

NEWS RECORDING AND CULTURAL CONNECTIONS BETWEEN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND AND NORTHERN BRITAIN

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The Irish chronicles, surviving in Irish manuscripts from the late-eleventh to seventeenth centuries, are critical sources for understanding the early medieval history of Ireland and northern Britain. Often relating over ten events per year and involving hundreds of named people per century, they constitute a crucial resource for this period, unparalleled elsewhere in Western Europe. Apart from the *Iona Chronicle* source for the period from the late sixth century to AD 740, these texts were largely written in Ireland, but they also constitute our main evidence for Scottish events for the whole period up to 1100.¹ Since annalistic chronicles were the result of news travelling from the location of an event to chroniclers, they reflect, to some extent, existing networks of communications and social connections by which people travelled, bringing information with them.

Communications networks have been regarded as important, not just for cultural and social connections, but also as economic evidence, as goods travelled with people (an aspect studied on a wider European basis by Michael McCormick).² The archaeological evidence for Ireland and Britain has been studied, as have textual references, but the potential to utilise the patterns of recording in the Irish chronicles for determining interconnections has not been fully considered.³ For the Irish chroniclers of the tenth and eleventh centuries (and potentially earlier), it is likely that the collection of news was not a matter of chance encounters with travellers, but a more organised affair, since there is evidence that chroniclers exchanged written notices of events.⁴ Each chronicle, therefore, was not only a reflection of the principally

1 Bannerman 1974 [1968], 9-26; Evans 2010, esp. 112-13, 171-73, 208-13. Presumably, a copy of the *Iona Chronicle* ending in 740 was incorporated into the Irish chronicles, with later events dealing with Iona recorded as a result of subsequent connections, perhaps with chroniclers based on the island. Therefore, there is no reason to connect this development with any particular secular or ecclesiastical event.

2 McCormick 2001.

3 Bowen 1969; Wooding 1996; Campbell 2007; Edmonds 2009.

4 Evans, 2010, 231-33.

ecclesiastical authors' interests, but also of the nature of the webs of contacts through which they obtained their material. We can assume that there was a mutually reinforcing relationship between the connections which chroniclers maintained and what they decided to include, since the latter was itself determined partly by social relationships.

However, there is still the question of whether the record we have accurately reflects the contacts which existed, or primarily the degree of interest shown by chroniclers; were they including all or most of the news they were receiving, or were they more selective? In addition, how did chroniclers decide what to include? The record for northern Britain can be used as an effective case study for this inquiry, as well as for the wider issue of cultural connections between Britain and Ireland, as it constitutes a varied but manageable corpus of material. Although the low number of events involved does preclude the reconstruction of news networks, plausible explanations for the inclusion of particular events in the record may be proposed, and broader patterns in the evidence discerned.

In this study, northern Britain, roughly identified as the territory north of the River Humber in the Kingdom of Northumbria, will be the main focus, since Scotland – as we know it – did not exist as a unit in this period. In this region, close contacts with Ireland in the period up to 740 are readily apparent, since the *Iona Chronicle* includes many Irish events, as well as those concerning Dál Riata, the Picts, the northern Britons, and Anglo-Saxons – mainly of Northumbria and Mercia.⁵ This is explained by the association of monasteries in both Britain and Ireland, headed by Iona.⁶ However, after 740, the recording of events in Britain occurs at a much lower frequency.⁷ This reduction makes it more

5 Bannerman 1974 [1968], 9-26.

6 Ibid., 9-10, 13-14, 19-25. For discussion of the terminology relating to Iona and associated establishments, such as *familia*, see Etchingham 1999, 90-93, 126-30, 172-77, 223-38. Apart from Lindisfarne in Northumbria (from 635 to 664) and mainly unidentified sites in northern Britain (like the subordinate monasteries at Mag Luinge on Tiree and on the unlocated island of Hinba), the continued significance of Iona for the Church in northern Britain after Columba's life is noted by Adomnán in his *Life of St Columba*, written c. 697 (see *Life of St Columba* for text and context), and by Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, completed in 731 (see Herbert 1988, 9-62, especially 33-34, 36; Fraser 2009, 237, 241, and for suggestions about Iona's role in Pictland, 256-62, 269-82). Iona's importance is also indicated by the reference to the expulsion of the *familia* of Iona by the king of the Picts in *AU* 717.4 (also *AT* 717.3, *CS* 717.2).

7 Bannerman 1974, 11, 25.

difficult to understand the nature of the connections between Ireland and northern Britain. However, when the corpus of chronicle material relating to northern Britain from 700 to 1100 is considered as a whole, it is possible to draw some conclusions. This was a period of significant change in both Ireland and Scotland, encompassing the impact of the Vikings, Scandinavian settlement and rule in the north and west, the end of the Pictish kingdom and language, the disappearance of Gaelic Dál Riata, and the emergence of the Gaelic Kingdom of Alba.⁸ The Irish chronicle record could reflect these changes, or other developments of this era.

The Irish chronicles survive in manuscripts from the late-eleventh century onwards, the earliest being the *Annals of Inisfallen* (AI). However, the mid-fourteenth-century copy of the *Annals of Tigernach* (AT), the late-fifteenth-century 'H'-copy of the *Annals of Ulster* (AU), and the seventeenth-century *Chronicum Scotorum* (CS) preserve more events for northern Britain. As these texts have also been studied more comprehensively, they will be focused on in this study.⁹ They are all interrelated, sharing a common ancestor for the early medieval Irish annals, which can be called the *Chronicle of Ireland*.¹⁰ This chronicle itself was based on earlier texts. Up to c. 740, the *Iona Chronicle* represented one such source, although not necessarily the only one. Afterwards, the chronicle was maintained in Ireland, probably in Brega, the area to the north and west of Dublin.¹¹ Events from northern Britain were still reaching these Irish chroniclers, but the lines of transmission have only been tentatively discerned. For the decades of the eighth century after 740, it is likely that a chronicle from Iona and Pictish sources were utilised by annalists in Ireland, and Dauvit Broun has suggested that, in the late-ninth century, news about Pictland and Alba came from Dunkeld.¹²

8 For surveys, see Woolf 2007 and Fraser 2009 for Scotland, Ó Corráin 1972 and Charles-Edwards 2000 for Ireland, Downham 2007 for the Insular Vikings, Herbert 1988 and *Life of St Columba* for the Columban context, and Etchingham 1999 for the Church in Ireland.

9 Grabowski and Dumville 1984; Evans 2010. See also Mc Carthy 2008.

10 Hughes 1972, 101.

11 *The Chronicle of Ireland* 2006, 9-24; Hughes 1972, 133-35, for the view that the chronicle was kept in Armagh, but with Louth and Brega news derived from stewards of St. Patrick.

12 Broun 1997.

As the *Chronicle of Ireland* ended in 911, the subsequent section of *AU* is independent of the source underlying *AT* and *CS*. There is, however, solid evidence for the exchange of written notices of some events between chroniclers in Irish centres as late as 1060, and probably occasionally after that, which can account for a minority of the later record with common phraseology in different chronicles.¹³ For their sections before 912, each chronicle contains a selection of items from the *Chronicle of Ireland*, the most comprehensive being *AU*, although the addition of extra material from other sources is also possible, especially in the case of *AT* and *CS*.¹⁴ However, items from the common source can be identified when found in identical wording in *AU* and either *AT* or *CS*, or when an individual chronicle contains a unique item reflecting the phraseology, vocabulary, and subject matter focused on by the *Chronicle of Ireland*. It is therefore useful to consider all three texts individually and comparatively.

The first chronicle to be considered, *AU*, was, after the *Chronicle of Ireland*, kept in Brega or Conaille up to c. 938 by stewards of St Patrick, who were involved in the administration of the ecclesiastical centre of Armagh.¹⁵ After this time, the evidence is less clear for some decades; it was probably kept somewhere in the Irish east midlands or in Ulster. By the last decade of the tenth century, it was clearly an Armagh source, and remained so until the mid-to-late-twelfth century, when it became a chronicle maintained by the clerics of Derry.¹⁶ *AU* contains the most events relating to northern Britain, and has no lacunae which obscure trends over time; as such, I will mainly focus on this chronicle, using *AT* and *CS* as comparanda.

The corpus under consideration (see appendix) has been created on the basis of the following criteria:

1. The event took place in northern Britain.
2. If the location of an event is uncertain, an item is included if it involved people from or rulers of part of northern Britain.

