

# A HISTORY OF SCOTLAND

THIRD EDITION

ROSALIND MITCHISON

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# A HISTORY OF SCOTLAND

Covering a staggering period from the Pictish peoples and their symbol stones to modern devolution, Mitchisons absorbing narrative remains the classic introduction to Scottish history.

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- the literature of Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott.

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# A History of Scotland

Third Edition

Rosalind Mitchison



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To Murdoch, who saw this coming before I did.

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‘Vie in this cingdum ar will ffull, proud, and nesiesitus eivin to begarie.’ *Lord  
Rothes, Chancellor of Scotland*

‘Any shuckle can write a book: it takes a Man to herd the Merrick.’  
*Anon.*

## *Author's note*

THIS BOOK HAS BEEN written with a mind to the problems of students of Scottish history at the moment of writing. It has therefore been over-weighted in the space and emphasis it gives to the key period for the understanding of modern Scotland, the seventeenth century. It has been finished at a time of considerable debate on the future government of the country. I ask the reader to bear in mind that in its own way this is a historical document, to be viewed in the light of changing events.

I have endeavoured in this book to make full use of the conclusions of modern research and to relate Scottish history to the current interests of students of history. In the present dearth of modern outlines of Scottish history it has seemed to me best that it should be written as independently as possible. Perhaps it is typical of a small country that there should be a wide gulf between the opinions of the current generation of working scholars and the popularly held truisms about its history. The version of Scottish history generally accepted, for instance in Scottish schools, has received little major change since Scott enshrined it in his *Tales of a Grandfather*, except that it has been extended to include some nineteenth-century events. Yet work has been done in this century that has undermined this received opinion, and the enthusiasm for new work to be seen in the biennial Scottish History Conference shows that many people are dissatisfied with the popular myths. There cannot be many historians working on a country of a little over five million inhabitants, and historians dislike disagreeing with the public except in the narrow field of their own specialisms. As a result the changes in opinion have not often been stated clearly at a popular level. When these have been stated, historians have tended to use a traditional phraseology and a similar tone of voice. In an attempt to offer an independent opinion, structure, emphasis, and style, this book has been worked at in isolation and kept away from authoritative criticism. As a result there are sure to be inaccuracies and mistakes in it. I shall be glad to be informed of these by readers.

In the matter of personal names I have tended to adopt the spellings of the *Complete Peerage* and the *Dictionary of National Biography*. An effort has been made to assist clarity in financial matters by reserving the sign £ for sterling money. The word Scotch has been used in the period when it was the adjective

Scots applied to themselves. The notes at the end of chapters are to help the reader to distinguish individuals from one another, and are not intended as miniature biographies. The notes at the end of the book are there to help a reader find his way about the chapters and main events.

History is a co-operative and kindly profession. This book owes a great deal to other practitioners of it. In particular it owes more than I can easily express, and far more than I can ever repay, to a lifelong friend, Sir Llewellyn Woodward, whose advice and counselling have been generously given at all stages. Though he has no responsibility for my opinions and my errors, he has given me detailed advice on the general problems of writing outline history. I have received a great deal of the stimulus to my historical thinking from conversations with Professor T.C.Smout, and could not imagine what this book would be without his contribution. There are also many others from whom I have gathered ideas, criticism, or information. Among these are Dr Jenny Wormald, the Reverend Dr James P.B.Bulloch, Professor Gordon Donaldson, Professor A.A.M.Duncan, Dr Bruce Webster, Dr Ranald Nicholson, Dr W.F.H.Nicolaisen, Dr Gweneth Whitteridge, Dr I.B.Cowan, Eric Linklater, the Reverend Campbell Maclean, Dr Atholl Murray, Dr N.Phillipson, Mrs A.L.F.Smith, and Father Anthony Ross. Futhermore I am intellectually in the debt of all those with whom I have associated in teaching over the last few years, both pupils and colleagues, as well as to members of my own family for stimulus, tolerance, and help.

