

SCOTTISH AFFAIRS AND THE POLITICAL  
CONTEXT OF *COGADH GAEDHEL RE GALLAIBH*

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The Battle of Clontarf is one of the most famous conflicts in Irish history. It was fought between the forces of Brian Boru, over-king of Ireland and his allies (including the *normaer* of Mar in Alba), and the forces of viking Dublin, Leinster and their allies (including men from Orkney and the Hebrides) on Good Friday 1014. The scale of the battle was noted by chroniclers in Britain, Ireland and the Continent.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the saga narrative *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* or ‘The War of the Irish and the Foreigners’, which was composed long after the event, has been very influential in shaping historical interpretations of the conflict. One under-researched aspect of *Cogadh* is the portrayal of Scottish affairs. In this chapter I seek to demonstrate the significance of northern Britain in the narrative, and to interpret the political context in which it was written.

Despite its historical significance *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* survives in only three manuscripts. The earliest copy survives in the famous Book of Leinster (Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1339 [H.2.18]), compiled in the second half of the twelfth century. *Cogadh* is the last text in this manuscript, whose loss of final leaves means that only the first 29 sections of narrative are preserved. The recension found in the Book of Leinster (siglum ‘L’) differs from that found in two later manuscripts. The second manuscript containing *Cogadh* is Dublin, Trinity College, MS 1319 [H.2.17] (siglum ‘D’).<sup>3</sup> This two-volume manuscript contains texts of various ages and sizes. The section containing *Cogadh* was written down in the late-fourteenth or early-fifteenth century. It is lacunose with leaves missing from both the beginning and the end of the narrative. The only complete version of *Cogadh* is a transcript on

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1 I should like to thank Denis Casey, Nick Evans, Rosemary Power, and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh for reading and commenting on drafts of this chapter.

2 *Ademari Cabannensis Chronicon*, iii, 54-55, 172-73; *Mariani Scotti Chronicon*, 1014; *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 1007 [=1014]; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 1013 [=1014]; *Annals of Inisfallen*, 1014; *Annals of Loch Cé*, 1014; *Annals of Ulster*, 1014; *Chronicon Scotorum*, 1014; *Brenbinedd y Saesson*, 1013 [=1014]; *Brut y Tywysogyon: Peniarth MS. 20*, 1014; *Brut y Tywysogyon: Red Book of Hergest*, [1014].

3 Arnott and Gwynn 1921, 351-97.

paper made by the famous Irish scribe Mícheál Ó Cléirigh (Brussels, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS 2569-2572, fos 103-34r, siglum 'B'). His transcript was made from an earlier copy he made in March 1628 of the now lost 'Book of Cu Connacht O'Daly'. *Cogadh* is the longest narrative in the Brussels manuscript, which mainly comprises Irish historical poems and genealogies.<sup>4</sup> The 'B' and 'D' versions of *Cogadh* are more closely related to each other than 'L'. James Henthorn Todd made an edition and translation of the text for the Rolls Series, published in 1867, which drew on all three manuscripts. Denis Casey has pointed out, however, that Todd probably did not use the Brussels manuscript directly, but relied instead on a copy made for him by Eugene O'Curry, which is now TCD MS 1408.<sup>5</sup> Todd divided the narrative of *Cogadh* into 121 sections and his section numbers will be used in this chapter. Nevertheless, a more accurate edition of the Book of Leinster text has been provided by Anne O'Sullivan, published in 1983.<sup>6</sup>

In terms of content, the narrative of *Cogadh* can be divided as follows: sections 1-3 provide an overview of the time frame covered by the narrative from the 790s until the reign of Brian Boru, during which time Ireland suffered depredations from Vikings. Sections 4-35 contain a terse narrative of Viking attacks throughout Ireland until the early tenth century. Apart from sections 37-39, the narrative from section 36 adopts a more florid narrative style, dramatically slowing the chronological pace of the narrative. Sections 40-60 deal with events focused on Munster and the struggle between Brian's family and the Vikings in the late tenth century, whilst sections 61-88 narrate the glorious deeds of Brian's reign until the eve of the battle of Clontarf. The remainder of the narrative focuses on events at Clontarf, which are described in vivid detail. The last three sections of the narrative (119-21) describe the aftermath of the battle. Despite the stylistic and narrative contrast between sections 4-35 and sections 40-121 of *Cogadh*, Scottish affairs can be seen to have a significant place throughout the narrative.

#### SCOTTISH AFFAIRS IN THE EARLIER SECTIONS OF *COGADH GAEDHEL RE GALLAIBH*

The narration of Scottish affairs in *Cogadh* can be compared to the Irish chronicles that the author(s) drew on to provide a historical

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4 Gheyn 1907, 46-48.

5 Denis Casey, pers. comm.

6 *Book of Leinster*; v, 1319-25.

backbone to the narrative. Chronology and historical accuracy are often subordinate to the propagandist purpose of *Cogadh*, which was to promote the interests of the descendants of Brian Boru. This is particularly true of the sections detailing Scottish affairs. The earlier sections (4-35) of *Cogadh* promote the notion that there was a long history of antagonism between Vikings and the kings of Alba. The first example of this is found in section twelve of the narrative, which describes a battle between a Viking fleet from Ireland and the rulers of Dál Riata. The Book of Leinster recension preserves the fullest account:

**CGG(L)§12** Tancatar iar sain cóic longa & tri fichit co Dublind Atha Cliath, & ra hindrit Lagin co Margi leo. & Mag mBreg. Tuosat Dál Riatai cath don longissein Uair ra chuatar lám chlá rá Herend fathúaid ar milliud Lagen & Breg. Ra marbad sin chathsin Eoganán mac Oengusa rí Dáil Riatai.

