Medieval European land assessment, Fortriu, and the *dabhach*

ALASDAIR ROSS

Introduction

The history of investigations into the different units of Medieval land assessment in Scotland follows a long and convoluted path. Yet, over 243 years since people first began to discuss them in print (Pennant 1998, 316), there is still no consensus about the when, who, and why such units were first introduced. Disagreement has also arisen about perceived differences within single types of land assessment, leading to excessive and convoluted disputes about inter-relationships, typology, and even ethnicity (Robertson 1862, ii, 271; Elder-Levie 1931, 99-110; Barrow 1962, 133; Dodgshon 1980: 49–50; Ross 2006, 57–74). To an outside observer, this debate must often seem oddly introverted. To be fair, not all of the controversy has been caused by historians; Medieval Scottish records are generally poor in comparison to other European countries and the fact that Scotland once possessed at least ten different units of land assessment within its current borders has merely served to stir already murky waters. Indeed, perhaps one of the great conundrums in Scottish Medieval history is why its rulers never introduced a truly common unit of land assessment across the whole country.

In contrast, during the last decade or so both North Atlantic and European studies in land assessment have burgeoned as researchers have realised the fundamental importance of such units to the formation of an apparatus of state in their respective countries. This paper will firstly provide a brief overview of some of this North Atlantic and European material and then examine one of the most common units of land assessment found in Medieval Scotland, the Pictish *dabhach* (pl. *dabhaichean*), within the broader context of this research.

Medieval European land assessment

Much research has been undertaken in Norway over the last decade in relation to Medieval administrative systems and state formation. One area of particular focus has been Hardanger, part of the early tenth century Gulathing law province. The Gulathing Law, surviving in written form from the thirteenth century—but much older—lists in descending order four units of land organisation, the *fylki*, *fjórðungr*, *áttungr*, and *skipreiða*. The three Medieval *fylkir*, *Horðafylki*, *Sygnafylki*, and *Firðafylki*, are thought to have comprised the original core of the province (Hobæk 2013, 64–75). Like some units of land assessment found in Scotland, so the *fylki* could be divided into quarters (*fjórðungr*) and eighths (*áttungr*) but it is perhaps the *skipreiður* that are of more immediate interest. These units of assessment were part of the naval defence system called the *leiðangr*, introduced during the tenth century and also allegedly found in the Northern Isles (Williams 2004, 68-69), in which each *skipreiða* was obliged to build and supply a warship. Claims that the two were introduced simultaneously are disputed but it seems to be generally accepted that *skipreiður* were first introduced in Gulathing during the tenth century and thereafter across the entire kingdom. In addition, *skipreiður* quickly came to function as fiscal and administrative units for more general tax assessment. According to Hobæk, the *fjórðungr* of Hardanger was divided into five *skipreiður*, the equivalent of exactly ten local communities that also formed ten Medieval parishes: Ulvik, Eidfjord, Granvin, Kinsarvik, Ullensvang, Odda, Røldal, Jondal, Vikøy, and Øystese. Interestingly, these ten parishes also formed nine judicial *–tinget* districts, Øystesetinget comprising the two parishes of Vikøy, and Øystese (Hobæk 2013, 65–8).

Similar research has also been undertaken in the landscape of Vicken, located in the Oslo fjord region. There, Ødegaard has argued that the area originally comprised three *fylki* that were subsequently united at the beginning of the eleventh century into the Borgarthing

law province after the establishment of a *lawthing* in the town of Borg *c* 1016 (Ødegaard 2013, 42–63). Vicken also possessed *skipreiður* established during the tenth century: forty-eight of these were listed in 1277, and an occasional correlation between Medieval parish boundaries and *fjórðungr* boundaries has already been noted. To complicate matters further, here the *skipreiður* may have been mapped on top of an earlier system of land assessment, the Danish *herað*, whose extents often match topographical borders (Ødegaard 2013, 44–8).

It has, however, already been recognised that both taxes and duties varied between the constituent parts of Medieval Norway and the taxation of Härjedalen is a case in point. There, though sixteenth-century tax registers have to be relied upon as evidence for Medieval taxation, it has been argued that even then the tax system was still quite primitive when compared against other regions, with either squirrels or their equivalent in money being due in tax. Because taxation via land assessment had been introduced throughout most of Norway by the end of the thirteenth century, Holm argues that Härjedalen, with its very basic form of squirrel taxation, remained on the periphery of the core of royal power (Holm 2010, 229–51).

