

# Connections and the Church in Late Norse Scotland

EDITED BY

CAITLIN ELLIS & TOM FAIRFAX



Spalding

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CAITLIN ELLIS AND TOM FAIRFAX

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## EDITORIAL PREFACE

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**A** *pardjón Journal for Scandinavian Studies* is pleased to present our fourth special volume and our first volume of collected conference papers.

The present publication, as will be noted further in the introductory article beginning on page 1, is the end result of a 2022 online conference hosted by the University of Nottingham and co-organised by this volume's guest editors, Caitlin Ellis and Tom Fairfax. That digital conference was themed around the events retold in the Old Norse *þáttr* ('story') *Brenna Adams Byskups* ('The Burning of Bishop Adam'), which recounts the murder of Bishop Adam of Caithness. Each of the articles within this volume discusses and analyses the various political and social events of the time, which either directly or indirectly led to the murder of a Catholic bishop by his own congregation. Additionally, each of these articles have utilised multiple sources to complete their analyses, including, but not limited to: Old Norse sagas, as well as Scottish-, and Irish chronicles and annals.

This volume has been subjected to a rigorous blind peer-review process and subsequently edited multiple times by the volume's guest editors, as well as by members of *Apardjón's* editorial board. As always, *Apardjón* would not exist without all of these scholars' commitment to creating an accessible platform for interdisciplinary research on the Viking and medieval North.

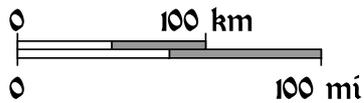
We likewise wish to extend our thanks to all the readers who have supported *Apardjón* since its inception, as well as those who have been introduced to us through this special volume. The next volume of the journal, *Apardjón* 4, is in early production and is scheduled to be published in 2026. *Apardjón* is also in the early stages of production on our next special volume, which will also be published in the near future.

*Apardjón* is always open for submissions of new translations, editions, and transcriptions of medieval Scandinavian literature, and the call for such translations and editions can be found at the end of the present publication. In the meantime, we sincerely hope you enjoy the papers collected for this special volume, entitled: *Connections and the Church in Late Norse Scotland*.

On behalf of the Editors,

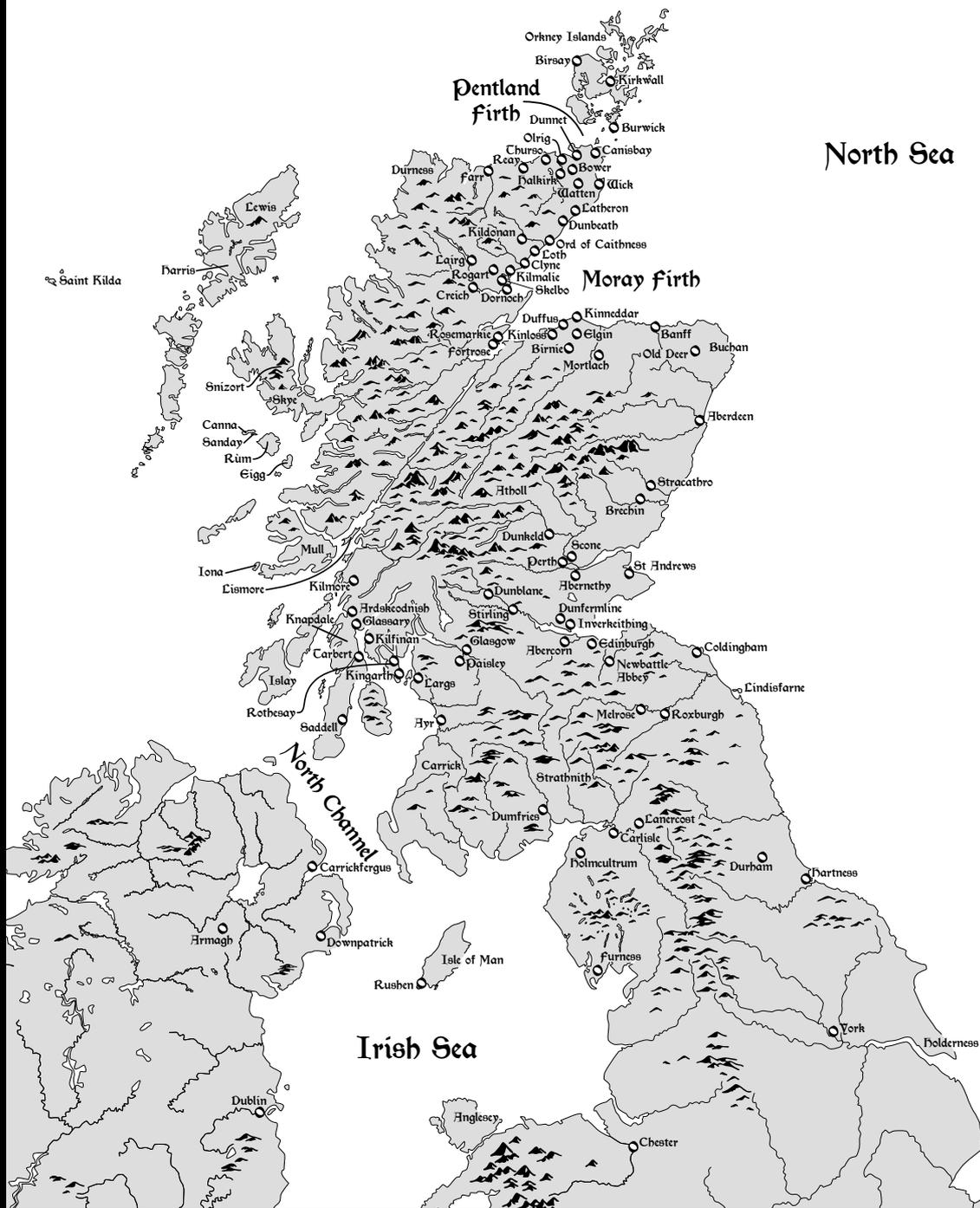
*Blake Middleton*





Atlantic Ocean

North Sea



BRITAIN AND IRELAND



CAITHNESS, SUTHERLAND, AND THE ORKNEY ISLANDS



# **‘People still have those injuries in their memories’: The burning of Bishop Adam, 800 years on**

Caitlin Ellis and Tom Fairfax

This special volume is the product of a conference hosted online by the University of Nottingham in 2022, co-organised by the editors of this volume, Tom Fairfax and Caitlin Ellis. The story of this project began amid the COVID-19 lockdowns of 2020, when Tom asked his then masters supervisor, Alex Woolf, what he thought of a few research ideas to keep him busy when everything had closed down. One of these projects was a translation of *Brenna Adams Byskups*, ‘The Burning of Bishop Adam’, an Old Norse account of the murder of Bishop Adam of Caithness in 1222. This idea evolved into a transcription, translation, and accompanying article that was published in *The Innes Review* in 2021. After starting his PhD at the University of Nottingham, Tom seized the opportunity of the 800th anniversary of Adam’s death to put together a conference, and quickly enlisted Caitlin as a co-organiser. Rather than solely focus on Bishop Adam, the decision was made to use aspects of Adam’s life and death as a starting point for the exploration of ‘Connections and the Church in Late Norse Scotland’. The conference took place on 17 September 2022, 800 years (and a few days) after the murder of Bishop Adam on 11 September 1222. Its aim, which we hope this volume will fulfil, was to demonstrate the range of influences in northern Scotland at the time of Adam’s life, placing it at the centre of a dynamic and interconnected political, cultural, and ecclesiastical milieu. We are proud to say that this volume features the majority of the original conference’s contributions, alongside additional contributions from Alex Woolf, Russell Ó Ríagáin, and James Moore, with an afterword from Barbara Crawford.

As many of the contributions in this volume use Bishop Adam of Caithness as a starting point for their wider discussions, this introduction will use Adam’s life and death to demonstrate the connections taking place around Britain, Ireland, Iceland, and Scandinavia.

## 1. Late Norse Scotland: Definitions and Directions

The ‘Viking Age’ of Scandinavian activity abroad has traditionally been defined as running from the ninth to eleventh centuries (Jesch 2015: 7; Holman 2007: 181). However, Scandinavian influence on Scotland, particularly its islands, continued long after this point. The survival of Norn, a dialect of Old Norse spoken in the Northern Isles and Caithness, into the nineteenth century is perhaps the clearest example of this (see Barnes 2010). Political influence from Norway also continued after the unsuccessful invasion of England in 1066 by the Norwegian king Haraldr *harðráði* (‘harsh-ruler’, ‘stern counsel’, ‘resolute’), which, along with the Battle of Hastings and Norman Conquest, has Anglocentrically been seen as closing the Viking Age (Holman 2007: 181–98). Notably, Norwegian kings made military interventions: two expeditions by Magnús *berfættr* (‘bare-legs’) in 1098 and 1102–3 (Power 1986), which particularly impacted the earldom of Orkney, and as explored in Alex Woolf’s article, a raid on Aberdeen by Eysteinn Haraldsson in c. 1151. Recognition of such continued legacies and connections has led to new chronologies and conceptual frameworks being put forward. In treating the cultural diaspora created by Scandinavian settlement abroad, Judith Jesch refers to the ‘long broad Viking Age’ as lasting to c. 1500 (Jesch 2015: 10, 55).

It used to be assumed that the Northern Isles received the earliest and most complete Scandinavian settlement in the British-Irish Isles. There was disagreement over the nature of the takeover, in terms of whether it was violent or peaceful (Bäcklund 2001; Smith 2001) – but its occurrence was taken for granted. This has recently been challenged, however, since archaeological corroboration ‘of an early and dominant Viking presence’ (Griffiths 2019: 474) is lacking, whereas clear material indications of Scandinavian presence date for the most part to the mid-tenth century or later (Griffiths 2019: 474). Indeed, it seems that the strength of Norse culture in the Northern Isles in later periods, and even into modern times, has influenced the assumption that Scandinavian settlement took place at an early date (Griffiths 2019: 474; Ellis 2021: 8). So perhaps ‘Late Norse Scotland’ was not quite so ‘late’ in the Norse period after all.

While the early history of settlement is more shadowy, a more clearcut end-date for Viking and/or Norse Scotland, at least in a political sense, is provided by the impignoration of Orkney and Shetland in 1458. This is the termination given for the Late Norse period by the Scottish Archaeological Research Framework (*ScARF* 2012: 2.3.3). Archaeologists have sometimes referred to ‘Late Norse’ without definition or explanation

(Batey 1982; Lane 2013).<sup>1</sup> ‘Late Norse’ is often used as synonymous with ‘medieval’ (Crawford 2023: 193), in the sense of ‘central-’ or ‘high medieval’ as following the Viking Age, since ‘Viking and Late Norse’ is a commonly used pairing (Batey 1993; Lane 2013; Mainland 2022).<sup>2</sup> For the kingdom of Man and the Isles, the Late Norse period has been defined as the late-eleventh to the mid-thirteenth century (McDonald 2015: 334, 2019). The earldom of Orkney took part in wider European trends of the central Middle Ages, such as crusading and pilgrimage, as features in Harriet Clark’s article in terms of Orcadians and Norwegians both travelling to Jerusalem and elsewhere. Recognition of this may have contributed to the periodisation and terminology of Late Norse, alongside discomfort about the word ‘viking’, with its associations of plundering marauders. Describing the ‘later parts’ of the era of Scandinavian influence on the Northern Isles and Caithness evidenced by archaeology (‘from the initial settlement sometime in the 10th century to the 13th’), Colleen E. Batey comments that they ‘would be termed Late Norse rather than Viking, since the activity was settlement and politically based rather than raiding motivated in true Viking fashion’ (Batey 1998: 4).

‘Norse’ terminology has been questioned as it is sometimes seen as specifically referring to Norwegians or sometimes to Scandinavians more broadly, which can be connected to the assumption that the Scandinavian settlers of Scotland and northern Britain originated from Norway (Downham 2013: 42–43). It is useful, though, in denoting language and literature rather than just ethnicity, and in referring to speakers of Old Norse beyond Scandinavia itself, for example in Iceland and the British-Irish Isles (see Ellis 2021: 2). Indeed, the ‘Late Norse’ period was of course much closer to the time that the Old Norse sagas were written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries than the Viking Age was. Though parts of Scotland were not entirely, exclusively, or even predominantly Norse-speaking, and there were high degrees of bilingualism and multilingualism, they were arguably still part of the Norse world in a cultural sense. This can be seen, for example, in the lines of communication and influence explored in Rosemary Power’s article with regard to Iona and the Hebrides.

From a broader Scottish perspective, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries were dynamic and formative. The unification of Scotland was a late and gradual process. It was

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<sup>1</sup> The term may have replaced ‘Late Viking’ (see for ex. Childe 1943).

<sup>2</sup> This is perhaps a development from an earlier usage. Ritchie (1976–77) uses ‘late Norse’ for the tenth century, though notably with lower case ‘l’ for ‘late’, following ‘early Norse’ and ‘middle Norse’ with reference to the phases of farmsteads at Buckquoy.

only by 1200, as Dauvit Broun observes, that ‘it had been established, in a way which [had] every prospect of enduring, that Scotland was not part of England’ (Broun 2002: 33). This was connected to an increasingly established royal administration in Scotland. There were likewise changes in church organisation, including new foundations and relocations, but international and local concerns were often balanced as Richard Oram’s article demonstrates. Despite increasing attempts at centralisation, it is widely recognised that there was much regional variation within Scotland at this time, given the different languages and traditions within the coalescing areas. We also recognise that there was variation within Norse Scotland and, as highlighted by Sarah Jane Gibbon and James Moore’s article, within the northern earldoms. With the legacy of nineteenth-century deterministic categorisation, much scholarship has focused on processes of Normanisation and feudalisation in opposition to traditional Gaelic lordship (Oram 2011: 312). While these overly simplistic binaries are now understood to be misleading, there were inevitably tensions between individuals and groups with competing political interests. The growing power of the kings of Scots and their attempts to exert royal authority beyond the core of Alba is a recurrent theme in this special issue, particularly in the articles by Neil McGuigan and Russell Ó Ríagáin. This, then, was the world which Bishop Adam stepped into — and which killed him.

## **2. The Burning of Bishop Adam**

When it comes to Bishop Adam of Caithness, it is perhaps easiest to start at the end, with Adam’s murder in 1222. Information about this incident is found in a range of sources. The quote from the title of this article comes from *Brenna Adams Byskups*, the Old Norse account of Adam’s murder. The oral traditions behind this text appear to have travelled to Iceland in the 1230s via the son of Rafn *logmaðr* (‘[the] lawman’), one of the people mentioned in the text (Fairfax 2021: 112–15; Chesnutt 1981: 47, 55). Its account of Adam’s death is sympathetic towards the *bændr* (‘farmers’, sg. *bóndi*) of Caithness, who were punished for Adam’s murder. These people were not tenants of the jarl, but landholders who appear to have had significant political power in the northern earldoms (Crawford 1987: 198–99). The story begins with their complaints about the church taxes imposed by the bishop:

‘It was an ancient custom that the bishop must have a *spann* [‘bucket’, or ‘measure’] of butter for every 20 cows. Every *bóndi* who was in Caithness had to pay this, the one who had more cows paid more, but the one who had fewer paid less – according to what they were liable for. However, Bishop Adam wished to increase the payment and have a *spann* for every 15 cows. And when he achieved this, he asked to have it for every 12 cows. And when this was permitted, he wished to have it for every 10 cows, but this seemed an enormity to everyone.’ (Fairfax 2021: 111)

The situation which develops shows a failure by the jarl of Caithness to resolve the situation, and a failure of the bishop to compromise:

‘At that time, Bishop Adam was in Halkirk in Thorsdale, but Jarl Jón was not far from there. The people of Caithness had an assembly on the hill above the farm where the bishop was. [...] a message was sent to Jarl Jón which asked him to reach a settlement with the bishop, but the Jarl wanted nothing to do with it.’ (Fairfax 2021: 111)

Enter Rafn ‘the lawman’, the voice of reason in this story, who is ignored.

‘Rafn ‘the lawman’ was with the bishop at that time, and told him to spare the people [from the tax], saying otherwise he was frightened about how it would turn out. The bishop told him to be cheerful, and he said that the *bændr* would stop themselves.’ (Fairfax 2021: 111)

Adam’s ignorance results in the murder of one of his advisors: a monk of Newbattle Abbey called Serlo, according to the *Chronicle of Melrose Abbey* (Stevenson 1835: 139, 1856: 174–75). After this, the bishop finally decides to negotiate:

‘The bishop asked Rafn to say to the *bændr* that he wished to be reconciled with them. When this was said to the *bændr*, all the wiser ones became happy. Then, the bishop went outside, intent on a settlement.’ (Fairfax 2021: 112)

For some of the aggrieved onlookers, however, this was too little, too late. *Brenna Adams Byskups* tells us that:

‘when the worse men saw this, those who were angriest, they seized Bishop Adam, brought him into a little building and then set it alight. The building burned so fast, that those who wanted to rescue the bishop could do nothing.’ (Fairfax 2021: 112)

The final part of *Brenna Adams Byskups* describes the retaliation of King Alexander II of Scotland for Adam’s death. This is portrayed as a near-genocidal act of retribution which seems to have affected Caithness for some time:

‘The king became so angry at the news [of Adam’s death], that people still have those injuries in their memories which the king made after the burning of the bishop, in maiming and killing, theft and the expulsion of people from the country.’ (Fairfax 2021: 112)

*Brenna Adams Byskups* views Bishop Adam as foolhardy, Jarl Jón Haraldsson as either incompetent or malicious, and the people of Caithness as too harshly punished. It is a story about a collapse of authority, in which leaders fail to step up and take responsibility in resolving a difficult situation. Of course, other commentators saw things differently. The *Chronicle of Melrose Abbey*, where Adam was abbot before becoming bishop, portrays him as a glorious Christian martyr, comparing him to St James, St Stephen, and St Laurence (Stevenson 1835: 139, 1856: 174–75). A letter from the papal curia, which was a reply to a letter from several Scottish bishops, expresses shock at the events, commenting that ‘our soul was terrified, our heart trembled, and our ears shook with the dreadfulness of that iniquity.’ (Johnston and Johnston 1909: 23–27). The papal court approved of King Alexander’s heavy-handed response, claiming that the grief caused by the murder was ‘very much mitigated by his diligence.’

This short discussion of Adam’s death shows that this shocking story found its way to Iceland, to Rome, and to Scotland. Other accounts are found in England and Ireland (Webster and Preest 2018: 47; Nicholls 1983: 96; Fairfax 2021: 121–24). This demonstrates that events in Caithness had impacts far beyond northern Scotland, and that information from Caithness was, at least occasionally, transferred through a network of connections. Adam’s lifetime can also be used to investigate these connections, revealing the ecclesiastical, economic, and political networks which Caithness was a part of in the Late Norse period.

### 3. Connections and the church in Adam's lifetime

Primarily, Adam represents connections between the bishopric of Caithness and the Scottish kingdom. Adam was formerly an abbot of Melrose Abbey in the Scottish borders. This was an influential Cistercian establishment founded by David I of Scotland, which enjoyed continued patronage from the Scottish kings into the thirteenth century and beyond (Broun and Harrison 2007: 4). Adam was not the only person from Melrose to be promoted to a bishopric. Both Reinald, bishop of Ross (1195–1213), and Gilbert, bishop of Galloway (1235–53), were former monks of Melrose (Broun and Harrison 2007: 4). The fact that these people were appointed in contested areas suggests that the Melrose monks were viewed as reliable and loyal by the kings of Scots. It seems likely that Bishop Adam had a diplomatic role to carry out too, being a direct line between the king and the earldom of Caithness. The jarls and the people of Caithness were still associated with Orkney and Norway, so the bishops of Caithness acted as a tool for the Scottish kings to increase their influence in the north of Scotland, an area which the kings had little control over (Crawford 1993: 130). However, Adam's appointment was not just an expression of a desire to control Caithness by the Scottish royalty. Indeed, Adam's career can provide an insight into the Cumbrian, Hebridean, and Irish parts of the Late Norse puzzle. To explore these areas, the 1222 entry in the *Chronicle of Lanercost*, which describes Adam's death, is a good starting point since it describes his transregional origins and his early career:

*Eodem tempore Adam, episcopus Cathensiæ, quondam abbas de Melros, territorio Carliolensi oriundus [...]* (Stevenson 1839: 29).

'At that time Adam, Bishop of Caithness, once Abbot of Melrose, who came from the territory of Carlisle [...]' (Authors' translation).

The context of Adam's beginnings in northwest England brings us into an ever-changing Irish Sea region in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century. It is plausible that Adam was later made bishop of Caithness because he understood some Old Norse due to this northern English background. Adam could have been a monk at Holm Cultram Abbey in Cumbria before his move to Melrose, as Holm Cultram was a daughter house of Melrose (Fairfax 2021: 107).

At this time in Cumbria, an English nobleman called John de Courcy was launching a takeover of Ulster from his mother's homelands. As part of this, he married

Afreka (or Affrica) Guðrøðardóttir, a member of the family of the kings of Man and the Isles. Together, this couple used connections with churches in Cumberland to establish new ecclesiastical foundations in Ulster, many of them Cistercian (Collins 2023: 144–46). Furthermore, there is specific evidence of the pair’s connections to Holm Cultram, with Afreka setting up Grey Abbey in County Down as a daughter house of Holm Cultram Abbey (Duffy 1995: 9).

There is also an indication that this couple influenced appointments in Holm Cultram and Melrose. In 1215, an abbot of Holm Cultram called William de Courcy was made the abbot of Melrose (Stevenson 1837: 121, 1856: 160). It seems likely that this was a relative of John, perhaps a brother or even a child (Duffy 1995: 10). The only attestation to his last name appears in Bower’s *Scotichronicon* (*Scotichron.*: 25). This text incorrectly claims that William was made abbot of Melrose in 1212, but there is no other plausible candidate for William’s identity. William did not become a bishop, but he later became the Abbot of Rievaulx Abbey in Yorkshire. This was one of the earliest Cistercian monasteries in Britain and was the first in the north of England, making this an influential position.

William’s appointment in Holm Cultram and Afreka Guðrøðardóttir’s role in bringing Holm Cultram monks to Grey Abbey can be viewed as part of a long-standing connection between Holm Cultram and the dynasty of the kings of Man and the Isles. Emilia Jamroziak has highlighted several documents in the Holm Cultram cartulary in which the kings of Man granted privileges and protections to the monks of Holm Cultram in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Jamroziak 2008: 32–33). R. Andrew MacDonald has noted that these privileges were mostly aimed at the economy of the abbey, with the kings granting the monks fishing rights and freedom from tolls (MacDonald 2019: 283). Afreka’s father and brother were among the kings granting the privileges to Holm Cultram.

The charters in the documents belonging to Melrose Abbey show the networks between these abbeys in middle Britain and Northern Ireland. The witnesses of one document involving a land grant to Melrose Abbey include Abbot William of Holm Cultram (quite probably William de Courcy), an abbot of Newbattle (where Bishop Adam’s assistant Serlo came from), an abbot of Rievaulx, and Ralph, the bishop of Down (Innes 1837: 53–54). This bishop of Down was himself a former abbot of Melrose – another case in which a Melrose monk was promoted to a bishopric (Stevenson 1837: 104, 1856: 142). This document, dated to 1207×1209 in the *People of Medieval Scotland* database (*PoMS*: H3/595/4), suggests that the links between northern Ireland, northern

England, and the Scottish borders continued despite John de Courcy's disrupted hold over Ulster. He was defeated by rival Englishmen in Ireland in 1203 and 1204, and his attempt to regain Ulster in 1205 with his brother-in-law, King Rǫgnvaldr of the Isles, failed (Duffy 2004).

Going backwards in time for a moment, it is apparent that the Late Norse links between the church in the Isles, Cumbria, and Ulster pre-dated Afreka and John's marriage. As Seán Duffy notes, the Cistercians at Furness had had a daughter house in County Down since 1127, and they were responsible for establishing the Abbey at Rushen in the Isle of Man (Duffy 1995: 24). Ultimately, John and Afreka's marriage might be seen as a symptom of these relations across the Irish Sea, rather than their cause. That being said, it is clear that the couple's actions in Ulster strengthened and further developed these links, with a clear cash injection for Cistercian establishments across the water.

John and Afreka's influence in the northwest of England is one thing, but how does this link to Caithness? According to *Orkneyinga saga*, (literally, 'the saga of the Orkney islanders', but perhaps more accurately, 'the saga of the earls of Orkney') Afreka Guðrøðardóttir's brother, Rǫgnvaldr, had been invited by William 'the Lion', King of Scots, to invade Caithness (*Orkn.*: 293, ch. 110). This probably occurred around 1199. The saga gives the impression that this invasion was short-lived, but this is more a characteristic of the saga than the events themselves at this stage. In its closing chapters, the saga condenses events lasting several years into short references or chapters. For example, an attempt by a man called Haraldr *ungi* ('the Younger', as opposed to the older Haraldr Maddaðarson) to claim the Orkney earldom is only one chapter in the saga when it must have lasted around 14 years.<sup>3</sup> Whether *Orkneyinga saga* is correct in identifying this Rǫgnvaldr has been debated. It is possible that Rǫgnvaldr, son of Sumarliði (or Somerled), another contender for the kingdom of the Isles, was the one who invaded Caithness.<sup>4</sup>

In either case, it is plausible that the kings of Man and the Isles continued to have an influence in Caithness for quite a while. Once we accept this possibility and look at the saga again, one individual stands out as a symbol of continued Isles influence in

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<sup>3</sup> This chronology is based on evidence from the chronicle of Roger of Howden and will be discussed in more detail in Fairfax's forthcoming publication on 'The Forgotten Dynasty of Rǫgnvaldr Kolsson'. There were attempts to make Haraldr *ungi* into another saint from the dynasty of earls (Ellis 2022: 131–33; Gibbon and Moore in this volume).

<sup>4</sup> Thanks to Russell Ó Ríagáin for discussing this possibility during the conference.

Caithness. The clearest connection between Bishop Adam and the Isles dynasty is that of Rafn ‘the lawman’, who appears as an advisor to Adam in *Brenna Adams Byskups* and who is first introduced in *Orkneyinga saga* as an official of the invading king of the Isles.

‘The King of Scots became very angry and sent people into the Hebrides to Rognvaldr Guðrøðarson, the King of the Hebrides. [...] When Rognvaldr came to hear of this, he immediately called an army together from all the Hebridean realm and from Kintyre; he also had a large troop from Ireland. He went north to Caithness and took all the land under himself and stayed there for some time. [...] And when it was winter, King Rognvaldr prepared himself to go back to his realm in the Hebrides. He set up three officials in Caithness; one was Máni Ólafsson, the second was Rafn ‘the lawman’, and the third was called Hlífólfr *inn alli* [‘the old’].’ (*Orkn.*: 293, ch. 110, Authors’ translation).

Rafn stayed in Caithness after Rognvaldr’s departure and the death of Haraldr Maddaðarson. Even if he was a native Caithnessian promoted by Rognvaldr, his link with Adam may be as a result of Hebridean connections. Adam’s earlier career allows for the possibility that Rognvaldr Guðrøðarson and his sister Afreka were partly responsible for getting Adam appointed in Caithness. Note that some of Rognvaldr’s army came from Ireland. Perhaps Rognvaldr Guðrøðarson was drawing upon the forces of his brother-in-law John de Courcy .<sup>5</sup>

The incentive for kings of Man and the Isles to be involved in Caithness appears to be linked to the route-ways from west to east. Typically, east-west travel in Northern Scotland has relied on either the Pentland Firth or the Great Glen. The Orkney jarls’ involvement in Moray and Ross, as demonstrated in *Orkneyinga saga*, was potentially aimed at controlling the stopping over points in both the Pentland Firth and the Moray Firth, and charging people for the pleasure of using them. *Orkneyinga saga* claims Haraldr Maddaðarson married Hvarfløð, the daughter of a ‘jarl of Moray’ called Melkólmr, indicating a desire by Haraldr to strengthen his connections on the mainland (*Orkn.*: 293, ch. 110). A brief mention in the saga that Haraldr’s son Heinrekr ruled in Ross following his father’s death might suggest that Orcadian influence in Scotland north of the Moray Firth continued into the thirteenth century (*Orkn.*: 297, ch. 112). Despite a lack of evidence regarding the jarls’ income, it is possible to imagine that, at its height, the

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<sup>5</sup> This was suggested by Thomas Barrows at the ‘New Perspectives in Castle Studies’ conference in April 2021.

Orkney earldom held a monopoly on selling supplies and repairs to passing ships. The jarls' taxes were not just generated through livestock, but through tolls and supplies. This meant Hebrideans wishing to profit from the burghs set up by the Scottish kings on the east coast of Scotland in the twelfth century, like Aberdeen and Elgin, had to pay out to the Orkney jarls every time they needed to stop. Having an ally in the Caithness bishopric meant having a stopping place at Dornoch.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps more significantly, the bishopric of Caithness had a harbour on the Pentland Firth at Scrabster.

The mutilation of Bishop Adam's predecessor, Bishop Jón, by Jarl Haraldr Maddaðarson of Orkney at Scrabster, on the Pentland Firth, should be viewed in this context. *Orkneyinga saga* describes the mutilation of Jón but does not explain why it takes place (*Orkn.*: 294–95, ch. 111). The bishops' estate at Scrabster could have allowed people to stay in the Pentland Firth while avoiding the jarls' taxes. Thus, Bishop Jón's mutilation could have been a reaction to Jón's harbouring of traders who avoided paying tax. Little information is available about Bishop Jón, but it seems as though he continued to be bishop during King Rǫgnvaldr's invasion of Caithness. Barbara Crawford has suggested the possibility that Bishop Jón was spying on Haraldr for King William of Scotland (Crawford 2023: 254), and this would suggest an anti-Haraldr alliance between the Caithness bishops, the Scottish kings, and King Rǫgnvaldr of the Isles. This opens up the possibility that, by supporting the bishopric of Caithness, this alliance was attempting to undermine the jarls' political, ecclesiastical, and economic control over the Pentland Firth.

