Tiree in the Viking Age

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The Lamonts, 1979

The Lamont and Gage Families, 1981

Donald Lamont and Sarah MacDonald: Their Ancestors and Descendants
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German, Celt, and Slav, 2001

The Ancestry of Roger Wilcox Hartman, 2003

Tales Are Told, 2004

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They Came From Tiree, 2004

Domhnall MacEan 'ic William, 2005

Kith and Kin, Paternal Relationships, 2006

Kith and Kin, Maternal Relationships, 2006

with Helen Lamont, Linda Kay Bryant & Jeanne Gohlke

Children of Croit Pharaic, 2003-2004

To Aaron Rosenblatt, a Greenwich Village Viking

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Preface

The history of Tiree during the Viking Age, which lasted roughly from 800-1266, is essentially non-existent, since no information has come down to us regarding this period on the island. Any attempt to write about these times would appear to be futile on the surface, except for the fact we do have some description of what was going on in Dublin, the Isle of Man, and the Northern Isles, such as the Orkneys and Shetlands, all of which impacted Tiree. Often, however, these are conflicting stories, not only about the dates of these happenings, but even about what actually occurred. Yet, this monograph of the history of Tiree and the other islands of the Southern Hebrides attempts to tell the tale of what occurred in this area in the Viking Age and extrapolating that history to cover Tiree and its neighbors whenever possible. It can be described as 'imaginative history', and an exercise that no true historian would attempt. To those readers offended by this approach I can only say, "Sorry", and inform them that I, too, prefer fact over fiction, even if the fiction is my own

Gene Donald Lamont
Bloomfield, Michigan
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Tiree in the Viking Age

TIREE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NINTH CENTURY

Tiree and the other islands of the Southern Hebrides, which collectively were known as the Sudreys by the Norse [1], were relatively peaceful compared to their turbulent past when the Viking age began at the beginning of the ninth century AD. The area had long had to contend with sea-borne raiders intent on booty and slaves, and Tiree had learned to defend itself, if the duns and brochs that dotted the island are any indication. The advent of Christianity to the Hebrides had dampened the violence, however, and lessened the danger in everyday living. This did not mean that Tiree and the neighboring islands existed in a quiet backwater. Quite the contrary, since they were situated on busy waterway that linked Scandinavia to Ireland and the west coast of England. In a time when there was little or no land travel the sea was the avenue upon which most commerce moved.

The inhabitants of Tiree were primarily engaged in farming and herding at the dawn of the Viking age, as countless generations before them had been. The island held a special place in the Hebrides, however, since it had always been known for its fertility. This it owed to the wind blown sand which replenished its soil, and indeed the ancient Gaels had named the island *Eileann Thiriodh*, or land of corn. Cereal crops, such as oats, rye, and bere, a crude form of barley, were in good supply and any surplus, along with some hides, was used in barter to trade for weapons, tools, and other items it did not produce itself. When the Vikings began their incursions in the Western Isles, Tiree was known as the 'Granary of Iona'.

Tiree was a part of Dalriada, a kingdom established by Celtic tribesmen from Ulster, who the Romans called Scotti. They had begun to invade the Western Isles and the nearby Scottish mainland in force at the beginning of the sixth century AD, and overran the inhabitants of that region. Three hundred years later their realm stretched from Loch Carron in the north to as far east as Drum Alba. This kingdom of the Gaels was divided into three tribes; the Cenel Loairn, holding Colonsay and north central Argyll, the Cenel Oengus, established principally in Islay, and the Cenel nGabrain, occupying Kintyre, Cowal, and many of the Western Isles. These tribes, each ruled by a sub-king, were in turn divided into more than one *tuatha*, or kindred, each with its own chieftain Tiree was no doubt part of a *tuatha*, which typically did not number more than two or three thousand people, but its extent is not known. The island, however, probably looked to the king of the Cenel nGabrain as its supreme overlord.

Tiree was part of a Celtic tribal society with a strong hierarchal structure, which the Dalriadic Scots had brought with them from Ulster. At its base were the slaves or serfs, often captives of war, subordinate to the free farmers. The latter tilled the soil and managed the herds. The next tier above can be thought of as a sub-class of nobles, whose arts and talents placed them above the commoners. These were the judges, the lawyers, the leeches, the joiners, the metalworkers, and most importantly the bards. At the top of the pyramid were the nobles, or the warrior class, from which the ruler was drawn. Aside from the island chief and possibly a few of

[1] The Norse called the Southern Hebrides the Sudrey Islands and the Northern Hebrides the Nordreys.

his henchmen, who may have been of the Celtic elite, the inhabitants of Tiree were probably free farmers, with possibly a few slaves.

