

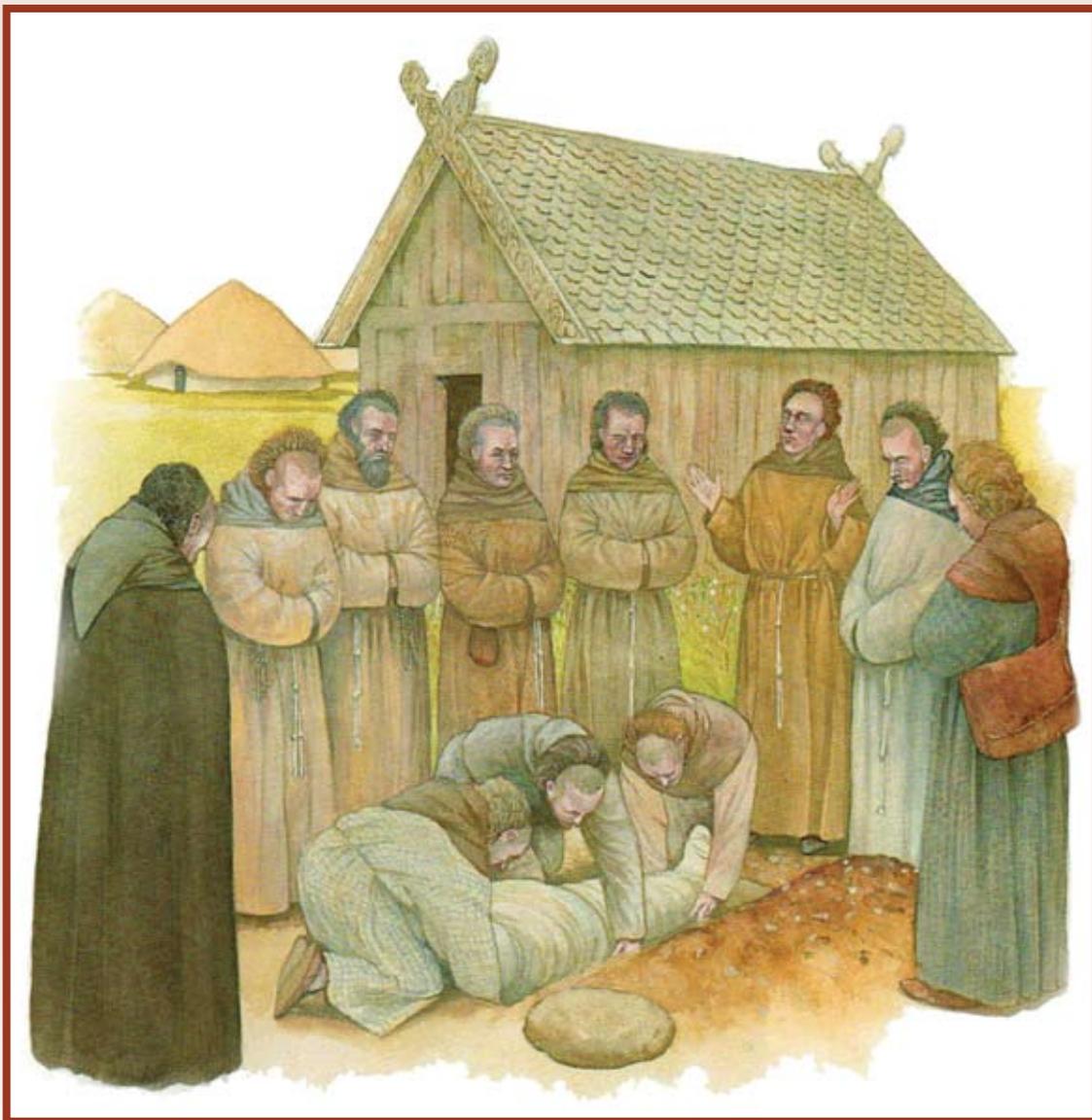
Chapter VIII

# Burial Interpretation

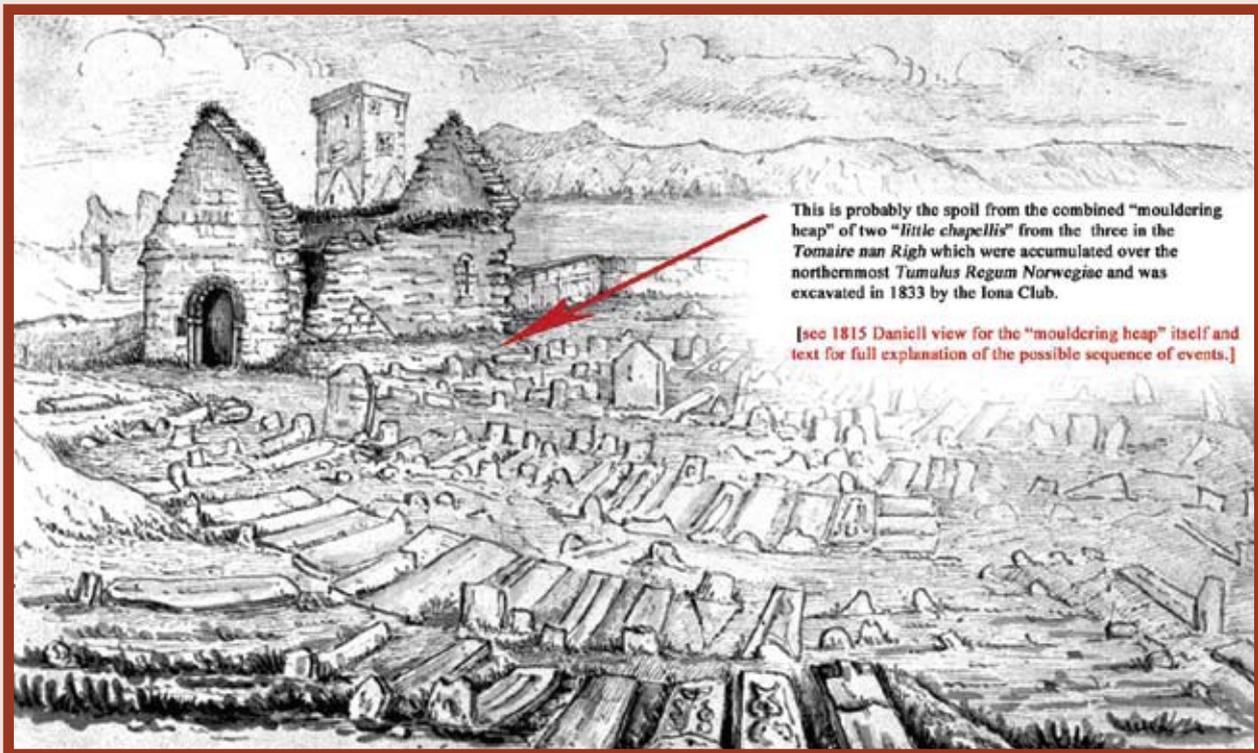


# BURIAL INTERPRETATION MONUMENT LOCATIONS AND ATTRIBUTIONS

“THE DEAD ARE NOT ACTUALLY DEAD”



Courtesy of Historic Scotland; *Iona Abbey and Nunnery*.  
Artists impression of the burial of St Columba.



This is probably the spoil from the combined "mouldering heap" of two "little chapellis" from the three in the *Tomair nan Rìgh* which were accumulated over the northernmost *Tumulus Regum Norwegiæ* and was excavated in 1833 by the Iona Club.

[see 1815 Daniell view for the "mouldering heap" itself and text for full explanation of the possible sequence of events.]

*ANTIQUITIES OF IONA*; HD GRAHAM; 1850 (caption added). [Slabs now uncovered by Iona Club and others before being put into two rows by 1858 and new fence built over outcrop at front. Before corners of chapel fixed (1855-6). Spoil from Kings Tombs undisturbed along chapel's south wall. For decades, the excellent Allan MacLean, charity schoolmaster, curator and guide had tried in vain to stop thieving of the "finest monuments".]

**1549** : *"This sanctuary was wont to be the sepulture of the best men of the Isles, and also of our Kings, as we have said; because it was the most honorable and ancient place that was in Scotland in those days, as we read"*.<sup>1</sup>

An October morning in the year 1773, Dr Samuel Johnson's travelling companion, James Boswell records:- "We were both disappointed, when we were shown what are called the monuments of the kings of Scotland, Ireland, and Denmark, and of a King of France. There are only some grave-stones flat on the earth, and we could see no inscriptions. How far short was this of marble monuments, like those in Westminster Abbey, which I had imagined here!"<sup>2</sup> Johnson's own account adds :- "But by whom the subterraneous vaults are peopled in now utterly unknown." (A demonstration of their unsympathetic appreciation and or ignorance?)

**1811** : "Referring to the wanton neglect of the human remains in this sacred place, a Scottish writer [James

MacDonald] expresses himself as follows :—" It is indeed, astonishing that the noble and ancient families above-mentioned, as connected with these remains, do not insist with the Duke of Argyll (the owner of the Island), either upon effectually preserving the bones and monuments of their ancestors from violation, or allowing them to carry them off to their present family vaults. This is peculiarly incumbent upon the Macdonnells [MacDonalds], Macleans, Mackinnons, Macleods, and Macquarries." (James Macdonald's *Hebrides*, p. 706). This was written in the year 1811, but, so far as we know, [in 1873] the families referred to paid no attention to the writer's remonstrance."<sup>3</sup>

Until c.1855, graveslab monuments lay scattered about the St Oran's burial ground being increasingly damaged by visitors ("*peasants and sassanachs*"; Sir Walter Scott; 1814), some stolen (eg, by Rae Wilson, 1830), vandalised and others carelessly reused for modern burials. At the vigorous insistence of both the Iona Club and the Archaeology Society, the 8<sup>th</sup> Duke of Argyll finally agreed to allow **them** to move and enclose most of the slabs within two parallel iron railings, miscalled "the ridge of kings" and "the ridge of chiefs". (The Rt. Hon. Godfrey William Macdonald, 4<sup>th</sup> Lord of Sleat, was an Iona Club member<sup>4</sup>).

<sup>1</sup> *Description of the Occidental, ie Western Isles of Scotland*; Donald Monro; 1549.

<sup>2</sup> *The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson*, LLD. J Boswell; 1785.

<sup>3</sup> Hill G. Rev; *An Historical Account of the Macdonnells of Antrim*; 1873. p.9, n.19. Referring to :- Macdonald, James A.M; *General View Of The Agriculture Of The Hebrides*; 1811. He visited Iona with seven voyages between 1793 and 1808.

<sup>4</sup> Other Clan Donald members were: Ranald of Staffa, Principal Sec. to Highland Society of Scot.; Reginald George of Clanranald;

The true Ridge-Tombs of Kings, *Tomair-nan-Rìgh*, was the three dry-stone *little chappelis* that were reported, in composite terms, as near and orientated with the above drawing's visible "*south side of the church*" (M Martin) wall of St Oran's Chapel. This was surely the vicinity. Two very reliable eye witnesses to them were Donald Munro, 1549 and George Buchanan, 1570-80. They were all intact then. (Other good witnesses were: Martin Martin, 1695, Dr Walker 1764, 1771 and W. Pennant, 1772). Two were already *mouldering heaps* – *slight remains*, at least by 1764-71 when the last *quite entire* (centre) one with only a slightly damaged corner was seen by Rev. Dr Walker<sup>1</sup>. This one was collapsed by c.1800 and William Daniell, RA, shows that it's more substantial remains appear to have been pushed north, partly over the Norwegian tomb's "slight remains" between c.1800-15, leaving a rearrangement of 17 *upright grave-markers* [for *secondary burial* of early King's bones?] and a few "*interesting tombstones*". NB: f/n 1., p.112 : One can be quite certain that the high quality isometric, well detailed view by the extraordinary Daniell, mid 1815, p.125, is accurate enough ("*every reason to confide in the fidelity of the representations*"). He was a brilliant draughtsman/artist and the ruins match later photographs. See his 139 aquatints in "*A Voyage round Great Britain, undertaken in the summer of the year 1813.*" Therefore, it appears to be under this pile that the Norwegian King's tomb was excavated in 1833 by the Iona Club and would logically put the spoil up against the chapel's south wall, as per Graham's 1850 sketch and GW Wilson photos (spoil half removed c.1858 for a new grave.) Quite astonishingly, in 1854, *The Topographical Statistical and Historical (Parliamentary) Gazetteer of Scotland*, p.51, when describing Iona and commenting about Buchanan's 16<sup>th</sup> century description of these tombs, which it said were "*enclosing the ashes*" of the Kings, added : "**The tombs, if ever they existed - and they almost to a certainty never did - have utterly disappeared.**" An extraordinary statement, even for the times.

The tombs are said to have partially collapsed into their "vault" spaces probably through the action of grave robbers, however : "*.. called the Ridge of Kings. Excavations were made in 1833 by the Iona Club, which demonstrated that there were no subterranean vaults or chambers, but brought to light many interesting tombstones*".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "*Report on The Hebrides*"; Walker, Rev. Dr. John ;1764 and 1771.

<sup>2</sup> *Guide to the Highlands and islands of Scotland including Orkney and Zetland,....etc.* G Anderson and P Anderson; p596. 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. 1850. Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis; Gregory, Skene; 1847; Iona Club Transactions; Vol 1, Part 1, p.6.

Were any of these '*tombstones*' that of the late 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century Kings, that is, from within or near the last tomb uncovered or between the three? (as previously disturbed-covered). It's a great pity there are no records of the detail and position of any of them – and blatant theft, of the "finest monuments", eg, 1830. It is possible a few slabs were moved from the known area of the true *Tomair nan Rìgh* to the so-called "Ridge of Kings" row of rearranged slabs, c.1858. In Daniell's c.1815 view, the many Chief's slabs in the majority of the graveyard are depicted still covered with the centuries of soil, grass and "*an accumulation of rubbish and dung*".

