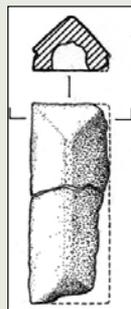


## SOMERLED. King of the Isles, 1158 - k.1164, Renfrew. “King of Innse Gall and Kintyre, Regulus of Argyll”

Somerled, the warrior who led the gaelic revival (against Viking occupation) and restored the ancient Dalriadic claim to Argyll, is bestowed encomiastically by Hugh of Sleat, the Macdonald historian <sup>1</sup> : “*He was a well tempered man, in body shapely, of a fair, piecing eye, of middle stature, and of quick discernment*”.

“REPORT OF 20 WRITERS IN ICOLLUMKILL”:-  
“*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.*” (Hugh of Sleat, c.1650). “*A sepulchre on Iona was Somerled’s final right.*” <sup>2</sup> “*His body was taken to Iona; his place of sepulture was the ancient ecclesiastical capital of his island domains.*” <sup>3</sup>

Is his graveslab extant in Iona? Most unlikely. The 12th century slabs are usually plain “coped” sandstone, with a section like a little chapel. The plain replacement flagstone in the floor of St Oran’s Chapel, at the prized “*Epistle*” side of the altar (south), was most probably the position for his coped slab. <sup>4</sup>



French, 12-13<sup>th</sup> century, coped graveslabs.

### OTHER KINGS BURIED IN IONA, REILIG ODHRAIN, NEAR THE TIME OF SOMERLED

W. Shakespeare: *MacBeth* “*Where is Duncan’s body, carried to Colmkill, .... The sacred storehouse of his predessors.....etc.*”

1. **MacBeth**: d.1057 - **King of Scots** - (and 12 before, to and including Kenneth MacAlpine, d.864.) In the *Tumulus Regum Scotiae, Tomb of King of Scots*; the centre one of a row of three small tombs. These inscriptions were on marble “*quoin stones*” in the fronting east gables.

These tombs were not the much later 12<sup>th</sup> c. solid stone *mortuary houses* of Ireland.

2. **Duncan II**: d.1094. **King of Scots**. Buried Iona.

3. **Donald (III) Ban**: c.1130. **King of Scots**. Bones re-buried from Dunkeld - last one buried in Iona.

4. **SOMERLED mac Gillibhride**: k.1164 - **REX INSULARUM**, BURIED IN HIS OWN SUPERIOR CHAPEL, TEMPEULLODHRAIN, SYMBOLISING THE 4<sup>TH</sup> TOMAIRE NAN RIGH, *TUMULUS REGUM INSULARUM*. “*THE MOST HALLOWED SPOT ON IONA.*”

5. **Godred Olafsson**: d.1187 - **King of Mann (and “Isles”)**; Norse. He is the very man Somerled defeated over 1156-8 but who returned 1164 after Somerled was killed. Was he buried on Iona to spite Somerled or was Iona so sacred and above politics for the dead? He was buried in the *Tumulus Regum Norwegiae* - the Tomb of Kings of Norway, the northern one. Ireland’s tomb, *Tumulus Regum Hiberniae*, was the southly one. All three became derelict (or destroyed in the Reformation) and removed two centuries ago.

Somerled built and was buried, 1164, in his **new**, mid 12<sup>th</sup> c. mausoleum, Teampeall Odhrain, ie, St Oran’s Chapel. Historic Scotland date the chapel as c.1150 matching Somerled’s conquest of the Isles. **Reginald was only born in c.1153 (died age 54 – G. Buchanan) therefore he could not have built it.** It was originally a pre-Columban dry-stone oratory built over St Oran’s grave with the altar over his tomb or translated relics as was the practice (then, only maybe, Queen (St) Margaret’s small effort c.1073). These events are confirmed by both the architectural archaeology and the history. (RCAHMS 1977, 1982 <sup>5</sup>; RA McDonald – “*Death & Burial of Somerled*”).

<sup>1</sup> *The Lords of The Isles - etc*; p.111; Ronald Williams; 1984.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.124;

<sup>3</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.

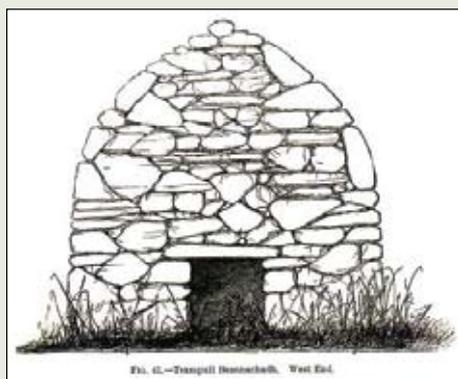
<sup>4</sup> The side on which the Epistle is read during the Mass or Eucharist.

