

1467 MS: The MacNeils

It has been remarked more than once that the MacNeils are conspicuous by their absence from the 1467 MS. I have come to believe that they are not missing at all, but lurking in the guise of a pedigree which has been variously seen as that of the Lamonts, the MacLennans and ‘Mac Gabharáin Earca’. In fact, I am not the first to reach this conclusion, although the issue has been confused by the tendency of some scholars to speak *ex cathedra* through concealing their sources. In 1907 the Rev. Alexander Maclean Sinclair began an essay on the MacNeils of Barra with the statement that ‘the Macneils of Barra were descended from Gilladamnan, son of Cormac, son of Airbertach, and were originally known as Clann Ghilladhamhnain, or Clan Gilladamnan’. He went on to speak of Gilladhamhnain’s son Nicail, Nicail’s son Duncan, and Duncan’s grandson Murdoch.¹ These are tell-tale signs that he was using Skene’s work on the 1467 MS, presumably as found in *Celtic Scotland*, but he failed to say so. However, when in 1909 he came to write his companion essay on the MacNeils of Argyllshire, he twice mentioned what he called ‘the Skene MS.’ – first in speaking of ‘Gmail, lord of Carrick’ (a clear reference to the MacLean pedigree in *Celtic Scotland*, vol. 3, p. 481), then in telling us that ‘John Dubh had two good sons, Lachlan and Hector’, which was lifted from the next page, p. 482 (though he muddied the water a little by describing his source as ‘the Skene MS., which was compiled about 1383’).² Fortunately Sinclair’s use of the *Celtic Scotland* pedigrees was noticed by David Sellar, who remarked in 1971 that in these two essays Sinclair ‘gives hardly any authority for his views, which involve taking a pedigree in MS 1467 thought by Skene to be that of the MacLennans for that of the MacNeils of Barra and tacking the MacNeills of Taynish and Gigha on to the MacLeans’.³ In this article I intend to demonstrate that Sinclair was right to identify Skene’s ‘MacLennans’ as MacNeils. It was a deduction of which he should have been proud, but he lacked the confidence to say so, and preferred instead to cover his tracks.

The text in question appears in Adv. MS 72.1.1, f. 1r, towards the foot of the fifth column (e), between the MacMillans and the MacLeans. This may in itself be regarded as a hint that we are dealing with an Argyllshire kindred. I will begin by citing the text first as given by Skene in his youthful *Collectanea* (1847), then as revised by him in *Celtic Scotland* (1880), then as set out by my wife Máire and myself in our website (2009). For ease of comparison, the texts are all presented here according to the seven-line structure in which they appear in the manuscript.

(1) *Collectanea:*

e35 Genelach ic Gillalament
e36 Murechach ic Fearchair mc Coll
e37 mc ic Murechach ic Fearchair mor
e38 mc Donch ic Nicaíl
e39 mc Gillaagam mor o fuilid Clann
e40 mc Cormac mc Oirbertaigh.
e41

e35 Genealogy of the Lamonds—
e36 Murdoch son of Ferchard, son of Coll,
e37 grandson of Murdoch, son of Ferchard mor,
e38 son of Duncan, son of Nicaíl,
e39 son of Gillaagam mor, from whom descend the Clan Ilwam,
e40 son of Cormac, son of Oirbertaigh.⁴
e41

(2) *Celtic Scotland, with Skene's footnotes:*

e35 GENEALACH MHIC GILLAAGAMNAN*
e36 Amurechach mhic mhic
e37 mhic Murechach mhic
e38 mhic Donnchach mhic Nicaíl
e39 mhic Gillaagamnan o fuil an fine**
e40 mhic Cormac mhic Airbertaigh
e41

* From MS. 1467. Some of the names cannot be read.

** The Clan is here called Finé.

e35 Genealogy of the MacLennans.
e36 Murdoch son of son of
e37 son of Murdoch son of
e38 son of Duncan son of Nicaíl
e39 son of Gillaagamnan, from whom came the clan,
e40 son of Cormac son of Airbertach⁵
e41

(3) www.1467manuscript.co.uk:

[The heading is 'Mac Gabharáin Earca (Clann Ghille Ádhagáin?)', footnoted: "Skene has this as MacGillaagamnan (MacLennan). It does say they are named from Gillaagan, but is this is [*sic*] MacLennan?" Italics are used here for text which appears in colour in the website, indicating illegibility or uncertainty.]

e35 genelach mhic gabharain erca
e36 Murchadh mac ferchair mhic coll
e37 mhic mhic murchaidh mhic ferchair mor

- e38 mhic donnchaidh mhic [*mhic alar--?-- or mhic abar--?-- or possibly nical --?--*]
 e39 mhic gillaagan mor o fuilid
 e40 mhic Cormaic mhic airbertaigh
 e41 *mhic* feradhaigh
- e35 The genealogy of Mac Gabharáin Earca:
 e36 Murchadh son of Fearchar(?) son of Colla(??)
 e37 son of the son of Murchadh son of big/great Fearchar
 e38 son of Duncan son of (the son of -----)?
 e39 son of big/great(?) Gille Ádhagáin from whom they are named
 e40 son of Cormac son of Airbheartach
 e41 son of Fearadhach.


I now proceed to my usual line-by-line discussion of Dubhghall Albanach's 1467 text using pen-and-ink sketches, based on spectrally-imaged colour photographs which are superior to those in the website. As always, square brackets indicate illegible or indistinct text, italics indicate expanded contractions (the less obvious ones, at least).

e35 

genelach mhic gabharain [fh]erc[hair] = “The genealogy of the son of Baron Farquhar.”

The contractions for *genelach* and *mhic* are standard. The interpretation of *mhic gabharain* as ‘of the son of [the] Baron’ is based on two assumptions, for both of which there is more than adequate evidence in the rest of the manuscript. The first is that the text, which is basically in the classical written language common to Scotland and Ireland, contains a substantial admixture of what we would now recognise as vernacular Scottish Gaelic – in this case, *mhic a’ Bharain* (vernacular) as opposed to *mhic an Bharúin* (classical). The second is the intrusion of *g* into this sequence. Examples of this which have survived to the present day are Maguire (*Mac Uidhir, Mag Uidhir, Meig Uidhir*), McGuinness or Guinness (*Mac Aonghusa, Mag Aonghusa, Meig Aonghusa*), McLaughlin (*Mac Lochlainn, Mag Lochlainn, Meig Lochlainn*), not to mention the Scottish pronunciation of MacLachlan as Maglochlan. Within Scottish Gaelic there is, or was, a lengthened pronunciation of *Mac Dhomhnaill* as *Màg’ ònaill*, reserved for the MacDonald chief, usually the lord of the Isles; this reflected Irish usage. The genitive case of *màg* was *méig*, so we may assume that what Dubhghall meant was *Geinealach Mhéig a’ Bharain Fhearchair* – a very grand designation indeed.⁶

Which brings us to Farquhar. The manuscript has *enc* or *erc* with a line running along the top of all three letters. The first stroke of the middle letter is a little longer than the second, which allows us to interpret it as *r* in preference to *n*. The genitive case of *Ferchar* is *Fherchair*, and *fh* is silent in Gaelic, so there is

no phonetic difficulty in understanding *erc* as *fherc*. And the suprascript stroke deals summarily with the ending, as suprascript strokes routinely do, not merely in classical Gaelic manuscripts but in shorthand systems generally. It may be countered that *Ferchar* (*Fearchar*) is a very common name in the 1467 MS – as I showed in my article on the Lamont pedigree, it occurs twenty-eight times, which the present instance would increase to twenty-nine – and that nowhere else does Dubhghall write it quite like this; but it can be argued that the mangled rendering  in that pedigree, backed up as *ferchair* by Irish sources, comes pretty close.⁷ At any rate it seems to me that, in light of the appearance of Fearchar Mór (who, as I hope to show, was a baron) at e37, *fherchair* is the only possible reading. With regard to the use of the genitive case, Gaelic grammarians will point out that a noun in apposition should be in the nominative, while admitting that this rule is kept as much in the breach as in the observance, e.g. *crùn an Rìgh Sheumais* for *crùn an Rìgh Seumas* (‘King James’s crown’); once again, we have evidence of Dubhghall’s vernacular, and proof that shaky grammar is no modern phenomenon.

