

= Gilli ( Hebridean earl ) =

Gilli was an eleventh @-@ century Hebridean chieftain whose career coincided with an era of Orcadian overlordship in the Kingdom of the Isles . According to mediaeval saga @-@ tradition , Gilli was a brother @-@ in @-@ law of Sigurðr Hlǫfviðsson , Earl of Orkney , having married the latter 's sister Hvarflǫð . Traditionally regarded as one of the most powerful Orcadian earls , Sigurðr appears to have extended his authority into the Isles in the late tenth century , and Gilli apparently acted as Sigurðr 's viceroy or tributary earl in this region . Gilli 's name is probably Gaelic in origin , and he seems to have seated himself on either Coll or Colonsay , islands in the Inner Hebrides . It is possible that Gilli is identical to Gilla Ciaráin mac Glún Iairn , an Uí Ímair dynast who was slain at the Battle of Clontarf in 1014 . If not , another possibility is that he was the father of a certain Conamal / Conmáel who was killed in 980 .

= = Earl in the Hebrides = =

There is evidence to suggest that Sigurðr Hlǫfviðsson , Earl of Orkney ( died 1014 ) extended his authority from Orkney into the Isles in the late tenth- and early eleventh century . For instance , the thirteenth @-@ century Njáls saga ? the only source that specifically refers to Gilli ? states that one of Sigurðr 's followers , Kári Sǫlmundarson , extracted taxes from the northern Hebrides , then controlled by Gilli himself . Whether these taxes were due to Norwegian overlords of Sigurðr , as the saga states , is uncertain . The saga further declares that Sigurðr and his men defeated Guðrøðr Haraldsson , King of the Isles ( died 989 ) , after which they plundered the Isles . Also noted are additional assaults conducted by accomplices of Sigurðr throughout the Hebrides , Kintyre , Mann ( against Guðrøðr ) , and Anglesey . The thirteenth @-@ century Orkneyinga saga also reports Sigurðr 's raids into the Isles , as does Eyrbyggja saga , a thirteenth @-@ century source which further notes his taxation of the kingdom . Contemporary Orcadian expansion may be perceptible in the evidence of the land @-@ assessment system of ouncelands in the Hebrides and along the western coast of Scotland . If Sigurðr 's authority indeed stretched over the Isles in the last decades of the tenth century , such an intrusion could account for the numbers of silver hoards dating to this time .

Various Irish annals also reveal that this was a period of strife in the Isles , as Danair ( literally " Danes " ) are recorded active in the region throughout 986 and 987 . Although it is not impossible that the Danair ( perhaps merely meaning " pirates " ) refer to Sigurðr 's forces , it is more likely that they are instead identical to the Vikings who are otherwise attested attacking England in the 990s . In fact , it seems that the Danair were active in the region against opponents of Guðrøðr . This could indicate that either the kin of the recently deceased Amlaíb Cuarán , King of Northumbria and Dublin ( died 980 / 981 ) , or perhaps an Orcadian @-@ aligned Islesman like Gilli himself , may have fallen target to an alliance between the Danair and Guðrøðr . This could in turn reveal that the aforesaid claims of continuous Orcadian conquests in the Isles ? otherwise unrecorded outwith saga @-@ tradition ? give a less than unbiased account of events . Whatever the case , Guðrøðr was slain in 989 , after which the political cohesion of Kingdom of the Isles ? perhaps shaken by Orcadian encroachment in the 980s ? seems to have diminished .

The extent of Guðrøðr 's authority in Hebrides is unknown due to his coexistence with Gilli , and to the uncertainty of Orcadian encroachment . Guðrøðr 's successor is likewise uncertain . Although it is conceivable that either Gilli or Sigurðr capitalised on the king 's death , and extended their overlordship as far south as Mann , possible after @-@ effects such as these are uncorroborated . According to Njáls saga , Gilli was seated on Kola or Kolu , an island that appears to refer to Coll or perhaps Colonsay . The saga also states that Gilli was married to Sigurðr 's sister , Hvarflǫð . This marital alliance appears to further evince the southward extension of Sigurðr 's influence . The latter 's family was clearly not adverse to marrying into native dynasties , as Sigurðr 's own mother was the daughter of an Irish king , whilst his wife was the daughter of a Scottish king . In fact , the aforesaid sources appear to indicate that Gilli operated in the Hebrides as a tributary earl to his brother @-@ in @-@ law . Certainly , Eyrbyggja saga states that Sigurðr left menn ( " agents " ) in

the Hebrides to collect tax from Mann , whilst Orkneyinga saga reveals that , at a later period in time , Sigurðr 's son and successor , Þórfinnr Sigurðarson , Earl of Orkney ( died c . 1065 ) , tasked a member of his own wife 's family , Kálfr Árnason ( died 1051 ) , to impose Orcadian authority in the Isles .