It is estimated that the descendants of the Dalriadic Scots numbered no more than 10% of the total population of the kingdom of Kenneth MacAlpin, when he had forged a union with the Picts in 843 AD. Yet these few were able to impose their language and culture over a region we now call Scotland. How these few could exert such influence has puzzled historians and remains unanswered today. If so, the inhabitants of Tiree at the beginning of the Viking Age were chiefly the descendants of the Neolithic hunters and gatherers, the indigenous people of the area. It is true that these early occupiers of the region had been conquered by earlier Celtic tribesmen, who may have subjugated them as early as 600-500 BC. The indigenous people had absorbed the earlier Celtic invaders, but had acquired a Celtic form of speech and culture in the process.[2]

Christianity came to Tiree shortly after the Dalriadic Scots first appeared in force in the Hebrides. Within a short period of time it came to co-exist on a more or less equal basis with the traditional paganism of the island. After almost three hundred years it was deeply embedded in the life of Tiree and was the dominating religious influence. St. Brendan the Voyager is credited with establishing the first church on Tiree in 514 at a location called Bledach, which is believed to have been in Vaul. It was St. Columba, however, who established a monastery on Iona in 563, along with twelve companions, who provided the impetus behind the conversion of all of Scotland to Christianity. The Celtic church was structured differently from the Latin one in that it was led not by priests from their churches but primarily by monks leading from their monasteries. One was founded on Tiree by St. Columba, such as *Mag Luinge*, who directed much of its activities from Iona. It was destroyed by fire in 673, but was rebuilt. Whether it was still in use at the beginning of the ninth century is not known. Several other monasteries were also founded on Tiree, one by St. Comgall, and another called *Artchain* by a monk named Findchán. Again it is not known whether any of these were in operation at the beginning of the ninth century, but certainly these or others were. Feuds between monasteries had been a feature of Christian life in Ireland, but St. Columba distanced himself and those he influenced from such discord. There were no feuds between Scottish monasteries, therefore, and the land knew a period of peace not duplicated again for almost a thousand years. Since the Gaelic nobles, who were nominally in control of the region had little interest in administrative duties, the church stepped in to fill this gap. It dispensed medical care, organized communal husbandry, provided food in years of poor crop yields, and administered the Law of Adomnan. Thus it was that the Celtic church in the form of its monasteries had far greater influence on the day to day life of the islanders than the Celtic elite.

SCANDINAVIA AT THE BEGINNING OF THE NINTH CENTURY

Scandinavia at the beginning of the ninth century AD was a tribal society much like that of Scottish Dalriada. At the bottom were the thralls, or slaves, a class describing the bankrupt, the captives of war, and all who were born to that unenviable position. They were as much a part of the wealth of their owner as his livestock, and could be sold to the ready markets in Europe and Asia. The life of a slave was bad, but since they had a value to their owner it made good business sense to keep them alive and well. Yet many slaves were sacrificed at the time of the death of their master or mistress and ended up with them in their graves.

The majority of the Viking people were the free farmers, or bondi, but even some of these were not entirely free. Those that had risen from slavery, or were the children of slaves, might

[2] Recent DNA studies indicate that 80% of the blood of today's Europeans can be attributed to the indigenous people of the continent. In more remote regions, such as Scandinavia, Wales, Northwest Scotland, and the Isles the percentage is probably higher.

still owe labor services to their former masters or their families. Others might not own their own land, and had to hire out their services to others that did. This same class was also comprised of the craftsmen, peddlers, soldiers, and traders. They provided a pool of manpower for those financing marauding or trading expeditions.

At the top of the social pyramid were the nobles, a class from which the petty kings, jarls, and other chieftains were drawn. Many were no more than warriors who had gathered like minded men around them and imposed their rule over a region of the country. The Vikings, much like the Celts, had a group below the nobles, but above the free farmers, to which those with special talents belonged. These were the men, such as the armorers, artists, and skalds. The last were the story-tellers, or bards.

Scandinavia, and Norway in particular, had a much more primitive political system than Dalriada, however, in that control was chiefly in the hands of petty kings and jarls, who recognized no central authority. While most of the people of Daldriada were illiterate the kingdom could boast of it learned clergy, whose mastery of the written word helped to make their realm a better organized society.

Scandinavia still clung to its polytheistic past, and gods such as Thor, Wodan, Freyja, and Loki had a firm grip on the populace. While it still shared many customs, such as burial and fertility rites, with their Germanic cousins, such as the Franks, Burgundians, and Alemanni, Scandinavia's paganism set them apart from Christian West. It did not help that the geographic isolation of Scandinavia had caused a differentiation in language with the Germans of the continent over a period of time, and thus it was that the Scandinavia had become a distinctly different, even alien entity from Continental Europe at the beginning of the Viking Age.[3]

Historical authorities debate the importance of the various reasons behind the outburst of Viking activity, which carried the Norsemen into the Faroes, Northwest Scotland and the Isles, Ireland, Normandy, Russia, Byzantium, and later Iceland and Greenland. It was an extraordinary development, which overshadows later conquests of the Moors in North Africa and Spain, or the subjugation of Eurasia by the Mongols. It is known that at the time of emigration, chiefly 860-940, there were temporarily colder conditions in Scandinavia, which no doubt brought suffering among the people enduring poor harvests. We can conclude, therefore, that this motivated many leaving the western fjords of Norway, an area that was hardest hit, to go to more hospitable lands, such as the Western Isles of Scotland. The importance of climatic conditions influencing settlement was underscored later by the depopulation of Greenland caused by the cold spell in 1050- 1250, which made farming much too difficult in that northern region.

