

Origins of the Marquis (MacMarki) Family

“My word but you have an interesting family tree.”

These were the opening words in an email Dennis Freeman-Wright sent me after meeting him for the first time at a history fair in Leicestershire where we got into a conversation about the origins of the Marquis family and their links to Clan Donald. Dennis is a keen etymologist and has studied in great detail the history of certain place and family names including the MacDonalds.

The information he provided plus some of my own additional research has raised some fascinating questions about the earliest roots of the Marquis family. As a result, I have written a more detailed account of that early history which tells a remarkable story of a family at the heart of the key historical events in the bloody creation of A'Gàidhealtachd - Land of the Gaels.

In my book I describe how the Marquis family had emerged from the lands of the MacDonalds who for 250 years from around 1250 to 1494 ruled over the Western Isles, western Scotland and parts of Ulster, and that the Marquises were part of the MacDonald clan structure as one of their leading bardic families.¹ In particular, they claimed to be descended from Marcus (*Marach*) MacDonald (who was killed in Antrim in 1397) a member of the ruling family of the MacDonalds who became the Lords of the Isles (see family tree below). The Marquis Gaelic family name was Mhic Mharki (son of Mark) or MacMarcuis, which would have been a later latinised spelling. The first recorded Mhic Mharki that I managed to locate was a Christinus Macmarkys who was rector at the church of St. Moluag, Totternish, situated on the MacDonald area of Skye, in 1428.

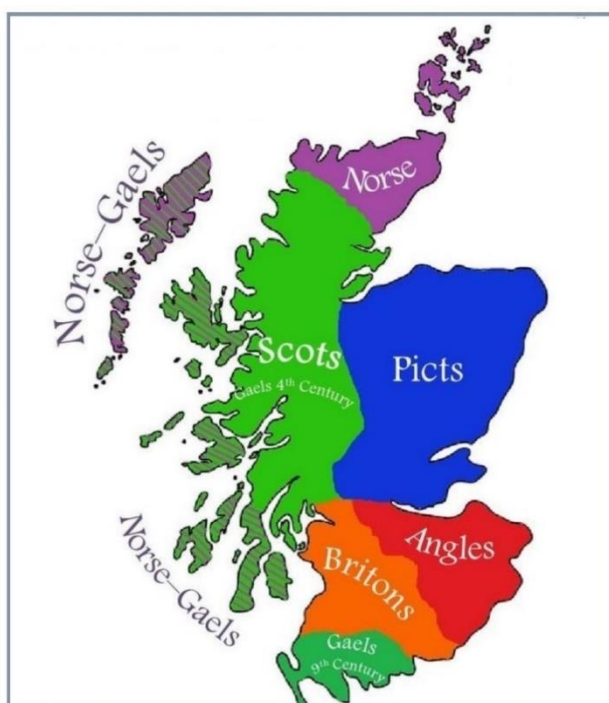
Although members of the MacMarki family were spread across the Gaelic world from the Hebrides in the north to Ulster in the south, it appears that a majority became a sept (sub-clan) of the MacDonalds of Dunnyveg and the Glens (also referred to as Clan Donald South), with one branch becoming a very important family of court poets for the MacDonalds (MacDonnells in Ireland) in Ulster – I write about this family in an Appendix to my book – and another branch with a very significant presence in Argyll. It is this family my book mainly tells the story of and

fortunately I appear to have the early history more or less correct and although initially rather sceptical of the MacMarki family claims to be related to Marcus MacDonald it appears that scepticism was unwarranted.



Earliest Origins of the Mhic Mharki Family

Little is known of the peoples who lived on the west coast of Scotland and the Western Isles before the 5th century when the area was occupied by Gaels from Ireland who established the Kingdom of Dalriada (Dál Riata), between 498-850. These lands were invaded again in the 9th and 10th centuries by Norse Vikings who established control over an area that was referred to as *Innse-Gall*, the 'Islands of the Foreigners' by the conquered Gaels. The MacDonaldds and the MacMarki were originally descended from male Vikings and Gaelic women.



The Peoples of Scotland



Gaelic Kingdom of Dalriada, 498-850

Marcus Macdonald, circa 1370-97

Marcus MacDonald was the grandson of Alasdair (Alexander) Og who in 1293 became Clan Chief (cinn-cinnidh) of the MacDonaldds on the death of his father Aonghus (Angus) Mór, but his reign was short-lived as he was killed fighting the MacDougalls six years later in support of Robert the Bruce's claim to the Scottish crown.

