

# Origins of the Scots

## Introduction

Scotland as we know it today evolved from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 12<sup>th</sup> Centuries AD. Most casual readers of history are aware that the Picts and the Scots combined to form Alba c.850 AD, and Alba evolved into Scotland - but not everyone is aware how this happened and what the other components of what became Scotland were. In this short essay, I will outline the various peoples who combined to form the Scottish people and state. This paper is not designed to be scholarly in nature, but merely a brief survey of the situation to acquaint the reader with the basics.

Sources of information are somewhat limited, since written records were unavailable in prehistoric times, which in Scotland means before the arrival of the Romans in the first century AD. The Romans came north after subduing southern Britain. One expects that the Roman view would be biased in their favor, so it is difficult to get an accurate picture from their records. After Rome adopted Christianity in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, church records became a source of information in Southern Britain, and by the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, in Ireland, but this introduced a new bias in support of Christian peoples as opposed to those viewed by Christians at the time as heathens, pagans, or infidels. As Christian missionaries moved into northern Britain from several directions, more documents became available. So, let's begin...

## Pre-Celts

Around 12-13,000 BC, after the ice began to recede, humans returned to Britain, probably as hunter-gatherers. Successive waves of immigrants appear to have continued for thousands of years. One estimate of population c. 9000 BC placed about 1000 inhabitants in all of Britain, which grew to about 4000 by 5000 BC. A thousand years later, from about 4000 BC, the population of Britain exploded exponentially, reaching about a quarter of a million by 2000 BC. One must keep in mind that compared to today, ancient Britain was relatively empty, and ancient Scotland emptier.

Hunter-gatherers began to trickle into Scotland, and the remains of settlements have been found from about 8500 BC. Successive waves of immigrants continued to arrive, although northern Britain was the last part of the island to be settled and had the smallest population. Recent DNA studies suggest that the DNA of the pre-Celts is still present in all the groups who came later and their descendants.

## Arrival of the Celts

During the 8<sup>th</sup> Century BC, Celts arrived in the British Isles, simultaneously with the arrival of iron weapons and technology. This raises the question of how did they get there, since in ancient times the Celts ranged over thousands of miles, from northwest Spain (Galicia) to central Turkey (Galatia). Although speaking related languages and dialects, the Celts were organized into independent tribes with no central leader or government.

### The theories on how the Celts arrived in the British Isles:

1. They came across from Gaul (modern France, Belgium, and Netherlands) to Britain - based on Roman and later documents.
2. They came up from Galicia in Spain - based on oral traditions later written down and more recently, by DNA links.

3. They came over from north Germany and Scandinavia via the Shetland and Orkney Islands – based on oral traditions documented later.

### Celtic Expansion into Southern Britain

The Celts in Gaul spoke Brythonic (P-Celtic) languages, and moved across the English Channel and southern North Sea (called by some the German Ocean) to modern day England, Wales, and Southern Scotland.

### Celtic Expansion into Ireland

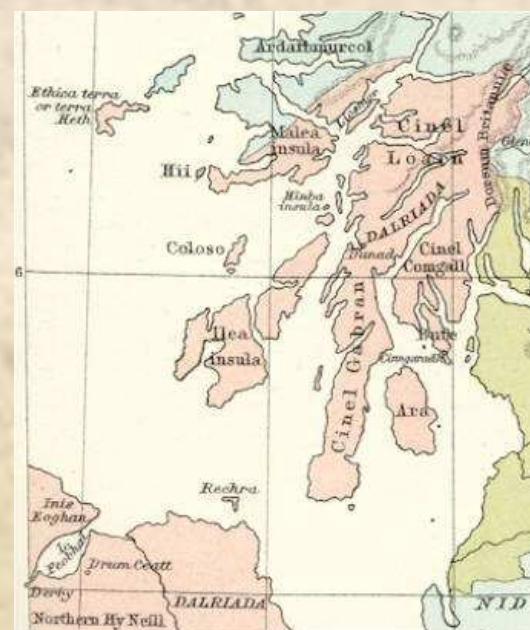
There are two theories about the Celtic settlement of Ireland by the Gaels (Goidelic – Gaelic - or Q-Celtic language speakers):