<sup>5</sup> “*ARGYLL : An Inventory of the Monuments VOL 4 IONA (ARGYLL VOL 4)* ; Royal Commission on the Ancient & Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS); pps.245-250. 1982. p.245; “**This chapel, N end of Reilig Odhrain, ...principal burial-ground of Iona, dates from the 12<sup>th</sup> century**”. p.249...” **the ornament of the arch-head is characteristic of the second half of that century. (12<sup>th</sup>)**” “*Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands*” (LMMSWH); Steer & Bannerman. (S&B); RCAHMS; 1977

He was **RIINNSE-GALL** (King of The Isles)<sup>1</sup> and would demand nothing less than to be buried with the 40 (at least) other Gaelic/Celtic/Norse Kings (or ‘sub-kings’) of Ireland, Scotland and ‘Norway’ in Reilig Odhrain, the **most ancient graveyard in all Scotland** (Chapter 11) - in a “Celtic Church” cemetery. And buried right next to the relics of a revered saint (Oran) whose earthly remains were *forever in direct contact with his soul in heaven!* St Oran was first on Iona, dying there in 548 of the plague, 15 years before Colum Cille even arrived.<sup>2</sup> W Reeves even says “*St Columba’s bones should be sought for in the Reilig Odhrain!*”<sup>3</sup>

### III Tumulus Regum

Were these three insignificant dry stone buildings originally elongated monk’s cells in what was St Oran’s first small monastic enclosure? (“*not above 10 feet long and 5 feet broad, within*”; Rev J. Walker in 1764.) They almost match in size, shape and construction the “*very primitive looking*” structure on Eilean Mor, one of the wild Flannian Isles (west of Lewis) - called the chapel of St Flann or Teampull Beannachadh<sup>4</sup> (below).



(“*within, the dimensions are - length 7’3”*; width, 4’5””).

They are in a grouping, like three large clochan cells in a row on Skellig Michael, Kerry (doors east) and the oval cells on the Isle of Saints, Garvellach Islands, just south of Mull where St Columba may have been - his “*Hinba*”?

<sup>1</sup> Historian Hugh MacDonald of Sleat, 17<sup>th</sup> c. has Somerled responding to Malcolm the Maiden : “He replied, that he had as good a right to the lands upon the continent as he had to the Isles. As to the Isles, he had undoubted right to them....”. (At least, a 17<sup>th</sup> c. Clan Donald, or their historian’s, opinion.)

<sup>2</sup> AFM 548.7 : St. Odhran, of Leitrioch Odhrain, died on the second day of the month of October, AD 548. (*Tiroran* –land of Oran on Mull; Kiloran on Colonsay; Oransay, etc). Oran was not in the original 12 who came with Colum Cille. **The re-burial ‘legend’ of him is simply a clever disguise of Oran’s prior foundation on Iona – he preceded Columba.**

<sup>3</sup> Reeves, William; Adomnan’s *Life of St Columba*; p.317, notes ‘it lies’; 1857.

<sup>4</sup> *The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland*, VOL I; p.77-78. David MacGibbon and Thomas Ross; 1897

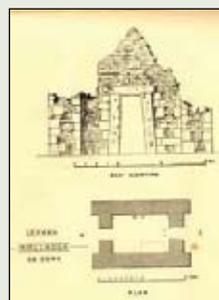
This was a very early monastic enclosure, possibly St Brendan’s (c.540), complete with small, stone rectangular chapels.<sup>5</sup> Probably just like the earliest St Oran’s chapel in his *Reilig Odhráin*, the enclosure on Iona before Columba’s.



Isle of Saints *bee-hives/clochans*. Courtesy CANMORE. All of these structures mentioned and the three “Tombs of the Kings” in St Oran’s cemetery are of dry-stone construction.

Or were they early, **functional mortuary house/tomb shrines**<sup>6</sup> built for the Dalriadic Kings (first was Aiden, in 609) and the other Kings. They possibly contained what was the rising popularity, a necessity even, of a translated relic of the very nearby Saint Oran that particularly gave these non regal looking “*little chapellis*”<sup>7</sup> such incredible religious significance and highly desirable status. They are not small chapels, or oratories, whose doors do **not** face east (it being the alter end) – unlike monk’s cells; or tombs.

