

DNA says Manx King, Somerled, the Celebrated Founding Father of Scottish Clans, had a “Norse” Patrilinear Ancestry !

DNA-TRACKING SOMERLED, KING OF THE ISLE OF MAN AND THE HEBRIDES

Remarkably, Somerled’s biogenetic impact on humanity has been studied beyond that of almost everyone else who has ever lived on this planet, and some of it has stirred up controversy in Scotland. Somerled’s biogenetic identity is even mentioned in a Wikipedia entry, as follows:

In 2005 a study by Professor of Human Genetics Bryan Sykes of Oxford led to the conclusion that Somerled has possibly 500,000 living descendants — making him the second most common currently-known ancestor after Genghis Khan. Sykes’s research led him to conclude that Somerled was a member of the Y-DNA **R1a1** Haplogroup, often considered the marker of Viking descent among men of deep British or Scottish ancestry.

(Quoting from “Somerled” at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Somerled/>.)¹ As will be described below, Dr. Sykes also concluded that Somerled’s father was a Norse Viking, not a Celtic Scot. **This news has upset many of Somerled’s living descendants !**²

The genetic history of the Vikings Age, in general, has recently been the object of serious genetic science research.³

¹ Indeed, Somerled’s progeny have much to appreciate about this research -- but primarily they should be appreciating God for His providence in procreatively making them, in every exact biogenetic detail, as exactly the unique human beings He made each of them to be!

² Of course, this should not have been too shocking, because the name “Somerled” is merely a modified version of the Old Norse name *Sumarliði*, meaning “summer-traveler” (i.e., a summer sailor). The ancient Scottish-Celtic (“Gaelic”) form of that same name would have been *Somhairle*. As noted below, it is likely that Celtic people of western Scotland and its islands (the inner and outer Hebrides) called Somerled “*Somhairle*”, the Celtic version of his name.

³ See, e.g., “Estimating Scandinavian and Gaelic Ancestry in Male Settlers of Iceland”, by A. Helgason, Sigurdardottir, J. Nicholson, Bryan Sykes, E.W. Hill, D. G. Bradley, V. Bosnes, J.R. Gulcher, R. Ward, & K. Stefansson, in *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 67:697-717 (2000); “Tracing European Founder Lineages in the Near Eastern mtDNA Pool”, by M. Richards, V. Macaulay, & E. Hickey, et al. (37 coauthors), in *American Journal of Human Genetics*, 67:1251-1276 (2000); “Genes and Languages in Europe: An Analysis of Mitochondrial Lineages”, by A. Sajantila, P. Lahermo, & T. Antitnen, et al. (13 coauthors), in *Genome Research*, 5:42-52 (1995); “Genetic Relationships of Asians and Northern Europeans, Revealed by Y-Chromosomal DNA Analysis”, by T. Zerjal, B. Dashnyam, A.

In general, recent demographic genetics research has corroborated the picture painted by the historic Viking sagas, confirming that the North Atlantic's Norse Vikings (who often adventured in and around the Irish Sea coastlands) often took for themselves Celtic wives --- women who were Irish, Scottish, Welsh, or Manx.⁴

However, as the seminal forefather of many Scottish clansmen (e.g., MacDonalds, MacRorys, MacDougals, MacAlisters, etc.), Somerled has been popularly assumed to have descended from Scotch-Celtic forefathers, as to his patrilinear ancestry, although Viking historians have disputed this for generations. Therefore, when Sykes' Y-chromosome-based DNA research led him to conclude that Somerled's male ancestry lines were Norse Vikings, many Scottish clansmen became quite upset, with what may be called a patrilinear identity crisis.

An Oxford University scientist has traced the Y-chromosome, which determines maleness, of the founder of Clan Donald - the great Somerled of Argyll, who was born around 1100 and drove out the Viking invaders. Geneticist Bryan Sykes says this microscopic fragment of the fearsome fighter still lives on in the DNA of half a million clansmen throughout the world. Indeed Professor Sykes says the Y-chromosome of the Gaelic warrior, who it seems had Norse blood himself, is so prevalent it could be among the most successful in the world. Prof. Sykes and his team made the discovery almost by accident while they were researching genetic links between the Scots and the Vikings and looking for Norse Y-chromosomes. He and researcher Jayne Nicholson had taken thousands of DNA samples from men in the Highlands and Western Isles, and spotted a group that stood out. They were at first puzzled, then Miss Nicholson looked at the donors' names. These revealed that among the men with the identical Y-chromosomes were MacDonalds, MacAlisters and MacDougalls.

Prof. Sykes said: "There didn't seem all that much in it until Jayne said quietly that these clans were related. The possibility that this Y-chromosome was inherited from the common ancestor of the MacDonalds, MacDougalls and MacAlisters was incredibly exciting." They wrote to dozens of those clansmen throughout Scotland, enclosing a sampling brush for them to collect DNA from inside their cheeks. In the samples of those who replied, they found a single common Y-chromosome. To be double sure this was Somerled's, Prof Sykes embarked on a sensitive piece of research involving the living chiefs of the Clan Donald and their septs. [Sykes] said: "I wanted to see if the clan chiefs still alive, whose recorded genealogies descend from Somerled, also shared the same chromosome. This was a delicate task. We might find one or more of the chiefs did not have it - meaning one of their paternal ancestors might have been adopted, or had not been the biological father of his heir." He approached Lord Godfrey Macdonald, Sir Ian

Pandya, et al. (18 coauthors), in *American Journal of Human Genetics* 60:1174-1183 (1997); "Y Chromosome Variation and Irish Origins", by E.W. Hill, M. A. Jobling, and D. G. Bradley, in *Nature*, 404:351-352 (2000); "Transferrin Variants as markers of Migrations and Admixture Between Populations in the Baltic Sea Region", by L. Beckman, C. Sikstrom, A. V. Mikelsaar, A. Krumina, D. Ambrasiene, V. Kucinskas, & G. Beckman, in *Human Heredity*, 48:185-191 (1998); etc.