[There came after that three score and five ships to Dublin of Áth Cliath, and Leinster was plundered by them to [Sliab] Mairge and Mag Breg.<sup>7</sup> Dál Riata gave battle to this fleet; for they went, with the left hand to Ireland northwards after the plundering of Leinster and Brega. Eóganán, son of Óengus, king of Dál Riata was killed in that battle.]<sup>8</sup>

This battle corresponds to the one described in the *Annals of Ulster* for the year 839, during which Eoganán son of Oengus and many of the men of Fortriu were killed.<sup>9</sup> It holds an important place in Scottish historiography. *Cogadh* claims that this fleet travelled from Dublin, although this is not mentioned in Irish chronicles.

Comparison between the text of *Cogadh* and Irish chronicles suggests that annals from 841 and 839 were conflated to create this account. The first part of the account in *Cogadh* appears to correspond to that in the now lost *Chronicle of Ireland* for the year 841. This text underpins surviving accounts in the *Annals of Ulster* and *Chronicum Scotorum*:

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7 In B and D manuscripts of CGG the variant reading ‘fargi’ (sea) is given, but plundering from Dublin to the sea does not make sense. Sliab Mairge (Slievemargy, Co. Laois) lay towards the western border of Leinster with Osraige and lies within the same county as Sliab Bladma (Slieve Bloom, Co. Laois). Mag mBreg (the plain of Brega) lay in Uí Néill territory.

8 *Book of Leinster*, v, 1321; cf. *Cogadh*, 12-13, 226 (§12).

9 *Annals of Ulster*, 839.

**AU 841.4** Longport oc Duiblinn as-rorta Laigin 7 Oi Neill etir tuatha 7 cealla co rice Sliabh Bledhma.

**CS 841.2** Longport og Duibhlinn, as ar loitedh Laighin ocus H. Neill eidir tuathaibh ocus cellaib co Sliab Bladma.<sup>10</sup>

[A longphort at Dublin from which the Leinstermen and the Uí Néill were plundered, both peoples and churches, as far as Sliab Bladma.]<sup>11</sup>

Based on Irish chronicle records, 841 has been regarded as the year during which the Viking camp at Dublin was founded, although recent discoveries of Viking burials around the margins of what was once the *dubb linn* – or ‘black pool’ – have indicated that there may have been earlier Viking activity in the region.<sup>12</sup> The second part of the account in *Cogadh* corresponds to the *Annals of Ulster* for the year 839:

**AU 839.9** Bellum re genntib for firu Fortrenn in quo ceciderunt Euganan m. Oengusa 7 Bran m. Oengussa 7 Eð m. Boanta 7 alii pene innumerabiles ceciderunt.

[The heathens won a battle against the men of Fortriu and Eóganán son of Óengus, Bran son of Óengus, Áed son of Boanta, and others almost innumerable fell there.]

There is no suggestion in the Irish chronicles that the Vikings who attacked northern Britain in 839 came from Ireland. It is chronologically impossible that the raiders who attacked Leinster and Southern Uí Néill territory from Dublin in 841 then went on to fight a battle in northern Britain in 839. Perhaps the author of *Cogadh* conflated his annalistic sources to bring Dublin Vikings into conflict with the ancestors of the royal line of Alba, creating a narrative of historical antagonism between them. As Nick Evans has pointed out, both Áed and Eóganán are listed as kings in *Duan Albanach*, with which the author of *Cogadh* may have been familiar.<sup>13</sup>

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10 The same record is found in the *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 838 [=841], and the *Annals of the Four Masters*, 840 [=841].

11 *Chronicle of Ireland*, 841.4.

12 Simpson 2005, 32-54.

13 Nick Evans pers. comm. See also Jackson 1957.

The next event of Scottish interest in *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* describes a battle between Vikings from Ireland and Causantín mac Cináeda (Constantine son of Kenneth).<sup>14</sup>

**CGG(L)§25** Ra hindarbait dano Dubgenti a Herind ar sain. & dochuatar i nAlbain. & ro brisisset cath for feraib Albain. du i *torchbair* Constantin mac Cinaeda ardri Alban & sochaide mor malle riss. Is andsain na maid in talam fo feraib Alban.

[The Black gentiles after this were driven out of Erin and went to Alba, where they gained a battle over the men of Alba in which were slain Causantín son of Cináed, high king of Alba, and a great multitude with him. It was then that the earth burst open under the men of Alba.]<sup>15</sup>

The chronology in this section is distorted. *Cogadh* places the death of Causantín after the battle of Strangford Lough, even though the battle was fought in 877 and the king died in 876.<sup>16</sup> Again, it is Vikings from Ireland who are seen to cause trouble in Alba, but the linkage between the events is anachronistic. The author of *Cogadh* may have deliberately conflated two accounts in the *Annals of Ulster*:

**AU875.3** Congressio Pictorum fri Dubghallu 7 strages magna Pictorum facta est

[An encounter between the Picts and the Dark foreigners and a great slaughter was made of the Picts.]

