

Chapter 4

Bute in the age of the Sagas

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IT WOULD be misleading to suggest that Bute figures prominently in the Icelandic sagas, but it does have significance because of two attacks on the island in 1230 and 1263. I published an article on the context of these attacks over twenty years ago (Cowan 1990). The SSNS Bute conference presented a welcome opportunity to look briefly at historiographical developments during the last two decades and to assess to what degree the ideas in that article, at least in so far as they concern Bute, still stand up. Perhaps the best place to begin is much further back, with the standard history of Bute, published in 1893 (Hewison 1893, I: 236–59). There we learn that a bunch of warriors in the mould of Ralph the Rover attacked the Hebrides at the end of the eighth century. The vikings had arrived. Attacks gave way to colonisation, the establishment of the Norse kingdom of Dublin and Harald Fairhair's expedition to the west. The Hebrides were ruled by Godred Crovan, king of Man until Magnus Barelegs, king of Norway swept down upon the isles to claim their sovereignty in the last decade of the eleventh century. This expedition probably explains the retrospective claim in the Bute Inventory to the effect that the Stewarts were granted Bute by Malcolm II, whereas historically they were probably infested in the island in the reign of Malcolm IV, 1153–64. Irrespective of when the Stewarts gained the island, possibly as late as 1200 (McDonald 1997: 111), there is little doubt that, from the time of Magnus's expeditions to the Hebrides until 1266, the kings of Norway considered Bute to be subject to Norwegian rule.

The great chief, Somerled, revolted, so bringing about partition of the kingdom of the Isles with Godred of Man, after the two fought a famous naval battle in 1156. It was said that Somerled 'did not cease (until) he cleared the western side of Scotland of the Lochlannaich [vikings], except the islands of the Norwegians called Innsigall; and he gained victory over his enemies in every field of battle' (*Clanranald* ii, 155). A different view was preserved in the *Chronicle of Man*, which lamented that the ruin of the kingdom of the Isles could be dated to the sons of Somerled gaining possession of it (*Chron Man*, 18). Thus was created the dynamic which would drive Bute's history and politics in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Mostly the struggle between the Houses of Somerled and Stewart is quite obscure, the evidence failing at critical junctures, but at certain points it erupts with dramatic effect, if lacking in desirable detail. One such occasion was the battle at Renfrew in 1164 when Somerled was killed. A Glasgow cleric, William, attributed the victory to the intervention of St Mungo in a Latin poem which luxuriates in Somerled's fate, with a notable lack of Christian charity. It

is also fantastically ahistorical but it would certainly sit well with the Stewarts whose lordship included Renfrew.

Somerled stood with a thousand of our enemies,
ready to make war against a mere one hundred innocents,
our few men advanced and made assault upon the ranks
of treacherous Argyllsmen, soldiers most unfortunate.

* * * *

The deadly leader, Somerled, died. In the first great clash of arms
he fell, wounded by a spear and cut down by the sword.

His son, too, the raging sea consumed
and with him many thousands of wounded men in flight.
Their savage leader now laid low, the wicked turned and ran,
But many of them were butchered in the sea as on dry land.
They sought to clamber from the blood-red waves into their ships
but were drowned, each and all, in the surging tide.
Such was the slaughter, such destruction of the treacherous thousands,
but not one of those who fought them was wounded here or died.
(Clancy 1998: 213–4)

The facts are undoubtedly highly suspect but the bloodlusty, celebratory tone is quite evocative of the victorious outcome.

Before attempting to unravel the tortuous tangle of Hebridean history in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries it is appropriate to pause for some consideration of our major sources for Scandinavian activity in the region, namely the Icelandic sagas, because without them we would know almost nothing at all about Bute. Such information as does exist is to be found in Sturla Thordarsson's *Hakon's Saga*. Sturla was the nephew of the greatest sagaman of them all, who was also, arguably, the greatest historian of pre-Renaissance Europe, Snorri Sturluson, author of *Heimskringla*, his massive history of the kings of Norway.