13 Evans 2010, 67-72, 91-114. For an alternative view, see Mc Carthy 2008.

14 Evans 2010, 60-62, 189-224.

15 Hughes 1972, 133-34; Evans 2010, 21-24, 43-44.

16 Bannerman 1993, 36-42; Evans 2010, 44.

For the sake of analysis, this material has been divided into the following categories (see also Figure 1):

- Events taking place in northern Britain (labelled ‘Northern Britain’).
- Events possibly occurring in or involving people active in northern Britain (‘Uncertain N. Britain’).
- Events only involving Northumbrians (‘Northumbrian only’).
- Events definitely involving Scandinavians in northern Britain (‘Scandinavians in N. Britain’), or without certainty (‘Scandinavians Uncertain N. Britain’).
- Events involving people travelling between Ireland and northern Britain (‘Travel to/from N. Britain’).
- Events concerning members of the Columban community who are not specifically linked to Iona, northern Britain, or Ireland (for instance, references to ‘heirs of Columba’ or the *familia* of Columba), for which the location of the event is not clear, and therefore could have taken place in either Ireland or Britain (‘Columban Community’).¹⁷
- Events concerning people with roles straddling the North Channel (‘N. Britain & Ireland’), chiefly items relating to the people or kings of Dál Riata, which included the northern part of County Antrim.

In terms of interpretation, the transfer of the chronicle from Iona to Ireland (c. 740) means that there is no comparable evidence on

17 While it is likely that abbots of Iona remained the heirs (Latin *heres*, Gaelic *comarbai*) of Columba - and therefore leaders of the wider Columban *familia* - beyond the ninth century, heirs of Patrick based in Armagh did also twice become heirs of Columba in the late ninth and tenth century (see ‘Columba Community’ items at *AU* 927.1, *CS* 927.1; *AU* 989.7; *AU* 998.2, *CS* 998.2). In the eleventh century, possibly in 1007, Kells in County Meath gained the coarbship from Iona (Clancy 2011), although links with Britain continued, as indicated by the drowning of Maicnia Ua hUchtáin, *fer léiginn* (‘lector’) of Kells, while bringing relics of Columba and Patrick from Alba (*AU* 1034.9). I have included eleventh-century items for heirs of Columba for Ferdomnach (*AU* 1008.1, *CS* 1008.1), Muiredach mac Críchán (*AU* 1011.1, also *fer léiginn* of Armagh), Máel Muire Ua hUchtáin (*AU* 1040.2, *CS* 1040.2), Robartach mac Ferdomnaig (*AU* 1057.8), Gilla Críst ua Maíl Doraid (*AU* 1062.2, *AT* 1062.3), and Domnall mac Robartaig (*AU* 1099.6), because they could have died in northern Britain - although an Irish location is more likely (see Herbert 1988, 88-97).

either side of that date, as the geographical focus of the chronicle alters so dramatically. While 701-740 has been included for the sake of comprehensiveness, we are not comparing like with like, so little value may be obtained from a quantitative analysis comparing, for instance, 701-720 and 781-800. However, in the period during which the chronicle was maintained and updated in Ireland (after 740), the results are potentially more significant, even if the annalists were writing in different centres there. If a new source became available to the chroniclers, this in itself would indicate contacts between Ireland and northern Britain. Although the number of events recorded in northern Britain after 740 is low – about one event per two years in *AU* – this still constitutes a substantial record, and with figures ranging from zero to nine per decade, there is scope for identifying significant patterns.

Nevertheless, as Colmán Etchingham and Roy Flechner have stressed, we have to be careful when using the chronicles as evidence for changes in the real world, because they could reflect the interests of the chroniclers rather than societal trends.¹⁸ The original record would have undoubtedly been selective rather than comprehensive, and alterations may have been performed during the later history of the texts. In addition, Flechner has also suggested two further problems: that the chronicles, which predominantly focus on the deaths of people, are primarily records of absence rather than presence, and that the analysis of the annals in groups of years is arbitrary, producing false and varying results, depending on how the texts are divided.¹⁹ Nevertheless, it should be stressed that the annals are neither records of absence or presence, but primarily records of events, with deaths presumably regarded as an important occurrence, marking a transition from this world to the next. It should be recognised that arbitrary groupings of annals can produce misleading results, although scholars like Etchingham have shown that their effective utilisation produces patterns not discernible by looking at the evidence year-by-year.²⁰ This is especially true if attention is paid to the finer detail and nature of the evidence. In addition, the representativeness of the record becomes less of a problem if the analysis is primarily focused on how reality was represented in the chronicle, as is the case here. However, the issue

18 Etchingham 1996; Flechner 2013, 429-32.

19 Flechner 2013, 429-32.

20 Etchingham 1996; Etchingham 2002.

of how to explain the patterns discerned in the text remains. In sum, we can fruitfully analyse the section from 741 onwards as evidence for the world-view of Irish chroniclers, as well as the degree and nature of contacts, even if we recognise that their works represent restricted and sometimes partisan reflections of society.

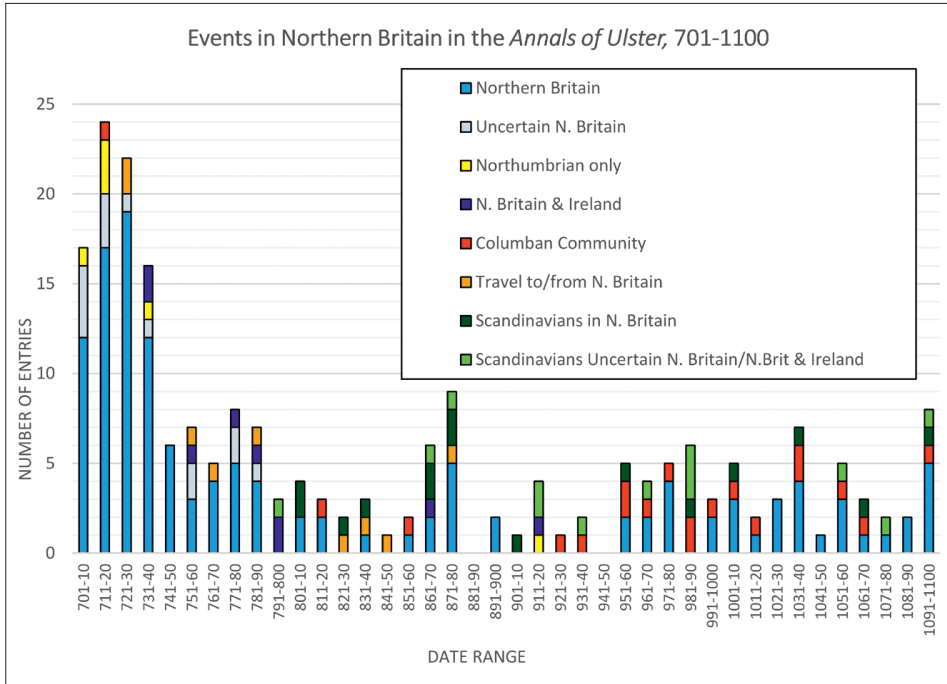


Figure 1: Events in northern Britain in the Annals of Ulster, 701-1100.

When the events for northern Britain in *AU* are analysed, changes over time can be discerned. The highest number of recorded events in northern Britain pertains, as expected, to the era of the *Iona Chronicle*, before 741, including many events not just in Gaelic Dál Riata, but also in Pictish, British, and Anglo-Saxon areas. After 740, when the text was composed in Ireland, there is a substantial fall in the record for northern Britain, although the overall number is generally still higher before 791 than in the following period before the mid-tenth century. After 790, the number is generally low, often fewer than three events per decade, with 861 to 880 representing a notable exception. We need to be careful not to place too much significance on individual figures,

which can be affected not only by loss or addition during transmission, but also by the fact that the deaths of important people sometimes cluster or are lacking in particular periods. However, even when taking this into account, there does seem to be an overall pattern in *AU* of a reduction followed by an increase from the mid-tenth century onwards, which is long-term and as such less likely to be affected by such short-term factors.

The pattern in *AU* is, to some extent, also found in *AT* and *CS* (see Figure 2). Like *AU*, these had the *Chronicle of Ireland* as a major source before 912, but they also contain other material, mainly derived from Clonmacnoise (on the River Shannon) and Clonard (by the River Boyne in the midlands), places where their common source was situated.²¹ As both *AT* and *CS* have large sections missing – 767-973 and 1003-17 from *AT* due to lost pages, and 723-803 from *CS* – both texts are only available for the years 701-722, 974-1003, and 1018 onwards. As a result, neither chronicle covers the period from part of 766 to part of 804. When both texts are available, it is likely that we have most of their common source, whilst only a partial picture is available outside this overlap. In general, the overall pattern in *CS* and *AT* is similar to *AU*: a high number up to 740, and a reduction after that. However, it is still higher during the immediate period after 740 than for 801-950, as is indicated by the high 751-60 figure when *AT* is available. This indicates that, if *AT* and *CS* had been available from 767 to 803, we would likely have seen the same general pattern as *AU* for those years. When *CS* becomes available again in 804, we find that it, like *AU*, contains very few events about northern Britain for the ninth and first half of the tenth century, apart from 861-880. Similarly, there is a greater degree of recording after the mid-tenth century, although the number fluctuates, particularly during the eleventh century.