Some authorities also point to an overpopulation among the landed class as the impetus behind the Viking raids and later settlement. While the eldest son was amply taken care upon the death of his father, every son inherited a share of the parental homestead. Since the Scandinavians were a prolific people at the time this often led to disruption and a social downgrading for the family. It can easily be seen that after several generations this could cause very serious problems, not the least being status, which is important to every society. Young men, lured by the promise of land and wealth, naturally chose a path by which they could possibly achieve this goal and joined Viking raids and later emigration. Some lands overseas, such as the Faroes, Shetland Islands and Orkney, were very lightly populated at this time, and thus presented great opportunities to the adventuresome

It is probably not coincidental that the Viking Age began at the time of great innovation in shipbuilding in Scandinavia. The people of the Northern Lands had long used the seas around them for commerce and communication. The very nature of the land, particularly in the western fjords of Norway, made mastery of the sea a prime necessity for the survival of any community. In an earlier age oars had been the only means of propulsion, but after the trial and error of many generations, shipbuilding skills produced ships with a true keel and powered by sail. This

[3] It is believed that his differentiation of language took place in the period of 100-700 AD.

enabled the Vikings to attempt much longer voyages over the open sea. All now what was needed were men with courage, will and resources, and these were soon found.

The protected fjords of Norway were a perfect proving ground for boat builders, of course, without which these skills could not have been learned. These innovations were a vast improvement over the crude crafts that had transported the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes earlier to England, and were to enable the Vikings to range much farther afield. This was only accomplished by learning to measure strakes more accurately, in keying in hull, ribs, and deck with more precision. The result was a trustworthy, easily maneuverable ship, which was capable of fast movement, and which had a shallow enough draft to be landed on a beach. A ship found at Gokstand in the Oslo fjord measured 80 feet in length, 17½ feet in width at its broadest point, and 6 feet, 5 inches from keel to gunwale at its highest point. A replica of it built of oak, except for the decking, mast and yards of pine, weighed 8½ tons and 10 tons fully loaded. It was capable of a speed of 10 knots, and was praised for its ease of handling in heavy seas. Not all had the beauty that graces the ships in the Oslo museum today, of course, but the less graceful knörrs that carried settlers and goods to the Faroes, Orkney and beyond were also fine technical achievements.

While praise of the shipbuilding skills of the Norsemen is certainly due, the navigational skills of Vikings, particularly the Norwegians from the western fjords, should also be commended. Detailed knowledge of the stars and the migration routes of birds aided the early intrepid navigators. Later the grasp of the position of the noonday sun and of the Polar Star was crucial in mastering the latitude of the position of a ship.

It was the political situation in Norway, however, that first was seized upon by historians, to explain the burst of Viking settlements in lands outside Scandinavia. When Harold Fairhair of the Yngling dynasty came to the Norwegian throne in the 870s his realm was split by a number of petty kings and jarls, who contested the royal authority. With determination, political skill, and a willingness to risk his throne Harold went about bringing them under control. At the Battle of Hafrfjord in 872 he defeated a coalition of his enemies, and many of them left with their families for territory overseas to escape retribution.[4] Their lands were forfeited and put in the hands of Harold's loyal followers. The rebels, however, were not completely subdued, however. Some continued attacks on their Norwegian homeland from their power bases in the Sudreys, as the Southern Hebrides were called. It was not until Harold mounted a sea-borne expedition against them in their island refuges that he gained a measure of control.

Status was mentioned above as an important factor that motivated many to go a-Viking, and this cannot be emphasized enough as one of the prime reasons behind the burst of Viking activity during this era. Theirs was a society that placed great importance on wealth and valor in war, and these were eagerly sought by those who wished to rise above their contemporaries, or even just gain acceptance among their equals. This was a great driving force, which no doubt gained strength from each successful marauding expedition.

THE VIKING RAIDERS

It can be imagined that raiding began when a ship on a trading mission found it more lucrative to take by force what could not have been earned peacefully. The vulnerability of isolated monasteries or communities proved to be an attractive lures for more organized ventures of this type, where several marauders banded together to despoil larger targets. In time the Vikings became such successful pillagers that large fleets attacked even power centers, such as Paris and Byzantium. Much has been written about the Vikings cruelly despoiling Christian

[4] The date of the Battle of Hafrsfjord is in dispute. Some authorities contend that it took place between 870 and 875, while others favor the 880s as the actual date.

centers, such as monasteries, wantonly killing peaceful monks and looting sacred relics of their faith. But this is not so surprising, since the Celtic monasteries of the Scottish Islands and mainland Ireland did display much of the wealth of their societies. As Willie Sutton explained, when asked why he chose banks for his robberies, that was where the money was. Isolated communities no doubt also suffered from Viking depredations during this period, but this was not as well publicized as was the despoliation of the monasteries, which had monks to record the atrocities visited upon them.

The men who led the Viking raiders were men, often ship captains, who by promising wealth and a chance to prove their valor, attracted a following of men willing to risk all in obtaining this goal. This activity was not instigated by any central authority. It was rather entrepreneurial in nature. Any man of wealth could gain a following, but to be successful in these plundering excursions one had also to have the respect of his peers. No man would fight to the death for their lord unless he had proved valorous, had great physical strength, and exhibited skill with weapons. A successful leader was also one who had proved he could lead his men intelligently in battle and showed wisdom in handling negotiations and could govern effectively.

Seamanship, navigational skills and business acumen were also needed by a Viking leader, who might be a trader one day, a raider the next, and colonizer the third. If he combined all these talents he could depend upon the oath of fealty given to him by his followers. In a time when it was a disgrace for a man to die in his bed a man who had taken another as his 'lord' would die rather than outlive his master. If he, by chance, lived when his lord died in battle, his only way back to respectability was to avenge him, even if he lost his own life.