**AU877.5** Belliolum occ Loch Cuan eitir Finnngenti 7 Dubgennti in quo Albann, dux na nDubgenti, cecidit.

[A skirmish at Loch Cúan between the Fair heathens and the Dark heathens, in which Hálfdann, leader of the Dark heathens, fell.]

A further hint that the author of *Cogadh* rewrote rather than copied information drawn from earlier sources may be the inclusion of the term

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14 *Cogadh*, 26-27, 232 (§25).

15 Manuscript B removes the clause 'in which fell Constantine [...] and a great multitude with him', thus removing an anachronism from the text. *Cogadh*, 26, no. 7.

16 *Annals of Ulster*, 877; Dumville 2000, 81.

'Alba'. As David Dumville has noted, 'Alba' is used in Irish chronicles to describe 'Britain' before AD 900, but after that date the term is used to describe the northern British polity ruled by the descendants of Cináed mac Ailpín (Kenneth Mac Alpin).<sup>17</sup> Causantín's death is recorded briefly in the *Annals of Ulster* and *Chronicum Scotorum* in the year 876 where he is called *rex Pictorum* ('king of the Picts'). Irish chronicles do not record Causantín's death at the hands of Vikings, but this information can be found in the 'X' group of Latin lists of kings of Alba. King-lists 'D' and 'T' add the location of the battle as *Merdo fatha* or *Inverdufatha*, which has been identified with Inverdovat, Fife. The reconstruction of the text of the *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba*, suggested by David Dumville and endorsed by Alex Woolf, indicates that Causantín may have died by Viking hands at Atholl.<sup>18</sup> The claim in *Cogadh* that an earthquake swallowed the men of Alba may owe more to literature than to history, although its inclusion is not easy to explain.<sup>19</sup>

A little later in *Cogadh* (section 27), it is stated that Vikings left Ireland and went to Alba under the leadership of Sigtryggr son of Ívarr. This report is not found in the Book of Leinster version of the text, but appears only in the two later manuscripts:

**CGG(D/B)§27** fo fhacsat gaill Erind, agus lottar in Albain im Sitriuc mac Imar.

[The foreigners left Erinn and went to Alba under Sigtryggr son of Ívarr.]<sup>20</sup>

At this juncture, the Book of Leinster states 'Mór tra d'ulc daronsat Gaill i nHerind sin bliadainsin' [great evil did the foreigners bring into Ireland in this year]. This report appears to correspond with the *Annals of Ulster* record of events for 893:

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17 Dumville 1996.

18 Anderson 1980, 267, 274, 283, 288, 290; Dumville 2000, 81; Woolf 2007, 111-12. Causantín's death is also described in the 'Prophecy of Berchán' but Vikings are not identified as his nemesis: *Prophecy of Berchan*, 43, 85.

19 1 Samuel: 14:15; Numbers 16: 30-34. Cf. Bray 1992, 116.

20 *Cogadh*, 28-29. The reference to Sigtryggr son of Ívarr fits with the theme of section 27 relating to the deeds of the sons of Ívarr in Ireland. The departure of Sigtryggr is followed neatly by the arrival of Rognvaldr grandson of Ívarr described in the opening of section 28. It may therefore have been part of the original composition of *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* but omitted from the Book of Leinster copy.

**AU 893.4** Mescaibh mór for Gallaibh Atho Cliath co n-dechadur i n-esriuth, indala rand dibh la m. nImair, ind rann n-aile la Sichfrith nIerll.

[A major dissension among the foreigners of Áth Cliath, so that they dispersed, one section of them with the son of Ívarr, the other with Jarl Sigfrøðr.]

The same event is reported in the *Annals of Inisfallen* (893): ‘Genti do dul a Herind isin bliadain so’ [Gentiles went from Ireland in this year]. In neither of the Irish records is Alba identified as a destination of the departing Vikings.<sup>21</sup> It must have seemed pertinent to the author (or interpolator) of *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* to mention this point. It fits with other references to Alba in *Cogadh*, which stress the difficulties caused by Vikings from Ireland in northern Britain.

The next event in *Cogadh* to relate to Alba is the record of the death of two Viking leaders, Rognvaldr and Óttarr. The event is related briefly in the Book of Leinster account: ‘Rachuatar i nAlbain iar tain. Et tucsat fir Alban cath dóib. & ra marbad and .i. Ragnall & Oittir’ [They went into Alba after that, and the men of Alba gave battle to them and they were killed there, that is Rognvaldr and Óttarr].<sup>22</sup> The account in the later manuscripts gives more detail, linking their death to a battle against Causantín mac Áeda (Constantine II) of Alba:

**CGG(D)§29** Ro innarbait iarsin tra asin Mumain, ocus dacuatar in nAlbain, ocus tucsat cath [do] Constantin mac Aeda .i. do rig Alban, ocus ro marbait aroen and, .i. Ragnall ocus Otir, ocus ár a muntiri leo.

[They were afterwards banished from Munster and went into Alba; and they gave battle to Causantín, son of Áed, that is to the king of Alba, and both were killed therein, that is, Rognvaldr and Óttarr, and their retinue was slaughtered with them.]<sup>23</sup>

This conflict can be identified with the battle of Corbridge fought in 918. The event is described in the *Annals of Ulster*, the *Annals of*

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21 *Annals of Ulster*, 892 [=893].