The sagas originally existed in the oral medium, in the Old Norse vernacular, and we seldom know who composed them. They were concerned mainly with Iceland's period of settlement when the uninhabited island attracted migrants from Norway, Ireland and the Western Isles, whence they often took wives, concubines or slaves of Celtic descent with them. It is quite easy to believe that those Celts somehow fed into the saga tradition but hard evidence for the process remains elusive, despite the best efforts of some scholars (Sigurðsson 2000). However it was the presence of such folk in Iceland that ensured a fair amount of content about Scotland and Ireland in the sagas, which were committed to vellum largely in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, at which point highly skilled *literati* were involved in the process. There were also sagas about Norway, the Faeroes, Orkney, Greenland and Vinland, or America. There were legendary sagas, saints' lives and short stories. In the thirteenth century 'contemporary sagas' were produced, one of which was *Hakons's Saga*. Unlike earlier compositions we know a good deal about its author. He was commissioned by Magnus Hakonsson to write the saga while his father was on his expedition to Scotland. Sturla Thordarsson had a reputation for telling sagas better than they had been heard before.

He collected some of his material from informants, for example, warriors returning from the Hebrides in 1263 and there is no doubt that he also used other documentary sources. He is also thought to have been the author of the magnificent *Grettir's Saga*, which is relevant to our Bute enquiry.

While there has been a huge advance in saga criticism during the last twenty or thirty years there has been very little progress in determining the historicity of the sagas, a problem which most scholars have avoided, while historians have remained deplorably suspicious of creations which circulated orally and which were composed in the vernacular. As I have argued before (Cowan 1998: 2) historians would be much more attentive if the sagas were in Latin, seemingly oblivious to the reality that it too was a vernacular, which was used to transform the oral into the literate. Medieval historians appear to scorn the vernacular while failing to realise that it is incumbent upon them to figure out the sagaman's idea of history rather than to reject his output as inadequate in terms of modern source criticism, to understand that there are different ways of representing the past, especially in a society which conceived of time as cyclical, which practiced ancestor worship, which saw the characteristics of these ancestors reborn in the present and which regarded the story as the most important component of *historia* (Cowan 2011: 36–41).

Reports in the Press about concerns that such search engines as Google are destructive of memory recall proverbial expressions that go back to the first manuscripts, predicting that, 'the feather of the goose will steal the memory from man'. It has been demonstrated that, in many pre-literate cultures, memory was, by modern standards, exceptional, in terms of quantity and accuracy. Sagas recited or declaimed in front of audiences that had heard them many times before, could not deviate from previous tellings because they, the listeners, were the check upon content and accuracy. In this regard orality was more democratic than literacy (Titlestad 2008: 59–63). In addition the use of poetry anchored many sagas because, as Snorri Sturluson long ago argued, scalds were compelled to be truthful about the great men who were their patrons; anything else 'would have been mockery not praise' (*Heimskringla* 4).

The argument is not that all sagas (or any) are gold standard unimpeachable historical sources but rather that they must be consulted on their own terms. Alex Woolf has suggested that the task facing compilers of kings' sagas and *Orkneyinga Saga* would be rather like 'trying to create a narrative history of the Second World War on the basis of Hollywood movies. Some of the source material would bear a close relationship to real events, some would get the gist right but make up the detail, and some would simply be telling a universal story set against a broadly familiar historical backdrop. The problem was that the Icelandic historian could not tell which source fell into which category, even if he was aware of all the distinctions' (Woolf 2007: 278). This seems to me unsympathetic and wrong-headed and I would argue that Icelandic historians could perfectly well distinguish the trustworthiness, or otherwise of their sources. Furthermore Alex cannot thus brand all sagas. *Hakon's Saga* is intended to be historically accurate and must have been regarded as such by the king's son when it was completed in 1265, all the more remarkable considering that Sturla Thordarsson was a lifelong opponent of practically everything that Hakon represented. It has even been suggested that Sturla could not conceal his bias in certain passages (Palsson 1973: 49–56), which may have rendered the saga truer than it was meant to be. It is instructive that within a very few pages of his 'Hollywood movie' critique, Woolf discusses evidence from a source

written on the Upper Rhine, about an Irishman travelling through Orkney, without subjecting it to anything like the same rigorous analysis! (2007: 287–8). History *is* about choice! It is also about cultural memory and the illumination thereof. Medieval Icelanders were not privy to history as a supposedly ‘scientific’ subject invented in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for the privileged few. For them history was a vital inclusive subject about society and identity that was accessible to every individual, each of whom perhaps preserved his or her own familial or personal part of the story, uncontaminated by footnotes and pedantry. Above all it was exciting, informative and didactic involving all humanity as they knew it, at its best and worst, Christian and pagan, peaceful and violent, like the climate and environment in which its owners lived. At the very least the sagas will always attract the ethnologist, who will find the contextualised voice of the past brilliantly preserved, and perfectly adapted to discussing change, in what is supposed to be an age of stasis. It is a pretty safe bet that no other medieval culture can offer the abundance of materials for insight into the mentalities of an entire nation to compare with Iceland. One sentence of a saga can often tell us more than an entire museum display case, full of artefacts.