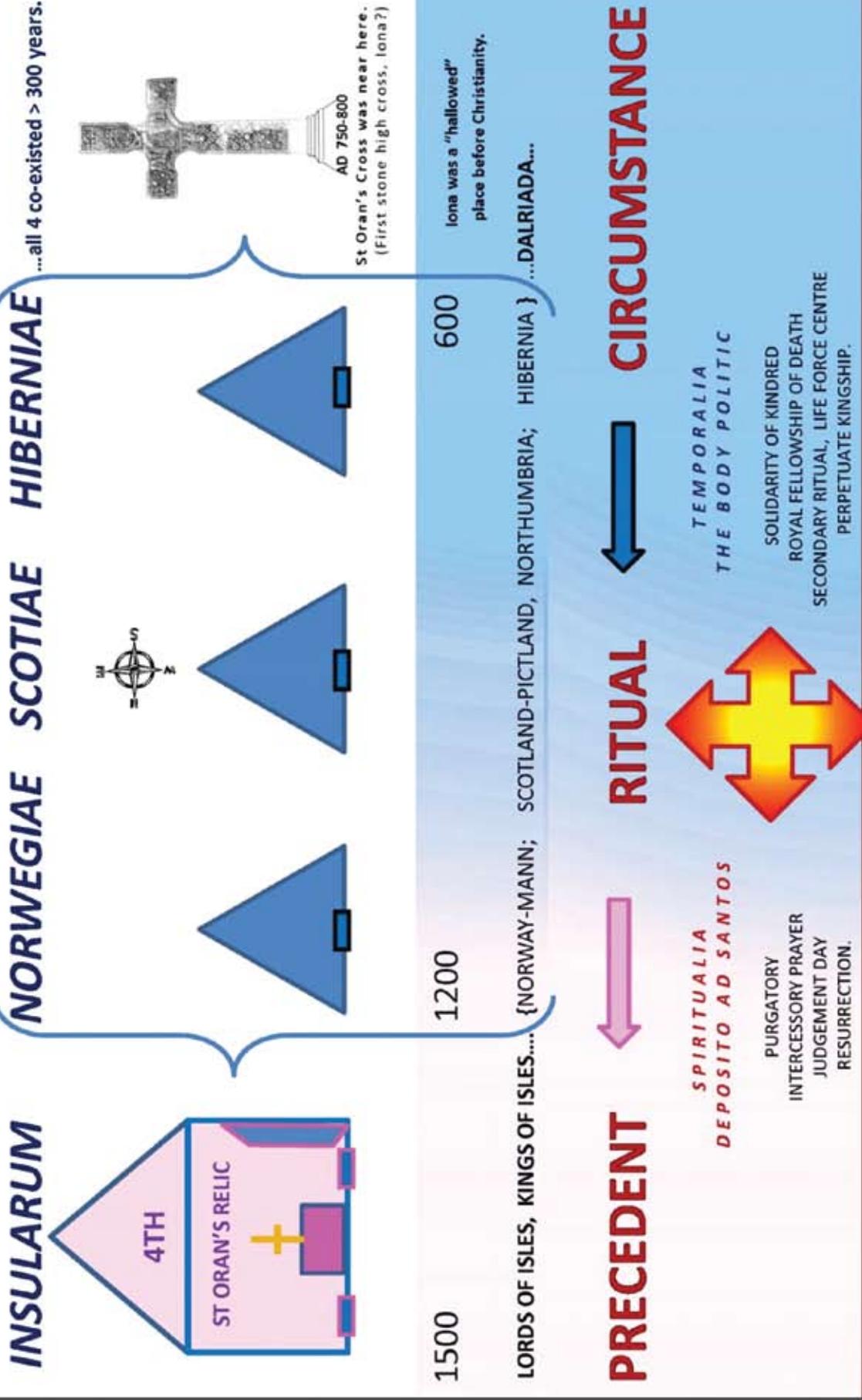
Pre-Reformation tombs were officially ordered to be destroyed in 1550. Even King Henry I's tomb at Reading Abbey and Stephen's at Faversham Abbey were both completely destroyed (this changed in 1563 – attacking aristocracy's monuments was seen as "subversive" to political order). Holyrood Abbey's "*vaults were violated and the various monuments destroyed*" in the Reformation and later destructive raids, as were those at St Andrews.<sup>3</sup>

**"This was the grand cemetery of Iona, the cherished and far-famed spot whither, for ages, funeral parties voyaged from a distance to inter the illustrious dead."**<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> "There were in all, **forty-nine canonical Archbishops or Bishops of St Andrews**, whose names, and other particulars concerning them, have been given in the foregoing part of this work. The greater part of these were buried here, and many of them are known to have had expensive monuments erected to their memories. Some of them were among the first men of their age in respect to rank, talent, and influence ; **yet there is not the monument of one of them remaining, unless we except the three mutilated stone-coffins** which I have already spoken of. There were also, as we learn from Fordun, more than twenty priors of the monastery interred in the chapter-house, which is close to the south transept of the cathedral church.' Here they no doubt rest in peace. **Yet there is not a stone to mark their names ; and, in all probability, their very graves have been rifled, and the lead in which their bodies were wrapped, as well as the ring, crosier, and silver chalice, with which it was usual for each to be adorned, carried off. In short, of the tombs of all the bishops and priors and numerous canons who were interred in the cathedral and chapter-house, there are no more remaining than the tomb-stones of three obscure canons** whose inscriptions I have just given, namely, Robert Cathnic, James Elioly, and William Ruglyn ; and one Gray, the plumber and glazier of the church. All the rest have been swept away by the reformers of the sixteenth century !" LYON Rev C. J. (Presbyter of Episcopal Church, St Andrews). *History of St Andrews, Episcopal, Monastic, Academic and Civil; comprising the principal part of the Ecclesiastical History of Scotland from the earliest age till the present time.* 1843; VOL II, p.158-9.

<sup>4</sup> *The Topographical Statistical and Historical Gazetteer of Scotland*, Volume 2. p.51. 1854.

# FOUR TUMULUS REGUM – THE RIDGE OF KINGS



...all 4 co-existed > 300 years.

Iona was a "hallowed" place before Christianity.

**The 4th Tomaire-nan-Righ.**

**REGINALD d.1207 & SOMERLED k.1164**

**LORDS OF THE ISLES**

**BURIAL CHAPEL**

**CLAN DONALD**

**Tomaire-nan-Righ, c.600 – c.1200. The real-historic**

**Ridge of Kings was three dry stone "cells".**

**TOMB**

**OF**

**NORSE**

**KINGS**

**TOMB**

**OF**

**SCOT**

**KINGS**

**TOMB**

**OF**

**IRISH**

**KINGS**

**"RIDGE OF CHIEFS"**

A cross base 15 meters S. from chapel ; RCAHMS



**St Oran's Cross**

**AD 750-800**

**"RIDGE OF KINGS" - so-called.**

**(Graveslabs re-arranged : 1854-9 by the Iona Club).**

**6 CLAN DONALD LORDS OF THE ISLES  
DONALD 1<sup>st</sup> TO DONALD OF HARLAW (1247-1421)**  
*"His full noble body was buried with befitting pomp and solemnity in the tomb of his ancestors on the south side of Teampull Odhrain; the sacred storehouse of his predecessors and guardian of their bones."*

**NATURAL SMALL HILL**

**"THE MOST ANCIENT GRAVEYARD IN ALL SCOTLAND"  
"THE MOST HALLOWED SPOT ON IONA"  
"THE ROYAL FELLOWSHIP OF DEATH"**

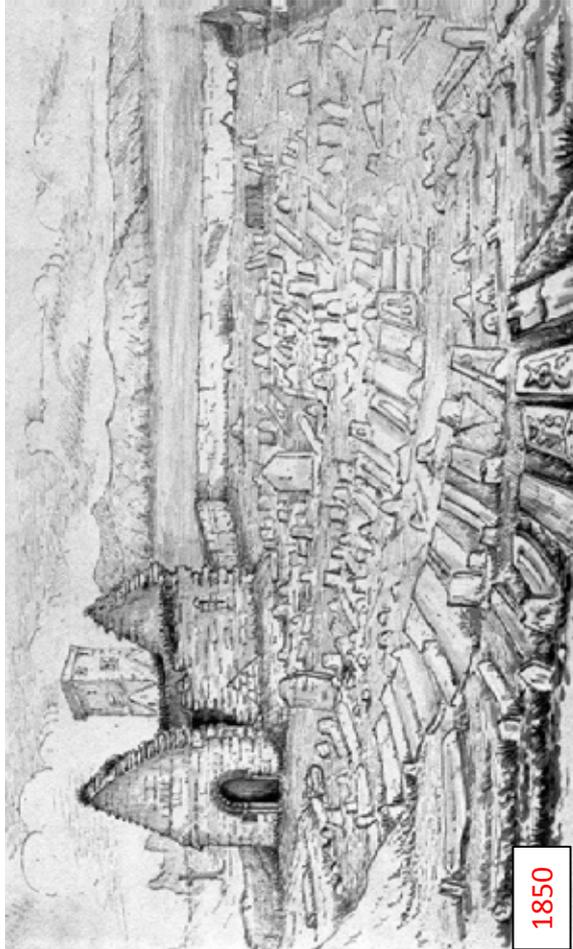
**AD 858 - TUMULUS REGUM SCOTIAE.**  
**Kenneth MacAlpin, King of Scots.**  
*"Kenneth, son of Alpin... he died in Forteviot, and was buried in the island of Iona.. where the three sons of Erc were buried."*  
**Chronicle of the Kings.**

**SOMHAIRLE mac Gillebride: k.1164. REX INSULARUM, WAS BURIED IN HIS OWN SUPERIOR CHAPEL, TEMPEULL ODHRAIN, SYMBOLISING THE 4th AND LARGEST TOMAIRE NAN RIGH, HIS TUMULUS REGUM INSULARUM.**

**"With regal pomp and ceremony the body of the King of the Isles was buried .....in Iona's piles, where rest from mortal toil the mighty of the Isles."**

A photo probably by the Iona Club just after finishing the re-arrangement of slabs in the cemetery (c.1858) and in St Oran's Chapel and then gating it shut (c.1860- see the thin iron pickets). It is not a good quality image (even enhanced) but a very good one to add text and graphics to which clearly show the historical context (The chapel restored and re-roofed a century later in 1957 by the Iona Community).

## St Oran's outside cemetery, Iona.



1850



c.1859



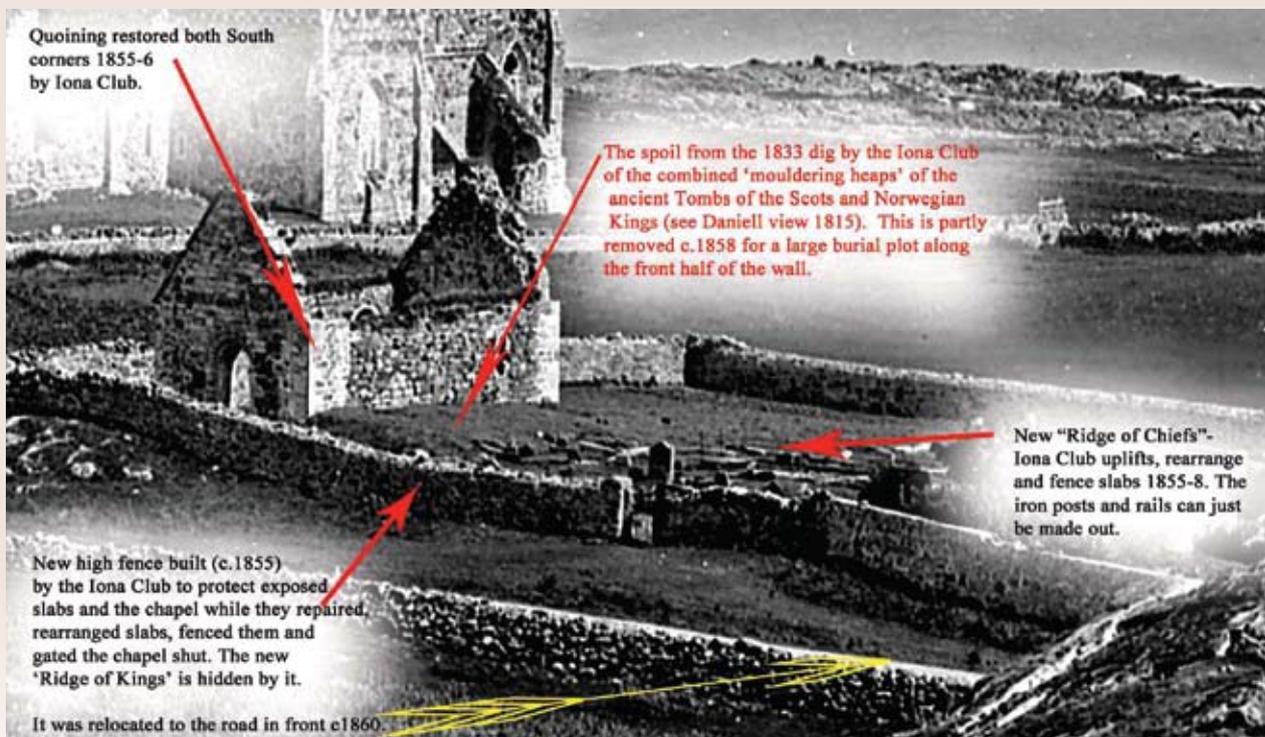
Slabs of Clan Chiefs, **“the best men of the Isles”** (re-arranged by the Iona Club, 1854-59). **They include a “Tomb” for the Chiefs of each of the Clan Donald Branches.** *“Each of these chief families of the Isles had its claim to a tomb in the Reilig Odhrain, if not by right of descent from the house of Somerled then by right of marriage into Clan Donald.”*

## NINE “KINGS & LORDS OF THE ISLES” WERE BURIED IN THE FAMILY CHAPEL, ST ORAN’S.

“A race the hardiest that received baptism” – bard MacMhuirich, c.1500

KINGS/LORDS	DIED	GRAVESLAB RCAHMS No. ARGYLL, VOL 4 (grey = tentative)
SOMERLED	1164	missing
1. REGINALD (Founder)	1207	<b>161</b>
2. RUARI	?	167
<b>3. DONALD I (CLAN)</b>	1247	126
4. ANGUS MOR	1292	185
5. ALEXANDAIR OG	1299	174
6. ANGUS OG	1318	<b>150</b>
7. JOHN (1)	1386	157
8. DONALD OF HARLAW	1421	152

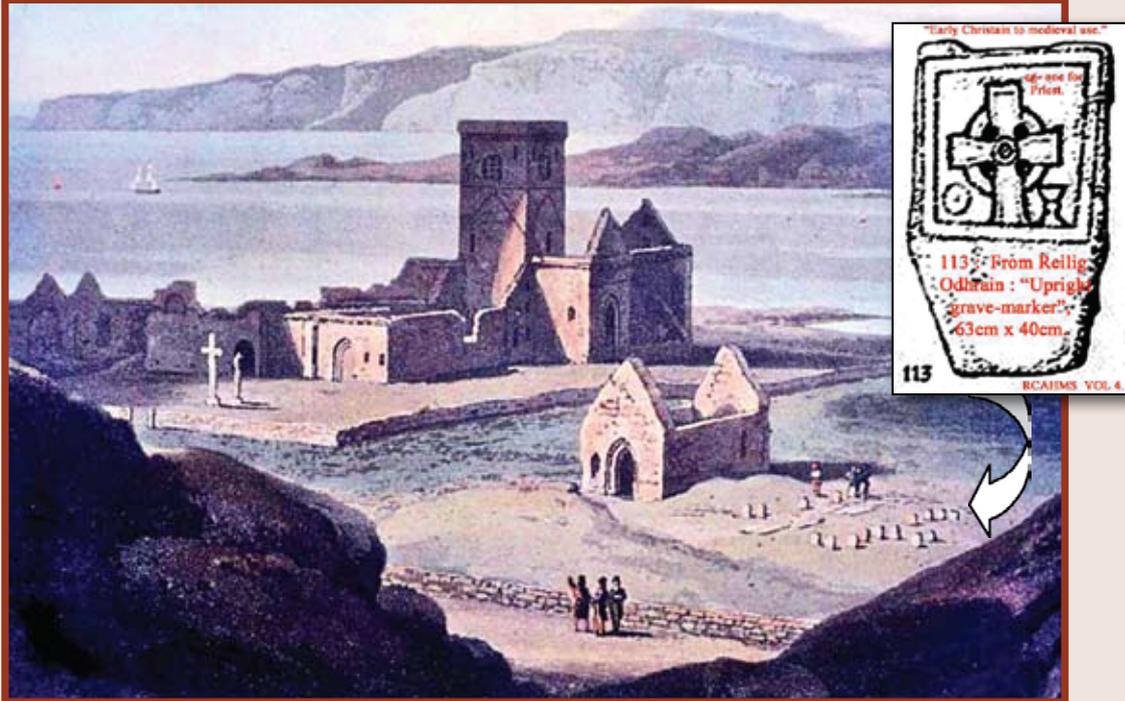
### 8 GRAVESLABS : EQUALS THOSE RECORDED AS IN, OR FROM ST ORAN’S CHAPEL.