During the years Alasdair Og (1293-99) was chief of the MacDonaldds, the first Scottish War of Independence broke out against England and

King Edward I ('The Hammer of the Scots'), initially led by William Wallace who for a time hammered back with his defeat of the English at the Battle of Sterling Bridge in 1297. Whilst fighting the English, Scots nobles were also squabbling amongst themselves in a protracted battle for the Scottish Crown. The death of Margaret, 'Maid of Norway', in 1290 meant there was no clear claimant to the throne. Two of the main contenders were John de Comyn and Robert the Bruce who became joint Guardians after Comyn disposed his uncle, King John Balliol, who had been placed on the Scottish Throne by Edward I.

The *Brus* were descended from the Normans and still owned lands in both Scotland and England. In fact, the first recorded mention of Robert the Bruce was in a charter issued by Alasdair Og shortly after becoming clan chief in 1293. As for Bruce's problem with John de Comyn, that was eventually solved by murdering him at an agreed meeting in Greyfriars Church, Dumfries, in 1306. Despite this blasphemy and his subsequent excommunication, Bruce was crowned king shortly after.

The MacDonalds supported the Bruce and their neighbours, the MacDougalls, supported John de Comyn, and with the MacDougall lands being concentrated in the Lorn region of Argyll (around Oban), this area became the site of the battles between the two clans during the fight for the Scottish Crown. A year after his great victory over the English at Bannockburn in 1314, Bruce repeated King Mangus Bareleg of Norway's feat of 1098 (see below) and transported his entire fleet across a small isthmus just outside Tarbert on Loch Fyne (see map, page 2), thus cutting short his voyage on his way to destroying the MacDougalls as punishment for supporting Comyn. This was one of the few occasions that the MacDonalds, and therefore, the MacMarki, chose the winning side.

However, the beneficiaries of this victory and the enthronement of Bruce were not the heirs of Alasdair Og, instead his treacherous brother Aonghus Mór reaped the rewards, his son, John of Islay, the first Lord of the Isles, married the daughter of Bruce's son, Robert II, as the MacDonalds consolidated their control over the Norse-Gaelic Highlands and Isles.

Alasdair Og's followers were forced to seek refuge in Ulster where his son, Somerled, established one of the leading MacDonald gallowglass septs (bands of mercenaries fighting in the conflicts between the leading Irish clans). Marcus MacDonald was the youngest of four sons of Somerled all of whom were killed fighting on the side of the Irish O'Connors against the O'Neills. Marcus was succeeded briefly by his son Somerled Buidhe who was killed only a year after his father. A second son of Marcus took over the family gallowglass, Turlough (Charles) Mór, who rose to be Chief of the Connaught and Leinster MacDonalds. The MacMarki would establish a strong presence in both Ulster and Argyll.²

The history of the MacMarki family's relationship to Marcus is covered, fairly accurately in my book, with just one slight confusion. In the book I mention a conversation with a Dr Pia Coira, an academic of Gaelic studies at Aberdeen University, who thought Marcus was actually the son of Donald 2nd Lord of the Isles rather than Alasdair Og, but it seems there were, in fact, two Marcus MacDonalds around this time, one presumably the son of Donald. The MacMarki family were definitely descended from Marcus, grandson of Alasdair Og.

As I described in my book, "The rise of Clan Donald as the Lords of the Isles not only created a new political entity that lasted for over two centuries it also acted as a catalyst for the revival of a distinct and vibrant Scottish Gaelic culture, a fusion of Scandinavian and Irish Gaelic heritage that evolved over five hundred years of shared occupation and intermarriages between the two peoples. In both societies the oral tradition of the Gaelic *bàrd* (plural *baird*) and Norse *skáld* was central in chronicling and preserving a cultural identity. MacDonald clan chiefs were generous benefactors of the key contributors to this cultural renaissance, in which poets (*filidh*) and bards played a crucial part. In a largely illiterate society with virtually no secular writing – apart from a few legal documents and religious texts, which were written in Latin – they were the library and historians of the clan. As well as helping generate this new Highland Gaelic identity, poets and bards just as importantly preserved and transmitted it across the generations. It seems that the higher status court poet's (*fili*) chief function was to glorify his patron by paying homage to his Chief's ancestors, praising his personal

accomplishments – real or imagined – and satirising his enemies. A kind of modern day ‘spin-doctor’ – the first ‘Alistair Campbell-like propagandistes’, you could say.



12th century bronze reliquary of the crucifixion added to the Guthrie Bell from Killmichael Glassary, Argyll.

A good example of this fusion of Viking and Gaelic cultural influences is represented in this early medieval iron handbell from Kilmichael Glassary.

