

17th century manuscript by bard Niall MacMhuirich.
From a poem to the eponymous Donald son of Reginald.



Dombnall mac Raghnaill of the Stately Gaze

I give this gift :

A gift greater than the golden cup given to me.

Though I received the gift freely

From the wolf of the Gaels,

I returned the gift in kind:

My love was payment.

DONALD (I) from 1207; k. 1247.

“Dovenaldus - Dominus de Inchehal”

CLAN DONALD’S EPONYM & FOUNDER

(c.1210 Charter - *dovenaldus filius reginaldi filii somerled dominus de inchehal* (title and designation at the end applies to all those before).

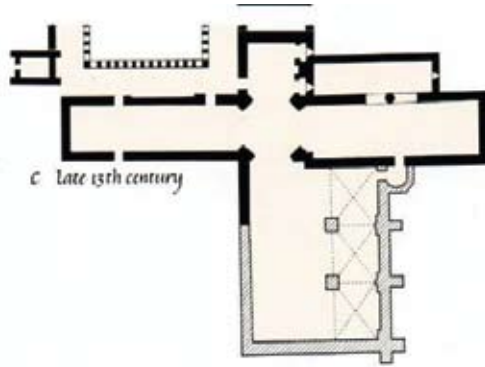
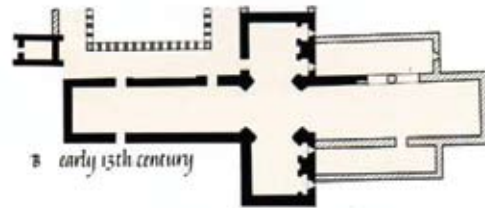
d. 1247 : “Mac Somurli ri Airir Gaidil”

According to a praise-poem written to Angus Mor, c.1250, the realm he inherited from Domhnall included “*every house from Mull to Kintyre*” (gach teach ó Mhuile go Maoil). It also calls Angus, *ri Leodhais*, King of Lewis.

From the early 13th century, it was the eponymous Donald who oversaw all or most of the building of the Abbey Church for at least 40 years. Each Benedictine Abbey was autonomous, with no “headquarters” jurisdiction over them like other orders. Although self-sufficient for basic sustenance, the newly re-endowed Abbey would not have been financially independent by then from raising its own various incomes to be capable of funding and carrying out large capital works. **Donald was an unrivalled ‘endower’, patron and generous benefactor and had to contend with a razing and a plundering of the Abbey in 1204 and 1210.** ¹ From c.1220 when the church was not even completed :- he extended the aisled presbytery 14 meters at the chancel (east) end of Church with undercroft - completed **c.1250**. (Plan “B”; hatched is the new.)

[The eastern cloister/range was possibly started at the same time as the north transept – they are connected; makes logistical sense, especially needing the Chapter house early – happened at Edward the Confessor’s first Westminster.]

He completed the massive central tower at the crossover; also commenced the remaining claustral buildings c.1225 to the north – cloisters, firstly the chapter-house and dormitory of the east range; refectory in the last quarter century and undercroft, (Abbot’s House?), etc. They also greatly extended a vaulted south transept for pilgrim’s viewing relics – Plan “C” but its likely it was never completed.



(Consecration cross Iona Abbey Church – ONE OF TWO both on parts that were not the first “smaller early 13th c. original” .)



1247 – ‘The Pope’ granted the Iona Abbot the privilege of wearing the mitre and ring in the absence of a bishop (Why then?). The Abbey had been “distant” for over a century from 1134 with the Bishop in

Mann (opposing polity). To regulate ecclesiastical affairs in Norway, which had suffered during the struggles with King Sverre, Pope Innocent IV in 1247 sent Cardinal William of Sabina as legate to Norway. Did he perform the “granting privilege”? This major ecclesiastical milestone occurs the same year as many say Donald was killed and might be an indicator supporting it. Is it just a co-incidence? If the Abbey Church or alter (new presbytery and alter area, alter) was not already even consecrated or reconsecrated (and I cant find a record) then it probably was this year, performed as a prerequisite for this unexpected “royal” requiem mass by the Abbot eventhough it was not complete. (occurred with Edward the Confessor when his (first, smaller) Westminster was consecrated just a week before his (expected) death which was 20 years before its full completion.) ²

¹ After only five years from the razing of the emerging Benedictine Iona Abbey by the Irish, it was **plundered in 1210** by the King of Mann. Destruction? Probably. The Isles’ opposing and competing Rushen Abbey church, Isle of Man, was only completed **1257**.