**Photo c.1857:** courtesy of Aberdeen Uni. (Digitool) – very large GW Wilson collection starting from 1853. I have heavily cropped it (this is the image in my GGgrandfather's 1860's *carte de visite*; see dedication at end. There are many such views from the SW which look and are called the same, but are in fact at different times providing a useful tool for sequencing and dating changes – with checking and matching to other data. (PS: the "Ridge of Kings" is just through the front gate.)

A SAD, SYMBOLIC IMAGE OF THE ENTWINED FATE OF CLAN DONALD AND IONA 16<sup>th</sup> –17<sup>th</sup> Centuries. THEIR VANQUISHED SEA KINGDOM AND DIOCESE OF THE ISLES.

(*"The Cathedral at Iona"* - mid 1815 by 'the masterly' William Daniell, Royal Academician, 1769 -1837)

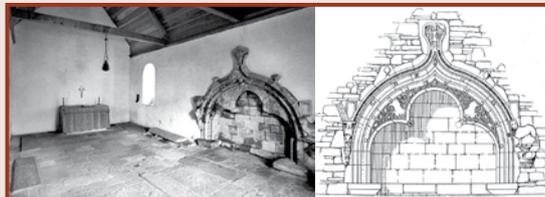


REX SOMERLED'S 12<sup>th</sup> CENTURY BURIAL CHAPEL – FRONT CENTRE – ST ORAN'S CHAPEL. SOMERLED, RI INNSI GALL, DESIRED : *"THE MOST ANCIENT GRAVEYARD IN ALL SCOTLAND."* <sup>1</sup>

*"His body was taken to Iona; his place of sepulture was the ancient ecclesiastical capital of his island domains."* <sup>2</sup>

#### **"THE ROYAL FELLOWSHIP OF DEATH"**

MANY KINGS OF SCOTLAND, IRELAND, NORWAY WERE EARLIER BURIED IN ONE OF THREE ANCIENT DRY-STONE TUMULUS IN ST ORAN'S MOST HALLOWED GRAVE YARD – IN "THE RIDGE OF KINGS".



LATE 15<sup>th</sup> CENTURY CANOPIED NICHE INTENDED FOR THE BODY & EFFIGY OF LORD JOHN (II).

MOST CLAN DONALD LORDS OF THE ISLES WERE BURIED THERE, IN THE FLOOR OF THE :-  
*"SOUTH SIDE OF TEAMPULL ODHRAN - WITH BEFITTING POMP AND SOLEMNITY IN THE TOMB OF THEIR ANCESTORS; THE SACRED STOREHOUSE OF THEIR PREDECESSORS AND GUARDIAN OF THEIR BONES."*

<sup>1</sup> The "mouldering heaps" outside the "south side of church" wall of the Chapel (two distinct, unequal roundish mounds) may be mostly the crumbled remains of the *Tumulus Regum Scotiae*, the central one and longest standing of the three dry-stone "little chapels", the burial places of the Kings of Scotland, with 'Norway' (North) and Ireland (South). Its collapsed remains appear to be pushed north partially over the "slight remains" of the Norwegian tomb between c.1800-15. It is not rubble from St Oran's chapel – south wall or roof. [And, from this small area of the cemetery, the only part systematically and grossly disturbed to 1815, are a few "interesting tombstones" re-arranged, as it would make common sense, in the area of discovery. (And why move anything to that particular spot from elsewhere?) Are they of the later 11-12th c. Kings, including the 17 regular shaped, correct size and period 'upright grave-markers' of the secondary burial of the earlier King's bones? (ideal size for stealing!) Rev. Walker on the King's Tombs : "These dimensions show that it could not serve for burying more than one person at a time." So many grave-markers in this small, special location, and there could have been even more, may indeed support the other indicators of a secondary burial process :- eg, Rev Walker's view, the Clones Macdonnell example given later. All explored later this chapter, Interpretation-Attribution.] The Chief's slabs and other monuments throughout the rest of the cemetery are

depicted correctly as still mainly covered with soil and grass (filled with gravestones but so overgrown with, common butter-bur, few are to be seen" Pennant, 1772). Therefore, the tomb under these combined remains would appear to be the one most likely excavated by the Iona Club in 1833 and the spoil logically appears next to it closer to the south wall of St Oran's Chapel in Graham's 1850 record and GW Wilson's late 1850's photos (it has a very different shape – a single narrow, lower, longer "row"). It was then partly removed for a large c.1858 burial plot hard up against and half way along the front half of that wall – desecrating the Norwegian Kings Tomb (photo prior page). Each of the parallel tombs faced East and formed the original Tomaire-nan-Righ, "Ridge of the Kings" (N. to S.) as described by Donald Munro, 1549, George Buchanan, 1570-80, Martin Martin, 1695, Dr Walker 1764, 1771 and W. Pennant, 1772 (see my original sketches of them pps. 122, 127 – I've not seen others). The c.1858 railed area of the same name further west towards the road was a re-arranged row of so-called "King's" slabs by the Iona Club (were some known to be from the Tomaire nan Righ?). The other railed row of chief's slabs was called the "Ridge of the Chiefs".

<sup>2</sup> The Death and Burial of Somerled of Argyll, West Highland Notes and Queries, ser. 2, no.8, Nov.1991, p.6-10. McDonald, Russell Andrew.

## “TREASURES OF HEAVEN”. Part 1 : “FROM TOMB TO ALTAR”

(Relate to my schematic diagram next page.)

*THE RELIGION OF RELICS IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND BYZANTIUM*; pps 5-17; DEREK KRUEGER.

“At the centre of the practices lay a basic belief that matter – fragments of bodies, oil, water, even bits of stone and dust - could contain and convey spiritual power.” (p. 5). [the first ‘derivatives’!]

“The idea that the fragmentation of these holy bodies retained the entirety of the saints’ power in each part likely formed in analogy to Christian conceptions of the Eucharist, which contained the body of Christ in each division. Relics contained the real presence of the saint just as the bread and the wine contained the real presence of God. The saint’s identity and presence persisted in each division and distribution. In the late sixth century, theologians such as Pope Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604) worried about how the powers of the saint, which one might expect resided in their holy souls, might still be available in their bodies, even after the separation of the soul and body after death. Nevertheless, it seemed sufficient that the holy soul, now residing with God in heaven, had been in contact with the saintly body and maintained a connection with it. The saints’ power also resided in items of a personal nature, especially the saint’s clothing, and could be transmitted to substances like oil and water that came into contact with the saint’s remains.” (p.8) “Already in the fourth century, altars in many Christian churches were furnished with relics; by the eighth century, relics had become indispensable. (see Robinson, p.112).” (p.10)

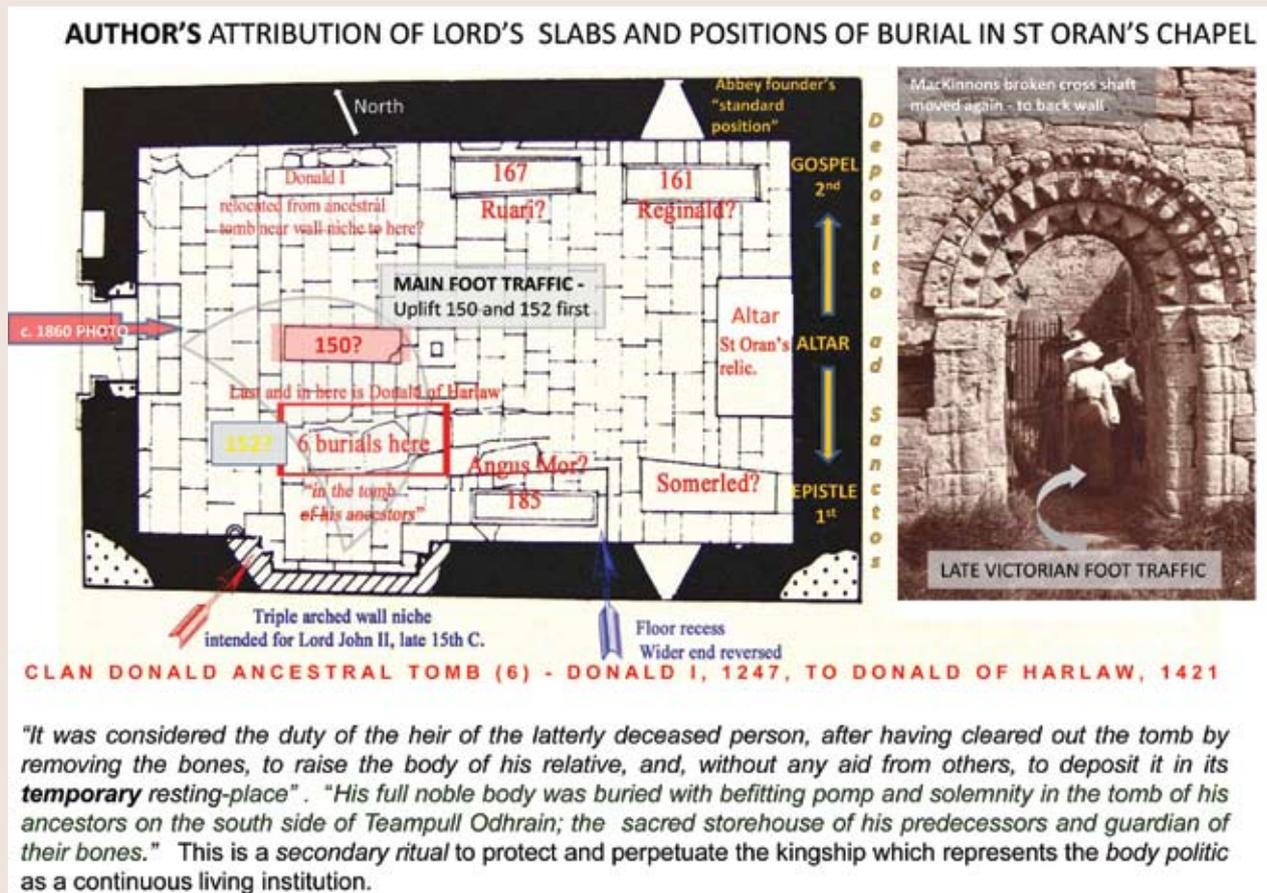
Part 3. *RITUAL AND PERFORMANCE*; p.112; JAMES ROBINSON. “Writing in the early twelfth century, the Benedictine abbot Rupert of Deutz expressed the relationship in the following terms: “Altare significat Christum.” Rupert’s forthright definition was the product of a long-established understanding of the altar’s sacred nature that had its basis in ancient Judaic and classical traditions. The supreme importance of the altar stone ensured that it was the most vital component of portable

altars used to celebrate the liturgy in unconsecrated spaces. Only certain stones were considered appropriate for use, and the most usual choices were marble, porphyry, jasper, alabaster, onyx, and serpentine. A second prerequisite for altar design – that was to transform the nature of the portable altar - emerged from the Seventh Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 787, which decreed that relics were to be placed in churches and that no altar was to be consecrated without them. [Iona Abbey church’s altar?] Cavities were made beneath the altar stone to accommodate relics, and although there is evidence to suggest that some portable altars were already equipped with relics, from this point onward they began officially to serve two functions: that of altar and reliquary.”

*RELICS AND THEIR VENERATION*; pps 19-28; ARNOLD ANGENENDT. “To understand the Christian veneration of relics, we must look far back into the history of religion, where it is consistently clear that the dead are not actually dead. Of course the soul travels to the other side, but the corpse retains a second soul with which the dead live on in their graves. The dead are actually able to reanimate themselves through the use of their skeletons, which must remain unscathed. This was especially true for one’s ancestors, among whom the primal ancestor was worshiped as “the very first man.” Ancestral graves remain the constant centre of life, because there one’s forebears are present, guaranteeing the line of descent and the dispensation of justice. Accordingly, this is where the hearth fires are located, where sacred community celebrations are held, where altars stand with their requisite cult objects, the bones, the idols, the magic stones, and medicines. Just as the life-force of the ancestors lives on in their graves, so it lives on in their legacies, including their garments, symbols of office, staffs, or ceremonial weapons, as well as the dishes and bowls out of which they ate and drank, and of course especially in the elements of their bodies themselves, their nails and hair, their teeth, and above all their skulls. These things form .....in a sense small ‘accumulators,’ from which power may constantly be drawn, particularly in crisis situations.” (p.19) “The connection between altar and relic tomb became common. Soon no altar was without relics. (p.21) “‘Saints preferred to work their miracles at their earthly graves, with which their souls in heaven remained in contact. The best approach was to combine place and time, and be at the saint’s grave on his feast day.” (p.23).



**ST ORAN'S CHAPEL: 2 slabs in floor; 1 on blocks in recess** (Three carved slabs of Kings/Lord of Isles).  
Slab numbers are RCAHMS; ARGYLL VOL 4.