1. They split off from the Brythonic Celtic settlers of Britain, moved across the Irish Sea and Gaelic evolved into a separate language in Ireland.
2. The split into P-Celtic and Q-Celtic already began before the settlement of Ireland, and the settlers moved up from northwest Spain by boat. The evolution of Gaelic could have occurred in Galicia, or after the settlers arrived in Ireland. This is supported by genetic evidence and oral traditions written down in the Christian era.

**The Scots (Gaels):** The Romans called Ireland Hibernia, and the inhabitants Scotti - Hibernians, Irish and Scots were the same people. They called themselves Erse, which later became Irish. Scotti (Scots) from northern Ireland began moving into southwest Scotland (Argyll) perhaps as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD, but definitely by the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. Gaels from the sub-kingdom of Dal Riata in northeast Ireland emigrated to southwest Scotland, in what became Argyll “coast of the Gael”). The Scotti who moved into what becomes Scotland were called Irish as well as Scots by other inhabitants of Scotland, although eventually, well into the Middle Ages, Scot replaced Irish as the primary designation.



**Dal Riata – Green, Pictavia – Yellow**



**Dal Riata - red, Pictavia – Blue, Strathclyde - Brown**

**The Picts:** The origin of the Picts has been and still is controversial. One theory is that they migrated from “Scythia”, based on oral and later written tradition (primarily the Venerable Bede and his *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*). Scythia in Bede’s time meant northern Germany and Scandinavia, and there is some suggestion that more specifically, it meant the land from the Frisian coast in the modern Netherlands to the coast of Jutland in modern Denmark. This would mean a seaborne movement, which is suggested by Bede.

One legend is that the Picts went to northern Ireland, without women, and were told that there was not enough land for them to settle there, but they should go to northern Britain, where they could find available land. This explains the presence of a proto-Pictish people in northern Ireland, the Cruithne, a tribe of apparently P-Celtic speakers in a largely Q-Celtic speaking northern Ireland. Some remained in Ireland and adopted the Q-Celtic language over time, while others moved into southwest Scotland and were later identified with the Picts of Galloway, who were later absorbed into the Welsh kingdom of Strathclyde, and so ultimately, into Scotland.

Although it is common today to identify the Picts as the *picture people*, based on the Latin root *picto*, there is another Celtic root word *pecht*, related to Pritani, from which Britanni evolved. Cruithne is the Q-Celtic word for Pritani. At this point, it should be obvious that due to the lack of written records and limited archaeological evidence, explaining the origin of the Picts (and whether or not they were tattooed) is a work in progress.

There is also evidence that the ancestors of the Picts arrived by boat in Shetland, and moved down to Orkney, then followed the coast to the east. These proto-Picts settled the coastal areas from Caithness in the north all the way down to the Firth of Forth region in South Central Scotland and inland at least to the Highland Line, and into the southeastern Highlands as far west as Pitlochry and Loch Tay. Pictish settlement in Western Scotland and the Isles may have been from Orkney south, or from the Cruithne of northern Ireland coasting northward – or both.

When the Romans arrived in Scotland in the first century AD, they identified the inhabitants as Caledonians. The Caledonians appear to have been the major tribe first encountered by the Romans, and as a result Caledonia and Caledonians was applied to all the peoples north of the Forth-Clyde line. The Antonine Wall, built by the Romans in this region, was roughly the boundary. By the late third century AD, the inhabitants are called Picts by the Romans, although this appears to be just the latest Roman name for the people beyond Roman influence. It may have been because they used woad (blue) coloring to paint their skin, or because they painted or tattooed symbols on their skin, or because Pict was the closest Latin word to *pecht*.