⁴ **The Hebrides** are here included as part of Scotland, yet they have not always been so, politically speaking, especially during the Viking Age. It should also be noted that **Cornwall**, at the southwestern end of Britain, has a Celtic identity distinguishable from the Welsh to its north. Two other Celtic sub-groups should be mentioned, the Bretons (of France's **Brittany**) and **Galicia** (in northern Spain), both having been "visited" by Vikings during the timeframe of the Viking Age (which may be approximated as the 800s A.D. through at least the 1100s).

Macdonald of Sleat, Ranald MacDonald of Clan Ranald, William McAlester of Loup and Ranald MacDonnell of Glengary, enclosing a DNA brush. The result was conclusive: "They all shared the same chromosome. There was now no doubt [doubt] we had identified the legacy of Somerled." Now the only one whose lineage is in doubt is Somerled himself. Tradition says he descended from the ancient Irish kings - but Prof. Sykes says the chromosome proves his Norse ancestry.

(Quoting from Neil Macphail, "The Norse Code", in the Main (Sunday, 28th Sept., 2003), accessed via Internet posting (<http://www.electricscotland.com/history/articles/norse.htm>).

Of course, DNA research has its inherent limitations: **Y chromosome** DNA tracing only tracks the exclusively male lineage (i.e., the "Y-DNA" lineage of father-to-father-to-father-to-father-etc.) and **mitochondrial DNA** tracing only tracks the exclusively female lineage (i.e., the "mtDNA" lineage of mother-to-mother-to-mother-to-mother-etc.).

Thus, DNA science research cannot inform us exactly about the genetic identity of a person's maternal grandfather, or paternal grandmother. Likewise, DNA research cannot tell us the genetic data of someone's mother's mother's mother's mother's father, or someone's father's father's father's mother, or someone's father's mother's mother's father's father's mother. However, even with its limitations, DNA research does tell us something, and that something is meaningful in itself, yet it must be appraised within its limitations.

Of importance to Scottish heritage advocates is the conclusion that Somerled, the seminal head of notable Scottish clans (and septs) --- like MacDonald and MacDougal, --- was the son of a Norse father, who was himself the son of a Norse father, who was himself the son of a Norse father, etc.

Since the lineal chain of Somerled's forefathers, for several generations, bore Celtic names, it has been assumed for generations that the biogenetic lineage undergirding that documented descent was ethnically (i.e., genetically) Celtic, not Norse.

These Scottish clansman had assumed: a Celtic name = a Celtic ethnic identity.

That underlying assumption is often sound, but it is not absolutely airtight. For example, consider the history of Linus, Claudia, and Rufus Pudens, three friends of the apostle Paul:

Do thy diligence to come before winter. Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren.

(Quoting **2nd Timothy 4:21**). On the surface it appears that the three latter-named friends are Romans, because they have Latin names (Pudens, Linus, and Claudia). But only one of these was ethnically Roman, Pudens (whose nickname we elsewhere learn was "Rufus"). "Linus" is the Latinized version of "Llyn", a native Celtic-Briton. Likewise, his sister's name, "Claudia", is a Latinized version of her native Celtic-Briton name, "Gladys".

In other words, Linus and Claudia were ethnically Celtic Britons, **not** Romans; yet they are mentioned in the New Testament only by their Latinized names, not their native Celtic

names.⁵ If someone assumes that “Linus must be [ethnically] Roman”, because “Linus” is a Latin man’s name, the conclusion would be wrong. Likewise, if the assumption was made that Claudia must be [ethnically] Roman, because “Claudia” is a Latin lady’s name, that conclusion would also be wrong.

But how did this happen? The universal language of the Roman Empire, during the 1st century A.D., was Greek (because Latin was not popularized in the Roman Empire until centuries later), so Llyn and Gladys would have learned a Celtic dialect (similar to modern-day **Welsh**) as their native language, thus also learned **Greek** as second language.⁶ (Imagine them attending “GSL” classes!) When those two siblings became political prisoners of the Roman Empire, they were hauled off from Britain to Rome, and there they eventually met Paul the apostle (during the time that Paul himself also was a prisoner in Rome).

To make a long story short, Llyn and Gladys became Christians, while living in Rome, during the time that Paul and Timothy lived in Rome. Also, somehow Gladys (a/k/a “Claudia”) met and married a Roman nobleman named Rufus Pudens (who himself had also become a Christian, while Paul and Timothy were in Rome).⁷ This history is recounted as follows:

During the 1st century A.D., British rebels were captured and hauled to Rome for trial. However, in the case of one British Silurian noble family, the captives’ lives were spared—due to the courageous speech of the family spokesman, Caractacus (the Latinized name of Caradog), to the Roman Senate. It was decided that some of the family would be imprisoned in Rome (at the same time Paul was imprisoned there) to serve as political hostages. Since it was believed that those hostages would secure a coerced loyalty, other family members were returned to England (including Bran, Caradog’s father) to rule as Roman puppets. Yet that experience allowed that family of captives, during their time of imprisonment in Rome, to somehow learn the Gospel of Christ — and **soon some of the newborn boys in that noble family were being named “Paul” and “Timothy,” which are neither Latin nor Brythonic (British Celtic) names!** In other words, a noble family of British Celts had received the Gospel as political prisoners in Rome — and became Paul’s personal friends in Christ as a providential result!

⁵ In the original Greek text, **2nd Timothy 4:21** reads as follows (with the names of Pudens, Linus, and Claudia in bold): σπουδασον προ χειμωνος ελθειν ασπαζεται σε ευβουλος και **πουδης** και **λινος** και **κλαυδια** και οι αδελφοι παντες .

⁶ Of course they would most likely have conversed in the universal language of the Roman Empire, Greek (the language of the New Testament, which was written in the Roman Empire of the 1st century A.D.).

⁷ And so the joke was told in Rome, by Martial (the Latin poet), that a “savage” Briton named Claudia had succeeded in “civilizing” Pudens, who previously had a reputation for being a “wild” partying Roman nobleman.