**SOMERLED?** (d.1164). On the *Epistle Side* of the *Holy Table* is the pre-eminent place to be buried (right side, facing altar). The builder, first patron of the chapel would select or be given this site in preference and reverence.<sup>1</sup>

[*"There were also vertical boundaries between Heaven and Earth. In Medieval Christian terms this is symbolically represented by burial as close as possible to the high altar or a shrine. These places had the power to draw down holy influence from Heaven, which was sometimes represented in art by a ray of light. A burial under the feet of the priest by the high altar was on a direct vertical line to Heaven. At the most holy point of the Mass, the transubstantiation, which turned the bread and wine literally into the body and blood of Christ, it was hoped that the religious power of the miracle would emanate to the deceased's soul and so help it through Purgatory."* ]<sup>2</sup>

There was a slab here but it is now gone and a plain flat sandstone "slab-flagstone" is in its place. St Oran's full body, a part thereof (or other primary relic) was

buried/translated under, in, or near the altar. This is an indispensable liturgical requisite.<sup>3</sup>

*Reilig Odhráin* means relic/cemetery of St Oran. (The south side is also closest to the *Tomair-nan-Righ*.) "The decision to erect an altar and then a church in one place or another coincided with the emergence of a saint's cult. **The church was erected around the saint's relics, contained in an altar**" (*Treasures of Heaven*)

Y-DNA (and carbon dating) from any genuine burial bones found would be very interesting as the current Clan Donald Chiefs are all Norse R1a1.

**1. Slab 161 - REGINALD mac SOMERLED** (d.1207). The "gospel" side of the altar is the second most revered place to be buried (left side, facing the altar - north). "*The written record shows that this position was also popular for burial among other orders {eg, Benedictine} and for bishops as well as founders*" (Fry, S). Reginald was the founder of Iona Abbey, Nunnery and Saddell Abbey.

<sup>1</sup> "*Toirrdelbach {father} on the southern side of it, Ruaidri on the other lofty side, a fierce and gentle pair; without stealth for a while, two comely high-kings of Erin.*" NOTE : this O'Connor father d.1156 and son d.1198. Exact same period and same orientation beside altar as Somerled (south) and son Reginald (north); "*Graves of Kings at Clonmacnoise*"; see poem further on. All chapels, churches have altar at east end. St Brigid and Archbishop Conled's tombs are each on side of an altar (Cogitosus' seventh-century life of St Brigid of Kildare.) Temple Ciarán tomb shrine, Oratory, Clonmacnoise, Ireland:-

in the north eastern corner (altar end) is an area believed to be the burial place of Saint Ciarán.

<sup>2</sup> *Death and burial in medieval England, 1066-1550*; Daniell, Christopher; 1997; p.101.

<sup>3</sup> *Medieval death: Ritual and Representation*; Binski, Paul. 2001; p.15. "... the law of the Church, Canon Law, required the insertion of a relic of the titular saint into the table of the high altar of every church.....(echoing Revelation 6:9)".

The slab has a sword and staff having a round pommel with long tang-button and a spike at the lower end. It's an "ecclesiastical" motif, the same as King Edward the Confessor's staff as the first great royal patron of Westminster. This "secluded" slab is not recorded as ever being disturbed. It's in the vicinity of the original medieval altar footing which still has detail of its edge moulding on the NE corner (both softer sandstone). The slab's outline is faintly visible in Drummond's Plate 6, 1850. It and 167, both "*much worn*", were covered by the Iona Club with a display of the better uplifted slabs. What lies with Reginald's bones? His staff, like Edward's? <sup>1</sup>

It is parallel sided and sandstone - uncommon. (1.66m x 0.42m) Also has a triquetra. ("Holy Trinity"). "*Probably Iona School*" - but "*transitional*". So it is earlier and very like (and exemplar for?) the coarser Kilmartin & Inveraray slabs of the later 13th century of similar design:- swords, long cross, plant-scroll, triquetra. The sword: "Lobated pommel & short quillons", is the same as No. 126 on the north wall (centre one of 5), St Oran's Chapel.

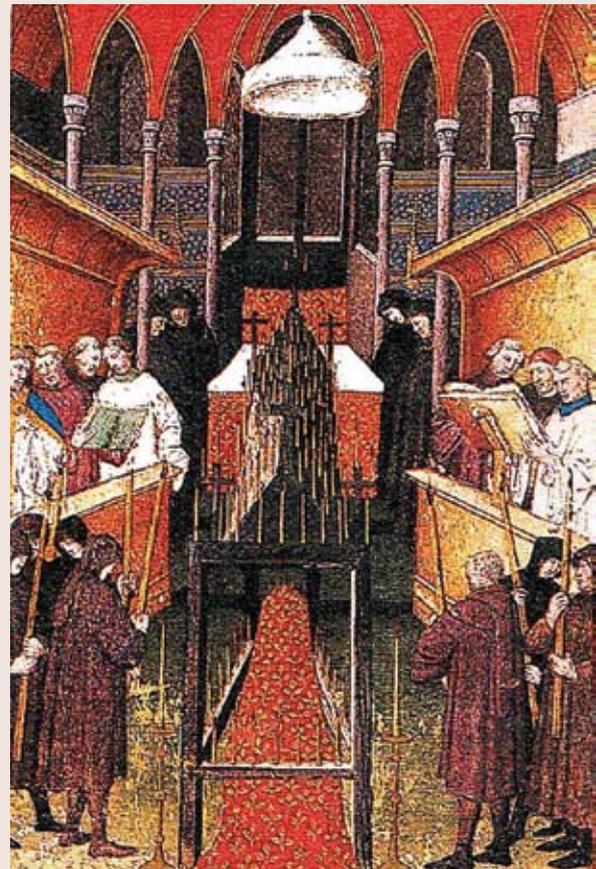
2. **167** - Slab of **Ruari mac Reginald**? Near middle of north wall. (1.80m x 0.45m)

3. **185** - Slab of **Angus Mor**? Son of Donald (I), son of Reginald. Sandstone - like 161. **On blocks**, South wall, east of wall niche. Over a shallow recess in floor; intended base for a catafalque? The slab is 1.76m x 0.46m (head), the exact same width as the slab for No. 126/56 - "C" on wall, page 45), putative slab for his father, Donald I. It is 40mm longer.

**FLOOR RECESS** (as per slab 185 above). It is just east of the arched wall niche where successive Clan Donald Lords of The Isles are buried in front. It's most probably a place for a table/platform, bier or catafalque, against the south wall with the head (its wider end reversed) towards the altar, to place the body "in state" and readiness before burial. "*Between the preparation of the body and the burial, the body lay in church on a bier and there was continual recitation of psalmody until burial...*" <sup>2</sup> It's also near the south window for obvious practical reasons! It was practise for many centuries (recorded through to the 17<sup>th</sup> c.) that candles were put on a frame, or even a table for the poorer, above the corpse. *The draped coffin is enclosed within a framelike hearse, which is covered by candles symbolising the upward*

*ascent of the offered prayers.* The warmer air would also lift the air around the corpse above head height and create a flow away from it.

When the body is picked up from this position by the son and heir and he turns around to present to the assembled nobles, the dead Lord's head is at the correct west end of the grave and church for the ceremonial burial. For each new elite Clan Donald burial (ie, from Donald I), the previous graveslab over the "tomb of ancestors" would be first uplifted during the 8 day waking, psalm singing and laying in state and readied for relocation within the chapel.



**A requiem mass in a collegiate church.** 'A prime function of such churches was the offering of prayers for the souls of their founders, and in this view **the service which followed the founders death is depicted.** The coffin is placed in the main body of the choir, to either side of which are the stalls of the canons, whilst the altar and its reredos are covered by the same cloth as is used for the coffin pall'. (Paris, Musée Jacquemart-Andre' MS 2f 142v). <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Temple Ciarán. During the last few centuries a Chalice and Crozier of the Abbots of Clonmacnoise, now housed in the National Museum, Dublin, were unearthed within the tombshrine.

<sup>2</sup> *Death and burial in medieval England, 1066-1550*; Daniell, Christopher; 1997; p.31.

<sup>3</sup> *Scottish medieval churches. An introduction to the ecclesiastical architecture of the 12th to 16th centuries in the care of the Secretary of State for Scotland.* Fawcett, Richard. Publisher: Historic Buildings and Monuments Directorate, Scottish Development Dept.; H.M.S.O. Edinburgh. 1985.

Then, following “*the mode of sepulture, according to the tradition of the country*”<sup>1</sup> the son burying his father would first reverently remove the (prior) revealed skeleton intact from the shallow grave to the newly prepared spot in the chapel : “*the bones found in the stone coffin, when a fresh interment is made, are carefully removed, and, afterwards placed in a wooden coffin [only latterly?], wherein the recent body was brought to the graveyard, are buried near the stone sepulchre*”.

n.1. TRADITION: It’s possible this included the Tyrone “*Clann Alaxandair*”, **Macdonnell** Galloglaigh High Constables of Ulster. “*They were the noble sons of a valiant father, scions of a noble line*”, that is, of none other than Lord of The Isles, Alaxandair OG, and in c.1362 they were ‘*heir to the lordship of the Insi-Gall*’. They were allied then with the MacMahon Chiefs and Abbots of Monaghan, Oriel (more at this chapters Appendix ‘A i-iv’). **Domhnach Mór (Donaghmore)** : Part IV: The Insurrection of 1641 and Its Background. Éamon Ó Doibhlin. **Seanchas Ardmhacha**: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1959), pps.413-428.

Before raising the body of his father, without aid (from the ‘catafalque’) : “*It was considered the duty of the heir of the latterly deceased person, after having cleared out the tomb by removing the bones, to raise the body of his relative, and, without any aid from others, [thus a shallow depth] to deposit it in its temporary resting-place*” – and turning to face the assembly : “*His full<sup>2</sup> noble body was buried with befitting pomp and solemnity in the tomb of his ancestors on the south side of Teampull Odhran; the sacred storehouse of his predecessors and guardian of their bones.*”

<sup>1</sup> Sources:-

1. **Ulster Journal Archaeology**, VOL 4, 1855; “*The Round Towers of Ulster*”; pps 70. **Macdonnell** burials, “stated by several intelligent persons”; the native “*Clankelly*” Macdonnells and the *MacAlaxandair* Macdonnell High Constables and also possibly MacMahons. There are multiple inscriptions (now damaged/illegible) on the appropriated large “chapel like” 12<sup>th</sup> C. solid sandstone tomb shrine (*mortuary house*) over the **burial site/relic of St. Tighernach**, Clones, county Monaghan (thought to be originally near the High Altar of the destroyed *Great Church of Clones*). Regardless of who is interred, the article fully describes the steps in the old custom from the late medieval period of obsession with saint’s relics through to the 19<sup>th</sup> c.

2. “*Report on The Hebrides*”; Walker, Rev. Dr. John, visited Iona 1764. On the graves in the cemetery of St Orans : “*It was the antient custom, as it still is in some places (1764) to bury a whole family, or at least the heads of it.....in the same grave,.....and under the same stone.*” Rev. Walker on the King’s Tombs : “*These dimensions show that it could not serve for burying more than one person at a time.....*” See Chief Gilbride/*Bricius* MacKinnon and “*no less than five generations inscribed as resting underneath*” - but this should not necessarily be interpreted as all resting together. They rested underneath, in their turn?

NOTE : A. The most frequent procedure of the custom was:- When burying the latest person who died in the ancestral grave, his new slab went on this ancestral burial tomb for his temporary resting place. The previous person’s slab went with his bones to his new and permanent resting place in the Chapel (and so on).

B. The minority procedure here was:- Where there was the one extra-special family slab that remained permanently over the ancestral plot (eg, a high relief warrior; acquired saint’s tomb-shrine: “*circumstance ritual precedent*”?), the new slab (OR upright grave marker for ancient Kings?) went over the new grave for the previous deceased person whose body was lifted from the ancestral grave and re-interred closeby in the cemetery.

3. *The Tombs of The Kings: An Iona Book of The Dead*; p.118. J Marsden.1994. “Each of the these chief families of the Isles had its claim to a tomb in the Reilig Odhrain, if not by right of descent from the house of Somerled then by right of marriage into Clan Donald.”

<sup>2</sup> “*Full noble body*” (MacVurich; *Book of Clanranald*). Knowing the context of this period and kingly burials, is this knowingly stating that there was no separate heart burial – no evisceration? For what other reason or figurative meaning would the word possibly be used? Otherwise, it seems superfluous. It does not mean he had a full compliment of limbs, fingers and toes (it was under earlier celtic law, strict convention that kings had to have no physical “blemishes”).

As a viable way to help understand the significance of making a decision on evisceration, here is a very short story of the historical novel genre (first & only) around this theme:-

Princess Margaret and John, eventhough only in his fifties, recently had long discussions about the fashionable separate burial of royal hearts and intestines and the opposing religious philosophy that it wasn’t right to divide the body as it was holy. John was thinking about burying his entrails at Ardtornish, and his heart at his beloved “Holy Cross” Oransay Priory. With his head and “body politic” on Iona of course - The Ancient Ecclesiastical Capital of his Royal family of MacDonald. But, the erudite John felt, as the Roman pagans had sensed when they scattered the remains of Christian martyrs at Lyons, that multiple burials stood in a potentially antagonistic relationship to the logic of the Resurrection.

Margaret, although very warm to her idea of keeping her beloved husband’s heart in a vase close to her breast forever more, even in her death, also had a mild concern but which related to the cult of Saintly body part relics. Although saints were fully present in any particular bit of their body - just as Christ was to be fully present in fragments of the consecrated host. John’s decision was final – his full regal body would be buried in the tomb of his ancestors.

“*He died in his own castle of Ardtornish, while monks and priests were over his body, he having received the body of Christ and having been anointed, his fair body was brought to Iona.*”

“*His obsequies were observed with great pomp and splendor by the Churchmen of the Isles, among whom he was known as the “Good John of Isla,” on account of a munificence to their order, in which he more than vied with the pious liberality of his fathers*”.

**The End.**

These last (17<sup>th</sup> c. redacted) quotes for burials of the Lords of The Isles in St Oran's Chapel are not melodramatic *waxing lyrical* (part Shakespearean!) It

needs to be appreciated for the 13<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> centuries, it does have significant and powerful meaning when seen in the context of this :-

*"The dead are not actually dead. "*

*"Relics were the Saints, continuing to live among men."*<sup>1</sup>

*"The Saints could act and feel like the living, and were treated as if they were alive and incorrupt."*<sup>2</sup>

*"And I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh I shall see my God."* (Job 19:26)

#### **DEFINITIVE INTERPRETATIVE FRAMEWORK** (from the martyrs onwards.)

*"The soul in heaven remains in contact with the earthly body, which shall renew itself at the Resurrection, but which is already filled with a heavenly dynamis-virtus, with a manna-like power: It was a miraculous double existence."* ("Treasures of Heaven"; 2011; pps 19-26.)