In Sweden, on the other hand, there seems to have been almost as much academic controversy generated over various systems of land assessment as has occurred in Scotland. For example, in 1296 the seemingly new judicial-administrative entity called Uppland contained three *folkland* (Attundaland, Tiundaland, and Fjädrundaland) which were clearly much older divisions of land. In turn, each *folkland* was divided into *hundare* (nominally the district of a chieftain and his one hundred men). Other units of assessment also existed alongside sub-divisions of *hundare*: half *hundare*, *hundarefjärdinger*, *hundaresåtting*, *skeppslagar*, *socknar* (parishes), *tolfter*, and *tredingar*. In Svealand, the *hundare* seem to have existed as a *ting* (court) region, as a tax district, and in the organisation of the military *ledung* (military fleet levy). In the mid-fourteenth century, during the reign of King Magnus Eriksson, the *hundare* (possibly in name only) was replaced by the *härad*, which meant that

both Svealand and Götaland were assessed in the same way. These reforms were clearly an imposition of conformity in nomenclature by a state authority, though some regional variation remained. The author also noted that the boundaries of these *hundare*, or *härader*, remained constant throughout the late-thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries and that there was wide variation in their size and wealth (Line 2007, 206–24). Lindquist has further refined this argument and suggested that the development of the Medieval Swedish realm occurred in three phases. The first phase, until *c* 980, was characterized by the demanding of tributes as part of an economy based upon plunder. The second phase, to 1250, involved the conversion of kings to Christianity with increased control over territory, modes of production, and men and the appearance of a new economic system based upon internal appropriation. The final phase, beginning *c* 1250, saw the emergence of a state with institutionalized political power, administrative literacy, legislation, and the imposition of permanent taxes (Lindkvist 2010, 251–61; Lindkvist 2011, 265–78).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, traces of Scandinavian units of land assessment can also be found in England, specifically in the Danelaw. There, Baker and Brookes have argued that the hundredal pattern of the Southern Danelaw, as it existed in 1086, demonstrates a complex evolution that preserves earlier elements of both Norse and English administrative landscapes. Essentially, they argue that the Scandinavian landscape organisation of midland England seems to be a reflection of groupings of troops ruled from a central settlement. The basic administrative unit was the *wapentake* (ON *vápnatak*) with such groups of troops perhaps capable of being organized into territorially based armies equivalent to *fylki*. They also note, however, that this administrative system may well have used a pre-existing Mercian structure, perhaps as early as eighth century in date; a case of adaptation rather than re-organization (Baker & Brookes 2013, 76–95).

Moving across the North Atlantic, the Faroe Isles were settled by the Norse in the ninth century AD. There, one or multiple *fyrndarbýlingur* (an 'old farm' which could be sub-divided into farmsteads and households) formed the eighty-five *bygðir* (settlements) that comprised the colony. Many of the latter possessed their own church and were also parishes. According to Vésteinsson, the concept of the *fyrndarbýlingur* is closely related to an Icelandic taxable unit of land assessment that could also contain multiple farmsteads, the *lögbýli*—a taxable unit of a certain value that contained any number of farmsteads and households (Vésteinsson 2006, 91).

Iceland is another part of the North Atlantic world where a lot of research has recently been undertaken in relation to landscape division and settlement. Iceland has a number of different terms for clusters of settlements including *þorp* (village) and *hverfi* (hamlet or neighbourhood). The latter sometimes has a dual meaning as either a cluster of farms or as a neighbourhood (Vésteinsson 2006, 102). Here too, parishes were a later development of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and there were two main types. One was akin to an estate parish, where the parish comprised either a single estate, or a single core estate with smaller ancillary estates attached to that core. The other type was where the parish church was attached to a less wealthy farm or in areas where there were major single estates (Vésteinsson 2006, 107–8).

