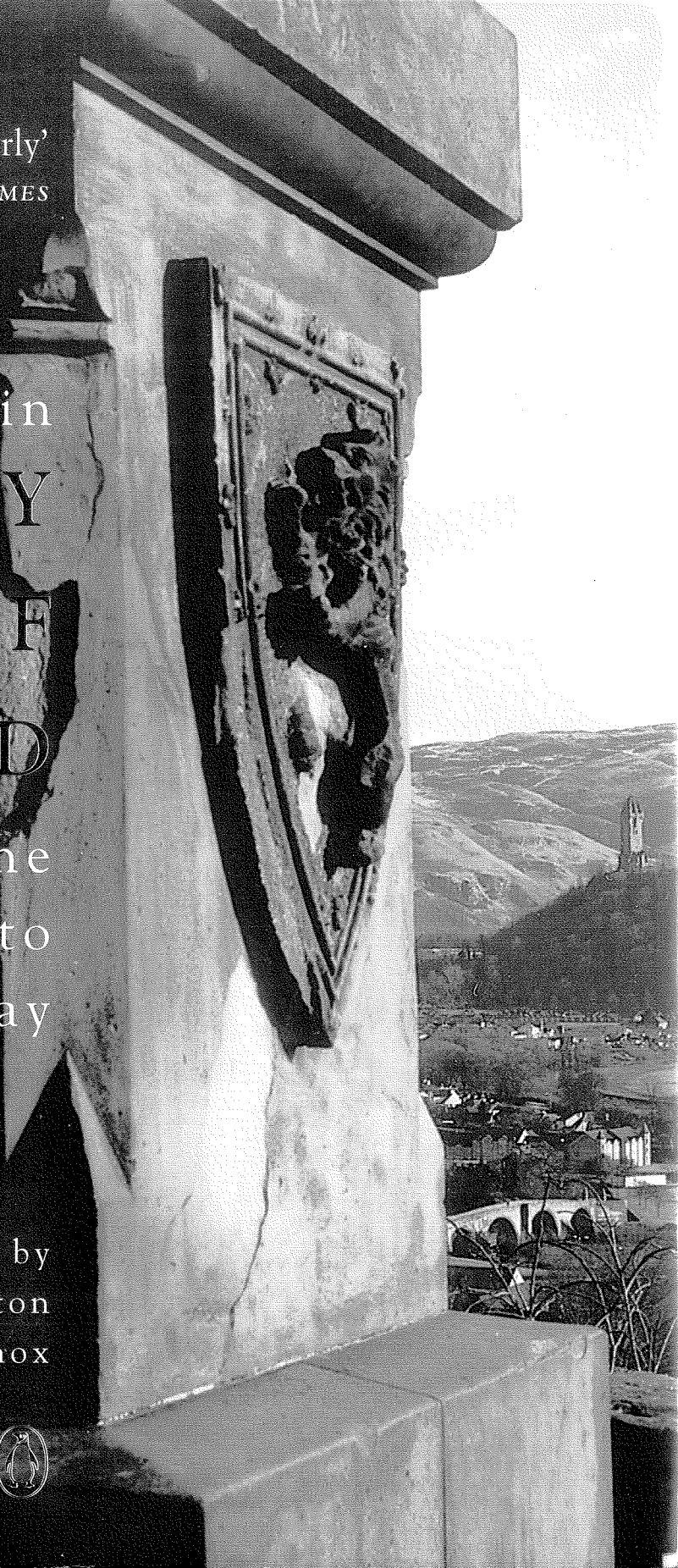


'Sharp ... witty ... masterly'  
JEREMY PAXMAN, SUNDAY TIMES

The New Penguin  
HISTORY  
OF  
SCOTLAND

From the  
Earliest Times to  
the Present Day

Edited by  
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## *The Second Viking Age*