#### ST ORAN'S CHAPEL AND CLAN DONALD BURIALS – CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE.

My précised interpretation by arranging some poignant short descriptive *quotes-words* reflecting the period:-

***Ancestral graves remain the constant centre of life – the sacred storehouse.*** At each new burial, *imperishable live skeletons, with second souls*, are relocated *unscathed* to await alone for their undisturbed and unhindered *heavenly re-animation at the resurrection – day of judgement*. In this process, the Clan Donald *ancestral line of descent of the very first man* (Donald I) is preserved, made *constant* and connected by the absorbed *power of the spiritual burial dust and bits of stone*, with their *accumulating life-force* mingling with the 'alive' *St Oran - the dynamis-virtus* of this *altar's requisite and indispensable saintly relics* of St Oran's bones and **his second soul** which is in *constant contact* with **his Holy Soul** in Heaven next to God (the skull/head was the most significant in this thinking.)

(But see above for the full quotes and my associated schematic diagram.

1. *The Archaeology of Death and Burial*; Parker-Pearson, Mike; p.60. 1999.
2. *Medieval death: Ritual and Representation*; Binski, Paul. 2001; p.15. ©

Those "*ceremonies*", which several observers said "*were strictly observed*" bear no resemblance whatsoever to any post-medieval or 'modern' convention of the last four centuries but ones that had some antiquity. It's tempting to say : A "*deposito ad sanctos*" milieu for *St. Tighernach's* tomb shrine, Clones, and the *Nobilis Scottici Macdomhnaill Ard Constabula Uladh* can be correlated to the ritualistic behaviour expected to occur for the medieval period, 1350-1450, in *Teampull Odhráin* by their elite Clan Donald kin. In fact, all members of the Lords of the Isles derbfine.

This is not just a show of filial piety. It also has all the hallmarks of an ancient inauguration ceremony or rite of a *mac ríogh* proving he is strong and able bodied, "*king fit*",<sup>1</sup> and the "*the true ruler*" with right of succession by the symbolism of personally placing his father, unaided, in the *spiritual burial dust and bits of stone* in the *sacred storehouse of his predecessors* and thereby also accumulating the (*life-force*) connection with the

ancestral line of descent. One can also imagine the *file* (bard) or Ollamh of history reciting the full ancestry of the line at this juncture with names and titles – back to Conn of a Hundred Battles.

From all accounts of these graves which are always described as "vaults" or "tombs" (albeit a general term) and judging by the convention and for other practical reasons (incl. *effort-expenditure* model<sup>2</sup>) it seems reasonable to assume the possibility that his particular ancestral tomb of the Clan Donald Chiefs may not have been filled with soil – eg, like a tomb chest; vault. However, the Iona Club in 1833 found no (open) "vaults" under the three tombs of the Ridge of Kings. It is difficult to locate any records of what the Iona Club found when they lifted these slabs. Maybe, by the absence of any record, it indicates that there was just the normal inhumation and earth to the top of the grave – with no excavation and nothing to report. Or, there was excavation, or no dirt fill, but no report of what they discovered! A similar, but unrelated ancient

<sup>1</sup> *From Kings to Warlords, The Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages*. Chapters III – Inauguration Ceremonies; IV - Methods of Choosing a King ;1987. Dr **Katherine Simms**: Senior Lecturer in medieval history, Trinity College Dublin.

<sup>2</sup> *The Archaeology of death*; Randsborg, Klavs; Kinnes, Ian; Chapman, Robert. 1981.

convention, is a behavioural model described by James Brown<sup>1</sup> as “crypt-processing” (Klunk & Gibson sites, Illinois, >AD 400) - the recent body had pride of place in the central crypt, but when the next arrived for placing there, the prior bones (and occasional body part) were gathered and piled in the corners.

I have included this because there is no other specific, detailed account that I have been able to find of anything similar to what I have described for these Donald Lords of The Isles. Unless the 17 regular shaped, correct size and period *grave-markers* shown by the reliable, *masterly* William Daniell RA, 1815, are from the *secondary burial* of King’s bones from the *Tomair nan Righ*, and the knowledge of this passed to the early MacDonald Lords and was the “circumstance ritual precedent”.

### THE CHRISTIAN SOUL : SURVIVAL, PURGATORY AND SUFFRAGES.

“So far we have seen that between the period of the early Church and the Middle Ages, the dead came profoundly to affect the living. Christianity, by virtue of its doctrines and the works of Christ, changed and strengthened the relationship between the quick and the dead. The Church placed the human body at the centre of its speculations about identity and faith, systematic or otherwise; and the power of the saints was bound up progressively with notions of authority, authenticity, place and, inevitably, power. Intimately tied to these issues was the question of the precise nature of the interaction between the living and dead; and related to this were the issues of selfhood, survival after death and whether the living could actively help the dead.”<sup>2</sup>

### SECONDARY RITES

“We may define these rites as involving a long intermediary period after which the remains of a dead body are recovered from their original place of depositon and moved to a new location. The term is normally reserved for practices which involve the transformation from corpse to clean bones which are laid to rest in a second ceremony. Although we think of Christianity as associated with single-rite practices of cremation or inhumation, including ideas that the skeleton must

stay intact until the Day of judgement, there are many Christian cultures where secondary burial is the norm. Orthodox communities in northern Greece, Anglican and Catholic communities in central and eastern Madagascar and Roman Catholic Neapolitans all practise rites of secondary burial, removing the body from its place of decomposition to an ossuary or individual vault”.<sup>3</sup> Metcalf and Huntington devote a substantial part of their book to the discussion of the transition of kingship during royal deaths emphasizing how royal rituals and their funerary constructions serve in turn to build the institution of kingship.<sup>4</sup>

In all societies in all countries throughout thousands of years there are elaborate ceremonies<sup>5</sup> when a King dies to protect and perpetuate the Kingship, usually a particular family dynasty, which represent the “body politic” as a continuous living institution – re-animated by the processes of a son connecting with the corpse and the bones or ashes from a secondary ritual. This one here on Iona for the Lords of The Isles, while not having any direct record of the practice (the norm; not unusual) except a later observation of a “*mode of sepulture, according to the tradition of the country*” for a particular location and in a special saint’s tomb-shrine at Clones, fits in perfectly with these “body politic” rituals and in fact is actually relatively basic, and low cost, in comparison to many others. It is basic in most respects except possibly one, because there are three kings involved – the father, the son and the “spiritual ancestor,” grandfather (God comprises three ‘persons’ that together form a single whole). Yes, a “trinity” reinforcing the institution of everlasting kingship. Going to far? This is not such an unbelievable concept when one considers the extraordinary status of the location, the period with its society and politics totally dominated and inseparable from religion, and the people involved, many of whom were Brothers of the Order, etc, etc. (also see the slabs of some of these men with trefoils on them).

<sup>3</sup> *The Archaeology of Death and Burial*; Mike Parker Pearson; p.50. 1999.

<sup>4</sup> *Celebrations of death: the anthropology of mortuary ritual* ; 1991. Metcalfe & Huntington; pps 133-88.

<sup>5</sup> “This is not to attribute to ritual any necessary priority in the chain of social and political causality. **Royal customs often begin in response to chance circumstances and practical considerations. But once performed, any part of a royal funeral ritual sets a precedent that is repeated at the next kingly death.** *Once present in the ritual, such an element accumulates meanings the way a ship accumulates barnacles.* Over the centuries, practical precedents become powerful symbolic configurations that constrain and inspire the course of later political events”. *Celebrations of death: the anthropology of mortuary ritual*; 1991. Metcalfe & Huntington; pps 166.

<sup>1</sup> Ibid, p.36.

<sup>2</sup> *Medieval death: Ritual and Representation*; Binski, Paul. 2001; p.21

**There is a way to prove or disprove this hypothesis.** If the shallow grave under one of the replacement flagstone slabs were to be explored by GPR and/or excavated if necessary (eg, opposite wall from the wall niche - Donald I?; and use radiocarbon dating) and it was proved to be undisturbed but the bones remaining in it were disarticulated, then this would prove a ceremony involving “secondary rites”. That is, in this case, a “*mode of sepulture, according to the tradition of the country*”... the heir removing bones (spiritual? – “second soul”) to a secondary grave and burying his father (temporal?-connecting ancestor) in the primary ancestral site. “The higher the rank, the more duty-status relationship owed.”<sup>1</sup> An excellent multidisciplinary team might also include those like Mike Parker-Pearson, Paul Binski and Eric Fernie.

**PLAIN “SLAB-FLAGSTONES”** : There are five other plain, undecorated ‘slab-flagstones’ in the floor of the Chapel. This matches the five (of six) slabs that were “re-instated in 1926” in the chapel floor with four of them now attached to the north wall and one in the cloister (Angus Og). It appears to me, that at the death of Angus Mor, when the first of the grave slabs was ceremoniously uplifted from the multiple burial spot in **1292**, ie, that of Donald I (126/56), it was for practical reasons, placed directly across the room against the wall, near and to the west of the putative grave of his earlier deceased brother Ruari, Slab No. 167. All the measurements confirm this as a distinct probability – see box and diagram on “Six in Same Grave” p. 139. If this is so, then this is where the disarticulated bones (“*live skeleton & second soul*”) of the eponymous Donald were carefully removed to (no coffins?), reburied and recovered by his relocated grave slab, and hopefully some, if soil is dry and not acidic, still remain (and optimistically not disturbed since).

#### A TIMETABLE - CHAPEL FLOOR AND SLABS

- **1850.** H. Graham’s Plate 6: St Oran’s Chapel door, also shows part of the floor. The interior aspect is minor and has poor perspective (north wall runs in to door jamb instead of NW corner; 2m. out). This north floor section was “obscured in the late 19th century” – see 1860. (No full plan?)
- **1860.** It appears the Iona Club may have first uplifted Nos. 150, 152 (took photo: main foot traffic area) and then four other slabs for protection, display (not the ‘*much worn*’ sandstone slabs 161, 167). They displayed these six on blocks, north half of the floor (photo p.135;

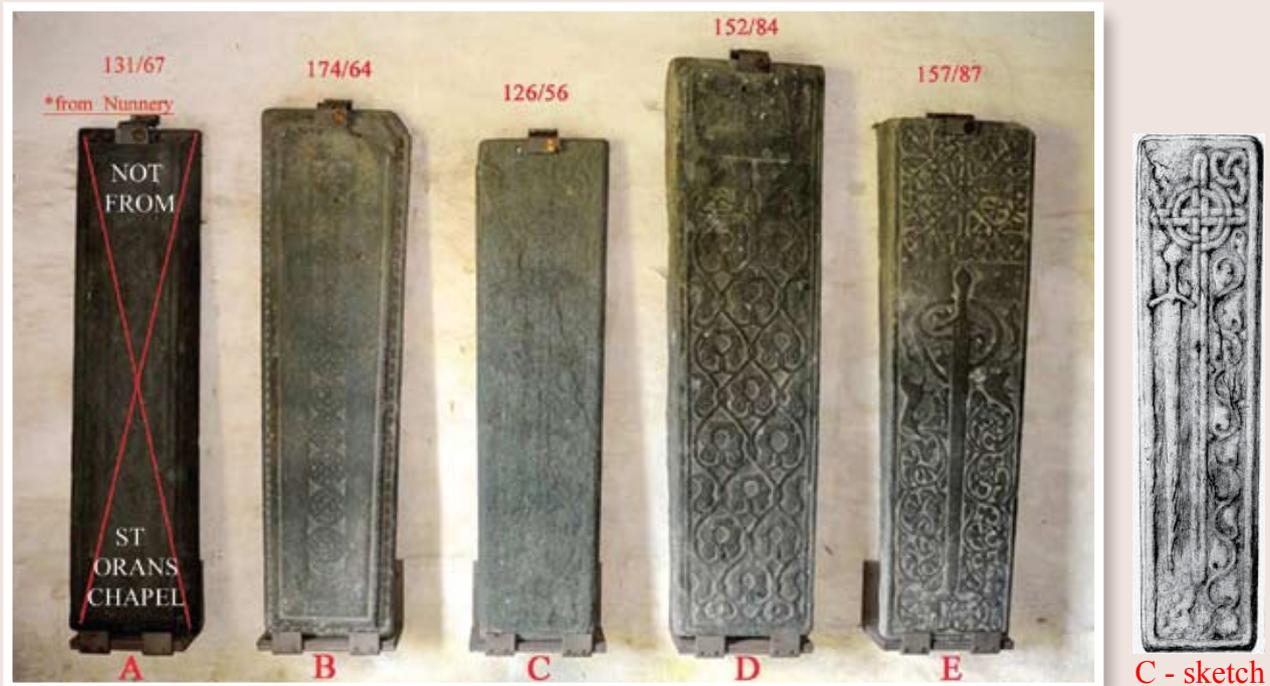
and Gilbride MacKinnon originally from outside – plus others? RCAHMS 2012 advice is “we don’t hold any plans depicting the original layout of the carved stones”.)

- **1921-6.** Five of the slabs above were (re) laid – “re-instated in 1926” (No. 185, ‘*much worn*’, sandstone, was put on blocks in the floor recess); “paved floor relaid by the Office of Public Works in the period 1921-6” (brass plaque 1926 – really need to obtain their (full?) records if available);
- **1957** - “and a full restoration undertaken by the Iona Community in 1957” (of roof, walls).
- **1975-77.** RCAHMS inventory; the same five uplifted again to the Abbey museum. Same two left in the floor, 161, 167; and 185 left on blocks. There is no record of slab No. 161, north of the altar, ever being disturbed. It’s isolated, already *much worn* soft sandstone, and well away from the main foot traffic. It is in its original position. Possibly it and No. 167, also *much worn*, were momentarily uplifted and laid straight back in the same exact position in a minor levelling process along the wall. They were not like the five uplifted, displayed, re-instated, uplifted, relocated, returned on wall or the one uplifted and left there on blocks, No.185.
- **2000.** Five slabs returned by Historic Scotland and placed on the north wall inside St Oran’s Chapel (four correctly). Slab 131/67, from the Nunnery (see Argyll VOL 4, p.222), is swapped for the slab 150/86 of Angus Og’s which was recorded as “formerly in St Oran’s Chapel” for some unstated, curious reason.

No one has ever suggested that any Clan Donald Lords of the Isles monuments have been moved into this chapel. They were always there – “the burial chapel of the Lords of The Isles”. Six were uplifted from the floor to stop degradation from visitors and they have been moved around in the chapel for better viewing; maybe a number of times (1860 - there was known to be a “poor arrangement” within St Oran’s and it was therefore changed). Only two **Clan Donald** graveslabs with galleys were ever recorded, or found, in St Oran’s Chapel – by T. Pennant, *Tour in Scotland*, 1772 and by all others including S&B (LMMSWH) and VOL 4 ARGYLL Inventory (both RCAHMS). Only one of these had an inscription (Angus Og, d.1318).