The connections discussed here between Caithness, Man and the Hebrides, eastern Scotland, the northwest of England, and the north of Ireland are somewhat speculative, but they add to the context of Adam's murder. It could be argued that the northern English milieu which Adam came from indicates a continued influence of the Kingdom of Man and the Isles in Caithness, given the links between Holm Cultram, Melrose, and the kings of Man and the Isles. If bishopric estates were being used by isles-based traders to escape paying revenues, this might explain why Adam was raising taxes. If Adam was not able to generate wealth from passing trade, he needed to draw on land-based resources, namely the livestock of his Caithness parishioners. This led to his murder, 800 years ago. Adam's death brought with it a regime change in the Caithness bishopric. King Alexander II's army helped to establish a cathedral at Dornoch under a new bishop, Gilbert de Moravia. Gilbert came from a different milieu: the families which the Scottish kings

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<sup>6</sup> For further discussion of Dornoch's role in the Caithness bishopric, see Oram in this volume.

installed on Scotland's east coast. The mercantile hubs in eastern Scotland, once an economic incentive for the involvement of the Orkney jarls and the Isles dynasty in the Caithness bishopric, now controlled the bishopric itself.

## **Conclusion**

Ultimately, Adam's life and death give us insight into various aspects of the Late Norse period, both geographically and thematically. Described as 'a period that has long been neglected by scholars' (McDonald 2013: 334), it is hoped that this special volume will contribute to efforts to rectify this. This was a time in which ecclesiastical, political, and economic connections were interlinked. Though the Viking Age is known for its connectivity, the period after it saw links between Scotland and Scandinavia grow in new ways, while the development of the Caithness bishopric inspired new ties between northern Scotland and more southerly areas. The Irish Sea zone continued to be relevant to the jarls and bishops of Caithness well into the thirteenth century. While Bishop Adam was of course just a single individual within this changing interconnected world, the articles collected herein use his career and its context as a starting point to shed light on this world from a number of different perspectives. In so doing they demonstrate the exciting potential of further research into Late Norse Scotland.

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# **‘He fared to Caithness, and was there worthily received of all’: Visualising the Impact of the Cult of St Magnus in Caithness**

Sarah Jane Gibbon and James Moore

## **Introduction**

**I**n this article we present and analyse evidence for the cult of St Magnus in Caithness. We do this in the context of the earldoms of Caithness and Orkney in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and with specific attention to visualising the evidence for the cult. By doing so we show differences in ways that the cult is manifest, and by extension consider how Magnus may have been venerated, in the three ecclesiastically, politically, and familiarly linked communities of Orkney, Shetland, and Caithness. In doing so we engage with wider political and ecclesiastical concerns impacting this area in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and their impact upon the spread of the cult of St Magnus in the Northern earldoms.

The history of the earldoms of Orkney and Caithness has been extensively researched by Barbara Crawford and we recommend her *Northern Earldoms* book (2013) for a comprehensive analysis of these earldoms. As a brief introduction for the purposes of this study, the conjoined medieval earldoms of Orkney and Caithness, located at the northern extent of the British Isles, formed a ‘maritime lordship’ for much of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In the *Longer Magnus Saga*, composed in Iceland in the early fourteenth century (Haki Antonsson 2007: 11), these earldoms are described as a single entity, ‘the earldom of the Orkneys, Caithness, and Shetland’ (*LMS*: 259). From the eleventh century onwards, earls of this lordship, however nominally, swore allegiance to kings of Norway for Orkney and Shetland and to kings of Scotland for Caithness. Hence their designation as joint earldoms. Towards the end of the twelfth century, this always somewhat challenging situation became untenable due to increasing direct involvement in the earldoms from the rulers of the emergent kingdoms of Norway and Scotland. It is during this time that the cult of St Magnus develops and so the evidence we present is interconnected with major political, ecclesiastical, and cultural changes. Of particular significance when considering the evidence presented below is that Shetland was

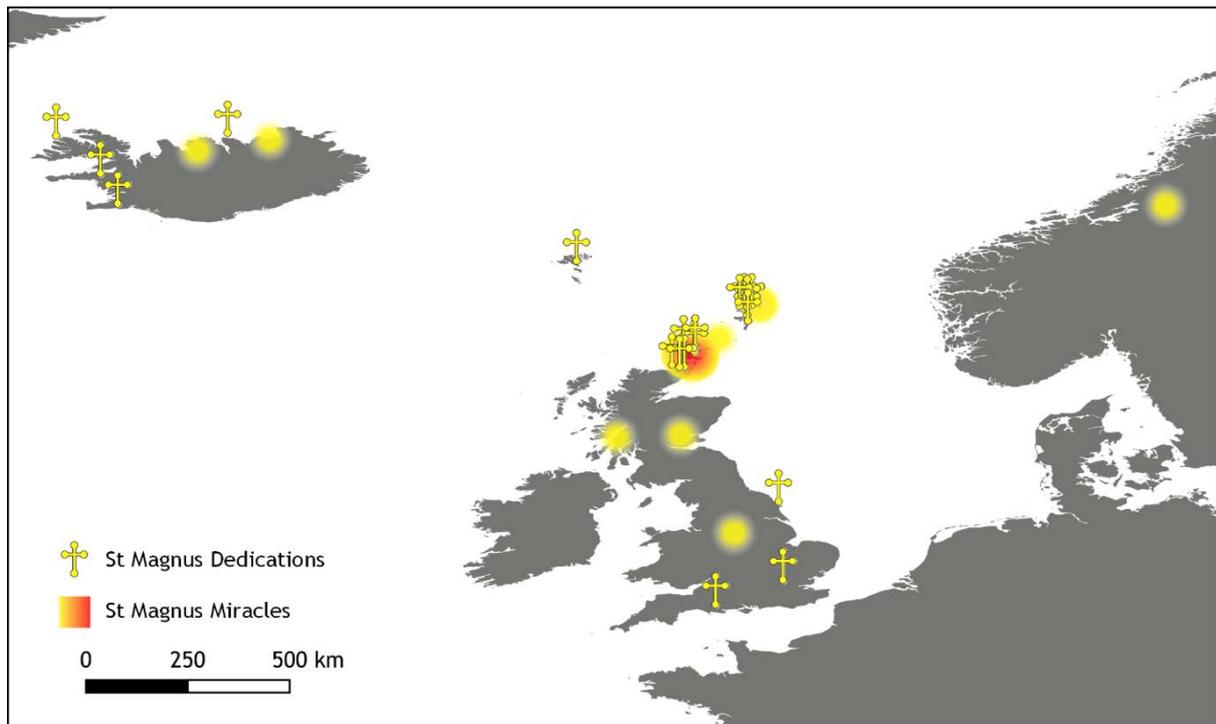
separated from the Orkney earldom in 1195 to be ruled directly by Norway, yet its ecclesiastical connections with Orkney continued because it remained part of the diocese, although under the Archdeacon's authority (*Orkn.*: 297–98; Smith 2003; Thomson 2008: 120–22). A Scottish bishop was established in Caithness in the mid- twelfth century, the appointment causing conflict in north Caithness, culminating with the death of Bishop Adam, after which the Caithness diocese was redesigned, and a new Cathedral built in Dornoch (See Oram, this volume). By the mid-thirteenth century Caithness had become an integral part of Scotland with its own bishop saint – Saint Gilbert.

### **The Cult of St Magnus in the joint Earldoms**

The Magnus cult is an international one (Figure 1 below), with his feast days (16th April and 12th December) being recognised in Iceland, Norway, Scotland, and Denmark; and with medieval churches and altars dedicated to him in those countries as well as in the Faroe Islands, Sweden, England, and the cities of Prague and Rome. Here, we follow on from previous work of visualising the cult of St Magnus in Orkney by mapping aspects of the St Magnus cult within the earldoms of Orkney and Caithness, looking at the distribution and type of evidence for sanctity across the earldoms and then focusing on showing the evidence for the Magnus Cult in the Caithness earldom.

Developing out of previous work in mapping the cult of St Magnus (Gibbon and Moore 2019) a similar approach has been employed here, with extracts from our database of the cultural remains of St Magnus plotted using the Geographical Information System software package QGIS 3.22.6. Given the nature of many of these remembered places and events, we have tried to avoid creating a false sense of accuracy. As an example, the location of Magnus' curing of two brothers in Norway (*LMS*: 279–80) is unknown and as such the geographical centre of the country has been employed to give a general indication of location. For full discussion of the challenges of locating and visualising these kinds of intangible heritage in cartesian space see Gibbon and Moore (2019: 239–43). In order to fully convey the nature of the landscape and topography of Caithness and Sutherland, elevation data from the Shuttle Radar Topography Mission (*NASA* 2013) was used to create a hill-shaded topographic map.

We are reliant on the work of Crawford (1974a, 1974b, 1982, 1984, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1998, 2004, 2013, 2014) for much of the Shetland and Caithness Magnus references which we have augmented with our own searches of both published material and 'grey



**FIGURE 1** EVIDENCE OF THE SPREAD OF THE CULT OF ST MAGNUS ACROSS NORTH-WESTERN EUROPE. FIGURE MADE WITH ‘NATURAL EARTH’ <NATURALEARTHDATA.COM>, A FREE VECTOR AND RASTER MAP DATA WEBSITE.

literature’ (including sagas, hagiographies, histories, onomastic studies, and historic records relating to these counties) and field visits to several of the Magnus churches/ places undertaking locational analysis. The core of this research was gathered to inform previous work concerning medieval churches in Orkney, Shetland, and Caithness (Gibbon 2006, 2007, 2012, 2018, 2025; Grieve 1999, 2005a, 2005b; Stevens, Melikian, and Grieve 2005) with more recent augmentations with specific interest in finding additional data to further illuminate our understanding of the Magnus Cult, including later traditions and folklore, and making use of recently published sources such as Rixson (Gibbon and Moore 2022).

The cult of St Magnus is evidenced in the three geographically distinct parts of the earldoms of Orkney and Caithness. Figure Two maps the information about the cult derived from medieval sources and church dedications; thus illustrating the ways in which the various aspects of Magnus’ sanctity and veneration are distributed. Later recorded placenames, stories and traditions are not included in an effort to present a representation of what medieval source data is available, with the caveat that the dedications often only survive in post-reformation sources but are highly likely to have medieval origins (Gibbon 2006: 173–76, 283–89, 2025).

## Signs

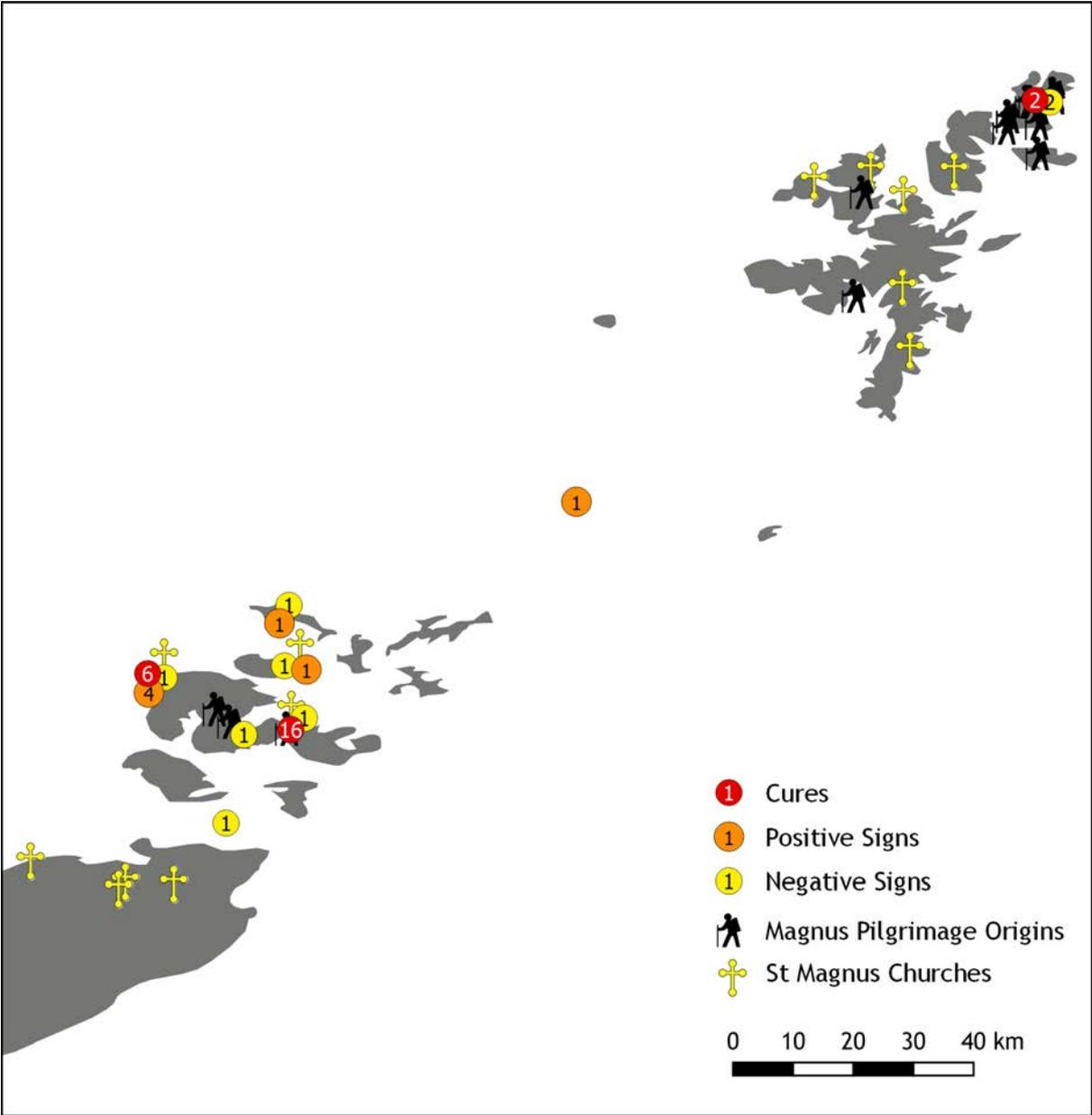
Magnus miracles, signs and portents recorded in medieval sources can be divided into those of a positive nature such as cures, light, fragrance, and glowing bone and those that are negative such as threats, injuries, and death. Positive signs of Magnus' sanctity, other than healing, are restricted to Orkney: Bishop William's safe passage to Orkney from Shetland (*Orkn.*: 123–24); the 'Fair Meadow' that appeared where Magnus was slain in Egilsay (*Orkn.*: 111); the heavenly light and fragrance at Magnus' grave (*Orkn.*: 112), as well as the trial by fire of his bones in Birsay and Gunni's first dream in Westray (*Orkn.*: 123–25). There are other signs recorded in post-medieval sources, but the data here has been restricted to that found in the Magnus hagiographies: *Shorter Magnus Saga (SMS)*, *Longer Magnus Saga (LMS)*, and *Orkneyinga saga (Orkn.)*.

Negative signs are mainly centred in and around Orkney with two instances in Shetland: the portentous wave which breaks over Magnus' ship in a calm sea as he travelled to Egilsay (*Orkn.*: 106); the blinding of Bishop William in Birsay (*Orkn.*: 103–4); the wrath placed on Gunni's inaction in Westray (*Orkn.*: 124–25); the Orkney thief stricken with insanity (*Orkn.*: 127); the Caithness thief drowned in the Pentland Firth (*Orkn.*: 127); the 'miserable' deaths of those complicit in Magnus' murder presumably in Orkney as this was where Hákon and his retinue were most often (*Orkn.*: 112–13); and the two Shetlanders from Unst, Þorðr and Sigríðr, who were punished for working on Magnusmas eve, and then subsequently cured (*Orkn.*: 126–28).

## Cures

There are 44 instances of people being healed in the earldoms by St Magnus, plus five instances where 'many' is used in the texts to indicate multiple instances of miracles. There are no instances that specify Caithness people being cured. Of the Orcadians and Shetlanders, unsurprisingly all but two were healed at the grave or shrine of St Magnus. Most of the miracles described take place in Christ Church Birsay with 28 individual instances recorded, plus two descriptions of 'many' healings occurring at the graveside and a description of 'many' at the shrine when Magnus' body was in Birsay. Once removed to the church in Kirkwall, there are 13 plus 'many' miracles described there, with only one detailed miracle and a description of 'many' occurring in St Magnus Cathedral in Kirkwall. Thus, the miracles mostly predate the placement of the shrine in the cathedral and focus on the early years of the cult's development. This accords well with Haki Antonsson's

dating of the reworked *vita* (a hagiography of a saint, lit. ‘life’) to the 1170s (Haki Antonsson 2007: 42–67). The two instances within the earldom where healing does not occur at the grave or shrine are associated with Bergfinnr Skatason, who had previously been cured twice by Magnus, after he promised a donation to Magnus’ shrine. In the *Longer Magnus Saga* account Asmund (or Ogmund) was only partially cured where he was injured in Shetland and then fully cured after a vigil at St Magnus’ shrine (*Orkn.*: 127; *SMS*: 39; *LMS*: 276).



**FIGURE 2** DISTRIBUTION OF MAGNUS DEDICATED CHURCHES, SIGNS, CURES, AND PILGRIMS IN ORKNEY, SHETLAND, AND CAITHNESS. FIGURE MADE WITH ‘NATURAL EARTH’ <NATURALEARTHDATA.COM>, A FREE VECTOR AND RASTER MAP DATA WEBSITE.

## Pilgrimages

The map (Figure 2 above) also shows where the earldom pilgrims who travelled to Magnus' grave and shrine came from. It is striking, particularly when mapped, how many came from the north of Shetland and all three texts state that sick people from Shetland and Orkney travelled to and were cured at the grave of Magnus prior to his elevation (*LMS*: 271; *Orkn.*: 112; *SMS*: 34). One wonders how they travelled and what provisions were available to them during their stay, especially as one miracle saw 24 people healed at the grave on a single occasion (*SMS*: 35), suggesting a sizeable number of pilgrims.

There are accounts of 14 people travelling from Shetland to St Magnus in Orkney for healing whereas there are just three instances of Orcadians travelling; although the 'many' who were cured at each place, presumably included mostly Orcadians since they lived closest to the shrine. Perhaps the individual accounts of pilgrims from the north of Shetland were included as they indicate veneration from the northernmost part of the earldom.

The mapping shows clearly that whilst miracles attributed to St Magnus are concentrated in Birsay and Kirkwall (Figure 2) his medieval veneration is most evident in Shetland where most named pilgrims and Magnus church dedications are found. The number of miracles at Birsay, the first centre of the cult, is well illustrated here and serves as a reminder of the significance of Birsay as the religious and political centre of the earldom prior to the development of Kirkwall. Caithness has the least varied evidence of the Magnus cult as found in the Icelandic hagiographies. Although, the *Longer Magnus Saga* connects Magnus more directly with Caithness than either of the other two hagiographies. Before Magnus returns to Orkney to claim his share of the earldom, *Orkneyinga saga* and the *Shorter Magnus Saga* describe him as being in Scotland (*Orkn.*: 98; *SMS*: 24–25), whereas in the *Longer Magnus Saga* he 'fared to Caithness, and was there worthily received of all, kept and cared for, and at once chosen and honoured with the title 'earl' beloved and worshipful to all the friends of God' (*LMS*: 251). Caithness is also the setting for Magnus' 'Paul to Saul' conversion (*LMS*: 251), making Caithness the place where he becomes Holy. Therefore, in this account Caithness has a major role in Magnus' journey both to political power and sanctification. Why the Icelandic composer of the saga chose to include this information, at a time when Caithness was no longer under Scandinavian rule, is interesting – this along with the naming of Shetland, Orkney, and Caithness as a single earldom could be seen as reminding the audience of the former cohesiveness of the earldom and Magnus' influence and veneration within all parts of it.

## **Magnus Dedicated Churches in the Joint Earldoms**

Starting in Shetland, 50 of the 134 possible medieval churches have surviving dedications and six are dedicated to Magnus of which five are parish churches including the archdeacon's church of Shetland, located at Tingwall (Cant 1975; Crawford 1984, 2013: 221–24; Gibbon 2006: 283; Grieve 2005b). Moving south, in Orkney, there are 114 of the 205 churches with dedications and of these, only three are certainly dedicated to Magnus (with the very unlikely possibility of a fourth on Stronsay which due to the lack of evidence is not shown in Figure 2) (Gibbon 2006: 996–97, 2025; Gibbon and Moore 2019). In Caithness, 41 of the 80 churches have surviving dedications, three of which are to Magnus; two are chapels and one a parish church (Crawford 2013: 224; Gibbon 2006: 283; Grieve 2005a) with a possible fourth dedication at the parish church of Watten (see below). Across the earldoms the number of churches with known dedications is variable, with dedications known for roughly half of Orkney (56%) and Caithness (51%) churches, whereas in Shetland fewer are known, with 37% of churches having dedications associated with them. Whilst Orkney and Caithness have a similar proportion of known dedications, there are more dedications to Magnus in Caithness. Even more striking given the lower dedication survival rate, is that Shetland has the most Magnus dedications. Reasons of 'antipathy' to the cult of St Magnus by subsequent earls (Crawford 2013: 224), Shetland 'enthusiasm' (Crawford 2013: 202) and deliberate restriction (Gibbon and Moore 2019) have been suggested and when combined plausibly account for this, at first glance unexpected, distribution (for more detailed recent discussion see Crawford 2013: 198–237; Gibbon and Moore 2019).

## **Church Dedications in Caithness**

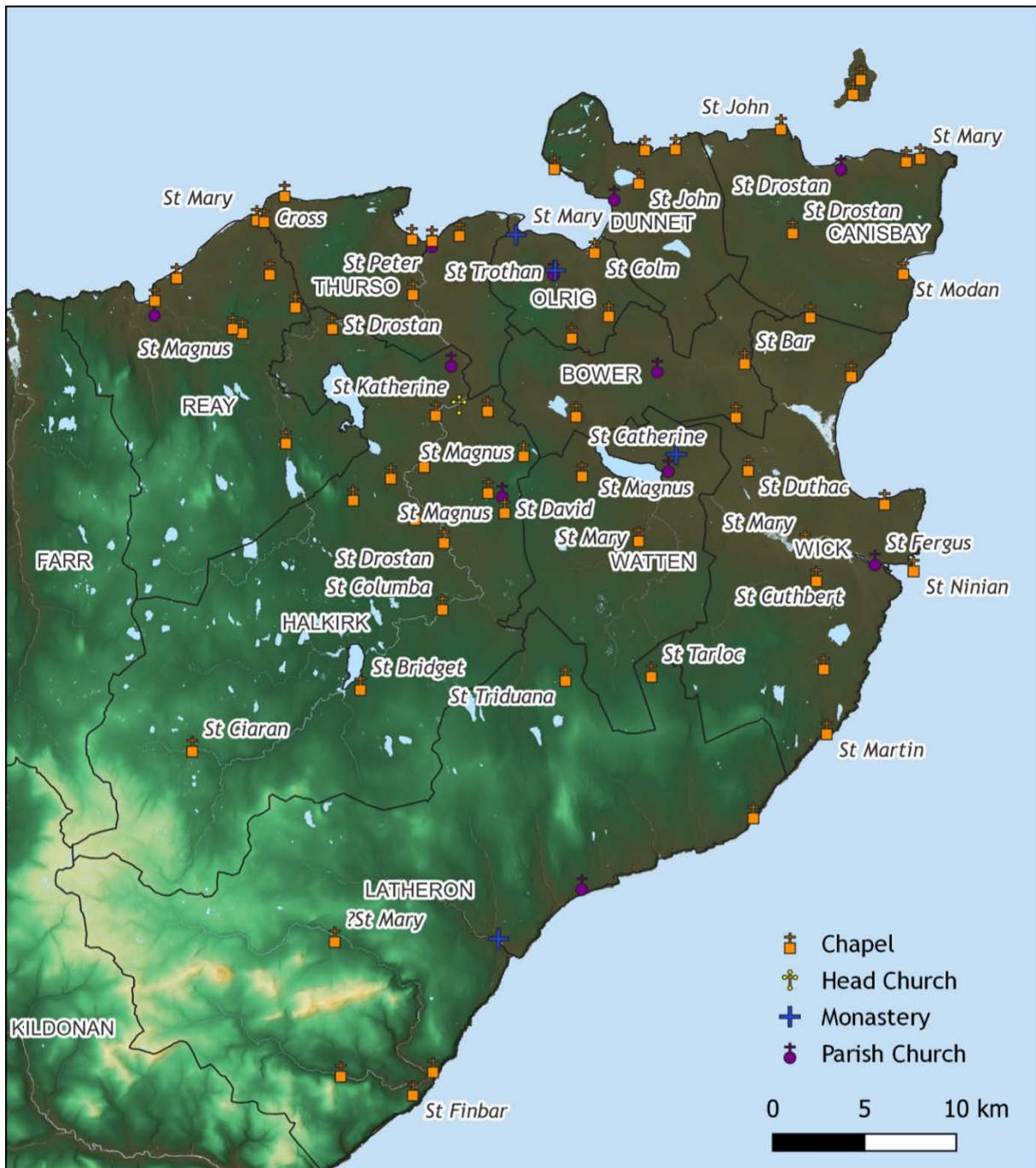
The most widespread aspect of the cult as shown in Figure 2 are the churches throughout the earldom dedicated to St Magnus. To fully appreciate their place in the wider saintly landscape, a summary of church dedications follows. Of the 226 dedications to 49 different saints in Shetland, Caithness, and Orkney, 14 are to Magnus (this is including the doubtful fourth Magnus dedication in Orkney and the possible dedication of Watten parish church). In Orkney and Shetland, both of the principal churches, the Cathedral in Kirkwall, and the archdeacon's church at Tingwall, are dedicated to Magnus. Orkney's other two certain Magnus dedications are associated with the first bishop's seat in Birsay where Magnus was interred and the place of Magnus' martyrdom on the bishop's estate of

Egilsay. Of the 27 parish churches in Shetland, 25 have dedications and of these five are dedicated to Magnus, and a further five to Norway's patron saint, Óláfr. In contrast, in Orkney where 33 of the 35 parish church dedications are known, Mary is by far the most common (10/35), and there are only two parish churches dedicated to Magnus, both in important places associated with his cult and both with evidence that the Magnus dedication replaces an earlier dedication. Of the 12 parish churches in Caithness, 10 have dedications, of which one (Spittal) is certainly to Magnus, with Watten also being possible.

More broadly if we consider all dedications, the most common dedications in each area vary: of the 28 saints with dedications in Orkney the top five are Mary (35); Peter (19); Colm/Columba (13); Cross (9); and Nicholas (8) (Gibbon 2006: 173–75, 283–88, 2025). In Shetland, which has dedications to 20 saints, Olaf is the most common (8); then Cross, John, Magnus, and Mary (each with 6) (Gibbon 2006: 283–88, appendix 8; Grieve 2005b). In Caithness (Figure 3 below), there are dedications to 26 saints, St Mary (6) is the most common, followed by St Magnus and St Drostan each with 4, whilst the remaining saints have only one or two instances, and as such cannot be meaningfully listed in terms of popularity (Gibbon 2006: 283–88; Grieve 2005a). When mapped (Figure 3), it is clear that most of the Magnus church dedications in Caithness are concentrated around the Loch of Watten, with the only outlier being the coastal chapel at Shebster, its siting perhaps indicative of a connection between this area and Orkney, either in respect of land ownership or the inhabitants.

As noted above, St Mary is the most common dedication in Orkney, and this is also true in Norway, Scotland, and England, so whilst her popularity in Caithness is not unexpected, in an earldom where so many of the saints have only one or two instances, it is notable that Mary occurs six times. Perhaps this relative prominence of Mary might reflect links between Orkney and Caithness. It is worthy of note that three St Mary dedications are found on the north coast, and two on the River Wick. The other dedications to St Mary in Caithness and Sutherland are, one a tentative association with the chapel site at Braemore in Latheron and the other at the cathedral in Dornoch. Whilst little more can be said about the frequency of Marian dedications due to the universality of their popularity, more can be drawn from the second most common saint, St Drostan.

The presence of a concentration of dedications to St Drostan, seventh-century abbot and founder of the monastery of Deer in Aberdeenshire (Farmer 2011a) has been interpreted as the influence of incoming lords from Moray in the late twelfth and early



**FIGURE 3** DISTRIBUTION OF KNOWN CHURCH SITES IN CAITHNESS, WITH DEDICATIONS WHERE RECORDED. SRTM 1 ARC-SECOND GLOBAL DATA COURTESY OF THE U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY.

thirteenth centuries (Clancy 2008: 384, 2010: 389–91) and points to the links across the Moray Firth. It is also possible that St Trothan’s parish church in Orlig is also a Drostan dedication (Myatt 1987), thus making it the second most popular dedication after Mary. In contrast to his popularity in Caithness, there are no dedications to Drostan in Orkney or Shetland. Table one shows the distribution of the dedications throughout the earldoms. Of the 49 saints dedicated, seven are found in all three parts, 6 are found in both Orkney and

Caithness but not Shetland, 4 in Orkney and Shetland but not Caithness, and there are none found in Shetland and Caithness that are not also in Orkney.