It must be remembered that until the defeat of the MacDonalds by King James IV in 1494, that ended their dominance over *A'Gàidhealtachd*, the Scotland that entered the second half of the millennium was still a country of two roughly equal halves, with as many Highland Gaelic speakers as Lowland Scots. However, the events of the 1490's determined that the future Scotland would be one nation, unified under one King, with one language, one culture, built on the destruction of one half by the other.

John Mór 'Tanister' and the MacDonalds of Largie

One of the constants in the story of the Argyll MacMarki family history was their close relationship to the MacDonalds of Largie for whom the MacMarki provided bardic services. The founder of the Largie MacDonalds was Ranald Bane MacDonald (circa 1410-76) second son of

John Mór 'Tanister', the younger brother to Donald, 2nd Lord of the Isles. Ranald received lands in Kintyre as a reward for his role in the Battle of Inverlochy (Fort William) in 1431, which was a MacDonald victory in the conflict with King James I of Scotland.

John Mór 'Tanister', called 'Tanister' because he had been named the official heir to his older brother Donald, why is not stated. The Law of *Tanistry* was the Gaelic system of passing on titles and lands within the tribe or clan system. In such a violent society a clan was perpetually fighting to preserve itself and its lands. A capable military leader was therefore essential, the succession of a minor or someone weak in mind or body posed a real threat to the security of the clan. In the Gaelic world the leading figures of the clan elected a new leader and heir according to what was felt to be in the collective interest, both would be chosen from the '*righdamhna*' (a list of those deemed suitable) and would normally be brother of the deceased chief or a younger son, even a bastard son instead of the natural heir, if he was thought unfit. Although the growing Norman influence amongst lower Scotland's elites, like the *Brus*, was encouraging the adoption of primogeniture, it did not become the rule amongst the Gaelic clans until the final defeat of the Lords of the Isles by James IV in 1494.

It seems that Donald refused to accept the decision of his brother becoming his heir and a long-protracted feud developed between them with Donald eventually coming out on top and John Mór forced to flee to Ulster in 1395, where his wife, Margaret Bissett, was a daughter of Mac Eoin Bissett, Lord of the Glens of Antrim. To what extent John Mór was able to gain control over his wife's lands is not known, as the male line of Mac Eoin Bissett still held official title until 1522. In fact, the Bissett's were not a Gaelic clan but a Norman family from Nottinghamshire, England, and were not clan leaders but barons in the feudal sense under de Lacy, Earl of Ulster. They were eventually absorbed into the Irish clan system.

However, John Mór was able to establish a strong presence in Ulster that allowed him to create his own separate Clan of Dunnyveg and the Glens. He had already inherited large parts of Argyll from his father which along with the Antrim landholdings became part of his substantial

fiefdom. Both the Largie MacDonalds and the MacMarki bards became septes within the MacDonalds of Dunnyveg and the Glens.

John Mór was assassinated by James Campbell in 1427. The main question surrounding this assassination concerns the role of King James I, recently returned from captivity in England. In order to re-establish his kingly authority, he felt it necessary to weaken the MacDonalds' hold over western Scotland. In an attempt to further divide Clan Donald, King James offered to support John Mór against his nephew, the current Lord of the Isles, Alexander MacDonald, who had recently succeeded his father, Donald. John Mór refused this 'Greek gift' and thus garnered the King's enmity. At a meeting called by King James, John Mór was treacherously murdered by James Campbell, James's representative. Although not in attendance himself, suspicion obviously fell on the King for being complicit, even ordering the act. Vehemently proclaiming his innocence James had Campbell arrested and executed, who even as he faced the axe still claimed he was merely obeying his liege lord. Thus began the eternal feud between the MacDonalds and Campbells that would ultimately all but destroy Clan Donald and the MacMarki alongside them.



Largie Castle before its demolition in 1958

Somerled, King of Argyll and the Isles, died 1164

The arrival of the Norse Vikings during the 9th century merely added fuel to an already raging fire as Gaels, Scots and now Vikings fought for control over *A'Gàidhealtachd*. There were in fact two distinct waves of Viking incursions (Norse/Finngall and Danes/Dubhgall) and soon a very complicated situation developed as conflicts between Gaels and Vikings, and even amongst the two separate groups of Vikings, with all forming temporary alliances of convenience. Intermarriage made it increasingly difficult to distinguish between Gaels, Norse and Norse-Gaels (generally referred to as 'Gall Gaels', literally 'foreign Gaels') amongst the ruling families.