**The other is possibly for *Donald of Harlaw, d.1421, the last Lord buried in the ancestral tomb, along which Lord John II built his (intended) elaborate arched wall niche, south wall.***

<sup>1</sup> Op Cit. *The Archaeology of death*; p. 56



**STORAN'S CHAPEL, NORTH WALL.** (Four Lords of the Isles' slabs). Numbers = ARGYLL V. 4 / Museum.

**A. It is not in ARGYLL VOL 4 as a slab from St Oran's Chapel.** It is a substitute for Angus Og's slab, in the cloister. Five slabs are recorded by RCAHMS as "formerly in St Oran's Chapel." This slab 131/67, from the Nunnery (Argyll VOL 4, p.222), is swapped for the slab of Angus Og which was recorded as "formerly in St Oran's Chapel" in the re-positioning of the collection. But why? No matter which MacDonald Lord Angus is, this slab, like the other four, came from this chapel. The person must have been a Lord of The Isles to have the right to be buried in their chapel. It is in the cloister, Museum No. 86, south wall by the 2nd door of nave and it should be re-located to St Oran's Chapel. (If it's secure, being the only slab remaining with legible inscription for a Lord of the Isles.)

**B. 174/64. Alexandair Og?** Killed 1299. Son of Angus Mor, son of Donald. (1.81m X 0.52m).

**C. 126/56. Donald 1?** (d. 1247, son of Reginald). Sandstone. Sword (short langet), plant scroll and two strand plaited ringed cross with full length shaft. It is virtually the same as (exemplar for?) the coarser Kilmartin (and Inveraray) "transitional" slabs of late 13th century with their swords, long cross, plant-scroll and Triquetra - Fig 2, no.3, p.14; LMMSWH. (The slab of his brother, founder of Clan MacRuari, may be No.167 which also has a cross, but interlaced.) (1.72m X 0.46m).

**D. 152/84. DONALD (II) of HARLAW?** (d.1421, son of John (I), son of Angus Og).

**Description** : Galley with sails furled, then intertwined plant scrolls surmounted by two pairs of animals with a keeled arris-roll border. (1.96m X 0.52m. - Angus Og's is 1.94m X 0.52m).



**Thomas Pennant, 1772, Fellow of the Royal Society,** possibly saw and recorded this slab that was beneath the *neat pointed arches* of the south wall niche. ("His works have proved invaluable as preserving the record of important antiquarian relics which have now perished." - 1911 Encyclopaedia Britannica.)

Donald II was the very last Lord of The Isles buried at that precise spot. There is no evidence of any kind including circumstantial, or even a suggestion, indication or good reason that since 1421 and prior to 1772, that any of the Lord's graveslabs in St Oran's Chapel had been relocated inside the chapel – besides the possibility of the last Lord of the Isles.

The only reasons that any slab was relocated from the outside cemetery of St Oran was to either place it in a chapel or church for protection or to raise its status (if inscribed – ie, MacKinnons), or, to reuse it over a fresh gravesite. Others were removed altogether – eg *Aonghus Na Gaoithe* (Mhartain/McDonald) slab No. 536 to Kilmuir.

ARGYLL VOL 4 ; Carved Stones, p.179; RCAHMS; Sep 1980. "In the past century many stones have been moved from one depository to another....".

It is clear from a number of sources that the substantial majority of monument movement has occurred since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and all major relocations have occurred post that time (see “Time Table” previous page). These later movements should not be used as a barrier or reason to infer “find spots” in St Oran’s Chapel a century before in 1772 are not original locations. Any item that was brought into the chapel after the Lordship fell (for protection, status) was clearly identifiable – and has been (RCAHMS). Pennant specifically describes the **MacKinnon’s** inscribed broken cross shaft (but as a tomb stone ‘near the south end’) and the warrior slab of the chief Gilbride (No. 207) and a **Maclean** slab, all of which have a galley on them. On the face of it, it is another slab with galley he also describes beneath *the neat pointed arches*. He also separately and specifically describes Angus Og’s inscribed slab with galley.

There were no others with galleys inside the chapel. Slabs latterly brought in (16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries) were placed in the centre of the chapel, over floor flagstones and slabs (Martin, Graham). If Martin Martin, 1695, is right (the historical narrative matches), the MacKinnons, out of spite, probably shoved aside the last Lord of Isles’ slab (No. 152?) for their nemeses, Donald of Harlaw, from the ancestral tomb in front of the elaborate triple arched wall niche, and placed their own ancestral tomb slab of five generations, the imposing Gilbride effigy, right on top to have the last ‘triumph *over them*’ (6 generations of Clan Donald Chiefs). Around 1850 these introduced slabs and the others uplifted of the Lords of the Isles were propped against walls for clearing, protection, photographing and re-display. Especially before **1772**, with anti-poperly sentiment still high, this wasn’t a place that one would wish to be buried - Catholic consecrated ground (soil from Rome) and a distant chapel of the defeated. The only identifiable early post Reformation burial (and outside) is Dr J Beaton, **1657**. Col. A. Maclean was not buried inside until **1817** (revealed by Public Works, 1926; what else?). It’s the only proven inside one of a possible few and means the originals need not have been disturbed. Why would they?

**But is Thomas Pennant’s eye witness account totally reliable?**

(*Tour*; p.286) : **“In Oran’s Chapel are several tombs.... within, beneath a recess formed with neat pointed arches, (south wall canopied niche intended for John II) is a tomb-stone with a ship and several ornaments”** (beasts and ornamental plant scrolls).

It might equate to Slab No. 152/84 and the accepted history of the burials of the Lords of Isles, specifically that of John I and then finally his son **Donald II** who were the last two and **both were buried, consecutively, on the “south side of the chapel in the tomb of their ancestors”**. (Neither Alexander, John II nor Angus Master were buried on Iona – see detail of Angus Og’s slab.)

HOWEVER : an early stereo photo I have only recently viewed from DIGITool alters my previous deduction. Slab No. 152 is not, at that time at least, in front of the triple arch in the south wall and, along with other points from this image, this raises questions that lead one to question Pennant’s accuracy – his *“invaluable works – records”*. Martin Martin got much wrong (using only memory), but is the more reliable Pennant also confused and mismatched the *slab stone* with “ship” - *beneath the tomb recess*” and the cross shaft inscription just as Martin did, 1695? And are Pennant ‘1’ and ‘2’ actually the same monument? See the photo next page with added tags to all the items Pennant described (the right side of stereo image).

(Partially because of those MacKinnons still causing trouble) I have to say there is much less certainty now that slab No. 152 was that of Donald of Harlaw, who was the last Clan Donald Lord of the Isles buried in the ancestral grave in front of that triple arch (under the “tomb cover” location shown). My ‘celebration’ of his tombstone for the anniversary of the Battle of Harlaw last year was somewhat premature.

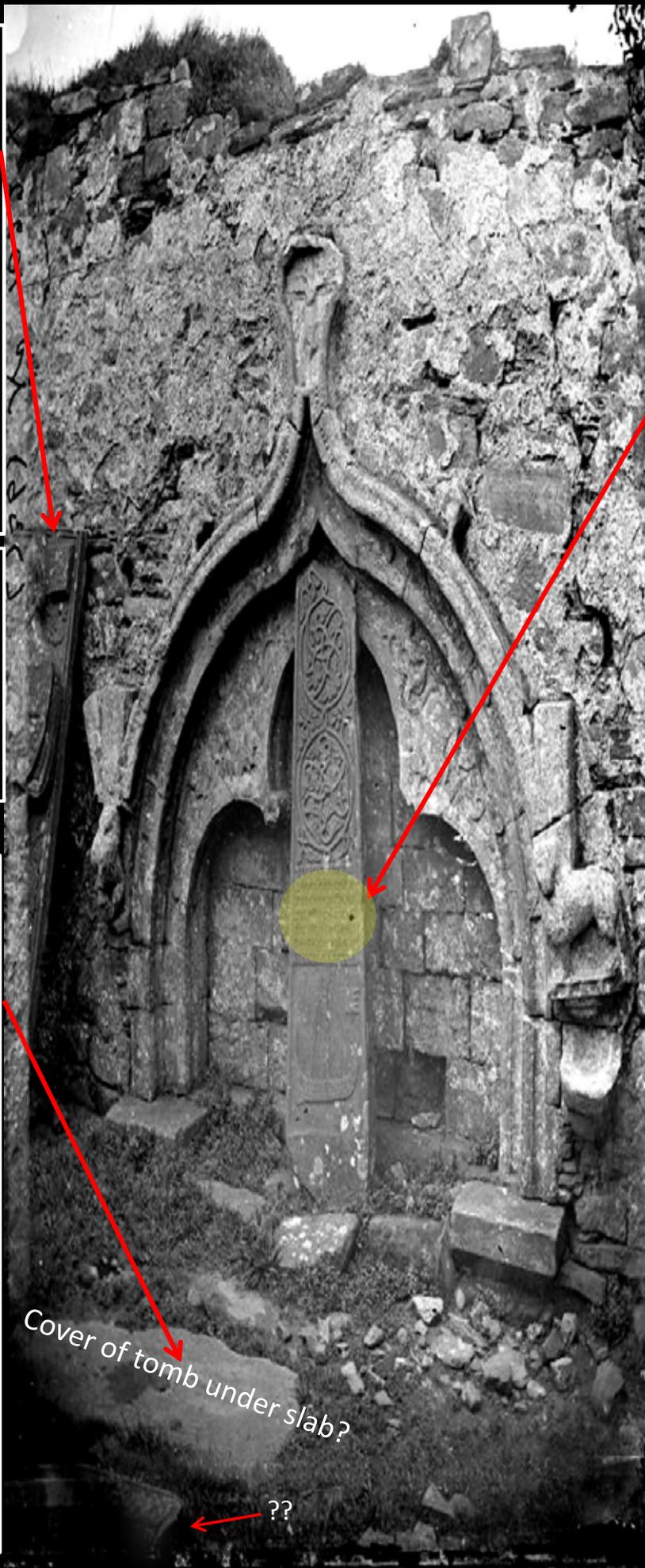
**E. 157/87. John (I) Lord of Islay?** d.1386. Foliated cross, sword with belt, lion, griffin, hound, stag, etc. (1.79m X 0.51m).



\*\*\*\*\*

One arrangement by the Iona Club (after 1860). Some slabs on blocks over the original floor. At the front appears to be the narrow end of No. 174 and in the middle appears to be the Chief Gillebride MacKinnon warrior slab No. 207/108 (*Iona Vol 4*) that was brought from its original position in the outside cemetery into the “centre of

St Oran’s chapel” (*“Antiquities”*, HD Graham; 1850) at some unknown time after the Lordship of the Isles fell. There are the six uplifted MacDonald Lord’s flat graveslabs originally from inside the chapel on display. (McKinnon’s inscribed cross-shaft is leaning on the E. wall – was previously leant against the south wall arched tomb niche and mistaken by some as a “tomb” inscription.)



Chief Gilbride MacKinnon's warrior slab from outside (No. 207).  
 (Martin Martin, 1695, gives this slab the inscription from the MacKinnon cross and has it in front, below the arched recess.  
 IF right, was it deliberately placed over the MacDonald's ancestral resting place, Donald II of Harlaw was last, as a sign of 'revenge?

**Pennant 4.**  
 Describes a galley on another slab and says it is a MacLean's (from outside) - *Ailean nan Sop*.

MacDonald Lord's Ancestral Tomb.  
 The last graveslab here was for Donald of Harlaw (No. 152?). Has been moved revealing what may be the tomb's sealing stone (or replaced with it).  
**Pennant 1.**  
1772  
 "Within, beneath a recess formed with three neat pointed arches, is a tomb-stone with a ship and several ornaments."

Abbott MacKinnon's cross shaft from outside  
**Pennant 2.**  
 But he describes it as a tomb-stone, and imprecisely "near the south end", while giving it the cross' clear inscription :  
 "Haec eft **crux** (cross)  
 Lauchlani Mc. Fingon et ejus filii Johannis Abbatis de Hy. facta an. Dom. m0++ cccclxxxix."

But is Pennant also confused and mismatched the slab - stone with "ship" - beneath the tomb recess" and the cross shaft inscription just as Martin Martin did, 1695? And are Pennant 1. and 2. the same?  
 "Near the South end is the tomb of the abbot Mac-kinnon's father.... "

Slab 150. (not in view)  
**Pennant 3.**  
 Described No.150's inscription as "Angus Oig's" slab. Has a galley.  
 "He was a strong friend to Robert Bruce, and was with him at the battle of Bannockbourne."

Cover of tomb under slab?

??

### ‘The Graves of the Kings at Clonmacnoise’

Earliest extant version preserved in 15<sup>th</sup> century MS;  
Author: R. I. Best 1905 (some selected verses).

*O cemetery of the warriors of Conn’s Half, which of thy nobles do I not extol! O sanctuary on whose floor is no stain! O place wherein Ciarán suffered!*

*O great temple which all extol for thy dignity and thy fortune, two with tapering fingers, mild was their glory, two kings of Erin, are under thine altar!*

*Toirrdelbach on the southern side of it, Ruaidri on the other lofty side, a fierce and gentle pair, without stealth for a while, two comely high-kings of Erin.*

*O great flagstone of the descendant of Maelruanach, to behold thee is not an order (?) of pride: twenty kings, and their heads ’neath thy cross, are under the mould which thou hast closed!*

*O stone of the descendants of Concenainn, thou hast concealed men of estate: seventeen men of shining valour ’neath thy comely angelic cemetery!*

*It is thirty kings in all of the folk of royal rank, of the kings of Cruachan who believed, that are under the flagstone of the kings in thy cemetery!*

*Ruaidri in this temple to the south, Diarmait son of Tadg, side by side, Conchobar, Aed, head to head, two sons of Ruaidri, king of Erin!*

view MS Rawlinson B 512 on Early Manuscripts at Oxford University & <http://www.ucd.ie/tlh/text/rib.eri.2.001.text.html>

“*O great flagstone*”:- is it formulaic, figurative synecdoche, hyperbole (ie, the numbers), or not?

To understand the true situation of “*O great flagstone*” at Clonmacnoise and the burial practise between c.600-c.1200 of many kings, up to 30, from the same dynasty is not straightforward. Some kings were replaced within months and some up to 20-30 years. Two to even four might die, be killed, within a year. The father and heir being killed together was not uncommon, but these were buried “*side by side*”, “*head to head*” in special enlarged graves on their own, not with all the prior ones.

Firstly, I don’t think the meaning is that multiples, up to 30 skeletons and even some fresh corpses together (depends on burial timings, acidity and bone degradation), were piled or stacked up in one normal man size, incredibly deep

grave under the one **regular** size recumbent graveslab- *O’flagstone* (“*great*” doesn’t mean huge – means its “status”). Even the more conservative 17 skeletons under one flagstone size normal grave is ridiculous, and these are not big burial mounds, chambers, barrows, large vaults, crypts, etc; war dead were buried side by side in larger open pits. Whatever “stacked” arrangements one can think of, for either whole skeletons or carefully piled disarticulated skulls and bones, it doesn’t work – even for a double sized slab and “retro” rearranging. Belief in the resurrection and maintaining skeletons “intact” to be clothed again in flesh is another absolute reason against this option (see later - *When our flesh, then glorified and Holy, Is put on us once more.*)

Does “*O great flagstone*” refer to the one or “the many”? Or the whole graveyard? (synecdoche - figurative language; a specific class of thing is used to refer to a larger, more general class - or a part describing or meaning the whole). If there was one king each **permanently** under their **own** *flagstone* (recumbent graveslab; one burial each, ie, no secondary) then the plural would surely have been used (*O great flagstones*; of 17 to 30).