If any readers have the feeling that they have read somewhere else that *mhic gabharain erca* is ‘the son of Baron Farquhar’, it is because I trailed the idea three years ago in my article on the MacEwen pedigree.⁸ However, I had no idea who Baron Farquhar might have been until I read R. L. Macneil’s revelatory ‘The Macneils of Bute’, which summarises evidence first put forward by James King Hewison.⁹

Finally, if we stand back a little from the manuscript text we can understand why young Skene, peering perhaps through flickering gaslight, read ‘Gillalament’ for *gabharainerc* in 1847. We have to criticise him however for misleading his readers in 1880. Nothing resembling ‘Gillaagannan’ appears in this line, and he fails to explain that it was one of the names in the 1467 MS which (in the words of his footnote) ‘cannot be read’. Clearly it is what led Sinclair to state that ‘the Macneils of Barra . . . were originally known as Clann Ghilladhamhnain, or Clan Gilladamnan’. I know of no other authority for this.

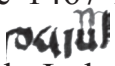
e36 

murchadh mac fer[c]lhair [mhi]c [conai]ll = “Murchadh son of Farquhar son of ?Conall”

The reader might be confused by the beginning of this line. It looks like *amrch* with a suprascript stroke on the *h*; *am* is in fact *mu*, the two minims that make up *u* being joined at the top rather than the bottom, which is common. There is, then, no difficulty with the reading *murchadh*. There is, however, difficulty with *ferchair*. It begins conventionally with *f* and the suprascript compendium for *er*, giving *fer*. Following this is what looks at first sight like *ll*, until it is realised that

the second of these long vertical strokes is part of an *h*, followed by the stroke that Dubhghall routinely employs to show *-ar* or *-air*. In other words, all the elements that usually make up *ferchair* are present and correct except that *c* is replaced by *l* – *ferlhair*. On closer inspection, the *f* has a little beard which could be *c*, and it may be that Dubhghall accidentally wrote *lh*, then, realising his mistake, tried to slip in a little *c* before it.

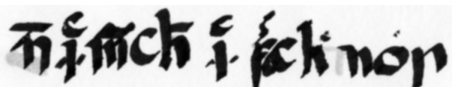
The remainder of the line is difficult. Following *ferchair*, or *ferlhair*, is a suprascript *c* exactly where it should be in the *mhic*-compendium. The *i* that belongs underneath it is missing, but that need not deter us from reading *mhic*, nor did it deter Skene in 1847 or 1880, so I think the matter is settled. Indeed, it is worth noting that one of the dots which Dubhghall regularly puts on either side of the compendium has survived. After this are what look like three doubtful letters, *e* or *c*, *a* or *o*, and *a* or *n*, ending with two that are a little more certain, *ll*. The young Skene, Máire and I were all willing to read *coll* for this, although the name in Gaelic is Colla; to give him credit, the older Skene declined to read anything at all. The genitive case of *Niall* is *Nèill*, but that is not what is in front of us. The most likely solution by far, it seems to me, is *conail*, all of the main elements in which seem to be present except *n* and *i*, though even these can perhaps be accounted for by traces of a suspension-stroke above *o* and the elongated penultimate *l*.

If Conall is the correct reading here, it is one of only two occurrences of the name in the 1467 MS, the other being in the MacEachern pedigree, where it appears as . This is perhaps curious in itself, because it was a common name in early Ireland, borne by a saint, by the Ulster hero Conall Ceithearnach, and by the ancestor of the O'Donnells, Conall Gulban, who gave his name to *Tir Chonaill* (Donegal). The tale 'Eachdraidh Chonaill Ghulban' was once very popular in Gaelic Scotland, but the key to that particular mystery is supplied by the late Alan Bruford, who pointed out that it was 'probably composed in Donegal in the sixteenth century, and by the end of the eighteenth was evidently known throughout the Gaelic-speaking parts of Ireland and Scotland'.¹⁰ Our Conall would have lived about 1300, and it is possible that the MacNeils and MacEacherns of that period had unusually close links with Ireland. There appears to have been a particular aversion in Scotland to baptising children directly with the names of saints: so rather than Conall we have Gille Conaill, hence the surname Mac Gille Chonaill (McWhannell, etc.).¹¹

There is another possibility, which may be considered in light of the evidence adduced below (e37), namely that what may be read here is not 'Conall' or any other personal name but *crúnair* 'crownier'. This would require *c* to be read *cr*, *o* to be read *u*, and *ll* to be read *r*, all of which is possible; the biggest hurdle, it seems to me, is the lack of any trace of the article *an* or *a'* to give us 'the crownier', which would oblige us to argue that the line is in fact *murchadh mac ferchair crúnair* 'Murchadh son of Farquhar the Crownier'. For me this is a step

too far – and perhaps I should add, before any reader suggests it, that the reading *murchadh mac ferchair baran*, ‘Murchadh son of Farquhar the baron’, is open to at least as many objections.

Reckoning by the customary average of thirty years per generation, Murchadh will have lived *c.* 1400, Farquhar *c.* 1370 and Conall *c.* 1340.

e37 

mhic mhic murchaidh mhic ferchair mor = “son of the son of Murchadh son of Farquhar senior”

The line begins with two forms of the *mhic*-compendium, first the one based on *m*, then the one based on *i*. The name that follows, *murchaidh*, is contracted in the standard fashion. Following another *i*-based *mhic*-compendium is *ferchair*, contracted more or less in the standard fashion, although the *c* is badly written (it resembles *ac* ligatured) and the concluding *-air* compendium is perfunctory. The word following it can only be *mór*, I think: the first minim of the *m* is faint but undoubtedly present, and there is what looks like a mark of lenition over the *o*, which must be in error (it should be over the *m*), unless it is intended as a lengthmark, which seems unlikely. (There are few lengthmarks in the manuscript, and Dubhghall writes them as long thin strokes.) Correct spelling and grammar demand *mhóir* here, but spelling and grammar are not Dubhghall’s strong points.

I now translate *ferchair mor* as ‘Farquhar senior’. This is on the basis that in Gaelic custom *òg* (literally ‘young’) is ‘junior’ and *mór* (literally ‘big, great’) is ‘senior’.

Murchadh will have lived *c.* 1280 and Farquhar senior *c.* 1250. We should therefore take seriously the possibility of identifying Farquhar senior with Ferchard of Bute who witnesses charters by Angus, king of the Isles, son of Donald and great-grandson of Somerled who died in 1164. These are to the monastery of Paisley, and are estimated to have been written ‘about the close of the thirteenth century’.¹² One of them includes the words: “Hiis testibus, Alexandro fratre meo, Ferchardo de Buit, Duncano fratre suo, Throsino, Gilberto filio Samuelis, Petro clerico, Henrico Russel, Thoma pistore, Wilelmo de Stragrif, Laurentio clerico, et multis aliis.” That is to say, this charter is also signed by Ferchard’s brother Duncan. The other includes the words: “Hiis testibus, domino Alano de Nes’ milite, Ferchar filio Nigilli de Buyt, Douenaldo clerico de Kilduffbenin, Gilhis Macdunsith, Kennauth Macgilruth, Gilleschop nuntio, et aliis.”¹³ This time Ferchard is *filio Nigilli*, which may be read as ‘son of Neil’ or MacNeil. If our pedigree is accurate, it has to be the latter; if not, it could be either.

According to J. K. Hewison, Ferchard and his immediate forebears were crowners of Bute. The term ‘crowner’, Gaelic *crùnair*, is comparable to the English ‘coroner’ in the restricted sense that such a person was an officer of the

Crown. “It seems to have been within the scope of his duty,” says Hewison, “to watch over all the interests of the Crown within his bounds, assisting at the courts of justice, apprehending and protecting criminals or accused, citing suspects and witnesses, investigating suspicious cases, pointing forfeited goods and lands, acting as coastguardsman in seizing castaway vessels, collecting the Crown rents and dues, and otherwise representing the Crown as a bailie or factor with the powers of a constable . . . In Bute the Crowner was annually entitled to a cow out of the feu-duties of Bute, and a firloft of corn and a lamb from every portioner of a ploughgate of the feu-lands, which numbered sixty-one. The office in the sheriffdom of Bute was held by Nigel or Neill of Kilmorie and his descendants, the Jamiesons of the same place.”¹⁴ Kilmory is on the west side of the island, as indeed is Kildavanan, presumably the domicile of ‘Douenaldo clerico de Kildufbenin’ who followed Ferchard in signing the second charter.

