler Marianus Scotus. Not only clerics travelled between the islands. Scottish poets would perform at the court of Irish princes, such as Giolla Críost Brúilingeach whose poem in praise of a king of Connacht is preserved in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*.⁵⁰

More importantly, from the ninth century there was intermarriage between the Scots and Irish that resulted in a number of Irish kings whose ancestry traced back to Kenneth Mac Alpin. In the ninth century the Scottish princess Máel Muire, the daughter of Kenneth Mac Alpin, was the wife of two powerful Irish Kings and the mother or grandmother of two powerful tenth century Irish kings.⁵¹ One of her Irish grandsons, Áedán mac Máelmithig, would travel to St. Andrews to die in pilgrimage there in 966. In the later half of the tenth century Kenneth's great-great-grandson Kenneth II would marry a princess from a northern Leinster kingdom; their son would be the early eleventh century king Malcolm II, the great-grandfather of Malcolm Canmore. The parentage of Malcolm II was remembered in contemporary verse; he is described in *Berchán* as, "the son of the cow who grazes by the Liffey."⁵² Malcolm's nobles intervened in Irish affairs; in 1014 the *mormaer* of Mar, Domnall mac Eimhin, would die fighting for the Irish king Brian Boru at the battle of Clontarf; his death would be commemorated in the eleventh century Irish history *War of the Irish against the Vikings*.⁵³ Malcolm himself was honored among the Irish and in his obituary in the Leinster-oriented *Annals of Tigernach* he is called "the glory of the whole

⁵⁰Watson, *Bardachd Albannach*, pp. 48 ff.

⁵¹B. T. Hudson, "Elech and the Scots in Strathclyde," p. 148.

⁵²Stanza 182: *Macc bó bronnas bruigh Life*.

⁵³*Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, ed. J. H. Todd (London, 1867), 175-7.

west of Europe."⁵⁴ Those Scottish-Irish connections may explain the interest of the Irish in Scottish history in the eleventh century.

The Irish descendants of the Scottish kings were proud of, and interested in, their eastern ancestors. The patronage of the Irish aristocracy for pieces concerning their ancestors is best witnessed by a stanza from a poem on the graves of the kings at Clonmacnoise. There the poet complains, "Said the clerics of Cluain (Clonmacnoise): Sing not the song to us! Sing to themselves at their feast a poem to the profit of Muiredach's seed."⁵⁵ That interest explains why so much of early Scottish literature can be recovered from Irish sources. The Irish aristocracy who counted the Scots kings among their ancestors would patronize those who recounted Scottish exploits; such patronage would extend to both the monastic chroniclers and to the poets, who would learn from the records of the Scots for use among the Irish. Antiquarian interest was not confined to the Irish; the tenth century Irish king Brian Boru is mentioned in the amusing Scottish parody of the heroic ballad in the poem *Laoidh an Tailleir*.⁵⁶ A shared literary culture covering an area from southwest Ireland to northeast Scotland explains the claim that John of Fordun searched libraries in Ireland as well as Britain; he, too, was aware of the materials available outside Britain for early Scottish history.⁵⁷ The conservatism that is so often claimed for Irish literary collections would ensure that the materials would be recopied into the early modern era.

There were two aspects to early Scottish historical writing: mere record keeping and the use of those records for entertainment. The records that were intended for reference, such as the *Old Scottish Chronicle*, were produced at roughly the same time that the same information was presented in popular form, as seen in the "Scottish Poem." The antiquity of Scottish historical writing is demonstrated by a chronological comparison with non-Scottish texts. The *Old Scottish Chronicle* is contemporary with the oldest extant version of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; the kingly section of the "Psalter of the Quatrains" is contemporary with the writings of AElfric and a generation earlier than the Norman historian Dudo; while the *Prophecy of*

⁵⁴A. O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1922), I, 572.

⁵⁵"The Graves of the kings at Clonmacnoise," ed. R. I. Best, *Ériu*, 2 (1905), 168:
Doráidset cléirigh Clúana
ná gadh dúin[n]e do dúana
gabh dóib féin ag á fledaibh
dán sochair síl Muredaigh.

⁵⁶Watson, *Bardachd Ghaidhlig*, p. 117.

⁵⁷*Chronica*, p. 1.

Berchán is contemporary with the earliest life of Edward the Confessor and a generation earlier than the Irish *Book of Invasions*.

This short survey of some pre-Norman Scottish literature has raised many questions and left few answers. Clearly, however, examples of early Scottish historical literature from the period 970-1100 can be identified and they show a blending of fact and embellishment that was continued by later writers. While relatively little of those early historical traditions can now be recovered, enough remains to suggest that by the end of the eleventh century there was a rich body of distinctly Scottish historical writing. This literature is not uniform in content; rather it exhibits signs of conflicting traditions that re-appear in later works. The mixing of legend, history and literary allusion in Scottish writings from an early date would contribute to the richness of later Scottish literature as reflected in the works of Fordun, Wyntoun and others. Literary fashions would change by the end of the Middle Ages and, as the reception of the Rook in the *Howlat* shows, the literary gems of one era would be the objects of ridicule for another. Enough survives of the earlier historical literature to suggest that the histories of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance were part of a tradition of historical writing among the Scots for which a beginning must be sought in the early Middle Ages.

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Appendix

SCOTTISH HISTORICAL WRITING

circa A.D. 970 - 1100: a preliminary bibliography

Some of these tracts have been edited in W. F. Skene's *Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots and Other Early Memorials of Scottish History* and by A. O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*.

King-List B

Ed. M. O. Anderson in *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1974), pp. 261-3.

Old Scottish Chronicle

Ed. M. O. Anderson in *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1974), pp. 249-252; trans. by A. O. Anderson in *Early Sources of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1922), *infra*.

Poem on the kings in the "Psalter of the Quatrains"

Saltair na Rann, ed. Whitley Stokes, *Anecdota Oxoniensis*, Medieval and Modern Series, i, III (Oxford, 1881)

Prophecy of Berchán

A. O. Anderson, "The Prophecy of Berchan," *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie*, 18 (1929-31), 1-56.

"Scottish Poem"

K. H. Jackson, ed. and trans., "The Poem *A Eolach Alban Uile*," *Celtica*, 3 (1955), 149-167; and "Duan Albanach," in *Scottish Historical Review*, 36 (1957), 125-37.

"What assembled the Picts in Britain?"

Cruithnig cid dosfarclam, ed. A. J. van Hamel, *Lebor Bretnach, the Irish version of the Historia Britonum of Nennius* (Dublin, 1932), pp. 10-14.