One saga which was not conceived as strictly historical, to judge from its occultic and monstrous content, was *Grettir’s Saga*. If it was written by Sturla Thordarsson, and many think that it was, then one early episode, a battle in the Kyles of Bute, may have been inspired by someone returning to the Norwegian court from Rothesay or the battle of Largs. The beginning of the saga introduces the great-grandfather of its eponym, a man called Onund, a Norwegian viking who was accustomed to crossing the North Sea for purposes of plunder. Indeed for the short time we meet him he seems pretty representative of the early raiders in the Western Isles. We are told he spent three summers looting in Scotland and Ireland. Back in Norway he fought against king Harald Finehair at the iconic battle of Hafirsfjord, in which his leg was severed. Rescued by a warrior named Thrand, a wooden leg conferred his nickname, Onund Treefoot. The two, having decided to flee the tyrannies of Harald, retreated to the Hebrides, where they met some fellow refugees and went off on raids. There was competition, however, for two Hebridean Vikings named Vigbjod and Vestmar were also in the vicinity. It is best to let the saga take up the story.

Thrand and Onund set out to confront [Vigbjod and Vestmar] and heard that they had sailed to the island of Bute [*Bótl*], so they went there with five ships. When the Vikings saw their ships and realised how few they were, they thought that they themselves had plenty of men, and so they seized their weapons and sailed towards them.

Onund told his men to bring their ships into a deep narrow channel between two cliffs [Loch Riddon?]. Then they could only be approached from one direction, and the channel was just wide enough for five ships abreast. Onund, who was a shrewd man, had the five ships brought into the channel in such a way that they could quickly pull back whenever they wanted, for there was plenty of deep water behind them. There was a small island on one side of the channel [Eilean Dubh?], and he had one of his ships lie in its lee. Then they brought a great number of stones to the edge of the cliff above, where they could not be seen from the ships.

The Vikings came on very boldly, thinking the others were in a trap. Vigbjod asked who these men were who were so penned in. Thrand replied, “Here is my companion, Onund Treefoot”.

The Vikings laughed and said:
May trolls take you, Tree-Foot,
May trolls break you all.

‘It is quite a novelty for us to see men going into battle who are so utterly helpless’. Onund said they could not be sure of that until it had been put to the test.

After that they brought their ships together, and a fierce battle began, with both sides fighting well. When the battle was in full swing Onund let his ship drift towards the cliff, and as soon as the Vikings noticed this they thought he was trying to escape, and so they closed on him and came under the cliff as quickly as they could. At that moment the men who had been left on the cliff came forward to the edge. They hurled such big stones down at the Vikings that no resistance was possible. Many of the Vikings were killed and others hurt and put out of the fight. They wanted to get away but were unable to, because their ships were then in the narrowest part of the channel. They were caught by the other ships and the heavy current.

When the crew on Vigbjod’s ship dwindled, Onund and his men attempted to board her. Vigbjod saw this and urged on his men fiercely. Then he turned towards Onund and many retreated before him. Onund who was a powerful man, told his followers to observe how it would turn out for the two of them. They pushed a log under his knee so he stood solidly. The Viking came aft along the ship until he reached Onund. Then he struck at him with his sword, hitting the shield and slicing a piece off, but the sword ran into the log under Onund’s knee and stuck fast. Vigbjod stooped to jerk the sword free, and just then Onund struck at his shoulder, cutting off his arm, and the Viking was out of the fight.

When Vestmar saw that his companion had fallen, he leapt into the ship that lay furthest out and fled away, and so did all who could. After that Onund and his men searched among the dead. Vigbjod was at the point of death. Onund went up to him and said:

Watch your wounds bleed
And think if you’ve ever
Seen me flinch. On a single leg,
I dodged the blows you dealt me.
Some men are full of boasts
Brainless though they be.