For the period up to 911, the overall similarity to *AU* can be explained by a shared derivation from the *Chronicle of Ireland*, but *AU* and the common source for *AT* and *CS* were independent chronicles after this time. As such, they represent two texts displaying broadly the same pattern of interest. These commonalities are reflected in the relatively high proportion of events shared throughout the whole period, not just in the section covered by the *Chronicle of Ireland*, but also those found

21 Evans 2010, 67-90.

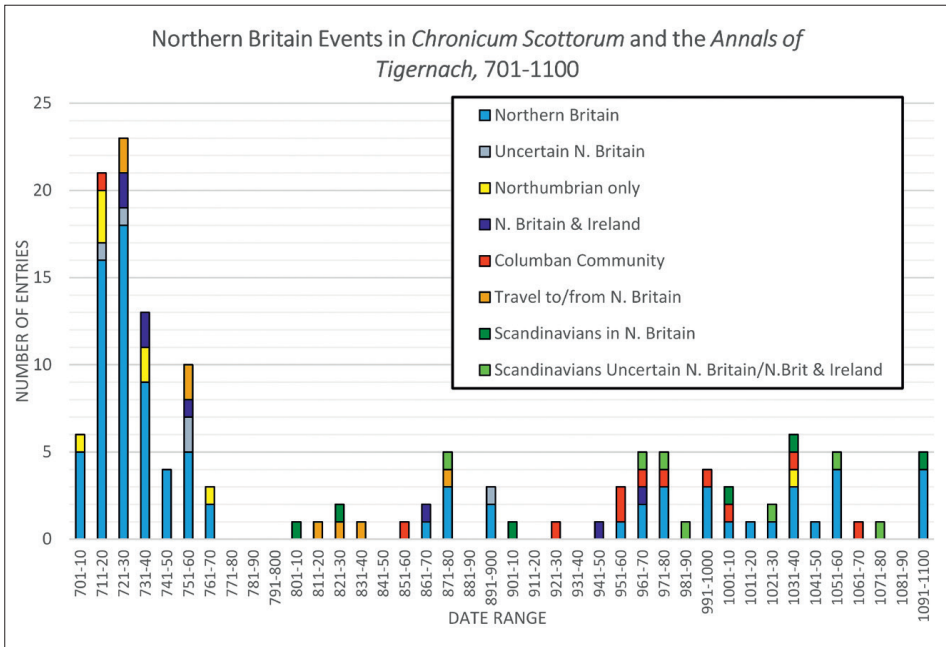


Figure 2: Events in northern Britain in *Chronicum Scottorum* and the *Annals of Tigernach*, 701-1100.

only in particular texts. Both *CS* and *AT* are the result of substantial later alterations. To simplify, *CS* retains ecclesiastical events but often omits secular ones (except for major kingdoms).²² *AT*, on the other hand, is pretty comprehensive up to 766, but adds extra text from other sources, and from the tenth century tends to have a secular focus, omitting Church matters.²³ Each chronicle contains additions, although these are largely focused on the record for Ireland, rather than northern Britain, apart from perhaps a few items on Dál Riata and the Picts, derived from king-lists.²⁴ At least for the period before 800, most of the unique items concerning northern Britain in *AT* are likely to have been part of the *Chronicle of Ireland*. Similarly, while *AU* has many unique items for northern Britain before 912, it is likely that these have been lost during the transmission of *AT* and *CS*.²⁵

22 Evans 2010, 65-66.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 208-13.

25 Ibid., 201-4, 208.

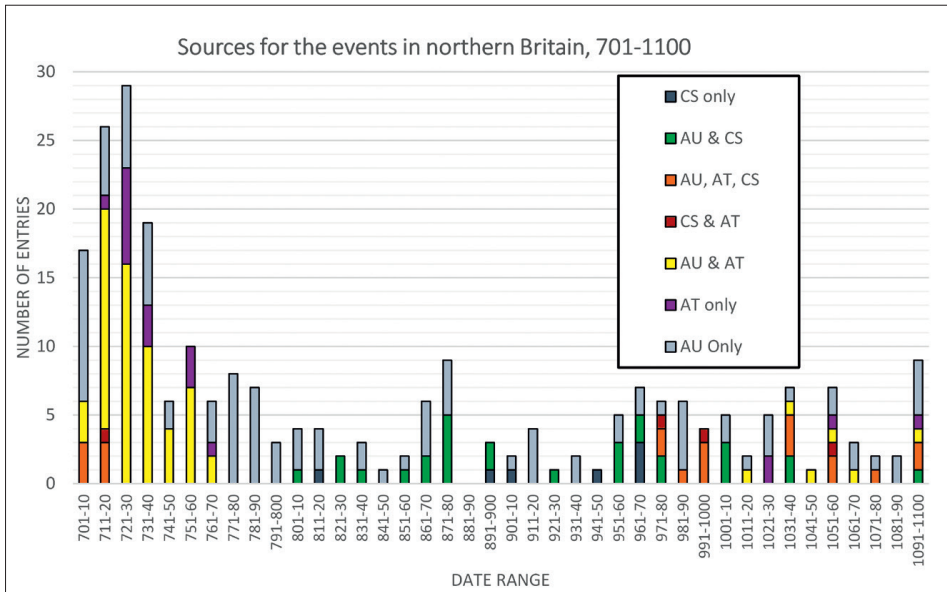


Figure 3: Sources for the events in northern Britain, 701-1100.

One issue is understanding the degree of omission in *CS* during the period from 804 to 973, for which *AT* is lacunose. Some idea of this can be gained by analysing which chronicles contain events in northern Britain (see Figure 3). From 701 to 722, *CS* lacks most of *AT*'s items for this region, only containing five items about Iona, and two conflicts relating to Dál Riata (one against the northern Britons). However, in the section from 974 to 1003, *CS* actually has more Scottish events than *AT*, including items unique to it, before again having fewer events during the eleventh century. From the high number of items unique to *AU* in 804-911, we might reasonably assume that many items had been omitted from *CS* in that section. However, it is unclear at which point between 912 and 974 *CS* increased its coverage of events in northern Britain, since *AT* cannot be used for comparison. Although this uncertainty, as well as the low overall number of events about northern Britain in these texts, should make us cautious, it would seem too much of a coincidence that *AU* and the combined *AT* and *CS* both exhibit an increase in the recording of affairs in northern Britain during the second half of the tenth century. The more frequent recording, reflected in eighteen events for northern Britain in *CS* from 951 to

1000 compared to three events in the previous fifty years, is significant, especially when we recognise that there is only a very slight increase in the overall number of events recorded in that source in the same period.²⁶ In sum, *AT* and *CS* confirm the overall trends found in *AU*, indicating that they are not the result of later changes.

An important further issue needs to be addressed before the significance of the discerned pattern may be argued. Colmán Etchingham, in his research on Viking activity in Ireland in the Irish chronicles, has stressed the importance of considering changing geographical and subject foci in the texts' contents before drawing conclusions.²⁷ Changes in chronicle interests and variations in the number of events recorded can affect the results of any quantitative analysis, so discerned patterns might not reflect actual changes, but simply altered chronicle practice. Considering first the overall number of chronicle items found in the text, the totals in *AU* for different periods can be seen in Figure 4. An item consists of one or more events verbally linked in the text by causation or a strong temporal or subject connection (so events merely connected by 'and' or 'then' are separately counted).

There are some similarities to the totals for northern Britain; after 740, the highest frequency is found in the late-eighth century, and there is a correspondingly greater number during the eleventh century compared to the tenth. In addition, a similarly low number is found during the period from 891 to 910 (54 for 891-900, and 44 for 901-910), with an average of only 4.9 items per annum. This may explain the appearance in *AU* of only four possible or certain events concerning northern Britain for that period. There are more substantial differences, however; the period with most items in *AU*, in which ten or more items are found per annum, spans from 731 to 840, although this includes a period in the early-ninth century during which the record for northern Britain is in significant decline. Moreover, the spike in items concerning northern Britain for 861-880 is not replicated in a high number of items in *AU* for the same period. Most significantly, there is a low number of items overall in *AU* from 961 to 1000, a time when there is a noticeable increase in the recording of events in northern Britain. Therefore, the overall number of items found in *AU* does not account for the changes

26 Totals of items are provided by Evans 2010, 70: AD 804-850, 219 items; 851-911, 267 items; 912-960, 220 items; 961-1010, 235 items.