² *Edward the Confessor - The man and the legend*; Ed. Mortimer, Richard; 2009.

The Abbot would have been granted the Bishop privileges by the Cardinal as the Pope's legate/delegate. (Eventhough the Abbot could only have "blessed" rather than consecrated – liturgically, this would have sufficed for the funeral.) In any case, Simon, the Bishop of Isles & Mann (Sodor), would not go (even if he could) because he was under the patronage of the competing Crovan dynasty, Kings of Mann (and Isles – see later). I'm not totally sure about all this, but for many good reasons, it can be said with certainty that, in any case, this would never have happened for RUARI mac Reginald and the same link could never be envisaged for his funeral if it was he who had been killed in 1247.

SOME BACKGROUND – HIGH KINGSHIP IRELAND :- Ruaidhrí Ua Conchobhair (anglicised **Rory O'Connor**) was arguably the first undisputed full king of Ireland. He was also the only Gaelic one, as the events of the Norman invasion of 1169–1171 brought about the destruction of the high-kingship, and the direct involvement of the Kings of England in Irish politics. The last of **Ruaidhrí's** descendants to hold the kingship of Connacht, Aedh mac Ruaidri Ua Conchobair, died in **1233**. The Annals of Connacht give the following reason for this: Aed mac Ruaidri had been five years King of Connacht, as the poet said: *'Aed mac Ruaidri of the swift onslaught, five years his rule over the province, till he fell—a loss on every frontier—by the hand of Fedlimid.'* **Here ends the rule of the children of Ruaidri O Conchobair, King of Ireland. For the Pope offered him the title to [the kingship of] Ireland for himself and his seed for ever; and likewise six wives, if he would renounce the sin of adultery henceforth; and since he would not accept these terms God took the rule and sovranity from his seed for ever; in punishment for his sin**".

All of Ruaidri's progeny, apart from the descendants of Rose Ní Conchobair, **faded into obscurity before 1250**.

English lordship in Ireland had also weakened and began to recede. *"Messages came from Tara in Ireland that Donald son of Ranald should take the government of Innsigall and of the greater part of the Gael (Ulster – Ireland?)." (This is not in the form of a bardic eulogy for nobles, whom poets regarded as all connected at some*

period and praised as worthy of Kingship of Tara.) No year is given : was it c.1233 after Aedh mac Ruaidri Ua Conchobair, died? (This quote is from *The Book of Clanranald; The MacDonald History; Translation of the Black and Red Books*; p.157. A 17th century recension century of their previous MSS).¹ The writers of these books were the Mac Vurichs (*MacMhuirich*), the hereditary bards and historians of Clan Donald (later to Clanranald.) **They traced their descent to Muireach Albanach, c.1200**, who was famous as a High Poet both in Ireland, to O'Donnell, and in Scotland. He had returned to Ireland 1228 from the Crusades.

No other Gaelic king was ever again recognised as king or high king of Ireland with the exception of Brian Ua (O')Neill, died 1260. He was the High King from only 1258.

Donald killed. Annála Connacht 1247.7.

"Muiris Mac Gerailt led out a great army of Galls (norse) ... O'Domnaill, king of Cenel Conaill, was killed there, and Mac Somurli ri Airir Gaidil and all the chief men of Cenel Conaill".

THE CONTEXT OF DONALD'S DEATH :-

Ni fhuil a nErinn na a nAlabain, Aonghus mar thus, a thaobh seang; "There is not in Ireland nor in Scotland an Aonghus like thee, tho graceful form; (from the final verse of Angus Mor's contemporary praise poem).

In 1292, Edward I, King of England, granted letters of safe conduct to Angus Mor, son of Donald, and his son Alaxandair Og to frequently buy and sell timber and merchandise in Ireland (Patent Rolls).

