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Source: *The Scottish Historical Review*, Vol. 79, No. 208, Part 2 (Oct., 2000), pp. 145-164

Published by: Edinburgh University Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25530971>

Accessed: 12-07-2016 11:15 UTC

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ALEX WOOLF

The ‘Moray Question’ and the Kingship of Alba in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries

It has become something of an orthodoxy in recent years that in the tenth and eleventh centuries there were two Gaelic-speaking kingdoms occupying the northernmost parts of the island of Britain, ‘Alba’ and ‘Muréb’.¹ In David Dumville’s words ‘[u]ntil about 900 *Alba* had meant “Britain”. Its adoption as the name of the kingdom of the Southern Picts caused a rapid narrowing of usage, but in time, as the kingdom of Alba became dominant in North Britain, the word came also by the twelfth century to adopt its modern meaning of “Scotland”.’² The territory designated ‘the kingdom of the Southern Picts’ in this passage was also known as Fortriu, and comprised, broadly speaking, the lands north of the Forth and south of the Mounth (the line of hills which stretch from the central Highlands almost as far as the coast near Aberdeen). The limits of Muréb are less clear. Certainly, it seems to be envisaged as somewhat greater in extent than modern Moray, to which it lends its name, but whether its eastern boundary was the Spey or further east is unclear, as is the extent of its territory to the west and south, in Ross and Lochaber.³ To a great extent Muréb is imagined as the negative imprint of our knowledge of effective Scandinavian settlement and control in the north of Scotland; what the Vikings cannot be demonstrated, or believed, to have held must, it is assumed, have been held by the Moravians. The affiliation of the north-east, modern Aberdeenshire and the medieval earldoms of Buchan and Mar, is entirely obscure and the possibility that it forms a third unit should not be dismissed.

¹ For recent statements of this view, see B. Hudson, *Kings of Celtic Scotland* (Westport, Conn., 1994), 127–48; D. Broun, ‘The Birth of Scottish history’, *ante*, lxxvi (1997), 4–22; D. Broun, ‘Defining Scotland and the Scots before the Wars of Independence’, in D. Broun, R. J. Finlay and M. Lynch (eds.), *Image and Identity: The Making and Remaking of Scotland through the Ages* (Edinburgh, 1998), 4–17; and D. Dumville, *The Churches of North Britain in the First Viking Age: The Fifth Whithorn Lecture* (Whithorn, 1997), 35–6.

² Dumville, *Churches of North Britain*, note 106.

³ G. W. S. Barrow, ‘Macbeth and other mormaers of Moray’, *The Hub of the Highlands: The Book of Inverness and District* (Inverness and Edinburgh, 1975), 109. Barrow presents here an alternative view of the early history of *Muréb* to that offered by the scholars listed in note 1, preferring to see the province simply as one of a series of mormaerdoms within the ‘Picto-Scottish’ kingdom.

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What will be explored in this article is whether or not the assumption that the term *Alba* was originally used to designate the southern kingdom only can be sustained, and, if not, what exactly the relationship between the province of Muréb and the kings of Alba was in the tenth and eleventh centuries. This 'Moray Question' lies at the heart of the study of medieval Scottish history, since the nature of the relationship of the kingdom of the Scots to the regions north of the Mounth was subject to violent dispute of varying sorts into the fifteenth century. Whether we interpret these struggles as northern separatism or southern imperialism depends very much upon how we perceive the relationship between the two provinces to have developed in the earliest days of the kingdom of Alba.⁴

*

Central to the 'Moray Question' is the career of Mac Bethad mac Finnlaich, the historical MacBeth, one of Scotland's best known rulers. In the mid-eleventh century, Mac Bethad slew Donnchad king of Alba⁵ and took and held the kingship for seventeen years, finally dying of his wounds after repelling an attempt to seize his kingdom by Donnchad's son Máel Coluim.⁶

Mac Bethad's success has been viewed in a number of ways by historians. Some, taking their lead from the late thirteenth-century *Chronicle of Huntingdon*, see Mac Bethad, like his rival Donnchad, as a uterine grandson of Máel Coluim II, Donnchad's predecessor, who had died peacefully in 1034 not, so far as we know, survived by any male issue.⁷ This interpretation of events would see the contest between Donnchad and Mac Bethad as simply a dispute between two claimants of dubious but equal legitimacy.⁸ An alternative perspective would see Mac Bethad's victory as a successful bid for the kingship of Alba made by a rival dynasty with an

⁴ For a discussion of the 'Moray Question' in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see R. Oram, 'David I and the Scottish conquest and colonisation of Moray', *Northern Scotland*, xix (1999), 1–19.

⁵ *The Annals of Ulster* [AU], ed. S. Mac Airt and G Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1983), 1040.5.

⁶ AU, 1058.6; for Mac Bethad's victory at the fatal battle of Lumphanan, see Hudson, *Kings of Celtic Scotland*, 144.

⁷ For the *Chronicle of Huntingdon*, see W. F. Skene (ed.), *Chronicles of the Picts, Chronicles of the Scots and other Memorials of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1867), 209–213. Máel Coluim II's death is noted at AU, 1034.1, and no source save Radulf Glaber's *Historiarum Libri Quinque*, ed. J. France (Oxford, 1989), ii, 3, mentions any male issue.

⁸ Dubious in as much as Gaelic custom did not generally recognise succession through the female line; see D. Ó Corráin, 'Irish regnal succession: A reappraisal', *Studia Hibernica*, xi (1971), 7–39, T. Charles-Edwards, *Early Irish and Welsh Kinship* (Oxford, 1993), 89–110, and A. Woolf, 'Pictish matriliney reconsidered', *Innes Review*, xli (1998), 147–67. The succession of a uterine grandson does not seem to have been unprecedented in this dynasty, however, if we are to believe the statement of the *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* [CKA] that Áed mac Cináeda was succeeded by his sister's son Eochaid in the late ninth century; it may not, however, be coincidence that he was expunged in all other accounts of the succession; CKA is edited in M. O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (Edinburgh 1980), at 249–253, and B. Hudson, 'The Scottish Chronicle', *ante*, lxxvii (1998), 129–161.

entirely different power base. The most forthright protagonist of this latter view has been Benjamin Hudson who, in his *Kings of Celtic Scotland*, argued that the Cenél Loairn, which had sometimes wrested the over-kingship of Dál Riata from Cenél nGabráin in the late seventh and early eighth centuries, had moved up the Great Glen from their homeland in northern Argyll and had established themselves in the region of Muréb as part of an historical process which was distinct from the seizure of the kingship of Pictavia by Cináed mac Ailpín in the 840s.⁹

The suggestion that Mac Bethad's kindred in the male line were Cenél Loairn is based on no Scottish source but on a pedigree of his kinsman Máel Snechta († *Annals of Ulster* [AU], 1085.1) preserved in a number of Irish compilations. Máel Snechta was the son of Lulach, son of Gilla Comgáin, and Gilla Comgáin's father was the brother of Mac Bethad's father Findláech. These relationships can also be reconstructed from the evidence of the annals.¹⁰ The Cenél Loairn pedigree of Máel Snechta is found in four MS texts, Rawlinson B.502, the Book of Leinster (LL), the Book of Ballymote (BB), and the Book of Lecan (Lec.).¹¹ Whilst the early date (LL, c.1120) of some of these manuscripts may suggest that the pedigree was indeed used by Máel Snechta and perhaps by Mac Bethad before him, there are grounds for suspicion. Firstly, Findláech who died in 1020 is removed from Aincellach (†AU, 719.6) by only seven generations. This would give an *average* generation length of forty-three years, which seems barely credible. This is not, however, the least of the problems of credibility with which the pedigree presents us.