In other parts of Medieval Europe these processes were different still. In order to achieve their goal of surveying and controlling new lands as their empire expanded, the Carolingian emperors introduced a standardised system of land organisation called the *mansus* (pl. *mansi*) as a means of tax-levying and warrior-recruitment from *c* 780. Essentially, this amounted to the managed exploitation of land through the mechanism of small units of land assessment whereby it became possible to calculate the tax contribution of each property holder. This standardisation transformed the Carolingian production structure

and it ultimately proved to be a hugely successful method of cultivating land and organising labour and army service (Sonnlechner 2004, 43–4).

This process was a clear attempt to establish order upon the Carolingian European landscape and its inhabitants by getting rid of diversity and imposing standard dues and obligations. Sonnlechner has further suggested that the whole system was underpinned by the development of an agro-ecological system which integrated livestock pasturing into land husbandry, thereby ensuring the proper fertilisation of field systems. In this model *mansi* became the production units of larger nodes of seignorial exploitation. In addition, the *mansus* was a flexible fiscal and administrative unit of differing size and producing different renders that could be imposed upon a range of different ecologies from the Paris basin to the high Alps of Salzburg and Provence (Sonnlechner 2004, 44–7).

Moving south-west again, in Medieval Castile the standard term for the units of administration was *Alfoz* (pl. *alfoces*) and they formed the territorial framework of governance. They seem to have been created in the late ninth or early tenth centuries out of supralocal territories and the free population in these units were subject to jurisdiction, work renders, and military obligations (Escalona 2006, 143–66), just like the *mansus*, *hundare*, *skipreiður*, and the *dabhach*.

In the Eastern Alps, the Slovene territories of *Carnolia* and *Carantania* had been affected by the collapse of the Avar khaganate in the late eighth century which caused widespread social and ethnic restructuring (Štih 2010, 154). Key figures seem to have the *Župani*, who constituted a special class and who governed *župe* (sing. *župa*) into which most of the Slavic population was organised. This seems to have been a unit of population greater than a single family unit. But like Scotland, Medieval historians of this area only have few sources upon which to draw information so it is a difficult process to precisely understand the structures of the area. Historians still do not know how big a *župa* was, how many there were,

their internal structures, or their respective shares of population. Nevertheless, their society

was structured and key to the development of land assessment were elders who aided the

transition from a Slavic economy based upon the *zadruga* (large family) to one based upon

the *mansus* (Štih 2010, 167). Accordingly, by the ninth and tenth centuries, many populations

widely spread across both Europe and the North Atlantic lived and paid taxes according to

regulated systems of land assessment. While each of these units may have possessed different

names, they essentially performed identical purposes.

The *dabhach*

The first attempt to undertake a supra-regional study of Medieval Scottish units of land

assessment was completed in the mid-1980s yet it was deeply unsatisfactory because it

mostly utilised only published primary sources, leaving a huge evidence gap (Easson 1986).

This has recently been rectified but to date only half of the country has been covered in any

detail (Bangor-Jones 1986; Raven 2005; Ross 2015). Even more surprising is that, until

recently, most of the Medieval land assessments in Scotland had not been contextualised

using research from across Europe. Many earlier debates about land assessment and the

dabhach in Scotland could perhaps be described as rather myopic in nature, obsessed as

many of them were with hypothetical tubs of grain (Jackson 1972, 116–17).

Most have thought the *dabhach* Pictish (pre-900) in origin, mainly because its

distribution pattern generally matches the area of the historical Pictland. But such

comparisons are rather inexact because we know so little about the historic extent(s) of

Pictland across the centuries of its existence, never mind the fact that 'Pictland' may never

have been a homogenous realm except in the minds of kings who occasionally ruled both

'northern' and 'southern' Picts. Like the 'kingdom of the Picts', the distribution of

dabhaichean is nuanced and the extent of these nuances is only now becoming clear. In part, perhaps previous investigations were inadvertently hampered because 'Pictish Studies' were long tagged as being 'problematic' in nature (Wainwright 1955; but see Driscoll, Geddes & Hall 2011).

Recently the *dabhach* has been comprehensively surveyed across an area of northern Scotland that stretches from Huntly in the north-east westwards to the Outer Hebrides, and from the Cairngorm plateau northwards to Cape Wrath, utilising historical evidence culled from over 1000 years of written records and maps (Ross 2015). The products of this survey are discussed in detail elsewhere but a number of key points can be taken from it for the purposes of this article.