Over the next two centuries various Nordic and Nordic-Gael warrior leaders fought for control over the Gaelic region but none were able to establish reigns that lasted for very long. One of the more successful was Echmarcach mac Ragnall who managed to rule over most of the area as the King of Dublin and the Isles during the 1030's and then again from 1046 until 1052, when after a defeat he retreated to the Isle of Man until his death in 1064/65. I shall look at Echmarcach in more detail later for reasons that will become apparent.

During this period a second battle was underway for the overall sovereignty over *A'Gàidhealtachd* between the Kings of Norway and Scotland. In 1098, Magnus 'Bareleg', King of Norway, was able to force the Scots King Edgar to sign a treaty granting Norwegian dominion over all the Isles off the coast of Scotland that could be circumnavigated by ship. In my book I describe how Magnus had a skiff hauled across the narrow isthmus at Tarbert, Loch Fyne, with himself at the helm, thus audaciously designating the Kintyre peninsula as one of the 'Isles' within his realm. Of course, both kings were too far away to rule directly so the battle for local control continued, and it was not until the appearance of Somerled (whose name means 'summer warrior') in the mid-12th century, that a more permanent authority was established.

Somerled's early years are largely a mystery, even his parentage is still debated, although it is widely accepted that his father was probably

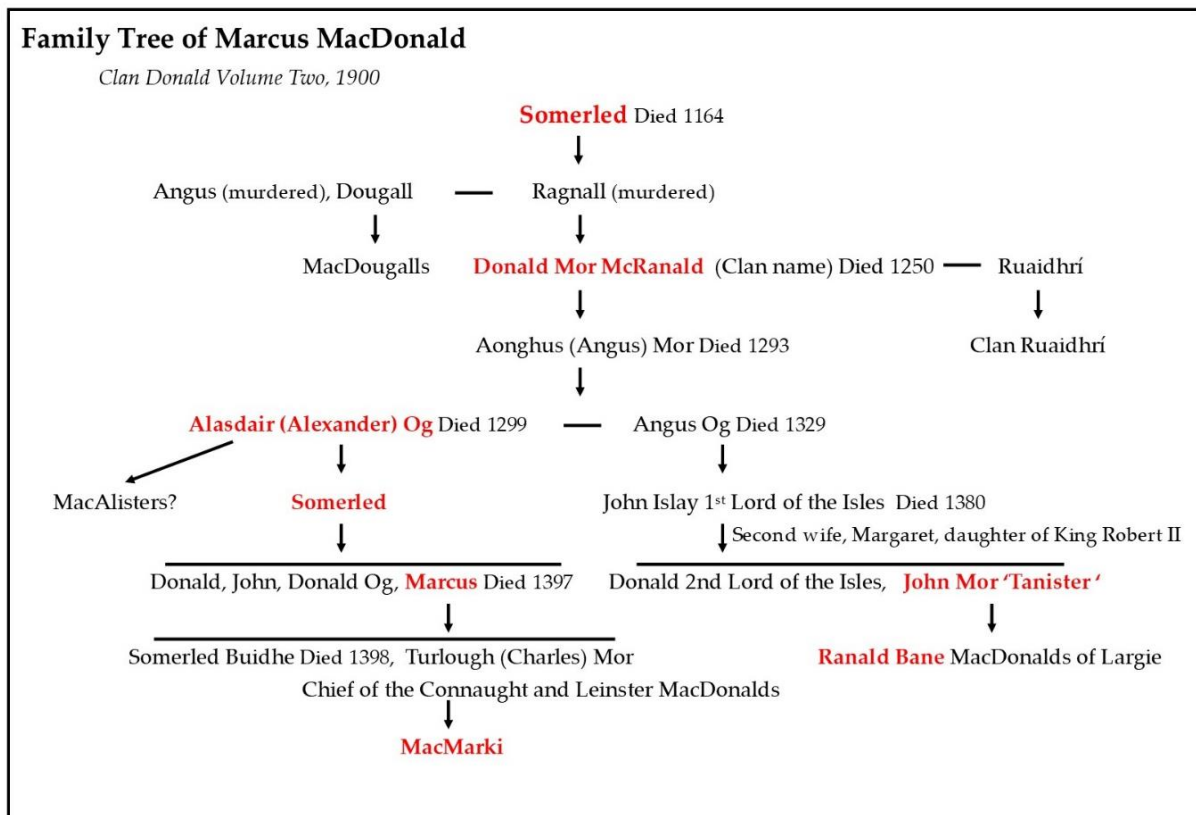
GilleBride³ whose ancestry was thought to have been Gaelic-Norse and possibly related to an earlier Irish king. Most contemporary sources suggested Somerled was Gaelic through his paternal line and his mother probably of Norse extraction, and he was portrayed as leading Gaelic resistance to the Vikings. But recent DNA research contradicted this view (see below) and reveals that his paternal ancestry was in fact Norse. And although Somerled saw himself as a Gaelic liberator, he was very much part of the battle to become *Ri* (king) of Viking controlled *Innse-Gall*.

