

A critical analysis of Dr Ewan Campbell's paper "Were the Scots Irish?"

During the early medieval period from around 400 to 1169 AD Ireland consisted of many small kingdoms or tuathas (Charles-Edwards 2001, 187). One of these kingdoms was Dál Riata, located in County Antrim, which is in the northeast of Ireland (Snow 2001, 46). Traditionally it is thought that in the fifth century AD there was a migration from the kingdom of Dal Riata in Antrim



into the area now known as Argyll on Scotland's North West coast (fig. 1)

Figure 1: Map showing the location of Dál Riata (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Dalriada.jpg).

(Snow 2001, 46; Campbell 2001, 285).

In his paper "Were the Scots Irish?" Scottish archaeologist, Dr. Ewan Campbell, attempts to critically analyse this claim and uses archaeological, historical and linguistic evidence to dispute a Scottic migration (Campbell 2001, 286). In his revisionist explanation for the origins of Dal Riata, Campbell claims that the so called migration is based on a set of elite origin myths (Campbell 2001, 285; Campbell 1999, 11-12). These myths date back to the writings of the eighth century English monk the Venerable Bede and the Irish 10th century Annals of Tigernach (ibid.). This essay will look at Campbell's claims paying particular attention to the archaeological evidence as well as the historical and to the linguistic arguments.

In the first instance, Campbell points out that Leslie Alcock was one of the few to look at the actual archaeological evidence for movement from Ireland to Scotland (Campbell 2001, 286). Alcock concluded that there were very little signs of transplantation of material culture to Dalriadic Scotland or to Dyfed in Wales, which is also supposed to have links with the Scotti tribe (Campbell 2001, 286; Alcock 1970, 65). One of the first areas that Campbell claims would be a source of archaeological evidence of migration is settlement. He looks at two forms of settlement common in early Medieval Ireland the ringfort and the crannog (plate 1) (Campbell 2001, 286).



Plate 1: Crannog reconstruction at Craggaunowen Heritage Park, Co. Clare.

Campbell claims that the dendochronology has produced early Iron Age origins for these lake land dwellings in Scotland while in Ireland most of these constructions date to the early Medieval period after 600 AD (Campbell 2001, 287). The word crannog comes from the old Irish, crann meaning tree and og meaning young or miniature (Fredengren 2002, 4). As previously mentioned, crannogs are artificial islands constructed on lakes and are peculiar to Ireland and Scotland though there is also evidence of at least one in Wales (ibid.).

Archaeologists such as Chris Lynn and Aidan O'Sullivan would certainly be in agreement with Campbell in the early medieval date for the origin of Irish crannogs. However, although Mill Lough in County Fermanagh produced the earliest dendrochronological date of 553 ± 9 which predates Campbell's assertion of post 600 AD by around fifty years (Fredengren 2002, 12). However, it should also be made clear that these dendrochronological findings are spot dates that do not give an overall indication of all the periods a site may have been in use (ibid., 103).

There are at least 2000 crannogs in Ireland, most of these located in the Drumlin belt in the north of the country which stretches from the west to the east coast (Fredengren 2002, 6). However, only five have been excavated to modern archaeological standards (ibid.). Excavations at one of these sites on Lough Gara, County Sligo by Christina Fredengren has produced a radiocarbon date of 900 BC indicating a late Bronze Age origin for crannog building in Ireland (ibid., 9). Fredengren believes that crannogs are multi-period dating as far back as the Mesolithic and that they were related to different forms of activity at different times from fishing in the Mesolithic to high status residences in the early Medieval period. She also states that many of the high cairn crannogs associated with the medieval period may, in fact, be covering earlier Bronze Age crannogs (ibid., 105). It was not unusual for people of the early medieval period to consciously reuse or re-appropriate earlier sites (ibid., 11).

Campbell goes on to state that the classic settlement type of the early medieval period in Ireland was the ringfort of which there were two types, the stone built cashel and the rath which was usually of earthen construction (Campbell 2001, 287). He points that this type of enclosed settlement so common in Ireland is non-existent in Argyll (ibid.). Early Medieval settlement types in Scotland include stone walled enclosures such as duns, forts, unenclosed houses built on platforms cut out of hillsides and brochs (Campbell 1999, 10). There is,

however, almost no brochs in Argyll, which would itself indicate something different about this particular area of Scotland (ibid.).