The picture of the Viking raider, with his horned helmet, battle-axe held high, and bloodlust in his eye, is one that has been handed down to us through the generations. The tales of spread-eagled priests and violated nuns is almost as fresh today as it was when the monks chronicled the pillaging of their monasteries and broadcast the atrocities of the Norsemen. The truth is somewhat different, however. The Viking was little different from other barbarians of this age, when life was cheap and cruelty the order of the day. The ordinary raider was not well protected by an iron helmet, nor did he probably carry a sword, which was the weapon of a man of wealth. A spear and a wooden shield were more likely to be his only armament until he could win better weapons. The same man bent on rapine and pillage during the summer was often a peaceful farmer harvesting his crops in the autumn.

Viking raids, at least in the beginning, were usually fast hitting. The goal was to plunder the target and then get away quickly before the countryside could be aroused against them. There was little profit in fighting for fighting's sake, although many no doubt boasted that they looked for every opportunity to do so. They had little to fear, however, from local levies, which were generally poorer armed and less experienced in warfare unless their sheer numbers caused trouble. Professional soldiers were another matter, however, and challenging them only increased the risk and offered little gain in return. A typical raid began with one or more longships landing on a lonely shore, and being left there under guard while the bulk of the Viking force commandeered enough horses to race toward their target. Sometimes small boats or canoes were stolen to take them upstream, if that was the avenue by which they could reach the site they wished to plunder.

No part of the British Isles was more directly affected by Viking invasions than the Western Isles of Scotland. These islands ranged from the Orkneys and Shetland Islands in the north, through the Hebrides, to the Isle of Man off the coast of Ireland. Much of the Viking activity in this area, termed the Nordreys and Sudreys in ancient times, was Norwegian in origin. Men from the southwest fjords of that land were central figures in the raids and settlements through out this region. The waterway in which these islands were located became a major highway for Viking activity, situated as it was on the route to Ireland and the west coast of Britain. These islands, particularly Orkney and Man, became useful staging points for expeditions further south, although smaller islands, such as Tiree, may have also been used for

this same purpose. These Scottish islands endured Viking attention as early as the 790s, when the Celtic religious center of Iona met disaster, and some of the earliest Norse settlements overseas were situated among this group. Details are lacking in the history of the Viking Age, but it would appear that the Faroes, Orkney, and the Shetland Islands were first colonized. These locations were tempting targets, since they were either not populated or only sparsely so.

TIREE UNDER VIKING ATTACK

It is not known when Tiree first suffered Viking attacks, but as a neighbor to Iona we can be certain that the Vikings paid them attention early in the ninth century, if not before. Tiree's reputation for fertility would alone have brought unwelcome pillagers, but it, too, had several monasteries that would have attracted raiders. The first sea rovers would have plundered the holy sites, helped themselves to grain and livestock, taken a few for slaves, and then been on their way. These first raiders hit hard and fast, and then left the island. Later, as the raiders became better organized, some no doubt carved out fortified sites on Tiree, from which they launched further expeditions amongst the islands to the south. These, too, returned home for the winter, but soon a few, more determined Vikings wintered on Tiree. The site of six small forts, which were built by Norsemen have been identified on Tiree. They have been traced by the '-brig' ending of their place names, which meant a fortified site. One example is Cnoc Eibrig in Baugh Township, which is celebrated by the name of Port Eibrig today. Another is Dún nan Gall, now a ruin of a fort in Barapol, which has a purely Gaelic name meaning 'stronghold of the foreigners'.

The fact that Norse forts were a feature on Tiree is reason to believe that the inhabitants were not easily subjugated by the Norse, and the invaders had to protect themselves from reprisals. Historians point to the fact that Celt and Norse place-names exist in close proximity as evidence that the two races lived in amity. It is unlikely that this was the case, at least in the beginning, since it is difficult to be tolerant of a foe, which has killed your relative or friend, raped your wife or daughter, and sold one of your neighbors into slavery. There is a legend handed down on Tiree about the Battle of the Sheaves. According to this tale a raiding party of Lochlannoch, or Norsemen, landed on the north shore of the island to kill and plunder. They were met near Kilmoluaig by the island's defenders. It was harvest time and the men of Tiree were without their weapons, but they resourcefully used sheaves of corn to slay the enemy until their arms could be brought up. This probably is one of these highly imaginative stories so loved by the Gael, since it is repeated in similar, but different form in other legendary tales, but no doubt Tiree attempted to protect itself from marauding parties.

It is not known when Norse colonizers first came to Tiree, but there is some circumstantial evidence indicating that this probably took place sometime in the second quarter of the ninth century. Since it is believed that Ketil Broadnef had established himself as King of Man and the Sudreys in the middle of the ninth century, one would have to assume that the Norse had permanent settlements in Man at the time. If so, there is every reason to believe that the Sudreys, such as Tiree, also had Norse settlers among their inhabitants. They may or may not have been as heavily populated with Norsemen as was Man, however.

In time an accommodation must have developed between the islanders and their conquerors, helped no doubt by an intermixing of the two. It is possible a truce came about when those Norse in permanent occupation offered to protect the island from other raiders in exchange for a safe refuge. It has been speculated that Tiree fell back into paganism during the initial phase of Norse occupation, but, if so, this must have been of short duration. It is known that some of the Norse in the Hebrides had embraced Christianity by 870, which suggests that Christianity might have received a setback at first, but never was entirely extinguished in this region. The conversion of some of the Norse on Tiree would also have helped to bring the Celt and Norse together, which would not have occurred as rapidly without this development.