In essence, Máel Snechta's pedigree can be subdivided into three sections. Two of these were the pedigrees of two contemporary Cenél Loairn dynasts, Ainbcellach mac Ferchair Fotai, who was expelled from the kingship of Dál Riata in 698,¹² and his cousin Mongán mac Domnall.¹³ Mongán's pedigree has been 'stacked' on top of Ainbcellach's apparently in the mistaken belief that Mongán's great-great-grandfather Ferchar was the same man as Ainbcellach's father.¹⁴ The third pedigree utilised within this compilation is made up of Máel Snechta and the five generations immediately above him. This pedigree only adds one name to those which can be reconstructed from annalistic references,¹⁵ that of Domnall, father to Ruaidrí and grandfather to Findláech and Máel Brigte. The gap that is left between the generation of Ainbcellach and

⁹ Hudson, *Kings of Celtic Scotland*, 127–48.

¹⁰ W. Stokes (ed.), 'The Annals of Tigernach [AT]: The Fourth Fragment, AD 973–1088', *Revue Celtique*, xvii (1896), 337–420; AT, 1020; AU, 1032.2, 1058.2, 1085.1.

¹¹ This analysis of the pedigrees is based upon an unpublished paper by D. Broun: 'A few notes on the genealogy of Máelsnechta mac Lulaich'; I am grateful to Dr Broun for lending me a text and for discussing its significance. See also D. Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Woodbridge, 1999), at 173 note 36.

¹² AU, 698.4.

¹³ For an edition of these pedigrees, which were attached to the *Senchus Fer nAlban*, see J. Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dabriada* (Edinburgh, 1974), 66.

¹⁴ The 'correct', or at least earlier, pedigrees appear in *ibid.*, 66.

¹⁵ See note 8 above.

Mongán, which came to an end c.700, and that of Findláech, who was killed in 1020, cannot be credibly filled by Domnall and Ruadrí alone. Thus the pedigree of Máel Snechta, as presented by his own *senchae*, in all probability did not go back beyond Ruadrí mac Domnaill, whose *floruit* will have been in the latter decades of the tenth century.¹⁶

This does not mean, of course, that Máel Snechta, and indeed Mac Bethad, did not think of themselves as Cenél Loairn; the fact that the early stages of the pedigree were constructed solely from Cenél Loairn material suggests that it was perceived as an important link. But it does mean that we cannot demonstrate this to have been the case and that they themselves do not seem to have thought it important to demonstrate the fact. Had they done so it seems unlikely that the Irish antiquarian responsible for fabricating the pedigree alluded to would have needed to go to such trouble. We must then ask the question, did their claims to kingship depend upon their (hypothetical) Cenél Loairn ancestry, as Hudson has suggested?

It has already been noted that the bulk of the genuine pedigree of this family can be corroborated by the chronicle record. References to this family begin in 1020 with the notice of the killing of Findláech by his nephews, the sons of Máel Brigte. In the *Annals of Tigernach* [AT], which identifies the killers, we are told that Findláech mac Ruadrí was mormaer of *Muréb*, but in the *Annals of Ulster*, which are usually held to reflect contemporary usage more accurately, he is designated *ri Alban*. A similar style is awarded to Findláech's nephew Máel Coluim mac Maíl Brigte at his death in 1029 by AT whilst AU and the *Annals of the Four Masters*¹⁷ simply give his name with no title. When this Máel Coluim's brother, Gilla Comgáin, was burned with fifty of his retinue even the *Annals of Ulster*¹⁸ style him 'Mormaer of Muréb' – his killing is not noticed elsewhere.

Hudson has argued that the failure of even AU to style Gilla Comgáin 'king' bears witness to his cousin Mac Bethad, rather than he himself, having succeeded Máel Coluim mac Maíl Brigte as ruler of Muréb. His evidence for this is the appearance of Mac Bethad as a king alongside Máel Coluim mac Cináeda, the 'southern' king, in a meeting with Cnut which he would place in this period, and on the reign length of thirty years given to Mac Bethad in the late eleventh-century *Prophecy of Berchán*.¹⁹ The failure of AT to note Gilla Comgáin's death may also reflect the fact that he had achieved lower status than some of his kinsmen. This may indeed be the case but it is not the only observation that can be made at this point.

¹⁶ The foregoing paragraphs are a summary of an unpublished paper kindly shown to me by Dauvit Broun (see note 11). This summary hardly does justice to Broun's full analysis but is sufficient for present purposes.

¹⁷ *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland by the Four Masters, II* [AFM], ed. J. O'Donovan (Dublin, 1856).

¹⁸ AU, 1032.2.

¹⁹ The meeting of Cnut with the northern kings appears in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, MSE, s. a.1031. B. Hudson discusses this in 'Cnut and the Scottish kings', *English Historical Review*, cviii (1992), 350–60, and in *Kings of Celtic Scotland*, 136–8.

In this group of annalistic references the title that is conspicuous by its absence is *rí Muiréb*, king of 'Moray'. The leading members of this lineage are styled either mormaer of Muréb or king of Alba. If the proposition put forward by scholars such as Dumville and Broun, cited at the beginning of this article, holds true, that Muréb and Alba were two distinct kingdoms separated by the Mounth, then why are the 'Moravians' who are ascribed royal status consistently called kings of Alba? The term *rí Muiréb* does in fact appear in the Irish chronicle record, but at a much later date, in *AU*, 1085.1, when the death of Máel Snechta is noted, and it is, perhaps, implied again in the same chronicle, under the year 1130.4, when 4,000 of the men of Muréb, along with their king (Máel Snechta's nephew Oengus), were slain in battle against the men of Alba. Here in the last ever notice of this kindred, in the middle of the twelfth century, we meet what seems to be a clear distinction between the men of Alba and Muréb for the first time in our sources.²⁰ From this time on until late in the reign of William the Lion a distinction between Scotia and Moray appears consistently in Scottish sources;²¹ but is this a reflection of conditions pertaining to the period prior to the reign of Máel Coluim Cenn Mór (1058–93) or merely a reflection of the failure of his dynasty to secure itself in the northern part of a divided kingdom for the first 160 years of its *floruit*?