Do thy diligence to come before winter. Eubulus greeteth thee, and **Pudens**, and **Linus**, and **Claudia**, and all the brethren. (2 Timothy 4:21, emphasis added)

Pudens (a/k/a Rufus Pudens) was a Roman who once lived a prodigal lifestyle, but then he became a Christian, amazing his acquaintances with his transformed character! Claudia (whose British Celt name is spelled "Gladys"), brave Caradog's daughter, was one of the British political prisoners who were, in the providence of God, carried to Rome in the belly of a Roman navy ship. Caradog's son Linus, Claudia's brother, was another of those British captives transported to face the Roman Senate. So Bran, the grandfather of Linus and Claudia, returned to England's shores as a Christian (soon sharing the Gospel of Christ in his native England), thanks to God working through Paul in Rome.

(Quoting James J. S. Johnson, "Marine Travel and the Great Commission", in *Stewardship, Discovery, & Development: Providential Technology Insights* (Dallas: ICR, 2007), 4. This particular episode of British-Roman history is best documented by historian Dr. Bill Cooper, himself a British laird (and also a direct descendant of King Somerled).⁸

The historic fact especially relevant to Somerled's identity is that "Paul" and Timothy" are not Briton-Celtic names, yet the extended family of Bran, Caradog, Llyn, and Gladys soon included those names ("Paul" and "Timothy") for baby boys born to this Christian family.

Similarly, centuries later during the Viking Age, the sequence of Orkney earls show this same kind of influence, as that sequence displays obviously-Norse names like Einar, Thorfinn, Hlodver, and Sigurd, followed by their kinsman "**Paul**" (who ruled from A.D. 1064 to A.D. 1093). The Orcadian dynasty's "Paul" shows reception of Christianity, not an ethnicity break. All of which is to say that names can reflect parental associations, like friendships (or a parent's religious conversion, exhibited in the naming of that parent's child), which are not ethnocentrically derived.

⁸ "It is unequivocally stated in the early records that the man who first brought the Christian faith to these shores was none other than Bran, the father of Caratacus (Caradog) who, with his family, was taken to Rome in chains and paraded before the Senate by the Emperor Claudius with the view to their immediate and summary execution. Caratacus (or, more usually, Caractacus), however, gave his famous speech of defiance that earned him instead the Senate's applause, a state pension and apartments in the Imperial Palace. And here conventional history loses sight of him. But the triads add to our knowledge. They tell us that, in perfect accord with previous Roman practice, Caratacus was allowed home to rule as a puppet king, but his family were kept behind as surety for his good behaviour. Whilst detained for seven years in Caesar's household, his father Bran was converted to Christ, and when allowed to return to Britain in AD 58, the very year of Paul's epistle to the Romans, he brought the Christian faith with him." Quoting from Bill Cooper, *AFTER THE FLOOD* (orig. published by New Wine Press, 1995), Appendix 13, accessed via Internet (<http://ldolphin.org/cooper/>).

Yet another pattern of non-ethnocentric naming should be considered: sometimes individuals who live in a cross-cultural (especially a bilingual) context may choose to adopt a linguistic modification of their own names, in order to accommodate people they interact with.⁹

Thus, the fact that Celtic names are recorded, for Somerled's father (**Gillebride, Thane of Argyll**) and paternal grandfather (**Gilledomnam**), does not negate the possibility that they themselves descend from a patrilinear stock of Norse Viking forefathers.

But long before Somerled was heralded as a biogenetic champion by DNA scientists, he became famous as a "founding father" of Scottish clans (and septs) in western Scotland and the cluster of islands thereby, the Hebrides (which were once known as the "Western Isles" or "Sodor" or "*Suðreyjar*"). How did this Somerled establish a historic dynasty in the Hebrides, which eventually spread onto the mainland coasts of western Scotland? The traditional records say **it all began with a salmon**:

Hailes in his *Annals* related that, in 973, Marcus, King of the Isles; Kenneth, King of the Scots, and Malcolm, King of the Cambri, entered into a bond for mutual defense. Then followed **Gilledomman**, the grandfather of Somerled. Gilledomnan was driven from the Isles by the Scandinavians, and died in Ireland, where he had taken refuge. His son, **Gillebride**, who had gone to Ireland with his father, obtained the help of the Irish of the Clan Cholla, and, landing in Argyll, made a gallant attempt to expel the invaders. The Norsemen proved too strong, and Gillebride was compelled to hide in the woods and caves of Morven.

At this time, when the fortunes of the Clan were at the lowest ebb, there arose a savior [i.e., military champion] in the person of one of the most celebrated of Celtic heroes, **Somerled, the son of Gillebride**. He was living with his father in the caves of Morven and is described in an ancient chronicle as "A well tempered man, in body shapely, of a fair and piercing eye, of middle stature and quick discernment." His early years were

⁹ This writer worked in the 1980s with a Mexican-American colleague in South Texas named **José**, who preferred to be called "**Joe**" when he was conversing with English speakers. This is comparable to Gladys being called "Claudia" in Rome, and her brother Llyn being called "Linus" in Rome. (Likewise, when alive "Charlemagne" was then known as "Karl der Gross".)

Many more examples could be given to illustrate this practice, e.g., the Norwegian Viking **Hrolf Rognvaldsson** was called "**Rollo**" (as his statue in Rouen remembers him) by French-speaking residents of Rouen (in Normandy), and he was baptized there as "Robert".

Likewise, recall that the Hebrew patriarch **Joseph** was re-named **Zaphnathpaaneah** (as recorded in Genesis 41:45). Notice also that Daniel 1:6-7 records that three Hebrew youths (**Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah**), when exiled to Babylon, were assigned new Babylonian names (**Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego**).