27 Etchingham 1996; 2002. See also Flechner 2013.

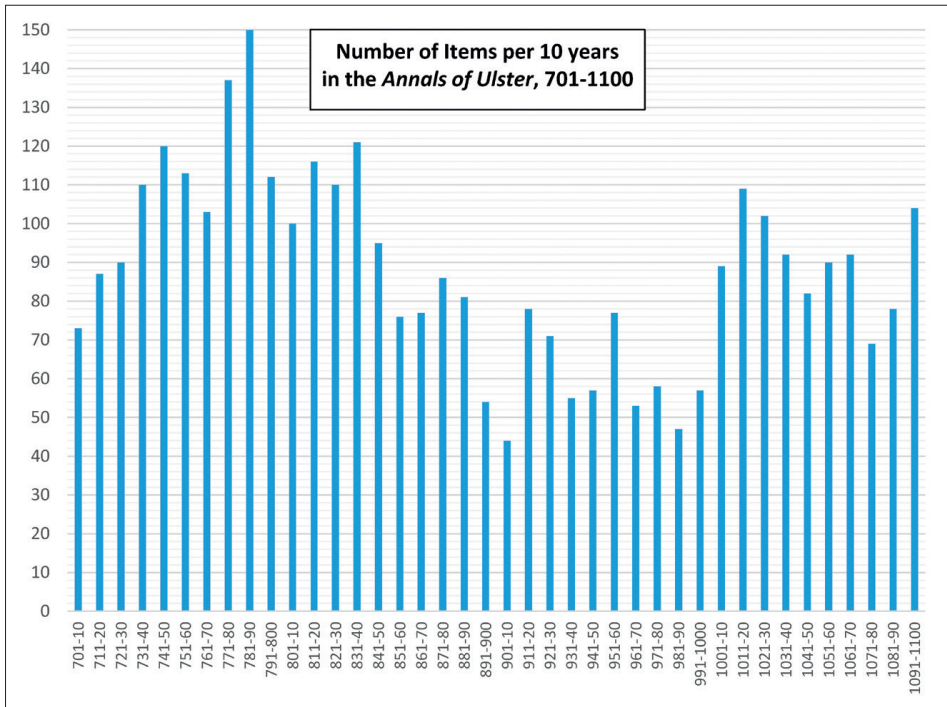


Figure 4: The number of items per 10 years in the *Annals of Ulster* (701-1100).

in the recording of events in northern Britain, except perhaps in the evidence for 891-910 and the eleventh century. What this comparison does in particular indicate is how anomalous the higher totals for northern Britain from 861-880 and 961-1000 are, and that the decline and subsequent increase in the record for the region does not closely correspond to the overall number of events recorded.

This fluctuation might, however, correspond with changes in the intensity of Viking activity. When the record for northern Britain is broken down into particular categories, it is noticeable that the period of sparse recording roughly corresponds to a period of significant Scandinavian activity in Ireland and northern Britain. According to Etchingham's analysis, the number of raids on ecclesiastical settlements and Scandinavian campaigns against or alongside Irish dynasts varied considerably, partly reflecting contrasting phases of Viking interaction with Irish polities and ecclesiastical establishments, as well as changing

interests and regional foci of the Irish chroniclers.²⁸ Whilst Viking raids started in the 790s, the most intense period of Scandinavian activity in Ireland recorded in the Irish annals was from the 820s to the first half of the tenth century. They continued to be active, albeit to a lesser degree, until the end of his study period in 1015.²⁹ This corresponds broadly with the period when the recording of events in northern Britain is low, although the reduction for northern Britain starts during the period 790-820, when the Viking impact was not as extensive as later on.

This development might be explained by looking at Viking activity in Britain. When events involving Scandinavians in northern Britain are considered, these are initially recorded in the last decade of the eighth century, continuing right up to 1100 (see Figures 1 and 2). The record is sporadic, with two peaks in 861-880 and 981-1000, which do not correspond to high points of recorded Viking activity in Ireland, apart from 861-70.³⁰ Indeed, the *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* contains a number of conflicts in northern Britain involving Scandinavians that are not found in the Irish chronicles, for instance, two or three events in the reign of Domnall, son of Constantine, King of Alba (889-900).³¹ In the Irish chronicles, only four raids on churches are recorded – all targeting Iona – three of which occurred in the early ninth century (802, 806, and 825). It is highly unlikely that these constitute a representative sample, but they may indicate that Viking raids were more significant in western Scotland than in Ireland in the first decades of the ninth century.³²

This Viking activity occurred before the great increase in activity in Ireland during the 820s. After 790, Scandinavians took over much of northern Scotland and the Hebrides, in what later became the Earldom of the Orkneys and Kingdom of the Isles. Meanwhile, in the south-west, a people called *Gallgoídil*, ‘Foreigner-Gaels’, settled. The exact dates of these conquests and settlements are uncertain.³³ Alex Woolf has stressed that Viking attacks were already substantial in the 790s, as is indicated by *AU* 794.7: ‘The wasting of all the islands of Britain by the heathens’.³⁴ He has also suggested that Scandinavians may have controlled Dál

28 Etchingham 1996, 7-34, 55-57.

29 Ibid., 1996, 7-16; Etchingham 2002, 53-54, 56.

30 See Etchingham 1996, 51-53, 55; 2002, 55-56.

31 Anderson 1980, 251; Woolf 2007, 122-25.

32 Woolf 2007, 56.

33 Ibid., esp. 41-67, 275-311; Clancy 2008; Downham 2015.

34 Woolf 2007, 43-47.

Riata from 793 to 806, before, in the late 840s, conquering the southern Hebrides. This is based on a reference from the *Annals of St Bertin*, in which the Northmen take control of all the islands around Ireland in 847.³⁵ Although the view that the Scandinavians ruled Dál Riata from 793 to 806 is highly speculative, a scenario in which Vikings attacked the Hebrides and Argyll, whilst establishing bases there to raid elsewhere, is very plausible, especially since, as Woolf points out, the chroniclers at this point tended to focus on attacks on ecclesiastical foundations.³⁶ If not for major battles or attacks on clerical sites like Iona – which were more likely to be recorded – we probably would have no evidence for a Scandinavian presence in Dál Riata. It is possible, therefore, that Scandinavian activities were a major cause for the decline in the record for northern Britain during the late-eighth and early-ninth century, with attacks and settlement, particularly on the Hebrides and west coast of Scotland, reducing connections between Ireland and Scotland.

However, we should further investigate the evidence before coming to such a conclusion, since it could be argued that other factors might also contribute to this pattern. One obvious alternative is that the change is connected to the end of the kingdom of Dál Riata in Argyll, which was probably controlled by the Picts by 800. Indeed, the share in Britain of the kingship of Dál Riata ceases to be mentioned after 792, and, along with Argyll and the Hebrides (apart from Iona), the name is absent from the record until the later tenth century (see Figure 5).³⁷ The Irish share of the kingdom (in Antrim) is, however, occasionally mentioned during the following centuries.³⁸ The conquest of Dál Riata in Britain could have reduced the number of events of interest to the chroniclers, although Gaelic culture certainly survived Pictish rule; it even spread further into eastern Scotland in this period as part of the process through which Pictland became Gaelic Alba. Given the lack of comparative evidence for events in these regions, it is difficult to judge how many significant events took place in northern Britain in this period. Nevertheless, it would be expected that the settlement and conquest of much of Dál Riata – first by the Picts and subsequently by

35 Ibid., 55-64, 99-100.

36 Ibid., 57-58.

37 *AU* 792.4, 986.2, 989.4 (*CS* 989.2, *AT* 989.3).

38 The Irish Dál Riata continued to be mentioned, for instance in *CS* 914.3, *AU* 1013.10.

the Scandinavians – would have been considered newsworthy. For the Picts, a considerable record exists regarding their earlier conquest of Dál Riata in the 730s, which may have made the re-establishment of Pictish authority later on less dramatic as a result. A battle recorded in *AU* 789.11 (duplicated in 790.7) between Constantín, son of Uurguist, and Conall, son of Tadg, may have been related to this process; the latter is found in some Dál Riata king-lists, but the 789 item from *AU* depicts this as an internal Pictish affair. Similarly, having recorded the ‘devastation of all the islands of Britain’ in *AU* 794.7, the establishment of Scandinavian control on the western seaboard of Scotland may not have been so noteworthy. Smaller-scale events in northern Britain are not present in the Irish annals from about 740, as the secular record focused on the deaths of kings and a few other events involving them. Therefore, our inability to discern these processes in Dál Riata is not particularly striking.

