

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

Dr Ali Bonner

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



Castle Sween, Loch Sween, Argyll

Course Description 2018–19

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 aims to 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. By the end of the course, it is hoped that students will have acquired a detailed knowledge of the history of the Irish Sea region and the Isles, a broad understanding of the European historical context, and the ability to deal with a wide range of evidence including texts, place-names, personal names and coins.

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 milieus 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 our 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 milieus 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.

Aims and Learning outcomes

The aims of the course are:

- to provide an overview of Celtic history in the eleventh and twelfth centuries;
- to introduce students to source material of various types;
- to provide students with opportunities to practice source criticism;
- to introduce students to historiography and concepts that underlie historical scholarship.

By the end of the course, students should be able to do the following:

- discuss the history of territories around the Irish Sea and the Isles;
- think across national boundaries;
- analyse source material of various types, such as chronicles and numismatic material;
- identify the historiographical concepts that underlie secondary literature;
- think critically about fundamental concepts, such as the medieval “state”;
- assemble evidence and analysis to produce compelling written arguments.

Organisation of teaching

The course will be taught through the medium of seminars, at which students will discuss pre-circulated essays. Bibliographies will be provided to enable students to prepare their essays, and all of the students are expected to read a selection of ‘essential reading’ each week. The rest of the session will be devoted to discussion between the presenter, the other students and the course convenor. The seminar convenor will return the essays to the presenters with comments. Eight seminars are held in Michaelmas term and eight in Lent term. There will be revision sessions of a more informal nature during Easter term.

Learning resources

Students should sign up to the ‘Sea-Kings’ Moodle site. This hosts electronic copies of all of the ‘essential reading’ articles, as well as scanned copies of the handouts and bibliographies provided during each seminar. The Moodle site also hosts other learning resources, such as quizzes that can be used after the relevant seminars or during the revision period. The detailed weekly bibliographies refer to books and articles that can be accessed in the University Library, the ASNC library and some of the college libraries.

Examination

The examination is a three-hour paper. Candidates are expected to answer question one and three others. In order to answer question one, candidates have to comment on three passages out of the five provided. Questions two to twelve are essay questions. Each question is 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 Gáedel 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: Ecclesiastical links (source focus: Jocelin of Furness)
- 8 Theme: The economy

Primary works

- D. S. Evans (transl.), *A Mediaeval Prince of Wales: The Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan* (Felinfach, 1990).
- P. Russell (ed. & transl.), *Vita Griffini Filii Conani. The Medieval Latin Life of Gruffudd ap Cynan* (Cardiff, 2005).
- J. H. Todd (ed. & transl.), *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh: The War of the Gaedhil with the Gaill* (London, 1867).
- G. Broderick (ed. & transl.), *Cronica Regum Mannie et Insularum: Chronicles of the Kings of Man and the Isles* (Douglas, 1996) [facing Latin text and English translation].

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).
- K. Maund, *The Welsh Kings: The Medieval Rulers of Wales* (Stroud, 2002)
- 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.
- Alex Woolf, ‘The Age of Sea-Kings: 900–1300’, in D. Omand (ed.), *The Argyll Book* (Edinburgh, 2004), pp. 94–109.
- R.A. McDonald, *Manx Kingship in its Irish Sea Setting, 1187–1229* (Dublin, 2007).
- Richard Oram, *The Lordship of Galloway* (Edinburgh, 2000).
- Robert Bartlett, *Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Cultural Change, 950–1350* (London, 1993)