The Scandinavians of 1763 saw **Jean-Baptiste Jules Bernadotte**, a Frenchman (who, through his mother, was a great-great-great-great-great-great-grandson of Denmark's King Frederick I Oldenburg!) become the King of Sweden and Norway, as he adopted the Scandinavian name "**Karl Johan**" (and "converted" to Lutheran Protestantism). This was obviously a public relations solution to the awkward situation of accepting a Frenchman (formerly Napoleon's Marshal) as the head of a new Scandinavian dynasty.

passed in hunting and fishing; "his looking glass was the stream; his drinking cup the heel of his shoe; **he would rather spear a salmon than spear a foe**; he cared more to caress the skins of seals and otters than the shining hair of women. At present he was as peaceful as a torch or beacon - unlit. The hour was coming when he would be changed, when he would blaze like a burnished torch, or a beacon on a hilltop against which the wind is blowing."

But when the [Hebrides] Isles' men, over whom his ancestors had ruled, were in dire need of a leader, Somerled came forward in his true character. A local tradition in Skye [promoted by the Clan of MacDonald] tells that the [Hebrides] Islesmen held a council at which they decided to offer Somerled the chiefship, to be his and his descendants forever. They found Somerled fishing, and to him made their offer.

Somerled replied, "Islesmen, there is a newly run **salmon** in the black pool yonder. If I catch him, I will go with you as your Chief; if I catch him not, I shall remain where I am."

The Islesmen, a race who believed implicitly in omens, were content, and Somerled cast his line over the black pool. Soon after a shining **salmon** leapt in the sun, and the skilful angler had the silvery fish on the river bank.

The Islesmen acclaimed him their leader, and as such he sailed back with them "over the sea to Skye," where the people joyously proclaimed that the Lord of the Isles had come. Such a tradition in Skye.

(Quoting from Henry Lee, "The Families of MacDonald, McDonald and McDonnell", orig. published 1920; accessed via Internet posting at <http://www.macdonald.com/clan.html> , *emphasis added*).

Perhaps there is something fishy about this Hebridean tradition, but the fact remains that the MacDonald clan (which traced its ancestry to Somerled) features a **salmon** in the bottom right quadrant of the MacDonald clan chief's official coat-of-arms:

Quarterly, 1st, *argent*, a lion rampant *gules*, armed and langued *azure*; 2nd; *Or*, a hand in armour fessways holding a cross-crosslet fitchee *gules*; 3rd, *Or*, a *lymphad* sails furled and oars in action *sable*, Flagged *gules*; 4th, *vert*, a **salmon** naiant in fess proper, over all on an escutcheon en surtout, *Or*, an eagle displayed *gules* surmounted of a lymphad sails furled, oars in action *sable* (as Chief of the Name and Arms of Macdonald). Above the shield is placed his lordship's coronet, thereon an helmet befitting his degree with a mantling *gules* doubled ermine, and on a crest coronet *Or* is set for crest a hand in armour fessways couped at the elbow proper holding a cross-crosslet fitchee *gules*, and in an escrol over the same this motto 'per mare per terras', and on a compartment of rocks and heather proper issuant from the waves undy along with this motto '*fraoch eilean*', are set for supporters two leopards proper.

(Quoting from Wikipedia's entry for "Clan Donald", which quotes "[Lord Macdonald of Macdonald](http://www.highcouncilofclandonald.org/Macdonald.html)", from www.highcouncilofclandonald.org, at <http://www.highcouncilofclandonald.org/Macdonald.html>. This tradition of Somerled's **salmon** omen carries on to this day, in the MacDonald clan chief's arms.

Unsurprisingly, a salmon also appears on the coat of arms of the Maclean clan chief.¹⁰ (The Scottish clan of Maclean also claims descent from Somerled.) Gilleain na Tuaighe (i.e., “Gilleain of the Battle-Axe”) is recognized as the historic founder of the Maclean clan, and he is recognized as a direct descendant of Somerled. (Whether this heraldic exhibition of the salmon is yet another a memory of the salmon omen incident, or not, may be argued by others.)

For one more example, consider the clan of MacGillivray, a clan that does not claim descent from Somerled, yet it claims to have banded together with his forces, militarily, to oppose the Vikings who then harassed the Hebridean isles and coastlands of Scotland. The official coat of arms of the MacGillivray clan’s chief (shown below), i.e., the “chiefly arms” of the clan, displays a salmon. Is this yet another memoir of the salmon omen incident?



(MacGillivray clan chiefly arms image, copied from www.mcgillivray.us/heraldrychief.html .)

¹⁰ See, accord, <http://macleanclan.com/maclean-heraldry/arms-of-the-clan-macleans-chief> .

What other importance has the salmon for the Hebrides islands? Many examples could be given, yet only one here, a humble recipe that incorporates salmon as one of its ingredients!

HEBRIDEAN SALMON RECIPE

Tweed Salmon [as in “Harris Tweed”]

About 2 lbs. **salmon**

1 cup water or fish stock (if not enough liquid from wine)

¼ cup chopped shallots or chives

Sweet white wine

Salt and pepper

Parsley

Place salmon in enough water or stock to cover. Poach gently for about 5-10 minutes. Cool. Flake the meat off the bones. Place in an ovenproof serving dish. Sprinkle shallots over and cover with the wine. Season with salt and pepper and parsley. Bake for about 30 minutes in a moderate oven (350 degrees). Serve hot or cold, serve with a cucumber. Makes 4 servings. [double recipe to serve 8]¹¹

And, since Somerled served as king over both the Hebrides and the Isle of Man, it is proper to also include a Manx recipe that incorporates salmon as an ingredient (notwithstanding that the Isle of Man is probably better known for its **kippers**), such as the following:

MANX SALMON RECIPE

Creamed Crabbys [i.e., a dish masquerading as creamed crabmeat]

1 lb. Mashed potatoes mixed with 2-3 ounces cream

¾ lb. Cooked boned **salmon**

¼ lb. Cooked boned white fish

2 oz. Fine white breadcrumbs

salt and pepper

dash of Tabasco sauce [obviously not an ingredient historically used by Manx Vikings!]

pinch parsley (chopped)

1 beaten egg

¹¹ *Quoting* Helen Smith-Twiddy’s “Tweed Salmon”, in her **CELTIC COOKBOOK: TRADITIONAL RECIPES FROM SIX CELTIC LANDS** (New York: Hippocreme Books, 1998; originally published in Wales by **Y Lolfa Cyf**), page 41.

oil to fry

Mix the potatoes and fish together until fine (no lumps). Add breadcrumbs, salt and pepper, Tabasco sauce, parsley, and beaten egg. Mix well. Form into small cakes and cook in a shallow frypan until browned on both sides. Makes 4 to 6 servings. [double recipe to serve 8 to 12]¹²

Somerled (known in Old Norse as “Summarliði”, known in old Gaelic as “Somhairle”), as a man, left his world with a memorable set of historic achievements, even apart from the biogenetic impact of his subsequent generations of posterity. (A short summary of Somerled’s career follows.)