Dedications in Caithness, Orkney, and Shetland	Columba/Colm/Colman (18); Holy Cross (16); John (10); Magnus (14); Mary (45); Ninian (7); Peter (22)
Dedications in Orkney and Caithness but not in Shetland	Bride (9); Catherine (4); Duthac (4); Tear (2); Thomas (2); Triduana (2)
Dedications in Orkney and Shetland but not in Caithness	Lawrence (3); Margaret (5); Nicholas (9); Olaf (13)
Dedications in Shetland and Caithness but not in Orkney	None
Dedications only in Caithness	Bar (1); Benedict? (1); Ciaran (1); Cuthbert (1); David (1); Drostan (4); Faelchu (1); Fergus (2); Finbar (1); Martin (1); Modan (1); Trothan (1)
Dedications only in Orkney	Andrew (2); Augustine (1); Boniface (1); Brendan (1); Christ (1); Curadan (1); Giles (1); Magdalen (1); Michael (1); Moluag (1); Salvador (1)
Dedications only in Shetland	Anne (1); Barnabas (1); Bartholemew (2); Gregory (1); Hilary (1); Leven (1); Matthew (1); Paul (3); Sunniva (1)

**TABLE 1** DISTRIBUTION OF DEDICATIONS THROUGHOUT CAITHNESS, ORKNEY, AND SHETLAND, SHOWING WHERE DEDICATIONS ARE FOUND IN ALL THREE PARTS, IN TWO OF THE THREE PARTS AND THOSE THAT ARE ONLY FOUND IN ONE OF THE THREE PARTS.

Of course, we must be cautious with any interpretations as 49% of the known ecclesiastical sites in the earldom have unknown dedications, but there does seem to be reasonable evidence to support religious connections between the Ness area of Caithness and Orkney. This can be seen in two directions, from the north there is Magnus influence from Orkney, and Holy Cross, and John (rare in Scotland but popular in Norway) and perhaps Thomas through his connection with Magnus (Haki Antonsson 2007: 42–67); and from the south the Sinclair promoted cult of Duthac as well as Tear, Triduana, Columba/Colm/Colman, Ninian, and Peter. Of the dedications specific to Caithness only, possible influences can be seen from Moray and/or Aberdeenshire (Drostan and Fergus, specifically), localised saints' cults as well as Scottish and Irish influence. Conversely the absence of dedications to Nicholas, a cult probably promoted by Hákon Pálsson and certainly venerated on several Orkney earldom estate churches, may speak to his more

limited involvement, and Magnus' stronger influence in Caithness (Ellis 2022: 129–30; Crawford 2013: 213).

There is then a greater focus on Nordic saints in the north of the earldoms, particularly in Shetland where direct rule from Norway lasted the longest. Further south there is a declining representation of these saints, and greater occurrence of saints associated with mainland Scotland and Ireland. The lack of dating evidence for the foundation and abandonment of each of these establishments results in a lack of temporal resolution and dynamism. But there are historically documented events that led to shifts in society, religious practice, and political control. For example, the gradual ceding of political and religious influence from Norse earls and bishops in the face of growing Scottish influence and control culminates in the establishment of Gilbert's reformed Caithness diocese centred at Dornoch (Cant 1986: 52–53). This shift in influence is made possible by incoming Scottish lords. Conceivably the Magnus, John, Mary, and Cross dedications in the far north of Caithness can be seen as pre-Gilbertine Orkney bishopric and earldom influence that continued, in some instances, well beyond the thirteenth century but which was rooted at a time when Caithness was under the auspices of Norse religious administration. That there are Magnus dedicated churches and a hospital in Caithness show the cult was established there, and even though the medieval Norse hagiographies have little Caithness content, the importance of Caithness as an integral part of the Norse earldom and that it is where Magnus has his conversion of character in the *Longer Magnus Saga* telling of his story, indicate continuing knowledge of and interest in Caithness in early fourteenth century Iceland.

Sarah Jane Gibbon and James Moore have previously discussed the evidence for the cult of St Magnus within Orkney, both in terms of contemporary medieval religious activities, and subsequent social memorialisation (Gibbon and Moore 2019). The detailed mapping of the cultural remains of veneration and belief reinforced the significance of the three key locations within Orkney – the place of his martyrdom on Egilsay, the location of his burial in Birsay, and his shrine in the church and then the cathedral in Kirkwall – alongside the processional routes between the sites. Beyond these locales with a direct connection to St Magnus, Gibbon and Moore also identified a range of other landscape features suggesting ongoing veneration, and a desire for continued association with Magnus. These include clusters of placenames, folklore, visions, miracles, and occasionally outlandish stories (Gibbon and Moore 2019: 243–47). Notably however, only a single cultural remnant of St Magnus was identified east of Kirkwall; the stone of St

Magnus, which according to legend was used by Magnus as a ferry boat to cross the Pentland Firth (Fergusson 1884: 93; Gibbon 2018).

That this stone was recorded more frequently than any other element of Magnus' cultural remains (aside from the three churches) is a testament both to the importance of physical remains, and to its location adjacent to an important harbour at Burwick (Gibbon and Moore 2019: 253–54). This was historically the landing place for many of those making the crossing from Caithness, and thus for both pilgrims and later scholarly visitors. As such, St Mary's Kirk, and St Magnus' stone (Figure 4 below) would have likely been the first place visited upon arrival in Orkney from the south. Given the Magnus connections to Burwick as a landing place from Caithness, the presence of Magnus dedications in Caithness and its inclusion in the hagiographies, Gibbon and Moore undertook a similar approach to their Orkney research to assess whether more could be learned about the Cult of St Magnus in Caithness by mapping a similar evidence dataset.



**FIGURE 4** THE LADYKIRK STONE OR THE STONE OF ST MAGNUS HAS MANY TRADITIONS INCLUDING THAT IT WAS EITHER A PETRIFIED WHALE OR A STONE USED BY MAGNUS AS A BOAT TO CROSS THE PENTLAND FIRTH. PHOTO CREDIT SARAH JANE GIBBON.

## **The Cult of St Magnus in Caithness**

The medieval sources demonstrate that Magnus had links with Scotland, England, and Wales (including *LMS*: 252–54; *Orkn.*: 97–98). Both Crawford and Willie Thomson (Crawford 2013: 165, 171–72; Thomson 2008: 90–92) have discussed these southerly connections in detail, namely that: Magnus spent time at the courts of King Henry I in England and King Malcolm in Scotland; that he married a Scottish noblewoman; that he may have supported the York claim to the Orkney bishopric; and that he was granted his Caithness earldom by the king of the Scots. To this can be added the hagiographical information noted above regarding Magnus. From the written evidence there is no doubting that in his lifetime Magnus would have been known in Caithness. But what about after his death, can the planting of, and veneration of, his cult be seen in Caithness?

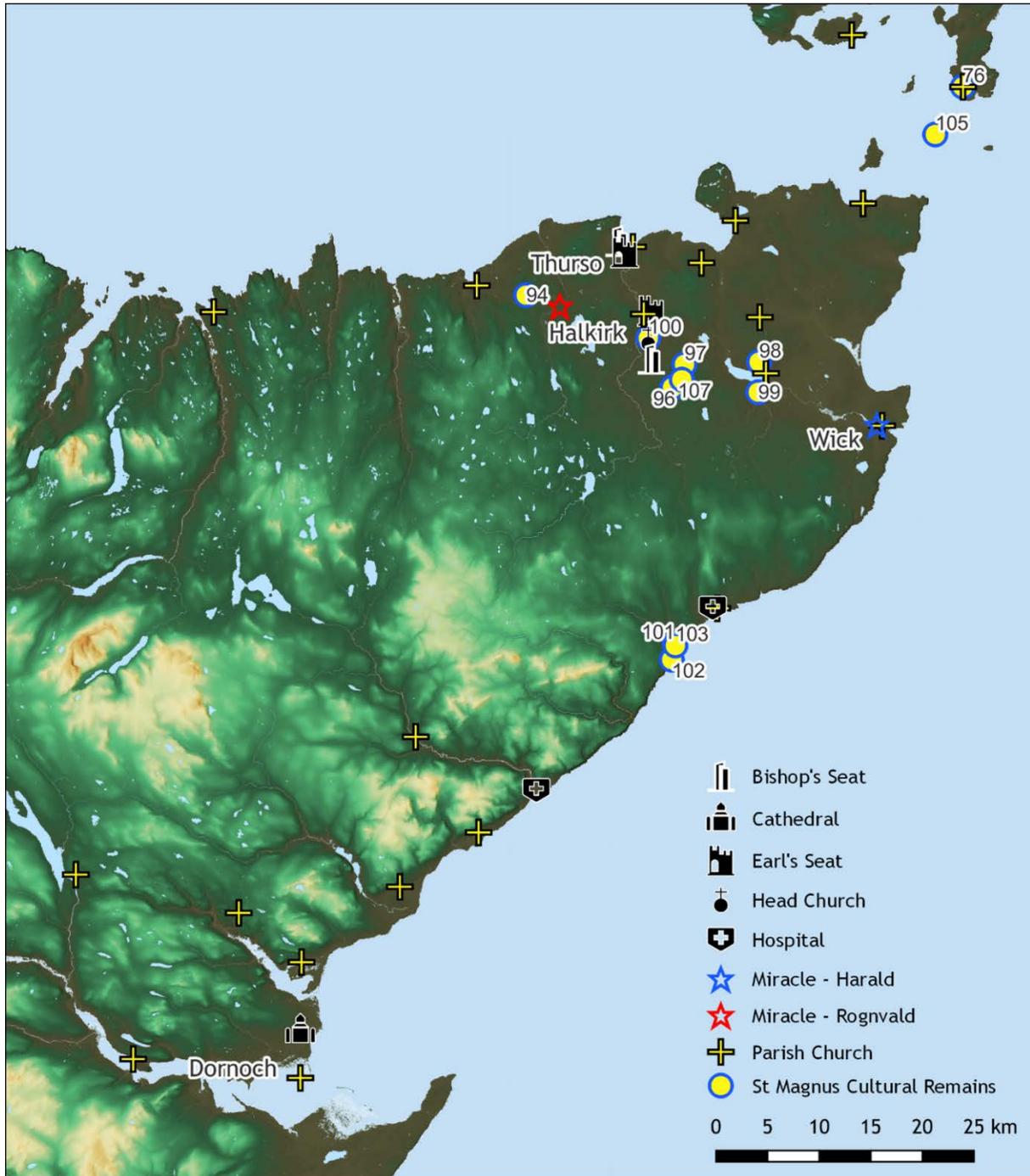
Mapping the landscapes of belief and worship highlights the developing centres of religion and community during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The presence of hospitals at Helmsdale and Latheron, along with a concentration of parish churches illustrates the importance of the coastal plain, both as the focus for settlement and as a main route of overland communication between the north and south of the diocese (Figure 5 below).

The evidence of the cult of St Magnus is concentrated in the northeast corner of Caithness (known as Ness), extending only as far south as Dunbeath (Figure 5). This should not come as a surprise given that this area of Caithness is both physically closer to Orkney and remained politically and socially connected to Orkney for a longer timeframe. But it is useful to see this concentration mapped as it reinforces the relative distances between the southernmost isles of Orkney and Ness, and the south of the Caithness diocese and Ness. Like the dedications, later documented evidence of St Magnus is concentrated around the Loch of Watten (Figure 5). This area is well-connected with direct links with Wick to the southeast, whilst the chapel and hospital at Spittal (Sites 95 and 96, see Appendix and Figure 5) sit alongside the route that runs from Latheron in the south to Thurso. Perhaps most importantly in understanding the influences on the spread of the Magnus cult is its proximity to the Norse secular and religious centres of power at Halkirk.

A smaller cluster of Magnus cultural remains at Dunbeath (Sites 101–3, see Appendix) are potentially associated with the possible monastic site at Ballachly (Laing *et al.* 2013). A social memory of this association might also be reflected in the post-

reformation plans to create there a burgh of barony called Magnusburgh (Crawford 1990: 15, 19, 2013: 224).

The locations of Magnus dedications indicate places of Magnus cultic practice and in Orkney, Magnus placenames and stories have shown routes of pilgrimage through the

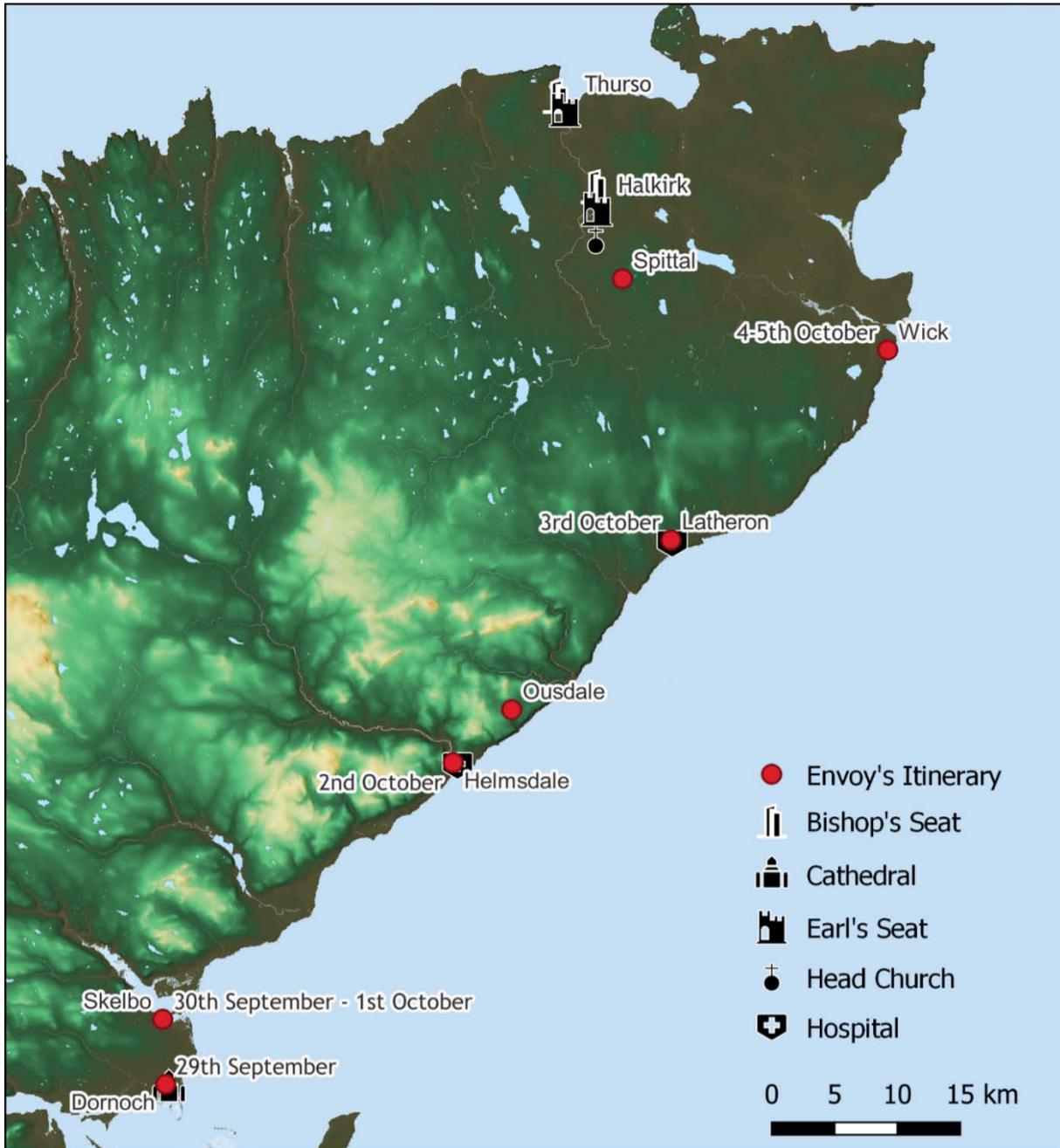


**FIGURE 5** DISTRIBUTION OF ST MAGNUS CULTURAL REMAINS SHOWN ALONGSIDE THE WIDER RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE (EXCLUDING SMALL CHURCHES) IN CAITHNESS AND EASTERN SUTHERLAND. SRTM 1 ARC-SECOND GLOBAL DATA COURTESY OF THE U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY. SEE APPENDIX FOR SITE DETAILS.

landscape (Gibbon and Moore 2019). It is therefore plausible to consider the Caithness Magnus places similarly. Whilst there are no medieval accounts of over-land travel in Orkney to compare to the Magnus places, in Caithness, two records provide illuminating detail regarding the speed and nature of travel and communication along this coastal plain, which in turn helps in understanding the functions and accessibility of, as well as relationships between, places during the medieval period. Thus, we can consider the relationship between the Magnus cult and a known route through the north.

The first is recorded in 1290 by English envoys who travelled north intending to meet Margaret, the Maid of Norway, as she travelled to Scone to be inaugurated (Stevenson 1870: 183–86; Crawford 1982: 62–63). Although the untimely death of Margaret meant there was no inauguration, the envoys still required reimbursement for their travels. Their itinerary records where they spent each night, as well as costs, and some additional detail and notes. They travelled north from Newcastle, mostly by sea, reaching Invernairn on the 27th September, then on to Cromarty, and Dornoch before stopping at Skelbo for two nights where they note they spoke with Scottish messengers (Crawford 1982: 62). From there they travelled to Helmsdale, and then on the night of the 3rd of October recorded that they stopped at a hospital. Three possible locations have been suggested for this: the well-known hospital of St Magnus at Spittal, a possible site at Ousdale, which may be an erroneous equation with Obsdale near Dalmore (Cowan and Easson 1976: 199; Crawford 1982: 62–63), and an ecclesiastical foundation at Latheron (Crawford 1982: 63). Given the regularly spaced stops illustrated by their itinerary (Figure 6 below) the proposed hospital at Latheron seems the most likely overnight stopping place. Further weight is added to this by excavations at Ballachly which provide evidence for a monastic, or at least an important religious, settlement dating to the Norse period in this area (Laing *et al.* 2013). We of course do not know the exact route taken by the English envoys, but direct distances as the crow flies provide an approximation of the speed of travel along the coastal plain. The three stages that required minimal or no water travel, Skelbo to Helmsdale (30.9km), Helmsdale to Latheron (24.9km), and Latheron to Wick (23km) suggests an average speed of as little as 2–3 km/h.

Nearly five hundred years later in 1762, Bishop Forbes toured Caithness and his account gives a good idea of the distances and travails of travelling in such country, most pertinently the day's travel leaving Clyne (north of Brora) at 20 minutes after 4 and arriving in Thurso between 10 and 11 at night, a distance that Forbes records as 36 long Scots miles (*c.* 65 km) (Craven 1908: 243–53). Forbes' estimate is likely to be



**FIGURE 6** MAP ILLUSTRATING THE STOPPING POINTS OF THE ENGLISH ENVOYS ON THEIR WAY NORTH. THE ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTED LOCATIONS AT OUSDALE AND SPITTAL, OF THE ‘HOSPITAL’ THE ENVOYS STOPPED AT ON THE 3RD OCTOBER ARE SHOWN, ALTHOUGH WE FAVOUR THE LOCATION AT LATHERON.

conservative, and probably closer to 80 km, suggesting an average speed of around 5.5 km/h (allowing for Forbes’ two-hour breakfast at Ousdale, and a similarly leisurely dinner at Latheronwheel).

Whilst the distance travelled by Forbes in the mid-eighteenth century suggests that it might have been possible for the English envoys to have made the journey in 1290 from Helmsdale to the hospital at Spittal (c. 50 km), it is worth noting that the English envoys

were travelling in late September and early October, when the available hours of daylight were declining, and the weather potentially worse than Forbes' travels in August 1762.

We can be safe in assuming that the quality of roads and bridges was poorer in the thirteenth century too. The example of the 'Causeymire' a route approximately following the same path as the modern A9 between Latheron and Thurso, provides a good example of the impermanence of roads in the region, even during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This route is illustrated on Pont's map of Caithness (produced by Gordon in 1642, but likely originally surveyed by Pont in the first decade of the seventeenth century). But less than two centuries later it is absent from Roy's map of 1747–55 (*RMSS*) and Bishop Forbes noted that in Thurso 'they told me that a causeway had been there of old, but that it had sunk down out of sight by the Ruines of Time' (Craven 1908: 252).

These two accounts show that travel through Caithness was coastal and punctuated by recognized stopping places, taking into account political and religious affiliations as well as convenience (Crawford 1982). It highlights the physical distance, and complexities of travel and in particular the separation – a product of geology and topography – between the northeast corner and the rest of Caithness. This is of particular relevance to the Magnus cult, since pilgrims travelling from the south to visit the shrine of St Magnus in Kirkwall would have travelled through Caithness; the existence of a hospital dedicated to him indicates one stop on this journey, and the English envoys and Forbes' accounts provide other possible stopping places and routes when travelling through Caithness. This is particularly valuable since no detailed account of medieval pilgrimage through the north of Scotland to Orkney exists.

### **The Ness – a closer look**

We have previously discussed Magnus churches and their relationships to other parish churches and small churches and in this section, we look at some other associations as well as additional evidence relating to St Magnus. The majority of the evidence is concentrated in the northeastern corner of Caithness, with the no longer extant St Magnus chapel at Shebster (Site 94) in Reay parish representing the most westerly evidence of the Magnus cult (Crawford 2013: 224; Grieve 2005a: 7 (Site ID: CRE5); Mackinlay 1914: 302; Mooney 1935: 275).

Along the north and east coast of Caithness, and not shown on the map, are several landing places from which boats travelled across the Pentland Firth, including

Thurso, Skarfskerry in Dunnet and Huna in Canisbay. The historic maps of this area record ferries in various places that could have been used by pilgrims making passage to Orkney. The Canisbay landing place at Huna, close to the parish church, conveyed people, and later the mail, to Burwick and from Huna roads led to Thurso and Wick (OSA: 160–61). Site 105 (Figure 5) denotes the story that Magnus was seen riding through the streets of Aberdeen after the battle of Bannockburn before travelling northward where he was seen crossing the Pentland Firth on horseback to tell the people of Orkney of the victory (Holinshed *et al.* 1808: 349; Turnbull 1858: 239).



**FIGURE 7** INTERIOR OF ST MAGNUS CHURCH SPITTAL TAKEN FROM THE WEST GABLE LOOKING EAST. PHOTO CREDIT SARAH JANE GIBBON.

Most of the Magnus evidence is in Spittal, with St Magnus Church (Site 96), located on the boundary between Halkirk and Watten, in the former parish of Spittal, being noted as one of the largest in Caithness and ‘the most distinguished’ (OSA: 44) in Halkirk (Bull 1914: 136; Crawford 2013: 224; Grieve 2005a: 5, 16; Mooney 1935: 275; Mackinlay 1914: 302–3; Muir 1885: 103; Torfæus 1866: 92).

The church, the ruins of which still stand, is 21 × 7 m and is a considerable size compared to other parish churches. Amorphous banks with walling and rubble to the south of the church are likely the remains of the St Magnus hospital buildings (Site 95). Several gravestones visible in the uneven ground surface are of nineteenth century date. Agricultural activity in and around the remains has caused disturbance making interpretation challenging. However, the complexity of the site and the large size of the church is still evident.

The hill adjacent to the church and hospital, Spittal Hill (Site 107), is one of the highest in the flat landscape of northeast Caithness, and its vantage is well described in the *Old Statistical Account*, ‘immediately on a person’s arrival at the top, the Orkney Isles, the Pentland Frith [sic], the stupendous rocks on each side of the frith [sic], and the surrounding seas, burst into view at once, and overwhelm with surprise and transport’ (OSA: 17).

In addition to the church, hospital, and hill, one of the main meeting places in Caithness was nearby (OSA: 46–47). Confused recollections of the church and its associated buildings being large enough to accommodate the Caithness inhabitants (OSA: 46–47) may retain a memory of this being a prominent place of worship within the diocese of Caithness. The nearby lands (see Figure 8 below) were owned by the diocese of Orkney, further indicating direct Orkney bishopric influence in the area (OSA: 47). So here is compelling evidence of a place of assembly, hospital, and church, as well as Orkney bishopric land ownership, indicating a central place of some significance with St Magnus at its core.

On the north side of Spittal Hill is Banniskirk in Watten parish (Site 97) where another chapel was dedicated to St Magnus (Crawford 2013: 224; Grieve 2005a: 6, 20 (Site ID: CHA9); Mackinlay 1914: 303). Nothing remains of the chapel and its precise location is not known, but the proximity of Banniskirk to Spittal, especially with the significance of Spittal Hill as a rendezvous place, is notable. It is surprising, given the presence of Magnus dedications, and that the hospital was a place where pilgrims stayed, that there are no other associated place names or stories about Magnus in the area. For this we do not need to travel very far to the east to St Magnus Stone, Stenhouse, Watten (Site 98). This is a large rock which has several stories attached to it. One being that it marked the grave of Ljótr Þorfinnsson, earl of Orkney, and the other that it was a serpent or dragon that St Magnus turned to stone on the day of the Battle of Bannockburn (Mackinlay 1914: 302; Mowatt 1993; Torfæus 1866: 24). This rather incredulous story is similar to those noted

above about the Ladykirk stone at Burwick, also associated with St Magnus. In addition, Watten's annual fair (Site 98), held on the last Tuesday of December, close to his translation date, was Magnamas or St Magnus Fair (Beur Soiland 2004: 175; Barrett 1914: 182–83; Mowat 1933: 226; NSA: 59). Also, it is possible that the parish church of Watten was dedicated to Magnus as Mackinlay states it was under the patronage of St Magnus (Mackinlay 1914: 302). Therefore, on the east and south sides of the loch of Watten is another small cluster of Magnus evidence.

The most southernly indication for the Magnus cult is at Dunbeath and forms another small cluster of evidence (Sites 101–3, see Appendix). A fair, St Magnus Fair, was held on his feast day at Dunbeath (Crawford 1990, 2013: 224), an 'image' of St Magnus is listed in a 1501 inventory of Dunbeath Castle (Crawford 1990, 2013: 215), and Magnusburgh was the name given to the proposed trading burgh at Inver mentioned in 1657 (Crawford 1990, 2013: 226; *OPS*: 768). The presence of this cluster demonstrates that the cult had spread much of the length of Ness and was not restricted only to the very north part.

Of relevance, given the cult was promoted by Earl Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson (Ellis 2022: 116–17) and Bishop William, are the bishop's and earl's seats along the Thurso River at Scrabster/Thurso and Halkirk/Brawl, as they were centres of the Orkney diocese and Norse earldom in the northeast corner of Caithness, although the political machinations of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries would have created a far more dynamic landscape than can be reflected in static maps. As noted above, that the principal church of the Orkney diocese within north Caithness (at Halkirk) was not dedicated to St Magnus, unlike its counterparts in Orkney and Shetland, suggests different religious identities were being expressed in Caithness by the mid-twelfth century. However, the other places associated with Magnus provide hints of his cult, its veneration, and a persistence of memory perhaps linked to Orkney-orientated ownership, influence, or cultural connections that then assumed a Caithness significance as retained in the collective social memories preserved in later sources. There is debate over the role of the church at Halkirk (see Oram, this volume), and if it were a non-parochial bishop's church (Crawford 1993: 132–34), one could see the large church at Spittal, adjacent to a meeting place and dedicated to St Magnus, in a different light, as the parochial-facing diocesan central church with respect to Caithness parishioners. The annual fair in Halkirk (Site 100), held on the Tuesday before the 26th of December, was St Magnus' Fair (Bull 1914:

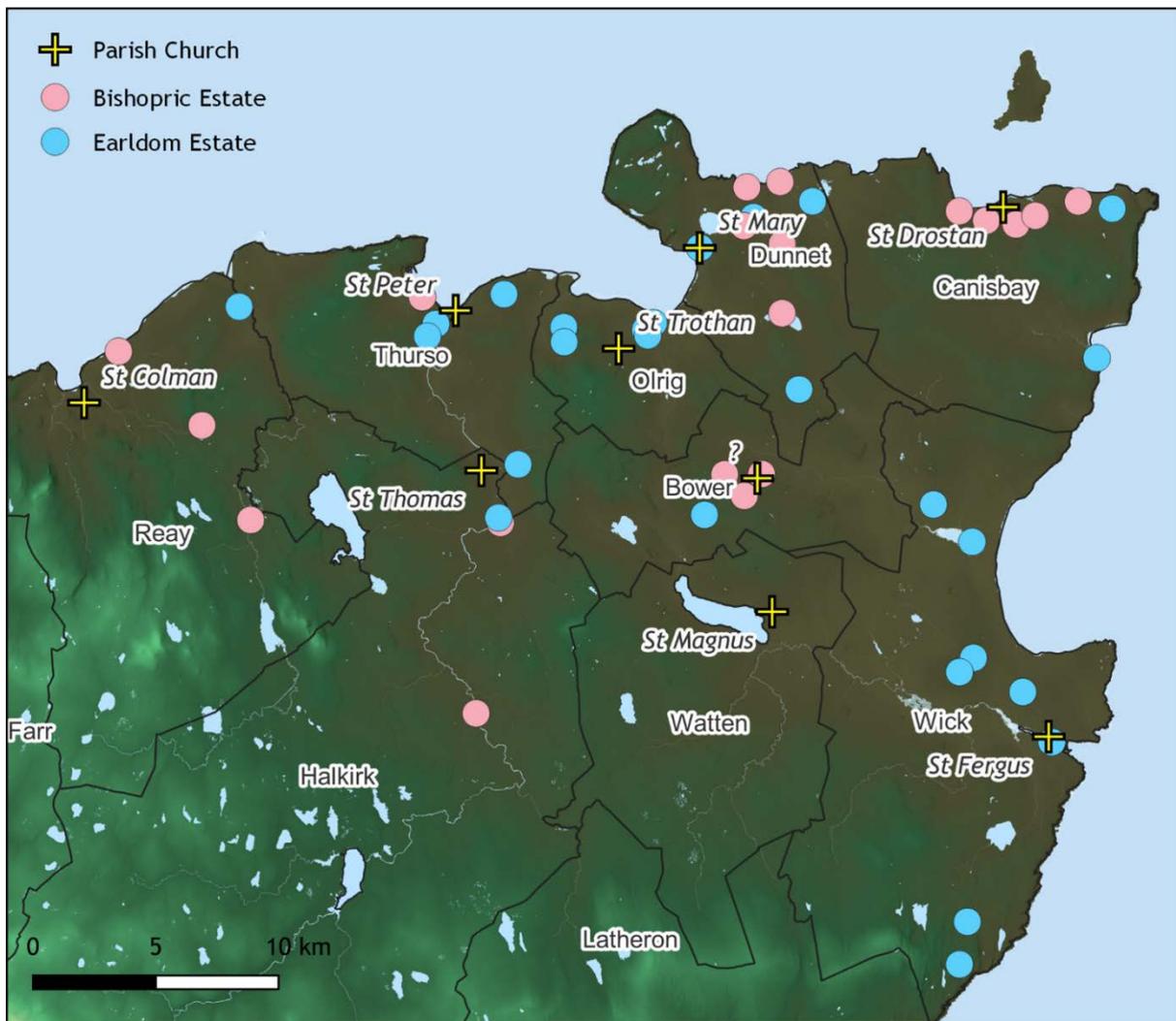
136; Marwick 1890: 62; Marwick n.d.; Mooney 1935: 275; NSA: 78) indicating an association between Halkirk and St Magnus.