(Grettir’s Saga, 7–9)

There is much that could be said of this passage. Note the short sentences suggestive of action. The dialogue cannot be historical though it can be used to make historical points. The viking mode of naval battle was to bring the ships side by side to create a sort of platform or

floating battlefield. Both sides think they can read the sea, the currents and the topography but if so would one be able to trap the other so successfully? Would they not expect some such attack with missiles if they approached the cliffs too closely? In this battle Onund truly earns his soubriquet of 'treeleg'. The one-on-one combat is skillfully depicted. We might assume a man was out of a fight once his arm was cut off but the statement of the obvious was not alien to the saga genre. The poetic banter reminds us that skill in words was almost as important as physical ability. The precise location of the encounter remains problematical; a *Bódach* with good local knowledge is required to work out the site of the conflict. It is noteworthy that all of the vikings clearly had a reasonable knowledge of the Clyde and the Kyles of Bute (fig 4.1) which should remind us that the vikings had been acquainted with the western approaches for a very long time. By 1263, when Hakon's expedition reached Largs, the Norwegians had accumulated four and a half centuries of experience in Scottish waters, which they undoubtedly knew much better than most landlubbers on the mainland. There can be little question that the Scots were apprehensive about attacks from the isles. The castles of Wigtown and Ayr were garrisoned in anticipation of Hakon's attack and the counties of Wigtown, Ayr and Renfrew are richly fringed with fortifications all the way from the Rhinns of Galloway to Glasgow, from Dunskey to Dumbarton, structures facing west on the lookout for incursions by a second Somerled.

The earlier phase of Viking contact with Scotland has been usefully summarised by two archaeologists (Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998) who do not have a great deal to impart about Bute, but the finds from Inchmarnock have generated great excitement with the



Fig 4.1 The Kyles of Bute from Badlia Hill in Bute (DP 067125, © Crown Copyright: RCAHMS. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk).

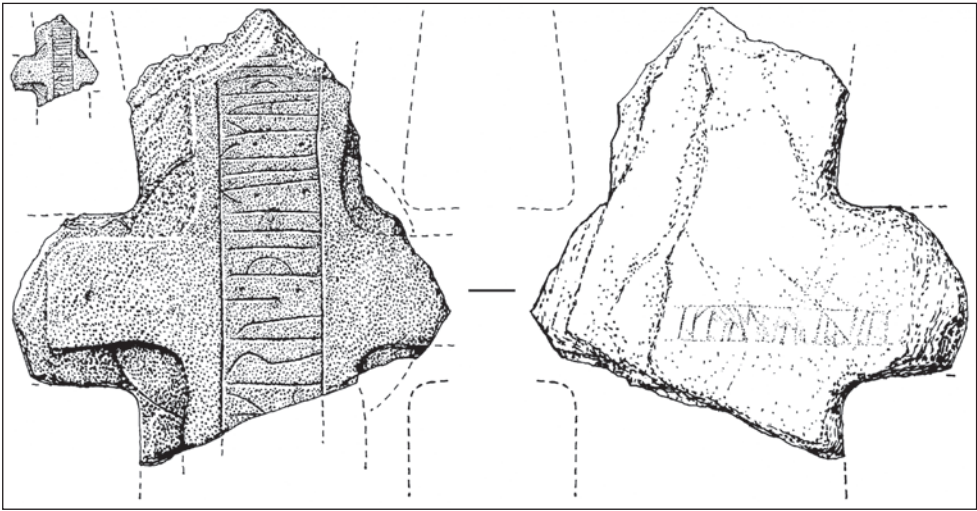


Fig 4.2 Rune-inscribed Norse stone cross from Inchmarnock (SC 403491, © RCAHMS. Drawing by Ian G Scott. Licensor www.rcahms.gov.uk).

discovery of a possible illustration of a viking raid, scratched on a stone (Lowe 2008: fig 6.27, no 46a) (fig 3.2). Inchmarnock has always been intriguing for it is also the site of one of the very few surviving runic inscriptions in the Western Isles. It has been read as containing recognisable words such as ‘cross’ and the name ‘Guthleif’ or ‘Guthleik’ (Hewison 1893, I: 223; Fisher 2001: 79) (fig 4.2). Otherwise the current Scottish historical school of what did *not* happen was well represented at the Royal Society Conference on the impact and influence of the vikings upon Scotland, where of three speakers on the early Vikings, one talked about the English church during the viking era, another discussed the richer sources for Ireland in the period, and a third concentrated on the difficulty of actually assessing the viking impact upon Scotland, in the present state of knowledge. So far DNA evidence throws little light on the genetic make-up of Bute (RSE 2006: 5–10).