The cemetery was called *Reilig Odhráin*, meaning the relics of St Oran. Martin Martin (1695) said the three “**shrines**” were “*on the south side of the church*”; ie, St Oran’s Chapel (the remainder of two of them can be seen as a combined “*mouldering heap*” in William Daniell’s drawing, 1815).



“The existence of special ‘mortary houses’ has also been noted in Ireland.”<sup>8</sup> The building, *Leaba Molaig*, “bed or grave” of St Molag, died c.655, is described by O’Hanlan (*Lives of Irish Saints*) :- “dating back to the 7<sup>th</sup> c.; 13’ by 9’...inside, a kind of kist, consisting of a large flagstone, resting on low side-stones.....”. The “bed” (‘flagstone-graveslab’) of St Molag may be 7<sup>th</sup> c., but this building, an oratory of 9<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> c., in my opinion closely approximates that of St Columba’s 9<sup>th</sup> c. ‘shrine’, oratory,

Iona. **Only tradition links Columba to this shrine and only might indicate where he was first buried (HS).**

<sup>5</sup> ‘Corbelled cells are also on North Rona (Western Isles; including the so-called oratory — a small stone building measuring 3.4m by 2.4m internally and 3.2m high — is the most complete complex of buildings.’ Foster, Sally; 2011; ***Physical Evidence For The Early Church In Scotland.***

<sup>6</sup> To stop looting, much later 12<sup>th</sup> c. ones were smaller and **solid** stone representations over the grave. See the one covering the grave of the body/relic of St. Tighernach, Clones, in Appendix ‘A’, Attachment ‘F’.

<sup>7</sup> *Description of the Occidental, ie, Western Isles of Scotland*; Donald Munro; ‘1549.’

<sup>8</sup> *Burial in Medieval Ireland, 900-1500: A Review of the Written Sources*; S Fry. pps 70-1. 1999.

SOME OTHER KINGS BURIED IN REILIG ODHRAIN were from :

**Ireland** - *Niall Frossach*, High King of Tara, 778.

**Northumbria** (then, and for some time, supreme among English Kingdoms) – *Egfrith*, King, 685.

**Pictland** – *Bruide*, King of Picts, 693.

**York & Dublin** (Norse) - *Olaf 'Cuaran'*, King, 981 (in the 700's York, then *Eoforwic*, was the Saxon capital of Northumbria; c.900 then viking *Jorvik*, York.)

**SOMERLED, k.1164, in the :- “The Royal Fellowship of Death”** : “...and especially the association with particular, specified Saints” (ie, Oran & Columba). “Where we encounter royal involvement in the **construction and embellishment of monasteries**, it is almost always connected to the monarch’s commemorative aspirations, or else to the augmentation of the political, religious and historical profile of his dynasty. Thus, the church in which a monarch and his family chose to be buried benefited in particular.”<sup>1</sup>

[**The Lord Rhys ap Gruffydd**, kingdom of Deheubarth, “Prince of the Welch”, (Reign 1155–1197) was a contemporary of Somerled and founded two religious houses during 1184-89. Talley Abbey was the first Premonstratensian abbey in Wales, while Llanllyr was a Cistercian nunnery, only the second nunnery to be founded in Wales and the first to prosper. He became the patron of the abbeys of Whitland and Strata Florida and made large grants to both houses. Rhys (and sons) built a number of stone castles, starting with Cardigan castle, which was the earliest recorded native-built stone castle in Wales.<sup>2</sup> The similarities of the dynasties of Somerled, west of *Druim Alban* and The Lord Rhys, west of *Offa's Dyke*, are striking. After restoring their kingdoms from the “Northmen”, Norse and Cambro-Normans respectively, both built castles in imitation. Somerled also attempted to endow and build an Abbey but he desired ‘traditional’ celtic monasticism of a reformed type from Derry, Ireland.]

Reilig Odhrain was a hallowed place long before the coming of firstly St Oran (d.548, Iona) and then St Columba’s arrival in AD 563. It was anciently known to the Gael as **I** (later written Hi; pronounced ‘Ee’), **‘THE Island – par excellence’**. An island correctly identified in pre-history by the Priests of *Innis nan Druidheanach* (Isle of Druids) as made of the oldest rock in the world and destined to be the last place destroyed at world’s end (*Carmina Gadelica* – rune lore). Where else would a King want to be buried to await the Day of Doom?