What is noticeable, however, is that not only the record for Dál Riata declines during the early ninth century, but those for other kingdoms in northern Britain as well. There are two secular events involving northern Britons in 751-800: *AU* 780.1, on the burning of Dumbarton Rock, plus the death of the King of Dumbarton only found in *AT* 752.2 (not included in Figure 5), and one Northumbrian event at *AT* 764.12 about King Æthelwold Moll becoming a cleric. However, no secular events about Northumbrians or northern Britons exist from 801-850, and there are also fewer Pictish events in the same period. The exception for secular items is the 851-900 period, during which there are more frequent references to Britons, Picts, and the northern English. This is, however, primarily concentrated in 861-880, in the context of repeated attacks on these peoples by Scandinavians, so it only qualifies the picture of reduced recording. Corresponding to the general secular pattern is a decline in the recording of ecclesiastical affairs, with a fall in the number of clerical obituary notices, which, as a result, tend to focus on Iona. No longer are occasional references provided to clerics of Dál Riata, such as the abbots of Kingarth on Bute. These reductions in secular and ecclesiastical items do not correspond to any reduced general interest in these same subjects in the Irish chronicles, so they do seem to represent a significant development.³⁹ As the decline in

39 Etchingham 1996, 11-12, 15, 51.

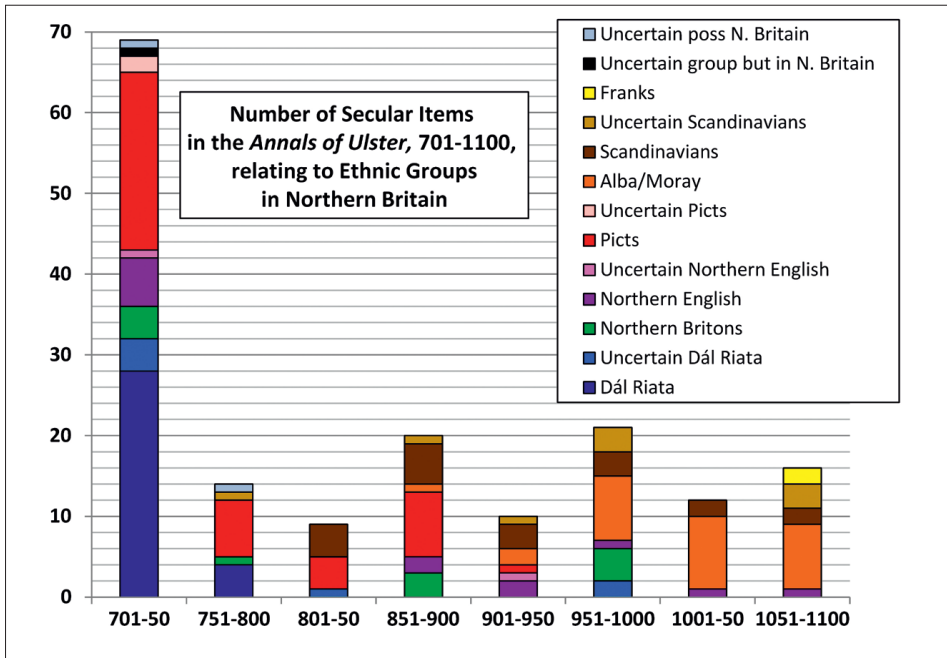


Figure 5: The number of secular items in the *Annals of Ulster* (701-1100) relating to ethnic groups in northern Britain.

recording is quite universal for northern Britain, the end of the kingship of Dál Riata in Britain cannot explain the reduction on its own (unless it also resulted in a decreased interest in northern Britain in general).

However, a lack of contacts cannot completely explain the pattern either, since news continued to reach Ireland from Iona after 800. That monastic centre continued to be the main ecclesiastical subject in northern Britain until 1100, although occasional references to Dunkeld, St Andrews, and bishops of Alba are also made.⁴⁰ From the mid-ninth century, the title *comarbae Coluim Chille* ('heir of Columba') often features, reflecting the increased use of saintly titles.⁴¹ This,

40 Items are from *AU* unless stated. Iona events (in which the person is linked to Iona or the event took place there): 801.4; 802.9, 806.8 (*CS* 806.3), 815.6, 825.17 (*CS* 825.9), 865.2 (*CS* 865.2), 880.1 (*CS* 880.1), 891.1 (*CS* 891.1), *CS* 966.4, 978.1, *CS* 980.5 ('heir of Columba' in *AU* 980.3), *CS* 980.6 (*AT* 980.6), 986.3, 987.3, 1005.1 (*CS* 1005.1), 1025.1, 1070.6, 1099.6; Dunkeld events: 865.6 (for a cleric also called *prim-epscop*, 'head-bishop', of Fortriu), 873.8, 965.4, 1027.7, 1045.6 (*AT* 1045.10); St. Andrews events: *CS* 965.1; bishops of Alba: *CS* 1033.2, *CS* 1055.3 (*AT* 1055.5), 1093.2.

41 Bannerman 1993, 14-18; Etchingham 1999, 47-103, esp. 91-93, 99-103.

however, makes it difficult to be certain whether the person in question was based in northern Britain or in Ireland. This office holder was probably based at Iona before the end of the tenth century, and often at Kells during the eleventh, but in many instances it is nevertheless difficult to be sure where people associated with this community were situated when they died.⁴² This is why such events have been placed in the separate ‘Columban Community’ category. In general, the events concerning Iona are not accompanied by other news related to western Scotland after 800, even though, presumably, it would have reached that monastery. There is one exception from 986 to 989, when *AU* records a number of events involving Iona, *Danair*, and the king of *Innse Gall* (the Scandinavian Hebrides) in *Dál Riata* (in this context probably in Britain rather than Ireland):

AU 986.2 Na Danair do thuidecht i n-airer Dail Riatai, .i. teora longa coro riagtha secht fichit diibh & coro renta olchena.

[The Danes arrived on the coast/in the territory of Dal Riata, that is, with three ships, and seven score of them were executed and others sold.]

AU 986.3 Í Coluim Cille do arcain do Danaraibh aidhchi Notlaic coro marbsat in apaidh & .xu. uiros do sruithibh na cille.

[Iona of Colum Cille was plundered by the Danes on Christmas night, and they killed the abbot and fifteen of the elders of the monastery.]

AU 987.3 Ár mor forsna Danaraibh ro oirg I coro marbtha tri .xx. it & tri cét diibh.

[A great slaughter of the Danes who plundered Iona, and three score and three hundred of them were slain.]

AU 989.4 (also **CS 989.2**, **AT 989.3**) Gofraidh m. Arailt, ri Innsi Gall, do marbad i n-Dal Riatai.

[Gothfrith son of Harald, king of *Innse Gall*, was killed in *Dál Riata*.]

42 Clancy 2011.

AU 989.7 Dub da Leithi, comarba Patraicc, do gabail comurbuis Coluim Cille a comurle fer n-Erenn & Alban.

[Dub dá Leithe, heir of Patrick, took the successorship of Colum Cille through the counsel of the men of Ireland and Alba.]⁴³

Given that the chronicle may already have been kept at Armagh by this time, it is likely that the close interest in events in and around Iona – concerning Scandinavians and Dál Riata – is connected to Dub dá Leithi's succession to leadership of the Columban confederacy, instigated by individuals in Britain as well as Ireland, and recorded at the end of the sequence in *AU* 989.7. During the abbacy of Muirín (obit. 980), Iona had close connections with the king of Dublin, Amlaíb Cuarán, who notably went to die on that island after being defeated in 980.⁴⁴ It has been plausibly suggested that Amlaíb's strong support for the Columban *familia* led him to found the monasteries of Scrín Coluim Cille (Skreen, Co. Meath) and Sord Coluim Cille (Swords, Co. Dublin) in his Irish lands, and that he controlled at least some of the Hebrides.⁴⁵ It is therefore understandable that both Irish chroniclers from the Patrician *familia*, based in either Brega, Conaille, or Armagh (which kept the ancestor of *AU*), as well as the Clonard or Clonmacnoise chroniclers in the midlands of Ireland (who produced the ancestor of *AT* and *CS*), would have been interested in attacks conducted by other Scandinavians on Iona. In addition, Dublin's interest in the Hebrides and Argyll region, and the challenge to it by the sons of Harald of Limerick could have had significant ramifications for the political and ecclesiastical activities of Dublin and the Columban *familia* in Ireland.⁴⁶ Overall, the series of items in the 980s indicates that, whenever the desire existed to record events in Argyll and the Hebrides, this would happen, allowing us to infer that there was usually no such interest in this region in this period, despite the means being available.