22 *Book of Leinster*, v, 1325.

23 It should be noted that this sentence at the end of section 29 follows an interpolation in *Cogadh* and should follow on from the end of section 28 of that text. *Cogadh*, 34-35.

*the Four Masters*, the *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba*, and, less reliably, in the *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*.<sup>24</sup> The first three accounts are given as an appendix to this chapter. Despite heavy casualties on the Vikings' side, Rognvaldr went on to rule York from 918 until his death in 921. Therefore, Causantín did not dispatch him on this occasion. The record of *Cogadh* may have deliberately twisted facts to present this well-known Scottish king as an effective opponent of Vikings. This portrayal suited the anti-Scandinavian sentiments of *Cogadh*.<sup>25</sup> The fact that Causantín would later ally with Vikings of Dublin at the battle of Brunanburh goes unmentioned. Viking relations with Alba are presented in *Cogadh* as uniformly antagonistic, and links between Vikings in Ireland and Scotland are emphasised.<sup>26</sup>

#### SCOTTISH AFFAIRS IN THE LATER SECTIONS OF *COGADH GAEDHEL RE GALLAIBH*

From section 36 of *Cogadh*, the narrative style is more florid and the chronological pace of the narrative slows to focus on the deeds of the Dál Cais and their most famous son, Brian Boru. One of the claims made about Brian is that, at the height of his power, he was able to levy a royal tribute from Saxons and Britons, specifically from Lennox and Argyll.<sup>27</sup> These were territories that may have lain outside the kingdom of Alba in 1014.<sup>28</sup> Brian's tribute-gathering across the seas is not attested in chronicles. Brian's secretary famously assigned him the title *Imperator Scottorum* when entering his name into the Book of Armagh. Around the same time that Brian exhibits this imperial title, Rognvaldr, king of Man and the Isles, died in Munster in 1005, although sadly no political context is given to interpret whether Rognvaldr was a vassal, ally,

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24 *Annals of Ulster*, 917 [=918]; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 916 [=918]; *Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, 180-83 (§459).

25 *Cogadh*, lxxxv, 35.

26 In the tract labelled *On the Fomorians and Lochlanns*, included in *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach* and compiled by Dubhaltach Mac Fhirbisigh (Duald MacFirbis), the death of Rognvaldr and Óttarr is attributed to Áed Finnliath of the Southern Uí Néill. As Aed died in 879, this is chronologically impossible. *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*, iii, 44-51.

27 *Cogadh*, 134-37 (§78).

28 Neville 2005, 14. It is possible that Lennox was part of the kingdom of Strathclyde or Galloway during this period, although little is known of the contemporary political history of the region. *Cogadh*, 134-37 (§87).



or enemy of Brian.<sup>29</sup> It is interesting that *Cogadh* avoids proclaiming Brian's supremacy over all the *Scotti* of Alba, despite indicating that he wielded influence over the western seaboard of northern Britain.<sup>30</sup>

*Cogadh's* description of Vikings continually refers to their moral depravity. However, particular censure is reserved for Vikings from Argyll and the Northern and Western Isles who came to fight at Clontarf. These men were a common enemy of both Alba and Munster:

Comtinol sloig buirb, barbarda, dicheillid, dochisc, dochomaind,  
do gallaibh Insi Orc, ocus Insi Cat, a Manaind ocus a Sci, ocus a  
Leodus; a Cind tiri ocus hAírer Goedel.

[An assembled army of ignorant, barbarous, stupid, wild, anti-social foreigners of Orkney and Shetland, from Man and from Skye, and from Lewis, from Kintyre and Argyll.]<sup>31</sup>

*Cogadh* therefore focuses on the common enemies of Alba and Munster living on the fringes of northern Britain. The saga also gives significant attention to the contingent from Alba which fought alongside Munster at the Battle of Clontarf. The battle is said to open with single combat between two men; Domnall mac Eimín, *mormaer* of Alba, and Plait, son of the king of Lochlann:

Ro comraicetar ardu and sin, Domnall mac Emin, mormaer Alban,  
o Briain, ocus Plait mac ri Lochland, tren milid gall; ar na rád do

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29 *Annals of Inisfallen*, 1004 [=1005]; *Chronicon Scotorum*, [1005]. Rognvaldr may have been the grandson of Haraldr king of Limerick who died in 940. Colmán Etchingham has drawn attention to the record of Brian as 'ardrí Gaidhel Érenn ocus Gall ocus Bretan' in the *Annals of Ulster* for 1014, suggesting that Brian regarded himself as heir to Anglesey as well as the Isles owing to the campaigns of Manx kings on the island. The reference to Lennox in *Cogadh* may prompt consideration of whether the Britons whom Brian held claim to rule were in northern Britain as well as/rather than Wales. Etchingham, 2001, 180.

30 Denis Casey has pointed out (pers. comm.) that the men of Lennox were said to have descended from Conall Corc of Cashel of the Eóganachta of Munster. The author of *Cogadh* may have been tapping into a genealogical tradition in order to link the kingship of Munster with Lennox. See *Corpus Genealogiarum Hiberniae*, 358 (LL 318b42); *Atbdiogluim Dana*, i, 173-74 and ii, 102-3; cf. *Triumph Tree*, 258-59.

31 *Cogadh*, 150-53 (§87).