<sup>1</sup> *The Art and Architecture of English Benedictine monasteries, 1300-1540*: pps.152-3. Julian M. Luxford, 2005)

<sup>2</sup> Turvey, R; *The Lord Rhys, Prince of Deheubarth*; 1997.

**1164** – (AU 1164.2) Somerled, the *Community of Ia* (Iona) and possibly Flaithbertach **O’Brolchan** himself, the reforming and mitred Abbot/Bishop of Derry, Ireland, all wanted Iona “reborn” but with O’Brolchan, the *Coarb of Columba*, titular head of the federated *familia Colum Cille*, **re-located to Iona**, and it once again the supremacy of a **revived, traditional Celtic monasticism**. (Maybe this was also in opposition to Armagh’s regional ascendancy.) The current Irish High King, the insecure Muirchertach MacLochlainn, King of Aileach (Cenel Eoghain, Northern Ui Neill) from Derry, the Ulster nobles and Gill Meic Liac, Archbishop of Armagh (was Abbot of Derry since 1121) all prevented O’Brolchan’s acceptance on self-interested political and status grounds, not ecclesiastical ones. MacLochlainn was a political competitor to Godfrey of Mann for control of the Irish Sea, Dublin, Mann – and the Isles, ie, involving Somerled.

The O’Brolchans from Derry were the hereditary Chief Masons of all Ireland and to the Lords of the Isles.<sup>3</sup> (*Donaldus O’Brolchan fecit hoc opus*). Flaithbertach O’Brolchan had just finished rebuilding the significant Derry Abbey, which in fact was the very first monastery that Columba had created of the many in Ireland before he went to Iona (in 544). Derry is the place most associated with Colmcille in Ireland and O’Brolchan had just brought it back to prominence in Ireland as the centre of the Columba confederation. **NB**: the first operational Abbot of a revived medieval Iona 1204, installed under force by the *familia Colum Cille* Derry, was Ó Fearghail (O’Friel) nearest in blood to St. Colmcille, for he was in direct line from his brother. **Somerled ‘won’? There was a Columban Abbot ruling the generic Benedictine order.**



<sup>3</sup> “No doubt the original home whence these arts of architecture, sculpture and others were imported into the Highlands was Ireland; but the connection between it and the Western Isles was for centuries so close that in all the essential features of their intellectual life they were the same”. *CLAN DONALD; VOL I; p.483.*

**“This early Norse-Gael Lordship, founded by Somerled and which was to develop through his descendants into Clan Donald, was very definitely not part of Scotland” – Dr David Caldwell**, archaeologist, Keeper of Scotland & Europe in the National Museums of Scotland, Curatorial Advisor to the Museum of Islay.

O’Brolchans - Masons ...to Donald Lords, from Ireland;  
MacMhurichs - Bards.....to Donald Lords, from Ireland;  
MacBeathadhs - Doctors... to Donald Lords, from Ireland.

**It is not surprising that SOMERLED** was hostile to the Anglo-French influence, including no doubt to the Canmore's, ie, Queen Margaret, who detested Gaelic tradition (See Reginald and Saddell below). He obviously did not abide the reforms originating from outside Scotland and Ireland and spreading there (to Ulster last). This was a renewed push on standardising a parochial, diocese based, pre-Norman (Episcopal) church, mainly via Cistercians. Ireland was originally under the *Paruchia of Patrick*, to the 7<sup>th</sup> century but Ireland had no cities (civites) so mainly saw no need for diocese structure. (Ireland's communal structure wasn't town based; it was Tuath based.)

Even from the 6<sup>th</sup> century, many Bishops were soon relegated to liturgical and sacramental functions and many Abbots had supreme authority.<sup>1</sup>

"He (Somered) was unreceptive to the reformed (Roman) religious orders."<sup>2</sup> This "power & prestige" squabble over Iona versus Derry did not cause any schism. Notable Irish elders continued to come to Iona for "*most excellent penance*" and, after "*going the way of the flesh*", be buried there. Also, O'Brolchans continued to serve in Iona, in fact for 300 years as the master masons to the Lords of the Isles, performing major works in the Abbey, St Oran's Chapel and were most probably the originators of the famous "*Iona School*" of monumental carving, with "*Good John of Islay*" as its initial impetus and their patron.