Annals of Ulster 1286.5 : "Aedh Ua Domnaill (O'Donnell) was deposed by his own brother, **namely**, by Toirdhelbach Ua Domnaill, through the power of the tribe of his mother, **namely**, the Clann Domnaill and many other Gallowglashes (and he took the kingship to himself by force)".

Toirdhelbach O'Donnell's mother was the "daughter of *The MacDomnaill of the Isles*", ie, Angus Mor. She was the second wife of Chief

Ch 6. *Edward the Confessor's Westminster Abbey*; Fernie, E; pps 139, 143. Ch 7. *New Glimpses of Edward the Confessor's Abbey*; Rodwell, W; p.155.

¹ *Reliquia Celtica : Texts, Papers and Studies in Gaelic Literature and Philology*. Left by the Late Rev. Alexander Cameron, LL.D., Ed. by Alexander Macbain, M. A., and Rev. John Kennedy; Volume II. 1894. pps 138-309.

Donal Og O'Donnell and her dowry included Clan Domnaill galloglaigh (c.1265). D. Schlegel says that : the foster-father of this Donal Og O'Donnell earlier in the 1240's was his grandfather, the eponymous Donald, "*Donnell mac Raghnaill mic Somhairle*" but S. Duffy says it was the *mic Suibhne* (Mac Sweeny) and he provides evidence in a contemporary poem.

However, Duffy also adds that there was indeed an on-going relationship, a "family alliance", between the O'Donnells and the *Mac Somurli* sept of *Donnell mac Raghnaill*. (Another possible connection is that around this time the O'Brolchans were Stewards to O'Donnell and were also chief masons and church wrights to the "sept of *Donnell mac Raghnaill*".)

With such a conspicuous allegiance, it is most probable that it was the grandfather of the *Clann Domnaill* wife of O'Donnell who "*died 10 July 1247 at Bel-ath-seanaigh (Ballyshannon), helping the ruling O'Donnell to defend Tir Conaill (Tyrconnell) against the aggressive Geraldines (Fitzgeralds) of Connaught.*"¹ That is, Donald I.

[The *MacRuairis* made alliance with the O'Connors, **not** O'Donnells :- Dugall MacRuairi provided eight score Galloglaigh (under brother Ailin) with his daughter's hand to Aedh O'Conchobhair. *MacSweeneys* became O'Donnell's Galloglaigh from 1290 with *Macdonnells* mainly to The O'Neill with others to the O'Connor Ruadh faction. Mac Dougalls (*MacDowells*) had made no Irish alliance and were Galloglaigh to O'Connor, O'Kelly outside Ulster.]

This is a cohesive, valid narrative; a sound context of interrelationships, places, timing and events. I see no problem with the title "*ri Airir Gaidil*" (king of the generic "coast of the Gael") given by Irish annalists for Donald in 1247 especially as the majority now (incl R A McDonald) have no problem with its use by them for Angus Og as *Mac Domhnaill tigearna Airir Gaoidel* for his death in 1318 at Dundalk (see Angus Og). After Bannockburn he did receive more lands, eg, Morvern, Ardnamurchan and Lochaber. However they are not the discrete mainland area of *Argyllshire-Lorne* itself that might make a difference (of why he was titled "Airir Gaoidel") and they were not part of his reward anyway

(went to Campbells). Islay, Jura and Mull were always considered part of the wider "*Airir Gaoidel*."

The "Mac Sorley" generation of leaders in question in 1247 were **titled**, styled or designated :-

1. Donald I: **King** of Airir Gaoidel; (territorial title)
2. Duncan: *Duncan de Ergadia*, (kindred head)
King of the Isles; (territorial title)
3. Ruairi : **Lord** of Kintyre.² (territorial title)

(*Italics*: evidence of style used by bearer; WHS Sellar).