James, the eponym of the Jamiesons, was presumably a brother of Murchadh with whom our pedigree begins (e36). His son Neil (*Nigellus Jacobi*) was the chamberlain (*camerarius*) of Bute, regularly handing in his accounts of the rents paid by Crown tenants there. “When the king was in residence in Rothesay, 1458, Niel made such a poor mouth about the bad weather for the past twenty-two years and the loss of his fees from Arran, which had been scoured by raiders in 1444, that the compassionate monarch allowed him an extra payment of 8 chalders, for his vexations in gathering and despatching the royal rents, or marts, to the moving Court. He seems to have been succeeded by his son James, for in 1501 we find Fergus, the son of James, Crowner of Bute, making a grant of two shillings to the Friars Preachers of Glasgow. In 1506, Robert Jameson is enumerated among the so-called ‘Barons of Bute’ who received charters from King James IV; and in 1534, apparently the same individual, Robert Neilsoun, is confirmed by James V. in the Crownership of the island and sheriffdom of Bute with the feus, which office had, according to the deed of grant, then lost, been held hereditarily by the family above two hundred years.”¹⁵

We are being told, then, that the MacNeil family had held the office of crowner since at least 1334, which appears to take us only as far back as the time of Fearchar Mór’s unnamed grandson; on the other hand, here at last is evidence, dated less than forty years after the writing of the 1467 MS, that the family were called barons, precisely as in our title ‘The genealogy of the son of Baron Farquhar’, which presumably refers to Fearchar Òg.

We can connect Bute with Barra. As is well known, the Norse-Gaelic warrior Somerled had three surviving sons by the daughter of Olaf the Red, king of Man and the Isles – Dugald, Ronald and Angus. On Somerled’s death Dugald received Lorn, Benderloch, Lismore, Mull, Coll and Tiree, Ronald probably received Islay, Jura, Kintyre, Morvern and Ardnamurchan, and Angus appears to have received Bute, Arran, Skye, Rum, Eigg, Uist, Barra and the lordship of Garmoran (presumably *Garbh-Mhórróinn* ‘Rough Bounds’), that is, Moidart, Arisaig,

Morar and Knoydart. Bute, the most vulnerable part of the Norse kingdom of the Isles, was seized almost immediately by the Steward of Scotland – he possessed the island at least as early as 1204 – and seems to have changed masters several times. In 1210 Angus was killed in Skye with his three sons, following which his territories were redivided. Islay and South Kintyre fell to Ronald's son Donald, eponym of the MacDonalds, and Bute with North Kintyre fell to his other son Roderick or Ruairi, founder of the powerful MacRuairi dynasty.

Many years later, according to Hakon's Saga, a man called Rudri 'who thought that he had a hereditary right to Bute' approached King Hakon (probably while his fleet lay at Kerrera) and complained to him about Scots aggression. 'Rudri' represents one of two Gaelic names, Ruaidhrí or Rudhraighe; it has been suggested that he was a great-grandson of Somerled, and that his forebears had been dispossessed of the island during Alexander II's campaign of 1222 in the Firth of Clyde. At any rate, his complaints led to the expedition which terminated in the battle of Largs. That was in 1263, during the lifetime of Farquhar senior. Rudri's restoration to Bute lasted just three years until 1266, when the kingdom of the Isles was formally ceded to Scotland by the Norse crown. The MacRuairi brothers Dugald and Allan were forced to resign their claim to Bute, but after agreeing to remain subjects of Scotland they were reassigned fresh lands in islands further north. On Dugald's death Allan reunited their possessions, and later acquired Garmoran as well.

By the time of the Wars of Independence the *de facto* leader of the MacRuairis was Allan's illegitimate son Ruairi, half-brother of his legitimate daughter Christina. He received Lorn, or most of it, as his reward for supporting Bruce, but was later forfeited of all his possessions for plotting against the throne, as a result of which the rival house of Islay, now represented by Aonghas Óg, rose to ever greater power and prominence. When David II returned from France in 1341, however, he recognised the need to ensure the loyalty of the MacRuairis as well as the MacDonalds. To John son of Aonghas Óg he granted or regranted Islay, Gigha, Jura, Scarba, Colonsay, Mull, Coll, Tiree, Lewis, Morvern, Lochaber, Duror and Glencoe, while Ronald son of Ruairi, representing the MacRuairis, received a charter to Uist, Barra, Eigg, Rum and Garmoran. Then in 1346 Ronald was killed at Perth in a quarrel with the earl of Ross, leaving no heir in terms of David II's grant but his sister Amy, wife of John of Islay. John joined the MacRuairi territories to his own, and began to style himself *Dominus Insularum*. His youngest son by Amy – Ronald, ancestor of the Clan Ranald – still held the superiority of Barra in 1373.¹⁶

A glance at the full Barra pedigree as it appears in *The Clan Macneil* reveals a sudden alteration at this point. Coming down from the year dot it had consisted mainly of the names Niall, Muirheartach and Aodh, but suddenly, following the appearance of a 'Murchard', these disappear to be replaced by Rodericks and Gilleonans.¹⁷ This was noticed by the late Sir Iain Moncreiffe, who pointed out

that ‘the banner of Macneil of Barra displays a quartering of the Black Galley, the emblem of the MacRuairis as a branch of the Blood Royal of the Isles, and there seems no doubt that the Galley descended to the Macneils, together with the characteristic name of Ruari and indeed the island of Barra itself, through a female-line descent from the House of MacRuairi’.¹⁸ It is a powerful argument. It suggests that part of the family which had run Bute prior to 1266, and were indeed continuing to do so under the Stewarts, had remained faithful to their MacRuairi masters through thick and thin, and had now received their reward in the form of Barra. It raises the strong likelihood that the ‘Murchard’ of the Barra pedigree is not another Muirheartach, as R. L. Macneil tried to suggest, but the Murchadh (a different name) with whom the 1467 MS pedigree begins.¹⁹ The people of Barra had of course never heard of the pen-pushing MacNeils of Bute, but they had heard of the legendary Niall Naoighiallach, ‘Neil of the Nine Hostages’, king of Ireland, so a splendid new pedigree was constructed to link Murchadh with him instead, thus conjuring up the first twenty-three chiefs of R. L. Macneil’s enumeration.²⁰

e38 

mhic donnchaidh mhic mhic ab l[esa mor] = “son of Duncan son of the son of the abbot of ?Lismore”

The first three words could not be clearer. The first *mhic* is in the form normally used at the beginning of a line, the second in the form normally used in the interior of a line. In both 1847 and 1880 Skene read what follows as Nicaill, but this depends on a misunderstanding of Gaelic calligraphy. Letters were not written suprascript for no reason, and if one were omitted by mistake, it was written above or below its proper place; if above, supported by a caret, just as we would do nowadays, except that the caret takes the form //. Suprascript *c* usually indicates *ac*, *aic* or *ic*, and I believe that is exactly what we have here, *mhic*.

Both in 1847 and in 1880 Skene was guilty of failing to tell us that there was anything else in the line. My sketch shows exactly what can be seen, without prejudice, and the website of 2009 indicates some of the choices that may be made. To sum up, following *mhic* we have *a*, then *l* or *b*, then apparently a space, then *l*, then perhaps *c* or *e* with something superscript, and finally a dreadful mess which might contain *b*. This points in the direction of a reading which occurs in the MacLean pedigree, *ab l[esa mor] san ab i* ‘abbot of Lismore, formerly abbot of Iona’. It would be possible to interpret the penultimate letter here as *e*, surmounted by a vague contraction for *sa*, and followed by *m* surmounted by *o* (for *mor*) exactly as in the following line: in other words, *ab l[esa mor]* ‘the abbot of Lismore’. In the MacLean pedigree the abbot of Lismore, formerly abbot of Iona, is *Cú Duiligh mac Fhraing mhic seanDubhghaill á Lios*

mhic Fhearchair Abhradhruaidh, ‘Cú Duiligh son of Francis son of old Dugald from Lis(more) son of Farquhar of the Red Eyebrows’. If the MacLean pedigree is correct down to this point, Cú Duiligh lived *c.* 1160, in which case his father was unlikely to have been called Francis, as the popularity of that name was entirely due to the fame of St Francis of Assisi (1181/2–1226).²¹

It would be possible to read the word before *ab* not as the *m*-based *mhic*-compendium but as yet another instance of *mor*, thus rendering the line as ‘son of Duncan son of the great abbot of Lismore’. It has to be said, however, that the letter above *m* looks very open (like a *c*) and not closed or nearly closed (like an *o*) as in the other two examples in e38 and e39.