As far as we know, the leaders of this kindred immediately preceding Máel Snechta were his father, Lulach mac Gilla Comgáin, and, before him, Mac Bethad mac Finnlaich. Given the paucity of the sources for this period we cannot be certain that another member of the kindred did not hold sway between Lulach's death in 1058 and the first mention of Máel Snechta in 1078,²² but assuming, for reasons of economy, that they were indeed his immediate predecessors we should note that both of them had made good their claim to the kingship of the southern province and were recognised in the official king-lists that were drawn up at least as early 1093–4.²³ This leaves us with the probability that for nearly eighteen years before Máel Snechta's kingship began there had been only one Gaelic kingdom in northern Britain. We should therefore be wary of assuming that the situation subsequent to this period of unity necessarily reflects conditions prevailing before it. Indeed, on the basis of the primary sources alone, we might consider that the concept of a 'king of Muréb' belongs exclusively to the period following Máel Coluim III's accession to the kingship of Alba in 1058.

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²⁰ Though it should be noted that *Fir Érenn*, the men of Ireland, are often found in conflict with other Irish polities, e.g., *AU*, 858.4, so the fact that one side in a battle is described as men of Alba does not exclude the possibility that the others were also.

²¹ For a discussion, see Broun, 'Defining Scotland and the Scots', in Broun, Finlay and Lynch, *Image and Identity*, 4–13.

²² In the D text of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: A Collaborative Edition*, Vol. 6 *MS D*, ed. G. P. Cubbin (Woodbridge, 1996).

²³ Broun, *Irish Identity of the Scots*, 165–74.

As has been noted, the family of these 'Moravian' rulers, whom we may call Clann Ruaidrí after the father of Findláech and Máel Brigte, was first noticed in the annals in 1020. Prior to this date there is only one explicit reference to Muréb in any of our sources. The *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba*, after noting the accession to the kingship of Máel Coluim mac Domnaill (c. 943), describes how he led an army into Muréb and killed Cellach. Who this Cellach was we do not know. The name seems to have been very common in this period, being borne by a bishop of Alba in 906,²⁴ by the son of Cústantín II who was killed at Brunnanburh (according to the *Annals of Clonmacnois*²⁵), and by two of the Albanian mormaers mentioned in the *Annals of Tigernach* under the year 975, as well as by numerous Irishmen. It has become commonplace to suggest that the Cellach slain in Muréb by Máel Coluim I was a ruler of Muréb related in some way to Clann Ruaidrí, but neither of these possibilities can be demonstrated.²⁶ Beyond this there are no references to Muréb in any sources relating to the tenth century. Although much later chronicles often ascribe the killing of Scots kings of this period to Moravians, the more reliable *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* and *Annals of Ulster* usually supply alternative versions of their death tales.²⁷

The question which must be asked at this point is whether the absence of Muréb from the records bears testimony to a gap in our documentation or to the absence of a significant political entity bearing this name? While pondering this question we should also recall that, when given the royal title, Clann Ruaidrí dynasts before Máel Snechta are all called 'king of Alba'. Does such nomenclature reflect extreme ignorance on the part of the Irish chroniclers (who, it seems to be supposed, knew the family relationships of these kings but not the name of the realm they ruled) or is Alba still being used in a very vague sense of 'Gaelic speaking Britain' in much the same way as the chronicles usually refer to British kings simply as 'king of the Britons' regardless of whether they are rulers of Dumbarton, Strathclyde, Gwynedd or wherever? In such cases, however, it is an ethnic term rather than a territorial term which allows the ambiguity. To establish the answer to this last question we must look at the use of the term *rí Alban* in the period prior to the notice of Findláech's death in 1020.

The term 'king of Alba' first appears in the *Annals of Ulster* in the notice of the death of Domnall mac Cústantín, a grandson of Cináed mac Ailpín.²⁸ At about the same period the *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* starts to use the term *Albania* rather than *Pictavia* for the kingdom ruled by the descendants of Ailpín. *Pictavia* is last mentioned in the general statement

²⁴ *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba*.

²⁵ *The Annals of Clonmacnois* [A. Clon.] ed. D. Murphy (Dublin, 1896): A. Clon., 931 (*recte* 937).

²⁶ See Hudson, 'The Scottish Chronicle', 151 (text) and 158, n. 48 (interpretation).

²⁷ For a discussion, see D. Broun, 'Consolidating Alexander II's kingship', in R. Oram (ed.), *Scotland in the Reign of Alexander II* (forthcoming).

²⁸ AU, 900.6.

that in Domnall's reign Pictavia was wasted by Northmen, and Albania first appears in a notice that in the third year of Custantín's reign the Northmen plundered Dunkeld and all of Albania. This latter event seems to be recorded in the *Annals of Ulster* under the year 904 when, we are told, 'Ímar grandson of Ímar, was killed by the men of Fortriu, and there was great slaughter around them'.²⁹ It also seems to be the historical event behind the narrative of Ímar's attack on Alba recounted in the *Fragmentary Annals*.³⁰ From this time on, the use of the term *rí Alban* seems to be confined, in the chronicles, to the descendants of Cináed mac Ailpín right up until the killing of Findláech in 1020.

The most notable feature of succession to the kingship of Alba in the tenth century is the regular alternation between the lines descended from the two sons of Cináed. This alternation is most clearly visible in the king-lists that survive in twelfth-century recensions.³¹ According to this evidence, Domnall ua Cináeda was succeeded by his first cousin Custantín who was succeeded by Domnall's son Máel Coluim who was succeeded by Custantín's son Illulb, and so on. Scottish historians have tended to see this as 'traditional Gaelic practice' or 'tanistry', but those more familiar with Irish regnal succession might have cause to query such an interpretation.

In an important article published in 1971, Donnchadh Ó Corráin established that the normal pattern of succession to early medieval Gaelic kingships was governed by situational factors and that, whilst most successful contenders for kingship belonged to the same agnatic lineage as the majority of their predecessors, there was no formal regulation by either election or designation.³² This meant that the kingship tended to go to the most vigorous and experienced adult male in any generation, usually the son or grandson of a previous king but not always so. Regular alternation between segments was not the order of the day, for the number of segments could not be regulated, every male child within the dynasty potentially spawning a new segment.³³ This meant that son rarely followed father directly and that several brothers might rule in turn.

The only well-established case of a regular alternation of lines in the kingship, other than amongst the descendants of Cináed mac Ailpín, is that of the kingship of Tara. From the mid-eighth to the early tenth century, the kingship of Tara was held alternately, with two brief interruptions, by members of the Clann Cholmáin dynasty of Mide and the Cenél nEógain dynasty of Ailech, both branches of the Uí Néill family. Prior to this date the title king of Tara – *rí Temrach* in Irish or *rex Temoriae* in Latin – seems to have been borne by the paramount leader of the Uí Néill who

²⁹ *AU*, 904.4.

³⁰ *The Fragmentary Annals of Ireland*, ed. J. N. Radner (Dublin, 1978), § 429. This episode appears as a retrospective comparison at pp. 170–1.

³¹ For the various king-lists and their inter-relationships, see Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, and Broun, *Irish Identity of the Scots*, 133–94.