SOMERLED’S NATIVE AND MARRIAGE-ACQUIRED FAMILY BACKGROUND

Somerled’s family history, although a bit controversial on his father’s side (as described above), is nonetheless quite notable regardless of whether his royal ancestors were ethnically Celtic or Norse.

Mike Ashley, British royal genealogy historian, summarized the Somerled’s original family background as follows:

Somerled was the son of Gillebride, thane of Argyll [on the western coast of Scotland], and was descended from Ragnall, the Danish king of York [i.e., Jorvik on England’s eastern coast]. He was born in Ireland (where his father had been exiled by the Scots king Edgar) perhaps around the year 1105. His mother was Norse, the daughter of Sigurd II [sic: should say Sigurd III, i.e., Sigurd Jerusalem-farer] of Orkney, and she named the boy with a typical Norse nickname, which means “summer voyager”. We know little of his early life, but he seems to have regained his heritage sometime before 1130, because he was already styled thane of Argyll when his sister married Malcolm [MacHeth], the illegitimate son of Alexander I of Scotland.

(Quoting from Mike Ashley, MAMMOTH BOOK OF BRITISH KINGS AND QUEENS: THE COMPLETE BIOGRAPHICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE KINGS AND QUEENS OF BRITAIN (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998), page 432.

Moreover, it should be specially noticed that Somerled married into a very notable family history, as records indicate that he married Ragnhild Olafsdottir (whose name in its Celtic version was “Ragnailt”), a Manx princess who was herself a descendant of Norwegian kings. Somerled’s wife, Ragnhild of Man (or “Mann”), was the daughter of the Manx king Olaf the Red “Bitling” Godredsson (who was king of the Isle of Man and of the Hebrides archipelago). Moreover, Ragnhild’s father Olaf the Red was himself the son of a Ragnhild Haraldsdottir, the daughter of no less than Norway’s famous Viking-king Harald “Hardrada” Sigurdsson, who died

¹² *Quoting* Helen Smith-Twiddy’s “Tweed Salmon”, in her *CELTIC COOKBOOK: TRADITIONAL RECIPES FROM SIX CELTIC LANDS* (NEW YORK: Hippocreme Books, 1998; originally published in Wales by *Y Lolfa Cyf*), page 35.

at Stamford Bridge on the 25th of September, A.D. 1066. Furthermore, Olaf the Red's father was Godred Crovan, himself king of the Isle of Man, the Hebrides, and Dublin. King Godred Crovan was famous for establishing the still-functioning Manx *Tynwald* [comparable to Iceland's Althing as a political institution] prior to his death in A.D. 1095.

In addition to Ragnhild's illustrious paternal ancestry (just described in part above), Ragnhild's maternal ancestry is quite remarkable.

Ragnhild's mother was Ingibjorg Haakonsdottir, i.e., Ingibjorg was daughter (via her mother, Helga) of an Earl of Orkney named Haakon Paulsson. Haakon Paulsson's father was Paul Thorfinnsson ("Paul I"), an Earl of Orkney. Paul Thorfinnsson was son of Thorfinn II Sigurdsson (a/k/a "Thorfinn the Black" and "Thorfinn the Mighty"), an Earl of Orkney. Thorfinn II was the son of Sigurd II (a/k/a "Sigurd the Stout") Hlodvirsson, an Earl of Orkney, by Earl Sigurd's second wife, Donada.¹³ Sigurd II Hlodvirsson, himself, was son of Irish princess (Eithne) and Hlodvir Thorfinnsson, also an Earl of Orkney. Hlodvir was son of Thorfinn I ("Skull-splitter") Einarsson, another Earl of Orkney. Thorfinn's father was Einar ("Turf-Einar") Ragnvaldsson, another earl of Orkney, who was himself son of Ragnvald ("the Wise") Eysteinnsson, Earl of Møre (near Romsdale in Norway). Ragnvald Eiysteinnsson's father was Eystein Glumra, Earl of the Uplanders.

SOMERLED'S POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

Politically (and economically), Somerled left a track-record of zealous defense of his family heritage's lands and rights in western Scotland and islands thereby, as well as those he acquired by marriage, in and around the Irish Sea.

In religious affairs, Somerled also left a track-record of advocacy for the **independence**-practicing Celtic Church, which continued to resist the increasingly monopolistic politics (and ecclesiology) of the Anglo-Norman-advocated Roman Catholic Church of the 1100s.

Political historian Mike Ashley acknowledges that **Somerled's pro-Gaelic political agenda** (i.e., conserving Scottish-Celtic traditions of clan rights and customs) **blended with Somerled's religious advocacy of the Gaelic church practices** (i.e., conserving Scottish-Celtic traditions of Celtic church rights and customs). This blended agenda provides a logical explanation for most of Somerled's actions, especially his actions that clash with what would appear to be his self-interests (and that of his immediate family). This led to serious conflicts.

But how could a pro-Gaelic agenda attract serious conflicts in western Scotland?

Both of these traditional institutions, the Celtic churches and the Scottish clans, were constantly threatened by the aggressive and unrelenting advances of the "church-state alliance" of the Anglo-Norman political powers (who were building "secular" political centralization, reshaping Scotland to Anglo-Norman model) and Roman Catholic political powers (who were

¹³ Interestingly, Sigurd II already had a son (by Sigurd's first wife) named Somerled.

building “spiritual” ecclesiastical centralization, reshaping Christian churches to the old Roman Empire model).