= = Clontarf , Gilla Ciaráin , and Conamal / Conmáel = =

By the end of the first decade of the eleventh century , the principal ruler in Ireland was Brian Bóruma mac Cennétig , High King of Ireland ( died 1014 ) . Brian 's daughter , Sláine , was married to Sitriuc mac Amlaíb , King of Dublin ( died 1042 ) , whilst the latter 's mother , Gormlaith ingen Murchada ( died 1030 ) was a former wife of Brian . In 1013 , Sitriuc allied himself to Brian 's enemies , and revolted against Brian 's overlordship . Although Brian proceeded to lay siege to Dublin ? the only Viking town that participated in the revolt against his supremacy ? Sitriuc retained possession of the settlement , and Brian retired to Munster for Christmas .

According to Njáls saga , Gilli and Sitriuc spent Yule with Sigurðr in Orkney , where Sitriuc convinced Sigurðr to ally himself against Brian on the condition that Sigurðr would gain Gormlaith in marriage . In April 1014 , the opposing forces met and clashed at the remarkably bloody Battle of Clontarf . Although Brian 's forces ultimately won the day , and Sigurðr himself was amongst the slain , Brian lost his life as well . As for Gilli , he appears in a chapter of Njáls saga that presents a series of supernatural events connected with the conflict . In one instance , a Caithnessman is said to have witnessed valkyrie @-@ like apparitions singing songs for the slain , whilst a similar event is said to have occurred in the Faroe Islands . Priests in Iceland are stated to have encountered paranormal phenomena , whilst an Orcadian is said to have encountered the spectre of Sigurðr before disappearing off the face of the earth . As for Gilli , the saga asserts that he dreamt of a song that foretold the outcome of the battle and the fall of Brian and Sigurðr . There is reason to suspect that the aforesaid supernatural manifestations ? arguably somewhat detached from the saga 's general narrative ? are actually interpolations of separate material . Elsewhere in the narrative , however , there are examples of paranormal phenomena intervening into human affairs . For example , the episode concerning Gilli 's dream seems to directly parallel an earlier episode in which another man , the Icelander Flosi Þórðarson , is depicted dreaming of the burning of the saga 's eponym , Njáll Þorgeirsson .

If the account of Gilli in the aftermath of Clontarf has been constructed for dramatic effect , the passage may not be evidence of his floruit beyond this point in history . In fact , it is possible that he is identical to Gilla Ciaráin mac Glún Iairn ( died 1014 ) , a man who was amongst those slain at the battle . The Annals of Ulster , which records the latter 's fall , styles him rigdamna Gall ( " heir @-@ designate of the Foreigners " ) , revealing that Gilla Ciaráin was indeed a prominent man . Sitriuc is known to have had an elder brother named Glún Iairn , a man who had reigned as King of Dublin until his death in 989 . If Gilla Ciaráin was a son of this king , his apparent tender age at the time of his father 's death could account for Sitriuc 's accession to the kingship . Furthermore , the aforesaid title accorded to Gilla Ciaráin appears to indicate that he was regarded as his uncle 's royal heir . If Gilli and Gilla Ciaráin are indeed identical , his pre @-@ eminent status in the Norse @-@ Gaelic world would help to explain his marital alliance with Sigurðr .

Gilla Ciaráin 's father bore a Gaelic name meaning " iron knee " . It may or may not be a Gaelicisation of Járkné , an identical @-@ meaning Old Norse name . Gilla Ciaráin 's own name is Gaelic , meaning " the servant of Saint Ciarán " . Gaelic names beginning with the initial name @-@ element Gilla- first appear on record in last half of the tenth century . Such names were shortened to Gilli by Scandinavian settlers in Britain and Ireland . In fact , such a phenomenon may account for the name accorded to Gilli himself . Gilli 's name suggests that he was at least partly of Gaelic descent , perhaps either Irish or Hebridean . Although various names are attributed to Gilli 's wife in the numerous versions of Njáls saga , the best version of this source gives Hvarfl?ð . This name appears to be an Old Norse form of Forbflaith , a relatively rare Gaelic name .

There may be further evidence concerning familial relations . In 980 , Máel Sechnaill mac Domnaill , High King of Ireland utterly defeated Amlaíb Cuarán 's forces at the Battle of Tara . One of the

casualties of this remarkable conflict was a man identified as " Conamhal m. airri Gall " by the Annals of Ulster , and " Conmael mac Gilli Airi " by the Annals of Tigernach . It is possible that these annal @-@ entries refer to a man named Conamal or Conmáel , who was in turn the son of a man named Gilli , and that either the father or the son bore the title airrí Gall ( " royal deputy of the Foreigners " ) . If correct , it is conceivable that that this father is identical to Gilli himself . Against this identification , however , is the fact that the aforesaid saga @-@ tradition depicts Gilli active at about the time of the Battle of Clontarf . The considerable span of time between the death of Conamal / Conmáel and this conflict may well be evidence that a paternal relationship between Conamal / Conmáel and Gilli is unlikely . Whatever the case , the sources appear to be confused as to whether the patronym refers to a personal name or a title . One possibility is that this confusion could indicate that the sources refer to both the personal name Gilla Maire and the epithet Gall .