Campbell's assertion that because there is no evidence of so called Irish ringforts in Scotland there cannot have been migration from Ireland to Scotland is extremely questionable (Wolfe 2012, 3). In Matthew Stout's book *The Irish Ringfort* it is stated that 54% of datable ringforts fall within the period 540 AD to 884 AD and 64% of these are in Ulster as a whole with one third belonging to Antrim (Stout 1997, 24). Since migration to Argyll from Antrim supposedly took place in the fifth century, this would indicate at least a hundred year period before the Irish Ringfort became fully established. It is, therefore, unlikely that it would have appeared in Argyll as part of an Irish migratory, cultural package (Campbell 1999, 7; Wolfe 2012, 3).

However, a further archaeological development which apparently has taken place over the last five years would seem to destroy Campbell's hypothesis regarding the existence of ringforts in Scotland (Noble et al. 2013, 1141). This has been the discovery of small defended enclosures in Aberdeenshire (ibid.). These hill slope fortifications less than 60 metres in diameter have hinted at possible house structures and therefore, bear a remarkable resemblance to Irish ringforts (ibid.). Irish archaeologist Dr. Elizabeth Fitzpatrick believes that Irish ringforts are the least understood element of the Irish landscape and that the word itself masks a complex variety of site types (Fitzpatrick 2009, 271, 274).

Although these sites are in the east of Scotland rather than the west, it would seem that like Ireland; Scotland had a range of enclosed settlements dating to the early Medieval period (Noble et al. 2013, 1144). Dean Snow asserts that the duns found in Scotland are very similar in appearance to Irish cashels (Snow 2001, 48). There are also examples of unenclosed

settlement dating to the early Medieval period in Ireland, such as Craig hill in County Antrim, a house and souterrain were excavated neither of which were associated with enclosures (Kerr et al. 2010, 37). Similarly at Brokerstown, also in County Antrim, two early medieval houses were located outside the enclosure boundaries (Kerr et al. 2010, 34).

Another category contested by Campbell is artefacts that he claims are further proof that there was no movement of people from Ireland to Scotland other than occasional visitation by individuals (Campbell 2001, 287). He asserts that zoomorphic penannular brooches common in Ireland have not been found in Argyll (ibid.). In fact seven moulds for bird headed brooches were found at the ancient hillfort of Dunadd in Argyll and the crucibles found with them were used for gold smelting (Butter 1999, 82). An Irish style zoomorphic brooch was also found in a crannog at Loch Glashan (plate 2) (Snow 2001, 48).



Plate 2: Crucible, penannular brooch mould and zoomorphic brooch from Dunadd and Loch Glashan (After Snow 2001, 48)

Campbell claims that although the G3 penannular brooch has been found at Dunnadd in Argyll, Dooley in Donegal and Moylough, in County Meath the Scottish examples date to the

seventh century AD while the Irish ones date to the eighth century (Campbell 2001, 287). He cites as further evidence that the influence was coming from Scotland to Ireland rather than vice versa (Campbell 1999, 14). The metal working phase at Moylough in Meath does certainly date dendrochronologically to the eighth century (Campbell 2001, 287). However a G3 penannular brooch was also found at Ballynass Bay, Cloghaneely, County Donegal, a site that dates from the seventh to 12th century (Dickson 1982, 44). Furthermore, activity at Dooley begins around the fifth to sixth century AD and the latest date for metal working at the site is the eighth century indicating that metal working was probably taking place there before that (Kerr et al. 2010, 29). Dooley may have been a beach market with trade links to Scotland as it was strategically placed on the north Atlantic seaway that would have connected the two places (ibid.).

Ogham stones are thought to be quintessentially Irish and according to Campbell's 2001 paper other than Ireland they have only been found in Wales and south west Britain (Campbell 2001, 288). He claims that their presence in these areas has unrealistically bolstered the evidence of Irish migration into mainland Britain, but he does not mention their existence in Scotland and particularly in Argyll (ibid.). However in his 1999 book *Saints and Sea-kings* Campbell does mention two of these stones present in Argyll one of which is to be found on the Island of Gigha (Campbell 1999, 14 and 15). He fails to mention the stone at Lochgoilhead bearing an ogham inscription and another ogham inscription on a cist burial at Poltalloch bearing the name Cron(a)n most probably Irish (Fisher 1997, 196). Furthermore, ogham has also been found on a rocky outcrop at Dunadd (ibid.).

An additional form of an archaeological monument that Campbell fails to mention in any of his writing is the inauguration stone, examples of which have been found in both Ireland and Scotland. These come in the form of a stone footprint either carved or natural. At Skerry

Church near the Holy Mountain of Slemish in North Antrim the footprint is attributed to the angel Victor who, it is alleged, gave St Patrick his mission in Ireland (Curran 2007, 35). In County Wicklow the Kings Stone is a large recumbent stone containing a foot shaped hollow located on high ground, around 800 metres west of Church Mountain (Fitzpatrick 2004, 238). Near Kilmacrenan village in County Donegal Cill Mhic Nenain church was the inauguration site for the Ui Dhomhnaill and the Mic Shuibhne (Fitzpatrick 2004, 111). Supposedly a stone decorated with a footprint was situated beneath the northeast window of the friary and may have been used by O'Dhomhnaill chief of Tir Conaill as part of his inauguration ceremony (ibid.). A late 16th century written account of this practice comes from Edmund Spenser, who claimed that during the election of a chief in Ireland the candidate would place his foot on a stone that was usually situated on a hillside (ibid., 109).