One element of help is impersonal and cannot be thanked. It is the living record of the past in the features and lie of the land. The opportunity of thinking of history in tranquillity in the environment that helped to shape it has come to me mainly on the hills of Scotland.

## *Introduction*

THIS BOOK WAS written in the 1960s, an exciting time for the study of history, particularly the long neglected area of Scottish history. Inevitably it bears the stamp of the period. It was a decade of rapid academic expansion, both in students and specialisms. In England the prospect of higher education was extended into new sections of society, and in Scotland where the universities were already used by working class students, a broader range of studies became available. There were new courses, and new subjects to be studied. A wider spread of topics was undertaken by research workers. The creation of a new political structure for part of Europe led to emphasis on the experience of the smaller countries and encouraged expression of national identity. In particular there was a sense of opportunity for a country which for over a century and a half had done its best to suppress serious study of its own past. The Scottish universities had seen the courses they offered as routes to profitable jobs in government service or in the church. A history degree was the way in to the civil service, and the history involved was English history with an occasional glance at what had happened in Scotland: this mixture might or might not call itself British history.

For the history of Scotland the prejudices and assumptions of the nineteenth century had dominated the scene. The picture of the seventeenth century as seen in Sir Walter Scott's *Tales of a Grandfather* still had a baleful influence, and the presbyterian churches had accepted and imposed an interpretation of the earlier period which justified their dominance in the nineteenth century. God could be seen as having favoured a particular outcome so there was no need for research on the way he had pulled it off. Education was seen as opening the door to particular careers in law, teaching and medicine, not on the whole, as a basis for enquiry.

The change in academic manpower made for a new career structure: scholars could devote time and effort to research. Their predecessors in the nineteenth century had not written many books but they had done a great deal of careful work in making primary sources available in print.

The types of history studied were changing in the 1960s. Economic history was popular, perhaps because political history was seen as already determined. The

development of industrial concerns, price movements, the growth of trade, (both legal and illegal) with the colonies in America were some of the branches of economic history now given serious attention. Economic study brought forward the significance of the labour force and this led to interest in a new type of social history, the study of the living conditions and traditions of the bulk of the population. This book has benefited from the enlargement of what was accepted as history.

The small band of historians concentrating on Scotland did work that was highly commendable, but the labour force had not been big enough to cope with changing historical interest, so there were serious gaps in published information. One of these was the significance and influence of the price revolution, the rapid inflation in the mid-sixteenth century. To understand the economic position of Scotland it was necessary to establish how much of the inflation was shared with the rest of Europe and how much was merely the result of impecunious monarchs debasing the coinage. Another important and unstudied theme was the structure of law and order in the eighteenth century. Local government had largely been provided by the national Church which managed the task well as long as there were no serious schisms. But it seems to be a weakness of presbyterianism that it fosters division. By the early nineteenth century the lack of effective local government was responsible for much of the appalling conditions of the industrial towns. Scottish historians did not find this a particularly attractive topic for it denied the strongly held belief in the superiority of Scottish institutions and their work to those of England.

The emphasis of the 1960s on serious study of Scotland's more modern historic past produced other general histories. Two of the four volumes that make up Oliver and Boyd's *Edinburgh History of Scotland* were published in the sixties and found a ready market in the academic world. They were followed in the 1970s by the remaining volumes, and in the 1990s by Michael Lynch's *Scotland, a New History*, a remarkably thorough exposition and analysis of over fifteen centuries. It might be held that there is no longer a place for other outline histories. But the public's use and demand for this book show that there is still a place for a work on a smaller scale than the Edinburgh history volumes, which yet has room for some detailed analysis. The book has been used by tourists and foreigners, and the users of English public libraries as well as by people living in Scotland, and recent political changes will no doubt give it a continued role.