The key to what little is known of Bute in the thirteenth century lies in the activities of the descendants of Somerled, the last of whose sons was killed with three of his own offspring in 1210. By whom is not recorded though the MacSorley kindred were engaged in battles with one another, as well as with people who had a claim to Man. It is known that Alexander II of Scotland led an expedition to Argyll in 1221–2, an event sufficiently alarming to prompt some Hebrideans to petition Hakon on ‘the needs of their lands’ (*Hacon’s Saga* i, 89–90). Alan of Galloway complicated the situation by entering the fray in 1228–9 to harry Man and the Isles. Meanwhile the MacSorleys were in revolt against Hakon (Cowan 1990: 112–15).

The saga mentions three grandsons of Somerled who were active in this drama, the sons of Dugald mac Somerled: Dugald, Duncan and Uspak. The last-named is the warrior who attacked Rothesay Castle in 1230. He is said to have long fought as one of the Birchshanks (*Birkibeinar*) alongside Hakon in his drawn-out struggle for the kingship, but ‘it came out that he was Dugald’s son’ (*Hacon’s Saga* I, 150). He was obviously much more of a Norwegian than his stay-at-home brothers, but the saga language may suggest he was illegitimate, which was no great bar to achievement in either Gaelic or Norse society. He was known as the ‘South-islander’ or the ‘Hebridean’. Hakon gave him the title of king [*konungr*] and the name, Hakon;

hence his designation of Uspak-Hakon, a mark of special royal favour not incompatible with the possibility that he had been fostered by the king.

While Uspak was preparing his fleet of eleven ships, at Bergen, King Olaf of Man arrived, seeking help. He reported Alan of Galloway's boast that the sea was no more difficult to cross from Scotland to Norway than in the opposite direction, a hollow threat, so far as the Norwegians were concerned, dismissed by the saga laconically and effectively, with the words, 'that was said not done' (*Hacon's Saga* i, 152). King Uspak's task was to sort out his own kindred, whom he met in the Sound of Islay. A MacSorley invitation to a feast, accompanied by strong wine, was sensibly declined since, notoriously, the climax of Hebridean banquets, then and for several generations, was the butchering of the guests. Each side prepared for the worst, 'for neither trusted the other'. Duncan slept on Uspak's ship and so was safe when the Norwegians captured Dugald, subsequently placing him in the safekeeping of Uspak, who took no part in the attack. With the original eleven ships somehow increased to eighty, an unbelievable number, Uspak sailed down the west of Kintyre and up the Firth of Clyde. Bute was the first target of this king of the Isles.

For three days they besieged the castle, which was under the control of a steward, who was probably in fact the constable of the castle and a member of the Stewart family. 'The Scots defended themselves well, pouring down boiling pitch and lead on the attackers', many of whom were wounded or killed. The Northmen armed themselves with wooden shields while they hacked at the soft stone of the castle wall until it crumbled. The constable was killed and the castle fell; much booty was seized and a Scottish knight (probably a Stewart) was ransomed for 300 silver marks, a colossal sum. Some 300 of the victors also died. Learning that Alan was to the south with 150 ships they sailed round the Mull of Kintyre and north along the coast. Uspak was overtaken by an unexplained illness, and died (*Hacon's Saga* i,