³² D. Ó Corráin, 'Irish regnal succession', 7–39 (see note 8 above).

³³ The ramifications of this are explored in Charles-Edwards, *Irish and Welsh Kinship*, 89–111.

controlled several dispersed territories each with their own king. This paramount leader might have been drawn from any of the septs and the paramountcy was at times monopolised by one segment for several successive reigns. The alternating succession which developed between the kings of Ailech and Mide seems to have stemmed from an agreement between these two branches of the dynasty which aimed to exclude other branches, such as the Cenél Conaill and the Síl nÁedo Sláine, and to duopolise the leadership of the extended kindred.³⁴

The kingship of Tara was able to alternate in a way other Gaelic kingships were not because its holders were all already kings, in Ailech or Mide, and the selection process for these kingships was far less clear-cut and much more in line with other early Insular patterns of regnal succession. The title 'king of Tara' simply passed between the kings of Mide and Ailech and did not take into account how these kings won their positions. Thus the easy succession of first a Cenél nEógain dynast and then one from Clann Cholmáin belies the murkier reality which underlay the internecine disputes over succession in the two provincial kingdoms. Eventually, in the latter part of the tenth century, one Cenél nEógain dynast, Domnall ua Néill, king of Ailech from 943 until his death in 980, attempted to set aside the alternating succession and to conquer the Clann Cholmain homeland. Although he was ultimately unsuccessful in this project, his actions spelled the end of the alternating kingship.³⁵

The regular alternation of the over-kingship of Tara in Ireland was in part facilitated by the fact that the territorial bases of the Cenél nEógain and Clann Cholmáin lay far apart, the one around the shores of Loch Foyle, in the north, and the other in the West Midlands. Ailech and Mide were separated from one another by a series of territories occupied by less important Uí Néill segments and by tributary population groups (the Airgialla). Because the wealth and power of the two dynasties, measured in land, cattle and clients, were located in their respective homelands, the ruler of the day was not in a position to exclude other segments of the dynasty as he might have been had their own resource base been contiguous with his own. The success of the alternating kingship relied upon the inability of the kings of either Ailech or Mide to control the other region effectively. Had a unitary, unilineal kingship begun to develop in either area, it would almost certainly have led to a reduction of the territorial extent of effective royal power. Indeed, this is, to a great extent, what happened in Ireland in the 150 years leading up to the Norman invasion.³⁶ Under the alternating succession, any given king of Tara could, in theory, rely upon his expected successor to operate as viceroy over that part of

³⁴ G. F. Dalton discusses these developments in 'The alternating dynasties, 734–1022', *Studia Hibernica*, xvi (1976), 46–53.

³⁵ For a brief discussion, see D. Ó Corráin, *Ireland before the Normans* (Dublin, 1972), 119–20.

³⁶ For a discussion of the political configuration of late pre-Norman Ireland, see F. J. Byrne, 'The trembling sod: Ireland in 1169', in A. Cosgrove (ed.), *A New History of Ireland*, Vol. II (Oxford, 1987), 1–42.

the confederacy which lay beyond his own effective reach. In practice, of course, the king in waiting often became tired of waiting.

The absolute regularity in the alternation of the succession to the kingship of Alba in the tenth century must lead us to wonder if there were in fact two territorial bases in which the descendants of the two sons of Cináed could, respectively, monopolise access to the sources of power. If this were not the case, it is hard to see why a strong king with a long reign, such as Cusantín mac Áeda (900–c.943), was unable to ensure that one of his own sons succeeded to the kingship. Every one of these kings, other than perhaps Cusantín mac Cuilén (995–7), had sons who lived into adulthood, so in no case was the actual successor the heir of the flesh of the dying king, or even the only adult male in the kindred. It is also hard to accept that these men had only one adult son each. Had some of these dynasts produced more than one son we might have expected brother to succeed brother in a normal succession on at least one occasion. In the tenth century, however, only one set of brothers Dub (962–6) and Cináed II (971–95) both held the kingship, and even in their case the other line, represented by Cuilén (966–71), intervened.³⁷ This regular alternation does seem to suggest that the descendants of Cusantín mac Cináeda and Áed mac Cináeda each had their own powerbase and client network as the kings of Ailech and Mide did in Ireland. We should expect these territories to have been, like those of Ailech and Mide, geographically discrete.

If this hypothesis is correct then the appearance of members of Clann Ruaidrí as kings of Alba in the early eleventh century may relate to the disappearance from the record of the descendants of Áed mac Cináeda. Cusantín III (995–7) was the last of Áed's line to appear in any of our sources and he was killed at Rathinveramon, near Scone, by his successor Cináed mac Duib.³⁸ The first mention of Clann Ruaidrí in the annals is the notice of the murder of Findláech mac Ruaidrí in 1020. As we have seen, the *Annals of Ulster* style Findláech king of Alba, but we have no way of knowing when he first made this claim. We might have expected Cusantín's death to be followed by the kingship passing to the senior member of the other line, and indeed Cináed mac Duib (997–1005) does fulfil that role. On Cináed's death the kingship remained with his branch of the dynasty, going to his first cousin Máel Coluim II (1005–1034). One might have expected at this point to see the kingship go, not to Máel Coluim, but to a representative of the Clann Áeda meic Cináeda.

As long ago as 1975, A. A. M. Duncan wrote that 'if we set aside the fourteenth century phantasies of Fordun we might see Malcolm II as an unsuccessful ruler who lost control of northern Scotland to the rulers of Moray'.³⁹ If this assessment is correct – and it should be noted that it is

³⁷ The succession by a brother rather than a son in this case is probably to be explained with reference to the brevity of both Dub and Cuilén's reigns. It is unlikely that any of Dub's sons were old enough to be considered as candidates for the kingship at the time of Cuilén's death.

³⁸ King-lists D, F, I; reproduced in Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*.

³⁹ A. A. M. Duncan, *Scotland: The Making of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1975), 100.

only in Máel Coluim II's reign that we definitely have alternative claimants to the title *rí Alban* in the Irish chronicles – then one might wonder whether it is a coincidence that this disputation and division in the kingdom arises at precisely the point at which Clann Custantín meic Cináeda set aside the custom of alternating kingship. If Findláech mac Ruaidrí's claim to the kingship was indeed an attempt to maintain the tradition of the alternating lineages, then one must ask, what was the relationship between Clann Áeda and Clann Ruaidrí?

No source claims that Ruaidrí was a descendant of Cináed mac Ailpín in the male line. Although, as we have seen, the pedigree of this family concocted by late eleventh- or early twelfth-century Irish genealogists is unreliable, indeed demonstrably at fault, it seems unlikely that such a concoction would have been deemed necessary had Máel Snechta's kindred had a more recent Cenél nGabraín king in its agnatic pedigree.⁴⁰ Ruaidrí's father was probably the Domnall of the pedigree, but his antecedents are unknowable. What then was the right by which the descendants of Ruaidrí claimed the kingship of Alba?