After the Act of Union of 1707 Scotland accepted its status as the lesser part of Great Britain, though there was an important minority of national opinion which expressed itself in the eighteenth century as active Jacobitism. But to many 1707 eventually came to be seen as a profitable decision. It was even more obviously profitable in the nineteenth century when Scotland's developing industries found an enlarged market in the British Empire. Yet emigration remained a conspicuous feature of Scottish life in both centuries and this has continued in the twentieth century, when Union no longer appeared to work to Scotland's advantage.

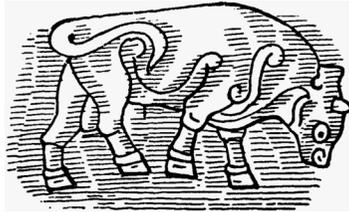
Emigration is often taken as a sign of dissatisfaction, economic, religious, cultural or social, with the home country. Any of these lines of thought might apply to Scotland, but there could also be a more positive aspect, the presence abroad of settled people retaining their Scottish national concerns and way of life. A Scottish family migrating in the nineteenth century might well know of families who had already made this change. Scots have had a strong sense of cousinage. They have also maintained or created their own rituals in foreign parts: two obvious ones are Burns night and the holding of Highland games. Among other allegedly Scottish ceremonies I have seen these games held in the Rockies. Dissatisfaction may not have been the only element in decisions to emigrate.

The major change in the setting up of the Scottish Parliament is already leading to new patterns of government expenditure, and may well produce a more positive commitment to Scotland. Links with Europe have brought home the realisation that small nations may have social or political aims of a new kind. The histories of Scotland, which will be produced ten or twenty years from now, will have many new themes to consider, and I wish them well.

August 2001

# Chapter 1

## *Before 1100*



GO AND STAND ON the castle rock of Stirling and look about you. That is the quickest way to comprehend the basic features that have dictated Scottish history. You will see the Highland line, one of the great geological faults to which Scotland owes its shape, a wall of hills rising sharply from the plain a few miles to the north. It runs as an irregular diagonal across the country. To the north-east lies its screen of outliers, the Ochils. Above the main ridge individual mountains, those of three thousand feet, Ben Ledi, Ben Vorlich, Ben Lomond, overlook their fellows. To the north-west runs the flat and now fertile carse with the great golden corn stacks and haystacks in ranks perpendicular to the road. But, for our ancestors, before the improvers of the eighteenth century drained it, this carse land was a bog covered with peat, across which the little sluggish streams took themselves to supply the still tidal Forth. The river Forth comes through Stirling in a series of big loops, and, four miles to the east as a hypothetical crow might fly, but many more as a boat's crew would row, it widens into the arm of the sea, its firth. South of Stirling the wall of the Highlands is reflected by the lesser ridge of the Campsies. To pass in reasonable safety and comfort from southern to northern Scotland a man must cross the Forth within a mile or two of Stirling. Stirling is the brooch that holds together the two parts of the country. It is right that the most decisive battle in Scottish history should have been planned and agreed to for the ownership of Stirling castle on its rock above the vital bridge. Scotland as we know it began when the various peoples that made up the medieval population linked together with the aid of this brooch. The division to be overcome was not the modern cultural and economic one between Highland and Lowland but the older one between north and south of the Forth.

At Stirling the sharpness of the Highland line reveals the Highlands as a region of low fertility. It has old hills with deep valleys that stand in sharp contrast to the rounded hills of the Lowlands. The fault that makes the main block of Lowland hills, the southern uplands, runs along the edge of the Lammermuirs and Moorfoots south of Edinburgh and builds a structure which reaches the top of its dome with Broad Law in Ettrick. This structure, though it can go up to two and a half thousand feet, has hills not mountains, and many of the hills have been an aid rather than a hindrance to communication. The treeline in Scotland is low, and you walk a lot drier at two thousand feet than at one thousand. Old tracks for man and cattle run along the ridges and over the cols; by them the farms and townships in the valleys can communicate with other centres. But in the scooped-out valleys of the Highlands communities are much more cut off, and the hill land is of negligible fertility; there the lines of contact often lie by water rather than by land. The geography of the Highlands makes the small chieftainship over a population held together by kin a natural political unit, in the same way that the little mountain-ringed plains of Sicily and Greece lead naturally to the city state. The creation of larger political units would be easier in the Lowlands. The diagonal of the Highland line leaves areas geographically lowland in the North of Scotland. These include the broad, fertile valleys of Strathearn and Strathmore, the coastal strip round the Mounth (the old name for the central block of the Grampians), the low, rolling country of Aberdeenshire, and the warm and sheltered plain of Moray.