Duncan will have lived *c.* 1220 and our unnamed abbot of Lismore *c.* 1190 or 1160, which makes him contemporary with that other abbot of Lismore, Cú Duiligh. There is, I think, no need to suppose confusion between the Duncan of our pedigree and the Duncan who signed the Paisley charter (see notes on e37). It will suffice to point out that Duncan senior appears to have been a grandson of the abbot of Lismore, and that he had sons called Farquhar and Duncan, both of whom were literate. All of this makes perfect sense. More importantly, it will be noted that no name is given either for Duncan’s father or for the abbot of Lismore. It seems highly likely, then, that this unnamed son of the abbot of Lismore was Neil, the eponym of the MacNeils – which reminds us that Cú Duiligh, the abbot of Lismore in the MacLean pedigree, also had a son Neil. This raises the possibility – and it is merely a possibility – that the MacNeils and MacLeans share a common ancestor, and that the descent of Cú Duiligh as given in the MacLean pedigree (*mac Fhraing mhic seanDubhghaill á Lios mhic Fhearchair Abhradhruaidh mhic Fearadhaigh mhic Fearghusa mhic Neachtáin mhic Colmáin mhic Leathain mhic Morgainn mhic Domhnaill mhic Cathmhaoil mhic Ruaidhrí mhic Fearghusa Uallaigh mhic Eathach*) is entirely fabricated, even in its first few steps.

There are no doubt many reasons why the MacLeans should wish to distinguish themselves from the MacNeils in this way. One is suggested by the events of *c.* 1420, when Roderick MacNeil of Barra, son of Murchadh, seized the island of Coll and held it against the MacLeans for three years. He was building himself a stronghold at Grishipol on the north shore, suitable for communications with Barra, when John MacLean (*Iain Garbh*) returned from exile in Ireland and killed him. Iain Garbh went on the offensive and captured both Barra and Boisdale (the south end of S. Uist). In 1427, however, Roderick’s son Gilleonan obtained a charter to Barra and Boisdale which implied that his right to Barra came to him through his mother’s mother, stating that the lands were to descend to the sons *inter Rodericum Makneill et filiam Ferchard Makgilleoin procreatis* (‘procreated between Roderick MacNeil and the daughter of Farquhar MacLean’). Iain Garbh grudgingly surrendered Barra and Boisdale and went on to establish himself firmly as the chief of the MacLeans of Coll.²² This does not explain, however, why the

name Neil should have been retained in the MacLean pedigree and skipped over in the MacNeil one – if anything, we might have expected the opposite.

Of the monastery of Lismore we know very little, except that it was founded by St Moluag *c.* AD 564. Robert Hay refers to ‘a list of early abbots’, but that is an exaggeration.²³ We have the names of Moluag’s successor Neamhan mac Ua Druidh (d. 610 or 611), his successor Eochaidh (d. 637), St Dubhoc, Tarnlag (d. *c.* 700), Mac Coigeth (d. 753) and, finally, Cú Duiligh (*c.* 1160x90), assumed to have been a layman who usurped the office, as had become common by that time. In 1236 Lismore became the seat of a bishop, and the monastery ceased to exist, if it had not done so already.²⁴

e39 

m̄h̄c̄ gillaagan mor o fuilid = “son of Gille Ádhagáin senior from whom they are named”

The reading *gillaagan* is clear, except that there may be something squeezed in the middle of *aa*, possibly even a *d*, giving *gilladagan* (Gille Ádhamháin). The name is certainly based on that of Columba’s biographer St Adomnan; in this form it resembles that of the MacLagan (*Mac Gille Ádhamháin*) eponym, but in Barra, as elsewhere, it became Gilleonan (*Gille Eódhnain*). For *mor* see line e38. The formula *o fuilid*, properly *ó bhfuilid*, occurs four times in the 1467 MS, but this is the only instance in which the verb is synthetic, i.e. contains its subject (‘from whom they are’); in the other three instances (Mackintoshes, Nicolsons, MacKinnons) it is analytic and therefore, by definition, followed by its subject, e.g. *m̄h̄c̄ gillachatain o fuilid clann gilla catain* ‘son of Gille Catáin from whom are the Clan Chattan’. Here the *u* is joined at the top instead of the bottom, as in e36; it is followed by *i*, then *l*, then the so-called *et*-compendium, which closely resembles the number 7 and stands for the common Latin word *et* (‘and’) or anything like it, e.g. *ed, it, id*. This of course is the line which gave Skene his heading ‘Genealach m̄h̄c̄ Gillaagamnan’, but he was quite wrong in translating it ‘Genealogy of the MacLennans’. The MacLennans are *Clann M̄h̄c̄ Gill’ Fhinnein*.

Gille Ádhagáin senior will have lived *c.* 1160 or perhaps *c.* 1130, during the time of Somerled. He bears the generally accepted name of Somerled’s grandfather, who was of course an ancestor of the MacRuairis, as was Somerled himself.²⁵ It could be argued that the translation ‘senior’ is inappropriate as no other Gille Ádhagáin is mentioned, but other persons of the name may have occurred outside the direct line of succession. The name is not a common one. It is a link in the chain of evidence that connects the genealogy of the son of Baron Farquhar with the MacNeils, and specifically with the MacNeils of Barra, several of whose chiefs (as we have seen) bore the name Gille Eódhnain. When

Dubhghall writes ‘from whom they are named’, however, one wonders how to define ‘they’. The simplest and least helpful answer is ‘all the other persons in the pedigree’. Maclean Sinclair’s was ‘the MacNeils of Barra’. An alternative is ‘the MacNeils and Jamesons of Bute’, but perhaps that begs the question of why a kindred with two names should have been known by a third. There is an answer which is very literally correct: the MacLagans, whose eponym was clearly a Gille Ádhagáin and not a Gille Eódhnain. The MacLagans were a minor kindred from Strath Tay, and perhaps the only thing that can be said of them for sure is that they belonged to that part of Scotland which was most thoroughly steeped in the cult of St Adomnan.²⁶ There is also evidence for his cult in South Kintyre, in the Loch Lomond area, in Aberdeenshire and in Banffshire, with outliers in Lothian, Angus, Campsie, Badenoch and North Uist, but if one were to ask where a twelfth-century man named Gille Ádhagáin was most likely to have originated, the answer is central Perthshire.²⁷ (Curiously, 350 years later, Sir James MacGregor, compiler of the Book of the Dean of Lismore, was titular dean of the cathedral of Lismore, and he, too, was from central Perthshire.) In this case, however, given the Somerled connection, South Kintyre is equally likely.

e40 

mhic cormaic mhic airbe[rta]ig = “son of Cormac son of Airbheartach”

The initial *mhic*-compendium looks very odd. The reading *cormaic* is clear, though the suprascript *c* is hard to see. The calligraphy of *airbertaig* is not very precise: perhaps the penultimate letter is *r* with a shortened left-hand stroke, as in *erc* at e35, and the mark above *g* is meant to stand for *tai*. Not that there is the slightest doubt as to who are meant. Cormac and his father Airbheartach feature in the pedigrees of the Green Abbot, MacGregors, Gillanderses, MacDuffies, MacMillans, MacQuarries and MacKinnons.

If this part of the pedigree were to be taken as historical fact, Cormac would have lived *c.* 1130 or 1100 and Airbheartach *c.* 1100 or 1070.

e41 

mhic feradh[aigh] = “son of Fearadhach.”