First, the *dabhach* debuts in the historical record in the longer version of the St Andrews foundation (Account B) which is thought to have been written *c* 850 during the Pictish historic period. Indeed, an old stratum in this text lists several place-names, some of which are given two names; what looks like the Pictish name is then followed by the Gaelic version. One such example is contained in the following section: *Inde transierunt montana, scilicet Moneth, et uenerunt ad locum qui uocabatur Doldocha nunc autem dictus Chendrohedalian* (Then they crossed the mountains, ie the Mounth, and came to a place which was called *Doldauha* but is now called Kindrochit-Alian). The latter place-name represents Kindrochit, now Castletown of Braemar in Deeside, a property that belonged to the Medieval cathedral of St Andrews.

Within the place-name *Doldocha*, *Dol-* (field or water meadow) was the Pictish form of the element thereafter borrowed into Scottish Gaelic as *Dail-*. The second element of this Pictish place-name, *-docha*, likely represents Middle Irish *dabcha*, the genitive singular of *dabhach*. If Taylor's interpretation is correct, it looks as though the term *dabhach* must have been in use during the Pictish historic period (Taylor & Márkus 2009, 564–92). By any

reckoning this is a very thin sliver of evidence upon which to argue that the landscape of the kingdom of the Picts had been perambulated and divided into *dabhaichean* before it ended *c* 900, yet it is all we currently have until the insertion of pre-charter property records into the Book of Deer between *c* 1130 and *c* 1150 (Broun 2008, 313). By the twelfth century, when Scottish records begin to appear more regularly, the *dabhach* was already a recognised and common feature of land transactions. But unlike units of land assessment elsewhere in Europe, across northern Scotland the *dabhach* remained in active use and seemingly unchanged across the entire range of ecological zones until *c* 1800, by which time many had fallen prey to the processes of agricultural improvement as estates were cleared and enclosure created new patterns across different landscapes (Caird 1980, 203–22); the last few units disappeared from estate rentals in the early twentieth century.

Second, across the survey area two different types of *dabhach* are found. The first type, I have labelled as 'self-contained' because all of the different elements of that type of *dabhach* are contained within a single defined area. The second type, I labelled 'scattered' because the *dabhach* can be composed of as many as four different portions that are physically separated from each other in the landscape, sometimes by distances of up to 30km. Both types look to have contained every resource that a group of settlements needed to survive throughout the year, ranging from meadow through to rough grazing (Ross 2015, 68). Unfortunately, the mechanism by which just one of these areas of settlement was chosen to lend its name to a particular *dabhach* is currently unknown.

Each of these different types of *dabhach* could be fractionalised, with halves, quarters, and eighths being the most common divisions. But even here there was great diversity in size. For example, the two half-*dabhaichean* that comprised the *dabhach* of Crathie in the parish of Laggan (Badenoch) were respectively 40km^2 and 10km^2 in size. In Sutherland, the two half *dabhaichean* that together comprised the *dabhach* of Mudale in

Strath Naver were respectively 89km^2 and 50km^2 (NRS RS38/3/348; RS37/5; GD84/1/32/5). Such disparity in size brings into sharp focus the fact that it was the availability of and access to natural resources that determined the size of each *dabhach* and its constituent parts, nothing else.

But it is equally important to realise that the landscape of northern Scotland was not entirely divided into *dabhaichean*. Very rarely in the landscape appear upland areas described (post 1100) as 'forest' that remain *dabhach*-free but which were used in common by the inhabitants of *dabhaichean* who otherwise had no access to high mountain grazings, most regularly by those who lived in *dabhaichean* along coast lines. Few of these upland areas have been identified to date but they amount to the high Medieval 'forests' of Strathavon, Glenmore, and Freevater. Perhaps the closest analogy to these 'forests' are the Medieval Cumbrian vaccaries identified by Angus Winchester (Winchester 1987, 42–3).