Plait in adaich remi, ni rabi i nErind fer bad incomlaind do, do gab immoro, Domnall mac Emin do laim é fachetoir, ocus ba cuimnech cehtar de, ar maitin. Is arsin tanic Plait a cath na lureach amach, ocus asbert fo thri faras Domnall? id est Cait ita Domnall? Ro recair Domnall ocus asbert, sund, a sniding ar se. Ro comraicsetar iarsun, ocus ro gab cach ic airleach araile dib, ocus i trocair cehtar reraile, ocus is amlaid ro tuitset ocus claidium cehtar de tre cridi araile, ocus folt cehtar de i ndurnd a cele. Ocus ro be sin a cet comlond na dessi sin.

[First then were drawn up there, Domnall, son of Emin, mormaer of Alba, on Brian's side, and Plait, son of the king of Norway, brave soldier of the foreigners; because Plait was saying the night before that there was not a man in Ireland who was able to fight him. Domnall, the son of Emin immediately took him up, and each of them remembered this in the morning. Then Plait came forward from the battalion of the men in armour, and said three times 'Faras Domnall?' that is 'Where is Domnall?' Domnall answered and said 'Here you wretch' said he. They fought then, and each of them endeavoured to slaughter the other; and they fell by each other, and the way they fell was, with the sword of each through the heart of the other; and the hair of each in the fist of the other. And the combat of that pair was the first.]<sup>32</sup>

The story of the noble from Alba is given top billing and described in dramatic terms, each warrior dying with his sword through the heart of the other. Domnall mac Eimín meic Cainnig, *mormaer* of Marr in Alba, is the last of the fallen leaders named on Brian's side in the battle in the *Annals of Ulster*, *Annals of the Four Masters*, and the *Annals of Loch Cé*. In the *Annals of Boyle*, he is simply identified as a *mormaer* in Alba, and *Chronicum Scotorum* identifies him by name only.<sup>33</sup> Curiously, the *Annals of Inisfallen*, which is a Munster-based account, makes no mention of Domnall. It is unknown whether other leaders from Alba fought alongside Domnall in 1014, as the chronicles focus on the leaders who fell rather than those who fought and survived.

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32 Ibid., 174-77 (§100).

33 *Annals of Clonmacnoise*, 1007 [=1014] call him 'Donnell m'Evin m'Caenich earle of Dombarr in Scotland'.

The meaning of the term *mormaer* has been debated and variously translated as ‘great steward’, ‘sea-steward’ from Gaelic, or ‘earl’ from its rendering in Latin as *comes*.<sup>34</sup> A key towards the understanding of the word in *Cogadh* may be a reference elsewhere in the narrative to Osli mac Dubcenn (grandson of the last king of Limerick) as *mormaer da maeraib*. This implies that, to the author of *Cogadh*, *mormaer* was placed in a hierarchy above lesser *maer* and may have overseen territories on behalf of the king.<sup>35</sup> I have suggested elsewhere that Domnall may have fought for his own interests, perhaps in opposition to the earl of Orkney, rather than being a delegate of the king of Alba at Clontarf.<sup>36</sup> It did, however, suit the author of *Cogadh* to exaggerate Domnall’s significance in the battle, promoting a theme of common interests between Alba and Munster.<sup>37</sup>

Domnall mac Eimín made his first appearance in *Cogadh* shortly before the duel that felled him. Brian sends Domnall as a messenger to his son Murchad, to instruct him not to take an advanced position on the battlefield but to fall back in line with the other troops.<sup>38</sup> Murchad refuses, saying that he will never yield his position although there would be many false heroes that day who would. Domnall replies that he would never give way, and the author confirms that Domnall’s promise would be fulfilled. This earlier passage did not yet identify Domnall as a *mormaer* of Alba, but it shows him to be a trusted messenger of Brian who fulfils his duty and stands by his word. The passage builds dramatic tension as the reader is prepared for the tale of Domnall’s heroism that is predicted.<sup>39</sup>

Thomas DuBois has noted an overwhelming focus on Irish affairs in *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, remarking that ‘the narrative follows

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34 Duffy 2013, 150.

35 Ibid., 151, 172; *Cogadh*, 146-47 (§84). Seán Duffy has argued that Domnall was an ally or a vassal of Brian.

36 Downham 2007, 157.

37 The links between Scotland and Ireland shortly before the battle of Clontarf are demonstrated in the year before the conflict took place. In 1013 the army of Mide, led by the provincial overking Mael Sechnaill, attacked lands north of Dublin, but his forces were defeated by Sitric of Dublin and his Leinster allies. The fallen included ‘int Albanach’, whose name indicates links with Alba: *Annals of Inisfallen*, 1013; *Cogadh*, 148-49 (§84).

38 *Cogadh*, 170-71 (§97).

39 Duaid MacFirbis indicated in the seventeenth century that Domnall was a member of the MacLeod clan of Harris. *Leabhar Mór na nGenealach*, ii, 51, 717 (§775.2, 1365.2).

characters only during their time in Ireland, providing no details of where they go or what they do when they leave the island'.<sup>40</sup> The inclusion of northern British affairs appears to be the exception that proves the rule. This may in part reflect the perception of Alba as an integral part of the Gaelic world, but it may also reflect the political circumstances in which *Cogadh* was composed. I would argue that the presentation of past events was deliberately twisted to show the common interest shared by Brian's family and leaders in Alba to keep the Vikings of the Isles in check.

