



(His seal now lost)

REGINALDUS · REX · INSULARUM ·
DOMINUS · DE · ERGILE

Graveslab : Most probably No. 161, St Oran's Chapel. North (east) corner beside altar (Gospel side). There is no evidence of it ever being moved. Somerled was almost certainly buried on the other, Epistle side.

1156 –Torredelbach Ua Conchobair, over king of Connaught, Ard Rí na hÉireann, was buried “beside St Ciaran’s altar” at Clonmacnoise and 1198 – his son and successor Ruadri, was buried on the **north** side of the altar (Annals F/M). “*Toirrdelbach on the southern side of it, Ruaidri on the other lofty side*” from 15th century MS (recension) “*The Graves of the Kings at Clonmacnoise*”. Somerled, King of the Isles, was buried in his own superior chapel, near (south of) St Oran’s relics, right next to the revered *Tomair-nan-Righ*, Ridge of Kings – “*The Royal Fellowship of Death*” in “*the most ancient graveyard in Scotland*”. Reginald must be buried near his father by solidarity of kindred and tradition. ¹ “*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*” (*Treasures of Heaven*; 2010). In any case, he could not be buried in the new Abbey Church (as other Kings did) as the building was just emerging under the direction of the eponymous Donald I - and St Columba’s relics had all left Iona. They are both buried right next to the relics of a revered saint (Oran), *deposito ad sanctos*, whose earthly remains, *dynamis-virtus*, were *forever in direct contact with his heavenly soul*. St Oran was first on Iona, dying there in 548 of the plague, 15 years before Colum Cille even arrived (Annals F/M 548.7). It had been “decreed that relics were to be placed in churches and that no altar was to be consecrated without them” (Proximity to relics = Relative status in society).

“The first abbey to be established in Ireland by a continental order was Mellifont, Co. Louth. Donough O’Carroll, the king of Oriel (Airghialla) who gave Mellifont its initial endowment of lands [plus its ‘stone, timber, books, gold, etc’] is thought to have been buried there in a tomb in the arched recess at the **north side of the altar, 1168. This came to be the standard position for the burial of founding patrons in the Cistercian abbeys of Ireland.**”

“*The written record shows that this position was also popular for burial among other orders, and for bishops as well as founders*”. “*Taken as a whole, this burial evidence shows that the practices of the medieval Irish were very similar to those of their western European neighbours*.” “*It is the similarities between England, Scotland and Ireland, rather than the differences, which are notable*”. ²

The slab is sandstone, a rectangle and much worn. All others here are tapered. It has a triquetra (*Holy Trinity*) at its foot, a sword (for aristocrats only) and a staff having a round pommel with long tang-button and a spike at the lower end. It is a strong ecclesiastical motif. Is it (still) in this grave? Reginald founded three monasteries. King Edward *The Confessor*, d.1066, was the first great royal patron of Westminster Abbey and he had the same kind of staff, also buried with him (ie, “Orb” at top and an end spike) – before his 1161 canonisation of course. A 1661 recreation of it from the Restoration period is in the Crown Jewels collection, London Tower. This appears to be no co-incidence, ie, for both men of the same broad era, status and both being the “*first great royal patrons*” of an Abbey, to have the same kind of staff, and both associated with their burials. Did Reginald copy this famous religious King who was made a Saint for so religiously *confessing* his faith? (and staying celibate despite marriage.) If it a “pilgrim staff”, then it is relevant that Reginald was a pilgrim of course to both Rome and Jerusalem. Possibly both of these staffs are enhanced, glorified pilgrim staffs.³

The slab sword: “Lobated pommel & short quillons”, the same as slab No. 126 on the north wall (centre one of five), St Oran’s Chapel. **SUMMARY** :-

- “**Probably Iona School**”- “**transitional**” (S&B; RCAHMS, 1977; p.14). So it is earlier and very like (and exemplars for?) the coarser Kilmartin & Inveraray slabs of later 13th century with their swords, long cross, plantscroll and Triquetra.
- Domnall Ua Brolchain d.1203 in Iona. The O’Brolchain family, Chief Masons to the Clan Donald Lords of The Isles, was very likely making these earlier slabs (also were high churchmen and scholars.)