The third point is perhaps the most important. According to the available historical evidence, through time only one new *dabhach* was ever created across the whole of the survey area. This occurred in the lordship of Badenoch in 1639 while it was temporarily under the control of the earl of Argyll. Contemporary documentation is quite clear that this new unit of land assessment was created by taking land from an adjacent *dabhach*, thereby reducing it in status, and that it had been done for personal greed. In any event, the new creation only lasted for a few years before the marquis of Huntly regained his lordship and restored the status quo (NRS GD44/41/22/2; GD44/10/10). Taken together, this evidence overwhelmingly suggests that the *dabhach* was a permanent feature across many landscapes, doubtless helped by the fact that their boundaries regularly followed landscape features like rivers and ridges.

This permanence is also highlighted by the relationship between the *dabhach* and the parish. Other than in parts of Caithness and some of the Outer Hebrides, for which

information is now entirely absent, across the whole of the survey area of Moray, Ross, Sutherland, and Caithness each Medieval parish (bar one which also contained a three plough land) was comprised of an exact number of *dabhaichean*. The key to understanding this relationship lies in tracking the detached portions of parishes. Across the area of the survey Medieval parishes could possess up to five detached portions of land. In every case these detached portions were either an exact multiple of *dabhaichean*, a single *dabhach*, or an exact fraction of a *dabhach*, indicating an intimate relationship between *dabhach* boundaries and parochial boundaries (Ross 2015, 71–2). Trying to decide which preceded the other is slightly more difficult.

The first scenario is that parishes were created at an unknown point in time and then subsequently divided into *dabhaichean*. This is an entirely logical proposition and something similar has been argued for the units of land assessment in the Northern Isles when they were under Scandinavian rule. Sarah Jane Gibbon has recently investigated the formation of parishes in Orkney in some detail and argued that they date from a twelfth-century ecclesiastic and secular reorganisation of the Orcadian landscape predicated upon the foundation of St Magnus cathedral in Kirkwall. During this reorganisation each Orcadian parish was subsequently divided into a set number of ON *eyrislands* (ouncelands—a fiscal unit for assessing taxation) (Gibbon 2007, 235–50).

However, given the dating of the St Andrews foundation legend and its mention of a *dabhach*, suggesting the same for mainland Scotland would firstly require that parishes across much of the kingdom of the Picts had been formed before *c* 850. Given the numbers of detached parochial portions this is also quite a messy solution. It either requires that some of the *dabhaichean* being laid out in each parish did not possess sufficient resources and so required lands elsewhere, or someone deciding that a particular parish did not possess a sufficient number of *dabhaichean* and so it was granted others (or fractions of others)

elsewhere, often located some distance away from the original parish. Either way, we are looking at many potential lawsuits as pieces of land were taken from one community and given to another in order to satisfy the basic requirements of *dabhaichean* as they were created within each new parish.

The second scenario is more logical. This suggests that *dabhaichean* preceded the formation of parishes and the latter were subsequently superimposed onto a pre-existing *dabhach* pattern of secular assessment. Using this argument, the apparent anomaly of the detached portions disappears because the only reason why some Medieval parishes possessed detached portions of land was because those same detached portions already belonged to the 'scattered' *dabhaichean* in those newly created parishes. Rather than break up pre-existing units of land assessment during the period of parish formation in northern Scotland, whenever that might have been, the detached portions of any *dabhaichean* in a particular parish were also included in that parish. For what it is worth, whenever a northern parish was split into two new parishes during the survey period, the cleavage always occurred along *dabhach* boundaries. For example, when the twenty *dabhach* parish of Tarbat in Easter Ross was divided into the two new parishes of Tarbat and Fearn by the Reformed Church in 1628, each of the two new ecclesiastic divisions received exactly ten *dabhaichean*:

> *The bishop and whole diocese agree to the division of the parish of Tarbat into the parishes of Tarbat and Fearn, the tithes [...] for each church to be decided on information from the owners of property there. Each church is to have ten dawaches (considerable tract of land; a small district including several oxgangs) of land. Signed: Mr. Will. Lauder. 1632 Nov. 15 Chanonry* (NRS, SP46/129, fo.164r).

Given the clear relationship between the *dabhach* and the parish it is unsurprising that there are also close links between *dabhaichean* and secular units of lordship. Wherever we look across northern Scotland, Medieval lordships were divided into exact numbers of

dabhaichean, as were thanages. The lordship of Badenoch comprised sixty *dabhaichean*; the lordship of Abernethy (Inverness) thirteen; and the thanage of Cromarty six.