Similarly in Dunadd the earthen hillfort supposedly occupied by the Scotti from the 5th century onwards holds a carved stone footprint. This is thought to have also been used in inauguration ceremonies during the medieval period (plate 2) (Butter 1999, 98).



Plate 3: Dunadd hillfort with inauguration footprint
(www.colmcille.org/argyll/6-01)

At Finlaggan on the Island of Islay the Clan Donald stone of destiny, which supposedly bore the imprint of two feet, was thought to have been used by the Lord of the Isles throughout the medieval period as an inauguration stone. The ceremony included the bishop of the Isles, the bishop of Argyll and other local chieftains (Fitzpatrick 2004, 120). Campbell claims that the main historical evidence for the migration of the Scotti tribe into northwestern Scotland

comes from two historical records the Annals of Tigernach and Senchus Fer nAlban (History of the Men of Scotland) (Campbell 2001, 288). The main focus is a phrase found in the Annals of Tigernach, which supposedly eludes to the invasion of Argyll by the King of Dalriada Fergus Mor mac Earca (figure 1).

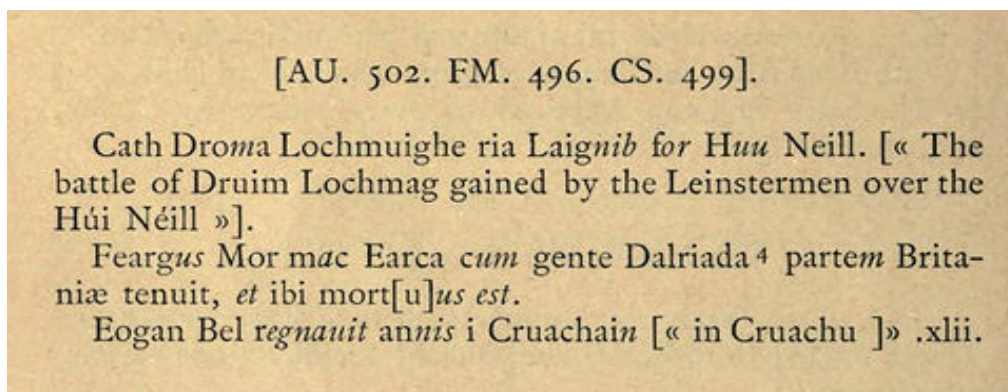


Figure 2: Extract from the Annals of Tigernach "*Feargus Mor mac Earca took part of Britain and died there*" (Stokes 1895, 124; Campbell 2001, 288).

Campbell states that this is a clear statement of invasion but that the Annals of Tigernach cannot be taken seriously as it is not a contemporary document (Campbell 2001, 288). He cites the spelling in the entry as a clear indicator that it was a 10th century inclusion (ibid.). Dalriada, Feargus and Earca are apparently Middle Irish spellings (ibid.). Campbell points out that if the entry were seventh century than the old Irish spellings Dalriata, Fergus and Erca would have been used (ibid.). He states that it has been argued that the entry originally came from the 10th century Chronicles of Clonmacnoise (ibid.). Although this is a small point, Fergus is mentioned in the Chronicles of Clonmacnoise, "Fergus brought an army out of Dalriada into Inisowen in Ulster upon whom there was great slaughter made" (Murphy 1896, 115). In this entry both old Irish and middle Irish, spellings are used.

The other documentary source for the invasion theory comes from the Venerable Bede an early medieval English monk who wrote the "Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation" in the early 8th century (Campbell 2001, 288; Halsall 1998). Bede refers to the Scots migrating

into Scotland from Ireland under the leadership of Reuda and settling among the Picts (Halsall 1998). He claimed that they were called Dalreudins because Dal in their language meant part (in Irish Dal means a tribe or division of race) (Halsall 1998). This contradicts the Annals of Tigernach. Despite the fact that Bede's account is two hundred years older than the Annals of Tigernach, Campbell believes that both Bede's and the Annal's accounts are nothing more than elite origin myths commonly created during the medieval period for political purposes.