In one of the few original passages in Book IV of the *Scotichronicon*, Walter Bower wrote that 'every king claims legitimacy for himself through blood descent or by right of election or through achieving power by conquest or through the gift of a higher prince.'⁴¹ Bower's maxim comes in the context of discussing Máel Coluim II's legitimacy, but whilst it is more likely to be his own invention rather than a contemporary insight or argument, it is a fairly good summary of the position of regal legitimacy throughout the Middle Ages. Any one of these claims is sufficient, Bower argues, but a combination of them is desirable. In the case of Findláech mac Ruaidrí, we can discount the gift of a higher prince and probably right by conquest, since there is no evidence that he was a ruler of any sort outwith the kingdom. Blood descent and right of election are the most likely routes by which he attained the kingship. We have seen that descent from Cináed mac Ailpín in the male line is not likely, but it may well have been the case that just such a descent existed in the female line. Since Máel Coluim mac Mail Brigte succeeded Findláech in the northern claim to the kingship, it seems likely that royal blood was brought into the family either by Ruaidrí's wife or his mother. If we accept that Domnall belongs to the true pedigree of Máel Snechta, then perhaps it is his wife rather than his son who is the more credible choice. More than this we cannot say, but Custantín mac Áeda (900–c.943), or his sons or grandsons, might all have begotten suitable daughters.

In general, Gaelic custom does not seem to have regarded the passage of the royal title through the female line as a legitimate succession.⁴² In

⁴⁰ An unlikely possibility, though worth considering, is that the pedigree belongs specifically to Clann Ruaidrí's period as kings of Muréb, rather than Alba, and seeks to legitimise tiered kingship within Alba by reference to the relationship of Cenél Loairn to Cenél nGabraín in the sixth and seventh centuries. See the conclusion (below, p. 164) for a context for such a position.

⁴¹ Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, ed. Watt, ii, 396–7.

⁴² Charles-Edwards, *Irish and Welsh Kinship*, 89–110.

this light one might ask why it was thought necessary to continue the alternation of the kingship after the extinction of Clann Áeda meic Cináeda? At this point Bower's second legitimisation, that of election, comes into play. As we saw earlier, the extraordinarily regular alternation of the kingship of Alba in the tenth century almost certainly bears witness to the fact that the two branches of the dynasty had separate territorial bases. These bases were not simply real estate, but would have been inhabited lands occupied by lesser kindreds in relationships of clientage with the local branch of the dynasty. These local families would have provided the core support for the activities of the kings, and their leaders in turn would have expected patronage and promotion from their kings when they were in power. Under these conditions the monopolisation of the kingship by one branch of the dynasty would have effectively disenfranchised the client base of the alternate branch, regardless of the fate of their patronal line. In such a case the community would be compelled, by its own interests, to produce candidates for the over-kingship regardless of the legitimacy of their hereditary right. That Findláech mac Ruaidrí and his kinsmen were the candidates chosen to contest the kingship with Máel Coluim II strongly suggests that the territorial base of Clann Áeda meic Cináeda had been in Muréb.

Who precisely Clann Ruaidrí were in origin is less clear. The simple answer would be that they were one of the greater kindreds of Muréb, but beyond that we can only speculate. John Bannerman has pointed out that, in his *Original Chronicle*, Andrew Wyntoun gives the earliest account of the prophesy made by the witches to MacBeth (Mac Bethad) before he made his bid for the kingship: 'they greet him as "thane of Cromarty", "thane of Moray" and "King of Scots" in that order'.⁴³ Cromarty, as Bannerman notes, is not known to have been a thanage, but Richard Oram has suggested the probability that the small sheriffdom that did exist at Cromarty was based upon an earlier thanage.⁴⁴ Indeed, given the distribution of thanages plotted by Alexander Grant, together with the acknowledged incompleteness of the record, it is hard to believe that the Black Isle was without one.⁴⁵ Located on the frontier between Muréb and the territories of Earl Sigurðr of Orkney (c.985–1014), Cromarty would certainly have provided a suitable base from which an aspiring family might prove its mettle.⁴⁶ Wyntoun's source for this episode is unknown, however, so we should not place too much confidence in the association of Clann Ruaidrí with Cromarty.

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⁴³ J. Bannerman, 'MacDuff of Fife', in A. Grant and K. Stringer (eds.), *Medieval Scotland: Crown, Lordship and Community* (Edinburgh, 1993), 20–38, at 26.

⁴⁴ Oram, 'David I and Moray', 6.

⁴⁵ See the map accompanying A. Grant, 'Thanes and thanages, from the eleventh to the fourteenth century', in Grant and Stringer, *Medieval Scotland*, 44.

⁴⁶ For the significance of this frontier region, see B. Crawford, *Earl and Mormaer: Norse-Pictish Relationships in Northern Scotland* (Rosemarkie, 1995).

The argument put forward above depends very much upon the assertion that the strict alternation of the kingship between the two branches of Cináed mac Ailpín's dynasty indicates that each branch had its own discrete territorial base. The fact that when one of the branches became extinct at the end of the tenth century its claim to the kingship seems to have been taken up by a family certainly based in the northern province of Muréb would seem to indicate that this branch had itself been located in this region. Is there any evidence which would support this hypothesis or, indeed, any which would directly contradict it?

It has been noted that the earliest direct reference to Muréb appears in the *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba*. Here it is stated that the Clann Custantín dynast Máel Coluim I led an army into Muréb and killed Cellach. We do not know who Cellach was but this notice implies that Muréb was certainly not Máel Coluim's home territory.⁴⁷ Early sources are vague about the nature and place of the death of Dub mac Mail Coluim (962–66), although the near contemporary *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* makes it clear that he spent most of his reign at war with Cuilén mac Illuilb, of Clann Áeda. The *Prophecy of Berchán* claims that Dub died on a useless journey north of Fortriu,⁴⁸ and Fordun has an account of his slaying by the men of Moray at Forres.⁴⁹ Fordun, interestingly, says that Máel Coluim I was slain by the Moravians, although this is countered by the more reliable *Chronicle of the Kings of Alba* which ascribes his murder to the men of the Mearns. The picture that emerges, however, is of a tradition which presented Clann Custantín meic Cináeda constantly at odds with the men of Muréb, whilst none of the sources suggest that Clann Áeda meic Cináeda kings faced opposition from this region.⁵⁰

How might such a territorial division have come about? The most likely period for the establishment of separate geographical locations for the two branches of the dynasty was probably the time, not of Cináed's sons, but of his grandsons. After the usurpation of Giric mac Dúngaile (c.878–889), Domnall mac Custantín assumed the kingship. His reign seems to have been a period of constant warfare with the Norse,⁵¹ and it is to this period that the kingdom in northern Scotland which Icelandic tradition attributed to Þorsteinn the Red probably belongs.⁵² If Domnall succeeded to a kingdom which was largely confined to Fortriu and

⁴⁷ The *Annals of Clonmacnoise* name the son of Custantín mac Áeda to die at Brunnanburh as 'Ceallagh'. It is tempting to speculate that this name, for a man who is mentioned but not named in other accounts of the battle, has been added to the chronicle source from a pedigree relating to the man killed in Moray by Máel Coluim I. To argue from such speculation, however, would be circular. *A. Clon.*, 151.