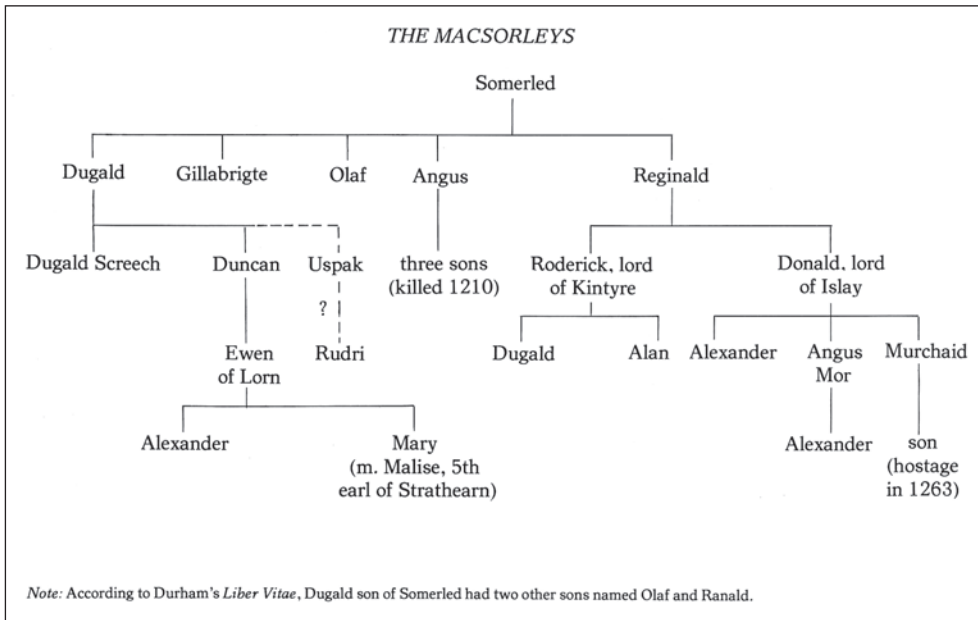


Fig 4.3 Family tree for the MacSorleys.

152–3). According to the *Chronicle of Man* he had been wounded by a stone during the siege. Clearly stones were the favoured weapons in Bute!

There is no further mention of the island in the saga until Hakon mounted his ambitious expedition to the Hebrides in 1263, as he attempted to consolidate his hold on the archipelago. Having arrived at Kerrera, Hakon despatched to Bute, ‘a ship’s captain whose name was Rudri – he was thought to have some claim to Bute’ (*Hakon’s Saga* ii, 351). The suggestion, long ago made, that Rudri was the son of the late Uspak Hakon, remains attractive and plausible (Duncan & Brown 1959: 203, n 5). He was assigned fifteen ships commanded by such captains as Erlend the Red, Andrew Nicholasson, Simon the Short, Ivar the Young and two Sudreyars, Eyfari and Guttorm. ‘Because Rudri did not get the island from the Scots, he strove fiercely against them, slaying many, for which actions he was outlawed by the Scottish king’ (*Hakon’s Saga* ii, 351). According to saga information, additional men were sent to reinforce Rudri’s troops in Bute but when they arrived the castle had already surrendered, in return for an agreement of peace. However Rudri, claiming to know nothing of peace, treacherously pursued them, killing nine men. Thereafter the island fell to Hakon, a triumph celebrated in verse:

The dauntless henchmen of the king,
The man of war so worshipful,
Broad Bute conquered for their lord
From the God-detested race.
The soaring raven thrust his sword
His cloven beak in Southern isles,
Into the bodies of the fallen;
So fell Hakon’s enemies.

‘Then Rudri fared far and wide with many slaughters and robberies and did all the harm that he could’, when, to paraphrase another verse, farms were harried and burned as the hot-raged, hall-crusher ravaged Scotland’s west coast and death-doomed warriors fell in the wasted isle of Skye (*Hakon’s Saga* ii, 351). When Hakon retreated after the encounter at Largs, he officially granted ‘Broad Bute’ to Rudri. He was not part of the expeditionary force which portaged from Loch Long into Loch Lomond to harry its shores and raid ‘almost across Scotland’ but he definitely benefited, or might have done, since, as I have previously suggested, these adventurers were targeting the Stewart estates of Strathearn and Menteith (Cowan 1990: 117, 120–2). As it turned out Rudri was too late. The Stewarts returned to Bute as the Norwegian sun set over the Clyde with the Treaty of Perth in 1266.