THE ISLE OF MAN AND THE SUDREYS UNDER VIKING CONTROL

Man and the Sudreys were quite independent of Norway for much of the ninth century. . Ketil Broadnef (Broadnose), a son of Björn Buna, a powerful baron in the province of Sogn, had established himself as the king of the Isle of Man and the Sudreys about 850, and Tiree must have acknowledged his authority, although there is always the question as to the tightness of this control. When Harold Fairhair came to the throne of Norway he began to re-establish the power that the Yngling dynasty once had but had lost during the stewardship of his immediate predecessors. Much of Norway was under the control of a number of petty kings and jarls, who resisted Harold's efforts to consolidate his power. They banded together in rebellion against Harold, but were defeated at the Battle of Hafrsfjord in 872. Those that had backed Harold were rewarded with the lands of the losers, who fled overseas with their relations, many of them to the Scottish Islands. When they became strong enough they regrouped and mounted attacks on the Norwegian mainland, ravaging its coasts. Harold was compelled to send a seaborne expedition against them in the western seas, which he personally led. He conquered Orkney, Shetland, the Western Islands, and even Man. This was the first time that these territories had come under the dominion of Norway, which gave Harold's successors an hereditary claim upon them.

There are several different stories concerning Ketil Broadnef's role during this turbulent time, but the most creditable one in this writer's opinion is that he was successful establishing himself as the sole authority in Man and the Sudreys around the middle of the ninth century. Evidence to support this is found in the fact that his daughter, Aude, was married to Olaf the White, the first Norwegian king of Dublin. Since their marriage could not have taken place any later than 852, it would appear that Ketil was already a force to contend with in this region. There is a story that Harold first confirmed Ketil's authority in Man and the Sudreys, but that he soon threw off his allegiance to the king. Again this seems unlikely, and a more creditable version is that Harold ousted Ketil from his position of authority in the Isles and installed an earl named Tryggvi as his lieutenant. Most histories of this time are generally true in the larger sense, but either imprecise or conflicting in detail, so it is not surprising that there is confusion as to what happened to Ketil Broadnef when Harold Fairhair imposed Norwegian rule upon the Sudreys and Man. In any event there is little doubt that Tryggvi, who answered to Harold and Norwegian authority, was the ruler of this region from 880 to 890, and some authorities give him the title of the sub-king of Man during this period of time. He was evidently slain in 890 and was succeeded by Asbjörn with the surname of *Skerjablest*, who in turn was killed by two relations of Ketil Broadnef in 899. No successor to Asbjörn was named in the annals of the time, and it is believed that the wars between the sons of Harold, which continued after his death in 931, allowed Man and the Sudreys to throw off Norwegian control once again.

Not all historians agree on which power had control of the Sudreys during much of the tenth and eleventh centuries, so it is difficult to understand who may have ruled Tiree at this time. It would appear, however, that after the death of Asbjörn Slerjablest the Isle of Man fell under the sway of the Dublin Vikings during the years of 942-989. Whether Tiree and the other Sudreys did so as well is not certain, because the Earls of Orkney must have made an attempt to exert their authority in these Islands as well.

The political story of the earls, or jarls, of Orkney illustrates very well the position of the overseas Vikings held in their relationship with the Norwegian crown. While these earls were nominally dependents of the Norwegian crown, it took a determined monarch to actually exercise control over them. Much of the time they were virtually independent rulers. The House of Ragnald, Earl of More in Norway, was the dynasty that came to rule these Northern Vikings. The first prominent jarl was Sigurd the Mighty, brother of Ragnald and father of Hrolf (Rollo), first Duke of Normandy. He died sometime at the end of the ninth century and his successors during

the remainder of that period never were able to exercise the same level of power. About 991, however, another Sigurd, named the Stout, brought fresh vigor and prestige to the dynasty. He was able to make significant inroads into mainland Caithness, take control of the Sudreys and Man, and install sub-kings answering to him in these areas. After his death in 1014 his son, Thorfinn the Mighty, succeeded him, but he had to share power with first his half brothers and then his half-brother's son upon the insistence of the Norwegian crown. Although he did recognize the overlordship of King Harold Hadrada, he enjoyed almost unfettered rule of Orkney, Shetland, and Hebrides. It is also said that he governed the Sudreys, which would have included Tiree, and in 1034 re-asserted control over Man, which had slipped after the death of his father. While the Faroes, Orkneys, and Shetland may have had permanent colonizers early in the ninth century, the Norsemen in Man and the Hebrides probably did not bring their families with them at first. There is evidence suggesting that they used these islands more or less as stepping stones for operations in Ireland, Northwest Britain, and the Continent of Europe. The Norse presence in the Hebrides early in the ninth century was thus a fluctuating one, and their early settlements can be viewed as only semi-permanent. This pattern changed in the last quarter of the ninth century, when there was a great outflow of emigrants from Norway. This came soon after Harold Fairhair crushed the power of the petty kings and barons, and made their continuing presence in Norway most uncomfortable. While this was no doubt a major factor in the emigration of this period, there were other factors involved as well, which were discussed earlier.