My deduction (cautiously) is that it does mean the one only dynastic grave slab and that it was reused for each king for continuity - the “perpetual kingship” ritual - but the graves only ever had the one dead king at a time (a kind of more sophisticated “crypt- processing” – new corpse replaces prior one in the central prime position).

Note the five MacKinnon chiefs’ inscribed on the one outstanding, high relief warrior slab.<sup>1</sup> A new slab, is provided for the relocated corpse’s or skeleton’s grave nearby, but is probably often plainer and of less cost.

**NB:** possibility of upright grave-markers being used to mark the relocated bones of early Kings buried in St Orans as seen in the drawings by Daniell, 1815.

There’s no *charnel houses* or *ossuaries* ever been evident for a collection of relocated bones on Iona. S Fry, p.69, says however that they were in general use in medieval Ireland (and parts of Italy, France). Indications are that these methods were mainly or only used when their was space limitations either within the church or its cemetery. This was not the case in St Oran’s cemetery or chapel to 1500.

<sup>1</sup> Slab “**The Four Priors**” –(Inscription 28). I think this should be treated as an “exception”. It’s even harder to try and work out what might have really happened in this period of takeover, turmoil and posturing. From S&B; LMMSWH; p.118: “*The four priors of the same clan qualified for an inscription in black letter dated somewhere between c.1500 and c.1560 would thus seem to be either Campbells or Macleans. Whatever their clan, it would seem that most, if not all, of these priors were in office before 1532, that is to say, more or less in the period of Campbell ascendancy at Iona.*”



**Four Augustinian Canons Meditating beside an Open Grave; c. 1500; Master of the Spes Nostra.** (courtesy Rijks Museum, Amsterdam - in the public domain)

In a walled monastic courtyard four men kneel beside an open grave. They are accompanied by two patron saints: St Jerome and St Augustine. On the lid of the tomb are the words: 'Rest In Peace'. An unknown master painted this panel in the early sixteenth century. It used to be known as the 'Spes Nostra': 'Our Hope'. Which is why the painter was known as the 'Master of the Spes Nostra', even after the painting was renamed.

**St Jerome (347-419/20).** Jerome is particularly known as one of the four Latin (Western) fathers of the church. He was a man of wide learning who, after studying grammar, rhetoric and philosophy, became a priest. While in the service of Pope Damasus I in Rome, he embarked on a new Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate. Jerome is often portrayed in art in Cardinal's robes, although that office did not exist at that time. After the Late Middle Ages Jerome is often shown in his study with a lion at his feet.

**St Augustine (354-430).** Augustine was the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa and also one of the four Latin Fathers of the Church. Note the 'heart' in his hand.

**GRAVESLAB – BURIAL :** Note the small log rollers under the slab and its small margin of overlapping the shallow grave (if master artist depicts it accurately). The shallowness is not totally due to dramatic license by the artist to be able to show the corpse before the weeping, (pregnant) wife. It is not quite as deep as it should be but neither were graves the standard six foot deep until after the bubonic plague in London, 1665. In California even today, for example, the coffin must only be covered by a minimum of 18 inches of dirt and turf. Possibly these comments should be put in perspective of St Jerome's lion (bottom left : popular fable has it that Jerome pulled a thorn from the animal's paw) - he is a bit on the small side, looking more like a huge rat, an '*allegorical*' taker of the flesh, licking its paw in anticipation of getting stuck into the corpse.

## GRAVE SLAB MEASUREMENTS- DONALD (I) TO DONALD (II), SIZE SEQUENCE OVER THE “SIX IN SAME GRAVE”.

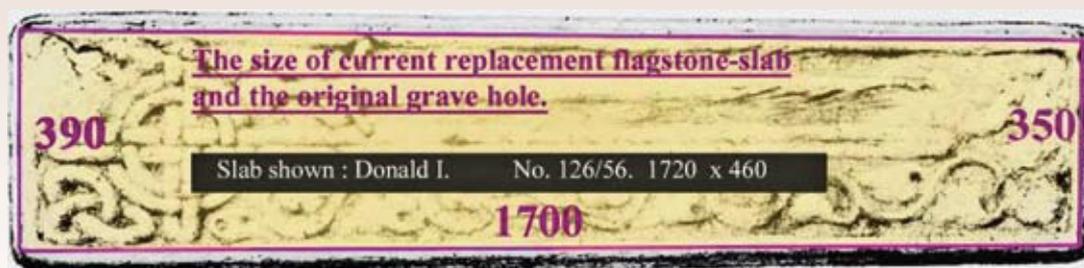
REV WALKER 1764 – On slabs in Relig Oran, ie, the outside cemetery. “Each stone lies flat on the ground and is seldom larger than dimensions of the grave it covers.” Walker on the King’s Tombs: *“These dimensions show that it could not serve for burying more than one person at a time.....”* (note: King Lulach was killed and buried in the King’s Tomb, ruling for only four months after King Macbeth was killed and buried there. They would not have been buried together!)

The six graveslabs of Donald I to Donald II that sequentially sat over the one ancestral grave in St Oran’s Chapel simply lay on top of the floor level – not inset to be flush. Observations before the Iona Club lifted them in 1860 show and say that St Oran slabs were “on the ground”, not “in”, and this is corroborated by the fact that some of the slabs were also carved on their sides (edges) and were obviously designed to be visible. See Angus Og’s. [PS: when the floor was relaid by the Public Works in 1926 they somewhat “obscured” this situation for some of them, possibly including to a small depth the two not lifted, no. 161 and 167.] Clonmacnoise recumbent slabs “laid flat over the grave.” Originally, the slab simply overlapped the grave hole by a small margin all around, sitting on top of the paved floor level (earth fill to top of floor level I presume; but possibly no earth for some of them.) See putative slab for Donald I below, superimposed over the current flagstone-slab, north wall nearest the door. This appears to be where Donald I’s remains and his slab were moved to when his son Angus Mor was buried in the ancestral grave along the south wall with his new graveslab. All the measurements match this ritual by practical application, with overlaps of 35mm at each side and 10mm at each end. (See diagram below; and the overlaps drawn in the c.1500 painting, *Four Augustinian Canons Meditating beside Open Grave*).

After deciding the possible burial order of the six slabs based on other factors, a check was then made on the six slab’s relative measurements. The first two in time for the same grave (Donald I and Angus Mor) are given (ARGYLL VOL 4) as exactly the same width of 460mm, and what’s more, they are the smallest in length, which

makes good sense. They are both 40mm wider than the probable slab for Donald’s father, Reginald. If not made to the exact same size, slabs should generally be made longer for later burials, not smaller; but especially the width to not show gaps, or fall in and in this regard, the last one for Donald of Harlaw is the larger of all. The last four slabs are wider and are the same width at 520mm (head end), except for 157/87 (John I?) which at 510mm is an inconsequential 10mm narrower (ie, only 5mm difference each side). The four lengths also vary in progressive order of upsizing in the ‘correct’ (my) sequence of slab to known burial year (except for one – “John I”) for a total difference of 170mm. Both the renowned warriors, Angus Og of Bannockburn and Donald of Harlaw, have slabs of the almost the same length (and design too) and are the longest of all by far; ie, big tall men. *Good John* was not a celebrated warrior, but a shrewd politician and great religious and cultural patron. He appears to be around 150mm (6”) shorter in height and, if true, the ends of the ancestral grave would simply need to be “blocked in” 75mm each end - and the smaller body of the head of the *Royal family of Macdonald* wouldn’t look insignificant.

The 50 slabs extant on Iona have a considerable range of measurements with differences varying between 1-200mm in width and 1-400mm in length. These slabs in St Oran’s Chapel show a noteworthy consistency, particularly in width, within the two distinct sets (in first smaller set and in later larger set.) This is to be expected, as each is a Lord of The Isles, “buried with befitting pomp and solemnity in the tomb of his ancestors” at known years. Even if these slabs were inset flush with the floor level, this ritual process from Donald I to Donald II would still prove to be practical with only one minor width change to the hole of +60mm; from 460mm to 520mm (for “Alaxandair”). PS: there was no overall standard slab width. Only 2 others are 460mm wide. There are 5 others 520mm wide, but there are, for example, also 10 @ 480, 7 @ 470, 7 @ 450. Slabs are all tapered, except 161, “Reginald’s,” which is very uncommonly, but not uniquely, parallel sided and it is prior to the Clan Donald ancestral tomb. Widths are given at the head ends.



(Fig. above: replacement flagstone-slab, north wall, nearest front door – ‘overlaid’ is *Donald I’s* slab; LxB in mm. Flagstone kindly measured by Jane Martin, Historic Scotland, Site Manager, Iona. ©

## ATTRIBUTION

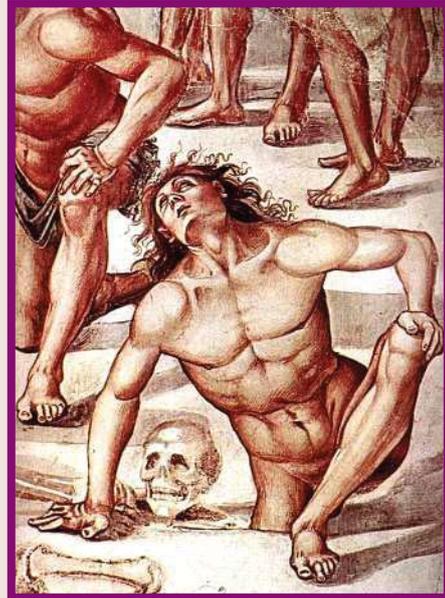
The attribution of these slabs (see detail on each Lord) is based on the period and style of the slab, the matching and meshing to the Clan Donald and individual's history and analysing all the many previous records of examinations (all types, including photographs) of these slabs and the chapel over the centuries. It's also based on where some were located in the chapel and the known history, custom and method of the Clan Donald Lords of the Isles' burial in the "same grave – same tomb" (not Chapel) and simultaneous relocation of the previous Lord's remains - and their slabs. That is, and this is most important, each Lord was not in the first instance buried in a new, individual grave.

When considering the "same grave" history, an important point is the understanding and practical application of the absolute reality of the high religious significance and seriousness of keeping skeletons "unscathed" so the "living dead" with their 'second souls' are able to reanimate themselves – "*clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh*" - at resurrection, the Last Judgement. There is one thing very clear and obvious from this strong belief system. The bones of all the important ancestors from a single, narrow (normally shallow- two to three feet) grave, the "*constant centre of life,*" would not be all piled on top of each other or jumbled together even in the least degree so as not to interfere in any way in the "life-force" of the line of descent, or the singular process of renewal and reawakening at resurrection - the ultimate goal. And not a neat stack of six, 10-12 foot deep! (They were not cremated).

Can you imagine this? These Lords, who in truth bought (and earnt) the privilege of entering Iona Abbey, many taking the Order of the Brotherhood, did this in great part to ensure access to and rigorously perform *the craft of a "good (idealised) death"* - which even culminated in a How-to-Die manual, *Ars Moriendi*. They did this to guarantee they died in a *state of grace to profit the soul*<sup>1</sup> and would never have endured the vivid and dreadful spectre of their six *live skeletons* all trying to clamber and clanker out of the one crammed hole while at the same renewing themselves, *clothing again with their skin*, to witness the *Beatific Vision!* This was their reality.

<sup>1</sup> Death and burial in medieval England, 1066-1550; Daniell, Christopher; 1997; pps 30-31. A sudden death was feared.

(Even if being a bit disarticulated, "scathed" in the secondary burial process may have caused the odd doubt. But, it seemed to work for Saint's body part relics!)



Paradiso; Dante; c.1308.

*When our flesh, then glorified and Holy,  
Is put on us once more, our persons will be  
In greater perfection as being complete at last.*<sup>2</sup>

**The Ollamh's job was to take his Lord's ancestral line of descent back to the very beginning - to Adam. The job of the "life-force accumulating centre", powered by the nearby Saint's "heavenly dynamis-virtus", was to take them forwards in the opposite direction - to God and eternity.**

**This is the Power, the Privilege and Prestige, the Passion and Pride of the Lords of The Isles; The Royal family of MacDonald with their Ecclesiastical capital of Iona. The customs above are only for the elite Royal, Nobilis, generosi, magnate; all terms used for The MacDonald.**

<sup>2</sup> **Paradiso** (Italian for "Paradise" or "Heaven") is the third and final part of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, following the Inferno and the Purgatorio. It is an allegory telling of Dante's journey through Heaven, guided by Beatrice, who symbolises theology. The Divine Comedy (Italian: Divina Commedia) is an epic poem written by Dante Alighieri between 1308 and his death in 1321. It is widely considered the pre-eminent work of Italian literature, and is seen as one of the greatest works of world literature. The poem's imaginative and allegorical vision of the afterlife is a culmination of the medieval world-view as it had developed in the Western Church.

Also applied in the attribution process is the knowledge of who was buried in the chapel, the relative timing and sequence of the individual's burials (known genealogy) and the practical "compatibility" of the dimensions of the slabs compared to these timings. Added to this, is the knowledge of what slabs were definitely uplifted in the 19th century and moved and those which were not. These are properly calculated probabilities, apart from Angus Og's which is absolutely certain.

#### RECOMMENDATION.

**Reginald's attribution is clearly a very distinctive prospect and as he is in fact the very founder of this entire existing medieval abbey as it stands today, an examination of this grave site seems to be vital.**

His staff should have been buried with him, eg : the Bishop of The Isles, Angus MacDonald, d.1441, was buried "*with his crozier and Episcopal habit, south side of the great choir*" as was King Edward *The Confessor's* staff.

There does not appear to have ever been any scientific exhumation of the bones (and possibly artifacts) of any of the Lords of The Isles. Nor has there been any less intrusive and less costly ground piercing radar (GPR) examination of what are shallow graves. If this is the case, it would be a most informative archaeological exercise of significant historical interest to see what is in each of the graves as I have described and in some cases attributed. And, if able, perform Y-DNA tests and radiocarbon dating. There is no record of them being grave robbed, unless the Iona Club had a "private collection".



