

Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic: Part II Paper 3 (A subject in the history of the Celtic-speaking world)

Dr Fiona Edmonds

Sea-kings and the Celtic-speaking world, c. 1014–1164



Castle Sween, Loch Sween, Argyll

This course is aimed at students who have taken either the History of the Brittonic-speaking peoples or the History of the Gaelic-speaking peoples (or both of these courses) at Part I. It will provide such students with an opportunity to study in greater detail a number of the territories which they have already encountered, through the medium of a range of primary sources.

The history of the Irish Sea region, the Hebrides and Argyll in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is an enigmatic, but engaging, topic. The area's history is punctuated by the stories of colourful characters. The Welsh king Gruffudd ap Cynan grew up in Dublin after his father was expelled from Gwynedd, but Gruffudd and his Hiberno-Norse allies launched an attack on Gwynedd in order to reclaim his inheritance. The Gaelic-Scandinavian dynast Somerled held sway over a seemingly autonomous kingdom which comprised coastal areas of mainland Scotland and numerous islands. Yet texts written in milieux favourable to the king of Scots presented Somerled as a rebellious traitor. The extraordinary story of Bishop Wilmund, a monk of Furness and bishop of Man, also draws attention. This cleric raised a fleet to attack the Scottish kingdom, claiming that he had an ancestral right to lands there.

These stories illustrate trends which can be plotted throughout the period. The eleventh and early twelfth centuries witnessed the growth of the kingdom of the Scots, and consolidation of widespread political power in Ireland in the hands of a select few dynasties. In Wales, an extensive hegemony developed under the aegis of Gruffudd ap Llywelyn. Yet the sea-kings managed to preserve some autonomy, even in the face of these developments. The cultural milieux in which the sea-kings operated also bear consideration: a complex mixture of Gaelic-, Brittonic- and Norse-speaking populations dwelt in Galloway and Strathclyde, but these territories nevertheless produced coherent political entities.

The primary sources which will be studied during the course are available in print, and most of them exist in recent and accessible editions and translations. The last two decades have witnessed a steady flow of publications on the topic, with the result that the body of secondary literature is now fairly extensive. These works will aid Part II students, but they will also find that this paper offers considerable scope for original thought and research.

Organisation of teaching

The course will be taught through the medium of seminars, at which students will discuss pre-circulated papers. Bibliographies will be provided to enable students to prepare their presentations. The rest of the session will be devoted to discussion between the presenter, the other students and the course convenor. In addition to their presentations, students will be expected to write a number of short essays or answers to gobbet questions. It is expected that eight seminars will be held in Michaelmas term and eight in Lent term. There may be scope for revision sessions of a more informal nature in the Easter term.

Examination

The examination will be a three-hour paper. Candidates will be expected to answer question one and three others. In order to answer question one, candidates will have to comment on three passages out of the five provided. Questions two to twelve will be essay questions. Each question will be worth 25% of the marks.

Course Outline

Michaelmas Term

- 1 Culture and language on the Welsh coast, c. 1000
- 2 The maritime dimension of eleventh-century Welsh politics
- 3 Wales, Ireland and the Normans to the end of the reign of Owain Gwynedd
- 4 Source focus: The Lives of Gruffudd ap Cynan
- 5 The impact of ‘kings of Ireland’ and ‘kings of Ireland with opposition’
- 6 The Hiberno-Norse towns
- 7 The Hiberno-Norse bishoprics and Church reform in Ireland

8 Source focus: Extracts from *Cogad Gaedel re Gallaib* and Irish annals

Lent Term

- 1 Culture and language in Man, the Isles and Argyll
- 2 Politics and the Church in Man, the Isles and Argyll
- 3 Source focus: *Cronica Regum Mannie et Insularum*
- 4 Somerled and the kings of the Scots
- 5 Cumbria and Galloway
- 6 Theme: Political structures and ‘Europeanisation’
- 7 Theme: Connections between churches
- 8 Theme: The economy

Introductory bibliography (secondary works)

- J.E. Lloyd, *A History of Wales from the Earliest Times to the Edwardian Conquest*, 3rd edn. (2 vols, London, 1967), I, 320–56; II, 357–535.
- K. Maund (ed.), *Gruffudd ap Cynan: A Collaborative Bibliography*, Studies in Celtic History 16 (Woodbridge, 1996).
- D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972).
- S. Duffy, ‘Irishmen and Islesmen in the kingdoms of Dublin and Man, 1052–1171’, *Ériu*, 43 (1992), 93–113.
- R.A. McDonald, *The Kingdom of the Isles: Scotland’s Western Seaboard, c. 1100– c.1336* (East Linton, 1997).
- Richard Oram, *The Lordship of Galloway* (Edinburgh, 2000).