Alongside the placenames and other cultural evidence, records of earldom lands in Caithness inherited by Lady Joanna (Crawford 1982: 65) and bishopric lands and taxes (Rixson 2022) provide an illuminating, if certainly incomplete, picture of the influence of secular and religious authorities across the northeast corner of Caithness and how these can be seen to link to certain churches (Figure 8). Caithness in the twelfth century lay under the jurisdiction of the Orkney earls, and therefore it likely was administered in the same way as Orkney and Shetland. Caithness formed the other side of the Pentland Firth and, its northeastern corner, Ness, was particularly closely linked to Orkney through estate ownership and management, and the Ord of Caithness to the south meant communication was easier with Orkney to the north than with the rest of Scotland to the south. The shared administration can be seen in both sides of the Pentland Firth having the same units of land assessment (Crawford 1974b: 98–99).

This preliminary attempt to map these complicated land holdings is based on published sources and limited investigation of early charters and is included to show the potential of this as a means of better understanding the impact of the various landholders on the church in Caithness. A more detailed examination of the records, showing both Scottish and Orcadian land holdings, would allow a more nuanced mapping than we have undertaken. The evidence is partial and does not cover the whole of Caithness. Notably absent is evidence for lands, residences, or taxes from the parish of Watten, where one might expect to find Orcadian influence, given the apparent strength of the cult of St Magnus. Joanna inherited half the Orkney lands (Crawford 1974b: 111–13), so whilst she did not have land in Watten this does not preclude other Orcadian land holdings within the parish amongst the half she did not inherit.

Whilst the map of lands provides an incomplete and static representation of the lands held by Orkney bishops and earls in Caithness during this period, comparison between the mapping and historic records does provide some insight. The clusters of Orkney bishopric land around the parish churches of Bower and Canisbay suggest that these churches were on Orkney bishopric land before Gilbert's constitution of the chapter of Caithness (1223–45) when the archdeacon was assigned 'the churches of Bower and Watten, with their whole revenues and pertinents', and three of the prebends were jointly assigned the churches of Olig, Dunnet, Canisbay, and Skinnet (Johnston and Johnston 1909: 20–21; Rixson 2022). Dunnet, Wick, and Thurso parish churches are more closely

associated with Orkney earldom land, and so we may be seeing five parish churches who achieved their parochial status at the behest of the earl and bishop, as was commonly the case in Orkney's Norse parochial formation (Gibbon 2006, 2007, 2012, 2025). Integrating saga-evidenced land holdings would provide an additional layer of meaning to this map that would further help explain relationships between the inhabitants and the church.



**FIGURE 8** LOCATION OF ORKNEY BISHOPRIC AND EARLDOM LANDS IN CAITHNESS. SRTM 1 ARC-SECOND GLOBAL DATA COURTESY OF THE U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY.

## Discussion

In view of the Orkney earl's authority over Caithness and the close association between the earls and bishops, it is very likely that ecclesiastically Caithness was under the jurisdiction of the Orkney bishops (Crawford 1974b: 99–100). The first Scottish bishop of Caithness on record dates to 1147–51 and so Caithness could well have been administered by Orkney bishops for almost a century before Bishop Andrew is appointed (Crawford

2013: 145–50; *PoMS*, no. 202). That Orkney's first permanent episcopal seat was established by Earl Þorfinnr Sigurðsson, who had close connections with Caithness, makes the likely joint secular and ecclesiastical administration of the two earldoms from the mid-eleventh century more convincing (Crawford 2013: 145–50; *Orkn.*: 79–81). Crawford has written of the proximity of earldom comital and bishopric residences as being indicative of a similarly close pairing of secular and church power as seen at the major estates in Orkney, something that would not sit comfortably in the context of the feuding earls and bishops in Caithness in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (Crawford 1974b: 100). All this helps explain the fractious relationship between the Scottish bishops, earls, and people of Caithness in the thirteenth century. The Scottish bishops were encroaching on and altering the established practice of the Orkney bishops (Crawford 1974b: 100) and it is perhaps evidence of this established practice that is shown in the land holdings in Figure 8.

Although we have focussed on St Magnus, the ruling elite in Caithness was seemingly not content with him as their patron saint, as medieval sources tell of several attempts to establish saint cults in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In 1158 Earl Rognvaldr is murdered in Caithness and on the stone where his blood fell, blood could 'be seen even today as if it were new-shed' (*Orkn.*: 282–83; see Figure 5). This cult was successful, but like Magnus' was centred at St Magnus Cathedral in Orkney. *Orkneyinga saga* tells us that in 1198 Harald the Younger was killed in battle near Wick, and a light shone where his blood fell and a church was built there; he was described by the saga writer as 'a very saint' and attributed 'countless miracles' but he was not sanctified (*Orkn.*: 289–93; Thomson 2003: 61). Then in 1222 Bishop Adam was murdered in a fire, and following his death, similarly unsuccessful attempts were made to make him a saint (Fairfax 2021; Ellis and Fairfax, this volume). Eventually in 1245, it was Bishop Gilbert who was canonised and became patron saint of Dornoch Cathedral and the diocese (Farmer 2011b) and herein is perhaps one of the main reasons the Magnus cult does not spread further. St Gilbert's cult is promoted by his family and supporters who hold extensive lands in Sutherland and consequently the St Magnus' cult does not expand further than its pre-Gilbertine extent.

As well as sharing a territory, Gilbert and Magnus share a similar tradition of defeating a dragon. There is a legend from 'Sutherland-shire' of Gilbert overcoming a dragon – or salamander – that was terrorising the country (Dempster 1888), which is similar to the Magnus dragon story at Watten. But it is not as simple as one cult replacing

another. In *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* in c. 1249, Alexander II of Scotland is warned in a dream not to attack the Western Isles, and the saints who appear are St Olaf of Norway, St Columba, and St Magnus (Torfæus 1866: 186–87; Dasent 1894: 265–66; Mackinlay 1914: 291–92; Thomson 2008: 98) suggesting that St Magnus still held power in the north and was seen as representing it. Evidence of veneration or at least allegiance to the two saints, is found in the thirteenth-century use of the given names Magnus and Gilbert by post-John earls of Caithness (*BM*: 77–78; Crawford 2014: 155). Magnus Gilbertson's (d. 1273) name combines these two saints; incidentally his rule illustrates the difficulties of being earl of Caithness and Orkney as the kingdoms of Scotland and Norway vie for power in the north.

Withstanding the changing political and ecclesiastical governance of Caithness, St Magnus Hospital at Spittal continued to be a centre of religion and community well beyond the thirteenth century, and one supposes played a significant role in the cult of St Magnus as a place of rest for pilgrims before they journeyed northward to the shrine of St Magnus. It is unfortunate that there are no written accounts of pilgrimages being made along this route. The cult may not have spread throughout Caithness in the same way as it did along the Magnus routeways in Orkney, but, then again, the places most deeply embedded with Magnus veneration in Orkney are linked to his martyrdom and elevation and are not found along other routeways to St Magnus Cathedral. The failed seventeenth-century Magnusburgh at Inver along with the 'image' and fairs, suggest his cult was venerated in and around Dunbeath into the post-reformation period. Similarly, the remembrance of St Magnus Fairs at Watten and Halkirk suggests a continued knowledge of his cult.

Additional archaeological evidence of possible St Magnus cult connections within the earldoms is found in the presence of dressed and moulded red sandstone blocks built into many of Orkney's parish churches (Gibbon 2006: 31–32), and more recently recognised at several kirks in Shetland (Fraser and Murray 2019; Scott and Ritchie 2015: 192–93). Such red sandstone, which in the case of the Shetland examples was imported from Orkney (Fraser and Murray 2019), is also built into the windows and doorway of Canisbay parish church (Figure 9 below), and a fragment of a medieval altar carved from red sandstone discovered from Noss Farm in Wick may also be related (*HHER* 2014). The presence of red sandstone blocks quarried from stone very like that used to build St Magnus Cathedral in Orkney suggests deliberate medieval acts of materiality connecting churches in all parts of the earldoms to the cathedral and therefore to the Cult of St



**FIGURE 9** CANISBAY PARISH CHURCH WITH RED SANDSTONE WINDOW, AND ORKNEY IN THE BACKGROUND. PHOTO CREDIT SARAH JANE GIBBON.

Magnus (Gibbon 2006: 31–32) reflecting cultural, political and spiritual links, as well as conscious and tangible expressions of affinity by the founders of these churches.

More widely, one of the 37 altar dedications recorded in 1492 at St Mary’s church, Dundee was to St Magnus (Mackinlay 1914: 303; Turpie 2015: 77) and both Magnus’ feast days, April 16th and December 13th, are included in the Aberdeen Breviary of 1510, and other calendars (*AB* n.p.; Craven 1901: 61; De Geer 1985: 120–22; Forbes 1872: 236, 384; Turpie 2015: 50–57).<sup>1</sup> There is a St Magnus Haven placename at Auchmedden in Aberdeenshire, where it is said Magnus blessed the boats that used the harbour on the day of the battle of Flodden (Mackinlay 1914: 300–1; Robertson 1843: 446). All indicate that the Magnus Cult continued to be recognised in Scotland after the impignoration of Orkney and Shetland in 1472. There are no explanations of the reasons for these Scottish Magnus dedications, but the east coast ports had trading relations with Orkney, and it could be that these dedications relate to seafaring connections and Magnus’ ability to grant safe passage. Inclusion in the Aberdeen Breviary and other calendars may have been post-impignoration attempts to incorporate the ‘Norwegian’ Cult of St Magnus more firmly in the ecclesiastical narrative of the Scottish church.

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<sup>1</sup> The *AB* calendars are provided at the beginning of the volumes, prior to the start of the volumes’ pagination, Magnus’s major feast day is in the calendar in Vol. 1 and the minor feast day in Vol. 2. The *AB* contains the full Latin services for Magnus of Orkney’s feast days.

## **Conclusions**

The cult of St Magnus can be considered another indicator of ecclesiastical influence exerted by the Orkney earls and bishops in Caithness, with the religious administrative development of the Cult through church dedications and the development of a pilgrimage route seen most obviously in the foundation of the Hospital of St Magnus at Spittal. Furthermore, evidence of community veneration of the saint is retained in the Magnus fairs, placenames, and folklore. That the Magnus cultural remains are found in those places most closely associated with the Orkney earldom is unsurprising; both this and the distribution of other Magnus names and places on the old routeways leading north, indicate the northern emphasis of the Cult and mirror, in many ways, the Magnus landscape previously mapped by the authors in Orkney where the surviving evidence is greater nearer the three Magnus-dedicated churches (Gibbon and Moore 2019). The changing ecclesiastical and political situation in Caithness in the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries must have had a negative impact on the spread of the Magnus cult and what we see in the evidence is the beginnings of the cult moving south before the Scottish bishops establish themselves. The unsuccessful attempt to sanctify Harald can be seen as a Caithness equivalent to Orkney's Magnus, perhaps considered more suitably Scottish in his ancestry, but eventually it is the cult of St Gilbert that dominates the Caithness diocese. Since the tensions in Caithness would not have been conducive to the spread of an Orkney saint's cult, it is quite remarkable, and testament to its popularity, that the Magnus cult survived at all.

There are limited cultural remains of St Magnus in Caithness when compared to the richer memorialisation and cultural knowledge of Magnus to the north. Mapping these, however, highlights the concentration of this evidence in the northeastern corner of Caithness, from Reay in the west, through Halkirk, Spittal, and Watten, to Dunbeath in Latheron in the south. Further, it demonstrates that the cult was one element of a complex religious landscape in the region, with influences from multiple directions, and different traditions of Christianity, which shifted and lulled over time. Alongside the direct evidence for St Magnus, the use of Geographical Information System (GIS) mapping and analysis of a range of historical and archaeological sources begins to provide a representation of some of the complex interactions between ecclesiastical, political, and cultural groupings and identities in this area during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

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## Appendix – Extract from Cultural Remains of St Magnus Dataset

Site No	Name	Where	Easting	Northing	Type
76	St Magnus' Boat	Burwick, South Ronaldsay	344000	984280	Stone
94	St Magnus Chapel	Shebster, Reay, Caithness	301699	963891	Church
95	St Magnus Hospital	Spittal, Caithness	315870	954860	Hospital
96	St Magnus Chapel	Spittal, Caithness	315870	954870	Church; Parish Church; Burial Ground
97	St Magnus Chapel	B a n n i s k i r k Mains, Watten, Halkirk	317038	957126	Church; Burial ground
98	St Magnus Stone	S t e n h o u s e , Watten, Caithness	324270	957358	Stone
99	St Magnus Fair, Magnasmas	Watten, Caithness	324181	954409	Fair
100	St Magnus Fair	H a l k i r k , Caithness	313533	959696	Fair
101	St Magnus Day Fair	D u n b e a t h , Caithness	316084	929855	Fair
102	I m a g e o f S t Magnus	Dunbeath Castle	315801	928264	Image
103	Magnusburgh	Inver/Ballachly, Dunbeath	316150	929650	Planned trading burgh
104	Mansies	Caithness			Name <sup>2</sup>
105	St Magnus	Pentland Firth	341335	979597	Appearance
106	Magnus	Earldom			Name <sup>3</sup>
107	Spittal Hill	Halkirk	316777	955636	Hill; Meeting place; Marketplace

<sup>2</sup> The collective nick name for Orcadians used in Caithness was 'Mansies'.

<sup>3</sup> The post-John earldom dynasty consistently used Magnus as a family name, closely connecting to the Saint and their ancestor.

# King Eysteinn's Raid on Aberdeen and the Scottish Kingdom in the mid-twelfth century

Alex Woolf

In the early 1150s Eysteinn Haraldsson, the eldest son of the late Haraldr *Gille*, who shared the kingship of Norway with his younger half-brothers, led a fleet across the North Sea. After surprising Haraldr Maddaðarsson, the Atholl-born Orkney dynast, at Thurso, in Caithness, and taking submission from him, he sailed south-eastwards and attacked Aberdeen before continuing down the eastern coast of Britain at least as far south as Hartlepool and Whitby. This expedition is not mentioned in any contemporary or near contemporary Scottish sources but in the following pages I hope to show that it was provoked by changes in the political make-up of the Scottish realm in the middle of the twelfth century.

The precise date of Eysteinn's expedition has been a matter of debate. Both *Morkinskinna* (*Msk.* 1: 216–25), the earliest saga source for it, dating from about 1220, which in turn cites skaldic verse (Gade 2009: 551–59), and near contemporary Reginald of Durham (also known as Reginald of Coldingham) (*Reg.*: 65–66), the only Insular source to record the expedition, date it to the reign of King Stephen of England (r. 1135–54). The sequence of events as related in *Morkinskinna* implies that the expedition took place whilst Haraldr Maddaðarson's Orcadian colleague, Earl Rǫgnvaldr Kali, was on pilgrimage to the Holy Land with Erling *Skakke*.<sup>1</sup> The Icelandic *Konungsannáll* dates both the expedition and the pilgrimage to 1151, the year before it notices Cardinal Nicholas's visitation in Norway (*Konungsannáll*: 16, s.a. 1151). Modern scholars have often been tempted to push the expedition a year or two later to fit with various interpretative agendas.

The attack on Aberdeen by King Eysteinn is almost the first mention of the town in the surviving historical record. Aberdeen's earliest contemporary notice appears in a record of a gift of land to the Church of Deer (Aberdeenshire), by the local mormaer of Buchan, Gartnait son of Cainnech, and his wife Éte daughter of Gille-Michéil (*Deer*: 138–

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<sup>1</sup> For further discussion of Rǫgnvaldr's journey to the Holy Land see Harriet Clark, 'Bestowing Status: The Journeys of Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson and Sigurðr Jórslafari' in this volume.

39), in a charter dated to the eighth year of King David I (r. 1124–53), which ran from April 1131 to April 1132. First amongst the witnesses is Nechtan, bishop of Aberdeen. In later episcopal lists Nechtan is counted as the first bishop to have his see at Aberdeen, having been translated there from Mortlach (now Dufftown) (Watt 1969: 1; see discussion in Woolf, 2007: 299–310). Prior to this it can be inferred from a charter of Malcolm IV (r. 1153–65) that David I's predecessor, Alexander I (r. 1107–24), had granted a toft in Aberdeen to the Augustinian priory he had previously established at Scone (*RRS I*: 263–65, no. 243).<sup>2</sup> The grant of Alexander I, if genuine, suggests that there was already a mercantile community at Aberdeen, perhaps even one that had burghal status.

Much closer in time to Eysteinn's visit was another event recorded, like Gartnait and Éte's grant, in the gospel book known as the Book of Deer, this one recording legal proceedings at Aberdeen (*Deer*: 142–43; *Charters of David I*: 119, no. 136). Unlike the previous six property records in the book this final, seventh, entry was in Latin and recorded King David's instruction to recognise the community's immunity from lay exactions recorded in the preceding Gaelic-language notes. The witnesses to David's confirmation included, amongst others: Gregory, Bishop of Dunkeld; Andrew, Bishop of Caithness; and Samson, Bishop of Brechin, as well as two *comites*, Donnchad of Fife and Gille-Brigte of Angus. The grant bears no date, but the floruit of the witnesses suggests a date between 1139 and 1153, and probably after 1145.<sup>3</sup> This was King David's only recorded visit to Aberdeen.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, this is only one of two grants known to have been issued by David I north of the Mounth (the eastern extent of the Highlands which reaches the coast a few miles south of Aberdeen); the other being a grant of twenty shillings annually to the monks of Urquhart Priory from the royal *ferm* ('tax') from the burgh of Elgin, issued at Banff, on the coast between Buchan and Moray (*Charters of David I*: 149, no. 195). Of course, the surviving charter record is largely determined by the presence of reformed churches requiring confirmation of their rights so it would be dangerous to infer too much from the absence of evidence for the royal presence. Geoffrey Barrow linked this grant issued at Banff by David with the confirmation issued at Aberdeen, noting that

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<sup>2</sup> A text purporting, to be Alexander I's original charter is preserved in the Scone cartulary and printed and discussed by Lawrie (see below) as document 36 at pp. 28–30 and pp. 279–88. While Lawrie supposed this to be inauthentic, Matthew Hammond (*PoMS* Document 1/3/4) now views it as reliable; see *PoMS* Document 1/3/4 (*Scone Lib.*, no. 1).

<sup>3</sup> See *PoMS* Document 1/4/68 (*Chrs. David I*, no. 136).

<sup>4</sup> On the issue of patchy survival of records from medieval Scotland generally, see Tucker 2023.

the wording of the Aberdeen document refers to the *clerici* of Deer having established their rights at Banff and then having sworn oaths at Aberdeen (*ESC*: 86, no. XC; Oram 2004: 91–93, 2011: 77). The implication here is that the royal party travelled from Banff, on the north coast, to Aberdeen, a distance of just over seventy kilometres. In his second biography of David I, Oram accepts this later date (Oram 2020: 402).

A number of historians have posited that this northern visit may also have involved the foundation of the Cistercian house at Kinloss, in Moray, which, according to the chronicle kept at its mother house of Melrose, took place on 21 May 1150 (*Mailros*: 74, *s.a.* 1150). Three weeks later (on 11 June) the king was in Fife celebrating the dedication of the abbey church at Dunfermline, the mother house to Urquhart. A charter issued in favour of Dunfermline, very likely at this event was witnessed by no fewer than six bishops: Robert of St Andrews, Herbert of Glasgow, Gregory of Dunkeld, Andrew of Caithness, Edward of Aberdeen, and Symeon of Ross (*Charters of David I*: 136, no. 171). This list seems to include all the bishops known to have then been in office in David's kingdom with the possible exception of Samson of Brechin, who was present at the Aberdeen meeting recorded in the *Book of Deer*. Samson is the first known bishop of Brechin and may have been the son of the Abbot Leod of Brechin who did attest the Dunfermline charter (Watt 1969: 14–16).<sup>5</sup> Amongst the lay witnesses of the Dunfermline grant are the two north-eastern *comites*: Gartnait of Buchan and Morgund of Marr. Gartnait, as we have seen, had already been mormaer of Buchan almost twenty years previously when he and his wife Éte had made the grant which Nechtan, the first bishop of Aberdeen, had witnessed. His appearance at Dunfermline in 1150 is in fact his only surviving attestation of a royal charter. It must in fact, also, have been one of his final public duties, for prior to David confirming the rights of the *clerici* of Deer at Aberdeen, his daughter Eva, together with her husband Colbán, now himself mormaer of Buchan, had had a grant of their own added to those which the *clerici* gathered in their Book (*Deer*: 140–41). Taken together this would allow us to infer that this visit of David to Aberdeen post-dated the Dunfermline event of the 11 June 1150.

Against this inference we might note the absence of Edward, bishop of Aberdeen, from the oath-swearing and royal confirmation that took place at his own see (*Deer*: 142–

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<sup>5</sup> Abbot Donald of Brechin, in the later twelfth century, is known to have been the son of a Samson and the grandson of a Leod, it is assumed that the principate of Brechin was hereditary, but that Leod and Donald did not attain episcopal status; see Watt 1969: 14–16; Barrow 1989: 76–88, at 82–85; Gray 2013: 71–74.

43, Text VII).<sup>6</sup> The Dunfermline charter appears to be the earliest attestation by Edward as bishop and his previous appearance was in the early summer of 1147 when he attested a grant by David and in favour of St Mary's of Stirling (Cambuskenneth Priory) in his earlier guise as royal Chancellor (*Charters of David I*: 129–30, no. 159). Dauvit Broun has made the ingenious suggestion, however, that, since all the witnesses to David's confirmation of the rights asserted by the *clerici* of Deer in their Book seem to have come from Gaelic-speaking backgrounds, this list may not be of all those present but only of those able to comprehend the previous five property transactions recorded in the Book when they were read out, for all but David's final confirmation were written in Gaelic rather than Latin (Broun 2008: 343).

The first appearance of Samson with the style bishop of Brechin, and the death of Gartnait and installation of his son-in-law Colbán as mormaer of Buchan, all suggest that some distance in time separated the oath-swearing in Aberdeen from dedication of the abbey church at Dunfermline. This supposition might receive some support from the fact that both Colbán and Samson are known otherwise only from records of subsequent reigns. As noted above Samson is the first known bishop of Brechin and his see may also have been new in this period.<sup>7</sup> Since by the mid-twelfth century the creation of new sees required papal approval, it is tempting to suggest that King David I's meeting with the Papal legate Cardinal John Paparo at Carlisle on the Feast of St Michael, 29 September 1151, may have played some part in the creation of Samson's see (Hexham: 327, *s.a.* 1152). Cardinal John was on his way to Ireland where he would preside at the Synod of Kells-Mellifont, in the following year, at which the reorganisation of the diocesan boundaries and provinces of Ireland was to be modified (Flanagan 2010: 34–91). Brechin may not have been the only new see discussed on this occasion as the final years of David's reign also see the appearance of a William, Bishop of Moray.<sup>8</sup> If we can put the end of September 1151 as the likely *terminus post quem* for Samson's consecration as

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<sup>6</sup> As inscribed in Note VII, the episcopal witnesses are Gregory of Dunkeld, Andrew of Caithness, and Samson of Brechin.

<sup>7</sup> The reference in the Chronicle of the Kings of Alba (see Anderson 1980: 253), to Cinaed II (r. 971–95) founding *magna civitas* of Brechin might suggest that the see could have been much older. For a summary of previous discussions, see Gray 2013: 35–36. However, a *magna civitas* was not necessarily an episcopal see; Gray only holds out a dim possibility that there were earlier bishops.

<sup>8</sup> Though for the brief appearance of Gregory as Bishop of Moray earlier in the century see below and also Woolf 2007: 306–9. Bishops of Moray were not evidenced since the conquest of Moray: for the argument that the bishop of Moray had been translated to Aberdeen at an earlier date see Woolf 2007.

bishop of Brechin then this would put the oath-swearing at Aberdeen after this date, and, bearing in mind the distance between Carlisle and Aberdeen, it would put the latter event most likely in 1152.<sup>9</sup> Almost certainly after King Eysteinn's raid upon the town.

We can now turn to look at the northern context for Eysteinn's expedition. It seems to have taken place immediately following the departure of Earl Rognvaldr of Orkney and Erling *Skakke* for the Holy Land (*Konungsannáll*: 16, *s.a.* 1151). According to *Orkneyinga saga*, Rognvaldr left the earldom in sole charge of his younger cousin Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson (*OS*: 193–208). This Haraldr, whose father had been mormaer of Atholl in Scotland, seems to have been intruded into the earldom as Rognvaldr's colleague through pressure from the Scottish crown in about 1139 (Topping 1983; Crawford 2013: 183–84). The Scots seem to have taken advantage of the civil strife in Norway following the killing of King Haraldr *Gille* in 1136 by the pretender Sigurðr *Slembe*, who himself seems to have spent time in the service of King David I *c.* 1130 (*Msk.* 2: 168–73; also see *OS*: 115–17 for Sigurðr's links with Sutherland). However, two years before departing on pilgrimage Rognvaldr had taken Earl Haraldr to Norway when both had sworn allegiance to King Ingi *krokryggi* ('Crookback') Haraldsson (r. 1136–61). This must have happened in 1149 (*OS*: 193–208). The context for Eysteinn's expedition to Orkney and Caithness, then, may have been to ensure Haraldr's loyalty. If by 1149 Haraldr had felt that he could defy Scottish over-lordship and entered into peace with the Norwegian king (or kings), had something happened to make this seem more likely and if so, had things changed again between 1149 and 1151?

We saw above how, on 25 May 1150, King David had founded a Cistercian house at Kinloss, near the mouth of the river Findhorn in Moray. At about the same time he seems to have also founded Urquhart Priory by the River Lossie, also in Moray. Urquhart was a daughter house of the Benedictine abbey at Dunfermline which served as the royal mausoleum for David's dynasty and Kinloss was the daughter house of Melrose where David I's stepson Waltheof had recently become abbot (*Mailros*: 73, *s.a.* 1148). The explanation for this disposal of land to the Churches associated with the royal dynasty can perhaps be explained if we look at the other end of David's lordship and at the foundation of another daughter house from Melrose at Holm Coultram on the Solway Firth in what is now the far northwest of England. Holm Coultram was founded in January of 1150 (*Mailros*: 74, *s.a.* 1150). In common with Kinloss, in Moray, the province that Holm

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<sup>9</sup> David I returned to Carlisle by 24 May 1153 when he died there.

Cultram lay in, Allerdale, had been held by David's nephew William fitz Duncan, the son of his elder brother Duncan II who had reigned briefly in 1094 (Oram 2020: 167–69). William, usually styled as 'the king's nephew' or 'my nephew' in royal Acts, had been a close associate of David since before the latter had become king. As with so many of Scotland's great men in this period there is no notice of William's death, but he disappears from the record after 1147, suggesting that he ceased to participate in public life at about that point. Wilmund, bishop of the Isles, a native of the Northwest of England, appears to have claimed to be a son of William and he abandoned his see in pursuit of an inheritance at some point between the deposition of Archbishop William fitz Herbert, in 1147, and the entry of his successor into York in 1151 (Woolf 2015: 335–36). David I seems to have just completed taking action against Wilmund in favour of William's legitimate son, William Puer, prior to his meeting with Cardinal John in September 1151, and was certainly present at Lamplugh in Allerdale at some point in the early 1150s (*Charters of David I*: 149–50, no. 196). William Puer, however, seems only to have succeeded to his father's holdings in the northwest of England, which the old William had held *de iure uxore* through his marriage to Alice de Romilly, that is to say the lordships of Skipton, Craven, and Coupland. His Scottish lands and authority seem to have been taken into the king's hand. William fitz Duncan's major Scottish office seems to have been as comes of Moray although he is only explicitly called this in one text of the early thirteenth century detailing the fate of his lordships in Allerdale and Coupland over the next few generations (*Bees Register*: 530–33).

The series of royal ecclesiastical foundations in what had been William's lordship, at Holm Cultram, Kinloss, and Urquhart in 1150 may represent, as Richard Oram has suggested (2004: 102–4), the final settlement, as David saw it, of William's inheritance and it may also have been at this point that he enfeoffed the Fleming Freskin with Duffus, Kintrae, and other territories in central Moray, leaving him the major secular landholder in the region under the new settlement. The period between William fitz Duncan's death, in 1147 or shortly thereafter, and May 1150 when the king was in Moray reorganising things might, however, have been marked by uncertainty and dispute, creating an effective power vacuum in the North of the kingdom. This power vacuum may well have created the situation in which Earl Haraldr felt compelled to visit Norway in order to pay homage to King Ingi. It may also be no coincidence that it is in this window that we first become aware of Bishop Andrew of Caithness who from this time forward, until his death in 1184, seems to have been in almost constant attendance of the Scottish kings and who was, or

became, a substantial landholder in Perthshire and Angus. It has sometimes been supposed that Andrew never visited his diocese, but an alternative position is that he left Caithness at the time of Earl Haraldr's journey to Norway; pastoral care of Caithness being assumed, if this were the case, by William, Bishop of Orkney. Combining the dioceses of Caithness and Orkney would have placed the earldom securely within the Norwegian Church. Andrew, a Dunfermline monk, had divided loyalties. This may be the context for David I's brieve directed to Rognvaldr and an unnamed earl of Caithness, presumably Haraldr, urging them not to molest the clergy of Dornoch and their tenants, dated by Barrow to 1137×51 and probably 1145×51 (*Charters of David I*: 153–54, no. 155). Haraldr's submission to Ingi had in effect reunited an Orcadian realm partitioned since 1139.