In historic times we know of five peoples to whom we can give names who occupied the territory now called Scotland. School textbooks still remind children that in 843, or thereabouts, two of these peoples, the Picts and the Scots, were united by Kenneth MacAlpin, a king of the Scots. But in the ninth century there were also British or Welsh tribes in the south of Scotland, still holding a line of principalities from the outskirts of modern Edinburgh to Carlisle. The British strain in Scotland was later to produce one of the country's greatest heroes, William Wallace, whose name means 'the Welshman' and whose family came from Wales. In Lothian, Berwickshire, and Roxburghshire there were Anglo-Saxons, probably mixed with the British. The Norsemen from Norway were colonizing the islands and estuaries of the north and west, and threatening the political survival of the other peoples. Beneath all these Celtic or Germanic populations the river names of Scotland carried, and still carry, the reminder that other people had been there earlier. Even if, by the ninth century, these people had lost their political identity, and perhaps their language, they still contributed to the future: perhaps in local cults and superstitions, perhaps in the extraordinary words on Pictish monuments, by cairns and barrows and the crumbling walls of early shelters.

Of the five historic peoples the one that was doing worst in the ninth century was the British. The Kingdom of Strathclyde, with its fortress at Dumbarton, straddled Clydesdale and the northern English counties on the west, and elsewhere there were lesser princes ruling smaller areas. We know something of

these Britons from Welsh literature. The Welsh epic, the *Gododdin*, written down in its final form in the twelfth century but carrying stanzas three centuries older, is about the great tribe of the *Votadini*, who at one time had a town on *Traprain Law*. This poem and other Welsh poems do not tell us of an organized kingdom but of princes who fought with one another and held court, who hunted and banqueted, listened to their bards, and counted wealth in flocks, jewellery, and splendid weapons. Just as Celtic art in its greatest phase was non-representational, so these poems shirk telling us clearly what has happened, and pass on instead to give us the lyric intensity of instants of feeling. For those lacking ancient Welsh and unsympathetic to the grouse-moor image of this way of life it is depressing: here we have the broken picture of a people who failed to organize themselves as a political force and who, in spite of occasional revivals, were to be defeated because of this. They failed to develop economically and have left us little in material relics, but we can hear of the sixth-century battle for a lark's nest (*Caerlaverock* perhaps) or of the desolation of *Powys* under Anglo-Saxon attack. Little survives of the days when the *Votadini* held their own with the other big political units. The importance of these British tribes to Scotland lay in the fact that they were the source of Scottish Christianity. The religion came through *St Patrick* to Ireland, and via Irish saints innumerable to *Argyll*, and through the *Columban* church there to *Pictland* and *Northumbria*.