Whatever his origins, Somerled clearly came from a family of some prominence. His sister had married Malcolm MacHeth grandson of the Scottish King Malcolm Canmore, and Somerled himself married Ragnhild, daughter of Óláfr Guðrøðarson, Viking King of the Isle of Man. By 1135 Somerled was being described as the King of Argyll and the Isles, in 1156 he defeated Guðrøðarson's son to also become King of Man. Somerled was *Ri Innse-Gall* until he was killed at the Battle of Renfrew in 1164, during a seaborne invasion of mainland Scotland. The *Chronicle of Mann* states that 160 ships were involved which was an extraordinary number and likely an exaggeration. Somerled's real intentions are unknown, trying to throwback Scot's attempts to encroach on his territory is one possible reason, but with such a large force he may have had much higher ambitions, perhaps even to win the throne of Scotland itself. Things went disastrously wrong from the start of the landing on the coast and Somerled was killed very quickly – according to MacDonald accounts through treachery – a source of some controversy to this day.

Somerled was clearly a very capable warrior king and established a successful dynasty that would rule much of the area for decades, even centuries to come. However, his long-term significance and legacy in the wider history of Scotland was, in fact, achieved by his sons and grandsons. On Somerled's death, his heirs went on an orgy of familicides as if they were members of an imperial family in the Roman Empire. His eldest son, Angus, is thought to be responsible for the death of his younger brother Ranald, but Ranald's sons, Ruaidhrí and Domhnaill, gained revenge by killing Angus and his three sons in 1210. Ruaidhrí's descendants would form Clan Ruaidhrí (MacRory) who dominated the

northern Hebrides for a while. Domhnaill (Donald) was the eponymous progenitor of Clan Donald. Another of Somerled's sons, Dougall, whose descendants founded Clan Dougall. Even the MacAlisters, a breakaway clan from the MacDonalDs, claimed lineage to one of Somerled's descendants, Alasdair (Alexander) Og, grandfather of our Marcus MacDonald, but there is no evidence for this apart from clan folklore.

There have been several genetic studies on men bearing the clan names founded by Somerled's heirs, with the results suggesting that as many as 500,000 of Somerled's patrilineal descendants are living today. These surveys also concluded that many of these men carried the genetic marker Haplogroup R1a, which is extremely rare in the general Gaelic population but very common in Norway, thus confirming that Somerled's patrilineal ancestors originated in Scandinavia. MacMarki's descent from Marcus MacDonald links the family directly to Somerled, so I'm contemplating taking the relevant DNA test to see if I carry the Haplogroup R1a marker.



At the Battle of Largs in 1263 (see map of MacDonalds above) Viking dominance over *Innse-Gall* came to a bloody end resulting in the evolving clan system filling the power vacuum with the MacDonalds eventually emerging as the dominant clan and Lords of the Isles. But the lands of the now Norse-Gaels remained frontier territory and the fight for control was now between the MacDonalds and the Scottish kings that would last for over two hundred years, even longer, if you count the Jacobite rebellions whose final defeat at the Battle of Culloden in 1746, resulted in the near genocide of an entire people and culture, aided by one of the greatest betrayals in history when the Highlanders were abandoned to their fate by their own despicable clan chiefs.

I tried to commemorate the demise of the Gaelic Highlanders in my book as one of our bardic ancestors might have done: -

“So, with the ‘mist rolling in from the sea over now almost abandoned dark, distant mountains and valleys of green’,* where the sounds of Gaelic poetry and music of the harp and pipes were replaced by a cacophony of bleating sheep and occasional gunfire on the new grouse wastelands – the new residents of *A’Ghàidhealtachd*.”

* From the song *Mull of Kintyre* by Paul McCartney’s Wings

Echmarcach mac Ragnall – The First Marquis?

Echmarcach was the dominant figure of the Irish Sea region during the middle of the 11th century and was described as the King of Dublin and the Isles. He is recorded attending a meeting in 1031 with King Cnut of England and Denmark, King Malcolm of Scotland and MacBeth of Moray (later, in 1040, King MacBeth of Shakespearian fame), so clearly, Echmarcach was acknowledged as the principal ruler of the region. Presumably to the chagrin of King Malcolm, Norse/Gael Echmarcach agreed to accept Danish Cnut as the sovereign overlord of *Innse-Gall*.