The northern kings escaped the worst of the impact of the so-called Second Viking Age. Swein Forkbeard of Denmark, followed by his son Cnut, and Olaf Triggvason of Norway led repeated raids against the England of Æthelred the Unready, starting in the 980s and continuing until the conquest of the kingdom by Swein and Cnut in 1013–16. The Scottish chronicler John of Fordun credits Mael Coluim II with success against Scandinavian raiders, fighting a heavy battle in Banffshire against a large band of Norwegians – perhaps from Orkney. The anonymous (but near contemporary) commentator writing 'The Prophecy of Berchán' calls Mael Coluim 'enemy of Britons, scourge of Norse, voyager of Islay and Arran'. Scandinavian attacks around Scotland were not, however, part of the focused and deliberate campaigns which were led against England for the purpose of extorting Danegeld, a tax or 'protection money' which was paid in huge amounts of silver coin. Perhaps Scotland's lack of coinage made her a less attractive target, although the increasing evidence of silver hoards from this period indicates that there was plenty of material wealth in circulation in the form of foreign coin and 'hack-silver' (cut-up items to be weighed for bullion). These probably originated from trading ventures and mercenary activities on the part of Scandinavian settlers and visitors.

It may even be the case that Swein took refuge in the north, for a German cleric, Adam of Bremen, writing about Swein in the eleventh century, said that he spent fourteen years in exile with a 'king of the Scots' during a period of difficulty after his father, Harald Bluetooth, died in 986. It is tempting to identify him with the 'Swein, son of Harald' who raided the Isle of Man in about 995. King Æthelred considered the situation unsatisfactory enough to lead an expedition to the north-west and plunder Cumbria in the year 1000, although the English sources give no reason for this campaign. Fordun provides some confused information about Mael Coluim (probably in fact a king of Cumbria), who during Cinaed III's reign had refused to render the tribute necessary for payment of Danegeld. He is said to have 'supported the Danes against his oath of allegiance' to Æthelred: this might suggest that a king of Cumbria had indeed given refuge to Swein, a situation which could satisfactorily explain how Swein came to be raiding the Isle of Man c. 995.

The effects of the final Danish conquest of England and the imperial ambitions of Swein's son Cnut 'the Great' changed the situation once more because of the Northumbrian power bloc, granted by Cnut to his most powerful Scandinavian earls. Mael Coluim II had taken advantage of the uncertainty in the years after Cnut's final assertion of power in 1016 to lead a very successful raid into Northumbria when he won a battle at Carham (in 1018) against Eadulf Cudel of the native dynasty of Bamburgh, which gave him control as far as the Tweed, and established the southern frontier of the medieval

kingdom. The powerful Norwegian 'jarl' Erik of Lade was given Northumbria by Cnut in the same year, which he ruled as an independent province. Mael Coluim would have to defend his gains against this newly-established Scandinavian warlord on his southern frontier.

It has been suggested that Cnut was very concerned to ensure that his wide-ranging North Sea political ambitions should not be upset by Scottish non-cooperation. But he had enough to do with establishing his authority on both sides of the North Sea before tackling the Scots, and it may not have been until the late 1020s that he turned his attention to the northern kingdom. The statement in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle about Cnut's campaign in the north is dated to 1031. There is evidence from a French chronicler, Rodolph Glaber, that warfare between Mael Coluim and Cnut was more long-lasting than a single campaign. Glaber knew that Mael Coluim was a great warrior as well as a 'truly Christian king', and he suggests that the strife between the two kings was brought to an end on the advice of Duke Richard of Normandy (whose sister Emma, widow of King Æthelred, Cnut had married in 1018).