*Pictland* was the country north of the *Forth* and, by the seventh century, east of the long mountain range that makes the 'spine' of Scotland. Mystery hangs about the *Picts* for two reasons. On the one hand we have a people who were defeated and whose language was obliterated. In this case there was no refuge for it in Wales. *Pictish* ceased to be spoken, and because it was not spoken the records (whatever they were, annals, histories, laws, genealogies) failed to be copied in later centuries and were lost totally. This alone would not make the mystery. That comes from the coupling of this silence with the most coherent, precise, and detailed artistic symbolism of the *Dark Ages*. The *Picts* have left their animals, real and imaginary, and their symbol stones all across north-eastern Scotland, as evidence of some articulate mythology, belief, or scale of values that was neither dependent on Christianity nor hostile to it. They have shown that from this they could develop a school of sculpture, simple and vivid. Hard facts about the *Picts* are confined to their royal inheritance, which came through the female line as it seems to have done in the Germany of *Tacitus's* day, to special places and areas, and to a language surviving in place names that belong to the *P-Celtic* division, as does *British*.<sup>1</sup> We know that they had sacred hills, *Ben Ledi* and *Schiehallion* for instance; and that special districts were important to their kingship—the *Tay* valley, *Fife*, *Morayshire*. We can trace them in 'Duns' or forts, *Dunnottar*, *Dunkeld*, *Dunnichen*. Perhaps they lived or kept their cattle in *souterrains*. *Scone*, 'Scone of the high shields' as the *Irish annals* call it, was in some ways a special centre, and it was here that *Kenneth MacAlpin*, King of the Scots, is said to have slaughtered many of the *Picts*, luring them to a feast 'by their excessive

potation and gluttony' says Giraldus Cambrensis, so that they could be killed by the 'innate treachery' of the Scots, 'in which they excel the other nations'.<sup>1</sup>

Like all the other peoples of ninth-century Scotland the Picts were at least partly pastoral. The late ninth-century Scottish King Constantine II is called 'the cowherd of the byre of the cows of the Picts' in one of those bogus Irish prophesies which were written after the events they foretold. This is a reminder of what was wealth to all these people. Minor details of evidence suggest that the Picts were not very thick on the ground, and were not a unitary kingdom but a federation or collaboration. We hear of kings of North Picts and of South Picts in Bede; we see the later separatism of Morayshire; Fife has always been remembered as a kingdom; the Caledonii had their Dun at Dunkeld. Part of this federation may have been dominated either by a people who still used a non-Aryan language and inscribed it on their great stones, or who had it surviving in personal names, or who collected impossible collections of consonants out of the initials of significant texts or sayings. We shall not know which of these explanations is the right one until we can interpret things like 'ettocuhetts ahehhtannn hocvvevv nehhtons'. Federations, even apparently strong ones, crumble more easily than unitary states under outside pressure. Another source of Pictish weakness may have been their old-fashioned matrilineal inheritance, through the sisters of kings, especially as some at least of these royal heiresses married foreign princes. Perhaps they all did. Certainly there were Pictish kings with English, British, or Scottish princely fathers, as there were Scottish kings with Pictish names. For a generation in the seventh century the kings of Northumbria were overlords of the southern Picts, until they were defeated in the great battle at Nechtansmere<sup>2</sup> in 685. In 741 the Pictish King Oengus had some sort of overlordship over the Scots. We have no record of this dominance ceasing until a great battle in 839 saw the slaughter of kings of both Picts and Scots by Norsemen. Before this date a Pictish King Constantine had put his son upon the throne of the Scots, and among his successors it appears that a father was succeeded by his three sons, marking the end of the Pictish rule of succession. But these were among the last of Pictish kings, so shadowy that they are no more than names, and names that appear in only one Irish list. Almost immediately afterwards we find a Scot, Kenneth MacAlpin, ruling the Picts, and various stories of the Pictish overthrow, of the slaughter at the banquet, showing that this

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1. The great body of Celtic speaking peoples had split many centuries before into two sections, P-Celtic and Q-Celtic. Of present or recent languages, Welsh, Breton, and Cornish belong to the former, Irish, Manx, and Gaelic (the language spoken by the Scots) to the latter.

1. Giraldus, a Welshman at the court of Henry II of England and Anjou, could hardly resist a jab at other nationalities, and is not always reliable as evidence of national characteristics.

2. Probably near Dunnichen in Angus.

was not simply a Scot inheriting the kingdom through a Pictish mother: the Scots had won. They proceeded to turn what might have been merely a temporary overlordship into a general take-over.