In order to understand Somerled’s opposition to Scotland’s Malcolm IV (whom Somerled had supported previously), Somerled fought to protect traditional liberties of the Celtic churches, as well as traditional liberties of the Scottish **Gall-Gaidheal**¹⁴ clans.

Accordingly, historian Mike Ashley summarizes Somerled’s political activities may be summarized as follows:

Throughout these years [i.e., the late 1130s and early 1140s A.D.] Somerled maintained a strong affection of the kingdom of the Gaels, not the rapidly anglicised or Anglo-Norman kingdom that [Scotland’s] King David had developed [which Somerled knew well, having served King David by heading the West Highland contingent of David’s army]. Although it [i.e., the centralization movement of the Anglo-Normans] was the way of the future, Somerled rejected it. He was unable to convince David, but when the new and very young king, Malcolm IV [king of Scotland], succeeded to the throne in 1153 [due to the death of Scotland’s king David I], Somerled tried again.

In 1154 Somerled and his nephews rebelled against Malcolm IV. At this same time Olaf of Man [i.e., Somerled’s royal father-in-law] had died and his son, Godred II [a/k/a “Godred the Back”, Somerled’s brother-in-law], had returned to the Isles and was proving something of a despot. Somerled spent two years redesigning and rebuilding his fleet and then, in January **1156** met Godred in battle off Islay. Godred’s fleet was the most powerful in Britain [then] and he should have been the victor but Somerled’s new design, which allowed him to out-manoeuvre his opponent, won him the day [though actually it was night! ¹⁵], though there were significant losses on both sides.

As a result Godred and Somerled negotiated and agreed to divide the Isles. Somerled received the southern Hebrides, which consisted of the two main groupings of islands around Islay and Mull.

Godred’s continued intolerance caused Somerled to bring his fleet against him **again in 1158** and this time Godred fled back to Norway. Somerled’s claims were upheld [there] and he became king of the Isles, a title accepted by both King Inge of Norway and eventually (in 1160) by Malcolm IV of Scotland. Somerled so ingratiated himself with the Scottish king [i.e., Malcolm IV] that he earned the nickname, “sit-by-the-king”.

¹⁴ “**Gall-Gaidheal**”, literally “foreign Gaels” [i.e., “**carpetbagger**”-Celts] is a name used to denote the blended population of Norse-Celts, the demographic mix of people whose ancestry was a blend of Scandinavian Vikings with the native Celts of the British Isles (such as the Gaelic Irish, Gaelic Scots, the Manx Celts, the Welsh, and/or the Cornish).

¹⁵ Amazingly, this sea battle occurred throughout the night, in rough ocean waters. (This battle is described herein, shortly after this quotation from Mike Ashley concludes.)

Nevertheless his [i.e., Somerled's] attempts to sway Malcolm toward maintaining the Gaelic heritage remained thwarted. Somerled did try to have the Celtic church reinstated on Iona, and it was only his death that halted that development. In 1164, Somerled raised an army in the hope of forcing Malcolm into treaty. A force of 10,000 men sailed up the Clyde, from where Somerled took half the army on to Renfrew to parley with the king's representatives. Somerled was found murdered [i.e., assassinated] the following morning, but his killers were never identified [though circumstantial evidence points toward one of his nephews]. Somerled was buried on Iona [the nerve center of the Celtic churches] but was apparently later reinterred by his son [Ragnald?] at Saddell Abbey on Kintyre.

After his death, **Godred II** regained [the Isle of] Man and the northern Hebrides. The rest of Somerled's kingdom was divided between his sons. The eldest, Dugald, took Lorne and Argyll, with the islands of Mull, Coll, Tiree, and Jura. The second, Ragnald, took Islay and Kintyre [a/k/a "Cinn Tire", in Scottish Gaelic], which remained the focal point of the kingdom of the Isles. A third son, Angus,¹⁶ took Arran and Bute.

(Quoting from Mike Ashley, **MAMMOTH BOOK OF BRITISH KINGS AND QUEENS: THE COMPLETE BIOGRAPHICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE KINGS AND QUEENS OF BRITAIN** (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1998), page 432 & 434, with some inserted information taken from the genealogical chart that covers page 433.)

REVIEW OF SOMERLED'S TWO BATTLES WITH MANX KING GODRED

The sea-battle between Somerled and his brother-in-law Godred (a/k/a "Goraidh", the Celtic version of his Norse name), during January of A.D. 1156, is worth describing, to appreciate the quintessential "Viking character" of the naval conflict.

The *CHRONICLE OF MAN* takes up the story again concerning events which were to bring Somerled and Godred into open conflict. It tells how Thorfinn Ottarsson, a powerful Manx chief, was sent to ask Somerled to allow his [i.e., Somerled's] son, Dugall, to be appointed king of Man and the Isles [in lieu of the tyrannical Godred]. After due consideration Somerled was pleased to allow Dugall to be presented as king to the islanders, who duly accepted him though hostages were taken to ensure their continued compliance! Acceptance, however, was not unanimous, and one of the chiefs, named Paul Balkanson, slipped away in the night in his longship and went to Godred with the news of all that had occurred. Godred, in alarm, hurriedly got ready a fleet and sailed north against the forces of Somerled. It was high time for Somerled to do something about Godred. He, in his turn, collected a large fleet of eighty [80!] longships and sailed out to confront his enemy.

¹⁶ Perhaps it should be noted that the **MacDonalds** (also spelled "McDonalds") proudly claim descent from Somerled, and Somerled fathered a son named **Angus** (ancestor of the MacRory/MacRuari/McCreary clan). So it is not a surprise that **McDonald's** restaurants now honor their kin by selling the "**Angus** Burger".

