

Resource Pack

Can you complete the Somerled, 'King' of the Isles quest?

You may need to do a little extra research:

- Visit the SCRAN website <http://www.scran.ac.uk/> and access the relevant records using the SCRAN ID numbers provided under each resource
- Visit [places of interest](#)
- Do your own research by following [links](#)
- Investigate the CD-ROM *The Scottish People 800-1450 – People of a kingdom*, Learning and Teaching Scotland www.ltscotland.org.uk, email: enquiries@LTScotland.com, tel: Customer Services +44 (0)8700 100 297

Somerled 'King' of the Isles (d.1164)

- Independent leader in the Western Isles in the 12th century
- Opposed the Anglo-Norman reforms of the King of Scots
- Defended and maintained a strong Gaelic community in the west



Chess piece of a figure with a sword and shield, from 11th century, found at Uig Bay, Lewis.

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Finding Facts

1. 'Somerled' means:

- (a) 'Son of Erled'
- (b) 'Summer leader'
- (c) 'Summer raider'

2. Who were Somerled's direct descendents?

- (a) The Earls of Orkney
- (b) The MacDonald Lords of the Isles
- (c) The Mormaers of Moray

3. Which Scottish king was on the throne when Somerled led an attack on Renfrew in 1164?

Looking at Evidence

4.



(a) This is a gold bangle found at the Sound of Jura, Argyll. The design is very similar to bangles found on the Isle of Man and Norway.

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(b) This Scandinavian style ring is from Fladda-chùinn near Skye, Inner Hebrides.

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Looking at the evidence, what can you say about the influence of Norse culture in the west?

5.



(a) This map outlines the influence of the Gaelic and Norse language in the north and west of Scotland.

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(b) This is a necklace from a Norse woman's grave, from the 10th century at Cnip, Uig, Lewis.

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Looking at the evidence, what can you suggest about the culture of the west? Why are place names useful evidence?

6.



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Study this family tree or 'bloodlines' of the Lords of the Isles.

- (a) Which of Somerled's descendents married a daughter of the King of Scots?
- (b) Who was his father?
- (c) Name Somerled's son Dungall's sons. What relation are they to Donald and Ruari?

Interpretation

7. Consider the bloodlines map for Somerled's extensive dynasty. Family trees are put together by piecing together records, photographs and even information passed down by word of mouth.

Try to draw up your own family tree. How far can you get? Why does it get more difficult the further back you go? Why do you think it is difficult for historians to trace Somerled's family tree?

8. There are some accounts of Somerled being married to the daughter of the King of Man. Describe why this would have been a clever tactical alliance.

9. Somerled was from a family of mixed Gaelic and Norse origins. He was also related to rulers in the Isle of Man, Ireland, Orkney. Why do you think these relations were important?

Links

<http://nms.ac.uk>

The National Museum of Scotland presents the history of Scotland – its land, its people and their achievements – through its rich collections built up over more than two centuries.

<http://www.scran.ac.uk/>

SCRAN is the award winning history and culture website providing instant access to images, sounds, movies and learning resources. It contains over one million records from museums, galleries and archives.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/scottishhistory/>

On this site you'll find in-depth articles, multimedia (like games, virtual tours and animations) as well as bite-size material like timelines and short biographies of historic figures. All is designed for you to get more out of your interest in History.

<http://www.nts.org.uk/>

This site contains useful information, whether you want to know more about the National Trust for Scotland's vital conservation work or are planning to visit some of the places of interest.

<http://www.ntseducation.org.uk/>

On this site there are sections which are intended to assist teachers with various topics in the school curriculum. They provide useful background material for teachers intending to explore these topics with their students.

<http://www.nationalgalleries.org/>

Education is at the heart of the work of the National Galleries of Scotland. Each of the Galleries provides a rich and lively learning resource. Our inclusive approach offers many different ways of learning to give everyone a chance to become actively engaged with art.

<http://www.historic-scotland.gov.uk>

Historic Scotland safeguards the nation's built heritage and promotes its understanding and enjoyment. You can find information on more than 300 properties and scheduled ancient monuments. We also have resources for schools and details on technical conservation and research.

<http://www.nls.ac.uk>

The National Library of Scotland – Scotland's largest library and the world centre for the study of Scotland and the Scots. A vast reference library, covering all subjects, from art to mountaineering, and from early times to the digital age.

<http://www.nas.gov.uk>

The National Archives of Scotland (or NAS) is the main archive for sources of the history of Scotland as a separate kingdom, her role in the British Isles and the links between Scotland and many other countries over the centuries.

<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk>

Learning and Teaching Scotland is a national public body sponsored by the Scottish Executive Education Department. The Scottish Executive has charged Learning and Teaching Scotland with providing advice, support, resources and staff development that enhance the quality of educational experiences with a view to improving attainment and achievement and promoting lifelong learning.

Email: enquiries@LTScotland.com

Telephone: Customer Services +44 (0)8700 100 297

Places of Interest

St Oran's Chapel, Iona, Argyll

Answers

1. (c) 'Summer raider'
2. (b) The MacDonald Lords of the Isles
3. Malcolm IV

4. The culture of the west was heavily influenced by settlers and travellers from Scandinavia. Evidence (a) and (b) are Scandinavian style jewellery. Stylistic influences stretch from Norway right through the Western Isles to the Isle of Man.

5. The map shows the intermixing of the Gaelic and Norse peoples in the west and north of Scotland. The necklace is evidence of Norse settlement in the Western Isles. Place names can be a good indication of the linguistic and cultural history of a region.

6. (a) John MacDonald 1st Lord of the Isles
(b) Aonghas Og
(c) Uspak, Olaf, Duncan, Ronald and Dungall, they are Donald and Ruari's first cousins.

7. It is difficult to trace a family history, because the further back you go, the less record there is of the family members. Historians often have to do a lot of research to find genealogical evidence. The difficulty often faced is that, for example, in Somerled's time, family data would have been passed down by word of mouth. More important Gaelic families would have had a bard who was employed to recount their genealogy. It is difficult to interpret such evidence as there is likely to be embellishments.

8. The Isle of Man was an important asset to securing the western seaboard. Good relations with the Isle of Man were essential to Somerled's ambitions for a strong, independent kingdom. A marital alliance ensured that the sons from this union were heirs to the throne of Man.

9. Somerled rebelled against the Scottish crown. Like many Gaelic lords he was unhappy at the influx of Anglo-Norman settlers whose traditions and culture often contradicted Gaelic culture. As a defence, Somerled tried to unite the Gaelic communities of the west, into a stronger kingdom.