Finally, across the full chronological range of documents relating to *dabhaichean* in northern Scotland, there are various types of service demanded by the crown and lords from these units of land assessment. The first of these burdens spans almost the entire historical period and relates to army service, specifically the widespread European assumption that during hosting each house and its land would produce a warrior (Duncan 1975, 110, 379–80; Taylor 2011, 166–234). The oldest reference to army service and other burdens in Scotland is again found in the Version B of the St Andrews foundation legend, written *c* 850:

> *Rex uero hunc locum, scilicet Chilrimonith, dedit Deo et Sancto Andree eius apostolo, cum aquis, cum agris, cum pratis, cum pascuis, cum moris, cum nemoribus in elemosinam perpetuo; et tanta libertate illum locum donauit ut illius inhabitatores liberi et quieti semper existerent de exercitu et de operibus castellorum et pontium et de inquietacione omnium secularium exactionum* (Taylor & Márkus 2009, 573).
>
> And the king [Unuist son of Uurguist, king of the Picts, *c* 729–61] gave this place, that is Kilrymont, to God and St Andrew his apostle, with waters, with fields, with meadows, with pastures, with muirs, with woods in alms for ever; and he endowed that place with such liberty that its inhabitants will always be free and quit of hosting, and of castle and bridge work, and of the trouble of all secular exactions.

It is entirely possible that this is an accurate record even if it might be a later addition: many other nascent kingdoms in Europe, like Mercia, also exacted similar levies during the eighth century (Stevenson 1914, 689–703). Similar demands to those expressed in the St Andrews foundation legend appear in other royal documents, specifically those from to the respective reigns of Kings Macbethad mac Findlaích (1040–57) and Malcolm IV (1153–65). In these latter cases religious communities were variously freed from the burdens of bridge repair,

castles, military service, and hunting (Thomson 1841, 114; Barrow 1960, no 213). Taken together, these later Scottish references again seem very familiar to the *trinoda necessitas* (bridge work, fortress work, and hosting) recorded from the eighth century in Mercia and Kent and later across the whole of the developing Anglo-Saxon kingdoms in England, and the three burdens of bridge work, army service, and watch duty found in the Carolingian Empire (Stevenson 1914, 689–703). Nor was the military service imposed on *dabhaichean* solely limited to fighting men. An 1304 document ordered that every *dabhach* in the lordship of Garmoran (including Knoydart, Moidart, and Ardnamurchan) would furnish a galley of twenty oars, and in 1343 two charters required the recipients to supply ships of twenty-six and twenty oars respectively for *dabhaichean* in Glenelg and Assynt (Bain 1884, no 1633; Megaw 1979, 75; Webster 1982, nos 486 & 487).

But by far the most common burdens imposed on *dabhaichean* were local as they were assessed for secular services and exactions, payable to the lord. One of the most common local services that can be traced concerns carriage service; others included arriage/harriage (the delivery of documents), hunting service (usually four men per *dabhach* for a specified period), road service, harvest service, fuel service (cutting peat), and building service. Interestingly, the evidence shows that local burdens due from each *dabhach* were not automatically exacted each year but could instead be carried-over by the superior lord for future use. This is logical as it would aid long-term demesne planning and allow superior lords to make strategic decisions about the uses to which their local reserves of manpower and the associated burdens might best be put. The final point to make here is that any *dabhach* could be picked up, transported across the North Sea, and put down in a number of other Medieval European countries. The people living there would instantly have recognised the *dabhach* for what it was: a common unit of land assessment imposed by a superior

authority as an effective way to assess and raise taxation, and to aid in a state building process.