This line is hard to read, and was not read at all by Skene. It contains enough, however, for us to be sure of what is intended: the superscript curl that betrays the *er* of *fer*; the *a*; the *d*; and part of the final *h*, with the mark that indicates *aigh*. There appears to be an *i* between the *a* and the *d*, but perhaps it is part of the *a*. Five of the seven pedigrees cited above as including Cormac mac Airbheartaigh also include Fearadhach, though his relationship to Airbheartach varies: in the Green Abbot’s pedigree he is his great-great-grandfather, in the MacGregor pedigree

he is his great-grandfather Fearadhach Fionn, in the Gillanders pedigree he is his father, in the MacDuffie pedigree he is his grandfather, and in the MacQuarrie pedigree he is his great-great-great-great-grandfather. This sheds some light on the lack of internal consistency which makes the 1467 MS an unreliable source, but Skene probably put his finger on it when he remarked that ‘there is every reason to think that the genealogies contained in the MS. are perfectly authentic for the last *fourteen* generations, or as far back as the year 1000 A.C., but that previous to that date they are to be regarded as altogether fabulous’.²⁸

This is the appropriate place to take note of a remark made by Christopher Beaton *c.* 1700 in the so-called Black Book of Clanranald. His version of the linked MacKenzie/MacLean pedigree ends ‘*mhic ferchir fada ri alban o bfuilid clann coinndigh, clann chatan, clann grigoir, clann fionguin, clann ghuair, clann neill bharra ⁊ ghigha, clann neachtuin, clann duibhshith, ⁊ morginnuigh mar adir cuid mhor áoca*’ (‘son of Fearchar Fada king of Scotland, from whom are the MacKenzies, the Clan Chattan, the MacGregors, the MacKinnons, the MacQuarries, the MacNeils of Barra and Gigha, the MacNaughtons, the MacDuffies and the MacKays of Strathnaver, as most of them claim’).²⁹ This is a very similar list to the one with which we have just been dealing, and it appears to add Fearchar Fada to the MacNeil pedigree. (He is not in R. L. Macneil’s version of the pedigree, nor indeed is Cormac or Airbheartach.) He is certainly a familiar figure in the 1467 MS, appearing as follows: twelfth in the pedigree of Maelsnechta son of Lulach king of Scotland (*mhic ferchair fada mhic fearadhaigh mhic fergususa*); twenty-first in the MacNaughton pedigree (again, *mhic ferchair fhada mhic feradhaigh mhic ferghusa*); thirtieth in the Mackintosh and Clan Chattan pedigree (*mhic conlaith mhic ferchair fhota mhic fearadhaigh*); fourteenth in the MacGregor pedigree (*mhic ferchairdi mhic ferchair fhada mhic feradhaigh finn*); fifteenth in the MacDuffie pedigree (*mhic cormaic mhic airbertaigh mhic ferchair fhada mhic feradhaigh*); and thirteenth in the MacQuarrie pedigree (*mhic finnlæich mhic fearchair fada mhic feradaigh*). Of those listed by Beaton, that only leaves the MacKenzies, the MacKinnons and the MacKays of Strathnaver, but these can be accounted for: through Gille Eoin na h-Àirde the MacKenzies are related to the Gillanderses, who are brought back to *mhic ferchair mhic cormaic mhic airbertaigh mhic feradhaigh*, presumably stopping short before Fearchar Fada; the MacKinnons are brought back to *mhic cormaic mhic airbertaigh mhic murchaidh mhic ferchair oig*, which implies the existence of an earlier Farquhar; finally, the MacKays of Strathnaver are not present in the manuscript, though the MacKays of Ugadale are. As the late Ian Grimble pointed out, the origins of the northern MacKays are a matter of dispute between theories of descent from King Duncan, the first earl of Ross, the Forbeses and Moddan of the Norse sagas.³⁰ Beaton would presumably have taken them from the earl of Ross, but curiously the name Farquhar appears in the story of MacKay origins told by Sir Robert Gordon, who mildly favoured the Forbes option, but whose principal aim was to

befoul his narrative with stains of illegitimacy. “One called Walter (reported by some to have bein the bastard sone of the Lord Forbesse his predicessour, who at that time wes not yit of the surname of Forbesse), came vpon some occasion into the dyocie of Catteynes, and did so insinuat himselff into the bishop of Catteynes his favour, that he obteyned of him to be his chamberlane and factor for taking vp of his rents. In end, he becam so familiar with the bishop’s base daughter, called Conchar, that he begat her with chyld, who wes called Martin; whervpon the bishop gave vnto his bastard grandchyld Martin some possessions of his churchlands in Strathnaver. Martin (the sone of Walter) wes slain at Kean-Loch-Eylk, in Lochaber, and had a sone called Magnus. Magnus died in Strathnaver, leaveing tuo sones, Morgan and Farquhar. From this Morgan the whole familie of Macky is generally called Clan-wic-Worgan, in Irish or old Scottish, which language is most as yit vsed in that cuntrey. From Farquhar the Clan-wic-Farquhar in Strathnaver ar descended. Morgan begat Donald. Donald mareid the daughter of Y-Mack-Neill-Ghika, by whom he had a sone called Y, so called from his gran[d] father Y-Mack-Neill-Ghika. Y begat Donald, who wes called Donald Mack-Y, that is, Donald the sone of Y; since which tyme (discontinuing to be of any other surname) that familie hath bene still called Macky.”³¹

The alleged MacNeil of Gigha marriage is credible on two counts: firstly because it is supported by Christopher Beaton’s linkage of the MacNeils of Gigha and the MacKays of Strathnaver through Fearchar Fada, and secondly because it avoids the obvious, which would have been to claim a connection with the MacKays of Ugadale, who were powerful figures in the lordship of the Isles.

If this part of the MacNeil pedigree were to be taken as historical fact, Fearadhach would have lived *c.* 1070 or 1040.

I have, I think, established beyond reasonable doubt that our pedigree is that of the first MacNeil of Barra, and that his father ‘Baron Farquhar’ was of the crowners of Bute. I am as surprised as anyone by this conclusion, as I had expected the evidence from Bute to lead to Knapdale. The pedigree is probably genuine as far back as Gille Ádhagáin, a twelfth-century contemporary of Somerled, who may have been a native of South Kintyre or of central Perthshire. Perhaps the former is more likely, given Dubhghall Albanach’s interest in the tribes of South Kintyre. Good information on MacLagan origins, if such is to be had, could shed light on this.

I have failed, then, to find any connections with the MacNeils of Argyllshire, other than Christopher Beaton’s claim that the MacNeils of Barra and Gigha share a common descent from Fearchar Fada, who was, as Sellar points out, a historical seventh-century king of Dalriada.³² This is surprising, in that with a good wind the MacNeil heartland of Knapdale is only three or four hours’ sailing from the western shore of Bute, and that (as I pointed out at the beginning) in the 1467 MS the MacNeil pedigree nestles between those of the MacMillans and

the MacLeans. Perhaps if this position in our manuscript means anything at all, it is that, as suggested above (e38), MacNeils and MacLeans are branches of the same stem. We know from MacFirbis that the MacLean eponym, Gillean of the Battle-Axe (*Gilleain na Tuaighe*), had three sons, Bristi, Gille Brighde and Maol Íosa. Maol Íosa (also known as Mael Íosóg or Gille Íosa) was a progenitor of the MacLeans, as was his son Malcolm or Gille Colaim, who married Rignach or Ríoghnach, daughter of a mormaer or lord of Carrick. They had three sons, Donald, Neil and John, of whom John is in the direct line of the MacLean pedigree.³³ The Rev. Alexander Maclean Sinclair remarked in 1909 that the MacNeils of Argyllshire ‘are evidently descended from Neil, second son of Malcolm Maclean in Kintyre’.³⁴ This appears to have been a stab in the dark, as he had said no such thing when discussing the three brothers in 1899.³⁵ Very judiciously, Nicholas Maclean-Bristol has remarked that there is no traditional evidence to support the theory and that it has found little favour with scholars, but he adds two points, ‘that the only hereditary constables of castles in the Lordship of the Isles were Macleans and MacNeills and that in 1481 both MacNeill and Maclean claimed land in Knapdale’.³⁶ It is easy to play this game: for example, as Skene pointed out, in 1539 James V appointed Alane McLane ‘Toschachdoir of all Kintyre, from the Mull to Altasynach’ and in 1542 he granted Neill mac Neill the same office.³⁷

One commentator who did buy into Sinclair’s theory was the late Somerled MacMillan, who wrote: “Gillise, youngest son of Gillean of the Battle-Axe, settled in Kintyre, and his son Malcolm appears there as a landlord in 1296. He married Reena, grand-daughter of the Lord of Carrick, and their second son Neil became the progenitor of those MacNeils belonging to Argyllshire. His birth was around 1305. The son of Neil was Malcolm, better known as Calum MacNeil, and he was the first of the Argyllshire MacNeils.”³⁸