A similar pattern can be found in the overall record of Scandinavian activity. As has previously been argued, it is very unlikely that the

43 All translations are based on the *AU* edition by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, with emendations by the author.

44 Clancy 2011, 90-91, 93-97.

45 Ibid., 90-91, 95.

46 Wadden 2016, 170-74.

account of their Scottish exploits is in any way complete. The chroniclers, based in Irish ecclesiastical establishments in the Midlands and later in Armagh, were living in close proximity to the Vikings, especially those of Dublin. Although they would have found them of particular interest, it is surprising how few Scandinavian events outside Ireland they recorded. This is perhaps best reflected by statements on the departure or arrival of particular leaders in Dublin, which lack their destination or origin (see for instance *AU* 893.4, 894.4, and perhaps 927.3). What we have for northern Britain are occasional events recorded from the 790s (see Figure 1), including a few periods during which chroniclers were particularly interested, as seems to have occurred in the 980s. Other decades of considerable interest were the 860s and 870s, when the Scandinavians of Dublin were involved in the conquest of much of Anglo-Saxon England, and repeatedly attacked the Picts and northern Britons. This interest is illustrated by items for 870 and 871:

AU 870.6 Obsesio Ailech Cluathe a Norddmannis, .i. Amlaiph & Imhar, duo reges Norddmannorum obsederunt arcem illum & distruxerunt in fine .iiii. mensium arcem & predauerunt.

[The siege of Dumbarton by the Northmen, that is Amlaíb and Ímar, two kings of the Northmen, laid siege to the fortress and at the end of four months they destroyed the fortress and plundered.]

AU 871.2 (also **CS 871.2**) Amhlaiph & Ímar do thuidecht afrithisi du Ath Cliath a Albain dibh cetaibh long, & praeda maxima hominum Anglorum & Britonum & Pictorum deducta est secum ad Hiberniam in captiuitate.

[Amlaíb and Ímar returned to Dublin from Britain with two hundred ships, bringing away with them in captivity to Ireland a great prey of Angles and Britons and Picts.]⁴⁷

After destroying Dumbarton Rock in 870, the Vikings returned to Dublin with many English, British, and Pictish captives during the following year. In terms of details and interest, the focus is on the

⁴⁷ All translations are based on the *AU* edition by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, with emendations by the author.

Vikings, presumably because these campaigns, involving large numbers of people, could have had repercussions in Ireland, boosting the Dubliners' prestige and wealth. In contrast, no details are given for the peoples or leaders on the receiving end of this campaign.

The same overall pattern can be found in the period following the Vikings' return to Ireland in 914, which had a considerable impact on the following decades. The activities of these Scandinavians in northern Britain is occasionally described, betraying, again, a scant interest for those fighting against these attackers. One clear example is represented by the account of the Battle of the Tyne in *AU* 918.4, in which, unusually, the Viking leaders and their deployments are specified, but the identity of their enemies is not elaborated. 'Men of Alba' and maybe 'northern Saxons' are referred to as the Vikings' adversaries, but their leaders are not named. Another example is the account of the famous Battle of Brunanburh, which secured Æthelstan's conquest of northern England:

AU 937.6 Bellum ingens lacrimabile atque horribile inter Saxones atque Nordmannos crudeliter gestum est, in quo plurima milia Nordmannorum que non numerata sunt, ceciderunt, sed rex cum paucis euassit, .i. Amlaiph. Ex altera autem parte multitudo Saxonum cecidit. Adalstan autem, rex Saxonum, magna uictoria ditatus est.

[A great, lamentable and horrible battle between the English and the Northmen was cruelly fought, in which several thousands of Northmen, who are uncounted, fell, but their king, that is Amlaíb, with a few escaped. A large number of English fell on the other side. Æthelstan, king of the English, however, enjoyed a great victory.]⁴⁸

This account of the Battle of Brunanburh names the English and Scandinavian leaders, but does not mention the presence of the men of Alba and their king, Constantine (or the more doubtfully present king of the northern Britons), whom we know were present from other sources.⁴⁹ Not only does this reflect the level of interest the chronicler

48 This translation is based on the *AU* edition by Mac Airt and Mac Niocaill, with emendations by the author.

49 Woolf 2007, 168-73.

had in particular subjects, but both here and in the aforementioned cases it indicates that the Scandinavians would have been the source of information, even if the annalists often depicted them negatively elsewhere.

These Scandinavian connections and the chroniclers' strong interest in their activities partly explains the spike in events taking place in northern Britain from 860 to 880. There are, however, events recorded for these decades which are not connected to the Scandinavians, such as the death of the *prim-epscop* ('head-bishop') of Fortriu and abbot of Dunkeld (*AU* 865.6), Pictish kings in *AU* 862.1 (also *CS* 862.1), 876.1 (*CS* 876.1), and 878.2, and the killing of the king of Strathclyde at the instigation of the Pictish king (*AU* 872.5, *CS* 872.4). The most likely explanation is that the activities of the Scandinavians simultaneously revived the Irish chroniclers' interest in the affairs of Pictland and the northern Britons. This is, perhaps, another indication that connections with the Picts were already in existence, but had previously only led to the recording of a few events.

It is unclear, however, why the increased record for northern Britain during the 860s and 870s is not replicated in the decades immediately after 914, when Vikings connected to the Scandinavian kingdom of York re-established themselves in Dublin and Waterford, and were active from Limerick. Why, for instance, were the activities of the Dublin Vikings in Northumbria, apart from the Battle of Brunanburh, not being recorded? An explanation may be that these events were not considered to be as directly relevant to the Irish situation as those in the 860s and 870s, when it may have been thought that a major reshaping of politics, creating a very powerful Scandinavian polity encompassing both Britain and Ireland, was possible. In contrast, the chroniclers producing the ancestors of *AU*, *AT*, and *CS* were more focused on Irish affairs than those active in the 861-880 period, and the conflicts between Scandinavians and the rising English kingdom of Wessex may not have seemed as immediately significant. As such, this is another demonstration of how the interests of the chroniclers, rather than their contacts, were primarily what is reflected by the record for northern Britain.

The evidence from secular and ecclesiastical records in both *AU* and the Clonmacnoise-Clonard chronicle (underlying *CS* and *AT*) indicates an overall increase in interest in northern Britain during the second half

of the tenth century. There is a continuing record of events, involving Scandinavians, which concerns Iona and the Columban community more generally (see Figures 1 and 2, noting that most travel items in the ninth century concerned the movement of Columba's relics). Some of these events may have taken place in Ireland rather than northern Britain, but they have been included in the 'Columban Community' and 'Scandinavians uncertain N.Britain/N.Brit. & Ireland' categories, as evidence exists for their activities in northern Britain, or the action described may have taken place there. For example, in *AU* 1075.1, Gofraid mac Amlaíb is called king of Dublin, in *CS* 1075.3 and *AT* 1075.2 he is just called *rí Gall* ('king of the Foreigners'), and *AI* 1075.2 states that he died *re muir anall*, 'beyond the sea'. This probably means that he died somewhere in south-western Scotland or the north-western seaboard of English, although the issue is uncertain.⁵⁰ Similar examples are Gofraid mac Amlaíb (obit. *AU* 963.5, *CS* 963.1), active in Ireland but probably with Hebridean connections, and Ímar mac Arailt (Ivarr son of Harald), ruler of Dublin from 1038-1046, but perhaps also from 1052 to 1054 based on his title *rí Gall* in his obit at *AU* 1054.1.⁵¹ He slaughtered members of the Ulaid at Raithlin Island off the Antrim coast in 1045, indicating that the Hebrides may have formed a base for him after 1046. Other events involved Scandinavian groups in both Britain and Ireland (*AU* 794.7, *AT* 1058.4), 'Irish' Vikings moving to or from Britain (*AU* 866.1, *AU* 871.2 (*CS* 871.2), *CS* 980.6 (*AT* 980.6)), conflicts involving the Irish and Vikings from Britain (*AU* 913.5, 918.4, 1098.2), those for which it is unclear where in Britain an event took place (*AU* 937.6, Battle of Brunanburh; *AT* 1030.11), or whether it took place in Britain or Ireland (*AU* 986.2 in Dál Riata, *AU* 987.3, 989.4 (*CS* 989.2, *AT* 989.3)). By not adhering to neat categories, these records often make our conclusions less certain, but they testify to the continued interaction between Ireland and northern Britain over the whole period.