### The Celtic Players as I See It

**Brythonic Celts (Britons, later called Welsh):** The Brythonic Celts (Britons, later called Welsh by the English) came from Gaul via Southern Britain and went as far north as the Firth of Forth – River Clyde line. The modern name for the British (P-Celtic speakers other than Picts) is the Welsh. Wealas was the name the English gave to the Celts of southern Britain – their own name was Cymru. There were several Welsh kingdoms in lowland Scotland:

- (1) *Strathclyde* in the southwest from the Clyde to just north of the modern border with England.
- (2) *Rheged* in Cumbria, later absorbed by Strathclyde.
- (3) *Selgovia* in the central borders region, later absorbed by the English of Northumbria.
- (4) *Gododdin* in the eastern lowlands, also absorbed by Northumbria.

**Picts:** The Picts (called Cruithne in Gaelic) probably originated somewhere between modern Denmark and the Netherlands, roughly the same area where the English later migrated to, before moving on to England. In other

words, when most of Central and western Europe was Celtic speaking. Sometime in the late first millennium BC, they went to Shetland and the Orkneys, perhaps simultaneously, and then spread down the east and west coasts of Scotland. On the east coast, they advanced until they met the Britons. On the west coast, they went as far as northern Argyll and the adjacent islands, and then jumped to northeast Ireland where they became the Cruithne. Some of the Cruithne were Gallicized and remained in Ireland. Others crossed the water to become the Picts of Galloway in the southwest, or joined the Picts of eastern Scotland above the Forth-Clyde line. Perhaps they were once linked but divided by the expansion of the Britons from the South. Most linguists now believe that Pictish is a P-Celtic language related more closely to modern Welsh than modern Scottish Gaelic, which increases the probability that the Picts emigrated from lands adjacent to Gaul (the heart of the P-Celtic lands).

Pictish sub-kingdoms (from Wikipedia):

- **Cait**, situated in modern Caithness and Sutherland
- **Ce**, situated in modern Mar and Buchan
- **Circinn**, perhaps situated in modern Angus and the Mearns.
- **Fib**, the modern Fife, known to this day as 'the Kingdom of Fife'
- **Fidach**, location unknown
- **Fotla**, modern Atholl (*Ath-Fotla*)
- **Fortriu**, cognate with the *Verturiones* of the Romans; recently shown to be centered around Moray

Eventually these kingdoms seemed to coalesce into a northern Pictish kingdom and a southern Pictish kingdom, with most historians suggesting that the dividing line was an extension of the Grampian Mountains called the Mounth that reached the sea near Stonehaven. The northern kingdom was centered on Fortriu in ancient Moray (somewhat larger than later Moray shire). The southern kingdom was once thought to be around Perth, so this suggests that the southern kingdom was most likely Fib or Fotla. The rulers of the Pictish sub-kingdoms (tribes) were called Mormaers.

The Picts were matrilineal (chose kings from the mother's line) but NOT matriarchal (men dominated government and society). The other Celtic and Germanic societies were both patriarchal and patrilineal (kingship through the father's line). In both societies, the kings were traditionally chosen by the royal family from amongst the close relatives of the previous king (matrilineal line for the Picts, patrilineal line for the Scots).

**Scots:** The Scots came from Galicia in northwestern Spain and immigrated to Ireland by sea across the Bay of Biscay and from there into southern Ireland, perhaps in about 600-700 BC, just after the Celtic incursion to Britain. This is supported by DNA evidence from Sykes and others. They occupied the entire island before the arrival of the Pictish contingent (the Cruithne) in northeast Ireland. From Ireland, immigrants from the sub-kingdom of Dal Riata began to drift into Argyll. This movement increased significantly in the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, and led to Dal Riata overlordship of the Scottish settlement of Argyll.