As with all rulers of this period, Echmarcach was constantly at war, he was overthrown first in 1038, but restored his kingship eight-years later only to be forced out again in 1052, when he retreated to the Isle of Man

which he ruled until 1061. Sometime during 1064 or 65, Echmarcach died whilst on a pilgrimage to Rome.

The Norse Vikings first occupied the Dublin area in the mid-9th century, at the same time establishing the ports of Wexford, Waterford, Cork and Limerick. Their presence would lead to persistent attacks from the native Irish resulting in Dublin changing hands on a number of occasions. Eventually, Viking leaders would marry into the Irish ruling dynasties and ordinary Vikings merge into the native population, although, Dublin remained linked to Viking-ruled *Innse-Gall* until captured by the Normans in 1171. The most important impact of the Viking founding of Dublin was to integrate this new port, and hence Ireland as well, into the extensive Scandinavian trading network which reached as far as Russia and the Mediterranean. Dublin became one of the major trading centres of western Europe, specialising in slaves.

Echmarcach mac Ragnall's precise origins are uncertain, his father was obviously called Ragnall and the general consensus, shared by Dennis Freeman-Wright (see below), is that this Ragnall was the King of Waterford (1022-1031). This would make him the great-grandson of Ragnall King of Dublin, Waterford and York who died in 921, who was described as "king of the fair foreigners (Norse) and the dark foreigners (Danes)" in the Annals of Ulster.

This King Ragnall was the likely leader of a group of Norwegian warriors that arrived off the southern coast of Ireland in 914, in order to restore Norse rule over Dublin and the surrounding area which had been lost when the Irish forced them out in 902. Waterford was also recaptured, hence the reference to Ragnall being King of Waterford as well.

The inclusion of 'York' in Ragnall's title shows the strong links between the Vikings of Jorvik and the Vikings of the Western Isles and the Irish Sea region. Ragnall is believed to be the grandson of Ímar, the principal Norse figure in this area during the second half of the ninth century, described as the Viking King of Dublin between 870-873 but had been the dominant figure in the region since 853 and founder of the Uí Ímair dynasty. In the Norse Sagas 'Ímar' becomes 'Ivar the Boneless' son of Ragnar Lodbrok, the central characters in the recent TV series the *Vikings*. Ivar/Ímar not

only dominated the Irish Sea region with his brother Olaf, uniting the Norse and Danish Vikings and consolidating Viking rule over all of *Innse-Gall*, Ivar is also believed to have led the army that captured York and then invaded East Anglia in 869, slaughtering its king Edmund the Martyr. If Ímar was indeed Ivar the Boneless – as a majority of historians believe, although there is some disagreement on this with a few other historians thinking it is more likely that they were two different Viking warlords named Ivar – that presents us with the intriguing prospect that the MacMarki could be directly related to ‘Ivar the Boneless’ son of Ragnar Lodbrok – now there’s a thought!



A fifteenth-century depiction of Ívarr and Ubba ravaging the countryside as it appears on folio in the British Library.

Echmarcach mac Ragnall is therefore thought to be the great-great grandson of *Ragnall*, King of Dublin, Waterford and York whose heirs had married into the Irish ruling families. This would make him a member of the Uí Ímair dynasty, founded by Ímar or Ivar the Boneless.

It seems that Echmarcach formed some kind of alliance with Ui Briain, Irish King of Munster, whose wife, Cacht ingen Ragnaill, is believed to be closely related to Echmarcach, possibly a sister. Echmarcach's daughter, Mór, also married one of Uí Briain's close kinsmen. In his pilgrimage

to Rome, Echmarcach was accompanied by Ui Briain where he died aged around 65.

Two other grandsons of Ímar who accompanied Ragnall in his attack on southern Ireland in 914, were Godfraid ua Imair and Sitric Cáech. All three would fight battles alongside each other in Ireland, Scotland and Northumbria, as well as on occasions against one and other. All three were at one time Kings of Dublin with Ragnall and Sitric also Kings of Northumbria and Jorvic. Godfraid tried to gain control over Northumbria and Jorvic but was defeated by King Æthelstan of England.

Godfraid's son, Olaf Guthfrithson, became king of both Dublin and Northumbria on his father's death in 934. Three years later he was defeated alongside Constantine II, King of Scotland, and Owain, King of Strathclyde, by Athelstan at the Battle of Brunanburh. Although forced to return to Dublin with his tail between his legs, Guthfrithson was able to take advantage of the confusion caused by the untimely death of Athelstan two years later and re-entered England to regain Viking control over York. He then moved south to reoccupy the Five Boroughs.