Niall D. Campbell, the scholarly 10th duke of Argyll, was of a different view. In 1912 he pointed to Aodh Álainn (d. 1047) as ‘the common ancestor of the chief clans of Cowall, viz. the MacLachlans, the Lamonts, and the MacNeills of Kintyre (but not the Barra family who appear to have sprung from a totally different stock)’. Then he mentioned Aodh’s three sons Gille Críost, Niall and Duinnsleíbhe, and remarked that ‘from Niall is said to have sprung the MacNeills of Kintyre’.³⁹ Two years later he saw the need to emphasise the point. Referring disapprovingly to Sinclair’s opinion on the Argyllshire MacNeils, he declared: “There is no doubt that they come from the same original stock as the Lamonts, MacSuibhnes, *alias* MacEwens of Otter and Castle Swein, and the MacLachlans.”⁴⁰ In 1981 Donald J. McNeill reviewed the entire question, taking into account the views of Sinclair, MacMillan, Duke Niall, David Sellar and others. He concluded very sagaciously that while it is possible that some MacNeils may have been ‘name-changed MacLeans’, the idea that this gave rise to the kindred in general ‘would be hard to reconcile with McNeill genealogies

and beliefs'. I part company with him, however, when he declares that the 1467 MS supports Duke Niall's view of the matter. It does not. Perhaps he was basing this notion on a claim made by R. L. Macneil in *The Clan Macneil*, see below.⁴¹

One of the most persistent names among the Argyllshire MacNeils is *Eachann*, Hector. Referring to a precept of sasine of 1548 by Archibald, master of Argyll, to Niall McNeill VcAchin (*Niall mac Nèill mhic Eachainn*) of Taynish, Herbert Campbell remarks that this Niall is obviously identical with Niall McNeill VcAuchin, father of Donald and John McNeill VcAuchin who were to receive a charter of the island of St Makchormik from Colin earl of Argyll in 1574, and he makes the telling point that 'it would appear that it was touch and go whether the patronymic [= *surname*] of the lairds of Taynish became MacNeill or MacEacharn'.⁴²

The first MacNeil in Argyllshire is said to have been Torquil son of Neil, who received a charter from the lord of the Isles in 1440 granting him the isle of Gigha, various lands in Knapdale, the constabulary of Castle Sween, and the toshachdorship of Knapdale. Lacking any earlier information, we probably have to assume that Torquil's father was the eponym, in which case the family certainly has nothing to do with the MacNeils of Barra. R. L. Macneil put it slightly differently, describing Neil, the first of the MacNeils of Taynish and Gigha, as 'said to have been a brother of Murchard (XXVII) Macneil of Barra', but giving no evidence. More recently, David Sellar has suggested that Torquil may have been a MacSween.⁴³ In either case the name Torquil is in my opinion a stumbling-block. It is pure Norse, unlike any name whatever in the pedigrees of Baron Farquhar, the MacSweens or the Barra MacNeils (Neil is Gaelic *Niall*, borrowed by the Norse as *Njal*); it is very persistent, occurring repeatedly among the MacNeils of Taynish and Gigha, and reappearing among the MacNeils of Tirfergus.

In this respect the Argyllshire MacNeils are perfectly typical of their home area, if this be defined as the Atlantic shores of Mid Argyll. Immediately to the north, around Loch Craignish, were the *Clann Dhubhghaill* or Craignish Campbells, who were not really Campbells at all and favoured a series of uncampbellesque names, notably Ronald, which is Norse, but also Farquhar and Malcolm, which are not.⁴⁴ The next fjord again to the north, Loch Melfort, was home to the MacIvers of Asknish, who naturally favoured Iver/Ivor (also Norse) and never fully made up their minds whether they should call themselves Campbell.⁴⁵ Finally, isolated at the other end of Loch Awe to the east were the MacCorquodales of Phantilands, who used no Norse forenames at all, as far as is known, but whose surname was derived from an alternative form of 'Torquil': *pórketill*, Gaelic *Torcadal*, rather than *pórkell*, Gaelic *Torcall*, all meaning originally 'Thor's Kettle', 'Thor's Helmet'.⁴⁶ I would suggest that it is to the MacCorquodales that we should look for clues to the identity of Torquil son of Neil.

There is a very touching Gaelic poem in the Book of the Dean of Lismore

by Aiffric nic Coirceadail, which we should probably translate as ‘Euphemia daughter of Torquil’ rather than ‘Euphemia MacCorquodale’. It is to Neil son of Torquil MacNeil of Gigha, known as *Niall Óg*, who died *c.* 1460. The poem conveys a strong sense of the MacNeils as an established kindred whose heartland was in Gigha and Knapdale (Castle Sween and Sliabh Guill are mentioned), but who were also well known in South Kintyre, Islay, Mull, Lewis and around the shores of Ireland.⁴⁷ These MacNeils, along with the *Clann Dhubhghaill*, the MacIvers and the MacCorquodales, appear to have been a Norse remnant on the outermost edge of the Scottish kingdom who throve under the sons of Somerled, and had become thoroughly gaelicised by the time the first earl of Argyll received a royal grant of lands in Knapdale – along with the keeping of Castle Sween – in 1481.⁴⁸ After that they were politically absorbed into the Campbell empire. They recognised no overall chief except Mac Cailein Mór, but stayed loyal to their surname, and continued to look west and south, maintaining strong trading (and free-trading) links with Ireland down to the eighteenth century. They had, I believe, nothing to do with the old MacNeils of Bute, or the new MacNeils of Barra.

Finally, since this article contests the early part of the MacNeil of Barra genealogy as published from five seemingly impeccable sources in *The Clan MacNeil*, it would be as well to subject these five sources to scrutiny. The author, Robert Lister Macneil (RLM), lists them carefully.⁴⁹ My comments on them are as follows.

(1) **The 1467 MS.** In his own admission, RLM’s claim that the 1467 MS backs up the genealogy which he prints is based solely on the words ‘Hugh Aonrachan from whom (descend) Clan Neil’, which, he says, are in the manuscript.⁵⁰ I have failed to find them. There is no ‘Hugh Aonrachan’ in the 1467 MS, but there is an Anradhán who had a son Aodh Álainn, nicknamed Buirce (Lamonts, MacLachlans). RLM may be paraphrasing something in the MacLachlan pedigree, first rendered by Skene in 1839 as *Cained ic Eoin . . . mc Dedaalain renabarta buirce mc Anradan condergaid clann Niel nai giall* ‘Keneth son of John . . . son of Dedalan called the clumsy, son of Henry from whom are descended also the clan Niell’. In 1880 Skene changed this to *Caineach mac Eoin . . . mic Aeda Alain renabarta Buirche mic Anradan condregaided Clanna Neill Nai Giallach* ‘Kenneth son of John . . . son of Aeda Alain called Buirche son of Anradan where it converges with the Clan Niall Naoi Giallach’.⁵¹ I suspect that RLM took the words from a collection of notes made in a library, perhaps by his mother. ‘Aodh Aonrachan, or Hugh the Solitary’ duly appears in his book as twentieth chief.

(2) **A Scots Magazine obituary of 1763.** It states: “*May . . . 7.* At Borrough [= *Borve*] in Barra, Roderick Macneil of Barra, Esq; aged 70. He was the

nineteenth generation from the first of his predecessors who settled in Barra, in the time of Malcolm II. King of Scotland, about the year 1030; and the thirty-fifth generation from one of the six sons of Murtach, son of Owen, son of Neil Noaigeallach, or *The hero of nine hostages*, monarch of Ireland in the year 371; from whom the O'Neils in Ireland, and the M'Neils in Scotland, derive their surnames."⁵² RLM remarks on this that 'the number of generations above set forth agrees exactly with those recorded', but this may well be a circular argument, for no doubt the obituary found its way into the 'Barra Register', source no. 4.⁵³

- (3) **The 'Barra Song'**. This Gaelic waulking-song, which is certainly 'centuries old' as RLM says, refers to a number of MacNeil chiefs. RLM had it from Marjory Kennedy-Fraser's collection, but we can now do much better than that, as Dr John Lorne Campbell of Canna (JLC) recorded numerous versions of what appear to be two different songs of the same type, including Kennedy-Fraser's, and published them together in 1977 with copious notes.⁵⁴ These songs are flytings between a Barra woman (Nic Iain Fhinn) and a Uist woman (Nic a' Mhanaich), uproariously over-the-top, in which the Barra woman boasts among many other things (in JLC's translation): "Where did ever sit in chamber . . . / A daughter of laird or thane / Of whom young Gilleonan was unworthy?" And: "I'd be better outside in my plaid, / Than listening to the slander I've heard, / Always abusing Neil of the Castle." And: "Where did you leave [= *forget about*] Rory the Noisy? / Or Neil Black-knee or Neil of the Showers / or Gilleonan the great hero?" And: "Little black thief who broke the fetters, / You sea hag of the skin coverings, / I'll put on you the 'black mare' [= *I'll beat you*]; / Where did you leave Rory the Noisy? / And his famed son Neil of the Castle? / And Neil Black-knee, and Neil of the Showers? / My music, my laughter [was] Rory the Noisy, / Who'd give wine to his horses, / Who would shod them with gold horseshoes, / Who'd put flour on the dew for them?"⁵⁵ JLC scrupulously ignores RLM's book, so it may be useful to provide a little biographical digest of the individuals mentioned, beginning in each case with the number which RLM allots to them in the chiefly line, and citing the pages of *The Clan Macneil* and *Hebridean Folksongs* vol. 2 at which notes on them by RLM and JLC appear.