The *dabhach* and Fortriu

Almost ten years ago Alex Woolf trashed the mental image Medieval historians possessed about the location of the powerful Pictish kingdom of Fortriu. By marshalling disparate pieces of evidence he effectively argued that it was not based in southern-central Scotland but north of the Mounth in northern Scotland (Woolf 2006, 195–7). The key to this are the *Verturiones* whose name passed into Gaelic as **Foirtrenn* (genitive *Fortrenn*, 'of **Fortriu*') and into English as *Waerteras*. Their seventh-century kings rose to eventually dominate both Northern and Southern Pictland and who can forget that Bredei son of Bili, king of Fortriu, 'destroyed' the Orkney Islands in 682? (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 682.4; Fraser 2009, 50)

The immediate problem is this: although the last mention of Fortriu in the Gaelic Annals dates to 918, and its people survive as a distinct entity in English sources until the late tenth century, historians currently have no means of estimating its territorial extent. This raises a new set of questions. If it is assumed for the sake of argument that the historical kingdom of Fortriu once occupied the whole of north Scotland, by what mechanism did that kingdom subsequently shatter into individual provinces like Caithness, Ross, and Moray before the end of the eleventh century as the regnal and political focus of the kingdom of Alba increasingly shifted southwards? Were these provinces originally named parts of Fortriu? If they were, how did Fortriu disappear without seeming to leave any trace in the place-names of those same areas? Essentially, there is no current way of telling just how far west, south, and east Fortriu may once have extended and how that varied across time.

Fraser has plausibly suggested that by 700 the Pictish kingdom of Atholl might have been the southern part of a diphyletic kingdom of Fortriu with rival 'colleague-kings' in both Atholl and Moray before the rise of Onuist son of Vurguist from the Mearns in 728 to dominate Fortriu and all of the Picts (Fraser 2009, 101–2, 225, 292). But this still leaves unclear the status of regions like Mar, Banff, Buchan, and Kincardine and their position in relation to the northern kingdom of the Verturiones. Nevertheless, given what is currently known about Fortriu and its location in north Britain, together with the almost complete population of that same part of north Britain by the *dabhach*, it is now surely worth exploring in greater depth the idea that the *dabhach* was the unit of land assessment employed by the rulers of Fortriu as a fairly standard European means of calculating military service and raising taxation across the lands under their authority (Ross 2015, 198).

Although a second survey of *dabhaichean*, this time for Banff, Buchan, Aberdeenshire, Mar, the Mearns, Angus, Atholl, and Fife, has begun it is already reasonably safe to state that there are some glaringly obvious differences between some of these areas and northern Scotland. Only Mar (so far) seemingly replicates the longevity of *dabhaichean* found further north. Most important is the fact that *dabhaichean* remain in use as viable units of land assessment far longer in the north than elsewhere in Scotland, even though there is no obvious landscape-related or climatic reason to explain this discrepancy. Again at a regional level, while there are *dabhaichean* present in Atholl they seem to form distinct clusters at key geographic points (like the southern end of Glen Tilt or the junction of the Rivers Tay and Tummel) rather than being omni-present across the entire landscape. What exactly these patterns might mean is also worth investigating. It might even be possible to contextualize them using the ritual murder of Talorcan, the Pictish king of Atholl, by the effective ruler of Fortriu in 739, which may have been followed by the absorption of Atholl into the Verturian kingdom of the Picts (Mac Airt & Mac Niocaill 1983, 739.7; Fraser 2009, 100–3).

Perhaps odder is the fact that while the *dabhaichean* of Braemar and Invercauld (in Mar) stretched southwards to Cairnwell and the summit of Glas Maol at 1068m, *dabhaichean* seem to be absent from large parts of the landscape on the southern side of the Cairnwell watershed. One interpretation might be that this is evidence of a political boundary but there are other possible solutions worth exploring because *dabhaichean* do occasionally appear elsewhere in Perthshire. Equally, how can the almost total absence of *dabhaichean* from Fife, Strathearn and Menteith be explained away, bearing in mind the small and solitary cluster of four *dabhaichean* in the Forth Valley that likely comprised the Medieval parish of Tillicoultry (RMS II 1984, no 3641). Evaluating and then interpreting the patterns of *dabhaichean* in the area of this second survey will likely lead to many more new insights.

What is clear is that the *dabhach* is no longer a 'Pictish problem'. By opening both it, and the patterns it created across so many different Pictish landscapes to wider contextualization across Europe and the North Atlantic, many more answers to the hitherto intractable puzzle of the Medieval state building process in North Britain will likely become apparent. More research of this type will also eventually allow us to look backwards in time and question why and how some areas of early Medieval settlement achieved pre-eminence over their neighbours by being chosen to lend their names to these new units of Pictish land assessment.

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