#### THE DATE OF *COGADH GAEDHEL RE GALLAIBH*

The date of *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* is significant to understanding relations between Ireland and Scotland at the time it was composed. On linguistic and stylistic grounds, the saga was composed in the late eleventh or early twelfth century.<sup>41</sup> More specific origins have been posited based on historical evidence. Anthony Candon and Máire Ní Mhaonaigh have identified Muirchertach Ua Briain, the great-grandson of Brian Boru, as the most likely patron of the saga.<sup>42</sup> Muirchertach was the most successful of Brian's descendants and he appears to have based aspects of his public image on the career of his great-grandfather.<sup>43</sup> This includes the gift of gold placed on the Altar of Armagh in 1103, perhaps in imitation of his great-grandfather's gift in 1005.<sup>44</sup> Muirchertach also rebuilt the fortress of Kincora in 1096, which Brian had constructed in 1012.<sup>45</sup> Muirchertach's reign witnessed a flurry of artistic production, and so the creation of a new history of Brian Boru might fit well with this context.<sup>46</sup> Ní Mhaonaigh has suggested a date range for the creation of *Cogadh* after the alliance between Muirchertach and Magnús Berfoettr ('Barelegs') king of Norway collapsed in 1103 and before Muirchertach was struck down with an illness that led to a temporary loss of power in 1114.<sup>47</sup>

More recently, Seán Duffy has assigned a late-eleventh-century date to the text.<sup>48</sup> This earlier dating is based on the positive representation

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40 DuBois 2011.

41 For a summary of scholarship on this matter, Casey 2013, 142-45.

42 Candon 1988; Ní Mhaonaigh 1995.

43 Ní Mhaonaigh 1995, 368-74.

44 *Annals of Ulster*, 1005, 1103.

45 *Annals of the Four Masters*, 1096; *Annals of Inisfallen*, 1012.

46 Gem 2006; Ó Carragáin 2010.

47 *Annals of Inisfallen*, 1114; Ní Mhaonaigh 1995.

48 Duffy 2013, 198, 242.

of Donnchad son of Brian Boru in *Cogadh*. It was at Donnchad's behest that Tadc, grandfather of Muirchertach Ua Briain, was killed in 1023. It would seem unlikely that Muirchertach would have been a patron to a positive representation of Donnchad, so Duffy posits an earlier date of composition when the descendants of Donnchad were in exile from Munster. Nevertheless, Denis Casey has suggested that the pro-Donnchad material was added in the early twelfth century, and I would support that argument.<sup>49</sup>

The first difficulty with accepting the pro-Donnchad material as criteria for re-dating *Cogadh* is that it survives only in one late witness – the sole complete version of *Cogadh*. Working out the textual history from one late manuscript is fraught with difficulty. The text transcribed by Mícheál Ó Cléirigh may diverge from the original narrative composed at least half a millennium before. Where witnesses of *Cogadh* can be compared, a number of interpolations have been identified. This includes material showing a bias towards Bréifne interpolated in manuscript 'D'.<sup>50</sup> The importance of *Cogadh* in the Middle Ages led later authors to influence the text. The material that presents a pro-Donnchad stance sits at the very end of *Cogadh* and may have been added on to an earlier version. It sits rather awkwardly as a post-climactic narrative. The story of the Battle of Clontarf closes with a list of the fatalities of the battle and reference to the fulfilment of Brian's will. However, the last three sections of *Cogadh* (119-121) create a new narrative, relating how Donnchad son of Brian overcomes three challenges to his new-found authority.<sup>51</sup> The post-Clontarf narrative has a self-contained character that could have been devised separately and then added to *Cogadh*.

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49 Casey 2013, 157.

50 Ní Mhaonaigh 1992.

51 *Cogadh*, 210-17. First it is reported that Donnchad had the oxen of Dublin slaughtered; a request came from King Sigtryggr of Dublin to leave nineteen of the oxen for each one that they took, but Donnchad refused. It is then reported that the Dál Cais carried their injured from the battlefield but were faced by a revolt from the men of South Munster (Desmond) who demanded hostages. Donnchad refused and his men prepared themselves for battle with such bravery (including stuffing moss into their wounds so they could fight) that leaders of Desmond declined to oppose them. After that, the king of Ossory demanded hostages, but the wounded warriors of the Dál Cais became angry and ordered that stakes be set up so that they might be tied upright in order to fight. This prompted the men of Ossory to decline battle and one hundred and fifty of Donnchad's men died of frustrated anger.

The tone of final sections of *Cogadh* is in contrast to previous references to Donnchad in the saga which, as Casey notes, are generally negative or ambivalent.<sup>52</sup> The lack of reference to Donnchad's half-brother Tadc in *Cogadh* does not discredit his son Muirchertach as a possible patron of the text.<sup>53</sup> If pro-Donnchad material was added to the narrative of *Cogadh*, then there is a possibility that some pro-Tadc or anti-Donnchad sentiments were edited out at the same time; Casey discusses one possible instance where this has occurred.<sup>54</sup> In sum, the re-dating of *Cogadh* based on pro-Donnchad material found at the very end of the text is insecure. Compared with other parts of the text, the ill-fitting and contrary nature of this material lends weight to the suggestion that it was added to the main narrative. The contextual argument for composition of *Cogadh* in the reign of Muirchertach Ua Briain, espoused by Candon and Ní Mhaonaigh, remains strong.<sup>55</sup> It is therefore to the reign of this king that one might look to interpret why Scottish affairs are given such prominence in the narrative of *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*.