X. 'Neil of the Showers' is Niall Frasach, High King of Ireland 763–70, who died as a monk at Iona in 778. He was great-grandfather of Niall Glùndubh. RLM 19–20, JLC 235–36.

XIV. 'Neil Black-knee' is Niall Glùndubh, High King of Ireland 916–19, 'claimed as an ancestor by the MacNeils of Barra', as JLC says. He appears in the Lamont pedigree.⁵⁶ RLM 22, JLC 235.

- XV. RLM's 'Muirceartach na Cochall Croiceann' (22–23) appears in one of the songs as *Muilgheartach nan cochull craicinn* 'of the skin coverings'. JLC says (237): "This was taken by Miss Annie Johnston to refer to the Muilgheartach, the monster sea-hag from Norway who came from Lochlann to Ireland to challenge the Fiantaichean, the subject of a popular ballad which may still survive in South Uist (it was extant 20 years ago there). See Reidar Christiansen, *The Vikings and the Viking Wars . . . in Gaelic Tradition*, pp. 215 and 359. It is, however, an odd coincidence that the name of Niall Glùndubh's most famous son was Muirheartach na gCochull gCraiceann, 'M. of the Leather Cloaks', who made a circuit of Ireland with only a thousand men, and fell fighting against the Norsemen in 943 (see the *Annals of the Four Masters*).” Like his father, Muirheartach appears in the Lamont pedigree.⁵⁷ As for the ballad of the Muilgheartach, it is well known from other sources.⁵⁸
- XXXIII. 'Gilleonan the great hero' is probably the Gilleonan who was Ruairi an Tartair's father or grandfather, and who was a member of the council of the Isles formed in 1545 to treat with Henry VIII. Intriguingly, RLM notes that Gilleonan 'helped the English forces burn the Island of Bute'. RLM 52–56, JFC 236.
- XXXV. 'Rory the Noisy' (or 'Rory the Turbulent' as RLM has it) is Ruairi an Tartair, who had two families, one legitimate and one illegitimate. In 1613 he and his legitimate son Gilleonan were seized and imprisoned by his illegitimate sons Niall Òg and Gilleonan. RLM 62–74, JLC 234–35.
- XXXVI. 'Neil of the Castle' is Niall a' Chaisteil, father of Gill' Eóghanain Òg; as JLC says, 'the appellation may have arisen from his seizure of Kismul Castle in 1613'. RLM 74–82 (for the seizure see 72–73), JLC 231, 235.
- XXXVII. 'Young Gilleonan' is Gill' Eóghanain Òg (son of Niall a' Chaisteil), who lived quietly in the time of Cromwell and Charles II (c. 1630–90), and was well respected. RLM 82–83, JLC 231.

Of these seven individuals, the first three belong to the 'spurious' (pre AD 1000) part of the Barra pedigree, the last four to the 'genuine' part. JLC has pointed out that, as a whole, our waulking-songs 'give a vivid picture of life in the Highlands and Islands in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries from the women's point of view'.⁵⁹ If the identifications and dates given above are correct, these particular songs cannot have reached their final form until about 1650. It seems, then, that the popular tradition of tracing the Barra line back to Niall Naoighiallach was in place by that time, but there is nothing in our sources that enables us to push the date back any further.

- (4) **The 'Barra Register'**. This was a written collection of materials relating to the MacNeils of Barra, kept up by a number of hands. It disappeared from sight in Oban in the early twentieth century. I recall corresponding with JLC about it on behalf of the National Library in the 1970s. RLM provides a good deal of circumstantial detail concerning it, but it is not in fact one of

his sources. Neither he nor any member of his family had seen the register itself, nor any copies made from it.⁶⁰

- (5) **Oral tradition.** RLM's specific source of oral information, noted down by his mother, was Michael Buchanan (b. 1843), who was proud of having once seen and examined the 'Barra Register' in Oban. "Michael was a Barraman whose great interest in life was the genealogy of the Clan Neil. In this he had followed in the footsteps of his older and departed friend, Michael Macneil. When my mother and I visited Barra in 1909 Michael Buchanan was sixty-six years old, mentally alert and physically active. As my mother was an enthusiastic genealogist, she and Michael carried on lengthy and animated conversations on the Clan Neil, with myself an attentive listener. Michael recited without any hesitation all the Chiefs' names down from Neil of the Nine Hostages and he had a wealth of knowledge about the Clan. My mother recorded much of his information and in my later years of research I never found any errors in what he had told her."⁶¹ I do not know the name of RLM's mother, but his father was Roderick Ambrose Macneil (d. 1914). Referring to the two Michaels, David Sellar noted in 1971 that 'the crucial links in the MacNeill pedigree appear to rest, incredible though it may seem, on the authority of two crofters living in Barra at the turn of the century'.⁶²

Conclusion

The pedigree described in *Celtic Scotland* as that of the MacLennans, and in www.1467manuscript.co.uk as that of 'Mac Gabharáin Earca', has turned out, much to my surprise, to be that of the MacNeils of Barra. There was never any such person as 'Mac Gabharáin Earca' – the correct reading is *Mac a' Bharain Fhearchair*. Farquhar and his family originated as court officials and tax-gatherers ('barons') for the MacRuairis in Bute, precisely the role performed by the MacKays and MacEacherns for the MacDonalds in North and South Kintyre respectively. It appears therefore that a pattern is emerging which can potentially explain the presence of an entire group of kindreds in the 1467 MS. This group would also seem to include the MacDuffies, MacLavertys and MacLeans. The pattern has to do with the arts of governance rather than of war. Following the destruction of the lordship of the Isles by the Scottish government in 1493 and the collapse of religious sanctions brought about by the Reformation in 1560, the MacNeils of Barra no longer wished to acknowledge the bureaucratic origins of their chiefs, and began to claim descent from a pagan Irish king instead. This spurious tradition was firmly entrenched by 1650.⁶³ As for the MacNeils of Argyllshire, the 1467 MS does not mention them, and if they have any connection with the MacNeils of Barra it is tenuous in the extreme. That is to

say, writing *c.* 1700, Christopher Beaton declared that the MacNeils of Barra and Gigha shared descent from Fearchar Fada (a historical king of Dalriada), as did Lulach (a historical king of Scotland), the Gillanderses, the MacKenzies, the Mackintoshes, the MacGregors, the MacKinnons, the MacQuarries, the MacNaughtons, the MacDuffies and the MacKays of Strathnaver. (We should probably add the Grants to that list.) More recent opinion has it that the Argyllshire MacNeils are unrelated to the Barra MacNeils, and are probably of the same stock as the Lamonts, MacSweens, MacLachlans and MacEwens, though some of them may be ‘name-changed MacLeans’.

I am grateful to David Sellar and Donald McWhannell for reading and commenting on a draft of this article. All surviving errors are mine.