¹ 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. METCALFE & HUNTINGTON; *Celebrations of death: the anthropology of mortuary ritual*; 1991. pps 133-88.

² FRY, Susan L; *Burial in Medieval Ireland, 900-1500*; 1999. pps 20, 164, 197. Stalley, R *Mellifont Abbey – Architectural History, Studies*; LXIV; 1975, pps 107-22.

³ CHRISTOPHER, Daniel. *Death and burial in medieval England, 1066-1550*; 1997. pps.167, 168. “*The only undisputed pilgrim staff.... at Worcester.... had a metal spike at the end*”.

- *Rex Insularum - Dominus de Ergile et Kyntyre, Dominus de Incheval*” (known titles used by him; WDH Sellar)
- “*The greatest warrior then in the western islands*” – Orkneyinga Saga.
- “*the laws made by Renald MacSomharkle callit in his time King of the Occident Isles*”... “*great peace and wealth in the Ilis through the administration of justice.*” Dean of Iles, Donald Munro 1547-49.
- “*Reginald Somerled, who was then the King of Man, was so opulent as to purchase the whole of Caithness from William the Lion, an exception being specially made of the yearly revenue due to the sovereign*”....(Chronicum Regum Manniae, apud Johnson, Antiquities Celto- Normannicae, p52 – AD1196.)
- “*Ranald was the most distinguished of the Galls or the Gael for prosperity, sway of generosity and feat of arms. Three monasteries were erected by him, that is a monastery of Black Monks in Iona, in honour of God and Columcille; a monastery of black nuns in the same place; a monastery of Grey Friars at Saddell, and it is he also who founded the monastic order of Molasie.*
‘That having obtained a cross from Jerusalem, and having received the body of Christ and extreme unction, he died, and was buried at Reilic Oran, Iona, in A.D, 1207.’ MacVurich, Book of Clan Ranald.
- *Reginald died in the 54th year of his age and was buried in Icolumkill*” – Buchanan, 1577.

He was buried in the same chapel as his father, Somerled, in St Oran’s Chapel. That is, neither of their corpses is buried in Saddell, but maybe their hearts are. (The warrior slab, south wall of choir, Saddell is 14th century at earliest and its arched wall recess is more typically late 15th century).

Relating to documents from Saddell Abbey itself: - “Reginald is referred to as the founder of Saddell Abbey (Cistercians, from Airgiolla’s Mellifont, Ireland) in a papal mandate of 1393 and in charters of King James IV (1498, 1508).”

“There are good reasons to believe that he, and not his father, was responsible for its foundation.”¹ (A. McKerral, C.I.E., B.Sc., F.S.A. Scot, 1955; and Andrew MacDonald, 1995). These documents referred to all previous grants of land to Saddell and Somerled was never included.

“Reginald is said to have made a pilgrimage to Rome and returned with consecrated dust which was scattered on the (Saddell) foundations and to have lived there for three years during its building ‘*without coming under a roof*’”. This strongly indicates that he superintended the Saddell construction from the start, leaving Donald to do the same for Iona. Reginald’s three years living rough at Saddell Abbey’s new Cistercian institution (period unknown), daughter-house of Mellifont, might indicate that this was his main love - “where his *heart* was/is.” (Did he also translate Somerled’s embalmed heart as part of Saddell Abbey’s founding ceremony?)

HISTORY OF REGINALD’S ENDOWMENT AND REBUILDING OF IONA ABBEY.

Pre 1200 - retired to Paisley Abbey with his wife (*Clan Donald*, VOL 1; p.466).