⁴⁸ B. Hudson, *The Prophecy of Berchán* (Westport, Conn., 1996), 88, 213.

⁴⁹ *Scotichronicon*, ii, 352–3. At this point Bower is following Fordun precisely.

⁵⁰ See also Broun, 'Consolidating Alexander II's kingship', in Oram, *Reign of Alexander II*, for the way in which such accounts were utilised by later chroniclers to meet contemporary needs.

⁵¹ *CKA*.

⁵² *Landnámabók*, ed. J. Benediktsson Íslenzk fornrit, i (Reykjavík, 1986), 136–7. Accounts of Þorsteinn's kingdom appear in other Icelandic sagas but these traditions are probably secondary to those recorded in *Landnámabók*.

proceeded to reconquer the north from Þorsteinn and his cohorts, then the opportunity may have presented itself for the creation of an appanage for his cousin Cústantín mac Áeda. If Cústantín was subsequently based in Muréb, then it might also explain the curious inexactitude of the sources regarding the length of his reign. The king-lists vary in ascribing a length of either forty years or forty-five years to Cústantín, whereas we can be fairly certain that he actually retired from the kingship some forty-three years after Domnall's death.⁵³ It is possible that following the killing of Domnall at Dunottar in 900 the pagans continued to occupy Fortriu until the defeat in battle there of Ímar ua Ímair by Cústantín in 904.⁵⁴ If this were the case, perhaps Cústantín was unable to celebrate his inauguration at Scone until some time after his cousin's death.

This speculative account would give Muréb a complicated and rather bleak ninth-century history, beginning as a Pictish province, receiving a Gaelic aristocracy in the middle of the century and falling to the Norse a generation later before being reconquered by the men of Alba in the nineties. Such a disrupted history of conquest and settlement might also account for the relatively poor survival of Pictish toponyms in Muréb when compared to Fortriu.⁵⁵ The disruption of land tenure and political and cultural allegiances would have been, cumulatively, far more catastrophic than in the south.

One further possible connection of Clann Áeda with the north exists. In his discussion of the Gaelic notes in the Book of Deer, Kenneth Jackson suggested that the Máel Coluim mac Cuilén who is identified in the second note as having, along with one Domnall mac Ruaidrí, given the estate of Biffie to 'God and Drostan', may have been a son of King Cuilén (966–71).⁵⁶ The name Cuilén was relatively rare and, in this list of donors to the monastery of Deer, Máel Coluim mac Cuilén is followed by the undeniably royal figures Máel Coluim mac Cináeda, Máel Coluim mac Mail Brigte and Máel Snechta mac Lulaig. None of the names which precede the three Máel Coluims are those of otherwise historically attested figures so we should perhaps be wary of reading too much into this identification. If Máel Coluim mac Cuilén were the king's son he might perhaps have been the head of Clann Áeda at some point during the reign of Cináed II (971–95). It should be noted that of the four identifiable figures in this list of donors two belong to Clann Ruaidrí and one each to Clann Áeda and Clann Cústantín.⁵⁷

Against the argument presented above there are various pieces of evidence which have been used to suggest that Muréb was in fact ruled by

⁵³ For the discrepancy, see Broun, *Irish Identity of the Scots*, 163 and 168, and Broun, 'Dunkeld and the origin of Scottish identity', *Innes Review*, xlviii (1997), 112–24, at 124 n. 56. Calculations from other reign-lengths allow us to be fairly certain that Cústantín retired in 943 and Domnall's death is noted at *AU*, 900.6.

⁵⁴ *AU*, 904.4.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., P. McNeill and H. MacQueen (eds.), *Atlas of Scottish History to 1707* (Edinburgh, 1996), 51.

⁵⁶ K. Jackson, *The Gaelic Notes in the Book of Deer* (Cambridge, 1972), 31, 34, 49–50.

⁵⁷ Máel Coluim mac Cináeda's presence will be discussed below.

Máel Coluim mac Cináeda. While Duncan has suggested that Máel Coluim II was perhaps a weak ruler who lost control of the north, E. J. Cowan has pointed to the poem *Duan Albanach*, claiming that it bears witness to this king's rule on both sides of the Mounth.⁵⁸ *Duan Albanach* is an Irish poem composed in the time of Máel Coluim Cenn Mór which devotes a couplet or two to each king of Alba from mythological beginnings to the present.⁵⁹ Máel Coluim II gets two lines of verse:

Triocho bliadhna breacaid rainn,
Ba Rí Monaidh Maolcoluim.

Thirty years of chequered portions,
Was Máel Coluim king of the *monaid*.

Cowan's contention that *monaid* here refers to the Mounth and implies rule on both sides of this divide, in Fortriu and Muréb, is far from secure, however. The same word is used apparently to describe the place of Máel Coluim's death in the *Prophecy of Berchán*, but Hudson, the poem's most recent editor, translates it as the common noun 'mountain' and suggests that it simply refers to the Sidlaw Hills which overlook Glamis, the place of Máel Coluim's death according to the king-lists.⁶⁰ In the notes to his translation of *Berchán*, A. O. Anderson discusses the more general use of *Moin* and *Monaid* in Irish sources relating to the kingship of Scotland, noting Watson's suggesting that it might refer to *Dunmonaid* – a name for Edinburgh, probably first an important centre for the kingdom in Máel Coluim's time – or to *Monad Mór*, the land around Dunadd, the earliest centre of Gaelic over-kingship in Scotland.⁶¹ In the eleventh-century poem on the birth of Áedán mac Gabráin, a king of Alba is referred to as 'king of Monad of the market', which, as Thomas Clancy has pointed out, implies that Monad refers to a town rather than a bleak range of mountains, perhaps Edinburgh, as suggested by Watson or, as Clancy believes, *Cennrígmonaid* – St Andrews.⁶² Donald Meek suggests that *monad* may simply have been a poetic name for Scotland, reflecting the peculiar usage of the word within Scottish Gaelic.⁶³

⁵⁸ E. J. Cowan, 'The historical MacBeth', in W. D. H. Sellar (ed.), *Moray: Province and People* (Edinburgh, 1993), 117–41, at 121.

⁵⁹ K. Jackson, 'The Duan Albanach', *ante*, xxxvi (1957), 133, and now also Broun *Irish Identity of the Scots*, 170–2. The text is printed with a translation by Skene in *Coll. de Rebus Alban* (Edinburgh, 1839), 70–79.

⁶⁰ Hudson, *Prophecy of Berchán*, 52 (text), 69 (discussion).

⁶¹ Anderson, *Early Sources*, i, 574–5. In this instance, and perhaps others, *monad* seems to be an oblique case of *móine*, a moor or moss.