Although there is no mention in this French source of any submission to Cnut by Mael Coluim, we can be certain that it did occur, for one of the English chronicle texts provides the remarkable information that *three* northern kings acknowledged Cnut's authority when he entered Scotland: Mael Coluim, 'Maelbeathe' (presumed to be Macbeth, ruler of Moray at that time), and 'Jemarc' (presumed to be Echmarcach, king of the Rhinns of Galloway and perhaps of the Isles, and later of Dublin). This unique piece of evidence tells us that Cnut considered all three to be important elements in his global imperial schemes. Fordun suggests that the main focus of Cnut's attention was Cumbria and does not mention any submission by Mael Coluim. But the significant phrase in the skaldic poem in praise of Cnut (*Knuts drapa*), 'the heads of famous foreign lords . . . journey from Fife in the midst of the north', stressing that there was a 'peace-buying', is supporting evidence for the English chronicle's report of the three rulers' submission.

English, Norman and Scandinavian sources, therefore, tell us of the threat to Mael Coluim's independence from the greatest ruler in the northern hemisphere. Some close alliance between Normandy and the Isles is also hinted at in the Norman source, and reveals continuing links among the Viking colonial settlements. Whether we can rely on the interesting information that peaceful relations between Mael Coluim and Cnut resulted in the latter acting as sponsor at the baptism of a son of the Scottish king is uncertain. Certainly no such son survived to adulthood. It is likely that the satisfactory resolution of the situation with the Scottish king would allow Cnut to go on pilgrimage to Rome, which he did sometime in the late 1020s or early 1030s.

The comment (in one text of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle) that Mael Coluim's submission did not last long may merely reflect expectation of Scottish faithlessness. This king had more important things to worry about at home, such as ensuring the

continuation of his own line to his grandson, Donnchad (Duncan); Mael Coluim (Malcolm II) had no sons, only a daughter. It would be surprising if rival segments would ever have accepted such an abnormal progression of inheritance of power through a daughter. Clearly they did not, for in 1033 Mael Coluim was induced to have either his second or third cousin slain (a grandson, or great-grandson of his own father, Cinaed III). Whatever the relationship, this deed provided Gruoch, granddaughter of Cinaed, and at that time married to Macbeth (her second husband), with a justifiable desire for revenge against Mael Coluim. The response from other dynastic rivals was swift and Mael Coluim himself was killed the following year as the result of an ambush at Glamis.

### *Macbeth, Mormaer of Moray and King of Alba*

This violent end did not, however, prevent Mael Coluim's plans for the inheritance of his kingdom from succeeding and his grandson Donnchad did indeed rule for six years, but probably only with the strong backing of his father Crínán, (lay) abbot of Dunkeld. The disastrous end of Donnchad's reign, with defeat at Durham and death in the north at the hands of Macbeth all in one year (1040), suggests some inability to judge the strength of the powers facing him on both his kingdom's southern and northern frontiers. Macbeth's attack on his overlord probably had many motivating factors: as ruler of Moray he was considered their subordinate by the kings of Alba, and no doubt deeply resented this demotion. We do not know if this was his position when, along with Mael Coluim II, he joined the submission to Cnut; but he is referred to as Donnchad's *dux* (by Marianus Scotus), which might be regarded as the Latin equivalent of *mormaer*. The variety of terms used to describe the ruler of Moray (noted earlier) tell us that their exact status was disputed; no doubt this was the cause of intense feelings of aggression against the southern dynasty, which constantly attempted to dominate. This rivalry would be the major factor lying behind Donnchad's violent end: Macbeth is said in most of the sources to have been responsible for Donnchad's death near Elgin where, according to Fordun, the king was taken to die. An assassination is implied, engineered by Macbeth who evidently disputed his authority to enter Moray. In addition there was the deep-seated desire for revenge, revolving around the murder in 1033 of Gruoch's nephew (or even son). It would probably not be far from the truth to allow Macbeth's wife (Gruoch) close involvement in Donnchad's demise, and thus give Shakespeare's dramatic creation some credibility.