1203 - Domnall Ua Brolchain*, *prioir Ia*, the Prior of Iona, died in 1203² and in the same year, with approval of a new Norwegian Archbishop of Sodor (Southern Isles) and Isle of Man, Reginald/Donald commenced building a “Norman” (Roman- Episcopal) church “*in the centre of the enclosure of Iona, without any right, in dishonour of the Community of Iona and so wrecked the place greatly*” - Annals Ulster 1204.4 (and celtic monks forced out). The date of the (Iona) foundation is suggested by the papal protection granted by Innocent III on 9 December of 1203.

* *O’Brolchans* were the hereditary “*Chief Masons of Ireland*” and *Chief Lectors, sometimes Coarb of Columba (head of the St Columba Familia – confederation of Ireland and Scotland) and also Bishops of Derry and Armagh.*” “*Perhaps the originators of West Highland style of stone-carving (from early 14th c.)*”. Op cit S&B; p.39.

¹ “It (Saddell) is not included in the list of Scottish abbeys in Gervase of Canterbury’s Mappa Mundi, written between 1205 and 1211”. “Saddell appears to have functioned as a religious corporation for a period of 250 years, approximately from 1220 to 1470.” (McKerral). **Founded c.1207** – Watt, D. E. R., & Shead, N. F. (eds.), ‘*The Heads of Religious Houses in Scotland from the 12th to the 16th Centuries*’; The Scottish Records Society, New Series, Volume 24, (Edinburgh, 2001).

² Annals of Ulster 1203.4

O'Brolchans were hereditary Chief Masons to the Lords of the Isles. ¹ *'Donaldus O'Brolchan fecit hoc opus,'* Chief Mason – incised on the capital of the south pier, east crossing (late 15th c.).

1204– A great hosting was made by the north of Ireland Abbots, Bishops, clergy & men of Derry who “razed the monastery, according to the law of the Church”. The Derry Abbot, Amalgaid Ua Fergail, “took the Abbacy of Iona,” overthrowing the first Benedictine Abbot, Cellach. A peaceful agreement was soon struck though, and:-

1205 - Reginald ‘re-founded’ ² (no “probably” about it: Research Framework; p2), with a :-

1. **Benedictine** monastery ³ - becoming by far the largest and most elaborate in the Western Highlands. **“Reginald, the son of Somerled, undertook the rebuilding of the [Iona] monastery”.... the likelihood that Reginald’s masons were drawn from Ireland**.
⁴ Unlike Augustinian canons regular, they were more like the non-clerical Columban “Iona” celtic monks (*Gillean-De*; Culdees), and an;

2. **Augustinian** nunnery. The only convent in Western Scotland. Reginald’s sister, “*Bethag, daughter of Somhairle son of Gille-Brigde, Prioress*” – first prioress. (Also proves Reginald founded the Abbey.)

As Reginald was not only elderly, dying within two years, but had also been ‘retired from the world’ (*assumed the cowl*) for over five years and often a long distance away in the brotherhood at Paisley Abbey, it was most probably Donald who actually superintended the construction of the present Abbey Church and later the Nunnery (from c.1208) – “*In remission of my sins and of the sins of my parents (and) for the health of my soul and the souls of my predecessors and successors.*” (an example from the foundation Charter of Monasterevan Abbey, Ireland, by the King of Offalia).

He, or most probably Donald, oversaw completion of St Ronan’s and Michael Chapels in his time. He most probably installed the beautiful late 12th century Irish chevron and carved heads decorated doorway in St Oran’s Chapel, his father Somerled’s mausoleum which is architecturally dated approximately three/four decades earlier from then. It appears that this enhancement was personally done in preparation for the “*opulent*” and “*most distinguished*” Reginald’s burial.