⁶² The poem is edited by M. A. O'Brien, 'A Middle-Irish poem on the birth of Áedán mac Gabráin and Brandub mac Echach', *Ériu*, xvi (1952), 157–70, and translated in T. O. Clancy (ed.), *The Triumph Tree: Scotland's Earliest Poetry, AD 550–1350* (Edinburgh, 1998), 178–82. My thanks to Dr Clancy for drawing my attention to this reference.

⁶³ D. Meek, 'Norsemen and Noble Stewards': The MacSween poem in the Book of the Dean of Lismore', *Cambrian Medieval Celtic Studies*, xxxiv (1997), 1–50, at 46.

Even if we were to accept that the term ‘monaid’ when applied to Máel Coluim mac Cináeda in the *Duan* does mean the Mounth, which remains a possibility, the precise identity of this mountain range remains unclear. Cairn o’ Mount separates Fettercairn in the Mearns from Deeside, while the White Mounth separates Glen Clova from Braemar and Monadhliath separates Speyside from the Great Glen. The term is a loose short-hand for the whole of the Grampian mountains and the eastern Highlands rather than the designation of a specific boundary.

There is, however, some evidence that Máel Coluim mac Cináeda did operate in at least one area to the north of these mountains, in Aberdeenshire. We have already noted his appearance in the Gaelic notes in the Book of Deer. There, interestingly, he precedes his contemporary Máel Coluim mac Maíl Brigte († 1029). At the beginning of this article, it was suggested that the perception of a two-fold division of early Alba into Muréb and Fortriu left the position of the north-east (the later earldoms Mar and Buchan and the territories of Formartine and the Garioch) unclear. Very few events in early Scottish history are explicitly located in this region and its political allegiance is difficult, if not impossible, to determine.⁶⁴

A story has been preserved, however, of the establishment of a bishopric for the lands between the Dee and the Spey. John of Fordun, himself a priest of the diocese of Aberdeen, tells us that, in the seventh year of his reign (1011–12), Máel Coluim II founded an episcopal seat at Mortlach (now Dufftown in Banffshire), close to the place where he had defeated the Norwegians early in his reign.⁶⁵ While the notice of Máel Coluim mac Cináeda in the Book of Deer, probably at a point early in his reign, might encourage us to take this story seriously, the surviving diplomatic material from the cathedral at Aberdeen, whence the see was moved c.1125–32 encourages one to believe that the original documentation probably referred to a foundation by Máel Coluim III in the sixth or seventh year of his reign (c.1063).⁶⁶ The fact that the translation of the see, c.1125, occurred during the incumbency of the fourth bishop, Nechtan, also makes a later date more likely, since, had the see been established in 1012, the average reign of each bishop would have been over thirty-two years (which whilst not impossible for any single bishop seems improbable if sustained over several generations) against the seventeen years required if the later foundation date were accepted. In all, then, there is some evidence, in the notes in the Book of Deer, for Máel Coluim mac Cináeda being involved in the lands between the Spey and the Dee in the early part of his reign, but, it should be noted, not to the exclusion of later intervention by the Clann Ruaidrí dynast Máel Coluim mac Maíl Brigte.

⁶⁴ The possibility that this region was incorporated into the kingdom relatively late, having been either a rump Pictish territory or gone through a period of Norse political control should be seriously considered. A thorough investigation of early Aberdeenshire and Banffshire is much needed, but this is not the place for it.

⁶⁵ *Scotichronicon*, ii, 402–5 (text) and 498 (analysis).

⁶⁶ *Aberdeen Registrum*, pp. xi–xix and 3–4.

One other area of evidence which is often cited in support of the case that Máel Coluim mac Cináeda had effective control in the north of Scotland is the assertion that he was responsible for the establishment of the thanage system.⁶⁷ Since thanages were found in the heart of Muréb, the argument goes that Máel Coluim must have held sway there.⁶⁸ Once more this trail leads us to Fordun. Surprisingly, however, on this occasion the fourteenth-century chronicler does not seem to be guilty of the error of his followers. Discussing Máel Coluim's excessive granting out of feus, he contextualises his account with the phrase *nam eo tempore totum pene regnum dividebatur in thanagiis* – 'now at that time almost the whole kingdom was divided up into thanages'.⁶⁹ Fordun seems, in fact, not to be ascribing the foundation of the thanages to Máel Coluim, but to be describing the socio-economic structure of the kingdom he had inherited (or rather usurped). As Duncan has shown in his discussion of the 'Laws of Malcolm MacKenneth', Fordun's account of Máel Coluim's profligacy appears to be a veiled analysis of the regime of David II and should not be taken too seriously as an account of the eleventh century.⁷⁰ In fact, as Geoffrey Barrow has shown, the system of shires and thanages long predates the period under discussion here.⁷¹

The one question one might ask, on the basis of Máel Coluim's appearance in the Book of Deer, is whether Findláech's aspirations to the kingship of Alba date to the very moment of Máel Coluim's 'usurpation' or to an opportune moment in his reign? Two possibilities present themselves when approaching this problem. Throughout the tenth century the men of Alba will have expected the succession to alternate between Clann Cusantín meic Cináeda and Clann Áeda meic Cináeda. But with the extinction of the direct male line of Clann Áeda upon the death of Cusantín mac Cuilén, or shortly thereafter, the clear course of succession was in doubt. From a legalistic point of view we can appreciate this; it is, however, hard to believe that during the reign of Cináed mac Duib there was not an expected successor. Either Cináed III expected to be succeeded by someone representing the claim of Clann Áeda, albeit in the female line, or he and the leading men of the realm were reconciled to the view that the claim of that branch of the family had ended with the extinction of the patrilineage. If the arguments put forward in this article hold water, then the same dilemma must have faced the men of Muréb. Either they were expecting to present their own candidate when the time came or they were reconciled to losing the kingship permanently to a dynasty based in Fortriu.

We are left then with two scenarios for the period 1005 to 1020, between the death of Cináed III and the notice of Findláech's royal status. Either

⁶⁷ See, e.g., Grant, 'Thanes and thanages', 47, and Oram, 'David I and Moray', 3.

⁶⁸ See the map in Grant, 'Thanes and thanages', 44.

⁶⁹ *Scotichronicon*, ii, 416–17.

⁷⁰ A. A. M. Duncan, 'The "Laws of Malcolm MacKenneth"', in Grant and Stringer, *Medieval Scotland*, 239–73.

⁷¹ G. W. S. Barrow, *The Kingdom of the Scots* (Edinburgh, 1973), 63–68.