Peter Andreas Munch, the author of *The Chronicle of Man and the Sudreys* makes a very strong case that the Western Isles of Scotland were more the cradle of the Icelandic race than Norway. The fact that the rearing and pasturing of sheep was the major livelihood of the Icelanders suggests that emigrants to Iceland had a long experience with such occupations. Since these had little importance in Norway, they undoubtedly were learned during their stay in the Scottish Islands. The various sagas also tell of movements into Iceland from the Orkneys, Shetland, and the Hebrides, with the last group playing a significant part in such action. A rather unscientific survey of the names of the early Icelanders showed 15% of them appeared Celtic, not Norwegian. A majority of these people were probably servants, but there were a few landowners with Celtic names as well. Since the servants were entrusted with the care of the livestock it is not surprising that they adopted Hebridean practices in Iceland. While many of the Norse emigrants did use the Orkneys, Shetland, and the Hebrides as only as a temporary stop before moving onto Iceland, it is certain that others did remain in the Scottish Islands and made it their permanent home.[5]

GODRED CORVAN AND HIS DYNASTY

After the death of Thorfinn, Jarl of Orkney, in 1079 Norwegian control of Man and the Scottish Islands again was loosened, although it was still nominally under the control of the northern kingdom. In that year Godred, nicknamed Crovan, collected a number of ships, supplied by Sudrey islanders according to one source, and invaded the Isle of Man. He was defeated in this first attempt, and again in a second, but he returned with another army and was successful in conquering the Manxmen in his third try at the Battle of Sky Hill. His origin is obscure. One source claimed he was the son of the Norse-Gael king Imar, who ruled Dublin from 1038-1046, while *The Chronicles of Man* reports that he was the son of Harold the Black of Iceland. In any event he obviously was of royal blood, or he would not have been able to claim the throne of Man. Since Godred was known as king of Man and the Sudreys, it has to be assumed that Tiree acknowledged him as their overlord as well.

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[5] Donald Lamont of Winnipeg, a third cousin of this writer, married Thora Isfeld, a girl of Icelandic heritage. Donald certainly has Hebridean ancestors, and Thora could have some of the same ones as well.

Godred , an ambitious man, was not content with only the throne of Man, and went from there to conquer Dublin, although the date of this action is not known, leaving his son Lagman as King of Man. This state of affairs was not acceptable to King Magnus III of Norway, nicknamed Berrfott or Barelegs, who had ascended to the throne of that country in 1093, and he made preparations to bring this region back under Norwegian control. He first sent an invasion force into the Hebrides under a vassal named Ingund, but when he was killed Magnus mounted another expedition under his own leadership. This was successful in subjugating Man and the Isles, bringing them back under Norwegian sovereignty. Magnus then went on to aid Muircheartach Ui Brian in ousting Godred from Dublin. Godred Crovan took refuge in Islay after being ousted from Dublin. There he died and was buried according to tradition in 1095. It is likely that Lagman did homage to Magnus as he apparently was left in place on the Isle of Man. In 1097 Muircheartach of Ireland encouraged a rebellion of the island chiefs against Magnus and he was compelled to mount a second expedition to quell this uprising. He had wanted to attack Muircheartach in 1099, but his army, weary of this long campaign, left him before onset of winter. He subsequently left his son, Sigurd as ruler of Orkney and it has to be assumed that the Sudreys were included in this arrangement. During the next few years Magnus was occupied fighting in Sweden, but in 1102 he returned to Man, from which he intended to again attack Muircheartach in Dublin. Muirteartach, however, entered into negotiations with Magnus and the two sovereigns agreed to join forces, rather than fight each other. Sigurd was now married to Muircheartach's daughter and proclaimed king of both the Nordreys and Sudreys. Magnus went on to join Muircheartach in 1103 in an attack against the latter's enemies in Northern Ireland. They were at first successful in this campaign, but Magnus was slain there in August of that same year. After that development Sigurd abandoned all his possessions in Ireland and the Isles and returned to Norway.

Olaf, the third son of Godred Crovan, who had been living in the English court since the death of his father returned to rule over Man and the Isles, which presumably included both the Nordreys and Sudreys. This was either in 1103 or ten years later, depending upon which source was correct. There is no account of his relationship with the Norwegian crown, but any would have been a very loose, if one existed. Olaf was also successful on keeping on good terms with both the Kings of Ireland and Scotland and his reign was relatively peaceful until 1152. At that time, fearful of an attack by King David of Scotland, he sent his son Godred to do homage to the Norwegian king and enlist his support if needed.

During Godred's absence the three sons of Olaf's brother, Harold, came from Dublin and demanded that he share his throne with them. Olaf, attempting to find a peaceful solution, agreed to negotiate with them, but when a meeting took place they murdered him. Godred upon hearing came to Orkney and then gathered a huge following among the island chiefs, who had been loyal to his father, and invaded Man, where he was successful in killing the usurping sons of Harold and ascending to the throne of Man and the Isles. Shortly after this success the people of Dublin requested that he come to rule over them as well. Muircheartach attempted counteract this development by meeting Godred and his island forces, but was overwhelmingly defeated.

Godred now had reached a position of unrivaled power, which was not challenged by Norway, since the country was undergoing a series of cival wars. Godred had not the wisdom of his father, the diplomatic Olaf, however, and proceeded to behave tyrannically toward the island chiefs, depriving some of them of their inheritance, and thereby alienating the very ones who had lifted him to his throne. One of the more powerful of these, a man named Thorfinn, son of Oter, went to a Gallo-Norse chieftain named Somerled, who had married Ragnhilda, an illegitimate daughter of the late King Olaf, and proposed to put his eldest son, Dugald, on the throne of Man and the Isles if Somerled would lead the island chiefs against Godred.