The story that follows incites our admiration for the impressive seamanship of both kings, and the seaworthiness of their ships. The battle took place at night, in the dead of winter, in the open ocean somewhere off the coasts of Islay, on the 5-6 of January 1156. How they managed to manoeuvre under oars (no sails were used during battle), in darkness, in wild winter seas, without most of their ships colliding or foundering, was a miracle. It must have been a titanic struggle and the *CHRONICLE OF MAN* describes the terrible slaughter which ensued. By dawn both sides were exhausted, neither having won, so they agreed to make peace and divided up the sea kingdom between them, in a rather awkward division.

Godred retained [the Isle of] Man and the islands to the north of the Ardnamurchan peninsula [of Scotland], while Somerled kept all the islands to the south including Kintyre, which was still class as an island [it being largely coastland]. King Inge of Norway must have accepted this arrangement, at least for the time being, for there was no Norwegian counter-attack in support of his protégé, Godred.

(Quoting from Kathleen MacPhee's *SOMERLED, HAMMER OF THE NORSE* (Glasgow: Neil Wilson Publishing, 2004) , pages 80-82.

Somerled and Godred faced off against each other again, two years later (in A.D. 1158). During 1156 and 1158 Somerled had responded to many disadvantageous distractions and turbulences in (or otherwise affecting) western Scotland, including the death of England's King Stephen, the death of Fife's earl Duncan, and Scottish king Malcolm IV's capture and imprisonment of Somerled's ally Donald MacHeth with his father Malcolm MacHeth. Meanwhile Godred has regionally resumed the same kind of despotic practices that had catalyzed the sea-battle of A.D. 1156, so eventually political tensions bubbled again to a boil between the two brothers-in-law. The less-than-two-years-old truce had broken beyond repair.

The year 1158, unfortunately, saw Somerled's attention brought sharply back [from the Scottish mainland] to events in the west. The situation in Man was simmering again. It was obvious that Godred would not accept the imposition of Somerled's son, Dugall, as King of Man, without a fight. Somerled must have recognised that Godred would have to be dealt with once and for all, and that battle was inevitable. The *CHRONICLE OF MAN* tell show, in 1158, Somerled sailed with 53 ships [noticeably less than his 80 longships during 1156] and engaged Godred's fleet off the coast of Man. Not only did Somerled finally rout Godred at sea, but he then brought his forces ashore [at the Isle of Man] and, by capturing or destroying all who opposed him, brought the entire island into submission before returning in triumph to his own waters. Godred managed to escape and fled back to Norway, hoping to get help against the [seemingly] all-powerful Somerled.

But Godred the Black never challenged Somerled again, and left him in possession of the Manx kingdom for the rest of his [i.e., Somerled's] life. [However, after Somerled was assassinated, Godred returned to the Irish Sea, from Norway, and reacquired the Isle of Man]. Again, the Norwegian king [i.e., Inge] did not intervene on

Godred's behalf, so we must assume his tacit acceptance of the situation. Somerled was now, truly, King of Argyll and Lord of the Isles [including the Isle of Man].

(Quoting from Kathleen MacPhee's *SOMERLED, HAMMER OF THE NORSE* (Glasgow: Neil Wilson Publishing, 2004), page 83.

Those who know not history would quickly dismiss King Somerled (and his wife Ragnhild Olafsdottir) as simply "dead and gone" from this world.



'Tis true Somerled himself is dead and gone, and it is quite likely that Somerled himself is now enjoying Heaven with the King Whom his Celtic churches worshipped. (Although it is certainly hoped that Somerled's own Celtic Christian faith matched the child-like faith required by John 3:16 (as that saving faith was clarified by the Lord Jesus Himself¹⁷), our knowledge about King Somerled's life is less personal than that.) However, the impact of Somerled's life, on Earth, is neither "dead" nor "gone"!

One amazing proof of that impact will be given below, yet probably more than half-a-million could be given. **Obviously God alone should get the glory for all who have been procreated from King Somerled, -- and that fact should never be minimized!**¹⁸

¹⁷ **"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."**

This is a faithful English translation of the original, which reads: ΟΥΤΩΣ ΓΑΡ ΗΓΑΠΗΣΕΝ Ο ΘΕΟΣ ΤΟΝ ΚΟΣΜΟΝ ΩΣΤΕ ΤΟΝ ΥΙΟΝ ΑΥΤΟΥ ΤΟΝ ΜΟΝΟΓΕΝΗ ΕΔΩΚΕΝ ΙΝΑ ΠΑΣ Ο ΠΙΣΤΕΥΩΝ ΕΙΣ ΑΥΤΟΝ ΜΗ ΑΠΟΛΗΤΑΙ ΑΛΛ ΕΧΗ ΖΩΗΝ ΑΙΩΝΙΟΝ. (Interestingly, the word "perish" translates the Greek verb "αποληται", which is a "middle voice" Greek verb form of the root verb **απόλλυμι**, denoting **self-inflicted destruction**.) Since the Celtic churches were routinely more focused on Bible study than the Rome-based church that competed with them, it may well be that Somerled had a more personal reason for preferring the Celtic "kirks" over the Roman, than just a desire to promote Gaelic independence traditions.) Of course, the critical context of **John 3:16** is provided by **John 3:14-15**, which itself refers to **Numbers 21:4-9**.

¹⁸ Consider **Romans chapter 1** (especially, Romans 1:18-21, which emphasizes the moral obligation of glorifying God as Creator, and the related moral obligation to be grateful for our creaturely lives. See also **Acts 14:17** (explaining how creation itself is proof of our Creator).

Yet, also, it should not be overlooked that God chose to providentially use human ancestors, like King Somerled, to do the procreating needed for us to be us.



LAIRD WILLIAM, AN EXAMPLE OF SOMERLED'S POSTERITY TODAY

Dr. William R. Cooper (a/k/a as “Nandad” to Ethan and Theo), Laird Gudsborn (“God’s bairn”) of Lochaber,¹⁹ can serve as one illustration of a living descendant of King Somerled. This is the same Dr. Bill Cooper whose Biblical and European history scholarship is quoted above (e.g., in **footnote 8**) regarding the history of Linus (Llyn) and Claudia (Gladys).