It was the norm at this time for competing claims of being King of The Isles (Territorial Title) – "there were several."³ **Note** : A personal name and "de Yle" (same as "de Ergadia/Ergile") is not a territorial title : it's shorthand for the head of the "*the House of Islay*" – the "Royal" family/clan headship. Similar to the patriarchal "The (house of) MacDonald." This is obvious because Islay was only one territory (island or mainland) of many controlled by any "de Yle" at virtually any period, unlike many other lesser lords of only one area. Thus we have, for instance, "*Alexandri de Yle Domini Insularum et Rossie*" = *Alexander of Islay*, (designated family head) *Lord of The Isles and Ross* (Territorial title). Lastly, the title, ie "**Domini** de Yle" is a style of title designating the **lordship** of the **principal centre**, or epicentre, of their Kingdom of The Isles (Clan Donald's).

So overall, there is no discrepancy of "style/designation/title" of any real consequence, even if there are vagaries.

In addition, Angus Mor granted a charter to Paisley Abbey, dated between 1241 and 1249,⁴ and this is a strong indicator at least that Donald was no longer Chief – ie, from 1247. Coeval to this, Angus Mor is eulogised (shamelessly flattered!) in an Irish poem, "**about 1250**", "*An Address to Aonghus of Islay*"⁵.

¹ *The MacDonnells of Tyrone and Armagh – A Genealogy Study*"; Seanchas Ardmhacha (Journal of Armagh Diocesan Historical Society), 10/1 (1980-1); Donald M Schlegel; pps 193-194.

² Op cit : *Hebridean Sea-Kings*; Table II; p. 194. Sellar.

³ *The Lords of The Isles - etc*; p.127; Ronald Williams; 1984.

⁴ Munro & Munro, *Acts of The Lords of The Isles*; , p. 280.

⁵ *Irish Bardic Poetry*; Osborn Bergin; 169-172; 291-294. "Ceannaigh duain t'athar a Aonghas – Purchase thy father's poem, Aonghus". "**There is nothing in the language or style to contradict the internal evidence that is was composed about the year 1250**" (p.170). <http://bardic.celt.dias.ie/main.html>; This also says "**13th mid**"; This database is the work of **Dr Katharine Simms**, Department of History, Trinity College Dublin.

It is obvious that his father, named as Donald in the c.1250 poem, is dead – “*thou hast the King’s house*”.

The poet would not be penning such excessive praise to Angus, even if only to resolve a debt for his father’s poem, if he wasn’t the **Clan Donald Chief, c.1247**.

Donald I was the “*Mac Somurli ri Airir Gaidil, K.1247.*”



GRAVESLAB:- 126/56 possibly.
Centre of Nth wall, St Oran’s Chapel.

Sword (with short langet) of an aristocrat, plant scroll and **two strand plaited ringed cross with full length shaft. Has Triquetra (“Holy Trinity”)** same as No. 161 in floor, N/E corner (ie, probably his father’s, Reginald); one at top right and one bottom left damaged corner.

- “Probably Iona School”- “transitional”. (p.14; S&B; LMMSWH). So it is earlier and very like (and exemplars for?) the coarser Kilmartin & Inveraray slabs of later 13th century with their swords, long cross, plant-scroll and Triquetra.
- Domnall Ua Brolchain, 1203, in Iona. Were the O’Brolchans, Irish chief masons to the Lords of the Isles, making pre-Iona School slabs? Very likely.

From Hugh Macdonald of Sleat, 17th century :-
Collectanea p.289.

Donald journeyed to Rome with seven priests to obtain remission for his sins – “*willing should they please to boil him in a cauldron of lead*” ; and obtained rights from the Pope to his lands? He was a generous benefactor to Iona and Saddell. “*After his return home he built the monastery of Saddell – mortified 48 merk lands to that Monastery and the Island of Heisker to the nuns of Iona*”.¹

In retirement, he also became a “brother” of Paisley Abbey. He continued Reginald’s grants to it. “He was buried in that sacred isle in which, after life’s fitful fever, many of the Kings of Innse-Gall peacefully repose” (IONA).

Donald was the first to be buried in a position along the south wall of St Oran’s chapel that was adjacent to and in direct N-S alignment with the three ancient tombs of the kings, the *Tomair nan Righ*. That position became Clan Donald’s “*Tumulus Regum Insularum*” (and the special location chosen by Lord John II for his elaborate arched wall niche). The evidence indicates that all four tombs were similarly used for “crypt processing” in a secondary burial process.