Macbethad mac Findlaích of Moray (Macbeth, in modern usage) himself had strong claims to the kingship of Alba for four reasons. First, he is suspected of being a grandson of Cinaed II (although proof of his mother's blood-line is wanting); second, he was married to a daughter of Boite, whose close relative had been murdered, and he was therefore bound to continue her family's feud against Mael Coluim II's line; third, he



was a vigorous military leader and hereditary ruler of a powerful province who probably regarded the possessor of power in Alba as having no valid claim to inheritance through the female line, and who was in any case discredited as a warrior; fourth, he killed Donnchad in some encounter on the frontier of his territory, and was left without rival except for Donnchad's two young sons, who soon fled into exile. There have been many less justifiable seizures of power in the history of medieval Europe than Macbeth's.

### *Power Struggles in the North*

So little is understood of the violent and dramatic events in the history of this period that we have to cherish all sources, however difficult it may be to ascertain their validity and meaning. One such source, written a century and a half later in the quite different literary and cultural milieu of Iceland, gives us a dramatized but credible narrative of the events in northern Scotland at this very time. This is the history of the earls of Orkney (*Orkneyinga Saga*) mentioned earlier, which includes important skaldic verses written by Arnorr *jarlaskáld*, the court poet of Thorfinn 'the Mighty', who ruled Orkney and Caithness from the mid-1020s to c. 1065. This earl was the grandson of Mael Coluim II from Earl Sigurd's marriage – suggested above to be a political alliance designed to keep the rulers of Moray in check. Indeed, Thorfinn's early career was directed towards maintaining control of his northern Scottish territories in the face of aggressive campaigns launched from the province of Moray.

The main protagonist in this struggle for power in the firthlands of Ross and in the waterways around the Orkneys was 'King Karl', son of Hundi, a name which links him with the enemy of Earl Sigurd II at the battle of Duncansby in *Njal's Saga*, who was also called Hundi. These Scottish warriors can only have been rulers of Moray: no king of Alba possessed the power to penetrate so far north, or had the fleets necessary for fighting naval encounters around the Orkney islands. Donnchad mac Crínáin was unable to cross the frontier into Moray without losing his life. The use of the term 'king of Scots' by the saga's author is entirely understandable if we identify Karl Hundason with Macbeth, a ruler of Moray who took power from the murdered Donnchad and became king of the southern Scottish kingdom.

For the period of Thorfinn and Macbeth's rise to power, probably in the 1030s, there has survived a brilliant account in Icelandic of the battles fought between these young warriors (and possible cousins). The first encounter was off the east coast of the Orkneys:

Made clear then to King Karl  
the close of his iron-fate,  
east of Deerness, defied  
and defeated by warrior-kin.

Confronting the foe, Thorfinn's  
fleet of five ships  
steered, steadfast in anger  
against Karl's sea-goers.

Finally at Torfness (probably Tarbat Ness in Easter Ross) Thorfinn won another victory against Karl which 'ended with Karl on the run' and 'some people say he was killed there'. The writer of the saga was not at all sure what had happened to King Karl after Torfness, most probably because he disappeared south as ruler of Alba.

The aftermath of such a defeat would have allowed Thorfinn the freedom to raid widely and enrich himself and his followers. In addition, the vacuum left in Moray by Macbeth's assumption of power in southern Scotland in 1040 may have given Thorfinn a commanding position in the north. The saga refers to his conquests as far south as Fife, and also to rebellion against his rule, which was met with harsh reprisals and the taking of many captives:

Shattered were the Scots'  
settlements that fear-day.  
Thatch smoked, fire  
flared over fields.  
The true prince took  
payment for treachery,  
thrice in one short  
summer he struck them.

It is likely that Thorfinn and King Macbeth/Karl Hundason eventually reached a settlement because of the changed circumstances in which Moray and Alba were ruled together for fourteen years. As far as Macbeth was concerned, the new situation required peaceable relations with the Norse world of Orkney and Caithness to enable him to rule his acquired kingdom without the distraction of northern warfare. Evidence of events during his fourteen-year reign is exiguous in the extreme (even for this period of Scottish history), a circumstance which might be taken to indicate that there were peaceful conditions and, therefore, not much to record.