The central seat of power, fame and influence of the federated Columban Church had in effect returned home to Ireland after 300 years on Iona and had been there

another 300, hotly contested by Kells, Derry and nearby Raphoe. (In Scotland it was Dunkeld.)

It was a bold attempt by Somered to try and get its return to the sentimental Iona site in his Sea Kingdom and its failure could not have been unexpected. This had nothing to do with the decades later endowment of Saddell Abbey – by Reginald. However, the "Cult of Columba" retained a strong sentimental link to its heyday in Iona. (See Reginald – Irish resistance to 'Roman reform' on Iona.)

**Somered also would be highly motivated to raise Iona as the Episcopal See of his Diocese of the Isles and not acknowledge Peel on the Isle of Man, a centre and polity dominated by his rivals.**

**1164 : "Wounded by a spear, slain by the sword, Somered died"** at : The Battle of Renfrew against an encroaching anti-Gaelic Scotland. He commanded 164 superior birlinns and 15,000 men from The Isles, Dublin and Mann. Its worth noting that the head of the army that killed Somered was Walter Fitz Alan – 1<sup>st</sup> hereditary High Steward ("Governor") of Scotland – the progenitor of the Stewart Kings who were instrumental in destroying the Lordship of The Isles.<sup>3</sup> It was not the Campbells, although imperialist and always managing to combine personal ambition with public duty as 'east-crown' allies, who were simply the blunt weapon.

The Cluniac Order of Benedictine monks at the then new Priory of Renfrew, founded only in 1163 by the very man whose army killed Somered, Walter Fitz Alan, tended to his body and this was to play a vital role in the later connections of Reginald and early Clan Donald chiefs to Paisley Abbey.

<sup>1</sup> "New History of Ireland" VOL 1. lxx, 2005. TM Charles-Edwards. Excerpts from *The Ancestors of McDonalds of Somerset*; by Donald M. Schlegel. "The church founded by St. Patrick originally fit the mould of Roman administration, but instead of having large dioceses, to avoid political jealousy and entanglements each tuath had its own bishop. Within a century this pattern began to change, as monasticism took hold. Gradually, monasteries were founded and sent out branches, daughter houses, which were subject to their mother houses rather than to the local bishops, and all endowed with wealth in land. Soon the bishops were relegated to their liturgical and sacramental functions, and often or even usually were themselves monks, leaving the administrative function to the abbots and other monastic officials, while the local churches were attended by priests sent from the monasteries. The Irish church was firmly in union with Rome, though communication sometimes lacked. This union was reinforced by crowds of foreign ecclesiastics (Egyptian, Roman, Italian, French, British, and Saxon) who flocked to Ireland as a place of refuge in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>5</sup> Services were in Latin, but of course **preaching was in the common Gaelic** of the people."

<sup>2</sup> "Scoto-Norse Kings and the Reformed Religious Orders"; R. Andrew MacDonald; 1995.

<sup>3</sup> During James VI's reign, the **transformation of the 15th century image of the Hebrides as the cradle of Scottish Christianity and nationhood into one in which its citizens were regarded as lawless barbarians** was complete. Official documents vilify the peoples of the Highlands as "*void of the knowledge and feir of God*" who were prone to "*all kynd of barbarous and bestile cruelties*". The Gaelic language, spoken fluently by James IV and probably by James V, became known in the time of James VI as "Erse" or Irish, implying that it was foreign in nature.

The **Statutes of Iona** were enacted in 1609, which required that clan chiefs: send their heirs to Lowland Scotland to be educated in English-speaking Protestant schools; provide support for Protestant ministers to Highland Parishes; outlaw bards; and regularly report to Edinburgh to answer for their actions. So began a process "*specifically aimed at the extirpation of the Gaelic language, the destruction of its traditional culture and the suppression of its bearers.*"

Renfrew priory moved to Paisley soon after 1164 (1169?) and was only raised to Abbey status in 1245. There appears to have been a very ancient church there dedicated to St Mirinus, an Irish saint of the 6<sup>th</sup> century who had been a disciple of the great school of St Comgal, Bangor, Ulster (included in the Paisley dedication).<sup>1</sup>

It is almost certain that Somerled's intestines, heart and brain/eyes (evisceration, and for embalming<sup>2</sup>) were removed by the Cluniacs in Renfrew as part of the preparation of his body :- *"The extraction of the inner organs and the separate burial of the heart and intestines was a hallmark of English and French aristocratic mortuary behaviour from the 12th century onwards. It is worth noting that the English often quickly discarded the viscera close to the site of corpse treatment, whereas the French treated them with great respect. The English aristocracy generally favoured a double interment (one for the body, the other for the heart), while French aristocracy often requested that their corpses be buried in three separate places (body, heart and entrails)."*