Seen in this light David's reconstruction of Moray in 1150, may have been perceived by Eysteinn as a threat to Norwegian hegemony in the region particularly once the more reliable Rognvaldr, a Norwegian by birth, had set off for Jerusalem. Haraldr, perhaps, needed to be reminded whose man his was now. The subsequent attack on Aberdeen may also have been aimed at suggesting to David that his power in the North had its limits. But returning to Aberdeen also leads us to investigate the changing structures of Scottish geography in this period.

In an earlier paper entitled 'The Cult of Moluag and the Organisation of the Church in Northern Scotland in the Eleventh and Twelfth centuries', Woolf suggested that the see which preceded Aberdeen, at Mortlach in Glen Fiddich, had been intended as a see for Moray following Malcolm III's conflict with the Moravian dynasts Macbeth and Lulach at the beginning of his reign in the 1050s. The argument made there was that the see of Mortlach lay right on the boundary between Moray and the lands of Buchan and Marr in north-eastern Scotland, and that it functioned as a 'colonial' see in much the same way that Abercorn, near Edinburgh had done in the seventh century, with its diocese North of the Forth, and as Dornoch would do for Caithness, in the Southeast corner of which province it lay (for Abercorn see *HE*: 428–29, IV.26; for Dornoch see Oram this volume). What seems to have happened at some point in the early-twelfth century, perhaps following David's defeat, and killing, of Angus king of Moray at the Battle of Stracathro in 1130, but perhaps earlier, under Alexander I, is that the bishop of Mortlach had his see translated to Aberdeen. Our earliest evidence for this, as we have seen, is Nechtan of Aberdeen witnessing the charter of Gartnait and Éte of Buchan in the eighth year (1131–32) of King David. A charter issued by David at roughly the same time

(1127×36) confirming various grants to Dunfermline by himself and his predecessors is also witnessed by Bishops Gregory of Moray and MacBeth of Rosemarkie [i.e. Ross] (*Charters of David I: 70–72*, no. 33). Dating back to the seventh century, Rosemarkie is quite likely to have been the oldest episcopal see in the north of Scotland but whether it was continuously occupied is very uncertain (Watt 1991: 70–73; Fraser 2009).<sup>10</sup> Gregory seems to have been the same man who was subsequently translated to Dunkeld and may well have been a chorepiscopus at St Andrews *c.* 1100 (Woolf 2007: 306–9). One possibility is that a single bishopric north of the Mouth, corresponding largely with the political hegemony of the Moravian dynasty was, at some point, perhaps over a period of time in the early twelfth century, broken down into three dioceses, Ross, Moray, and Aberdeen. Moray seems to have been somewhat problematic, and its see was not finally settled, at Elgin, until 1224 (Fawcett and Oram 2014: 21–33, 120–26).

The cathedral of Aberdeen lies at the extreme southeast of its diocese and its relationship with the burgh there is also curious. Old Aberdeen, lying around St Machar's cathedral, overlooking the flood plain of the river Don, and lies about two kilometres north of the burgh of Aberdeen, lying by the harbour on the north bank of the estuary of the River Dee. The burgh served as the outlet to the sea for Deeside, a dale stretching more than a hundred kilometres due west into the central Highlands. The Don, however, which flowed past the bishop's seat from the Northwest, drains the north side of the Cairngorm massif which separates it from Deeside. It is Donside which provided route-ways towards Mortlach and Moray. The linkage, and shared name, between the two settlements probably stems from the fact that the mouth of the Don lacked the natural harbour of the mouth of the Dee, so traffic to and from the bishop's town by sea probably disembarked and embarked at the burgh on the Dee and travelled the last few kilometres overland. The combination of the episcopal see for the Northeast and the *entrepôt* for Deeside was greater, however, than the sum of the parts. Whereas the burgh at the mouth of the Dee may have begun life simply as a place where timber and other products, smoked salmon perhaps, from Deeside could be loaded onto ships heading south in exchange, perhaps, for luxury goods for the chief men of the district, its juxtaposition with an episcopal court which had jurisdiction as far as the bounds of Moray turned it into a regional centre of greater import.

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<sup>10</sup> Between Curetán (fl. 697) and MacBeth, only Duthac/Dubthach (obit in AU: 503, s.a. 1065) has been posited as a holder of this see, though the bishops of Fortriu whose deaths are noted in *Annals of Ulster* (AU: 179, 321, s.aa. 725 and 865) may have been based there, and his claims are not based on reliable or contemporary sources.

Alexander I's grant of five tofts in burghs to the canons of Scone, back in about 1120, included, as well as that at Aberdeen, one each at Edinburgh, Stirling, Inverkeithing, and Perth, very close to Scone itself at the tidal reach of the river Tay. Aberdeen is very much an outlier in this company and probably reflects the earliest phase of the attempt by the Scottish kings and their circle to draw the Northeast into the Anglo-Flemish trade networks which dominated the southern North Sea. In Alexander I's time the relatively modest aspiration to draw Deeside into this network may have been all that was visualised but after the conquest of Moray in 1130 the possibility that the harbour could be a jumping off point for royal interests north of the Cairngorms may have become realised. After Moray was taken into more direct royal control following the death of William fitz Duncan, and with the establishment of major ecclesiastical foundations which had mother houses at Dunfermline and Melrose, the whole aspect of the province may have changed with Aberdeen and the North Sea World drawing the lands to the south of the Moray Firth into a social and economic geography that looked south-eastwards across the Spey to Aberdeen and the Anglo-Flemish World beyond.

From the perspective of the Scandinavian territories in the North the implications of this may have been quite apparent. One is tempted to expound a miniature Pirenne Thesis arguing that the 'Mediterranean' aspect of the Moray Firth which had connected the coastal lands from Rattray Head to Duncansby Head, as the shipping forecast would have it, with Inverness and the Black Isle at its centre, which had defined the region since at least the sixth century, had been struck a fatal blow. The reconstruction of Moray towards the end of David I's reign irresistibly drew the coastal plain and the Spey drainage, down a line of communication represented today by the A96 roadway, into the sphere of the Anglo-Flemish North Sea World which the Kingdom of the Scots had been gravitating towards for half a century. This was a defining moment in Scottish history in which the 'North East' as it is conceptualised today first emerged, drawing Moray and Buchan into what would become defined, by the end of the Middle Ages, as Lowland Scotland and creating a rift with Inverness, Ross, and Caithness that lay beyond the sea. Alternatively, this same transformation may have encouraged the inhabitants of Orkney and Caithness to seek overseas trading partners in the southeast rather than in Norway. In this light we can perhaps see Eysteinn's raid on Aberdeen not merely as an 'anachronistic viking raid' but as a strategic attempt to prevent Scottish royal encroachment on what had hitherto been the hinterland of the Orkney Earldom.

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# Bestowing Status: The Journeys of Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson and Sigurðr Jórsalafari

Harriet Clark

In c.1153 Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson set out from Orkney on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The tale of the journey is well-documented in *Orkneyinga saga*, and the narrative shares several features with other Old Norse accounts of similar journeys undertaken in the twelfth century. In c.1103, Eiríkr *inn góði* ('the good') of Denmark set out for Jerusalem but died in Cyprus before completing his journey. Around five years later, in c. 1108, the Norwegian king, Sigurðr *Jórsalafari* ('Jerusalem-traveller'), set out for Jerusalem, sailing from Norway to the Levant and conducting several battles along the way. Pål Berg Svenungsen has done much-needed work in contextualising the journeys of these three figures, especially of Sigurðr *Jórsalafari* and Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson, against the wider European crusading activities of the twelfth century, though this has focused mostly on the ramifications of events and less so on the reputations of the players (Sveungsen 2021: 95–132). In the respective Old Norse narratives of each journey, the legacies and statuses of the individual leaders are emphasised through the events and contacts made throughout their travels.

Previous research into the respective narratives of these adventures has largely focused on the prestige of Sigurðr *Jórsalafari*'s journey. In 1984, Marianne Kalinke published an analysis of *Sigurðar saga Jórsalafara* from *Morkinskinna*, considering how the *Morkinskinna* author made 'historical incident more vivid and more memorable' to emphasise the prestige that Sigurðr had earned abroad (Kalinke 1984: 156–65). Ármann Jakobsson reviews this interpretation in his 2013 study of the same text, agreeing with the emphasis on political prestige, while also arguing that the narrative should be read as an inverted play on the "king in disguise" motif in contrast to Harris' analysis of the device (Ármann Jakobsson 2013: 131–39; Harris 1979: 57–81). Whereas the narratives of Sigurðr *Jórsalafari*'s journey depict the king as putting on a show for the aggrandisement of himself and Norway on an international stage, the author of *Orkneyinga saga* does not cast Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson as a player of such political theatrics. Nevertheless, the tale of Rognvaldr's pilgrimage is in itself a prestige device. In her aptly named article, 'Pilgrimage and Prestige in the Icelandic Sagas', Joyce Hill identifies prestige as the main theme and

purpose in each of the respective narratives of *Eiríkr inn góði's*, *Sigurðr Jórsalafari's*, and Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson's journeys, and expands the prestige to carry 'between narratives as one Scandinavian ruler is shown to be as good as another Scandinavian ruler in a recognisable similar situations: in other words, the heroes gain prestige not only by proving themselves to be the equals of the foreign rulers, but also by proving themselves to be the equals of each other' (Hill 1990–1993: 437–38). Though it is true that the shared pilgrimage motif bestows a shared prestige on each central figure, Hill fails to consider the inverse side such as both the similar and comparable narratives produce. While there are similarities between the journey narratives, there are also notable differences in the events recounted and in the narrative presentations for each figure.

The present article seeks to explore this middle ground between similarity and difference by comparing the two most detailed journeys: the journey of *Sigurðr Jórsalafari* and the journey of Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson.<sup>1</sup> On the surface, the narrative accounts of these two journeys have the most similarities overall – including battles in Galicia, visiting royalty, and piety – but a closer inspection of the details of these events reveals significant differences between the narratives and their presentation of *Sigurðr Jórsalafari* (d. 1130) and Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson (d. 1158). Rǫgnvaldr was canonised in c. 1192, though the reasons for and influences of this are subject to debate (Ciklamini 1970: 50–51, note 2; Phelpstead 2007: 109–11) it is possible that his status as a saint impacted his depiction. In considering the differences, rather than solely the similarities, it is possible to determine the different methods that the respective authors of the tales used to bestow status and consider how this has the potential to create a hierarchy of prestige between similar tales.

## **The Sagas**

It is first worth noting that none of the Old Norse narratives of the journeys of Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson or *Sigurðr Jórsalafari* were written contemporaneously with the events which they describe. The narrative of Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson's journey is recorded in *Orkneyinga saga*, which was penned around 1200, close to fifty years after the pilgrimage took place. The saga's author is now unknown to us, but it is thought the work was written in Oddi in southern Iceland (Goeres 2015: 10; Hermann Pálsson and Edwards 1981: 9–10;

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<sup>1</sup> Further research could be done in future to compare to other examples of how individuals benefitted from journeys (or were depicted as doing so), such as Erling Skakke whose prestige within the royal network was greatly enhanced by his participation in the crusade.

Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1937: 16–39; Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1965: xc-xcii; Finnbogi Guðmundsson 1995: 206–11). The narrative of the journey is well-detailed and filled with poetry attributed to Rognvaldr and the skalds who accompanied him. Ian Crockatt finds that ‘the Rognvaldr revealed by his poems is somewhat different to the man portrayed in the prose’ (Crockatt 2014: 20). This is not entirely surprising, as the anonymous author of *Orkneyinga saga* can only project an image of Rognvaldr as suiting their narrative, while Rognvaldr’s poetry are the words of the man himself. ‘Though always based upon the living being’ the narrative figure ‘is never the same as the living being itself’, as Ármann Jakobsson explains (2014: 103). Thus, at no point are the depicted figures definitively more accurate portrayals of the people themselves; they are all reliant upon the understandings the saga’s composer had of these people, and of the narratives they sought to create. In Judith Jesch’s assessment, the author of *Orkneyinga saga* ‘wants to engage his audience in dialogue about the story he presents. The audience is encouraged to look at the sources of that story critically, to sift them and to consider questions of bias and distortion’, among which are the different voices of prose and poetry (Jesch 1996: 350). Such reading suggests an author who was historically engaged, conscious of how they constructed their narrative and the effects their narrative could have.

Sigurðr *Jórsalafari*’s journey to Jerusalem is recorded in a range of Old Norse, Latin, and Arabic texts which combine to corroborate his expedition. The most extensive narratives of Sigurðr *Jórsalafari*’s journey are found in three Old Norse *konungasögur*: *Fagrskinna*; *Sigurðar saga Jórsalafara*, which is recorded in *Morkinskinna*; and *Magnússona saga*, which is contained in *Heimskringla*. Sigurðr’s journey is also briefly mentioned in Theodoricus Monachus’ Latin work, *De Antiquitate Regum Norwegiensium*, as well as in the anonymous Old Norse text, *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sǫgum*, though these texts only offer scant overviews of his recorded deeds and offer little narrative detail, thus they will be treated only briefly in this paper. Of the three more extensive accounts, *Morkinskinna* is the eldest, being written around 1220 by an anonymous author (Storm 1873: 28–29; Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1937: 136–37; *Msk.* I: xvii). *Fagrskinna* has likewise been dated to c. 1220, though, as Gustav Indrebø demonstrates, it must have been written after *Morkinskinna*, which the anonymous *Fagrskinna* author used as a source for their work (Indrebø 1917: 12–21). Finally, *Heimskringla* is the youngest of the three texts detailing Sigurðr *Jórsalafari*’s journey, being dated to c. 1230 (Whaley 2012: clxviii). *Heimskringla* draws on both *Fagrskinna* and *Morkinskinna*, and in places the narratives run almost identically between the three. The authorship of *Heimskringla* has become a controversial

topic in recent decades after centuries of being attributed to Snorri Sturluson. In her 2005 book, Patricia Pires Boulhosa rejects Snorri Sturluson's authorship of *Heimskringla* due to there being no surviving manuscript attributing the work to him (Boulhosa 2005: 8–21). Though Boulhosa's reason is valid, it does not negate Sverre Bagge's and Diana Whaley's arguments that Snorri Sturluson was well-placed and well-educated enough to be capable of producing *Heimskringla* (Bagge 1991: 12–14; Whaley 1991: 15). Until a stronger argument is forwarded for either side of the debate, it is perhaps best to remain open to both possibilities, as Shami Ghosh does (2011: 16–17). In places, *Heimskringla* draws on *Orkneyinga saga* for information, though the author of *Orkneyinga saga* also appears to have been aware of several kings' saga traditions (*Orkn.*: ci, 56, 237; Hermann Pálsson & Edwards 1981: 10; Goeres 2015: 11). Though Paul Bibire argues that the references in *Orkneyinga saga* to other kings' sagas are indicative of an authorial desire for Orkney to emulate Norway (Bibire 1984: 82), it is worth considering how *Orkneyinga saga* sits among the kings' sagas, both by its dating and as a source for *Heimskringla*.<sup>2</sup> The material for each of the sagas was likely shaped over time through oral tradition and collective memory, as well as borrowing between texts, and the respective narratives and presentations of people and events cannot be considered as solely the result of a single author or compiler. It is therefore useful to think of the "author" as an entity rather than an identity. The narratives of Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson's and Sigurðr Jórslafari's journeys presented in these texts are then a testament to both the authors' own understandings and perceptions of the earl and king, and those of the society in which the authors' worked. Finally, these narratives reveal how status was understood to be bestowed, and how differences in narrative detail could bestow different forms of status.

## Two Journeys

Following the locations detailed for Sigurðr's journey in *Magnússona saga*, *Fagrskinna*, and *Morkinskinna*, a direct route through the Mediterranean is easily mapped (see Figure 1 below), with the fleet sailing around Iberia to the Balearic Islands, followed by a stop in Sicily, before continuing eastward to the Levant (*Msona*: 240–49; *Msk.* II: 71–93; *Fsk.*: 315–18). *Orkneyinga saga* outlines a similar route for Rognvaldr's voyage (see Figure 2 below), but with subtle differences, such as stopping in Narbonne (in modern France) and

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<sup>2</sup> In her 1992 (p. 348) article, Jesch notes how the references in *Orkneyinga saga* to other works are not present in the *Flateyjarbók* redaction.

returning overland up the Italian peninsula rather than through the Balkans (*Orkn.*: 208–35). The similarities between the two routes are unsurprising, being that there was only one sea route to Jerusalem from Norway, where both expeditions began. It is therefore more worthwhile to study the differences in the narrative details of both journeys.



**FIGURE 1** MAP OUTLINING THE ROUTE TAKEN BY SIGURÐR JÓRSALAFARI, INCLUDING THE LOCATIONS DETAILED IN *MAGNÚSSONA SAGA*, *MORKINSKINNA*, AND *FAGRSKINNA*. MODERN BORDERS HAVE BEEN INCLUDED FOR EASE OF REFERENCE.



**FIGURE 2** MAP OUTLINING THE ROUTE TAKEN BY RÖGNVALDR KALI KOLSSON, INCLUDING THE LOCATIONS DETAILED IN *ORKNEYINGA SAGA*. MODERN BORDERS HAVE BEEN INCLUDED FOR EASE OF REFERENCE.

## Trouble in Galicia

Both Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson and Sigurðr *Jórsalafari* are said to have stopped over Christmastime in Galicia. According to *Morkinskinna*, *Magnússona saga*, and *Fagrskinna*, Sigurðr initially made a deal with the local ruler in Galicia that his company could winter there and be provided with a market where they could purchase supplies (*Msk.* II: 71–87; *Msona*: 240–42; *Fsk.*: 315–17). A similar account is given in *Orkneyinga saga*, that Rognvaldr made a deal with the local people that they would provide a market for his company while they wintered in Galicia (*Orkn.*: 208–15). The peaceful arrangement does not last long for either expedition. Sigurðr and his company are said to have challenged the Galician lord after he failed to provide them with sufficient supplies, while Rognvaldr and his followers agreed their trade with the local population on the condition that he would depose their tyrannical lord (*Msk.* II: 71–87; *Msona*: 240–42; *Fsk.*: 315–17; *Orkn.*: 208–24). Though, in both cases, the ensuing battle is the result of the agreement, Rognvaldr is given a more noble reason for challenging the Galician lord than Sigurðr. Whereas Sigurðr's battle is an act of revenge against the lord for failing to uphold his side of the agreement, Rognvaldr is shown to act for the benefit of the local people. Rognvaldr is thus presented as being more selfless and considerate than Sigurðr.

Sigurðr's battle is largely downplayed in the *Magnússona saga* and *Fagrskinna* accounts. *Fagrskinna* simply states *jarlinn rauf þá sætt um haustit [...] en Sigurðr konungr drap marga menn fyrir jarlinum, ok jarlinn komsk nauðuliga undan* ('the earl broke the peace they had made in autumn, then King Sigurðr killed many of the earl's men, and the jarl barely got away', *Fsk.*: 315–16).<sup>3</sup> *Magnússona saga* offers slightly more detail, noting that *fór Sigurðr konungr með miklu liði til kastala þess, er jarl átti, ok flýði jarl undan, því at hann hafði lítit lið* ('King Sigurðr went with a large troop to the castle that the jarl owned, and the earl fled away as he had few troops', *Msona*: 241). Though this encounter features as the first battle in which Sigurðr is said to have fought, there is little dramatic flair in the simple telling, devoid of combative action. Rather than an emphasis on martial skill in fighting or leadership, the *Magnússona saga* author relies on the apparent size of Sigurðr's force as the driving factor for the Galician lord's defeat, while the *Fagrskinna* author offers no comment on the means of Sigurðr's success.

The *Morkinskinna* account of Sigurðr's attack against the Galician lord is far more descriptive and depicts Sigurðr giving a rousing speech to his forces before leading them

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<sup>3</sup> All prose translations of Old Norse are my own.

into battle and causing the earl to flee from his numerically superior force (*Msk.* II: 71–87). Through the delivery of his speech, Sigurðr is depicted as being in active command of his troops, and in this way the scene fits Bagge’s notion of ‘the king as “the best man” [...] whose power is based on skill, courage, eloquence and the ability to gain his men’s respect and defeat his opponents’ (Bagge 2010: 162). Moreover, Thomas Morcom reads Sigurðr’s speech as ‘something akin to a manifesto for the bellicose form of masculinity he typifies’ (Morcom 2020: 131–32). The scene in *Morkinskinna* can thus be seen as a demonstration of ideal kingship and aggressive masculinity, with kingship linked to masculine performance. In actively leading his troops and gaining victory over the Galician earl, Sigurðr is shown to embody both ideals and earn prestige through his depicted actions. Though the *Fagrskinna* and *Magnússona saga* narratives offer glimpses of the same actions, they do not depict Sigurðr’s abilities or his role in leadership to the same extent as is found in the *Morkinskinna* account.

The battle which Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson is said to have fought against a Galician earl named Godfrey in *Orkneyinga saga* follows the same pattern as the *Morkinskinna* version of Sigurðr’s battle. According to *Orkneyinga saga*, Rǫgnvaldr spoke to his company ahead of the attack against the castle, calling on their duty to uphold their agreement with the local populace or else risk losing their trade with them (*Orkn.*: 208–15). *Orkneyinga saga* provides a long and vivid account of how the Orcadian–Norwegian company *sækja fast at bæði með eldi ok vápnum; skutu þeir þá hart í virkit* (‘attack ferociously with both fire and weapons; they then shot hard into the castle’, *Orkn.*: 216). The extensive details given for Rǫgnvaldr’s attack on the castle far outweigh the descriptions given to Sigurðr’s equivalent battle in Galicia. The whole scenario, from their first arrival in Galicia to their subsequent victory covers 111 prose lines in the Íslenzk Fornrit edition of *Orkneyinga saga*, with an additional four verses of skaldic poetry (*Orkn.*: 208–24). By contrast, the lengthiest account of Sigurðr’s battle found in *Morkinskinna* covers only 37 lines in the Íslenzk Fornrit edition and does not include any additional poetry on the scene. Whereas Sigurðr is simply said to have fought and won the battle in short order in all three of his narrative accounts, Rǫgnvaldr is shown to have coordinated the attack, and his tactics are described (*Fsk.*: 315–17; *Msona*: 240–42; *Msk.* II: 71–87; *Orkn.*: 208–24). These additional details in *Orkneyinga saga* emphasise Rǫgnvaldr’s capabilities and reputation and as a result bestow a greater and more meaningful level of prestige upon him than Sigurðr receives from his narratives.

## Visiting Royalty

Røgnvaldr's stay in Narbonne at the court of Queen Ermingerðr is a single geographic inaccuracy in the otherwise well-mapped route in *Orkneyinga saga*, with the account claiming he stopped there before sailing through the Nørvasund ('Straits of Gibraltar') into the Mediterranean Sea (*Orkn.*: 208–24). Due to Narbonne's location, Røgnvaldr must first have sailed around Iberia and then north to France, essentially following the same route as Sigurðr's expedition. The misplacement of Narbonne is something of an oddity compared with the carefully detailed order of the other destinations.<sup>4</sup> The notion that the saga's compiler made a geographical error is the most likely explanation. However, it is unclear whether their contemporaries would have noticed the mistake, or if they were equally misinformed about Mediterranean geography. Røgnvaldr's time in Narbonne must by necessity have occurred following his battle in Galicia (like Sigurðr's own battle there), and possibly after the battle with the dromond (*Orkn.*: 208–35; *Msk.* II: 71–87; *Fsk.*: 315–17; *Msona*: 240–42). Compared to the route and sequence of events of Sigurðr's journey, Queen Ermingerðr may have been a figure comparable to King Roðgeirr ('Roger') of Sicily, who had hosted the Norwegians (*Msona*: 247; *Msk.* II: 71–87; *Fsk.*: 317–18).

The inclusion of royal hosts in the narratives of both journeys follows Hill's established pattern of 'imitation' and serves in both cases to bestow prestige upon the protagonists (Hill 1990–93: 437). The presence of royalty in *Orkneyinga saga* aligns with the depicted motivation for the journey. According to *Orkneyinga saga*, Røgnvaldr was persuaded to lead the expedition after being told that it *muntu þar bezt virðr, sem þú kemr með tignum mǫnnum* ('from that there would bring a great reputation, if you come with distinguished people', *Orkn.*: 193–208). As Carl Phelpstead comments, 'the primary reason for Røgnvaldr's pilgrimage [...] is his intention to enhance his reputation' (Phelpstead 2007: 104). Sigurðr's journey is shown to be similarly motivated in *Morkinskinna*, where it is stated he sought to *kaupa sér Guðs miskunn ok góðan orðstíðir* ('earn God's mercy and good renown', *Msk.* II: 70–71). *Morkinskinna* is the only narrative account to offer a spiritual motivation for Sigurðr's journey, though a material motive remains. *Fagrskinna* offers no comment on Sigurðr's supposed motive, and *Magnússona saga* explains that Sigurðr led the journey at the behest of Norwegians interested in gaining wealth in Mikligarðr ('Constantinople') (*Fsk.*: 315–17; *Msona*: 238). A spiritual

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<sup>4</sup> An old suggestion by Sir George Dasent (1894) for Narbonne being equated to the River Nervión near Bilbao on the Biscay coast of northern Spain is plausible inasmuch as plotting a sensible route, though it does not appear to have gained any attention in subsequent studies.

intent nonetheless features in the narratives due to Sigurðr's arrival in Jerusalem before travelling to Constantinople – if the endeavour was purely material, the fleet could have sailed to Constantinople directly (*Msona*: 249–53; *Msk.* II: 87–96; *Fsk.*: 318–19; Figure 1). It is difficult to untangle the balance of spiritual and material motivations, and one does not necessarily void the other. Material reward could be read as a sign of divine favour, as Svenungsen argues, where the spiritual and material investment and gains were intertwined (Svenungsen 2021: 117–119). Additionally, the motives that are presented are only those which the saga authors state and demonstrate in their accounts, and which doubtless form part of the narrative intent. The depictions of the journeys are designed to enhance the reputation of their protagonists; thus, they concentrate more on prestige and the material than the spiritual elements of the journeys.

Sigurðr is said to have met several royal figures throughout his travels, including Baldwin I in Jerusalem and Emperor Alexios I Komnenos in Constantinople. When entering Constantinople, Sigurðr is said to have given a grand performance to create the impression of being more important and wealthier than he actually was (*Msk.* II: 93–96; *Fsk.*: 319; *Msona*: 252–53). Though giving the illusion of higher status, the self-bestowed grandeur is an obvious performance within the narratives, for the purpose of demonstrating ‘that he is a king equal to the kings of the Mediterranean’, as Ármann Jakobsson explains (2013: 136–39). Because Sigurðr's performance is clearly just that, the descriptions of his enacted grandeur do not add to his status and instead reveal what he is lacking. Rather, the clearest example of where Sigurðr receives prestige in the narratives, and that is not a description of his own self-aggrandisement, is in his encounter with Roðgeirr of Sicily. According to all three narratives, Sigurðr *gaf honum konungs nafn* ‘gave him [Roðgeirr] the name of king’ (*Msona*: 247; *Fsk.*: 317–18; *Msk.* II: 71–87). Sigurðr's own status as king is emphasised through this seemingly simple action, as he is shown to have the power to create another king. However, the episode is undoubtedly fictionalised. While it is plausible that Sigurðr stopped in Sicily, he cannot have made Roðgeirr king. Roðgeirr became king in 1130, about twenty years after Sigurðr's expedition, and the same year in which Sigurðr died and was buried in Oslo (*Msona*: 276; *Fsk.*: 321; *Msk.* II: 151–152; Ármann Jakobsson and Þórður Ingi Guðjónsson, *Msk.* II: 86, fn. 2). The purpose of the tale is then, as Björn Weiler reads it, ‘to invent occasions on which the great status of their protagonist was demonstrated by his giving of crowns and the making of kings’ (Weiler 2010: 78). The scene is a narrative device designed to bestow prestige

upon Sigurðr by creating both a connection with foreign royalty and a lasting impact from that connection.

Likewise, Rognvaldr's stay in Narbonne with Queen Ermingerðr has the same narrative effect. According to *Orkneyinga saga*, Ermingerðr was encourage by her people to host Rognvaldr because *ef hon fagnaði vel svá gófgum mǫnnum, þeim er svá langt váru til komnir ok enn myndi víða bera frægð hennar* ('if she received well such noble men who had come so far, they would carry her fame far and wide', *Orkn.*: 209). Although the focus here is on Ermingerðr, the statement reveals the influence travellers could have on the people with whom they connected themselves, especially when those connections are to people of noble status and bearing. There is no reason to suppose such connections functioned in only one direction. Just as Rognvaldr's presence could add prestige to Ermingerðr, so too does Ermingerðr's presence add to Rognvaldr's reputation. Following Lars Hermanson and Hans Jacob Orning's framework of horizontal bonds, the connection between Rognvaldr and Ermingerðr is presented as mutually beneficial within the narrative, with the potential to be cemented should the two marry (Hermanson & Orning 2020: 54–62; *Orkn.*: 208–15). Though no wedding takes place, the notion alone presents the two as equals (cf. Hermanson & Orning 2020: 54). This comparison and connection elevates Rognvaldr from being a noble earl to a more royal status suitable for a queen. Ermingerðr's presence in the narrative is thereby used to bestow greater status on Rognvaldr, to the extent of suggesting him to be of royal quality.