As the following data will show, Laird William is an F25 descendant²⁰ of King Somerled, i.e., he is a great^{23x}–grandson of King Somerled:

¹⁹ Laird William now resides chiefly in Middlesex, England, yet he owns an estate in Scotland, a modestly proper situation for a direct descendant of the Norse-Gaelic (“Gall-Gaidheal”) King Somerled. Laird William (i.e., William R. Cooper, PhD, ThD) is an evangelical historian-scholar of the highest water, having made major contributions to the study and understanding of both Biblical history and Viking history, plus Reformation history and creation science apologetics.

²⁰ In population biology this convention (with F denoting “filial”) is used to denote generational levels: son or daughter = **F1**; grandson or granddaughter = **F2**; great-grandson or great granddaughter = **F3**; etc.; similarly, forbear ancestry is denoted by “P” (as in “parental”) generations, so that **P1** = father or mother; **P2** = grandfather or grandmother; **P3** = great-grandfather or great-grandmother; etc. Thus, as a F25, Laird William is 25 generations after

Somerled, the seminal ancestor of this lineage, begat a son Angus;²¹

- F1 Angus, Lord of Bute, with wife Ragnhild of the Isles, begat a son James;
- F2 James Macrory (or “MacRuari”), whose wife’s name is unavailable, begat daughter Jean;
- F3 Jean MacRory, with husband Alexander, the 4th High Steward, begat a son James;
- F4 James, the 5th High Steward, with wife Cecilia of Dunbar, begat a son Walter;
- F5 Walter, the 6th High Steward, with wife Marjorie Bruce, begat a son Robert;
- F6 Robert II, king of Scotland, with wife Elizabeth Mure, begat a son John, later called Robert;
- F7 Robert III (originally named John, but renamed as a Scottish king), king of Scotland, with wife Annabella Drummond, begat a son James;
- F8 James I Stuart, king of Scotland, with wife Joan Beaufort, begat a son, James;
- F9 James II Stuart, king of Scotland, with wife Mary of Gueldres, begat a daughter Mary;
- F10 Mary Stuart, with husband Lord James Hamilton, begat a daughter Elizabeth;
- F11 Elizabeth, with husband Matthew Stuart, Earl of Lennox, begat a daughter Margaret;
- F12 Lady Margaret, with husband Alexander Douglas of Mains, begat a son Matthew;
- F13 Matthew Douglas, with wife Margaret Buchanan, begat a son Malcolm;
- F14 Malcolm Douglas, with wife Janet Cunningham, begat a son Robert;
- F15 Sir Robert Douglas, with wife Elizabeth Whalley, begat a daughter Susannah;
- F16 Susannah Douglas, with husband Sir Robert Douglas of Blackerston, begat daughter Mary;
- F17 Mary Douglas, with husband Joseph Johnston, begat a son Robert;
- F18 Robert Johnston, with wife Mary Fulton, begat a daughter Rachel;
- F19 Rachel Johnston, with husband Caleb [#1] Buglass, begat a son Caleb [#2];
- F20 Caleb [#2] Buglass, with wife Barbara Marshall, begat a son Caleb [#3];
- F21 Caleb [#3] Buglass, with wife Jean Robertson, begat a son Caleb [#4];
- F22 Caleb [#4] Buglass, with wife Mary Hogg, begat a daughter Annie;
- F23 Annie Buglass, with husband William Cooper, begat a son John;
- F24 John Cooper, with wife Ivy May Taylor, begat an extraordinary son William (“Bill”);
- F25 William (“Bill”) Cooper, by God’s providential grace, arrived safely in England.

This lineage covers more than 800 years in 26 generations, averaging close to 3 generations per century. (This example of 26 generations may be compared with others, in existing or subsequent family history literature, to see if it is typical or atypical of generational time length.)

And, the above-listed lineage continues on, to this day: Laird William married Eileen Reeve in the year of our Lord 1972, and they begat two daughters (who both are F26 to King Somerled), both now married, and so far two grandchildren (who both are F27 to King Somerled), have arrived safe and sound --- with God’s providence continuing on.

(“posterior”, as in the word “posterity”) King Somerled. If the concept of “descent” is used, F25 would be characterized as 25 generations “under” (i.e., descended from). Thus Laird William is said to be 25 generations “after” (or “descended from”) his P25 ancestor, King Somerled.

²¹ It is well-documented that Somerled begat more children through his wife Ragnhild than just **Angus**. In this listing, however, only the *direct* “links” in the biogenetic “chain” that connects Somerled to Dr. Bill Cooper are named.

And that is just one documented lineage from King Somerled!

CLOSING COMMENTS, REGARDING AN UNCLOSED FAMILY HISTORY

Although some clansmen of western Scottish (and the Isles) may be disturbed to learn, due to Dr. Bryan Sykes' biogenetic history research, that their patrilinear ancestry traces to a Norse-fathered King Somerled, the old Viking histories pointed to that fact all along.²²

Regardless, King Somerled's adventurous life affected many other lives, as he struggled to conserve what he valued of the Gaelic heritage (especially the vital independence of his Celtic church and of the Gaelic clan traditions).

Moreover, King Somerled's marriage to Ragnhild Olafsdottir procreatively enabled many, many lives that have lived centuries after Somerled lived, with at least one of them being (by God's providential grace), Dr. Bill Cooper (a/k/a Laird William), a Christ-redeemed Viking history scholar!

>< JJSJ

16th January, A.D. 2010

© A.D. 2010 James J. S. Johnson

profjjsj@aol.com



²² In light of King Somerled's patrilinear Norse ancestry, it seems quite proper that his own F25 descendant, Laird William, should be a member of a distinguished society that promotes the appreciation of Norse Vikings, Norwegian family history, and an appreciation for the Nordic-Gaelic spirit of independence in matters of church and state. It is so, for at the time of this writing, Dr. Cooper is a member in good standing of the *Norwegian Society of Texas*, facilitated by cyberspace-telecom technology that King Somerled himself could never have imagined!