Ronald Black

Notes

- 1 Rev. A. Maclean Sinclair, ‘The Macneils of Barra’, *The Celtic Review*, vol. 3 (1906–07), pp. 216–23: 216.
- 2 Rev. A. Maclean Sinclair, ‘The Macneills of Argyllshire’, *The Celtic Review*, vol. 6 (1909–10), pp. 55–64: 55, 56.
- 3 W. D. H. Sellar, ‘Family Origins in Cowal and Knapdale’, *Scottish Studies*, vol. 15, part 1 (1971), pp. 21–37: 32.
- 4 The Iona Club, *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis* (Edinburgh, 1847), pp. 358–59.
- 5 William F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland* (3 vols, Edinburgh, 1876–80), vol. 3, pp. 489–90.
- 6 Ronald Black, ed., *The Gaelic Otherworld: John Gregorson Campbell’s Superstitions of the Highlands & Islands of Scotland and Witchcraft & Second Sight in the Highlands & Islands* (Edinburgh, 2005), p. 436.
- 7 Ronald Black, ‘1467 MS: The Lamonts’, *WHN&Q*, ser. 3, no. 21 (Jan. 2013), pp. 3–19: 9–10.
- 8 Ronald Black, ‘1467 MS: The MacEwens of Otter’, *WHN&Q*, ser. 3, no. 24 (Jan. 2014), pp. 15–22: 20.
- 9 R. L. Macneil of Barra, *The Clan Macneil: Clan Niall of Scotland* (New York, 1923), pp. 126–28.
- 10 Alan Bruford, *Gaelic Folk-Tales and Mediæval Romances* (Folklore of Ireland Society, Dublin, 1969), p. 72.
- 11 For St Conall see William J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), pp. 169, 189.
- 12 James King Hewison, *The Isle of Bute in the Olden Time*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 1895), p. 161.
- 13 Maitland Club, *Registrum Monasterii de Passelet* (Edinburgh, 1832), pp. 127, 128.
- 14 Hewison, *The Isle of Bute*, vol. 2, pp. 160–61.
- 15 Hewison, *The Isle of Bute*, vol. 2, pp. 161–62.
- 16 Donald Gregory, *The History of the Western Highlands and Isles of Scotland* (2nd edn, London, 1881), pp. 12–27; Sir G. W. Dasent, trl., *Icelandic Sagas*, vol. 4, *The Saga of Hacon, and a Fragment of the Saga of Magnus* (London, 1894), pp. 351, 389; Sir Iain Moncreiffe, *The Highland Clans* (London, 1967), p. 81; K. A. Steer and J. W.

- M. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland [RCAHMS], Edinburgh, 1977), pp. 201–04; R. Andrew McDonald, *The Kingdom of the Isles: Scotland's Western Seaboard, c.1100–c.1336* (E. Linton, 1997), pp. 45, 69–80, 111, 130–31.
- 17 Macneil, *The Clan Macneil*, genealogical tables at end.
 - 18 Moncreiffe, *The Highland Clans*, p. 81.
 - 19 Macneil, *The Clan Macneil*, p. 40.
 - 20 Macneil, *The Clan Macneil*, pp. 11–40.
 - 21 Ronald Black, '1467 MS: The MacLeans', *WHN&Q*, ser. 3, no. 22 (May 2013), pp. 3–19: 12–15.
 - 22 Jean Munro and R. W. Munro, eds, *Acts of the Lords of the Isles* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1986), pp. 34–35; Nicholas Maclean-Bristol, *Warriors and Priests: The History of the Clan Maclean, 1300–1570* (E. Linton, 1995), pp. 37–40.
 - 23 Robert Hay, *Lismore: The Great Garden* (Edinburgh, 2009), pp. 31, 34.
 - 24 Ian Carmichael, *Lismore in Alba* (Perth, [1948]), pp. 68–90.
 - 25 Dubhghall Albanach gives two variants of Somerled's pedigree on the same page. In one (1vbc23–24) he is *somairle mac gilla brigde mhic gofraigh mhic alasdair mhoir*. In the other (1vd9–12) he is *somairle mac gillebrigde mhic gillaeaghanain mhic solaim*. This underlines his status as a popular hero who sprang from obscurity.
 - 26 R. C. Maclagan, 'Maclagan: The Clans Cuil and Clachane, and The Combat on the Inch of Perth', *The Celtic Monthly*, vol. 9 (1901), pp. 87–89, 114–16, 126–28, 153–55, 164–66, 195–97, 217–19; Rev. William A. Gillies, *In Famed Breadalbane* (Perth, 1938), p. 264; George F. Black, *The Surnames of Scotland: Their Origin, Meaning, and History* (New York, 1946), p. 534.
 - 27 Watson, *Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, pp. 270–71.
 - 28 William F. Skene, *The Highlanders of Scotland* (2nd edn, Stirling, 1902), pp. 179–80. Sellar makes a similar point in 'Family Origins in Cowal and Knapdale', pp. 22–23.
 - 29 National Museum of Scotland MCR 40, f. 89r, cf. Rev. Alexander Cameron *et al.*, eds, *Reliquiæ Celticæ*, vol. 2 (Inverness, 1894), p. 300.
 - 30 Ian Grimble, *Chief of Mackay* (London, 1965), p. 14.
 - 31 Sir Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun, *A Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland* (Edinburgh, 1813), pp. 302–03, cf. Skene, *Highlanders of Scotland*, p. 362.
 - 32 Sellar, 'Family Origins in Cowal and Knapdale', p. 22.
 - 33 Black, '1467 MS: The MacLeans', pp. 9–11.
 - 34 Sinclair, 'The Macneills of Argyllshire', p. 57.
 - 35 Rev. A. Maclean Sinclair, *The Clan Gillean* (Charlottetown, 1899), pp. 42–44.
 - 36 Maclean-Bristol, *Warriors and Priests*, p. 13.
 - 37 Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, vol. 3, p. 301.
 - 38 Somerled MacMillan, *The MacMillans and their Septs* (Glasgow, 1952), p. 35.
 - 39 Niall D. Campbell, 'MacEwens and MacSweens', *The Celtic Review*, vol. 7 (1911–12), pp. 272–84: 273, 274.
 - 40 Niall D. Campbell, 'Some Highland Pedigrees: a Correction', *The Celtic Review*, vol. 9 (1913–14), pp. 347–49: 347.
 - 41 Donald J. McNeill, 'Were Some McNeills Really Macleans?', *WHN&Q*, no. 15 (May 1981), pp. 3–8.

- 42 Herbert Campbell, 'A MacNeill Inventory', *The Genealogist*, new ser., vol. 36 (1920), pp. 121–23: 123, cf. his 'Some Other Writs Relating to the Campbells of Duntroon', same vol., pp. 77–82: 77–78.
- 43 Macneil, *The Clan Macneil*, p. 98; Munro, *Acts of the Lords of the Isles*, p. 50; RCAHMS, *Argyll: An Inventory of the Monuments*, vol. 7, *Mid Argyll & Cowal: Medieval & Later Monuments* (Edinburgh, 1992), p. 259; David Sellar, 'Clans, Castles and DNA: Macneils, MacNeills and the Families of Cowal, Knapdale and Glassary', in *Castles and Galleys: A Reassessment of the Historic Galley-Castles of the Norse-Gaelic Seaways*, ed. by Paula Martin (Laxay, Isle of Lewis, 2017), pp. 34–43: 39.
- 44 Ronald Black, *The Campbells of the Ark: Men of Argyll in 1745* (2 vols, Edinburgh, 2017), vol. 2, p. 190.
- 45 Black, *Campbells of the Ark*, vol. 1, pp. 279–80.
- 46 Moncreiffe, *The Highland Clans*, pp. 103–04.
- 47 William J. Watson, ed., *Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore* (Scottish Gaelic Texts Society, Edinburgh, 1937), pp. 60–65.
- 48 Gregory, *History of the Western Highlands and Isles*, p. 84.
- 49 Macneil, *The Clan Macneil*, pp. 24–25.
- 50 Macneil, *The Clan Macneil*, p. 24.
- 51 Iona Club, *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis* (1839), pp. 56–57; Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, vol. 3, p. 473.
- 52 *The Scots Magazine*, vol. 25 (1763), p. 302.
- 53 Macneil, *The Clan Macneil*, p. 25.
- 54 Marjory Kennedy-Fraser, *Songs of the Hebrides* (London, 1909), pp. 4–9; J. L. Campbell, ed., *Hebridean Folksongs*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1977), pp. 112–29.
- 55 Campbell, *Hebridean Folksongs*, vol. 2, pp. 117, 125, 127, 129.
- 56 Black, '1467 MS: The Lamonts', pp. 4–7, 16–18.
- 57 Black, '1467 MS: The Lamonts', pp. 4–6, 14–16.
- 58 See for example J. F. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, vol. 3 (2nd edn, Paisley, 1892), pp. 136–60.
- 59 Campbell, *Hebridean Folksongs*, vol. 2, p. 2.
- 60 Macneil, *The Clan Macneil*, pp. 25, 33; R. L. Macneil of Barra, *Castle in the Sea* (New York, 1964), pp. 54–55; cf. also Compton Mackenzie's comments in *The Book of Barra*, ed. by John Lorne Campbell (2nd edn, Stornoway, 1998), pp. 22–23.
- 61 Macneil, *Castle in the Sea*, p. 54.
- 62 Sellar, 'Family Origins in Cowal and Knapdale', p. 32.
- 63 David Sellar has revealed ('Clans, Castles and DNA', p. 34) that RLM's son, the late Ian Macneil of Barra, was sceptical about his family's alleged descent from Niall of the Nine Hostages.