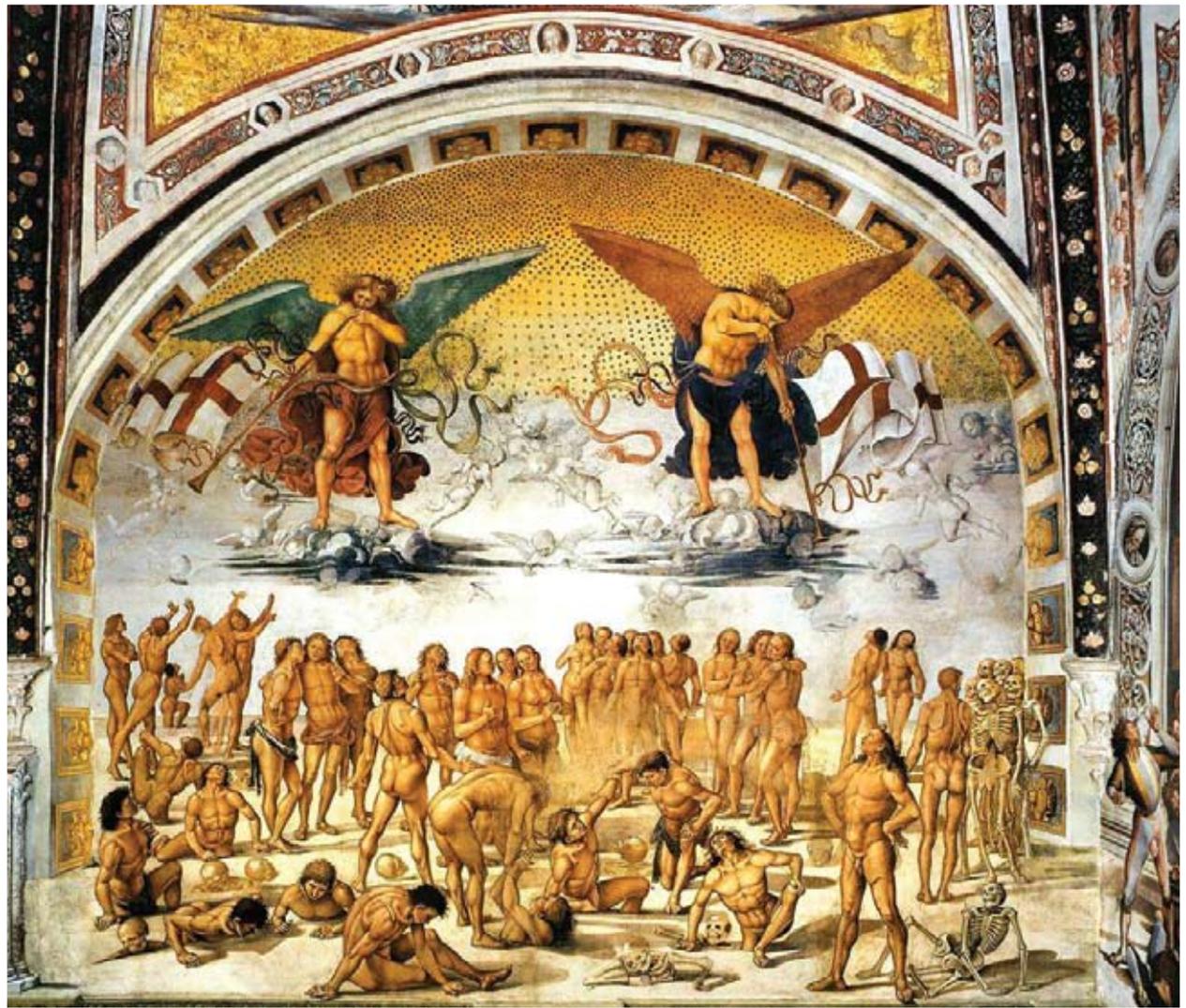
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**Resurrection of the Flesh; 1499-1502.**

Fresco, Chapel of San Brizio, Duomo, Orvieto Terni, Italy; by Luca Signorelli.

The skulls surfacing through the cracks in the ground, who put on their bodies as though they were a costume, and become human beings once again. The macabre but hilarious idea of the nude with his back to the observer who is carrying on a conversation with the skeletons. (The *Web Gallery of Art* is a virtual museum and searchable database of European painting and sculpture from 11th to mid-19th centuries.)



## Attachment (A) to Chapter 8.



Author's photo 2011.

The native sept of *Clankelly* Macdonnells, the Tyrone-Armagh *MacAlaxandair* Macdonnell Galloglaigh *High Constables of Ulster*, Nobilis, and the MacMahons all possibly appropriated this *mortuary house* covered grave at Clones. It is not a hollow, real sarcophagus.

This is a solid sandstone 'tomb-shrine' covering the shallow grave of the body/relic of St. Tighernach, Clones, county Monaghan thought to be originally near the High Altar of the *Great Church of Clones*. The church was destroyed during the Nine Years War, 1594 to 1603. Tighernach was the first (royal) Abbot of Clones Monastery and Bishop of Clogher, d.548 (it is thought he was the *Primus Abbas*, or first mitred abbot of Ireland.) He was said to have been the godchild of Saint Brigid, and educated in Scotland. He also is called Tierney and Tierry. He was descended from Colla da Crioch, one of the Three Collas. His feast day is April 4.

**It is a 12<sup>th</sup> century representation** of an early Irish church and was originally carved from a single block. Possibly it is a copy of the Saint's small wood and metal reliquary; chapel shaped "tomb shrine" reliquary casket/box like Columba's Brebannach - note shape and proportions also to St Oran's Chapel (same period). It has a mitred head carved on the east end (sanctuary, altar end) and animal heads on the west end like St Oran's chapel doorway arch (voussoirs on second order). That is, celtic, like an Irish "*sheila*", possibly to frighten away evil spirits from going through the door.

There are unknown number of *Macdonnell* burial inscriptions on the pitched "roof" areas which can still be seen but they are now illegible with several being totally defaced. It's a disappointment to not be able to see the script of all the inscriptions which may have helped to date them. Did all of these burials have an inscription in any case? There are no visible inscribed years of death and even to have the total number of inscriptions may not have helped calculate the length of the custom.

[Annals Ulster 1346.1](#)

**John MacDomhnaill the Black** ("Owen Duv") was killed by Maghnus, son of Echaidh Mag Mathgamna (MacMahon).

NB : Owen Duv (John The Black) is the senior, disinherited son of the Lord of The Isles, Alaxandair OG de Yle, k. 1299, in Ireland, and buried in St Oran's Chapel. (see chart at end)

[Annals of Four Masters 1365.8 \(rectè 1362\)](#)

*"Brian, the son of Hugh MacMahon, assumed the lordship of Oriel (Airghialla). He sued for an alliance by marriage with Sorley, son of Owen Duv Macdonnell, heir to the lordship of the Insi-Gall, and High Constable of the province of Ulster."*

But over a dispute, Brian ritually murdered Sorely by drowning;

*“Woe the world and land and water wherein was submerged the noble, well-born offspring, to wit, one who was to be king of Insi-Gall, namely, the son of John the Black, son of Alexander.*

*As the poet said:*

*This is the lake wherein was put an innocent one, Somuirle of the sharp-pointed spears,”*

(Annals of Ulster 1362.8).

The O’Neil and “Scots” Macdonnells attacked him: *“The men of Oriel were defeated, and deprived of their arms and cattle. After this Mac Mahon was banished from his own country, and his wife and his daughter were made prisoners.”*

1372 : *Brian Mor Mag Mathgamna, high-king of Oriel, fell at the hands of one of his own gallowglasses.*

These Galloglaigh Macdonnells (descent from Colla Uais-*Cenél Meic Cárthind*) and distantly “related” MacMahons (descent from Colla Fochrith) were originally both close to Clones. MacMahons were *Uí Cremthainn* – from one of the Three Collas, first king of Airghialla, Colla-da-Chríoch, aka Colla Fochríth. The common ancestor of Maguire, MacMahon, and other chiefs of Oriel were the *native* Macdonnells, barony of *Clankelly*. There apparently was some dispute over “ownership rights” to the revered *mortuary house* holy grave site – ie, *deposito ad sanctos* and status. MacMahons were the ex-“bandit” relatively new Kings of the reduced A/Oirghialla (Monaghan) and also coarb/Abbots of Clones four times between (1413-1536). However the Macdonnells are said “by several intelligent persons,” to have prevailed, even latterly resorting to litigation (UJA).

**No matter which Macdonnells or MacMahons are buried there, the re-burial “mode of sepulture according to the tradition of the country” that is described in the UJA article and specifically the 13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> century essentiality of burial near a Saint, is the primary consideration for the Iona burials of Donald I to Donald II. It’s not surprising at all if they are the same or similar because the language, culture, religion of the Western Isles all came from Ireland – Dalriada.**

It is an interesting twist that the last lineal Macdonnell descendant who claimed the right to the “tomb-shrine” was deprived of his honour - he died in Scotland (and might mean nought).

Unfortunately the period of the custom cannot be certain and the extent of it is limited by rank, status and privilege to the elite of royalty, nobility. Also the sheer cost and scarcity of relics/‘tombshrines’ determines a very restricted practice. But to be regarded as “*tradition of the country*” enshrined in a medieval pre-occupation with saints bones and to be the subject of disputed access rights, it must have had considerable longevity and gravitas. The fact that that they moved this enormous solid block off and then back on every time for a new burial is a certain indicator that it was a genuine long term tradition of some weight! In comparison, the “thin” Iona slabs would be regarded as a breeze to relocate.

A supplementary consideration is that the old northern Airghialla was, at least, the believed Irish “birthplace” of Clan Donald. That is, the *Cenél Meic Cárthind* from Colla Uais of Tir-Keeran, Carthend’s lands, Nth Airghialla - on the east side of River Foyle and only four miles to the contemporaneous Colmcille’s Derry on the west side. Fact, fable or latterly “pseudo-history,” it was of no difference to this ‘race of Conn, Clann Cholla’ : “*Sons of Conn remember*” (*Conn of 100 Battles* - High King of Tara); “*Race (children) of Conn; “as for hospitality, this race of Conn are followers of the Royal example* (Leinster Galloglaigh Macdonnells – Tinnakill Dunaire); The Three Collas - Colla Uais, d.c. AD 337 – “*The sovereignty of the Gael to the Clann Colla, It is right to proclaim it*”; “*Founder of Clann Cholla*”; “*Colla’s race*”. *During a raid Colla’s race continually smashes axes*” (Tinnakill Dunaire).

Their descendant King of Airghialla, the historical *Gofraidh mac Fearghus, Taoiseach of The Isles*, fl. 835, is a Clan Donald ancestor. (*Taoiseach* is not an anachronism; the usual “simple substitution” into Middle Irish by recension.) Chief Guthfrith Mac Fergus, *Taoiseach Oirghiall*, Somerled’s ancestor, took the Airghialla host to Kenneth MacAlpin’s side in 835 (*Gofraidh* name: *Finn-Galls* came c.795; by 832, based Lough Neagh). McAlpin began the dynasty of the first Kings of the Scots and Picts, his daughter married *The O’Neill* and Guthfrith became the “*Taoiseach Insi Gall*”, marrying MacAlpin’s sister. Their daughter married Somerled’s grandfather, Gilledomnan.

Why in particular did the sons of Alaxandair Og originally return to the then reduced lands of southern Airghialla/Oriel, a federation of clans and placename associated with Clan Donald's Irish birthplace 500 years before? (even if all had contracted south). What choices did they have? Was it more than the Airghialla simply being an ancient "warrior clientship" class; or the noble Macdonnell Constable's Galloglaigh being cessed (billeted) by The O'Neill on the lands of his MacMahon and kin MacCawley vassals? ("*The Galloglaigh Macdonnells of the old countries of Wicklow, Leix and Offaly*"; I. Macdonnell; coming.)

**NOTE** : There was at least one Macdonnell of Clan-Kelly burial in Clones, late 15<sup>th</sup> century :-

1449 : *Mac Donnell of Clann-Kelly, i.e. Cormac, the son of Art, a charitable and truly hospitable man, died, and was interred at Clones.* From this one burial, which says nothing of the burial spot, the journal article concludes the Macdonnells using the tomb shrine were this clan. The Clann Kelly Macdonnells, the Nobilis Scottici Macdonnells, High Constables of Ulster and the MacMahon Chiefs and Abbots were all possibly "usurping" at one time or another this much sought after saint's tomb.

Whatever the case, the "**mode of sepulture according to the tradition of the country**" is a rare insight, because day to day customs regarded as "normal" are not normally recorded. It is a tradition that can be related to St Oran's Chapel as it also fits in with the independent evidence there of both the "transition of kingship" custom and use of a temporary "ancestral grave". That is, it has a basis in the recorded history of the burials of the Lords of the Isles, eg, "same tomb" and "south side" of St Oran's Chapel, plus archaeological evidence of the expensive wall niche being especially built over this south side ancestral grave location - there were other distinct wall spaces from which to choose.

## POSTSCRIPT

After "*The Macdonnell*" and his Tyrone Macdonnell Galloglaigh accompanied *Shane O'Neill The Proud* to the court of Queen Elizabeth I for his short lived submission in 1562 - in great style and to the wonderment of all <sup>1</sup> - and then suffered his many lost battles, they become a vital "pike & caliver" force in the Nine Years War for *Hugh, The Great Ó Neill* (c. 1590 – 1616), 2nd Earl of Tyrone. He was aiming to be "King of Ireland" with his High Constable of The Province of Ulster (*Ard constapla coicidh Uladh*), Chief of the Tyrone & Armagh MacDhomhnaills, Emann Og, Dean of Armagh (returned from Spain), d.1601.

**Emann Og Macdonnell was postulated by Hugh, The Great O'Neill for Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of All Ireland, upon selection by the Chapter.** <sup>2</sup>

**"For many centuries then, the ancestors of Dean MacDomhnaill were held in the very highest esteem by reason of their nobility and their function".**

<sup>1</sup> *Annales* of William Camden, collected 1590's; Pub. 1630: "And now Shane O'Neill came from Ireland, to keep the promise he had made a year before, with an escort of galloglas armed with battle-axes, bare-headed, with flowing curls, yellow shirts dyed with saffron, large sleeves, short tunics and rough cloaks, whom the English followed as much wonderment as if they came from China or America".

<sup>2</sup> *Archivium Hibernicum*, III, 241. (Op cit. *Macdonnells of Tyrone*, p.210). An **Anglo**-Irishman was appointed of course. *Archivium Hibernicum*, III, 241. *The MacDonnells of Tyrone and Armagh – A Genealogy Study*"; *Seachas Ardmhacha* (Journal of Armagh Diocesan Historical Society), 10/1 (1980-1); Donald M Schlegel; p.210. *Domhnach Mór* (Donaghmore) : Part IV: *The Insurrection of 1641 and Its Background*. Éamon Ó Doibhlin. *Seachas Ardmhacha: Journal of the Armagh Diocesan Historical Society*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (1959), p.413.