He makes a very good point in that these legends would certainly have been used by ruling dynasties who wished to promote the idea of a mythical or religious ancestor that they could directly trace their descent. However, even if elements of these stories were fabricated or embellished as part of political or religious expediency surely they cannot be entirely dismissed as Campbell attempts to do? The one thing that both the Annals and Bede have in common is the idea of some kind of migration from Ireland to Scotland during the early medieval period.

Irish scholar Eoin MacNeil postulated that the creation of the Scottish Dál Riata was a two stage process (Dumville et al. 1999, 187). In the first instance during the Irish assaults on other parts of Britain he conjectured that settlements may have become established on some of the western Isles and even mainland Argyll (ibid.). Irish Dál Riata on the north eastern coast of Ireland was economically poor (ibid.). As the settlements in Scotland became better established both economically and politically it would have become a more attractive proposition for the ruling classes in Ireland to move there (ibid.). The second stage of the process concludes with the establishment of a monarchical state that retained its links (if somewhat strained) with mainland Ireland at least until the Convention of Druim Cett, which supposedly took place in the late 6th century (Campbell 1999, 13). Although the plausibility

of MacNeil's theory cannot be validated with literary evidence, the jury must still be out as far as both the archaeological and linguistic evidence is concerned.

Campbell does not deny the presence of Q Celtic Gaelic speakers during the early medieval period in Argyll (Campbell 2001, 289). He also concedes that modern place names in Argyll have Goidelic origin (ibid.). He makes a relatively valid point that if there had been a migration of the Scotti from Ireland there would at the very least be some remnants of the Brittonic language spoken by the Pictish populace they supposedly displaced in the place names (ibid.). This of course is not the case and his reasoning for this is that there was no displacement of the Picts because the indigenous people of the region were Q Celtic Gaelic speakers (ibid.). For Campbell, the linguistic barriers that existed between west and east Scotland were related to geography and typography rather than ethnicity.

In Argyll, the sea and the land are closely associated and long narrow valleys cut deeply into the mountains (Campbell 1999, 9). The mountains would have been a substantial barrier to communication for the people living on either side of them (ibid.). Documentary evidence for this comes from the writings of the seventh century abbot Andomnán of Iona, who referred to the mountain range of Druim Alban, or the Spine of Britain, as the frontier that separated the Picts in the east from the Scots in the West (ibid.). Argyll is an archipelago and during the early medieval period the sea would have been the fastest and most convenient way to travel as it linked the numerous islands with the North of Ireland (ibid.). The Glens of Antrim were much more accessible than the eastern part of Scotland (ibid.) Campbell rightly states that Argyll was a maritime economy and this would have greatly influenced both political power and the spread of Christianity (ibid.). Campbell believes that the Gaelic language goes back as far as the Iron Age in Argyll precisely because of the maritime trade links persisted into the Medieval period with Ireland (Campbell 2001, 291).

Alex Wolfe makes a very interesting conjecture regarding the origins of Dal Riata and the evolution of the Gaelic language. He states that Dal Riata may have belonged to the Cruithni a pre Gaelic group that inhabited the North of Ireland (Wolfe 2012, 11). He further suggests that the Cruithni could have been a group the Roman Geographer Ptolemy referred to as the Epidii, who migrated to Ireland from Britain probably from Kintyre (ibid.). He hypothesizes that there may have been a convergence of Gaelic dialects from which an acrolect was adopted by the whole group (ibid.). If his hypothesis is correct then the Irish language was originally brought to Ireland from Scotland (ibid.).

In conclusion, Ewan Campbell has claimed that the migration of the Irish Scotti Tribe into Argyll comes from a set of elite origin myths that have their foundation in questionable historical documents. These documents include the Annals of Tigernach and the writings of the Venerable Bede (Campbell 2001, 285 and 288). He suggests that there is no actual archaeological evidence to prove that a migration took place and that linguistic connections between the two areas came about through close proximity and trade links rather than any ethnic connection (Campbell 1999, 9; Campbell 2001, 289). Many of his arguments and suppositions are sound particularly with respect to historical documentation and even to a certain extent the linguistic argument.

Both in prehistory and early medieval period modern nations such as Ireland or Scotland would not have existed. It would make sense that there would have been a continuity of language among groups that lived and traded in close proximity to one another. However his supposition that there is no archaeological evidence is weak especially about ringforts and crannogs. In the case of ringforts, recent possible finds of these enclosed settlements in Aberdeenshire would indicate that ringforts were not peculiar to Ireland (Noble et al. 2013,

1114). Crannogs in Ireland date to the late Bronze Age, not as Campbell states the early medieval period (Fredengren 2002, 9). Ogham script, inauguration stones and zoomorphic penannular brooches all point to at the very least a shared cultural heritage that spans a long period (Butter 1999, 82; Richie 1997, 196; Fitzpatrick 2004, 111).

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