Scottish sub-Kingdoms: Initially, sub-kingdoms subject to *Dal Riata* in Ireland were established in Argyll, but sometime in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD, *Dal Riata in Scotland* became independent of Dal Riata in Ireland. There were several sub-kingdoms in Scotland, known as kindreds, the most important of which were the *Cenel Loairn* (kindred of Loarn) in north and mid-Argyll, the *Cenel nEngusa* (kindred of Oengus) on Islay, and the *Cenel nGabrain* (kindred of Gabran) in Kintyre. Eventually, the *kindred of Gabran* prevailed over the others, and became the high kings of *Dal Riata* of Scotland, but

the later Mormaers of *Moray* claimed to be descendants of the kindred of Loarn.

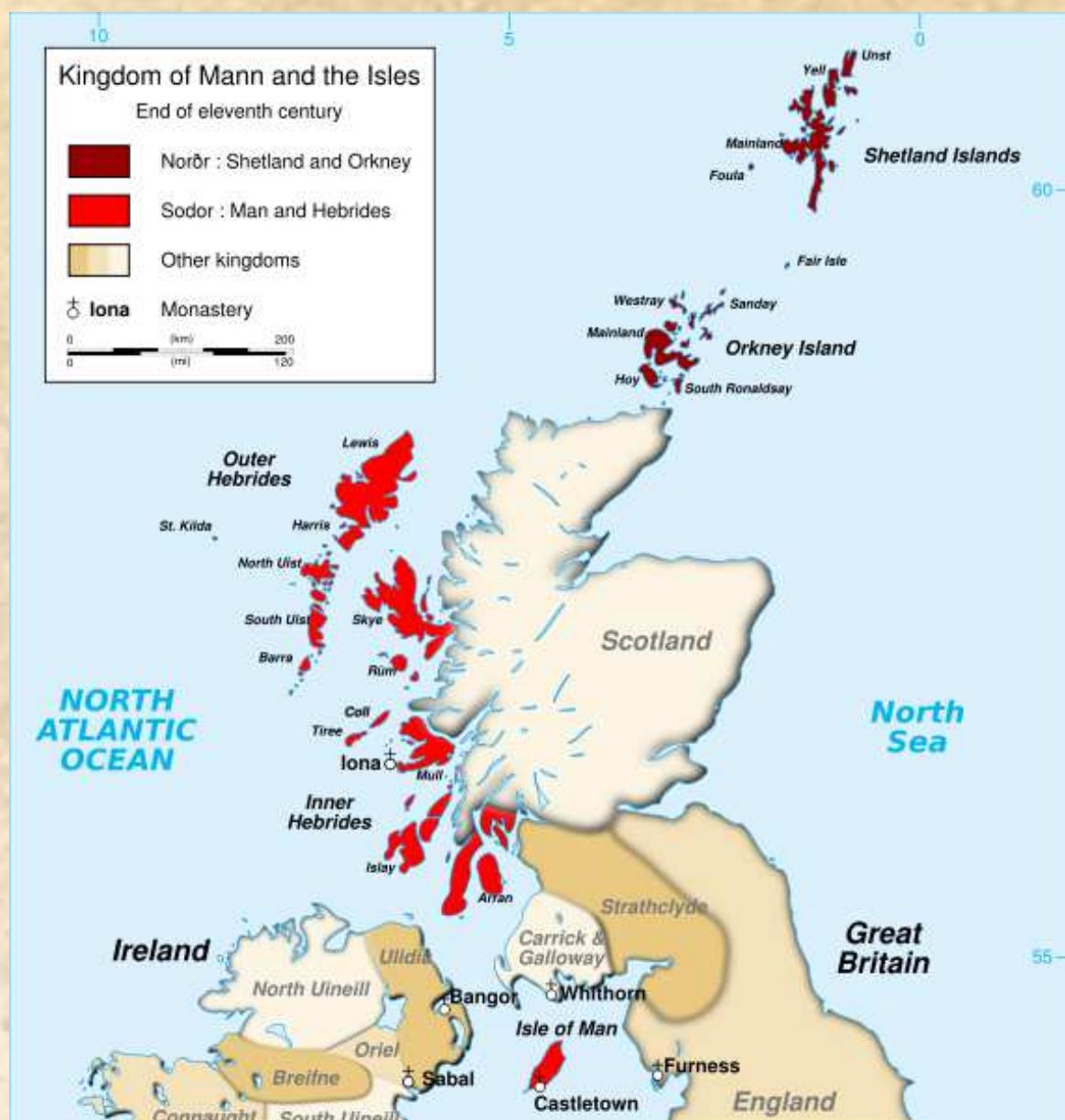
### The Germans

**English:** Germanic peoples (called Saxons after their weapon of choice, the knife called a saxe) began raiding England as early as the third century AD. Saxon appears to be a generic Roman name for any Germanic raiders from the Netherlands to Jutland in Denmark. By the fourth century AD, raiding had increased sufficiently to cause the Romans, who occupied southern Britain to be alarmed. In the so-called Great Conspiracy of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, Britain was simultaneously assaulted by Saxons, Picts, and Irish. After the collapse of Roman Britain in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, Germanic peoples began a serious assault on Britain aimed at conquest of the island. This resulted in the establishment of Germanic conquest kingdoms in northeast Britain. In Scotland, it was the English (Angles) who were the threat. The English kingdom of Deira was established in modern Yorkshire, and the English kingdom of Bernicia in modern Northumberland. Bernicia expanded into Lothian by conquering the Welsh kingdom of Gododdin and the northern lowlands, while Deira expanded westward into the Welsh kingdom of Elmet and pressed the Welsh kingdom of Cumbria. Eventually, Bernicia united with Deira to form the English kingdom of Northumberland, and came to dominate northern England and Lowland Scotland.