On their own, however, references to Scandinavians, Iona, or vague references to the Columban community do not account for the increased number of events concerning northern Britain recorded from the 950s

50 Cf. Duffy 1992, 102; Clancy 2008. A similar case is *AU* 913.5, recording a battle between the Scandinavians and the Ulaid of Ireland on the 'Saxon coast', which Clancy (*Ibid.*, 43-44) argues to be a probable reference to Galloway.

51 On Gofraid mac Amlaíb, see Etchingham 2001, 169-71; Downham 2007, 29, 48-49, 219-20, 253; Woolf 2007, 212-14. On Ímar mac Arailt, see Duffy 1992, 97-98; Etchingham 2001, 161-62.

onwards. The main difference from the preceding period (apart from the exceptional 861-880) is the increase in items about secular events and bishops of Alba. From the 950s onwards, there is a regular – if not frequent – record of battles, killings, and obituary notices for the kings of Alba, whilst the rulers of the Isles, south-west Scotland, and northern English (or those fighting against their northern neighbours) appear occasionally (see Figure 5).⁵² In the second half of the tenth century, events involving the northern Britons feature on occasion, whilst the powerful rulers of Moray, bishops of Alba (especially in CS), and abbots of Dunkeld also appear during the eleventh century.⁵³ The cumulative picture is a modest, but wide-ranging increase in recording, the reasons for which are difficult to perceive.

This increase may have been partly facilitated by the transmission of written notices of events, since these occur quite frequently in both *AU* and *AT* or *CS*, sometimes using similar language.⁵⁴ For instance, for the accounts of the death of Máel Coluim III, his son Edward, and his wife Margaret (1093), the same wording is found not only in *AU*, *AT*, and *CS*, but also in the *Annals of Inisfallen* (*AI*), in a section of the manuscript contemporary to the event:

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- 52 Items are from *AU* unless stated. Those involving fighting against Scandinavians are underlined. Secular events involving Alba: 952.1, 952.2, 954.2 (*CS* 953.3), *CS* 962.2, 965.4, 967.1, 971.1 (*CS* 971.1), 977.4 (*CS* 977.2, *AT* 977.4), 995.1 (*CS* 995.1, *AT* 995.3), *CS* 997.1 (*AT* 997.1), 1005.5 (*CS* 1005.5), 1006.5, 1033.7, 1034.1 (*CS* 1034.1, *AT* 1034.1), 1040.5 (*CS* 1040.3, *AT* 1040.1), 1045.6 (*AT* 1045.10), 1054.6 (*AT* 1054.5), 1058.2 (*CS* 1058.1, *AT* 1058.1), 1058.6 (*CS* 1058.4, *AT* 1058.5), 1072.8, 1085.2, 1093.5 (x2) (*CS* 1093.1, *AT* 1093.4), 1094.7 (*CS* 1094.3), *AT* 1099.1. The Isles (not including those leaders also based in Ireland): 989.4 (*CS* 989.2, *AT* 989.3), 1005.1 (*CS* 1005.1). Rulers in south-western Scotland: 1034.10 (*AT* 1034.3), 1064.9 (Echmarcach, king of the Rhinns, presumably of Galloway, according to Marianus Scottus; see Duffy 1992, 97-99). Northern English (including battles between northern Britons, Alba, and the English): 952.2, 1006.5, possibly *AT* 1030.11, *CS* 1032.4 (*AT* 1032.4), 1054.6 (*AT* 1054.5).
- 53 Items are those in *AU* unless stated. Those involving fighting against Scandinavians are underlined. Northern Britons: 952.2, 971.1 (*CS* 971.1), 975.2 (*CS* 975.4, *AT* 975.3), 997.5 (*CS* 997.2, *AT* 997.3), possibly *AT* 1030.11. Dynasty of Moray (unless also king of Alba): 1020.6 (*AT* 1020.8), 1029.7 (*AT* 1029.5), 1032.2, 1033.7, 1085.1. Ecclesiastical events involving Alba: *CS* 965.1 (death on pilgrimage in St Andrews of Áed mac Maíle Mithig, of the *Síl nÁeda Sláine* dynasty of Brega) 965.4 (death of abbot of Dunkeld in battle), 1027.7 (the burning of Dunkeld), *CS* 1033.2 (bishop of Alba), 1045.6 (*AT* 1045.10) (death of abbot of Dunkeld in battle), *CS* 1055.3 (*AT* 1055.5) (bishop of Alba), 1093.2 (bishop of Alba).
- 54 Evans 2010, 91-114.

AU 1093.5 Mael Coluim m. Donnchadha airdri Alban & Etbard a mc do marbadh do Francaibh [add. marg. H: .i. i n-Inber Alda i Saxanaibh.] A righan imorro .i. Margareta do ec dia cumaidh ria cenn nomaidhe.

[Malcolm son of Donnchad, great King of Alba, and Edward, his son, were killed by Franks (add. marg.H: that is, at the mouth/confluence of the Aln among the English). His queen, moreover, that is Margaret, died of sorrow for him within nine days.]

AT 1093.4 (and **CS 1093.1**) Mael Colaim mac Donnchadha, rí Alban, occisus est o Frangaib, & Edabard a mac, & Margarita, ben Mail Colaim, do ég da chumaidh.

[Malcolm son of Donnchad, King of Alba, was killed by the Franks, and Edward, his son, and Margaret, wife of Malcolm, died from sorrow for him.]

AI 1093.13 Mael Coluim mac Donnchada, rí Alban, & a mac do marbad do Rancaib a boegul chatha, & Margaréta, .i. a ben, do éc da chumaid.

[Malcolm son of Donnchad, King of Alba, and his son were killed by Franks in an unguarded moment in battle, and Margaret, that is, his wife, died of grief for him.]⁵⁵

This signifies that this phenomenon is probably a contemporary one, reflecting the existence of single written texts created either in Ireland or Alba, which were then distributed to different Irish chroniclers at Armagh, Clonmacnoise, and Munster (where *AI* was kept). However, the evidence would be overstretched by suggesting that all records for northern Britain (or Alba) would have originated in one particular location, or through one method of transmission, or that the existence of such written sources by themselves caused a higher rate of recording for northern Britain in this period.

The most plausible explanation is that Alba, the Isles, and south-west Scotland had become more relevant to the chroniclers. From the mid-tenth century, Alba increasingly expanded into the rich agricultural

55 Ibid., 112-13; *AI*, xxx-xxxi. All translations by the author.

territory of Lothian, enhancing the power and prestige of the ruling Gaelic dynasty, whilst *mormaír* members of Alba's elite are recorded as taking part in conflicts in Ireland in *AT* 976.7 and the Battle of Clontarf in *AU* 1014.2 (*CS* 1014.2).⁵⁶ In turn, from the late-tenth century onwards, Irish leaders claimed and perhaps occasionally obtained control over parts of the Isles and western seaboard of Scotland.⁵⁷ Moreover, strong connections between the Isles (including Man) and Dublin are attested, with interaction in both directions, partly reflected in the biographies of those found in the Irish chronicles, but also in other sources.⁵⁸ It was also a period during which the Scandinavian elites in mainland Argyll and islands like Bute were adopting the Gaelic language.⁵⁹ The spread of Gaelic may also have been taking place in south-west Scotland, around the Firth of Forth, Galloway, and in the Kingdom of Strathclyde.⁶⁰ As a result, the increased prestige of these rulers, combined with the creation of a cultural and linguistic continuum from Ireland to the kingdom of Alba, made it more likely that events in northern Britain would have been recorded.