Máel Coluim's killing of Cináed was followed by the immediate acclamation of Findláech as king in the north, and a divided kingdom from the start, or the Moravians acquiesced in this situation until such time as they saw an opportunity to shake off Máel Coluim or until he vexed them in such a way that his dominion became intolerable. Since the Irish chronicles note only the deaths of kings and not their accessions this problem is intractable. If one wished to nominate a point early in Máel Coluim's reign at which his enemies might take joy and heart, one might look either at the defeat of the Scots by Earl Uhtred in 1006, immediately after Máel Coluim's accession,⁷² or some eight years later, following the battle of Clontarf in Ireland.⁷³ While Clontarf had no direct bearing on Máel Coluim's position, a number of his associates may have been involved. The *Prophecy of Berchán* describes the king's mother as a woman of the Laigin,⁷⁴ and it was the Laigin who were defeated at the battle, their king slain. Also amongst the slain were Earl Sigurðr of Orkney, said to be Máel Coluim's son-in-law,⁷⁵ and Gilla Ciaráin, the senior *rígdamna* amongst the Uí Ímair, who may well have been that Earl Gilli who is presented as ruler of the Isles in this period in *Njáls Saga*.⁷⁶ The leader of the defeated coalition, Sitriuc mac Amlaím, was also, like Máel Coluim, the son of a woman of the Laigin and quite possibly a kinsman. Frustratingly, the only man of Alba whose death in the battle is recorded, Cainnech, mormaer of Mar, came from precisely that part of the kingdom, between the Dee and the Spey, the customary allegiance of which is obscure. He died fighting on the opposing side from the other men named here.⁷⁷

After the death of Earl Sigurðr, the Orkney earldom was riven by civil war and this would have created an opportunity for the Moravians to consider southern ambitions. By 1018, however, Máel Coluim may have re-established his reputation and confidence by defeating Earl Uhtred at Carham and securing Lothian and the Merse, whilst the Northumbrians concerned themselves with reaching an accommodation with their new overlord in the south, Cnut.⁷⁸ If the men of Muréb did not contest Máel Coluim mac Cináeda's kingship from the outset, it seems most likely that they would have been tempted to challenge him in the period between 1014 and 1018.

⁷² *AU*, 1006.5.

⁷³ *AU*, 1014.2

⁷⁴ Hudson, *Prophecy of Berchán*, 52 (text) and 90 (translation).

⁷⁵ *Orkneyinga Saga*, ed. Finnþogi Guðmundsson, Íslensk fornrit, xxxiv (Reykjavik, 1965), ch. 12.

⁷⁶ *Njáls Saga: Brennu-Njáls Saga*, ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson, Íslensk fornrit, xii (Reykjavik, 1954), ch. 89. In the saga, Earl Gilli is said to be married to the sister of Earl Sigurðr. He is also mentioned alive after the battle, but in a scene which is, from its place in the narrative, likely to have been refined for dramatic effect. It is interesting to note that the *Prophecy of Berchán* also calls Máel Coluim mac Cináeda an 'exile in Arran and Islay', regions which may have been under Gilli/Gilla Ciaráin's control by 1005 (cf. *AU*, 1005.1 for the death of the rival dynast Ragnall mac Gofraidh).

⁷⁷ *AU*, 1014.2 lists the great men who died in the battle.

⁷⁸ The best discussion of this topic remains A. A. M. Duncan, 'The battle of Carham, 1018', *ante*, lv (1976), 20–28.

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The arguments laid out above have sought to demonstrate that there is no evidence for an independent kingdom of Muréb before the later eleventh century – that up until the time of Máel Coluim II (1005–34) one king of Alba was recognised from the Cromarty Firth to the Firth of Forth and that during the reigns of Máel Coluim and his immediate successor Donnchad (1034–40) the right of these two rulers to the title *rí Alban* – king of Alba – was challenged by members of another dynasty, Clann Ruaidrí. During this period we should envisage two kingdoms of Alba, or rather two kings of Alba at any one time each claiming to be the legitimate ruler over the whole, but, in fact, forced to divide the kingdom between them. The northern dynasty ultimately made good its claim to the whole in the persons of Mac Bethad (1040–57) and Lulach (1057–8).⁷⁹ The basis of Clann Ruaidrí's claim to the kingship, it has been argued, was their representation of a claim, based on territorial and popular interests in Muréb, inherited in some way which is not recorded in the sources from one of the branches of the dynasty descending from Cináed mac Ailpín (i.e., Clann Áeda meic Cináeda).

The success of Clann Ruaidrí was based, it is argued, to some extent, upon the location of the estates and clients of the descendants of Áed mac Ailpín (876–8) in the northern part of the kingdom. The strict and regular alternation of the kingship of Alba in the tenth century, between the descendants of the two sons of Cináed mac Ailpín, was explained, by analogy with the alternation of the kingship of Tara between the dynasties ruling in Ailech and Mide, as the result of the two branches having discrete territorial bases. Rather than abiding by a gentlemanly agreement, the two lines were encouraged to share the kingship with one another by the need to placate constituencies which formed their own communities of interest on each side of the Mounth. Whilst Fortriu, the southern province, was better placed to be observed by foreign chroniclers, and indeed somewhat richer in natural resources, the community of Muréb retained a significant position within the realm well into the eleventh century.

The decline of the importance of Muréb, the *regnum*, and indeed of Moray the region, was probably linked to the expansion of the kingdom southwards. With the annexation of Lothian and Cumbria, and with the increased economic ties with England and the Continent, Fortriu turned the slight advantage which it had retained in the earlier period into a

⁷⁹ The fact that Donnchad was only descended from Cináed mac Ailpín in the female line may have made Mac Bethad's legitimacy seem less questionable since Máel Coluim mac Cináeda's advantage over Clann Ruaidrí lay in part at least in the fact that he alone represented the direct line. It is often claimed that Mac Bethad's marriage to Gruoch a grand-daughter of one or other of the Cináed's was significant in respect to his claims to the kingship. In the absence of knowledge concerning other Scottish queens of the period (she is the first to whom we can put a name), this is difficult to assess, but cf. A. Connors, 'The Queens of Tara', in A. P. Smyth (ed.), *Seanchus: Studies in Early and Medieval Irish Archaeology, History and Literature in Honour of Francis J. Byrne* (Dublin, 2000), 98–108.

grotesque imbalance. As the kings became increasingly attached to the Forth, with the royal residences at Dunfermline and Edinburgh becoming the most favoured locations of the court, the north became increasingly marginalised. During the early part of Máel Coluim Cenn Mór's reign, when the king of Alba enjoyed excellent relations with both the English court and with his stepsons, the earls of Orkney, Máel Snechta, the last survivor of Clann Ruaidrí, may have narrowed his horizons and sought to retain his royal title by dropping his pretension to the over-kingship of Alba. It is for him, and him alone, that the more circumscribed title *rí Muiréb* is used. One might almost argue that the kingdom of Muréb emerged as Máel Coluim Cenn Mór's solution to the problem since it legitimised his dynasty's monopoly of the kingship of Alba whilst allowing Máel Snechta to retain a royal title, albeit one which admitted more restricted ambitions.

In later years Moray remained a breeding ground of rebellion against the authority of the kings of Alba. Some of these rebels, like the Oengus, the son of Lulach's daughter, who was slain in 1130,⁸⁰ may have been related to Clann Ruaidrí, as it has been argued here that Clann Ruaidrí may have been related to Clann Áeda. Others, however, may simply have found in Moray an established community who believed, on the back of a long tradition, that they had the right to a say in the choosing of kings.

⁸⁰ *AU*, 1130.4.