**The Norwegians (Vikings):** The first Norwegian (Viking) raid on Northumbria was in 793 AD when the monastery on the island of Lindisfarne was sacked, followed by the sacking of the monastery of Iona in Dal Riata. The Vikings went on to conquer Shetland, the Orkneys, Caithness and Sutherland, the Inner and Outer Hebrides and Kintyre. These areas were initially ruled by independent Norse earls, but were subdued by the early 10<sup>th</sup> century AD by the King of Norway. The Norse king created a sub-kingdom under his control called Man and the Isles, which included the inner and outer Hebrides, Kintyre, and the Isle of Man.

In the mid 12<sup>th</sup> century, a descendant of an earlier sub-king of Man, Somerled, rebelled and established the sub-kingdom kingdom, later Lordship, of the Isles. Somerled's overlord was the King of Norway. By a treaty between Scotland and Norway in 1266, overlordship of the Isles was transferred to the King of Scotland, and the Isles became a Lordship under the King of Scotland. The Lordship of the Isles, although technically under Scotland, functioned as an independent state until it was suppressed by Scotland in the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. Somerled's grandson Donald was Lord of the Isle and the first chief of what became Clan MacDonald.

Orkney remained a Norse earldom until 1468, when it was transferred to Scotland from Norway to pay off a debt. Up until 1468, the Scottish Barons and Chiefs Sinclair were also Norse earls of Orkney. After 1468, they continued as earls of Orkney under the Scottish King.



## The Normans

King MacBeth recruited Norman mercenaries during his reign, before the Normal conquest of England that began in 1066 AD, but it was not until the reign of King David I (1112-1153 AD) that large numbers of Normans came to Scotland. The Normans were descendants of Viking raiders who seized what became known as Normandy (land of the Northmen) in coastal northern France. They were primarily Danes and Norse. By the 11<sup>th</sup> Century AD, they had adopted the French language (with Norse variations) and much of French culture. The term also came to include Bretons from France (Celts) and Flemish (Germans).

King David intended to initiate Anglo-Norman institutions in Scotland, and granted land (fiefdoms) to Norman knights and nobles, and appointed them to important royal positions. David introduced the burgh system to Scotland and was patron to many Norman-style monasteries. Many Highland and Lowland clans have their origin in this Norman migration, including those of Bruce, Fraser, Ramsay, Ogilvie, Montgomery, Sinclair, Pollock, Douglas and Gordon.