The Scots historically are intruders—they came from Ireland and built the Kingdom of Dalriada on land which had once been Pictish, in the west of Scotland, in Argyll and the Isles. By the mid-sixth century they held a sizeable kingdom lying north of the Britons of Strathclyde and stretching up beyond the Great Glen, and they named it after the district in Ulster from which they took their royal house. The spine of Scotland (as Adomnan calls it in his life of St Columba, the *Drum Alban*), the big hills of the west, effectively cut their grazing grounds and small patches of arable off from the Picts. This country includes some fertile islands, notably Bute, Islay, and the traditional fair-weather corn-growing Tiree; the good land at the south end of Kintyre and the straths of Knapdale; but if a people there were to increase and turn steadily more and more to corn-growing they would need to look eastward in their imperialism to drier country. East lie the belts of the old red sandstone which still to this day give the best farmland of Scotland, from the red earth of the East Lothian plain to the flat-bedded fields of Caithness. The drop in annual rainfall as you go east in Scotland is more than an inch a mile, and to primitive farmers this is very important. As a people become more agricultural, expansion becomes more a matter of conquest than of infiltration or of gradual pressure. Pastoral peoples can be shifted slowly and more easily than a community of farmers. We know no facts about the demography of this period, but our suppositions and estimates of climatic history offer us a vision of a warmer and more even climate in north Europe than that of today. In the ninth century Norse voyagers laid courses farther north than we can do today without risk of ice. So of the two semi-independent variables that dominate the history of numbers, disease and climate, we can allow that if disease did not prevent it, the Scots in Dalriada could have been a fast-growing population. They gave the names of individual princes to areas of occupation, for instance, Comgal to Cowall. They had their strategic fortified centres: Dunadd, commanding movement down the sound of Jura; Dunolly, controlling the western approaches of the Great Glen. In the mid-sixth century they added to their territorial imperialism the great saint of the day, Columba.

Columba had come to Scotland in his forties, already a notable man, a member of a royal house, a scholar and ascetic in a country where these qualities were prized, and had persuaded the Pictish king to give him Iona for the founding of his monastery. We do not know if he came because he had made Ireland too hot to hold him: the wish to live a monastic life may have been the only reason. Yet his coming was bound to be a political event. Iona became the centre of the Columban church, creating and dominating other monasteries in Dalriada and Pictland. This church was run by monasteries under their abbots, and these abbots had even greater authority when they were princes. Bishops might be attached to monasteries to provide for ordination, but the rule of bishops and the delimitation of dioceses was unknown. The Celtic church kept

its admiration for hermits and monks. Saints, however genuinely they may have abjured the world, provided outlets for the competitive emotions of their admirers. This is clearly shown in the Irish annals. The austerities of the saint, his learning, his monastic skills, were all points in a championship or competition, and his miracles not only showed his prestige but were the means by which he looked after his people. The stories of Columba show what the Scots valued in a saint; second sight for instance, and calligraphy. We see the monks of a century later rowing over the sea in coracles to Iona, towing behind them the timber for his church, and grumbling to the saint because he had not arranged better weather to let them get home in time for his feast day. The prestige and influence of the great saint was part of Scottish imperialism. Because of this, the authentic missionary activity of other saints, St Maluag of Lismore for instance, or of any or all of the saints of Pictland, have been swamped by the cult of Columba. It was in Iona that the Scottish kings were buried in the hope of picking up benefits hereafter from the proximity of the great saint.

By the ninth century the Columban church was no longer a separate unit. Conformity with the practices of Rome—the Roman calculation of Easter and the other movable feasts, the Roman shape of the tonsure—had been accepted by the Pictish King Nechton, says Bede, and even in Iona. But it took longer to get the Roman form of church government systematically established, and the wars of the ninth and tenth centuries did not provide a good setting for reorganization. The Church in Scotland, as in England and Wales, saw a decay of real monasticism and learning, and a continuation of proprietary habits—hereditary abbotships in princely families for instance—until cleaned up at the end of the eleventh century.