### **Pious Intent**

Upon reaching the Levant, Rognvaldr's fleet is said to have docked at Akrsborg ('Acre') before Rognvaldr proceeded to visit the *helgustu staði* ('most holy places') and bathe in the River Jordan – all of which mirror Sigurðr's activities in the Kingdom of Jerusalem (*Orkn.*: 224–35; *Msk.* II: 87–95; *Fsk.*: 318; *Msona*: 249–50). While tales of visits to the same pilgrim sites are to be expected, the account of Rognvaldr's arrival in Jerusalem is presented with decidedly less pomp than Sigurðr's (*Orkn.*: 224–35; *Msona*: 249; *Msk.* II: 87–93; *Fsk.*: 318). Whereas Sigurðr is shown to have been hosted by and allied himself with the king of Jerusalem (increasing his tally of royal connections), *Orkneyinga saga* does not mention if Rognvaldr met the ruling king during his stay (*Msona*: 249–50; *Msk.* II: 87–95; *Fsk.*: 318; *Orkn.*: 224–35). While the narratives of Sigurðr's expedition continue to focus on the material gains of the journey and his international reputation with foreign

rulers, *Orkneyinga saga* reveals a more spiritual emphasis in Rognvaldr's narrative. Rather than giving Rognvaldr a greater material reputation, *Orkneyinga saga* highlights his piety and spiritual status. While *Orkneyinga saga* does not conform to hagiographic principles, as Phelpstead demonstrates, the saga nonetheless depicts Rognvaldr's piety in the Holy Land in a way suited for a secular leader and saint (Phelpstead 2007: 110–11).

The legacies of the two leaders and the journeys themselves are the final point of how status and reputation were crafted in the sagas in different ways. While the tales of both journeys are filled with swashbuckling adventure, they are both also presented with piety at least partly in mind. In Sigurðr's narrative this culminates with his receiving a fragment of the Holy Cross, which he is later said to have placed in the church at Konungahella (approximately Ragnhildsholm in Bohuslän, Sweden) (*Fsk.*: 318; *Msk.* II: 87–93; *Msona*: 250, 254–55). Most likely, the relic was a fictionalisation to enhance Sigurðr's reputation and piety.

Both *Ágrip af Nóregskonunga Sögum* and Theodoricus Monachus' *Historia de Antiquitate Regum Norwagiensium* explain that the relic was brought back to Norway by Sigurðr, and this is the main feature in their description of his expedition (*Ágrip*: 48; *Historia*: 52–53). Both texts date to the end of the twelfth century, though the *Historia* predates *Ágrip*, whose author used the *Historia* as a source (cf. Driscoll 2008: xiii–xix). The *Historia* is therefore the oldest extant work to mention the story of the Holy Cross relic and it is possible that the tale was transmitted to *Ágrip* and thence to the longer narrative sagas (cf. *Msk.* I: xxxv–xl). It is unclear whether the tale originated with the *Historia*, which was written in a suitably clerical setting for a pious motif to be added, or whether it grew from an earlier oral tradition that became an established embellishment to Sigurðr's deeds.

The closest contemporary Old Norse records of Sigurðr's voyage still surviving are the slightly fragmentary skaldic poems composed of his voyage, most especially those by Halldórr *skvaldri* (*Útfaradrápa*) and Einarr Skúlason (*Sigurðardrápa* I and II), either during or shortly after the voyage took place. Each poem is designed to praise Sigurðr and his deeds, cheering his success in battle and his honourable conduct throughout the journey. Both *Útfaradrápa* and *Sigurðardrápa* I–II chart much of the expedition and route taken, including the capture of Sætt ('Sidon'). In the prose accounts of both *Magnússona saga* and *Fagrskinna*, Sigurðr is presented as receiving the relic shortly before the siege of Sætt took place, with the relevant supporting verses by both skalds being incorporated into the details of the city's capture (*Msona*: 250; *Fsk.*: 318; Hskv *Útdr.*, v. 11;

ESk *Sigdr* I, v. 5). *Morkinskinna* likewise follows the same narrative structure, but after Sigurðr is said to have received the Holy Cross the text continues to state that Sigurðr bathed in the River Jordan and includes a verse by Þórarinn *stutfeldr* recounting this matter (*Msk.* II: 87–93; *Þstf Stuttdr*, v. 5). An outline of the battle is then included in *Morkinskinna* and is supported by the same two above noted verses set within the prose (*Msk.* II: 93–95; ESk *Sigdr* I, v. 5; Hskv *Útdr*, v. 11). As each of the poems are designed to praise Sigurðr, making note of his achievements, it is likely his receiving of the Holy Cross fragment would have been mentioned and remembered if it had indeed occurred. Either the supposed verses containing mention of the Holy Cross relic were lost by the time the prose works were penned, or, more likely, the poetic narratives never included the Holy Cross scenario, presumably because it did not happen. Other works such as Albert of Aachen’s *Historia Ierosolimitana* (Edgington 2013: 166–71), the *Gesta Francorum Iherusalem peregrinantium* by Fulcher of Chartres (1969: 199–200), and William of Tyre’s *Historia rerum in partibus transmarinis gestarum* (1943: 486–488) also mention Sigurðr’s voyage. Of these, Fulcher of Chartres was writing closest to the time of the voyage, and Albert of Aachen was working from around a decade after (Fulcher of Chartres 1969: 18–24; Edgington 2013: 2–3). Being clerical works, each history has reason to include an exchange of the Holy Cross between King Baldwin and Sigurðr *Jórsalafari*, but as none do it must be assumed the tale was a strictly Old Norse addition without a factual basis. Nevertheless, Lukas Raupp considers the relic to have been imported as a legitimising tool for Sigurðr’s kingship and in the power struggles between Magnús *inn blindi* (‘the blind’) and Haraldr *gilli* (‘the servant [of Christ]’) (Raupp 2021: 156–64). Whether Sigurðr did return with an item that was believed to be a relic of the Holy Cross cannot be certain, but it is clear that stories about a relic and the prestige and legitimation it could bestow grew after his return to Norway. In this way, the stories were of equal if not greater political and reputational significance than the supposed relic itself.

Throughout his journey, rather than being depicted as a pious leader, Sigurðr is instead shown as being more concerned with the political connections he could make on his travels and in providing an impression of himself and of Norway as being far greater than they necessarily were. The *Morkinskinna* and *Magnússon saga* accounts of his arrival in Constantinople are filled with grandeur and show him to have been dismissive of gifts of wealth (*Msona*: 250–53; *Msk.* II: 93–98). As Ármann Jakobsson notes, ‘the journey is a spectacle with the main function of enhancing the king’s prestige’ (2013: 123). The same sentiment holds true for Rǫgnvaldr, though for Sigurðr it is entirely the point of his

voyage. Even without specific details of events, the route Sigurðr takes is deliberately chosen to ensure his meeting with as many members of nobility and royalty as possible. In essence it is a journey for political networking.

Though Rognvaldr seems to have similar political motivations throughout his travels (such as his stay in Narbonne and positive reception from the Byzantine emperor), his journey is decidedly more pious than Sigurðr's, despite Phelpstead's claims that the saga 'provides little evidence for exceptional piety on the part of Earl Rognvaldr' (Phelpstead 2007: 104). Comparing the routes of the two expeditions, it is immediately clear that, had he wished it, Sigurðr could have easily included Rome among his list of destinations, most plausibly either before or after his time in Sicily (Figure 1). As none of Sigurðr's narratives mention a diversion to Rome, being the seat of the papacy and another major pilgrim city, it must be assumed that piety was of lesser concern to his reputation than building political connections. As with his outbound travel, the narratives of Sigurðr's journey home to Norway are likewise sprinkled with names of other nobles whom it is claimed he met (*Msona*: 253–54).<sup>5</sup> By contrast, Rognvaldr's route deliberately backtracks on itself for the purpose of showing him to have visited Rome after staying in Jerusalem and Constantinople (Figure 2). Rognvaldr's depicted route therefore shows deliberate piety, from both a predetermined direction of travel and the additional time it would have taken to make such a detour westward from Constantinople rather than simply returning north as Sigurðr had done.

Pious preoccupations are also apparent in the verse Rognvaldr is said to have composed upon approaching the city of Jerusalem after visiting the River Jordan (*Orkn.*: 224–35; *Rv Lv*, v. 29):

*Kross hangir þul þessum*  
– þjóst skyli lægt – fyr brjósti,  
– flykkisk fram á brekkur  
ferð – en palmr meðal herða.

'A cross hangs on the breast of this poet, and a palm between his shoulders; the tumult ought to be lessened; the group crowds forward on the slopes.'

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<sup>5</sup> With regard to the various nobles encountered on the return journey, Magnússon saga chapter 13 (pp. 253–254) notes that Sigurðr firstly leaves Alexios I Komnenos in Constantinople (whom the saga call 'Kirjalax'), before meeting Lothair III (the duke of Saxony, and later Holy Roman Emperor) (cf. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, *Msona*: 254, footnote 1), and finally Nikolàs ('Niels') Sveinsson of Denmark, who is said to have provided Sigurðr with a ship to reach Norway (*Msona*: 253–254).

As the poet, Rǫgnvaldr's imagery is clear in how he wished to depict himself and his conduct in approaching Jerusalem: a pious and respectful pilgrim. Erin Michelle Goeres notes how the poem contrasts to 'Rǫgnvaldr's representation of himself in other verses as a young, active warrior' (Goeres 2015: 27). This is not entirely surprising. Whereas elsewhere, Rǫgnvaldr is portrayed in both the *Orkneyinga saga* prose and his own poetry as a cavalier nobleman, in the context of the presented moment he is presented as a simple man among many others without need of earthly glory. The portrayal is deliberately humbling and pious. Notably, Sigurðr is not depicted in similar humility in his narratives.

Additionally, as Jesch identifies in the verse, Rǫgnvaldr is also 'urging his men to behave respectfully as they approach the holy places' (Rv Lv: 606). Rǫgnvaldr is therefore concerned with both his own piety and the spiritual significance of his travels, as well as in the conduct of those accompanying him, either as concern for their own spiritual elevation or for the reputation their conduct and company could transfer to him. If they did not act in a respectful manner, by association their conduct could tarnish his pious reputation. As such, it was important for the whole company to display the appropriate behaviour and respect to the places they visited. Whereas Sigurðr's expedition is shown to have built status and reputation in a purely political sphere, Rǫgnvaldr's efforts are shown to have focused on a religious acts and the building of a pious reputation. On the question of piety, the combined description in *Orkneyinga saga* of Rǫgnvaldr's route and his conduct in Jerusalem create a strong image of a man more concerned with the piety of his journey than with the political connections he could make. This does not negate the depictions of the material and political aspects of his journey, but places them in context with and beneath the devout intent of the pilgrimage. Rǫgnvaldr is therefore shown to undertake his expedition with greater piety than Sigurðr took his, and so is bestowed with greater prestige for his religiosity.

## **Concluding Remarks**

The narratives of Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson's and Sigurðr *Jórsalafari's* respective journeys are filled with similarities, such as the routes taken, the places where battles were fought, and the political connections that were made. However, looking closely at just a few key aspects of these journeys reveals differences in the details of Rǫgnvaldr's and Sigurðr's narratives, with the effect of the presentations bestowing different types and degrees of prestige on either leader. Overall, in the accounts of the battles in Galicia, Rǫgnvaldr is

shown to be the more active leader as the narrative details how the battle was fought and won (*Orkn.*: 212–19). The *Morkinskinna* account of Sigurðr's battle against the Galician lord attempts a similar effect by showing Sigurðr to rouse his company to fight, but fails to provide any description of the tactics used (*Msk.* II: 71–87). In this account, and in *Magnússona saga* and *Fagrskinna*, it is simply enough that Sigurðr won the battle to earn him renown. *Orkneyinga saga*, meanwhile, both grants Rǫgnvaldr with glory for his victory, and explains how he earned it.

The depictions of royal connections is one of the most similar features in both journeys. These connections build the reputations of both Sigurðr and Rǫgnvaldr, and reciprocate the prestige their presence brings to their hosts. However, subtle differences are still apparent. Sigurðr's status as king is emphasised when he is said to have elevated Roðgeirr of Sicily to the same status, but Sigurðr's standing otherwise remains the same (*Msona*: 247; *Msk.* II: 85–86; *Fsk.*: 317–318). By contrast, though Rǫgnvaldr receives no stated promotion, he is heavily implied to be of royal calibre through his meeting with Queen Ermingerðr, and *Orkneyinga saga* presents an honorary elevation of his status in the narrative (*Orkn.*: 209–12). In this way, *Orkneyinga saga* emphasises Rǫgnvaldr's quality and equates him to being a king in all but title.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, Rǫgnvaldr is shown to be a more pious pilgrim than Sigurðr, and thus earns greater spiritual prestige. Though both journeys are depicted with material motivations, only Rǫgnvaldr is portrayed in religious humility, and is said to have taken extra measures to visit Rome as well as Jerusalem (*Orkn.*: 231–36). There are no equivalent depictions of Sigurðr in pious humility, and he visits only the most necessary sites in Jerusalem. Piety is therefore more apparent in the narrative of Rǫgnvaldr's journey, which features as an additional form of prestige in *Orkneyinga saga*.

By studying the differences between the narratives of the two journeys, it is therefore apparent that different forms of prestige are invoked by the authors, and that this prestige is emphasised or bestowed in different ways. *Morkinskinna*, *Fagrskinna*, and *Magnússona saga* all concentrate on the material benefits of Sigurðr's journey and bestow status by simply stating his actions and victories. A different approach is used in *Orkneyinga saga* for the narrative of Rǫgnvaldr's journey, where his actions and victories

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that despite Norwegian claims to overlordship of the earldom of Orkney, the reality of this relationship was more complicated, with increasing Norwegian claims to authority in the central and later medieval period (see Imsen 2003; Wærdahl 2011).

are depicted in greater detail instead of simple statements that they occurred. Røgnvaldr is thereby equated to figures of higher status without performance, and his overall greater piety is demonstrated. Through these narrative details and devices, Røgnvaldr is bestowed with greater prestige than Sigurðr. While the similar journeys of Sigurðr and Røgnvaldr were roughly equivalently prestigious, how that prestige was bestowed in the narratives is decidedly different.

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# Haraldr Maddaðarson and Scoto-Orcadian Politics before 1222\*

Neil McGuigan

**A**t Northallerton (Yorkshire) in 1138, a tightly organised group of Anglo-Norman knights managed to repulse a numerically superior force sent against them by David I, king of the Scots (r. 1124–53). The encounter, the ‘Battle of the Standard’, is documented in numerous near-contemporary sources, among them a dedicated tract by the English Cistercian abbot Aelred of Rievaulx, himself a former member of the Scottish court. There are numerous highly valuable points of interest within the abbot’s account, and one of these is that amid the vast array of soldiers at the command of the Scottish potentate there were not a small number of [Hebridean] islanders and of Orcadians’ (*insulanis et Orchadensibus non parvam multitudinem*) (*RdS* 3: 181, author’s translation). Aelred does not explain the presence of Orcadians, perhaps because the detail was incidental.<sup>1</sup>

Seemingly David I was able at least to summon sizeable contingents from the lands of the earldom of Orkney to participate in a military expedition to England. It happens that David I’s authority beyond the river Oykel, c. 1140, is attested independently by diplomatic evidence. This consists of a brieve (or writ) issued by the Scottish king in the 1140s commanding the *comites* (‘earls’) of Orkney and ‘Caithness’ to protect the *manachi* (‘monks’) dwelling at *Durnach in Cateneis*,<sup>2</sup> i.e. Dornoch in what is now Sutherland (*Chrs*

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<sup>1</sup> Although unrelated to the presence of Orcadians in David I’s army, it is worth noting here that in the major accounts of the battle a certain Radulf Novell, (by this point titular) bishop of Orkney (see Harrington 2022), is presented as a leading figure on the ‘English’ side. Radulf’s episcopate is discussed further below. For the Normans of Yorkshire, see Dalton 1994.

<sup>2</sup> This pluralised word appears to Latinise Old Irish *manach* (pl. *manaig*), itself derived from Latin *monachus* (pl. *monachi*), ‘monk’. The term could mean ‘a member of the religious community’, including a ‘monk’ but perhaps could also refer to a lay dependent such as a tenant of ecclesiastical property. A twelfth-century *comes* in a document like this could refer to a Scandinavian *jarl* but also to a Scottish mormaer or Anglo-Norman earl/count, and potentially titles of similar or analogous status.

*David I*: 127–28, no. 155; Barrow 1997: 83–84). The document, preserved in the cartulary of Dunfermline Abbey, names a certain *Reinwaldus* as one of the intended recipients. The figure in question must be Rǫgnvaldr Kali Kolsson, with the other *comes*, his co-earl, the young Haraldr Maddaðarson. The verbs *mandare* and *praecipere* (both ‘to command, order’) suggest that David I’s relation with the earls was that of an overlord, at least in relation to the territory around Dornoch. Barbara Crawford, in her influential 1985 study of the ‘Earldom of Caithness and Kingdom of Scotland’, was a little dismissive of the *brieve*, referring to the Scottish king’s ‘pretensions to authority in the area’ as ‘rather remarkable’ (Crawford 1985: 28), but by the time of her monograph in 2013 Crawford had come to accept that ‘Rǫgnvaldr must have acknowledged King David’s authority’ in the matter concerned (Crawford 2013: 185).

In the last decades a number of studies of Scoto–Orcadian relations have brought much needed light (among the most prominent, see Chesnutt 1981; Topping 1983; Crawford 1985, 2013; Thomson 2008). Nonetheless, these contributions have tended to share a number of assumptions or arguments that in the following article I would like to address and modify. In particular, I want to move some of the emphasis away from processual conflict based on aggression and resistance, and cultural and jurisdictional conflict. The tendency to take an extremely *Orkneyinga saga* centric view of the twelfth century needs to be countered, something that is possible due to the presence of useful material of equal or superior date or provenance, such as Aelred of Rievaulx or the Dornoch *brieve*. Reliance on the saga and its back-projected view of the past has also tended to contribute to the idea that the twelfth century was simply a relatively uninteresting extension of a long Viking Age. If we try to look at these matters from the point of view of strictly twelfth-century sources, then the 1130s, 1140s. and 1150s were an era of incredible historical possibility and dynamism, when the terms of Scoto–Orcadian relations were yet to be set. Moreover, we also need to be more sensitive to what we know about the Scottish political system itself in the twelfth century, and in what follows I shall also try to show how Earl Haraldr’s life and career can be best understood not as an opponent of Scottish expansionism but as a member of the Scottish elite. Indeed, Haraldr was part of the Scottish royal family, a beneficiary of the ambition of his kinsman David I but also subsequently a participant in the process of internal dynastic fragmentation that followed David’s death.

## ***Orkneyinga saga* and Scoto-Orcadian relations**

As documents produced in their original form in the 1140s and 1150s, the *brieve* (modern Scottish English for ‘writ’) and the testimony of Aelred provide two of the earliest contemporary windows on Scoto-Orcadian relations. However, witnesses like these have not always been given due weight by scholars of twelfth-century Orcadian affairs, sidelined by the large charismatic narrative, traditionally known as *Orkneyinga saga* (McGuigan 2011, 2021: 7, 353–61). This saga appears to have been finalised in Iceland by c. 1230, but was built from an underlying, potentially Orcadian source compiled in earlier decades, perhaps as early as the 1190s (Jesch 2005: 13–14; Ellis 2022: 112–13). In the saga’s extant form, a large proportion of twelfth-century events tend to be woven around the alleged deeds of a certain Sveinn Ásleifarson (e.g. see Jesch 1996: 83; Chesnutt 1981: 334 for apparent termination proto-saga at Sveinn’s death), a powerful landowner within the earldom and we hear nothing of Dornoch or Orcadians in any Scottish army. Still, even the *Orkneyinga saga*’s enthusiasts will not need to look strenuously to contextualise what Aelred and the *brieve* appear to suggest about growing Scottish power in the northlands. The narrator is keen to aggrandise Sveinn by giving him a prominent role in relations with David, and so the saga does have a lot to say about Scoto-Orcadian relations at various points. Indeed, among the significant political interactions is a relatively long account about David I’s intervention in the Orcadian succession that arose, we are led to believe, from the engineered demise of Earl Páll (II) Hákonarson (*fl.* 1120s–30s).

One of the remarkable things within the saga is the political detail the narrator presents, exciting but also potentially very treacherous for any historian usually forced to confine their imagination to the content of short annals or charters. If we are to follow the account and, for argument’s sake, broadly accept its synchronisms (the saga offers little by the way of any explicit chronological framework), then in the 1120s Orkney’s territories were ruled by Páll (II) Hákonarson, one of the two sons of Hákon Pálsson (died c. 1123). The demise of Earl Páll then occurs under pressures simultaneously originating from royal courts in the mainland of Norway and Scotland. We are told how a Norwegian nobleman named Kali, supported by King Sigurðr Magnússon of Norway, tried to pressure Earl Páll to surrender half of his earldom (*OS*: 116). Kali’s father Kolr Kalason, we learn, had been a key follower of King Magnús *berfættr* (‘Barefoot’ or ‘Barelegs’), and as a result of his service had been given Páll’s kinswoman Gunnhildr Erlendsdóttir, daughter of Earl Erlendr Þorfinnsson (died c. 1098), in marriage (*OS*: 88). From this union is born Kali, who later (having been given the name Rognvaldr by the king of Norway) presented what

Earl Páll is said by the saga to have called a ‘feeble claim’ to the earldom (OS: 118).<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately for Earl Páll, this claim had the less-than-feeble political support of the Norwegian king himself; and we are likewise told that Kali Kolsson also formed a pact with a certain Frakøkk, daughter of Moddan, a powerful noblewoman in Sutherland (OS: 116–19).

Frakøkk, the account elaborates, had an established alliance with the Scots, having arranged the marriage of Earl Páll’s sister Margarét Hákonardóttir to Matad (rendered in Old Norse as *Maddaðr*), son of Máel Muire (Old Norse: *Melmari*) the mormaer of Atholl. Frakøkk agreed to support the Norwegian incomer in hopes of furthering her own ambition to control the earldom. After some setbacks, the previously mentioned Sveinn Ásleifarson captured Earl Páll and dispatched him to Matad’s homeland of Atholl, never to be seen again (OS: 139), killed or tonsured—the author claims to have encountered conflicting accounts; and as a result, Røgnvaldr Kali Kolsson obtained his end (see OS, chs 63–75). But these developments lead to interest from Scotland, and an attempt to promote Haraldr, the son of Matad and Margarét, to the earldom. We are told that in the days after Christmas, in the second year of Røgnvaldr’s time in Orkney, that a certain ‘bishop John came down from Scotland from Atholl’ (*Jón byskup [kom] ofan af Skotlandi af Atjoklum*) (ÍF 34: 175; OS: 143).<sup>4</sup> The Scottish bishop and his Orcadian counterpart Bishop William formulated an agreement dividing the earldom between Haraldr Maddaðarson and Røgnvaldr. The agreement was to be ratified during Lent in Caithness, after which it ‘was sealed with sworn oaths of all the best men of Orkney and Scotland’ (*var bundin eiðum inna beztu manna af Orkneyjum ok af Skotlandi*); subsequently, ‘Haraldr Maddaðarson went out to Orkney with Earl Røgnvaldr and was given the title of earl’ (*[f]ór þá Haraldr Maddaðarson út í Orkneyjar með Røgnvaldi jarli, ok var honum þá gefit jarlsnafn*) (ÍF 34: 176; OS: 143).

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<sup>3</sup> *Orkneyinga saga* chapter 61 states that after king Sigurðr *jórsalafari* Magnússon of Norway had granted Kali both half of Orkney and the title of earl, the king also gave Kali the name Røgnvaldr. The saga states Kali received the name in order to associate him with a previous earl of Orkney named Røgnvaldr Brúsason, who was regarded as ‘the most able of all the Earls of Orkney’.

<sup>4</sup> It should be noted here that while the text of *Orkneyinga saga* states that Bishop John had arrived from Atholl, this does not indicate that Atholl was John’s episcopal see. Rather the text is only indicating from where Bishop John began his journey to reach the islands.

## Traditional models of conflict

For Crawford, Earl Haraldr's appointment had been part of a 'Scottish' policy in Caithness characterised by 'repeated efforts to bring under firm control Caithness and its ruling earls' (Crawford 1985: 25), attempts undermined by cultural conflict between the Scots and Scottish-imposed bishops on the one hand and with the earls and Caithness locals on the other. Crawford suggested that the imposition of Haraldr 'did not have fruitful results for the Scottish cause' because Haraldr 'was not enthusiastic about the policy of spreading Scottish influence in Caithness' (Crawford 1985: 28). Patrick Topping expressed similar sentiment when he stated that Haraldr's 'Scottish connection [...] was the same connection which he was to struggle so violently against during the latter part of the [twelfth] century' (Topping 1983: 106–7). Much of the traditional analysis of this topic has concentrated on the tensions surrounding the jurisdictional demands of the 'Scottish' bishops of Caithness, Aindreas (or Andrew) of Dunfermline and Adam of Melrose, wherein historians have presented the earl as a recalcitrant Norse traditionalist defending his peasants against the greed of intrusive foreigner bishops, invariably presented (speculatively) as absentees. As Crawford wrote of the death of Bishop Adam, 'the earl and "bondi" [free-farmers] were at one in their hatred of the bishop [Adam] and all he stood for' (Crawford 1985: 28).

Part of the issue is that Haraldr has been framed as a figure divorced from the Scottish political system after the 1140s. This framing is, however, inaccurate, as throughout his life Haraldr was a patrilineal descendant of a Scottish king and a member of the extended Scottish royal family, the ruling dynasty—something we will look at further below.<sup>5</sup> Another tendency, to see Haraldr as 'half Scottish' (Crawford 1985: 28), appears to slightly offset this notion. It is accurate on the surface, as Haraldr himself was a member of prestigious descent group from what we would now regard as the 'Scottish Highlands'. However, the use of the term 'half' relates to imaginary genetics; and if we are talking about cultural experience, we must remember that it is always perfectly possible to be 100% immersed in several cultural groups even when they are separated by language. No one has ever suggested that Haraldr's paternal background would be any barrier to familiarity with the Norse background of his mother's lineage, but there is nothing to suggest anything likewise vice versa. He is the *Maddaðarson* in the Icelandic language of

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<sup>5</sup> Note for instance Earl Haraldr's commitment to gift the abbey of Scone, sited at 'chief seat' (*RRS* 1: 256, no. 234) and ritual centre of the Scottish kingdom, one mark every year, to which he bound his heir *Turpinus*, that is, Þórfinnr (*Scone Lib.*: 37, no. 58). The charter must precede the death of the latter c. 1201 and follow the beginning of Earl Haraldr's adulthood but is otherwise undatable.

the saga, but Gaelic *Macmadit* (i.e. *mac Mataid*) as presented in the Latin writing of the contemporary English chronicler and diplomat Roger of Howden (*RHC* 4: 10, s.a. 1196). It is sometimes casually supposed that Haraldr spent all of his early years in Orkney (Thomson 2008: 114), but even the saga itself appears to indicate the contrary. We are told how until he was approximately 20 years old, Haraldr fell into the care of a certain Þorbjörn *klerkr* ('the Clerk'), grandson of Frakǫkk, who 'sometimes [...] lived in Orkney and sometimes in Scotland' (*þá ýmist út í Orkneyjum eðr uppi í Skotlandi*) (*ÍF* 34: 176; *OS*: 143; cf. *OS*: 209, ch. 102) and was later 'very highly' regarded by King Máel Coluim IV of Scotland (*OS*: 208).<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps the bishops are another matter. The first known bishop of Caithness, Andrew, was a Gaelic Scot who came with Earl Haraldr, possibly the model for the 'John from Atholl' of the *Orkneyinga saga* but confused with his successor, who was indeed called John.<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, it is tempting to assume that Andrew would have found it easier to cooperate with the *manachi* around Dornoch or Gaelic/Gaelicised landowners south of the Ord of Caithness than in the Dales of Thurso; then again, it is not obvious that we have the right to back-project the cultural division between [Gaelic] 'Sutherland' and [Norse] 'Caithness-proper' evident in subsequent centuries into the 1140s. In any

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<sup>6</sup> Norse names were used among a handful of aristocratic families in the heartlands of twelfth-century Scotland as well as Lothian, including kindreds who supplied the mormaers of Fife and the sheriffs in Lothian. It is worth noting also, perhaps, one prominent clerk who serves as bishop of Brechin (Angus) from c. 1175, whose name usually appears in Scottish scholarship as 'Turpin' (Watt and Murray 2003: 53; Watt 1977: 549). If the underlying name was Norse, we would expect it to represent 'Þórfinnr', but it is not impossible that it assimilated 'Þórbjörn' too in the diplomatic context of Scottish charter production, based on Anglo-French Latin. D. E. R. Watt identified Turpin of Brechin with a clerk and university graduate who appears in documents connected with the king and bishop of St Andrews from the 1160s (Watt 1977: 548–9). A potential connection between clerics in Angus and Frakǫkk would be interesting in light of the later links between the province and northlands, though Turpin's tenure of Brechin would not necessarily mean he had pre-existing links there.

<sup>7</sup> We learn from postmortem sources that he owned a toft in Forfar, Angus (*RRS* 2: 305, no. 280), and once had the gift of the Holy Trinity Church (Little Dunkeld) at Dunkeld (*SEA*: 45–46, no. 42), along with ecclesiastical properties in Gowrie and Angus (*Dunf. Reg.*: 151, no. 236; *PoMS*, no. 202). In 1172 a certain Gille Brigte son of Eógan of Monorgan in Gowrie is described as Andrew's *nepos*, that is a 'junior male relative' (*RRS* 2: 208–9, no. 133; *AED*: 235–36, no. 28; *PoMS*, no. 1316), leaving us to presume that Eógan of Monorgan was Andrew's older brother. We also know that Andrew employed a *clericus* named Muiredach, who subscribed charters of the bishops of Dunkeld (*SEA*: 42–44, nos 39–40). Although not conclusive, it would suggest strongly that Andrew hailed a family closely connected to Dunkeld, and almost certainly from Tayside. In that context it is difficult not to wonder if he was a junior member of the Atholl family and thus also of the extended royal family.

case, there is no evidence that Andrew had any difficulties as a bishop. The opposition of Andrew's successor, Bishop John, to a papal tax along with John's poor relationship with Earl Haraldr appear to have led to his mutilation (Crawford 1974), but this bishop's background is unknown. In the case of Bishop Adam, he was a Cistercian monk, from childhood brought up in Melrose, Teviotdale, originally perhaps from Cumberland. In terms of ethnic affiliation, he would have been identified as English in this period (Broun 2007b). It is here that cultural tension might be the most tempting as an explanation, especially because Adam was killed by the province's farmers amidst tension about the collection of *teinds* ('tithes') (see Fairfax 2021). However, due to the similarities of contemporary English and Norse he was likely the better suited linguistically for pastoral work in Caithness—proper than Andrew.<sup>8</sup> Simply put, when it comes to complex political developments speculation about cultural conflict offers the historian very little, and is certainly no replacement for well-informed, detailed analysis based on something like rational self-interest or the familiar logic of economic or dynastic conflict.