***"It was in 12th century France and England that the heart began to receive separate burial, not only from the corpse but also from the intestines."***<sup>3</sup>

The intestines would be interred in an urn at that site – a decidedly functional practice I agree (but then moved to Paisley?) The custom for the medieval Kings of England and France, was generally to have three 'coffins' (jars/urns), usually buried separately. It is said that King Malcolm IV paid for Somerled's body to be sent to Iona.

*"The period immediately following the royal death is one devoted to the preparation of the body and effigy for the grand ceremonies to follow. The heart and entrails are removed and each encoffined*

*separately. The practice of evisceration allowed the reasonable preservation of the corpse for a few days. The three coffins (corpse, heart, entrails) are then the objects of almost continuous high and low masses, night vigils, and services for the dead performed by members of the religious orders. The heart and entrails of an English king usually received separate burial from the remainder of the corpse. After about a week, the heart and entrails receive their final service and are put in a permanent resting place. Some monarchs generously had their remains distributed among three locales".*<sup>4</sup>

I'm not sure how a region might feel back then receiving the 'bowels' : *"black bile; melancholic humor"*? (of the four medieval 'medical' humors).

The fact that Paisley Abbey was endowed by Reginald and early Clan Donald chiefs and was a place of their retreat in old age (brothers of the order) attests to the practise above. Reginald became a monk of Paisley 'before 1200' and therefore should have had good access to any *inside knowledge* about Somerled's viscera and heart burial by the Cluniacs (and their whereabouts – including his head?).

However, *"The hierarchy of the body was both a political one – the head (when attached!) remained the official site of the burial of the person – and an effective one: thus the heart was coming to be regarded as the seat of personal piety,...."*<sup>5</sup> I don't think it can be believed that a cleric cut off the head of Somerled and gave it to the Glasgow Bishop ..... after "divine interposition".<sup>6</sup> Somerled's corpse (*body politic*) and head - 'head of the family, Kingdom'- are buried in the "official site", St Oran's Chapel. Actually, with his head or not is immaterial because, even if true, it wasn't removed

1 The Ecclesiastical Architecture of Scotland, VOL III; p.7. David MacGibbon and Thomas Ross; 1897.

2 'Embalming was the preferred option of body treatment among medieval English aristocrats from the 12th to the 14th centuries'- "Heart Burial"; p.132 (especially during the Crusades, when crusading noblemen wished to have their bodies preserved for burial closer to home.) Robert The Bruce's body is buried in Dunfermline Abbey, while his heart is buried in Melrose Abbey. His embalmed heart was to be taken on crusade by his lieutenant and friend Sir James Douglas to the Holy Land.

3 Heart Burial in medieval and early post-medieval central Europe; pps 119-34; Estella Weiss-Krejci. From Body Parts and Bodies Whole. Changing Relations and Meaning (Studies in Funerary Archaeology 5); by Katharina Rebay-Salisbury, Marie Louise Stig Sorensen and Jessica Hughes; 2010. pps. 120, 122.

4 *Celebrations of death: the anthropology of mortuary ritual* . 1991. Metcalfe & Huntington; pps 163-167.

5 *Medieval death: Ritual and Representation*; Binski, Paul. 2001; p.64. "In a sense it marked the assimilation of the art of power to the art of the cult of relics, where the Christian cult of the dead had begun. Kings, and queens, bishops and Popes, were as divisible as the saints, even if the by were not quite as powerful"; p.69. A fragment of a saintly body represented the saint in his or her entirety...."; p.14.

6 This Glasgow story doesn't match other unconfirmed stories of his death or the sending of his body to Iona by King Malcolm at his own expense. None mention what would be the rather palpable and noteworthy condition of him being headless! Its all speculation..... including that if its true that Malcolm IV was so moved and concerned to do the right thing, he would have ordered the head be re-united with body for Rex Insularum's last journey *"With regal pomp and ceremony to Iona's piles, Where rest from mortal coil the mighty of the Isles"*.

idiosyncratically for ritual burial purposes (if its true, it was as a trophy). Some Celtic pagan burials involved the decapitation of the deceased with the heads either buried with the body or at a different site altogether. This practise in fact persisted in some places in Britain but only up to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. <sup>1</sup> However head separation in the high middle ages of Somerled was obviously mainly to fallen warriors in the course of battle (slaughterings, executions). <sup>2</sup>

Some of the above however raises an interesting thought about Saddell Abbey and the unsubstantiated, very late “family tradition or quoted “universal tradition” (with no evidence or reason ever given) that Somerled’s corpse is buried there – **IF the prerequisite** prestigious Abbey, with necessary resident Saint’s relics, had existed in 1164.