The best-known fact concerns Macbeth's pilgrimage to Rome in 1050 when he bestowed gold generously on the poor, perhaps on an ecclesiastical foundation for Scottish pilgrims. Such a pious and peaceful religious journey was accomplished by several lords of northern lands at this time, some of them probably in emulation of Cnut the Great's pilgrimage of c. 1030. It entailed absence from their kingdom for months and could only be achieved if conditions were indeed peaceful at home, which suggests that Thorfinn was now an ally. Significantly, some rival Irish kings are known to have

gone on pilgrimage together in this period as a sign of penitence for past enmity and pledge for future friendship. Is it pure coincidence that Earl Thorfinn also went on pilgrimage to Rome at about the same time as Macbeth? The two did not travel out together, for Thorfinn went via Norway, Denmark and Germany, nor can his 'famous journey' be pinned down to a particular year. Nevertheless the possibility remains that the two visited the pope together. The main motivation for both rulers was probably the need for remission from the sin of murdering a rival in their accession to power. Both would have been obliged to make compensation in the form of generous benefactions to the church in their territories, as we know they both did. It is tempting to speculate that, as warring cousins, they also committed themselves to bettering their relations in future under the seal of papal forgiveness. There is no evidence that Macbeth needed to take special care over the security of his northern frontiers during the time he was ruling in the south, which could suggest the development of amicable relations with Earl Thorfinn.

Evidence that Macbeth made generous provision for the church in his kingdom comes from the record of a grant to the *céli Dé* foundation of St Serf on an island in Loch Leven, which included certain lands in Fife. This charter also associates his wife, Gruoch, called daughter of Boite and *Regina Scotorum* (queen of Scots), with the grant, an unusual event in any part of northern Europe in this period of history. What can we deduce from such a remarkable piece of evidence? Were the lands part of Gruoch's patrimonial inheritance? Did she also need to gain remission of her sins for partnership in her husband's violent accession to power? The document does not tell us, but it bears out Macbeth's standing as a benefactor of the church, as later expressed by Wyntoun in his verse Chronicle:

And all tyme oysyed he to wyrk  
Profitably for Haly Kirke.

Whatever crimes he had committed on his path to becoming the first king of Scots to rule both Alba and Moray, Macbeth compensated with generosity and the promotion of good relations with the church; actions for which he would have received ecclesiastical support in return.

*Mael Coluim III mac Donnchaid 'Cenn mór'*  
(Malcolm Canmore): Exile and Restoration

Macbeth's rule of fourteen years (1040–54) was remembered as a time of peace and plenty, but his line did not displace the southern dynasty permanently. Donnchad's eldest son was Mael Coluim 'Cenn mór' ('Big Head'), who is usually known as Malcolm III or Malcolm Canmore (the anglicized form of his name will be used here). He was

restored with the support of the Anglo-Saxon king and Earl Siward of Northumbria. Once more the Scandinavian element had a role to play in the internal development of the Scottish kingdom.

The earldom of Northumbria had been ruled since 1016 by the Norwegian Erik of Lade and from 1033 by the Dane Siward Bjornsson, two of Cnut's most formidable military lieutenants. The Scottish kings perceived the necessity of developing alliances with these Scandinavian warlords in Northumbria even though they constantly tried to expand southwards into northern England. It is likely that Donnchad himself had been married to a member of the ruling Northumbrian family, so it was natural that Malcolm should flee south in the years following his father's death and Macbeth's assumption of power. His brother Domnall went to the Isles, probably the Hebrides. The two princes, heirs-in-waiting, were thus in exile for fourteen years, one under the tutelage of the Danish earl (with access through him to the Anglo-Saxon court), while the other was brought up in the Gaelic-Norse world of the Western Isles.