SOMERLED

Somerled's antecedents are obscure, but the bards, who make him out to be the foremost hero of the Gaels, state that he was born in Morven about 1113, the son of Giolla Brighid Gillebride, a man of Celtic forebears, and a Viking woman.[6] He first appears in the chronicles in 1040 as the regulus or sub-king of Kintyre in Argyll, and when Thorfinn approached him he already wielded considerable power in the region, probably because of connection with the royal house of Godred Crovan.

After agreeing that he would take up the challenge of replacing Godred with his own son, Somerled put Dugald in Thorfinn's hands and they went from island chief to island chief to gain their allegiance to their cause. This came to Godred's ears through an island chief named Paul, and he ordered his followers to collect a fleet of ships to meet this threat. Somerled and his party, of course, had been busy along these same lines and they met Godred in battle with eighty ships of their own in January of 1156. The outcome was inconclusive, but the net result was that Godred and Somerled agreed to share the Kingdom of the Isles between them. Somerled gained a smaller share, which probably entailed the smaller Sudreys, which would have included Tiree, while Godred kept Man and the remainder of the Hebrides.

This division of authority in the Isles was unstable, and in 1158 another quarrel arose between Godred and Somerled, which broke out into open warfare. Somerled led a fleet of 56 warships to Man and this time utterly defeated enemy's forces. Godred was compelled to flee to Norway and Somerled came to be the undisputed sovereign of a region which stretched from Man to the Butt of Lewis. While Somerled was consolidating his power in the Isles another threat in the form of the Stewart king in Scotland arose in the west coast of Argyll, where the Scots were making inroads. To meet this challenge Somerled assembled a sizable army and met the Scots in Renfrew, where a great battle took place in 1164. There is much confusion surrounding this battle, if indeed it ever took place. What is known is that Somerled was killed, perhaps by a traitor among his troops, and his dispirited force retreated from the mainland.

Upon Somerled's death his realm was divided among his surviving sons, as was the Norse custom. Dugald inherited the territories of Argyll and Lorn, along with the Isles of Jura, Mull, Coll, and Tiree

Many Scottish historians like to mark the ascendancy of Somerled to the position of King of the Hebrides as the end of Norse rule in the Isles, but it probably should be viewed as only the first step in this direction. Somerled and his sons, who succeeded him, nominally owed allegiance to the Norwegian crown, and resisted Scottish attempts to gain control of the Isles. They much preferred this arrangement, because Norway was the farthest away of the two and it allowed them much greater independence.

Norwegian kings continued to contest the ownership of this region for another century with Scotland, and Haakon of Norway led a large expedition to the Isles in 1263, plundering Tiree at this time. Later that same year he met the Scots, including men from the Isles, at Largs, where he was defeated, as much by a storm than by the Scots some authorities contend. Three years later in 1266 Haakon's son, Magnus, ceded the Hebrides to Scotland at the Treaty of Perth, and Norse rule did end in this area. Norway, however, continued to hold onto the Orkneys and Shetland Islands for another two hundred years.

[6] Recent DNA evidence shows conclusively that the paternal line of Somerled was of Norse origin.

THE IMPACT OF NORSE OCCUPATION

Much of what is written about the history of the Norse occupation of the Isles emphasizes the amity which existed between the inhabitants and their conquerors. The facts that the Celtic language and culture survived, as did the Christian faith, seems to bolster this assertion. Yet the Viking invasions must have been a wrenching experience for the islanders, at least during the initial period when any resistance was probably put down with the utmost cruelty

The recounting of the struggle for control of the Hebrides between one ambitious king, jarl, or warlord during the four centuries of Viking rule only gives us only a glimpse of what happened during this period of time in the Isles. The Sudreys, of which Tiree was a part, receive only passing reference in the chronicles of the day, which even then is not detailed. Thus we can only speculate about how any of this impacted Tiree. We can assume, for example, that the island was ruled by a chieftain of sorts, who defies any better description. He may have made his home on Tiree, or ruled it from a neighboring island, leaving his deputy in charge. He was probably a Celtic noble, when the first Viking raider arrived, and soon replaced by a Norse warlord with a rapacious following. He may have taken a Celtic concubine to warm his bed, as did some of his henchmen, and we can be certain that his successors intermarried with Celtic women. Before the end of the ninth century and every century thereafter the island chieftain who ruled Tiree was no doubt of Gallo-Norse origin, as were many of the inhabitants. In these turbulent times it could not be expected that any one leader and his descendants kept their position on Tiree for any extended period of time. Those that could survive the changes of power in Man, Dublin, or the Orkneys had to be very skillful, and if they were unfortunate enough to back the wrong horse ended up being supplanted by those more adept at the political game.

Before the end of the ninth century life on Tiree went on as much as it had before. One master might be exchanged for another, but bringing in a good crop in at harvest time and keeping their livestock healthy and reproducing dominated their existence. Who ruled in the Isle of Man or the Orkneys was only of passing interest to most of the inhabitants of the Sudreys, if they were even aware of such happenings. At times the men might have been enlisted to fight in support of one cause or another their chieftain espoused, but most of these warriors were probably men of his own household. Taxes were no doubt imposed upon these islands by those in ascendancy, but this probably was of a sporadic nature, and depended upon the strength of whoever claimed sovereignty, and this was more of a problem for the island chief than the average islander.