Modern Norwegian historians, however, have a different take on all of this. No longer do they recognise that the death of Hakon in Orkney and the subsequent surrender of the Hebrides at Perth represent the death knells of medieval Norway. The *Norgesveldet*, the Norwegian Dominion of the area north of Orkney, continued (Helle 2003: 387). Norwegian foreign policy remained much as it had been before 1266, ‘the loss of the Hebrides and Man having been compensated by the gain of Iceland and Greenland’ (Bagge 2010: 100). An entire volume of essays, helpfully devoted to the investigation of *Norgesveldet*, has recently been published (Imsen 2010). One must defer to a nation’s historians. Had I written the piece on Hakon’s last campaign today, I would not have used the metaphor of Norwegian sunset. Attractive as I find them, metaphors can very often mislead. However, viewed from Perth or

Largs, or anywhere else in Scotland, the treaty of 1266 marks a conjuncture and the end of an era.

One other helpful Norwegian suggestion is to look at the ‘project’ or ‘idea’ that successive rulers had for their kingdom, a fairly necessary recourse for a nation whose documented early history, aside from the sagas, is even more impoverished than that of Scotland. Thus we have Harald Fairhair’s project of unification through tyranny, as he stripped away the freedoms from his subjects, contrasting with that of Hakon the Good’s policy of ‘tentative christianisation’, while his idea changed from force to the consent of the people. Olaf Tryggvason followed with a project of national unification through religion. The model works well for Norway as successive reigns establish evolving layers of experience, and it is persuasive because Norwegian historians do not shy away from writing nationalist history, while the Norwegian people of today find it easy to identify with, and even relate with, the folk of their past. Torgrim Titlestad’s idea of Norway clearly embraces his hero, Erling Skjalgsson, the supreme *hersir* of West Norway, embodiment of generous lordship (for some), an international trader, possibly a pioneer of the commercial fishing industry, a summer viking par excellence, a man who freed his thralls if only out of self interest, owner of a ship capable of holding 240 men, christianiser and ‘king among earls’. Unfortunately for him he fell out with his king, Olaf the Saint, against whom he fought his last battle in 1028. He was one of Snorri Sturluson’s paragons as he faced the inevitable. ‘Face to face should eagles fight’ he said, while standing alone in the stern of his ship as, bloody but unbowed, he greeted Olaf, who, impressed by his martial prowess, offered him mercy. Erling accepted, removing his helmet, but Olaf could not resist marking him on the cheek with his battle-axe: ‘a mark he shall bear, betrayer of his king’. A kingsman nearby sank his axe in Erling’s head. ‘With that blow’ said the king, ‘you struck Norway out of my hand’ (*Heimskringla*, 467; Titlestad 2008: 129–313). It could be said that with the battle of Largs, and hindsight, the Hebrides were struck from the hand of the kings of Norway.

Gael, Norse and Scot all crossed paths in Bute. The island may have been part of the spawning ground of the Gall-Ghàidheil, Gaelic speakers of mixed Norse and Gaelic descent (Clancy 2008: 31). It was obviously seen as a place of great strategic significance, controlling, as it did, access to the Firth of Clyde and the sea lochs of its estuary, placing Glasgow and Dumbarton within reach, as also Loch Lomond via the Leven or Loch Long (Loch of the Ships), and Argyll by way of Loch Fyne. From Bute it was no great distance to the portage across Kintyre between West and East Loch Tarbert, though the saga implies that most of the voyages it records took the south Kintyre route around the Mull. Hence the appeal of the vikings’ Bute project: first, an excellent harbour at Rothesay, (*Baile Bhoïd* in Gaelic, possibly renamed by the Norse in honour of Rudri); second, potential control of the Clyde for its ease of communication and its vast resources. A third aim, made explicit by the 1230 raid, was the control of Rothesay Castle and the urgent expulsion of the Stewarts for it was in Bute that Scotland and Norway truly came face to face, so to speak. From a Norwegian point of view the Stewarts were the aggressors and if they triumphed in Bute then the whole of the Hebrides might be in danger of a Scottish takeover. Had Uspak lived, the process of attrition might have been delayed, though probably not for long. Rudri mac Uspak clearly thought it was worth his while having another go in 1263. He may have spent the previous thirty years attempting to regain what he considered to be his patrimony; we have no way of knowing. He is depicted in the saga as a wild, merciless character but he fits the mould of

many Hebrideans in the period who were trapped between the millstones of Norway and Scotland and who were attempting the best for their kindreds. Bute was thus an important player in this particular story which ended with the Treaty of Perth.

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