The chronicler Symeon of Durham in his *Historia Regum* records that Guthfrithson and the new English King Edmund met at Leicester in 939 and came to an agreement on dividing England. According to the 12th century chronicler Roger of Howden “Anlaf (Olaf) took as his wife Aldgyth the daughter of Jarl Orm [Jarl of Leicester] by whose advice and help he had gained the aforesaid victory”. However, his victory was short-lived, Olaf died in 941 and his two nephews, Amlaíb Cuarán and Blácaire mac Gofrith were driven out of Northumberland by Edmund I in 944. Both would become kings of Dublin and create the Crovan dynasty, which, like Somerled were descended from the Uí Ímair, yet they would fight against each other over two centuries for dominance of *Innse-Gall*.

Somerled had been very successful in his contest with the Crovans but after his death, Godfraid, with the help of the King of Norway, was able to re-establish Crovan control over the Hebrides and Man which he had lost to Somerled in 1156. Somerled’s grandsons Ruaidhrí, would take back the Hebrides, and Domhnaill, founder of the MacDonalds, would eventually dominate the whole region as the Lords of the Isles.



Irish clans circa 900



The lands of the Crovan and Somerled dynasties in about 1200.

One sobering thought is that nearly all our leading male ancestors from this period were either murdered or killed in battle!

What follows is **Dennis Freeman-Wright's** own interpretation of the history of Echmarcach and the likelihood that he was the first Marquis:-

“Your conviction that your family descended from Marcus MacDonald son of Somerled, son of Alastair Og MacDonald Lord of the Isles and dispossessed by his younger brother Angus Og, the friend of Robert the Bruce, is interesting not least because in the Annals of the Four Masters this Marcus MacDonald is referred to as "Marcach", obviously a hypochoristicon [the nature of a pet name or diminutive form of a name] of Echmarcach, which confirms my hypothesis.”

The MacDonald genealogy given in MacFirbis and the Annals of Ulster runs thus: -

Ranald [Ragnall] King of Dublin, Waterford and York, died 921, his son

Ivarr died 950, his son

Ranald died 995, his son

Ranald King of Waterford, 1022-1031, killed in Dublin 1035. He clearly married into an Irish royal house to give one of his sons a Gaelic name.

Echmarcach King of Dublin and Man, Ruler of the Isles, defeated on Man in 1061 and died on pilgrimage to Rome 1065, his son

Solmund, who married into the kindred of St Columba [Gaelic Clans like the Malcolms and McCallums named after and claiming descent from the followers of the 6th century St. Columba of Iona, who himself was said to be from the Irish O'Neills], his son and more Gaelic inter-marriage.

Gilladamnan Lord of Argyll, his son

Gillebride, claimant to Argyll, his son [see note 2, SM]

Somerled, King of the South Isles, Lord of the Isles, assassinated 1164 at Renfrew. Founder of the MacDonald clans and their septs.

You will note I have emboldened Echmarcach; this is his name in the Annals of Ulster but in the MacFirbis genealogy he is called **Imergi**, probably pronounced Imerki or just Merki, and may account for the first name Mark in MacDonald genealogy. This ruler had a well-documented and varied career and at various times ruled over Dublin (twice), Man, Rhinns of Galloway and the southern Hebrides. He certainly fathered innumerable children, but none managed to assert their claim to any substantial territories. He was a contemporary of King Canute the Mighty and MacBeth and was present at a notable meeting of the kings of Britain in 1031.

Now, although Eachmarcach (meaning 'horse-rider') as a name in Ireland is not uncommon and anglicised into MacCaffarky and then wrongly bastardised into McCarthy, I am suggesting that because of the Scandinavian influence in the Scottish isles and the apparent hypocoristic Imergi, his descendants in the southern isles were referred to as MacMerki, anglicised Mac Marquis."

Dennis Freeman-Wright

To sum up, the Marquis family of Scotland descends from Norse Vikings through the male line and Gaels through the female line. Also directly descended from Marcus MacDonald whose immediate heirs established the MacMarki sept which became part of the MacDonalds of Dunnyveg and the Glens. Through Marcus the MacMarki family are directly related to Somerled one of the most important leaders in Scottish history. If Dennis Freeman-Wright is correct, the first MacMarki were the direct descendants of Echmarcach mac Ragnall (perhaps also called Imerki or just Merki), King of Dublin and the Isles during the 11th century, who was the great-great-grandson of Ragnall, King of Dublin, Waterford and York, who died in 921 and likely related to Ivar the Boneless and Ragnar Lodbrok.