The Scottish kings continued to be buried in Iona after 843, but otherwise they turned their backs on the west. Scone and the area round it became their base: they were enthroned on the sacred stone there. Gaelic speech and culture, remarkably intrusive at this time, spread with Scottish power across Scotland almost to Edinburgh. This was a drastic change, even though for the most part it replaced another Celtic language. The gap between P- and Q-Celtic was already deep. Columba had needed an interpreter when speaking to the Pictish king, which implies that Pictish and Gaelic were then farther apart than, say, Italian and Castilian are today. Gradually the name Scotia divorced from its old meaning of Ireland and came to mean all Scotland north of the Forth, which had hitherto been called Alba. This area was now predominantly occupied by people speaking Gaelic and owning a Scottish king, though they might differ as to who he ought to be.

To the south of Scotia lay the Anglian kingdom of Northumbria, populated by Angles from across the North Sea, but with a fair-sized British element too. These 'English' were probably already more geared to agriculture than their northern neighbours. Perhaps as a result of this their society was less exclusively masculine. Women figure in their stories not merely in the form of Celtic

goddesses reincarnated as Celtic saints, but as princesses and rulers, abbesses of large monasteries, and missionaries in the great Anglo-Saxon mission field in Germany. The northern part of Northumbria, Bernicia, had its Dun at Bamburgh, its great missionary monastery on Lindisfarne, but it extended well beyond the Tweed. St Cuthbert, its special native saint, came from near Coldingham, and the St Abb whose headland still carries her name was an English princess Ebba. Neither the Tweed nor the Tyne provide the sort of natural frontier of the Forth. Invasion into or from Bernicia was relatively easy, and for a time the Bernician Empire had dominated as far as the Tay. What destroyed this Anglian kingdom and its civilization was the force that shaped Scotland in the ninth and tenth centuries, the invading Norsemen. In 793 they sacked Lindisfarne. The 'black gentiles', as the Irish called them, sailed down the west coast of Scotland too and in 794 Skye and Iona and all the islands were pillaged by 'this valiant, wrathful and purely pagan people'.

Men had been sailing, visiting, exploring, colonizing, and occasionally trading up and down the western screen of Scottish islands for generations. The old routes ran across to Ireland, and thence to Cornwall, Brittany, and Spain. Mediterranean pottery has been found at Dunadd. But the Norsemen at sea were a different matter from Irish saints or Irish warriors in coracles. The viking long-boat, seventy feet long, strongly built and beautifully curved along its gunwale, carried thirty oars and could row the North Sea. It could and did fight naval battles. Not for nothing was his boat in some special way of religious significance to a viking ruler, so that he would be buried in it with his broken gear around him. On land the Norsemen added a touch of ruthlessness to the already bloody battles of primitive peoples. At first they came as pagan looters and destroyers of other civilizations: a generation later the emphasis was on conquest and settlement. By the late ninth century all those who found the growth of a powerful monarchy under Harald Fairhair of Norway an intolerable restriction on their enterprise looked for a better field abroad. Ketil Flatnose, for instance, went to Scotland: wide lands were known to him there, because he had plundered there widely'; he stopped paying tax to his king, conquered the Hebrides, and lorded it over them. It was these settling 'Norsemen' from Norway, bringing their families with them, and their laws, looking for good trading bases and building up private empires, who destroyed the central and northern English kingdoms. They also occupied all the islands of Scotland and much of the coast of Britain and Ireland, and founded earldoms in Caithness and Sutherland. It was their pressure on the Scots and Picts that produced the smashing military defeat of these two together in 839, a defeat which seems to have led to the Scottish take-over. In the wake of the Norsemen came other pirates, in particular the *gall ghaidhil* or foreign Gaels, perhaps a mixture of Scots and Norse, who were raiding and settling the coast of what was to take its name from them and be called Galloway.

The Norsemen created the literary form of the saga, the realist prose narrative, strong on character and biting conversation. Though the sagas which were