The new Abbey church was nowhere near complete by his death in 1207 – only the Michael Chapel. With Reginald’s sister Beathag being Prioress of the Iona Nunnery, it is interesting to note the parallel that St Benedict’s sister, Scholastica, was “*Abbess of the Order*”. Her graveslab, now stolen has the inscription – “*Behag niin Shorle vic Ilvrid Priorissa*”. She may have founded Trinity Chapel at Carinish, Nth Uist. The *Iona Psaltar* in the Museum of Scotland is possibly Beathag’s.

Reginald and his wife Fiona gave grants to Paisley Abby where they both retired to and respectively became a “brother of the order” and a convent sister and both died there. In addition to Somerled’s viscera burial there, the more advanced (more comfortable) Paisley would have had a better library, scriptorium, hospice, etc, at that very early stage, in fact even before Iona’s rebuilding had begun.

1207 ⁵ – Ragnall mac Somairle, buried Iona, St Oran’s Chapel. There is absolutely no doubt his corpse would be buried in the same chapel as his famous father, Somerled.

¹ **O’Brolchains** - Masons ...to Donald Lords, from Ireland; MacMhurichs - Bards.....to Donald Lords, from Ireland; MacBeathadhs - Doctors... to Donald Lords, from Ireland. (All received land as payment – like Galloglaigh Constables.) **1426**, Alexander de Yle’s secretary was Roger **O’Brolchan**. In Islay when the Lordship was forfeited in 1493 it had sudden and profound consequences for the trade of monumental sculpture. The masters of the monastic works departments left Iona to set up independent businesses elsewhere, ie, **John O’Brolchan** (son of *Donaldus*?) to Ardchattan Priory and Mael-Sechlainn O’Cuinn to Oransay Priory, both c.1500. (Op cit S&B; Ch. *Sixteenth Century*; p.63.)

² a. **Supported by the foundation chronology** (and tradition) : McDonald RA; *The Kingdom of the Isles*; 1997; p218.

[b.] “*Iona was engaged in building its Benedictine abbey in the first decade of the century, under the protection of Reginald, son of Somerled.*” Power, Rosemary; 2005. “Meeting in Norway: Norse-Gaelic relations in the kingdom of Man and the Isles, 1090–1270” (pdf), Saga-Book (Viking Society for Northern Research) 38 : 5–66. NB : Power does not say that anyone other than Reginald was the founder of Iona Abbey and to infer otherwise is misreading or twisting her words (and this is clear from her quote above). All that Rosemary clearly says is the large foundation endowments from all over the isles “must have involved the agreement” of the wider Mac Somerled family (p.29), ie, they were co-opted by the primary founder, Reginald, to make a contribution of some land.

³ “*ARGYLL : An Inventory of the Monuments VOL 4 IONA*”; Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS); p.49. 1982. “The Romanesque church of around 1200.....”

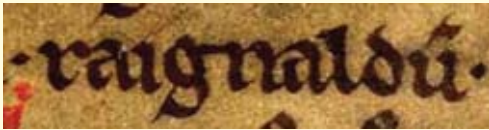
⁴ *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland*”, VOL III; pps 48,49. David MacGibbon and Thomas Ross; 1897.

⁵ There is much less certainty to other dates such as 1192, 1227.

The *most distinguished* Reginald is buried on the gospel side of the altar with his father Somerled on the epistle side, just as :-

“There repose the glorious bodies of both Archbishop Conled and the noble virgin Brigit in their sarcophagi, the one to the right and the other to the left of the beautifully adorned altar”⁶ (at Kildare).

“These sarcophagi are richly decorated with gold, silver and multicoloured precious stones; they have also pictorial representations in relief and in colours, and are surmounted by crowns of gold and silver”.



Rag(h)nall mac Somairle’s name as it appears in Folio 35v. of the Chronicle of Mann, c.1262: **Raignald(m)** (his name also: Ragnvald or Rognvald - Ranald; Reginaldus - Reginald.)

“In the history of the western seaboard it is not, however, the Manx kings who appear as the pre-eminent monastic patrons. That distinction was reserved for the descendants of Somerled, and among their number none was a better friend of the monks than Ranald, the son of Somerled.”

