

## **Columba (521-597) - Lecture 5 – ‘Bridei and the Picts’**

### **THE ‘WATER-BEAST’**

- Luigne Moccu Min
- Sign of the Cross
- Invoked the name of God
- THE GATES OF THE FORT

### **Q1 – Where was the Fortress?**

- Torvean Hill?
- Castle/Crown area?
- Mound at Old High Church?
- Craig Phadrig
  - Impressive situation - One of a series of strongholds
  - Archaeological evidences to end of 6<sup>th</sup> century

### **Q2 – When did Columba visit Bridei?**

- 555 – Bridei becomes King
- 559 - Victory over Dal Riata, defeating King Gabrain
- 560 – Conall becomes King of Dal Riata
- 563 – Columba arrives in Dal Riata
- 564/565 – Columba’s first visit to Bridei
- 574 – Aedan becomes King of Dal Riata

### **Q3 – What was the Political Context?**

- Bridei had shown his military strength.
- Bridei was a formidable pagan presence adjacent to Dal Riata.
- Bridei had to be reckoned with if the Iona mission was to get off the ground.
- Bridei had to be pacified if the Dal Riata kingdom was to survive.

### **Q4 – Who were the Picts?**

- Flourished until 9<sup>th</sup> Century
- Pictii – ‘the painted ones’
- Alex Woolf’s deduction that Fortriu was in the NORTH rather the SOUTH
- Pictish studies as a vibrant research area today
- A loose hegemony centred on the northern Kingdom.
- Included Orkney and Skye, perhaps also Outer Hebrides

### **Q5 – Were the Picts ONE nation or MANY nations?**

- Old View – Two distinct Pictish Kingdoms
- New View – Close confederation with collections of quasi-independent groups.

### **Q6 – What is Bede’s version of the Columba/Bridei story?**

- Bede writes c. 730
- Bede’s sources for this are Christian Picts seeking to enhance the Columba/Pict link.
- Bede’s sources paint a very positive picture of Pictish response to Columba.

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### Q7 – Who was King Bridei?

- Bridei mac Meilochon (Bridei mac Maelchu) reigned from around 555 to around 584.
- Termed *Rex Potentissimus* [by Bede] ‘most powerful king’.
- A Man of Wealth:
- A Man of Uncertain Origin – was he originally a Northern or Southern Pict?
- Powerful on both land and sea.

### Q8 – What did Bridei already know about Christianity?

- Bridei was well-informed. Knowledge is power
- Bridei aware of the religion of Dal Riata.
- Bridei aware of the Christianisation of Ireland.
- Bridei aware of pre-Columba missionary activity in various regions of Pictland.
  - W. Douglas Simpson argues for widespread Christianisation of Pictland BEFORE Columba – eg. Moluaig etc.
  - James E. Fraser argues for a more modest pre-Columba impact.

### Q9 – What were Columba’s aims?

- Ambassador of Christ/Political Envoy?
- Protection for Iona monks working within Pictland?
- Truce between Conall and Bridei?
- Evangelist or Reformer?
- Attracted to power-figures?
- Finlay argues for pre-arrangement

### Q10 – What happened when Columba met Bridei?

- Bridei cited five times by Adomnan

### Q11 – Did Columba ‘preach the Gospel’ to Bridei?

- Did Adomnan omit ‘unsuccessful’ events?
- Adomnan presents Columba as man of God clothed with power of God.
- Gospel ‘proclaimed’ when the victory of Christ is made manifest.
- The ‘triumph of Christ’ is equivalent to ‘preaching’
- the claims of the true God to the listeners.

### Q12 – Did Bridei become a Christian?

- Does Bede imply this?
- No statement from the Iona tradition.
- Unlikely such a high-profile conversion would not have been referred to.

## THE STRANGE CASE OF THE WANDERING MONK

### Q13 – What did Columba achieve with Bridei?

- Political success.
- Spiritual/Personal goals?
- An ‘understanding’
- Safety and security for Iona monks.