#### THE DESCENDANTS OF BRIAN AND LINKS ACROSS THE IRISH SEA

Throughout the *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, historical distortions are made with an eye to bolstering the position of Brian Boru's descendants. This propagandist slant is obvious in some areas, including the uniformly negative view of Vikings and the celebration of Brian's victories over them. Brian won a high position of influence over the Viking ports of Limerick, Waterford and Dublin during his career.<sup>56</sup> It has been pointed out by Donnchadh Ó Corráin and others that the narrative of *Cogadh* helped to justify the domination of these ports by Brian's descendants.<sup>57</sup> Seán Duffy has also highlighted that Irish intervention in the Viking towns drew Uí Bhriain into a wider web of Irish Sea politics.<sup>58</sup>

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52 Casey 2013, 145-49, 152, n.46.

53 Ibid., 145.

54 Ibid., 151. Cf. *Cogadh* 200 (§113); *Annals of Loch Cé*, 1014.

55 This also fits with Casey's suggestion that a version of *Cogadh* was produced for Brian Gleanna Maidhir. Casey 2013.

56 *Annals of Inisfallen*, 977, 984, 999.

57 Ó Corráin, 1978, 31-32.

58 Duffy 1992, 93-94.

*Cogadh*'s interest in northern British affairs may reflect the ambitions of Brian's descendants in the kingdom of the Isles and Galloway. Brian's son Donnchad formed an alliance with Echmarcach son of Ragnall (Rognvaldr), who was intermittently king of Dublin as well as king of the Isles and part of Galloway.<sup>59</sup> In 1072, Donnchad's nephew Toirrdelbach took control of Dublin and two grandsons of Brian were killed on the Isle of Man in the following year, perhaps attempting to assert control over the Isles.<sup>60</sup> After Toirrdelbach's death in 1086, his son Muirchertach ua Briain held ambitions that ranged across Ireland and across the eastern seaways.<sup>61</sup> His attempts to dominate the kingdom of the Isles and Dublin were initially thwarted by Gofraid mac Arailt (Guðrøðr Haraldsson, better known as 'Godred Crovan') who died in 1095. The Isles may have then fallen under the control of Domnall mac Taidc, nephew of Muirchertach.<sup>62</sup> When Magnús berføttr, king of Norway, arrived in the Irish Sea in 1098 he asserted direct control over Man.<sup>63</sup>

Muirchertach sought to regain influence in the eastern seaways through the betrothal of his daughters, one to Sigurðr son of Magnús in 1102 and another to the Cambro-Norman baron Arnulf de Montgomery. With Sigurðr in mind, it is interesting to note that one of the key combatants at Clontarf according to *Cogadh*, is 'Plait, son of the king of Norway', but he does not appear in chronicle records. This figure may have been invented to reflect relations with Norway at the time when *Cogadh* was written. Magnús posed a threat to Muirchertach's interests in the Hebrides, but the marriage alliance which was planned to offset this threat was short lived.<sup>64</sup> When Magnús met a violent death in Ulster in 1103, his young son immediately departed for Norway, leaving Muirchertach's daughter behind.<sup>65</sup>

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59 Ibid., 97; Casey 2013, 157.

60 *Annals of Ulster*, 1073.

61 For a summary of his career, see Candon 1988.

62 Duffy 1992, 105, 109. Duffy has pointed out that the *Bansbenchas* identify Tadc as the husband of a daughter of Echmarcach mac Ragnall, which may have supported his claim to rule Man.

63 Candon 1988, 404; Duffy 1992, 109.

64 *Cronica regum Mannie et Insularum*, fos 34v-35r; *William of Malmesbury, Gesta Regum Anglorum* i, 571; *Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* v, 218-19, 222-23; *Annals of Ulster*, 1098; *Annals of the Four Masters*, 1098; *Orkneyinga Saga*, §§39-43; *Heimskringla*, trans. Laing, §§9-12, 25-27, ed. Aðalbjarnarson, §§8-11, 23-25; *Ágrip af Noregskonungasögum*, §§50-51; *Morkinskinna* trans. Andersson and Gade, §§58-59; eds. Jakobsson and Guðjónsson, §§61, 63.

65 Candon 1988, 407, 411-12.

Contemporary attitudes in Munster towards Alba and the Kingdom of the Isles are hinted at in the *Annals of Inisfallen*. This chronicle was compiled during Muirchertach's reign in Munster and has been linked with the church of Emly.<sup>66</sup> In its records relating to Scotland, the chronicle includes obits of kings of Alba, but unlike the *Annals of Ulster*, Book of Leinster, *Annals of Tigernach*, and *Chronicum Scotorum*, it does not record the obits of 'kings' of Moray. Could it be that rulers in Munster were more sympathetic to, and simply more interested in, the royal line of Alba compared to that of Moray?<sup>67</sup> It may be telling, given Uí Bhriain ambitions in the Isles, that while the *Annals of the Four Masters*, *Annals of Tigernach*, and *Chronicum Scotorum* record Magnús as 'king of Norway and the Isles' at his death in 1103, the *Annals of Inisfallen* do not acknowledge Magnús's title in the Hebrides, but merely record him as 'king of the foreigners'.<sup>68</sup>