(Kingdom of the Isles : McDonald, RA; p.218)



Woodcut, far left: Pilgrim and staff (Albeit a later 15th c. version).

Note the similar *round, circular pommel, long tang-button at top and the end spike* as per graveslab No.161: of *Ragnall mac Somairle*, pilgrim to both Rome and Jerusalem and the founder, “*first great royal patron*” of Iona Abbey, buried in St Oran’s Chapel, next to the altar. King (St) Edward The Confessor was buried, reputedly with his staff, before the high altar in his new Norman church, Westminster Abbey. (He commuted a pilgrimage vow.)

The “walking staff” was looted during the Reformation and was recreated at the Restoration, “shod with a steel spike”, as the *Rod of Justice and Equity* for King Charles II (the pommel and tang became the orb and cross).

Staff ‘3’, in centre: “No 3 Kilbride” is from Steer & Bannerman; Ch. Decorative Motifs, LMMSWH; 1977; Fig. 24, pps 178-79. They give two graveslab cases of a carved “ceremonial” staff motif with round or circular pommel, tangbutton at top and end spike, both also accompanied by a sword. One is on the floor of St Oran’s Chapel (slab No. 161) and one at Kilbride churchyard near Oban – “*a (staff) symbol referring to the rank or status of the deceased.*” They said it was not possible to identify the staff’s prototype.

“The only undisputed pilgrim staff, at Worcester, had a metal spike at the end.” (Christopher, Daniel; 1997).

GRAVESLAB No. 161 – ATTRIBUTION SUMMARY

- Reginald as the known founder:- the standard or popular position for abbey founders was the Gospel side, or the north of an altar. The Abbey church was barely re-started and St Orans was preferred in any case – the “*most hallowed spot*”, “*most ancient*”, “*Royal fellowship*”, etc. Also note altar burials of St Bridget and Archbishop Conled, Kildare;
 - *Solidarity of kindred* burial as proved in contemporary Ireland:- buried near his father, Somerled, who had prime position in his chapel, on the other side of the altar (eg, as per Clonmacnoise c.1200 for the O’Connor dynasty;
 - *Depositio as sanctos* ritual:- near St Oran’s relics/altar;
1. Slab has a staff:- Reginald was a known Pilgrim/Founder;
 2. Slab has a sword:- Reginald was “*the greatest warrior*” King of the Western Isles - *nobilis Rex Insularum*;
 3. Slab is right design age, earlier 13th c. :- pre Iona School.

RESEARCH PROCESS:

Manuscript collation and their stemma (“family descent tree”) and the *joys and perils of emendation* are areas that arouse some controversy. In my use of all records, contemporary or otherwise, I am fully aware of the pitfalls of “formulaic conventions”, encomiastic or panegyric praise poems, regional bias, interpolations, etc, etc.

I have taken what I consider a careful, considered positive approach along the following lines. By researching the ‘entries’ either side of the event in question (for the same place – or same time other places) to develop a cohesive narrative, a context of events, a chain of cause and effect – to fully grasp what is really happening; to confirm and validate the accurate history (after Dr. K. Simms).

⁶ Cogitosus’ seventh-century *Life of St Brigit* of Kildare.

'Eamhain of the Apples', on Ranald mac Somerled,

REGINALDUS • REX • INSULARUM •
DOMINUS • DE • ERGILE

Thy fair fresh cheek thou hast bathed;
In thine eye is blue beam soft as summer showers;
Over the locks of thy hair,
O descendant of Fergus
The wind of paradise has breathed.
O man of the white steed,
O man of the black swan,
The fierce band and the gentle mood,
The sharp blade and the lasting flame.

Descendant of Conn, and descendant of Cormac;
Thou with the speckled ship of ships;
Pursue thy raids on a worthy steed,
For a foolish steed carries one away.

Translated, W. F. Skene.