This ‘tradition’ has been unexplained to date because the (only) two recognised early Clan Donald Sennachies, Hugh of Sleat and MacVurich both state Somerled was buried in Iona. (The warrior slab, south wall of choir, Saddell is 14<sup>th</sup> century at earliest and wall niche 15<sup>th</sup>.)

A possible explanation is that Reginald “translated” his father’s embalmed heart as part of Saddell Abbey’s later founding ceremony; after being taken with him to Rome and Jerusalem for a blessing? “Reginald is said to have made a pilgrimage to Rome and returned with consecrated dust which was scattered on the (Saddell Abbey) foundations, and to have lived there for three years during its building “*without coming under a roof.*”

Or, at the time of Somerled’s death, there possibly was a small, budding monastery (granted by him) of a few Cistercian monks and a tiny chapel as opposed to an Abbey - ie, which must have an Abbot, at least 12 monks and a completed Abbey Church - and his heart may have been sent there. <sup>3</sup> And just maybe, Reginald’s heart is also in Saddell, next to his father’s, both in their small urns, in a yet undiscovered small “vault” under the presbytery of the Cistercian Abbey ruins - *‘There was also a trend for donating hearts to the newer religious orders which*

<sup>1</sup> Watts, D. Dr (Q’ld Australia); *Religion in Late Roman Britain: Forces of Change*; 2011.

<sup>2</sup> *Burial in Medieval Ireland, 900-1500: A Review of the Written Sources*; p.131. S Fry. 1999.

<sup>3</sup> The hearts of Henry III and II and all his other sons were buried separately, 1189-1216, as were those of II’s grandsons. **“Heart Burial”**; Charles Angell Bradford; p.64; 1933. PS : *Sweetheart Abbey*, Kirkcudbright, founded c1269 by the wife of John Balliol for the preservation of her beloved husband’s heart.

*advocated personal spirituality’ (and revived austerity) – Heart Burial*; p.132.

Where are the hearts of other Lords of the Isles? At Finlaggan, Iona Abbey Church, or Saddell? Next to the bosom of the wife who loved them most – or the first or last wife? The greater part of the viscera of Donald I, his two grandsons Alaxandair Og and Angus Og and the last Donald (Dubh) are all most likely in Ireland (probably Donald Dubh in his entirety).

**However, Somerled’s corpse (the *Body Politic*) is definitely buried in his own chapel, in :- St Oran’s, Reilig Odhrain, IONA.**



Holyrood Abbey slab. It was taken - by collector or clan?

NOTE : Who took ‘his’ graveslab from beside the alter? It does not appear to be still on site but broken. Its peaked shape and hollowness are hardly useful for a local cottage’s lintel, or a quoin (maybe upside down as an animal drinking trough). Was it inscribed, legible and clearly the famous Somerled’s with this being the possible and main reason replacement flagstone then it is very discernible, having only one side with a large taper. But is this accurate? Or was the flagstone cut this way for easiness in refitting one side parallel to the closeby wall? Probably not I think. It is accurate.

If it was inscribed, I’m not positive what language and script it would be in :- possibly in latin but before Lombardic script on Iona; unlikely its Norse runes; but I’ll attempt it in Middle Irish something like ‘minuscule’ script – as best one can here (eg, as in *The Book of Glendalough*, Part II, mid 12<sup>th</sup> c., in Irish and Latin, minuscule.)

A basic attempt at an inscription :

Ór don anmain  
sombairle (mac) giolla bríde  
rig innsi gall

A PRAYER FOR THE SOUL OF  
SOMERLED (mac) GILLIBRIDE  
KING OF THE ISLES.

(based partly on earlier Christian inscriptions, St Oran’s cemetery and ...

ÓR DON RÍG DO TOIRDELBUCH U CHONCHOBAIR

“A prayer for the king, for Toirdelbuch U Chonchobair”  
(1152, Tuam)