The struggle in Caithness over *teinds* was not rooted in differing Scottish or Norse cultural traditions but was one of a number of regional flashpoints that came to be intertwined with the implementation of ecclesiastical reform in 'marginal' parts of Latin Christendom. Crawford herself pointed to a number of instances from other regions undermining the peculiarity of the Caithness dispute (Crawford 1985: 28–29). Pope Innocent IV, notably, would complain during the minority of Alexander III that magnate opposition to ecclesiastical privilege was a problem across Scotland (*Moray Reg.*: 334–38, no. 260; *SSC*: 212–17, Appendix 1, no. 6) and the Church faced similar opposition to *teinds* in Carrick and Lennox, Gaelic-speaking provinces on the Firth of Clyde (*Glasgow Reg.*: 117, 119–20, nos 139 and 141). As Crawford also pointed out, the policy was also imposed by the Norwegian Church, leading to resistance in the Hebrides (Crawford 1985: 28–29; *DN* 7: 10–11, no. 10).

The tendency to resort to models of 'ethnic antagonism' to understand broader political conflict is an idiosyncratic feature of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Scottish historiography, and it is important that scholars of Scoto-Orcadian affairs move away from it (Hammond 2007; McGuigan 2022: 479–81). A similar dark shadow has been cast by a

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<sup>8</sup> Particularly worth noting here is that in the chronicle maintained in Adam's home monastery, Bishop Adam's place of death is recorded *apud manerium episcopalem que Haukirc lingua Anglicana nominatur* ('at the episcopal manor which is called Halkirk in the English tongue') (*Chron. Melrose*: 139, s.a. 1222; Stevenson 1837: 139).

propensity in British and European scholarship more generally to analyse state-building as a struggle between ambitious, ‘modernising’ kings and recalcitrant, conservative local potentates. In recent scholarship there has been a move instead to understand the growing control of kings and aristocrats as symbiotic processes; that aristocratic power was as much constitutive of ‘state power’ as that of monarchs, and that the growth of mighty nobles such as earls was key to expanding royal authority (Taylor 2016: 20). The twelfth and thirteenth centuries were an age of jurisdictional expansion, competition and settlement. Kings sought to define their zones of power vis-à-vis other kings, and monopolise their ideological role within these zones, but ‘intensive’ ‘state’-power (i.e. local micromanagement) was generally out of the question (at least outside a small ‘core’). Instead, the more that a regional node like an earl or baron was able to act as local autocrat the more effective he was as conduit of royal authority. As long as there was a substantial difference in power and prestige between the monarch and the local potentate, the latter could be selectively ‘controlled from above’ when necessary.

If Scottish royal authority was weak in Orcadian territories, boosting the power of its earls would have been in the twelfth century one of the easiest ways to increase it. Expanding royal authority became most difficult when there was a lack of established regional autocrats who could theoretically function as ‘nodes’ of control. It was in areas with diffuse distribution of power, where the “middle classes” preserved their traditional Viking Age agency, that kings had difficulty. The problem of the earls in Orkney and Caithness was likely their own lack of local command, something which is prevalent in the sources that so characteristically credit considerable dramatic agency to unpredictable assemblies and free-spirited local chiefs. Thus, aggrandising kings would be disposed to support enforcement of teinds not only as a way of boosting their own ideological credibility but also because it would concentrate resources in fewer places: control could be exercised more effectively with fewer nodes, a single bishop or earl.

Late in his life, Earl Haraldr himself is alleged to have pleaded to King Sverrir Sigurðarson that ‘the men of Orkney do not always act as I wish; many leave the Orkneys to plunder in Ireland and Scotland, to pillage merchants, and all contrary to my wish’ (*eigi gera Orkneyingar allt eftir mínum vilja. Margir hlaupa út ór Orkneyjum ok herja á Írland eða Skotland eða ræna kaupmenn, ok allir at óvilja mínum*) (ÍF 30: 191; Sephton 1899: 156). The deniability was plausible enough to those who mattered: kings like Sverrir of Norway and Alexander II of Scotland accepted it as a mitigating factor when the activity (or lack of it) from the earls forced them to intervene in Orcadian affairs. In the case of Alexander II,

the Scottish king did confiscate territory from Earl John, son of Haraldr, because of ineffective action, but critically he also relied on the earl's cooperation to punish the perpetrators and thus maintain his own royal authority as protector of the Church (*Scotichron.* 5: 114–15, representing *Gesta Annalia I*: s.a. 1222).<sup>9</sup> Crawford, as previously noted, suggested that 'the earl and "bondi" were at one in their hatred of the bishop and all he stood for' (Crawford 1985: 28), but we are on more solid ground if we accept that the earl's political choices were constrained by the same forces that limited the bishop's power: the presence and strength of a large, vocal "middle class" (Barrett 2005: 219–21).

### **The Earldom and Firthlands**

No Orcadian earl is known in contemporary sources until 1014, when one is named among the defeated Dublin-Leinster faction at the battle of Clontarf (Woolf 2007: 300), and it is not until 1066 that we hear of another (*ASC*: 140–45, s.a. 1066; *ASC D*: 79–81, s.a. 1066; *Chron. ex chron.* 2: 604–5, s.a. 1066). If we put the pseudo-historical material that characterises the *Orkneyinga saga*'s 'Viking Age' sections to one side, the existence of the Orcadian earldom prior to the eleventh century is uncertain and even by the early twelfth our picture of Orcadian succession politics remains patchy. Nonetheless, in broader terms we can be reasonably sure that the zone north of the river Oykel had fallen under heavy Scandinavian settlement after c. 900. Although we cannot be sure of local terminology, it would not be unreasonable to assume that the area hosted 'big men' similar to the 'earls' and 'holds' (mentioned in *OS* ch. 55 as the title of Þorbjörn *klerkr*'s father Þorsteinn) who settled England. Even in the *Orkneyinga saga* there are more earls in the region than simply the earl of Orkney, for instance one of Frakþokk's brothers, Óttarr, is referred to as 'earl' of Thurso (*OS*: 101). Moreover, in the saga we are presented with a persistent division of the region, sometimes between members of the same family and sometimes under pressure from outsiders. The Dornoch brieve confirms the saga's account that this was the case in the time of Rognvaldr.

One is tempted to wonder to what extent it is reasonable to conceive of the northern lands as a stable, unitary polity, rather than a poly-cephalous political

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<sup>9</sup> *Gesta Annalia I* refers to a proposed annalistic chronicle centred on the deeds of the ancestors and descendants of St Margaret, wife of Máel Coluim III, that takes events up to 1285. The underlying material was produced at Dunfermline in the thirteenth century, but survives only as part of the historical work presented by John of Fordun (*fl.* c. 1370) and subsequently Walter Bower (d. 1449) (Broun 1999, 2007a, 2024: 401–2; Taylor 2009: 7–8).

community; more like the Danelaw around 900 than, say, the Isle of Man in 1200. The horizon for detailed literary sources (like the *brieve* discussed above, or the ecclesiastical correspondence discussed below) does not, after all, appear until about 1140 when the earlship itself is divided and ecclesiastical institutions actively undergoing reorganisation. Perhaps, we may be entitled to wonder, if this itself was the period of formation for the familiar ‘Orcadian earldom’, analogous to the kingdom of Man that was emerging under Óláfr Guðrøðarson (reigned c. 1113–53). The intense move to reorganise ecclesiastical structures of the Orcadian earldom from the 1130s, leading to the foundation of Kirkwall Cathedral in the north and the first bishop of Caithness in the south, can be seen as part of similar trajectory of centralisation. Is it a coincidence that the same years witness the appearance of two new lines of earls, from Norway and Scotland, imposed through the influence of their respective kings? Unfortunately, our picture of the region before the 1140s has been set by historical writing of the thirteenth and fourteenth century, and it is very difficult to reimagine it. What is presented to us for the ‘Viking Age’, unsurprisingly, is little different to the realm of the Orcadian earls in the late twelfth century.

At this point, it is worth considering some of the nomenclature involved. There were significant differences between Scottish and Norse terminology for the region, and what the terminology might have suggested about ‘the past’ of the earldom, especially south of the Pentland Firth. In the world of the saga the earldom encompasses not only Orkney itself, but also Shetland and the mainland part of Great Britain referred to as ‘Caithness’. *Katanes* is an example that occurs elsewhere in Norse Britain where a placename encompassing the element *-nes* is used for a recognisable type of regional community, of similar size and coastal position. Other examples including Holderness, Amounderness, Furness, Hartness, Durness, and possibly, Desnes and Farines both in Galloway — a province based on a ‘headland’, *nes*, seeming large enough to support a ‘hold’ (McGuigan 2024: 140–41). The name *Catenes* appears in a text of tenth-century provenance (but twelfth-century form) as the furthest point reached by the fleet of King Æthelstan in 934 (*Chron.* 957: 93, s.a. 934). There is of course no indication about the boundaries of early *Catenes*, but the potential longevity of the concept is worth noting.

In the later Middle Ages, the province of Caithness was not commonly held to include the area south of the Ord, which was instead regarded as part of Sutherland (Old Norse: *Suðrland*, lit. ‘southland’). The latter does appear in *Orkneyinga saga*, more than a dozen times. We are told, for instance, that King Máel Coluim of Scotland ‘gave Thorfinn [‘the Mighty’, his grandson] Caithness and Sutherland, granted him the title of earl, and

appointed counsellors to govern with him’ (*gaf Þorfinni dóttursyni sínum Katanes ok Suðrland, ok jarlsnafn ok setti menn til landráða með honum*) (ÍF 34: 28; OS: 38).<sup>10</sup> The account proceeds to tell us that Þorfinnr’s right to the inheritance of his brother Sumarliði was blocked by their brother Einarr because he ‘argued that Caithness and Sutherland, which were in Thorfinn’s hands, had been part of his father’s earldom’ (*sagði at Þorfinnr hefði Katanes ok Suðrland, þát ríki, er átt hafði faðir þeira*) (ÍF 34: 28; OS: 39). Later the saga recounts that King Máel Coluim’s successor, the fictitious Karl Hundason, sought to replace Þorfinnr with a certain ‘Mutatan or Muddan’ in Sutherland and Caithness (OS: 51). Although not explicitly identified as the same man, in the time of Earl Hákon we are introduced to Moddan, ‘a rich and well-born man, living in the Dales of Caithness’ (*bjó sá maðr í Dali á Katanesi, [...] gofugr maðr ok vellauðigr*) (ÍF 34: 114; OS: 97). This introductory account proceeds to name Moddan’s daughters and various marriage links. Sutherland appears several times again as the base for both Moddan’s daughter Frakøkk and her nephew Haraldr Maddaðarson (see OS, chs 54–55, 63, 112).<sup>11</sup>

Frakøkk herself, and her father Moddan both seem to have Gaelic names;<sup>12</sup> and the fact that they were linked to an eleventh-century king named Máel Coluim, may indicate that Scottish penetration of Sutherland had begun a century before the Dornoch *manachi* appear in David I’s *brieve*. If so the ‘King Máel Coluim’ in question is likely to have been Máel Coluim mormaer of Moray (d. 1029), and not Máel Coluim II (d. 1033). The former was given the title ‘king of Scotland’ in his own Irish obit (AT: 369, *s.a.* 1029.5) and his position underlay that of his successor Macbeth, who after 1040 was ruler

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<sup>10</sup> Here the young Þorfinnr is five years old, and the account is almost certainly more to do with Haraldr Maddaðarson than Þorfinnr. In general, the saga’s account of Earl Þorfinnr seems to say more about Haraldr’s time than his own, but that is perhaps a subject for another article.

<sup>11</sup> We are also told that Sveinn Ásleifarson plundered Sutherland (OS: 145) and that Earl Røgnvaldr attended his daughter’s wedding in Sutherland, to a local named Eiríkr *stagbrellr* ‘Stay-Brails’ (OS: 193).

<sup>12</sup> Moddan is not Norse but does appear to correspond to the contemporary Scottish name *Mataidin* (*Matudán*) or *Matain* (*Deer Not.*: 136–39, 140–43, nos 2–3, 6–7); Frakøkk likewise, and although otherwise directly unattested, appears to incorporate the feminine diminutive suffix *-óc*, perhaps \*Frac[c]óc, ‘little woman’. As with many Celtic ‘Scottish’ names of the era, their ultimate etymology could be either ‘Pictish’ or ‘Irish’. Alex Woolf has suggested, *pers. comm.*, that ‘Angus the Generous’ Frakøkk’s brother may be the Áengus, ruler of Moray, killed by the forces of David I in 1130. Since Áengus is known as ‘the son of the daughter of [King] Lulach [of Scotland]’ (*AU*: 578–79, *s.a.* 1130.4), this could make Frakøkk’s family (see Williams 2007: 141) the dynasty that succeeded Lulach’s Clann Ruaidrí (albeit briefly) in the ‘under-kingship’ of Moray. The implications of this point are potentially huge, but cannot be elaborated here.

of all Scotland (Woolf 2000, 2007: 220–30; Ross 2011: 82–95; McGuigan 2021: 86–89). Nonetheless, it is not until the beginning of the thirteenth century that Sutherland is taken from Norse into Scottish sources, or rather into the Latin documents produced by clerics (mostly of French or English origin) working in Scotland, when the name appears in texts particularly associated with the Freskin lordship (*Moray Reg.*: 453–56, Appendix, nos 1–3). As a borrowing it seems to be recent: references to locations in Sutherland when they appear in Scoto-Latin or Anglo-Latin sources in the twelfth century use the province name *Catenesia* or *Catania* (with orthographic variations) (e.g. *Chrs David I*: 127–28, no. 155; *Chron. Melrose*: 93, 114, s.a. 1185, 1213).

Because of the developments of the thirteenth century, the Caithness-Sutherland distinction came to be a formal part of the Scottish political system, even though ‘Caithness’ was to remain the title of their common episcopal see in Dornoch. Given the lack of contemporary Norse sources, we cannot be sure about the term’s exact use in the twelfth century, and it is possible that the Caithness-Sutherland distinction sometimes evident in the saga was a thirteenth-century development. In what we have of Gaelic vernacular tradition, the region north of the Dornoch Firth seems to have been referred to as ‘Cat’ or ‘Cait’. It is usually translated by scholars as ‘Sutherland’, because it is the name that the Gaelic population of Sutherland used to refer to their own province, in particular to the (comparatively) rich southern-east coast of Sutherland, and evolved so that by the nineteenth century the term *Cataibh* (from *i Cattuib*, ‘among the Cats’) was used. ‘Caithness’ in English (*Gallaibh*, by analogy with *Cataibh*, in Gaelic) is usually the name for the region north of the Ord of Caithness (Watson 1926: 30), separated politically after the thirteenth century because of the creation of the ‘earldom of Sutherland’. Previously, Cat and ‘Greater Caithness’ seem to have been regarded as equivalent.

From the ninth century and still in the twelfth century Cat was imagined as one of the ancient provinces of *Alba* (Scotland). A Gaelic quatrain dated by Dauvit Broun to the ninth century names the seven sons of the kingdom’s founder, Cruithne, who gave their names to its seven divisions. ‘Cat’ appears alongside what appear to be attested Pictish-era petty kingdoms like ‘Fortrenn’ and ‘Atholl’ and provinces like ‘Fife’ and ‘Cé’ (Broun 2007a: 78–79; Márkus 2017: 254–57). In the eleventh century a poet at the court of either Macbeth (reigned 1040–57) or Máel Coluim III (reigned 1058–93) celebrated the extent of ancient Scotland, stretching *o crích Chat co Forcu*, ‘from the march of Cat to the Fords of the Forth’ (*LB*: 14, author’s translation). The poet does not say anything else, but it is

clear that Cat is imagined as being a territory either to the north of Scotland itself or else marking its northern limit.<sup>13</sup>

During the reign of the Scottish king Máel Coluim III, the early medieval text known as *Historia Brittonum* was reworked and translated into Gaelic. It has been argued that the compilation and translation was carried out by scholars based at Abernethy on Tayside (Clancy 2000). Cat is mentioned in a list of *mirabilia* ('marvels'), added to the translation, where we are told about a rock with limpets, perhaps musical limpets depending on the reading, situated 30,000 paces from the sea (*LB*: 76–82). The ultimate Scottish provenance of the anecdote is geographically self-evident, and the sources reveal the relatively banal familiarity of the region to southerners, in both Scotland and even Ireland (Wadden 2013).

Around 1200, the overseer of a compilation of Scottish historical documents, a French-speaker it seems, composed a preface relating to the geography and constitution of Scotland. Known today as *De situ Albanie* ('Concerning the place of Scotland'), the writer included various pieces of lore derived from vernacular poetic learning and *dinshenchas* ('place-name stories'). Seven ancient kingdoms of Scotland are placed into a description of Scotland (*Albania*) presented as a man, with various geographical features described as body parts. The text seems to draw on the same historical learning embodied by the quatrain, listing the seven brothers and their provinces, including Cat in the Latinised form *Katenesia*, or *Katania* (*DSA*: 240–43; Broun 2005). An important point about the document is that one of the sources used was correspondence with Andrew, bishop of Caithness (*DSA*: 242). In *De situ Albanie* Andrew appears in the guise of a member of the Gaelic learned elite, but as scholars of Orcadian history know him, he was also an agent of the king involved in pushing Scottish hegemony north of its traditional boundaries.

### **David I and his Dynasty**

The establishment of such strong Scottish influence in Orkney by the 1140s needs to be seen in appropriate context. The pre-eminence of David's dynasty, variously called 'House of Dunkeld', 'Canmores', or *Clann Chrínáin*, was a relatively recent phenomenon. They appear from nowhere in the 1030s in the person of Crínán, abbot of Dunkeld, and his son Donnchad I, whose disastrous reign was terminated by Macbeth in 1040. Crínán's dynasty

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<sup>13</sup> It is possible that the phrase is connected to the place-name, ecclesiastical site and parish of Creich, on the Sutherland side of the Dornoch Firth.

was restored and secured during the long reign of Donnchad's son Máel Coluim III, after whom the succession passed first to brother Domnall Bán and then to sons Donnchad, Edgar, Alexander and David himself (McGuigan 2021; Woolf 2007: 220–71).

The long reign of Máel Coluim coincided with the Norman conquest of England and also the collapse of significant political order south of the Scottish kingdom's traditional border on the Forth (McGuigan 2021: 372–90). The family were one of the main beneficiaries, and for a decade prior to his own inauguration as king of the Scots at Scone in 1124, David had served as 'ruler of Lothian' and 'prince of Cumbria'. In that role David had been responsible for his family's conglomeration of territories in what were in essence the remnants of the old realms of Strathclyde and Bamburgh (McGuigan 2022). The arrangement had been supported if not facilitated by the Norman leadership of England, who had allied themselves with David's family; and who before sponsoring David's own rise had helped his brothers Donnchad, Edgar, and Alexander prevail over rivals at home. Critical was the marriage between the Anglo-Norman monarch Henry I (r. 1100–35) and David's sister, Matilda. More bonds were created when King Henry gave the great English heiress, Matilda of Northampton daughter of Earl Waltheof (d. 1076), to David in marriage. The union came with custody of the honour of Northampton/Huntingdon, a substantial earldom centred in the English East Midlands. Later another Matilda (of Boulogne), the daughter of David's sister Maria, became wife and queen of Henry I's successor, Stephen (Oram 2020: 33–60).

David was to retain his East Midlands earldom and his other holdings south of the Forth after his accession as Scottish king in 1124. These acquisitions alone meant that David was now more powerful than any of his predecessors; but further expansion followed. Upon the death of his patron Henry I in 1135, the Anglo-Norman political system fractured into civil conflict between the adherents of Henry's designated heir, the Empress Matilda, and his *de facto* successor, Stephen of Blois. David proclaimed himself a partisan of the Empress and used the crisis not only to stage multiple invasions of England but also to press the claims to the defunct earldom of Northumbria on behalf of his son Henry, who had a claim via his mother. Despite some setbacks, by the 1140s David exercised various types of lordship as far south as Lancashire. Richard Oram has shown how close David in this period came to securing both the bishopric of Durham and archbishopric of York for his own clients and to being the ruler of a double 'Scoto-Northumbrian' realm (Oram 2020: 145–72; see also Oram 2011: 74–114). Thus, the ruler

who persuaded the Orcadians to accept Haraldr as earl around 1140 was no ordinary Scottish king.

The appearance of Orcadians in a Scottish army is not something the historian would expect in other decades, but the 1130s and 1140s represent a peculiar phase of a Scottish royal power in the north. The major background development in northern Scotland specifically was the imposition of David's power over Moray, begun in 1130. That year David survived an attempted coup, during which Áengus mormaer of Moray raised an army and proceeded southward in order to install David's nephew Máel Coluim, son of Alexander I, as overking of Scotland. Áengus was killed in the encounter, and in the aftermath David's agents took direct control of the western coastal regions of the Moray Firth (Oram 2020: 95–96). The Scottish king then took a number of steps to integrate the region into the wider kingdom. At some point in this process, another of David's nephews, William son of Donnchad II, seems to have become mormaer of Moray. David and William seem to have had a programme of settling Flemish and Danelaw merchants and craftsmen into new planned towns, the 'burghs'. These foundations sometimes appeared alongside the foundation of new religious houses and in the years following Áengus' defeat, burghs were founded at Elgin, Forres, and (possibly) Inverness, with new monastic houses at Urquhart and subsequently Kinloss.

With these actions, the Scottish king was repeating a policy that had been successfully conducted since at least the 1110s in former Northumbrian territories south of the Forth, in Lothian. David's projection of a kinsman like Haraldr into a border polity is in line with his dynasty's earlier behaviour. William of Moray, son of King Donnchad II, would be the obvious contemporary comparison. However, David's own position as ruler of Lothian and Strathclyde back in the 1110s would also fit, as indeed might the position Gospatric (d. 1077×80), the son of Máel Doraid. This Gospatric, most likely (but not certainly), was cousin to Máel Coluim III, the reigning Scottish king when he obtained rulership of Bamburgh around 1067 (McGuigan 2021: 74–75). It is probably not a coincidence that the boy Haraldr was imposed upon the earldom at the time of extended Norwegian civil conflict, limiting the ability of any Norwegian king to maintain the levels of political credibility that underlay earlier claims of hegemony across the sea to the islands of the west.

Returning to the Dornoch brieve, David's interest in protecting churchmen was of course general to his kingship, but the need of the *manachi* of Dornoch for a royal brieve of protection suggests that they were involved in local political conflict. It can be no

coincidence that a Tayside Scot, Andrew, became bishop in the region around the time of the *brieve* (neither can be dated to a precise year).<sup>14</sup> *Brieves* tend to be preserved by beneficiaries, and the fact that this document comes from Dunfermline Abbey helps us understand what was involved here. Andrew, the new bishop of Caithness, had been a monk of Dunfermline (*DSA*: 242). It is probably no coincidence either that Dunfermline had also recently established a dependent cell across the Firth at Urquhart. Indeed, Andrew's earliest appearance in the record seems to be his appearance in Urquhart's foundation document (*Chrs David I*: 144–45, no. 185).

The arrival of Scottish royal hegemony and southern clerics on the Moray Firth in or around 1140 is likely critical to understanding the emergence of a bishopric in Caithness as well as the career of Haraldr. Although not certain, modern historians have tended to believe that pastoral care in Caithness and in Orkney had been hitherto provided by a common source (Crawford 2013: 251). The 'seven sons' of Cruithne and the status of Cat as an 'ancient province of Alba' would have been something that, for members of the Scottish elite, set the province of Cat as an entity meriting its own bishopric. With that cultural historical perspective in mind, the decision of the Norwegian earl Rognvaldr to found a new cathedral for the see at Kirkwall in the late 1130s, dedicated to his relative St Magnús, would have been perceived as a threat to the territorial integrity of their 'ancient kingdom' (or at least to the pretence) just as the Scottish kings themselves were acquiring the ability to defend it.

### **Matter of Norway**

For Crawford, security had been David's principal concern in the north (Crawford 1985: 25–26). While doubtless an important consideration, it is also clear that the Scottish king's standing in the north had wider ramifications for the potential authority of the kingship. Indeed, prior to his death in 1153, David I had actively strived to attach the see of Orkney

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<sup>14</sup> Some historians have also speculated that Andrew was an absentee bishop, based on some appearances that Andrew makes in the witness lists of charters issued during his episcopate in the southern royally held territories (e.g. Crawford 2013: 251; Oram 2020: 100). This logic is unsound even though the contention is not itself impossible. It was a matter of course for bishops of this period to divide their time between the service of their potentate and their own see, and it takes only about a week of travel to reach Dornoch from Tayside. Indeed, we have firm evidence of the bishop's activity in the see. In 1198 Pope Innocent III informed the bishops of Ross and Orkney that Earl Haraldr had restored the penny hearth tax. The tax had been introduced by Bishop Andrew, only to fall into abeyance under his successor (*DN* 7: 2, no. 2).

to the Scottish Church. David sought papal authorisation for a new Scottish archbishopric based at St Andrews that would have subsumed Orkney as well as the Hebrides among its dependent dioceses (HP: 72). The creation of the archdiocese of Niðaróss (see below), and the inclusion of Orkney therein, marked the defeat of King David's project. Norway obtained what Scotland was denied, and it was not until the 1170s (or at least the 1190s) that the papacy recognised the independence of the Scottish sees from the English Church. But we should not accept the resulting ecclesiastical boundaries between Norway and Scotland as an inevitability before the 1150s.

Part of the problem stems from the abundance of late twelfth and thirteenth century Scandinavian historical writing where the earldom is presented not only as a unitary polity (see above) but one that had always been part of the Norwegian kingdom (e.g. Woolf 2014). In its coverage of the period before the partition of power between Rognvaldr Kali Kolsson and Haraldr Maddaðarson the *Orkneyinga saga* presented a succession of rulers descended in the male-line from Rognvaldr, earl of Møre, and his brother Sigurðr (see OS, ch. 4), kinsmen of the later dukes of Normandy.<sup>15</sup> Rognvaldr of Møre, we are told, had been a contemporary of King Haraldr *hárfagri* ('fairhair') of Norway, from whom the brothers obtained their rights over Orkney and Shetland. Haraldr *hárfagri* is the founder of the Norwegian political system, and so the narrative establishes the islands as an integral part of the kingdom of Norway from its inception. In this respect, the saga mirrors the almost contemporary *Historia Norwegie*, although the latter imagined that Orkney and Shetland had formed part of a larger subordinate realm that also included the Hebrides, a realm formerly inhabited by two legendary peoples labelled *Peti et Pape* ('Pets and Paps', see HN: 64–67, chs 5–6).

In both *Orkneyinga saga* and *Historia Norwegie* the power of the ruling dynasty in Orkney extended to lordship in Caithness and elsewhere in northern Great Britain. *Orkneyinga saga* is careful to outline how Orcadian earls held Caithness either by grants from the Scottish king or by conquest (see OS, chs 5, 10, 20). *Historia Norwegie* lists Caithness alongside Northumbria and the cities of Ireland as part of a wider Insular dominion, but also imagines that the province had been taken from Scotland (HN: 66–67). The traditions thus offer 'deep historical' explanation for what from the mid twelfth century is an agreed feature of Scoto-Norwegian relations: a division of underlying

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<sup>15</sup> As we learn from *Íslendingabók*, according to twelfth-century Icelandic learning this would have made the old line of Orcadian earls' kinsmen also to the Siða folk of Austur-Skaftafellssýsla, south-eastern Iceland, named descendants of one Hrollaugr, son of Earl Rognvaldr of Møre (*Íslendingabók*: 4).

sovereignty between the Scottish and Norwegian kings based on the Pentland Firth that in practice cut through Norse communities subservient to Orcadian earls.

We probably know enough from contemporary sources to say that the saga's vision of Orkney's Norwegian past is fundamentally anachronistic and misleading. The first issue is that the kind of unitary Norwegian kingdom imagined by the saga writers is clearly a back-projection of the twelfth century itself (Sverrir Jakobsson 2016). Only after the collapse of Danish *imperium* in 1035 did Norway begin to assert independent power (Bolton 2009: 315). Indeed, it is not until the second half of the eleventh century that we get our first definitive evidence of Norwegian hegemony in Orkney itself: Adam of Bremen singles out the takeover of the islands, probably in the 1050s, as a major achievement of King Haraldr *harðráði* ('hard-ruler', r. 1046–66) (*GHEP* III.xvii: 127–29).<sup>16</sup> This does not *per se* mean that earlier kings or earls from the territory of Norway had never been able to assert any power over the islands, but the best evidence, when it says anything, tends to indicate that the Orkneys had been more closely tied to the rulers of Dublin, Northumbria, and even Normandy (Woolf 2007: 300–8). The twelfth- and thirteenth-century accounts simply do not present a reliable picture of Orkney's relationship with other neighbouring kingships.