The interest in Scottish affairs in *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* fits the political context of the reign of Muirchertach ua Briain. In 1103 that Muirchertach ua Briain received a camel as a gift from King Edgar of Alba in 1105.<sup>69</sup> This implies a political effort to cultivate good relations. The leaders of Alba and Munster held common interests in the political stability of the Hebrides and Man. In 1111-14, Domnall mac Taidc, the nephew of Muirchertach ua Briain, was established (or re-established) as King of Man and the Isles, although Munster domination would collapse thereafter.<sup>70</sup> The Isles may have served as a conduit for information about Clontarf that appeared in the work of thirteenth and fourteenth-century Icelandic writers, including *Njáls Saga*, *Orkneyinga Saga*, and *Þórsteins saga Síðu-Hallsonar*. Various authors have discussed the theory of a 'Brjáns saga', which was composed in one of the Viking towns of Ireland and then exported overseas.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, a copy

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66 Grabowski and Dumville 1984, 3-107.

67 Duffy 2000.

68 *Annals of Inisfallen*, 1103.

69 *Ibid.*, 1105. It should be noted that one of the few 'foreigners' praised for bravery in *Cogadh* is Plait, son of the king of Norway. This may reflect on the alliance that Muirchertach had built with Sigurðr son of the king of Norway. According to *Morkinskinna*, Sigurðr later returned to Ireland and exacted tribute. This deed (which would have taken place before 1130) is not attested in Irish chronicles. *Morkinskinna*, trans. Andersson and Gade, §70; *Morkinskinna*, eds Jakobsson and Guðjónsson, §77.

70 Duffy 1992, 115-16.

71 For discussion of a hypothetical Gaelic-Scandinavian Brjáns saga, see Ó Corráin 1998, 447-52; Hudson, 2002; Duffy 2013, 231.



of *Cogadh* or a verbal account based on it may have made its way north in the twelfth or thirteenth century. Skalds or ambassadors visiting Alba, the Isles, or Ireland may have brought information about Clontarf to Iceland.<sup>72</sup>

Three arguments emerge from this analysis. The first is that Scottish affairs have a significance in *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* that deserves further investigation. The second is that these references show a consistent outlook throughout the narrative, that is, both in the terse opening sections and in the more extended saga dealing with Brian's reign. Finally, it is argued that northern British affairs may have been woven through *Cogadh* with an eye to promoting Uí Bhriain rule in the Isles in the early twelfth century. Its positive portrayal of Uí Bhriain's historical links with Alba reflected the political links that were cultivated between Muirchertach and Edgar. One is left to envisage the ceremonial arrival of Edgar's camel at the court of the Munster king in 1105, imagine the reaction of the courtiers, and to ponder whether a copy of *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh* was sent to Scotland by way of return in a diplomatic gift-exchange.

#### APPENDIX: THREE RECORDS OF THE BATTLE OF CORBRIDGE

**AU918.4** Gaill Locha Da Caech do dergiu Erenn, .i. Ragnall rí Dubgall, & na da iarla, .i. Ottir & Graggabai & sagaith dóoib iar sin co firu Alban. Fir Alban dono ara cenn-somh co comairnechtar for bru Tine la Saxanu Tuaiscirt. Do-gensat in genti cethrai catha dibh, .i. cath la Gothbrith ua n-Imair; cath lasna da iarla; cath lasna h-óc-tigerna. Cath dano la Ragnall i n-eroloch nad-acadur fir Alban. Roinis re feraibh Alban forsna tri catha ad-conncadur co rolsat ár n-dimar dina genntibh im Ottir & im Graggabai. Ragnall dono do-fuabairt iar suidhiu i l-lorg fer n-Alban coro la ar dibh acht nad-farcbath ri na mor-móer di suidibh. Nox prelium dirimit.

[The foreigners of Waterford i.e. Rognvaldr, king of the dark foreigners, and the two jarls, Óttarr and Gragabai, forsook Ireland and proceeded afterwards against the men of Alba. The men of Alba, moreover, moved against them and they met on the bank of the Tyne in northern Saxonland. The heathens formed themselves into four battalions: a battalion with Guðrøðr grandson of Ívarr, a

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72 Rosemary Power has recently suggested a thirteenth-century context for the transfer of stories (pers. comm.).

battalion with the two jarls, and a battalion with the young lords. There was also a battalion in ambush with Rognvaldr, which the men of Alba did not see. The men of Alba routed the three battalions which they saw, and made a very great slaughter of the heathens, including Óttarr and Gragabai. Rognvaldr, however, then attacked in the rear of the men of Alba, and made a slaughter of them, although none of their kings or mormaers was cut off. Nightfall caused the battle to be broken off.]

**AFM916[=918]** Oitir & na Goill do dhul o Loch Dá Chaoch i n-Albain, & Constantin, mac Aedha do thabhairt catha dóibh, & Oitir do mharbhadh co n-ár Gall immaille friss.

[Óttarr and the foreigners went from Waterford to Alba; and Causantín, the son of Aed, gave them battle, and Óttarr was slain, with a slaughter of the foreigners along with him.]

**CKA** bellum Tine more factum est in xuiii anno inter Constantínium et Regnall et Scotti habuerunt uíctoríam.

[The battle of Tynemoor was fought in the eighteenth year between Causantín and Rognvaldr and the Scots won the victory.]

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