



WIRRAL ARCHAEOLOGY

CONSTANTINE

MAC AEDA, KING OF ALBA. 900 TO 943AD.

Versioning

Version

Draft

0.9

1.0

Date

27 July 2020

28 July 2020

20 Nov 2020

Comments

Original Draft

Reformatted

Initial Publication

Contents

Constantine Mac Aeda, King of Alba.900 to 943AD.....	4
Introduction	4
Constantine.....	4
Vikings in 917.....	4
918.....	4
920.....	4
926.....	4
927.....	5
934.....	5
937.....	5
943.....	5
Footnote.	5

Constantine Mac Aeda, King of Alba.900 to 943AD.

Introduction

Constantine the second of Alba (early Scotland) was one of the Northern British Kings that fought against Athelstan at the battle of Brunanburh in 937 AD.

Constantine

He was the grandson of the great Pictish King, Kenneth MacAlpin and the son of the last Pictish King, Aed.

Constantine (Causatin Mac Aeda) was considered to be the first King of Scotland and was the ruler over the merging Pictish and Scottish peoples. The kingdom of Alba was the embryonic state that would evolve into the medieval Kingdom of Scotland.

There is little doubt, that over the course of the previous century, that the incursions of the Vikings had severely destabilised Pictland and that these incursions acted as the catalyst that led to the Pictish and Scottish peoples merging into what would become one people.

When he became King, Constantine was beset by several enemies and was facing war on several fronts. Within four years of being crowned, he fought a battle against a Viking army at Strath Erenn in what is now Perthshire. The Vikings had raided and sacked a church at Dunkeld, a holy place that contained relics of Saint Columba. It's not clear as to where this Viking army had come from but they may have been from Dublin, having been expelled by the Irish two years earlier.

Vikings in 917

At this time the Vikings had been suffering several military setbacks throughout the British Isles and Ireland and Scandinavian Warlords were struggling to gain control of the Western coasts and the Irish Sea. In 917, the Vikings recovered Dublin and some- time later, a Warlord called Ragnall landed on the Lancashire coast and crossed the Pennines and captured York. The Northumbrian King, Ealdred, sought sanctuary with Constantine.

918

In 918 Constantine saw an opportunity to increase the size his own Kingdom and marched an army to Corbridge, an old Roman Town to the south of Hadrian's wall. An Irish source claims that Aethelflaed, the lady of Mercia and daughter of king Alfred, had made an alliance with Constantine and that she joined him at Corbridge where they engaged Ragnall's army. The battle was indecisive and Ragnall retained the Kingship of York and with the Vikings back in control in Dublin, the Northern kingdoms of Britain must have been concerned at the prospect of further Viking expansion.

In the South, Wessex and Mercia were becoming ever more powerful and it is believed that Aethelflaed brokered an alliance between Mercia, Alba and the Welsh Kingdom of Strathclyde, under its King, Dyfnwal ab Owain. This must have countered Ragnall's threat to Mercia's northern border. Aethelflaed died, a short time after the battle of Corbridge but her brother, Edward the Elder, King of Wessex continued the alliance whilst building fortifications across the English midlands.

920

The powers signed a treaty at Bakewell in 920 AD. Other signatories were the English Lords of Bamburgh and English Northumbria. They agreed not to attack Ragnall and he agreed not to raid south of the Humber. A year later, Ragnall died and Sihtric, the King of Dublin set himself up as King of York. Three years later, Edward the Elder died and Wessex had a new King, Athelstan.

926

In 926, Athelstan married one of his sisters to Sihtric of York. Sihtric died the following year and Athelstan seized York and added Northumbria to his Kingdom. Sihtric's brother, Gothfrith tried to claim the throne but was fought off by Athelstan. Gothfrith returned to Dublin thinking he was the rightful king of York. The road to Brunanburh was now set.

927

On the 12th July 927, the Northern Kings, including Constantine, Owain and Ealdred of Bamburgh swore fealty to Athelstan and acknowledged him as their overlord. The treaty seemed to unravel within years.

934

We don't know as to why, but in 934, Athelstan launched a full- scale military invasion of Alba. Had Constantine refused to pay homage to Athelstan? Whatever, the cause was, Alba was plundered and thoroughly looted. We have no records of any battles being fought but. In the end, Constantine swore a new oath of fealty to Athelstan.

Constantine was obviously resentful and he formed an alliance with Strathclyde and Anlaf Gothfrithsson, the Norse King of Dublin.

937

In 937 AD,, the Northern Kings, together with Anlaf Gothfrithsson, king of Dublin went down to defeat at the battle of Brunanburh. Constantine's son, Cellach, was slain in the battle.

Anlaf, Constantine and Owain all survived the battle. None of them seem to have lost any territory to Athelstan, none of them seem to have suffered a loss of reputation either and all outlived Athelstan who died in 939.

943

In 943, Constantine abdicated his throne and retired to the monastery at St.Andrews. He died in 952 AD, when he was about 80 years old. He was buried on the island of Iona.

He had been succeeded by Mael Coluim, possibly his heir, but not his biological son. Constantine, according to a 12th century source, encouraged Mael Coluim to attack

Northumberland but the new English King, Edmund, Athelstan's brother, who had expelled Anlaf Gothfrithsson from the five boroughs and York, had installed an East Anglican nobleman as King of Northumberland and it seems that Edmund struck a deal with Mael Coluim who then supported the English King's attack on Alba's former ally at Brunanburh, the Kingdom of Strathclyde in 945. Dyfnwal, the son of the Owain who had fought for Constantine and Anlaf was the current King of Strathclyde. There is no record of what happened to him but Edmund had his two sons blinded. Edmund then appointed Mael Coluim to supervise the Kingdom of Strathclyde on his behalf.

It is clear from the above that all these 'players' were opportunistic by nature and this is clearly demonstrated by their willingness to fight former allies on behalf of former enemies.

Footnote.

It is a matter of some dispute that Constantine had married one of his daughters to Anlaf Gothfrithsson. Some sources suggest that he did others dismiss this.