### Consolidation of Scotland - Timeline

c. 600-843 AD – Alternating Pictish domination of Dal Riata, Dal Riata independence from the Picts, occasional Dal Riata domination of all or part of the Pictish lands.

c. 843 - 900 AD: Dal Riata (Scots) and Pictavia (Picts) formally united as the Kingdom of Alba under Kenneth MacAlpin sometime between the mid 800s and 900 AD under Gaelic speaking kings. 843 AD is the traditional date of the union of the two kingdoms under Kenneth MacAlpin.

c.900-1018 AD – Kingdom of Alba. The kings of Alba chose to utilize Gaelic rather than Pictish culture as the basis for consolidation. This was most likely because Roman Christianity had replaced Celtic Christianity in Alba even before the consolidation, and Roman Christianity was highly

patriarchal and therefore of greater use by the Kings of Alba in consolidating their control of the unified kingdom.

1018 AD – (Welsh) Strathclyde incorporated into Alba, which begins the transformation of Alba into Scotland. Lothian down to the River Tweed taken from the Angles and incorporated into Scotland. The southern part of the old English kingdom of Northumberland was conquered by the Vikings, leaving only the northern part of the Kingdom (Bernicia), which included Lothian. The northern part of Bernicia was taken by the Scots.

1040 AD – MacBeth, Mormaer of Moray, defeats and replaces Duncan I, king of Scotland (ancestor of Clan Donnachaidh), and MacBeth becomes king of Scotland. Before this, Moray was semi-independent of Alba. As a result of MacBeth assuming the crown of Scotland, Moray is fully integrated into the kingdom.

1243 AD – Galloway incorporated into Scotland. Galloway was probably a Pictish kingdom that was later overrun by Norse and Gallo-Norse invaders, and then became part of Scotland.

1266 AD – Lordship of the Isles incorporated into Scotland.

1468 AD – Orkney and Shetland incorporated into Scotland. Orkney may have been a separate Pictish sub-kingdom before the conquest by the Norse.



### The Bottom Line

**Scotland** came into existence as the Kingdom of Alba in c.843 AD when Kenneth MacAlpin consolidated the Dal Riata Gaelic royal line (patrilineal) with the Pictish royal line (matrilineal) – he descended in the male line from the kings of Dal Riata and in the female line from the kings of the Picts. Keep in mind that the change from tribal to national identity took even longer than the consolidation of nations.

The **consolidation of Scotland** as we know it today was not accomplished until 1469 – a process that took over 600 years. Depending on which part of Scotland one refers to, the ancestry (and DNA) as of 1500 AD was a mix, roughly speaking, of the following components:

1. Northern Highlands (Caithness, Sutherland, and Ross, and adjacent areas), Outer Hebrides, Orkney and Shetland - pre-Celtic, Pictish, and Norse.
2. Southwest and Central Highlands (mainland Argyll, western Atholl, eastern Inverness shire, and adjacent areas) – pre-Celtic, Gaels.
3. Inner Hebrides and Kintyre - pre-Celtic, Gaelic, Norse.
4. Coastal from city of Inverness to the Firth of Forth, pre-Celtic, Pictish, and Norman.
5. East Central Scotland (eastern Atholl and adjacent areas) - pre-Celtic, Pictish. Atholl was an area of Pictish-Gaelic contact and mixing, as were other areas along the Pictish-Gaelic border.

6. Western Lowlands (historic Strathclyde) - pre-Celtic, Pictish, Welsh.
7. Southwestern Lowlands (historic Galloway) - pre-Celtic, Pictish, Norse.
8. Central and Eastern Lowlands (Lothian, Borders, and adjacent areas) - pre-Celtic, Welsh, English, Norman.

Today, the mix is even greater, especially in the lowland industrial and urban regions. As the reader can see, Scotland historically compared favorably to the USA in terms of **cultural diversity**, since the Scots came from many ancient nations and today have a variety of DNA. What does it mean to be an ethnic Scot today? It depends on what part of Scotland one's ancestors derived from.

And there you have it...