[Donald’s brother Ruari is most likely buried along the north wall, west of their father Reginald and when Donald I’s bones and slab were relocated from the ancestral tomb on the south side of the Chapel (the first of five to be done so), they were probably placed just west of and next to Ruari’s grave (see section “Six in same Grave” – LOCATIONS & ATTRIBUTIONS”). That is, the founder/father and his two sons would all be in a line along the north wall.]

¹ Slate Historian Hugh – *Collectanea*; p.289.



There is agreement that Somerled's father was "Gillibrigdi" and that his grandfather was Gilli Adamnáin. Solam and its variants consistently appear as his great-grandfather, but earlier than this there is not total agreement. Although the sources generally lead back to the legendary figure of Colla Uais. The name "Gofraid" also appears in all the different versions, and in addition to Monro's¹ claim that Somerled was a member of "Clan Gothofred" in a poetic address to Aonghus of Islay, Clann Somairle is described as having "sprung from Síol nGofraidh" (the seed of Gofraid). Alex Woolf² identifies this as referring to Godred Crovan rather than Gofraid ua Ímair or Gofraid mac Fergusa, although as Crovan died in 1095 this would require far fewer intermediate names than the annals suggest.

Woolfe regards Clan Donald's genealogy as "fabricated". He is dismissive of the MacMhuirichs as "*Johnny-come-latelies*". To disregard their prior Irish expertise and accumulated knowledge as second rate is questionable. As *High Poets* to the O'Donnells, Northern Ui Neills, it was obviously of substance and relevance to the early Clan Donald.

Muireadhach Albanach Ó Dálaigh, (fl. 1190-1240) the alleged founder of the family of hereditary Scottish bards known to history as the Mac Mhuireadhaich or "MacVurich" family, lived in County Sligo. He was the ollamh (high poet) of Domhnall Ó Domhnaill (died 1241). He killed King Domhnall's steward **Fionn O'Brolchan** in 1213 with an axe, whom Muireadhach considered had been insolent (Annals). When O'Donnell received intelligence of this, he collected a large body of his forces, and pursued him half way around Ireland. After being chased from Limerick to Dublin Muireadhach fled from Ireland. He served as the court bard to the Mormaer of Lennox and went on the 5th Crusade 1213-21. **In 1228 he was apparently then allowed to re-enter Ireland.**³ After time there, he then attached himself to the Lords of The Isles, ie, to Donald I – 1233? **He was obviously in a position to have known if "Messages came from Tara (Tara - slight anachronism) in Ireland that Donald son of Ranald (Muireadhach's contemporary) should take the government of Innsigall and of the greater part of the Gael."** (Ulster – Ireland?). As S. Duffy says, there was indeed an on-going relationship, a "family alliance", between the O'Donnells and the *Mac Somurli* sept of *Donnell mac Raghnaill*. Toirdhelbach O'Donnell's mother was the "*daughter of The MacDomnaill of the Isles*", ie, Angus Mor. She was the second wife of Chief Donal Og O'Donnell and her dowry included Clan Domnaill galloglaigh (c.1265).

[Gillebrighde Albanach (fl. 1200-1230) was a medieval Scottish poet and crusader (Scotland : calling it my dúthchas ; "native place", "heritage", "birthright", etc.) When not crusading with his fellow Gael **Muireadhach Albanach above**, in the Fifth Crusade, Gillebrighde spent much, if not most of this life working as a poet in Ireland. His panegyric poems are all dedicated to Irish patrons.]

¹ "The Genealogies Of The Chieff Clans Of The Iles". Munro; 1594.

² Woolf, Alex (2005) "*The origins and ancestry of Somerled: Gofraid mac Fergusa and The Annals of the Four Masters*". Woolf, St Andrews University, disagrees with W. D. H. Sellar's paper, "*The origins and ancestry of Somerled*", Scottish Historical Review 45 (1966) 123-42; 1996. Woolf's primary concern (his last words - and motive?) is that the : "Lords of the Isles wished to be seen to have been involved in '*Project Scotland*' from its inception" (Another attempt at denying Irish roots for Scotland's identity, etc.)

³ MacQuarrie, Scotland and the Crusades, (Edinburgh, 1997), p. 37.