This was a situation which was not uncommon in northern Europe at this date. Edward the Confessor was brought up at the court of his mother's family in Normandy for twenty-six years, and he is said by Fordun to have received Malcolm favourably at the Anglo-Saxon court 'for he too like Malcolm had recently lived in exile'. Exile in England strengthened the ties of the Scottish dynasty with its powerful southern neighbour. Symbolic of these close links was the grant of estates in Northamptonshire (probably by Siward) to provide income, and a residence *en route* to London, for Malcolm. The future relationship of medieval kings of Scots with England is clearly foreshadowed in this significant period of exile.

Provision of refuge for Malcolm in Northumbria meant the Anglo-Danish regime in England was given a very valuable pawn to hold in the game of influence and overlordship of the Scottish kingdom. Malcolm was eventually restored to his father's inheritance with military backing, and trained household troops known as *huscarls* were provided by both Earl Siward and King Edward for the famous campaign into Scotland in 1054. Yet we know that Macbeth also hired foreign troops, Norman knights who had been expelled from England in the turbulent events of 1052 when Edward's Norman followers were ousted by Earl Godwin. These two forces met north of Dundee where a famous and decisive battle took place, traditionally located near a hill called Dunsinane. The encounter between *huscarls* and knights foreshadows the battle of Hastings twelve years later, but on this occasion the Norman knights did not prevail. Macbeth fled north to his patrimonial lands and Malcolm is said by most commentators to have been restored to power over the southern parts by Siward. However, by the fourteenth century Fordun complained that everything was ascribed to Siward, and Malcolm deprived of all glory 'when in actual fact Malcolm alone with his own men and standard-bearer was responsible for the whole victory'. It can hardly be doubted that Siward would make the most of his pawn and require some reward for his outlay:



control over Cumbria may have been part of the bargain, for evidence suggests he had some authority in lands north of the Solway.

Practicalities and theoretical overlordship did not always match: but Siward was dead the next year, and Malcolm won glory on his own account two years after that by hunting down his enemies and dispatching first Macbeth, and then Gruoch's son by her first marriage, Lulach, in military encounters in the north-east. Few returning claimants from exile have ousted those in possession of power and established themselves more decisively. Malcolm's kingship was a military and political reality, and the way was clear for the re-establishment of the dynasty descended from Cinaed mac Ailpín without rival.

This was more than just a re-establishment. It was a re-formulation. The new king had spent his formative years in exile at the courts of Siward and Edward; he must have returned to Scotland speaking a heavily Scandinavianized form of northern English, in addition to his paternal Gaelic tongue. Undoubtedly Malcolm also returned home with a following drawn from the Anglo-Danish community of Northumbria among whom he had grown up and with whom he must have forged bonds of loyalty and military companionship; the obvious parallel is Edward's return to England from Normandy in 1042 with some powerful French knights and churchmen who became very unpopular with some sections of the Anglo-Scandinavian ruling elite. Such followers expected to be rewarded with land and rights. Moreover Siward's expedition north of the border had resulted in a great slaughter of 'all that were best there in the land', according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Thus a new raft of nobility would have been installed in Malcolm's kingdom, alongside those surviving members of the old Celtic families who had remained loyal to the exiled prince during Macbeth's rule (first among them being MacDuff, according to Fordun's story). This situation, of Malcolm's triumphant return to his rightful inheritance, would seem to provide the right circumstances for the importing and implanting of Northumbrian agricultural, legal and social terminology later found throughout southern and eastern Scotland.

The social framework of Macbeth's kingdom with its predominant Gaelic culture would have become inevitably more 'anglicized' through this dramatic change of political fortune. The arrival of Northumbrian warriors from an Anglo-Danish society, who would have been given estates in the fertile lowlands of Lothian, Fife, Angus and Perthshire, must have started a reversal of the previous spread of Gaelic language and culture south of the Forth, and implanted a Northumbrian element in the political heartland of the Scottish kingdom. This was a significant step in the formation of the Scots language and in determining the cultural mix of the Scottish kingdom.