In conclusion, then, the Irish chronicle record for northern Britain, although undoubtedly the result of communications networks, was more dependent on what their writers considered to be relevant and important to include. This interest in itself was shaped by political and social realities, such as Armagh's involvement with the Columban *familia* in the late-tenth century, as well as the concerns of chroniclers based in Brega or Conaille about the potential power of the nearby Vikings of Dublin during their campaigns in northern Britain in the 860s and 870s. However, it was also shaped by the horizons of the world immediately relevant to chroniclers. Before 800, this meant that events in Dál Riata, Pictland, and, to a lesser degree, the lands of the northern Britons and Northumbrians, were recorded, but after that there was a decline. That change is unlikely to be straightforwardly attributable to the end of the kingdom of Dál Riata in Argyll, or to a particular source, since the record for the whole of northern Britain (except Iona) declined, despite sufficient connections remaining to maintain it, had the chroniclers

56 Woolf 2007, 193–5, 209–11, 234–40.

57 Wadden 2016.

58 Duffy 1992; Etchingham 2001; Downham 2007, 177–99.

59 Jennings and Kruse 2009, 89–99; Márkus 2012, 29–39.

60 Clancy 2008, 39–45.

been willing. The reduction can also plausibly be connected to the coming of the Vikings; first to the western seaboard of Scotland, and increasingly to attack Ireland from the 820s. Although the details of when and how Scandinavians became involved in western Scotland is difficult to determine, a period of substantial disruption and conquest at the end of the eighth and during the early-ninth century (before major settlement) is plausible. This conflict, as well as attacks on Ireland, did not sever contacts, but may have reduced the chroniclers' horizons, preserving their interest in events around the northern coastal regions of Antrim, yet no longer in those in the nearby, Scandinavian-dominated lands of Islay and Kintyre. It is also worth raising the possibility that an accompanying heightened sense of 'Irish' identity, reflected in the use of the terms *rí Éirenn* ('king of Ireland') and *firu Éirenn* ('men of Ireland') from the mid-ninth century onwards, itself perhaps a product of the Viking impact, may have been another contributing factor later on.⁶¹ It may be suggested, given the date of such references, that the process was the other way around; the conquest and settlement of Gaelic Dál Riata by the Picts and Scandinavians may have made focusing on the island of Ireland more attractive, rather than directly causing a reduced interest in northern Britain's affairs earlier on.

What is clear from the surviving record, however, is that from the mid-tenth century, as the Gaelic language spread in western Scotland, rulers based in the Isles and Alba gained in power and sometimes became involved in Ireland. At the same time, northern Britain became increasingly relevant again to the Irish for political and cultural reasons, partly as a potential arena for expansion. Interest in northern Britain grew, so that this region again constituted a part – albeit a relatively minor one – of the world-view of the Irish chroniclers. Although the chroniclers in Ireland presumably knew much more than they recorded, the products of their labour provide us with important reflections on what they regarded to be significant events in this world.

APPENDIX

Categorised events relating to Northern Britain in the *Annals of Ulster*, *Annals of Tigernach*, and *Chronicum Scottorum*, 701-1100 (Items are from *AU* unless stated).

61 Herbert 2000, 62-66.

Northern Britain: 701.7, 701.8, 701.9, 704.1 (CS 704.1, AT 704.2), 704.2 (CS 704.2, AT 704.3), 705.4, 706.2 (AT 706.2), 707.9 (AT 707.5), 709.4, 710.1 (CS 710.1, AT 710.1), 710.4, 710.5, 711.3 (AT 711.3), 711.5 (AT 711.5), 712.1 (AT 712.1), 712.2, 712.5, 713.4 (AT 713.4), 713.5 (x2) (AT 713.5), 713.7 (AT 713.7), 714.2 (AT 714.2), AT 715.8, 716.2, 716.4 (AT 716.4), 717.1 (CS 717.1, AT 717.1), 717.4 (CS 717.2, AT 717.3), 717.5 (CS 717.3, AT 717.4), CS 718.3 (AT 718.6), 719.6 (AT 719.4), 719.7 (AT 719.5), 721.1 (AT 721.1), 722.1 (AT 722.1), 722.3 (AT 722.3), 722.6 (AT 722.8), 723.4 (AT 723.4), 724.1 (x2) (AT 724.1), AT 724.2 (x2), 725.3 (AT 725.3), 725.7 (x2), 726.1 (AT 726.1), AT 726.2, AT 726.4 (part), 726.3, 727.3, 728.4 (x2) (AT 728.4, AT 728.5), 729.1 (AT 729.1), AT 729.2, 729.2, 729.3 (AT 729.4), 730.4, 731.4, 731.6 (AT 731.5), AT 732.7, 733.2 (AT 733.2), 734.5 (AT 734.4), 734.6, 736.1 (x2) (AT 736.1), 736.2, 737.1 (AT 737.1), 737.2 (AT 737.2), 739.7 (AT 739.6), 740.3, 741.10, 747.5 (AT 747.6), 747.10 (AT 747.11), 749.7 (AT 749.7), 750.4 (AT 750.4), 750.11, 752.1 (AT 752.1), AT 752.2, 752.2 (AT 752.2), AT 752.3, 752.8 (AT 752.9), 761.4 (AT 761.3), 763.10 (AT 763.8), 767.5, 768.7, 772.5, 775.1, 776.6, 780.1, 780.5, 782.1 (x2), 789.11 (dupl. at 790.7), 790.1, 801.4, 807.3, 815.6, 820.3, 834.1, 858.2, 862.1 (CS 862.1), 865.6, 872.5 (CS 872.4), 873.8, 876.1 (CS 876.1), 878.2, 880.1 (CS 880.1), 891.1 (CS 891.1), 900.6 (CS 900.5), 952.1, 954.2 (CS 953.3), CS 962.2, 965.4, CS 966.4, 967.1, 971.1 (CS 971.1), 975.2 (CS 975.4, AT 975.3), 977.4 (CS 977.2, AT 977.4), 978.1, 995.1 (CS 995.1, AT 995.3), CS 997.1 (AT 997.1), 997.5 (CS 997.2, AT 997.3), 1005.1, 1005.5 (CS 1005.5), 1006.5, 1020.6 (AT 1020.8), 1025.1, 1027.7, 1029.7 (AT 1029.5), 1032.2, CS 1033.2, 1033.7, 1034.1 (CS 1034.1, AT 1034.1), 1040.5 (CS 1040.3, AT 1040.1), 1045.6 (AT 1045.10), 1054.6 (AT 1054.5), CS 1055.3 (AT 1055.5), 1058.2 (CS 1058.1, AT 1058.1), 1058.6 (CS 1058.4, AT 1058.5), 1070.6, 1072.8, 1085.1, 1085.2, 1093.2, 1093.5 (x2) (CS 1093.1, AT 1093.4), 1094.7 (CS 1094.3), AT 1099.1, 1099.6.

Uncertain N. Britain: 701.6, 703.5, 707.3, 708.3, 711.6, 712.4, 717.2 (AT 717.2), 727.4 (AT 727.4), 740.5, 757.4 (AT 757.4), 760.7 (AT 760.3), 776.10, 778.11, 781.3, CS 900.6.

Northumbrian Only (kings of England noted also): 704.3 (AT 704.4), 713.3 (AT 713.3), 716.1 (AT 716.1), 718.1 (AT 718.1), 731.3 (AT 731.3), AT 735.7, AT 764.12, 913.1, [939.6 K.Eng.], [975.1 K.Eng.], CS 1032.4 (AT 1032.4), [1035.1 K.Eng.], [1040.6 K.Eng.].

Scandinavians in N. Britain: 802.9, 806.8 (CS 806.3), 825.17 (CS 825.9), 839.9, 867.7, 870.6, 875.3, 875.4, 904.4, CS 904/5.6, 952.2, 986.3, 1005.1 (CS 1005.1), 1034.10 (AT 1034.3), 1064.9, 1095.11 (AT 1095.5).

Scandinavians Uncertain N. Britain (not clear where event took place – e.g. where ruler also involved in Ireland or Man – or where events involved Irish): 794.7, 866.1, 871.2 (CS 871.2), 913.5, 918.4, 937.6, 963.5 (CS 963.1), CS 980.6 (AT 980.6), 986.2, 987.3, 989.4 (CS 989.2, AT 989.3), AT 1030.11, 1054.1, AT 1058.4, 1075.1 (CS 1075.3, AT 1075.2), 1098.2.

N. Britain & Ireland: AT 726.4 (part), AT 726.9, 731.2 (AT 731.2), AT 733.5, 734.7, 757.9 (AT 757.9), 778.7, 781.3, 791.1, 792.4, 865.2 (CS 865.2), 913.1, CS 941.5, CS 965.1.

Travel to/from N. Britain: 727.5 (AT 727.5), 730.3 (AT 730.1), 754.3 (AT 754.4), AT 758.2, 766.6, 782.2, CS 818.4, 829.3 (CS 829.2), 831.1 (CS 831.1), 849.7, 878.9 (CS 878.9).

Columban Community: 716.5 (AT 716.4), 814.9, 854.3 (CS 854.2), 927.1 (CS 927.1), 938.1, 954.6 (CS 954.6), 959.2 (CS 959.2), 964.3 (CS 964.5), 980.3 (CS 980.5), 989.5, 989.7, 998.2 (CS 998.2), 1008.1 (CS 1008.1), 1011.1, 1034.9, 1040.2 (CS 1040.2), 1057.8, 1062.2 (AT 1062.3), 1098.9.

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