The impact of Norse rule in the Scottish Islands was long lasting. In the Orkneys and Shetland Islands, where Norse the number of Norse settlers was high, Norse place-names predominate. In many districts they number as high as 99%. The language that evolved in these islands was called Norn, and could hardly be distinguished from Norwegian. Norn continued to be spoken by most Orcadians throughout the 16th century, and they probably did not become bi-lingual until the 17th. It was not until the end of the 18th century, however, that Scots displaced Norn as the language in these islands. Yet recent evidence only shows the Norse contribution to the gene pool of the Orkneys to be about 20%, while Shetland Islanders as a whole only have 17% of Norse blood.

The number of Norse place-names become fewer as one goes further south into the Hebrides, but Norse impact in these islands was still significant. In the Outer Hebrides the vast majority of place-names are Norse, but in Skye they are reduced to 60%, while farther away from Norway in Jura they number only about a third. Half of the place-names in Mull are of Norse derivation, while in neighboring Tiree the Norse place-names outnumber the Gaelic by a small percentage. The townships of Scarinish, Heanish, Baugh, Hough, Barapol, Hynish, Mannal, Gott, Soroby, and Heylipol are Norse names on Tiree. Many others, such as Cornaigbeg and Balephetrish, are a combination of Norse and Gaelic. There is no doubt that the islanders of Tiree were bi-lingual for many centuries, certainly up to the 13th, and probably much longer. Norse

forms did penetrate the Gaelic language, however, and remain today in *ob* (bay), *vidh* (ford), *dail* (field), and *strome* (stream) to name but a few. Gaelic language and culture survived the Norse occupation of the Hebrides, and historians like to point to this as evidence that the Norse never outnumbered the Gaels in these islands, and ultimately were absorbed by the larger group. This is borne out by recent genetic studies that show that Norse intrusion into the bloodstream of the inhabitants of the Western Isles to be in the neighborhood of 7-8%. It should be noted, however, that some contrarians believe that the Norse presence in these isles was much higher at one time and was only diminished by later filtration from the mainland. While there is no DNA evidence as yet for Tiree that would supply us with exact figure for the Norse contribution to the gene pool of the islanders, it probably would not be much different than the overall percentage of 7-8%.

It is not surprising that DNA studies show that Norse blood in the Isle of Man to be 10%, since it was a major Norse outpost during the period of Viking control in this part of the world. What is surprising, however, that Norse blood among Icelanders only measures 33%. The significance of this is difficult to explain, since it leaves us with more questions than answers.

One of the more important legacies of the Norse in the Hebrides was their view of land ownership. Under Norse law land was owned by the individual and not jointly by the extended family group, or clan, as was the Celtic custom. The Norse laws of land ownership have prevailed in the Hebrides, supplanting the ancient Celtic form, but a vestige of the older concept remained in the Islands. There is a widely held belief that prolonged occupation of any property gives the occupier and his heirs a right of permanent occupation, but not ownership of it. This concept called *dutchas*, a Gaelic term that defies translation, is the pervasive belief than clansfolk were entitled to a permanent stake in the territories of the clan. This entitlement was extended to the crofter, who occupied only a few small acres at one end of the social scale, and to the tacksman at the other. Admittedly there was a fundamental incompatibility in the right to occupy land forever and the time limitations of a tacksman's lease, which has never fully been resolved. This belief in *dutchas* on the part of the small tenants of Tiree and other Hebrideans exacerbated the bitterness caused by the Clearances. The commission appointed to look into the grievances of the crofters in 1884 took note of this feeling of the tenants that they had an inalienable, inherited right to occupy the land of their forefathers as long as they paid a fair and reasonable rent.

APPENDIX I

NORSE PLACE-NAMES IN WESTERN ISLES

Current	Norse
Arran	Hearsey
Bute	Bót
Colonsay	Koln
Gigha	Guôey
Iona	Eyin helga
Islay	Il
Kerrara	Kjarbarey
Lewis	Ljóôhás
Man	Mön
Mull	Myl
Sanda	Sandey
Skye	Skiô
Tiree	Tyrvist
Uist	Ivist
Ulva	Ulfey

APPENDIX II

THE ORIGIN OF TOWNSHIP NAMES IN TIREE

Township	Derivation of name
Scarinish	N. Skari, seagull + ness, point
Heanish	N. Hja, outlying + ness, point
Baugh	N. Baugr, bay
Balephetrish	G. Baile + N. Ulf + , town of Wolf Bay
An Ruighe, or The Reef	The Common Sheiling
Cornaigmor and Cornaigbeg	N. Corn + vik, bay + G. Mor and Beag, large and small
Kilmoluaig	G. Cille, Church + G. Moluac (personal name)
Balevulin	G. Baile + Mhuilinn, town of the mill
Hough	N. Haugr, burial place
Kilkenneth	G. Cille-Choinich, Church of St. Kenneth
Grianal	G. Greenhill
Baile-Meadhonach	G. Baile, town + middle
Barapol	N. Barrow, + bol, town of the burial mound
Hynish	N. Heidh, bright + ness, point
Mannal	N. Mann + vallr, field
Balemartin	G. Baile, town + Martin
Soroby	N. Sauer, marsh + baer, town
Balinoe	G. Baile, town + nodha, new
Heylipol	N. Helgi, holy + bol, town
Moss	G. A'Mhointeach, the Moss
Gott	N. Godhr, the name of a person
Kirkapol	N. Church town
Vaul	N. Hvall, hill
Salum	N. Salt, sea + holm, island
Ruaig	N. Ruadh, a clearing + vik, bay
Caolas	G. Strait

G. = Gaelic
N. = Norse

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