One branch of the MacMarki became the bards to the MacDonalds of Largie on the Kintyre peninsula in a close relationship that would last until the end of the 18th century. Members of the MacMarki sept would have fought in all the Clan Donald battles alongside the Largie

MacDonalds including joining in the Jacobite rebellions and some could have fought and even conceivably died at the Battle of Culloden in 1746.

The MacMarki bardic family fortunes reached their highest point during the 16th century with large landholdings at Laggan to the north and Kerranmore to the south of Kilkerran (Campbeltown) being granted for bardic services in 1506, but there is also evidence of a significant presence across Argyll during this period and most likely from much earlier considering the familial links to Somerled. For example, there was a small town called Balamack markyh (town of the MacMarki) north of Kilkerran which grew out of Laggan, and a peninsula called Rudha Mhic Mharcuis in Lorn near Oban, suggesting a family of some importance over a significant period of time. The catastrophic 17th century, “The Killing Time”, saw the total loss of their lands and almost certainly many would have died from the continuous violence or consequent famines and epidemics. It is only at the very end of the 17th century as law and order was slowly restored to Kintyre and a larger number of records survived, that increasing numbers of actual named individual MacMarki, now MacMarcuis, MacVarquis or McMarcus, began to appear throughout Argyll.

One family of survivors from the bardic MacMarki were the McMarcus tacksmen (chief tenant) on the MacDonalds of Largie Island of Cara off the west coast of Kintyre during the 18th century, one of whom, Alexander McMarcus, was married to a cousin of the famous Flora MacDonald (herself a Largie MacDonald) and a direct ancestor of mine. It appears that the McMarcus tacksmen were part of a smuggling operation overseen by their Largie patrons, primarily in whisky, that lasted until the end of the 18th century. The grandson of Alexander McMarcus, also Alexander, eventually moved from Cara to Tarbert and changed his occupation from smuggler to fisherman. This Alexander Marquis (name now anglicised) was my great-great-great-great-grandfather. Alexander’s father, Donald, was the last of Largie tacksmen and the centuries old connection with the MacDonalds – which would have included many intermarriages – was over – the Marquises were now on their own.

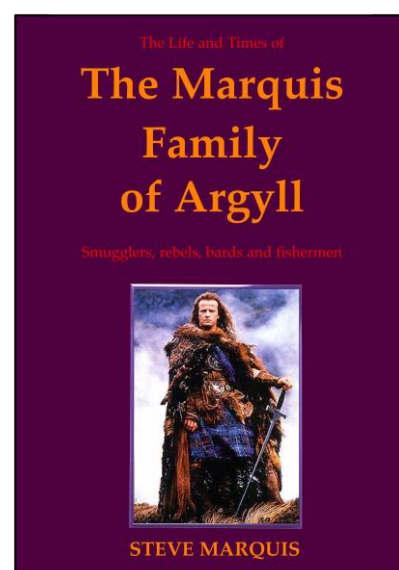
Steve Marquis, 2023 www.marquisfamilyhistory.com

1. The role of the bard was to write poems and compose songs, but providing musical entertainment seems to have been their principal function. As with all Gaelic official posts, being a bard was a hereditary position, his services paid for with grants (*wadset*) of land. If a bard failed to produce a suitable male heir, he was expected to train a brother's son or other male relative (via *tanistry*) in order to preserve land titles and maintain the bardic tradition.
2. There is also a reference to a poem for the chief of the Mac Marcuis family of 'Knocknacloy', in Antrim, presumably associated with the McDonalds of Knocknacloy, one of the septs established by the heirs of John Mór 'Tanister' (see Family Tree above). It is dated 1588, but we do not have the name of its author or the first name of that chief.
3. Lord Hailes's in his *Annals of Scotland* written in 1776, stated that "in 973, Maccus, King of the Isles; Kenneth, King of the Scots, and Malcolm, King of the Cambri, entered into a bond for mutual defence. Then followed Gilledomnan, the grandfather of Somerled. Gilledomnan was driven from the Isles by the Scandinavians, and died in Ireland, where he had taken refuge. While there, his daughter married Harold Gille, King of Norway, in an attempt to bring peace."

It must be remembered that these very early Gaelic Annals are often contradictory and are more concerned with telling a story than providing an accurate historical record. The information in this article is based on the latest academic interpretation of these early Annals and clan histories, plus the analysis of Dennis Freeman-Wright.



The Island of Cara





Tacksman's House on Cara (built in 1735), where my Ancestors lived for around 70 years.



Where my grandfather, Angus Marquis, great-great-great-grandson of Alexander who moved to Tarbert from Cara in 1818, establishing a new family of fishermen until Angus moved to Glasgow in 1915/16 to start an apprenticeship in the Govern shipyards.