Only from the 1150s can we really speak with certainty about Orkney as a fixed component of the kingdom of Norway. Norway's position as a mature polity independent of Denmark received confirmation within Latin Christendom generally with the creation of a separate archbishopric for the kingdom at Niðaróss in 1152/53 under the authority of the English-born papal legate, Cardinal Nicholas Breakspear (Bergquist 2002). Mainland Norway, but not Orkney, had since 1107 been part of the Danish archdiocese of Lund, which itself had become independent of Hamburg in 1104 (Bagge 2009). When Breakspear's plan for Niðaróss was finalised in 1154 by Pope Anastasius IV Orkney and the Hebrides were included within its jurisdiction (*DN* 8: 1, no. 1). All the historical writing that places Orkney within the Norwegian historical orbit was created significantly after this potentially revolutionary event. Again, if we turn to Adam of Bremen, our best

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<sup>16</sup> [N]unquam quietus fuit a bellis, fulmen septentrionis, fatale malum omnibus Danorum insulis. Ille vir omnes Sclavorum maritimas regions depredavit; ille Orchadas insulas suae ditioni subiecit; ille cruentum imperium usque ad Island extendit ('[Haraldr] never ceased from warfare; he was the thunderbolt of the north, a pestilence to all the Danish islands. That man plundered all the coastlands of the Slavs; he subjected the Orkney islands to his rule; he extended his blood-stained sway as far as Iceland') (Schmeidler 1917: 159; Tschan 2002: 128).

contemporary guide in the eleventh century, Orkney had received Scottish and English bishops prior to the mid eleventh century. Only in the time of King Haraldr *harðráði* was it that Adalbert archbishop of Hamburg, metropolitan for Scandinavia, assumed responsibility for the appointment of Orcadian bishops (*GHEP* III.lxxv: 181–82, III.lxxvii: 182–84). But we know from a letter of 1072/3, in the year following Adalbert’s death, that Earl Páll I made an appeal to the archbishop of York to revive the practice of ‘former times’, asking the English-based archbishop to consecrate his preferred cleric as bishop for the islands (*Lanfr. Letters*: 78–81, no. 12).

York continued to consecrate bishops for Orkney into the twelfth century, with the episcopates of Roger of Whitby (fl. 1100×1108) and Radulf Novel (fl. 1098×1114–51) extending from the first decade of the twelfth century into the 1140s (Watt and Murray 2003: 322–23). The English archbishops commonly performed this service to other Insular sees such as the Isles, Dublin, and Glasgow, but before the twelfth century the service does not appear to have been tied strongly to any sort of claims to permanent jurisdictional oversight. York’s privilege may be why Orkney does not appear among the Norwegian sees in the so called *Florenslistan* (‘Florence List’), an enumeration of Scandinavian sees, subject to Lund, drawn up in the first decades of the century (Lovén 2020: 4–5, 7).<sup>17</sup> It seems that this arrangement with York became problematic from the 1120s at the latest, when Pope Honorius II on behalf of Bishop Radulf wrote to King Sigurðr of Norway seeking Radulf’s ‘restoration’ to the see. The effort failed because for some unknown reason Radulf either had been or would become unacceptable to the ‘prince’, presumably an earl.<sup>18</sup>

In *Orkneyinga saga*, we are told incredibly that Bishop William ‘the Old’ died after sixty-six years in office. Since in the *Annals of Iceland* he is said to have died in 1168

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<sup>17</sup> Note that Bishop Radulf of Orkney, like the bishops of Glasgow and Durham, is listed separately from the bishops of ‘Scotland’ (*per Scotiam*) in an address by Pope Calixtus II in 1119 (*SP*: 22, no. 4; *HEE*: 124–25; pace Norton 2006: 42, 229, followed by Harrington 2022: 29).

<sup>18</sup> *Honorius episcopus, servus servorum Dei, dilecto in Christo filio, S[igurdus], illustri Norwegiae regi, salutem et Apostolicam benedictionem. Auribus nostris intimatum est, quod venerabilis frater noster, Thomas Eboracensis archiepiscopus, Radulfum Orcheneia episcopum consecravit. Postmodum vero, sicut accepimus, alius est ibidem intrusus.* (‘Bishop Honorius, servant of the servants of God, to his beloved son in Christ, Sigurd, illustrious king of Norway, greetings and apostolic blessings. It has been related to our ears that our venerable brother, Thomas Archbishop of York, consecrated Radulf Bishop of Orkney. But afterward we learned that another was forced into that very place.’) (*HCY* 3: 50–51, no. 34, author’s translation). John of Worcester relates that: *Qui Radulfus quoniam nec principis terre, nec cleri, nec plebis electione uel assensu fuerat ordinatus, ab omnibus refutatus [...]*. (‘Radulf, however, had been ordained without the election or consent of the ruler

(*ESSH* 2: 266), his episcopate would have gone back to c. 1102 and overlapped with both bishops Roger and Radulf. Even if we did not possess (as we do) contemporary papal correspondence documenting intervening succession disputes relating to the diocese, thus discrediting this longevity assertion (*HCY* 3: 39, 50–51, nos 21, 34), there would be no need to give *Orkneyinga saga*'s claim any weight. The simplest explanation for the overlap is that the incredible figure arising from the saga's claim is mistaken. Bishop William simply does not appear in any early contemporary sources, and while we need not doubt that there was a historical episcopate that terminated in the 1160s, there is no reason to think the saga was accurately informed about its beginnings and length.

William, said by the saga to have studied in Paris (*OS*: 161), appears to have been a historical figure, and the saga author is no more likely to have invented him than Earl Haraldr or Earl Rognvaldr; and it is very likely that he was, as the saga claimed, the bishop involved in the emergence of Kirkwall Cathedral (Crawford 1996: 6). It is possible that William had been the bishop who displaced Radulf Novel or who had 'been intruded' into the see before the latter's consecration (*HCY* 3: 50–51, no. 34). Although we will never make sense of it with certainty, ecclesiastical appointments are likely to have been extensions of other conflict in domestic politics (Haki Antonsson 2007: 90–96; Crawford 2013: 171–72, 198–204; Ellis 2022: 124–25). A couple of observations can thus be made. Firstly, the custodians of the new archdiocese of Lund, who assumed the metropolitan role in the Scandinavian world from Hamburg c. 1104, would have been aware of Adalbert's old relationship with Orkney, at the very least a good pretext to claim jurisdiction. Secondly, the ability to play Lund and York against each other would have been available to the various parties who participated in the Orcadian and Norwegian civil strife of the early century.

Where does this leave Scotland? It suggests that Andrew of Dunfermline's appearance as bishop in Caithness from the 1140s should not surprise us. The lack of clear ecclesiastical hierarchy and structure before the 1150s left enough room for competition from a uniquely ambitious Scottish king. In its initial conception Andrew's sphere may even have been the whole north, based perhaps in Dornoch but with a larger diocese

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of Orkney nor of the clergy or people, and had been universally rejected'). John of Worchester additionally calls Radulf: *nullius episcopus urbis* ('bishop of no town') (*Chron. ex chron.* 3: 174–75, s.a. 1128; translation altered by author). The York account of this is a little different, claiming that Radulf like his predecessor Roger was elected *ab Orcadensibus* ('by the men of the Orkneys') (*HEE*: 52–53). Norton (2006: 230) speculates that the electors were 'members of the city's [i.e. York's] Orcadian community'.

including the ‘Northern Isles’. From the Scottish perspective Orkney, after all, could surely have been regarded as an appendage of Cat in the same way that Caithness was regarded in the Norwegian world as an appendage of Orkney. Here we should note that in contemporary Gaelic the name for Shetland appears to have been rendered *insi Cat*, ‘islands of the cat [folk]’.<sup>19</sup> It occurs for instance in the twelfth-century Irish text of Brian Bóruma, the *Cogadh Gáedel re Gallaib* (‘The War of the Gaels with the Foreigners’). The text tells us that the army of Sigurðr, surnamed in Irish *mac Lotair*, ‘son of Lotar’ consisted of Norsemen ‘from *Insi Orc* and *Insi Cat*’ as well as Skye, Lewis, Kintyre and other lands (Cogadh: 153; cf. ÍF 34: 25–27; OS: 37–38). The place-name scholar William Watson regarded *Insi Cat* as ‘pre-Norse’, and while that may be true in terms of ‘coining’ as far as I can tell *Insi Cat* is not attested before the Viking Age itself (Watson 1926: 30; Hogan 1910: 462, *s.v.* ‘i. cat’). The *Cogadh* itself is twelfth century, at best reflecting an underlying an eleventh century source.

Perhaps this was no more than an etymological curiosity by the twelfth century, but it is also just about possible that it touches on something much more significant. Namely, that members of the Scottish elite in the time of David I and Haraldr Maddaðarson, informed by established Gaelic learning, conceived of the entire ‘earldom of Orkney’ as part of Cat; after all Shetland, *insi Cat*, from that perspective is beyond even Orkney. Perhaps, then, it was Pope Anastasius who created the bishopric of Caithness when he separated it from Orkney; leaving it, in essence (in theory but never in practice) the rump of the old York dependency?<sup>20</sup> Whatever the case here, in setting that boundary the papacy formalised the political boundary between Scotland and Norway, and did so half-way through the territory of Earl Haraldr.

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<sup>19</sup> There is a possibility that Cat lies behind the Norse name for Hjaltland, see Jennings (2011) for evidence for and against.

<sup>20</sup> It should be stressed that the official papal position in this period was that all of the mainland sees in Great Britain north of York were part of the archdiocese of York. In papal eyes, the beneficiary of Caithness’s exclusion from the new Norwegian archdiocese would have been York, not the Scottish Church (as it was in practice). In 1155, soon after the formal inclusion of Orkney into the Norwegian Church, Andrew of Caithness and other Scottish bishops were ordered by the pope to submit to York (*SP*: 40–42, no. 34). They never did this of course, but the point is that not until 1155 was there a clear demarcation of ecclesiastical sovereignty between ‘Norwegian Orkney’ and ‘Scottish (or Anglo-British) Caithness’.

## Explaining Earl Haraldr after 1150

Rather than being some longstanding inevitability, the emergence of the Pentland Firth as the boundary between two political systems may have been the outcome of rapid political developments in the years around 1150. After the heights of the early 1140s David's expansionary vision for his Scottish realm in northern Britain experienced a range of reversals. By 1150, David's right-hand man in the Moray Firth, his nephew William son of Donnchad, had died; and it is unclear that David ever successfully managed to stabilise the region thereafter. Likewise, sometime c. 1150, the Norwegian king Eysteinn II forced Earl Haraldr into personal submission. This seems to have been followed by direct action against David's core territory, with the Norwegian royal fleet raiding and burning the burgh of Aberdeen around 1150 (see Woolf, this volume). And finally, any immediate prospect of recovery disappeared with David's own passing in 1153. These developments deprived the Scottish royal dynasty of the personal authority that David himself had commanded, and exposed his successors, his grandsons under the care of the queen-mother Ada de Warrene (d. 1178), to an insurrection. Aware of the likelihood of his coming demise, David I had arranged for the mormaer of Fife, the commanding Donnchad I (d. 1154), to act as guardian on the accession of the boy king Máel Coluim IV, the mormaer conducting the boy and proclaiming him heir *per provincias Scotiae* in 1152/53 (*Hist. Iohan.*: 327, s.a. 1153 [1152]; *SAEC*: 227–28).

However, Donnchad I of Fife's own death followed David's within a year (*Chron. Holyrood*: 126, s.a. 1154). The resulting insurrection, led by Somerled of Argyll and his *nepotes* ('junior male relatives'), the sons of Máel Coluim (the son of King Alexander I), seems to have led to the disaffection of much of *Scotia* (*Chron. Holyrood*: 124–25, s.a. 1153; Ross 2007a; Woolf 2013). Until 1157, the disaffection appears to have extended into the critical province of Ross, intermediate to Moray and the earldom of Caithness (*Chron. Holyrood*: 129–31, s.a. 1157; Ross 2007a). To top it all off, in 1157 the new English king Henry II stripped the Scots of the southern gains David had made after 1135 (*Chron. Torigni* 1: 202–3, s.a. 1157; *Chron. Holyrood*: 131, s.a. 1157; *SAEC*: 239). David I's successors attempted to restore these later in the century but failed. They also struggled to regain control of the Moray Firth region, where by the 1170s there were significant number of locals openly supporting the claims of a royal pretender, Domnall Bán 'Mac William', a descendant of David's nephew William son of Donnchad II (Stringer 1985: 32–33; McDonald 2003: 36; Ross 2007b: 29–30; *Chron. Melrose*: 90, s.a. 1179; *Scotichron.* 4: 336–37, representing *Gesta Annalia I*: s.a. 1179; cf. *RRS* 2: 200–1, no. 119).

It is extremely unlikely that the saga was in error in describing Earl Haraldr as a kinsman of the Scottish kings; and indeed the information is confirmed by English bureaucratic records dating 6 January 1202, when King John ‘directed his beloved cousin Harold, earl of Orkney to come to England to speak with him’ (*CDS* 1: 53–54, no. 324).<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, there is a problem. In *Orkneyinga saga*, Haraldr is presented as the son of Matad of Atholl, son of Máel Muire, son of King Donnchad (I), father of Máel Coluim III — and thus David I’s cousin. This is quite a challenge chronologically: to believe it we would have to accept that someone born in the 1030s (or 1041 at the latest) had a grandson, Haraldr, alive in the thirteenth century, as late as 1206. At the same time, we would usually be confident that figures as prominent as those in Haraldr’s genealogy have accurate profiles. The names of the immediate progenitors of the ruling earl would have been public knowledge of high importance, and it is very difficult to believe that a text so close chronologically to the time of Haraldr would present them inaccurately. Since the names and sequence of the genealogy are likely to be correct, the solution would probably have to lie in how the genealogical information had been integrated into the saga’s broader historical framework. Like assembling a piece of IKEA furniture without the instructions, the pieces can be made well enough but put together badly.

When discussing this problem in a 2021 study of the reign and legacy of Máel Coluim III, I have suggested that the saga’s author simply stretched the genealogy, with the likelihood that the writer omitted names that otherwise would have taken Haraldr’s pedigree convincingly all the way back to King Donnchad I (McGuigan 2021). However, there is a simpler explanation: that the saga’s architect simply misidentified King Donnchad. That is to say, rather than Donnchad I, who died in 1040, being the father of Máel Muire, perhaps the latter’s father was instead Donnchad II, who died in 1094. Although this Donnchad is mentioned separately by the saga (*OS*: 76), his reign was very short and it would not have been difficult to confuse him with his namesake and predecessor, the illustrious father of Máel Coluim III. The saga is certainly not immune to misidentifying the pedigree of Scottish kings, wrongly, for instance, naming Máel Coluim IV’s father as David rather than being his grandfather (cf. *OS*: 183–88). The most obvious support for this theory is that prominent Scottish leaders with those names, Matad and

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<sup>21</sup> King John of England (r. 1199–1216) was a great-grandson of Queen Matilda, daughter of King Máel Coluim III of Scotland (see Figure 1).

Máel Muire of Atholl, appear in sources from the second quarter of the twelfth century, sound for sons and grandsons of Donnchad II, implausible for those of Donnchad I.<sup>22</sup>

### The 'Wrong Donnchad' Theory Illustrated

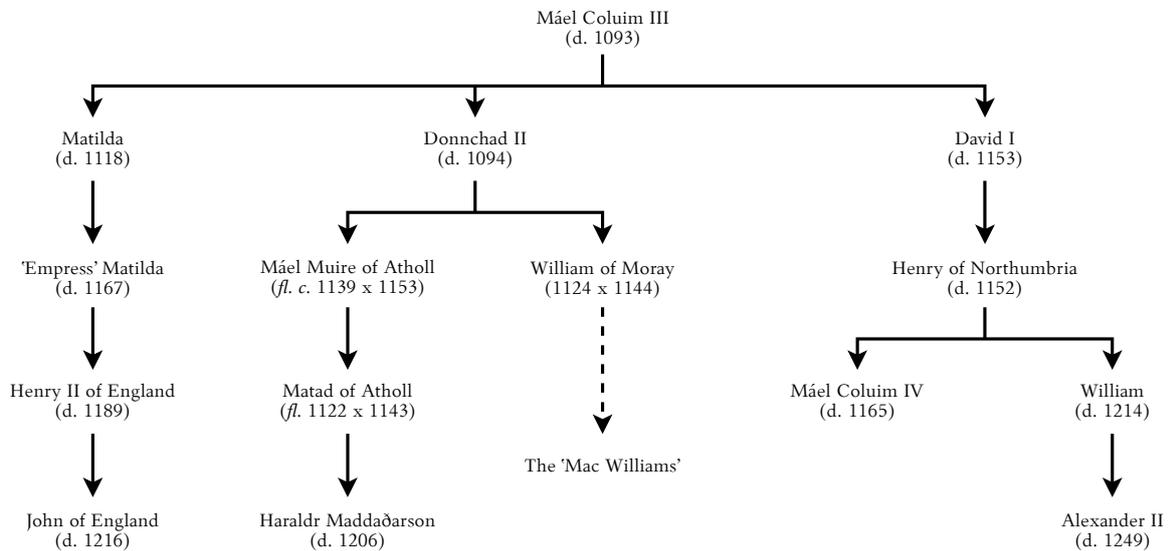


FIGURE 1 'WRONG DONNCHAD' THEORY ILLUSTRATED

In this scenario, our picture of northern Scottish politics in the twelfth century would change drastically.<sup>23</sup> If he were the son of King Donnchad II, Máel Muire of Atholl would also be the brother of William, *nepos* of King David who, after the defeat of

<sup>22</sup> Máel Muire (*PoMS*, no. 512) is *Mal-Mori d'Ath[f]otla* in a Scoto-Latin charter of David I, dating somewhere between 1139 and 1153; he appears between the *comites* of Fife and Angus (*Chrs David I*: 119, no. 136; *Deer Not.*: 142–43, no. 7). It is not clear that he ever served as mormaer/earl, for (in this theory his son) Matad (*PoMS*, no. 593) is attested with the title *comes* as early as c. 1120 (depending on the authenticity of the witness lists in the early Scone charters) and witnessed charters throughout David I's reign (*ESC*: 28–30, no. 36 = *Scone Lib.*: 1–3, no. 1; *Chrs David I*: 70–72, 75–76, 78–79, 85, 111–13, nos 33, 44, 53–54, 67, 121–22, respectively; using the title *consul* at no. 53). Matad's son Máel Coluim assumed the mormaer-ship during the reign of Máel Coluim IV, sometime before 1159 (*RRS* 2: 200–1, no. 119). It is possible that Matad predeceased his father Máel Muire, and that in the Deer charter Máel Muire witnessed as custodian or kin-leader (*cenn cineoil*) on behalf of his grandson, probably Máel Coluim but possibly Haraldr himself (remembering the possibility, after all, that a turn of Scoto-Orcadian relations in the early 1150s may have deprived Haraldr of Atholl).

<sup>23</sup> There are a number of other explanatory benefits to this scenario. It would explain why the mormaer of Atholl exercised influence in the north without relying on the agency of the Scottish king. Another benefit is that it could explain the origins of Clann Donnchaidh, the clan that provided a common identity to the commoner landholders of Atholl following the demise of the earldom in the fourteenth century.

Áengus, seems to have taken command of Moray. In our scenario, the two brothers together would control Atholl and Moray, a swathe of territory stretching from the Beaully Firth to Dunkeld;<sup>24</sup> and after the installation of Haraldr in Caithness, only the province of Ross would have broken up control of territory stretching from Dunkeld as far as the Pentland Firth and beyond. Additionally, Haraldr would be an even closer kinsman of the MacWilliams who from the late 1170s held control over much of northern Scotland. The scenario would also make it even easier to understand why *Orkneyinga saga* appears to be, in the words of Alasdair Ross, ‘the only medieval source that is actually pro-MacWilliam’ (Ross 2007: 38). This is potentially crucial, because there are no signs that relations between the Scottish king and Earl Haraldr were hostile until the MacWilliam bids for the throne began after 1178.

In the 1160s Ross had been governed by a mormaer named Máel Coluim mac Áeda, ‘Malcolm Macheth’. From the *Chronicle of Holyrood* we learn of his death in 1168, but also that prior to that, in 1157, he had to be ‘reconciled’ with King Máel Coluim IV (*Chron. Holyrood*: 129–31, 151, s.a. 1157, 1168). Máel Coluim mac Áeda of Ross seems to have taken the wrong side in the succession dispute that followed David I’s death, a contest substantially resolved when in 1156 Domnall, grandson of Alexander I, was captured at Whithorn and imprisoned with his father Máel Coluim son of Alexander I in Roxburgh Castle (*Chron. Holyrood*: 128, s.a. 1156). Falling a year later, Máel Coluim of Ross’s reconciliation in 1157 makes most sense in light of the end of the succession conflict. Presumably, Ross had either backed the pretender’s coalition or opposed it with a paucity of vigour that antagonised the regime presiding on behalf of the young King Máel Coluim IV. Besides his death, the only other thing we hear about Máel Coluim of Ross from his own lifetime is that sometime between 1160 and 1162 he received a brieve from the king ordering him to protect the monks of Dunfermline (*RRS* 1: 222, no. 179). The threat posed from Ross was grave enough that at some stage Ada de Warenne contemplated transferring control of the province to Floris III, count of Holland, who in 1162 would be married to Ada’s daughter Ada (*Great Cause Recs* 2: 186). The proposal would likely have seen Ross parcelled out among mercenaries from the Low Countries, and indeed the regime had already overseen similar colonisation projects in Strathclyde

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<sup>24</sup> The theory adds an interesting light to one of Haraldr’s few appearances in southern diplomatic sources, where he witnessed the ‘Dunfermline memorandum’ (*ESC*: 8–9, no. 10). Involved in the document is a certain Ivo ‘abbot of the Céli Dé’ and a certain Ness son of William, sometime lord of Leuchars and likely also a member of the MacWilliam kindred.

and Moray. This project was, however, never realised and it is worth considering the possibility that Earl Haraldr had something to do with that.

Without reliable control of Ross the new regime representing Máel Coluim IV would have little prospect of projecting power beyond the river Oykel, leaving Earl Haraldr himself as the senior representative of the Scottish dynasty in the area. Perhaps Haraldr, the royal family's kinsman, was critical in maintaining the Scottish king's position. The problem we have is that for three decades we are unable to say anything much about the region's politics, including Haraldr's relationship with the Scottish kings. What we do come to learn, however, is very significant. Roger of Howden tells us that in 1196 the Scottish king refused to make peace with Earl Haraldr until he dismissed the daughter of [Máel Coluim] Macheth and took back the daughter of Donnchad (*RHC* 4: 12, *s.a.* 1196), almost certainly Donnchad II (d. 1204), mormaer of Fife.<sup>25</sup> The latter detail is important, and suggests independently that there had been a preceding period of positive relations or even close alliance between Haraldr and the Scottish kings. Clan Macduff, the ruling kindred of Fife, were the most powerful loyalists of the Scottish monarchs, while Donnchad II's only known wife was likely the Scottish king's 'niece', Ela, a member of the de Warenne family (Bannerman 1998; Barrow 1960: 18; see also Barrow 1953). Ada de Warenne was mother of the Scottish kings Máel Coluim IV and William and likely *de facto* ruler of the kingdom for the much of the 1150s and 1160s. There could hardly have been a marriage that would have brought Haraldr closer to the ruling regime in southern Scotland. However, Haraldr evidently, subsequently turned.

According to what may be, in origin, a contemporary chronicle from southern Scotland, relating to 1196, '[Haraldr] had been a good and loyal vassal, but at that time rose against the king at the instigation of his wife, a daughter of [Máel Coluim] Macheth' (*Scotichron.* 4: 419). The subsequent open conflict between the earl and the king is well known and cannot be discussed in detail here. But evidently Haraldr had begun to distance himself from the Scottish rulers years before, for the abandonment of his Fife wife cannot have been recent and would have soured relations with King William. The

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<sup>25</sup> Pace Balfour Paul (1907: 6), who identifies her (probably correctly) with the *Orkneyinga saga's* Affraic (*Afreka*) (*OS*: 214–15), but makes her the daughter of Donnchad II's father, Donnchad I (d. 1154). Donnchad II, however, makes much more sense chronologically. Also, when Howden wrote Donnchad II had been mormaer/earl of Fife for nearly four decades, it is surely inconceivable that he would have named Donnchad's father without specifying the relationship to the familiar contemporary figure. The *Orkneyinga saga* names Haraldr's second wife Hvarflod, 'daughter of Earl Malcolm of Moray' (*OS*: 218).

end of the good relationship could even explain why, apparently, some sort of Cistercian monastic colony from Melrose that appears to have operated in Orkney with its own abbot was abandoned in the early 1170s (*Chron. Melrose*: 87–88, *s.a.* 1175). The breakdown of the Scottish political system began in as early as 1174, when King William was captured by the forces of Henry II of England at Alnwick. The appearance of the MacWilliam pretenders by *c.* 1179 would have been a good opportunity for Haraldr to join the opponents of King William, and would make even more sense if Haraldr as we suggested above was a much closer kinsman to them than hitherto historians have thought.

However, of the two marriages known for Haraldr, both were among other members the Scottish aristocracy. That Haraldr abandoned a daughter of the mormaer of Fife for a daughter of the mormaer of Ross suggests not that he turned against the Scottish political system, but that his orientation within it changed. We can reasonably assume that Haraldr saw an opportunity to rule Ross, at least until the majority of a son; and certainly by 1200 there were other examples of provincial mormaer-ships passing outside the dynasty through the female line (e.g. Buchan).<sup>26</sup> It would have been an opportunity for Haraldr to stretch his territory as far south as Inverness. Whether this was a move of magnate aggression or dynastic entitlement, it is best understood in terms of the wider fallout caused by rise and continued erosion of royal authority north of the Mounth from the challenge of the MacWilliams, also Haraldr's kinsmen. As segmentation of the royal kin and civil war split the Scottish political system, Haraldr's hostility to the ruling Scottish monarch King William was common among the Scots of the north by the 1190s. Haraldr's participation in the conflict may be best explained not by his role as any outsider let alone some kind of Norse nationalist, but rather by his very membership of the Scottish royal family and his high status as a Scottish magnate.

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<sup>26</sup> A slightly puzzling issue is that the son who later rules Ross, according to the saga, is Henry (*Heinrekr*), one of his sons by Affraic (*Afreka*), presumed to be the Fife lady (*OS*: 224); so it may be that Haraldr advanced multiple strategies for realising his ambition there, or that Henry succeeded to Ross after under Scottish royal authority later, perhaps an attempt to reconcile the family.

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# Competing Ecclesiastical and Royal Attempts at Centralisation in Scotland's West before 1230\*

Russell Ó Ríagáin

## Introduction

**A**s discussed elsewhere in this special issue, Adam of Melrose, bishop of Caithness, was burned to death by a group of local notables in 1222. This occurred the same year as Alexander II launched a campaign in Argyll that would eventually result in a major shift in the pattern of lordship there. This campaign also contributed to the growing ill-feeling that eventually led several groups in the west to support Hákon Hákonarson's 1263 invasion of Kintyre and Bute. The events of 1222 in Caithness and Argyll occurred the same year as a major attack on Coleraine on the north coast of Ireland by Hugh de Lacy and Aéd Ua Néill. This article will explore some of the paths that led to this state of affairs, providing a discussion of the processes at work in the west that provide something of a parallel to those within which the burning of Bishop Adam and the earlier blinding of Bishop Jón of Caithness, his predecessor, occurred. The focus will be on Argyll, Man, and the Hebrides, with occasional reference to Galloway and Ireland. Having briefly introduced the emergence of the relevant polities, the article will then turn to a diachronic discussion of the shifts in Scottish royal policies towards the lordships or kingdoms — depending on whose perspective — along Scotland's western seaboard in the 'long' twelfth century, opening with a brief discussion of the career of Somerled son of Gille-Bhrighde, whose activities intersect with the ongoing process(es) of centralisation in northern Britain. This is followed by a treatment of the concurrent

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emergence of the dioceses of Suðreyjar/Sodor in Niðaróss' archdiocese and the diocese of Argyll in the aftermath of the Gregorian reforms that resulted in much of Catholic Europe adopting a stricter diocese–deanery–parish system of organisation.

### **The emergence and use of geographical and political names**

A full discussion of the Iron Age and early medieval secular and ecclesiastical histories of Man, the Hebrides and Argyll would be far beyond the remit of this article (but see e.g. Ó Ríagáin 2020). The usage of geographical terms can change over time, and we should avoid reading later meanings back into the deeper past.<sup>1</sup> Old Norse *Suðreyjar* ('south(ern) islands'), from which the diocese of Sodor derives its name, would seem to have applied to the islands from Lewis southward. Like the Hebrides, it is unclear whether Anglesey, Man, Arran, the Cumbraes, Bute, and Lismore were consistently regarded as part of this group, if at all.

Additionally, ethnonyms and demonyms, and geographical terms built on them can mean different things at different times, in addition to often being mistranslated or misrepresented. The term *Gall-Goídil* or *Gall-Gáedil* (Old or Middle Irish 'foreign Gaels') followed one *Gall-Gáedel*, Fergus, to his new lordship in *na Renna* ('[Kingdom of] the Rhinns')<sup>2</sup> in the twelfth century, leading to his associated ethnonym being transferred to the lordship of 'Galloway'. Prior to this, it seems to have referred to Gaelic-speaking groups around the Clyde and possibly further north. *Airer Gáedel* ('coast/borderland of Gaels'), rendered *Ergadia* in Latin and Argyle or Argyll in English, first appears in surviving documentation in the twelfth century (1141×47, Lawrie 1905: 116–19, no. CLIII; 1150×52, Barrow 1999: 136–39, no. 172). The first ruler of Argyll to be mentioned in surviving documentation is Somharlidh (*AU* 1164, two items) or Somhairle (*AT* [1164]; *MCB* 1163[=1164]) mac Gille-Bhrighde,<sup>3</sup> who would have had an Old Norse name

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<sup>1</sup> The earlier geographical terms are discussed in Ó Ríagáin 2024: 49–51.

<sup>2</sup> The Rhinns (or Rhins) of Galloway make up a double-headed peninsula in southwest Scotland. However, here *na Renna* refers to more than just the Rhinns, but also to other adjacent headlands and broadly corresponds with later Wigtownshire.

<sup>3</sup> When citing annals/chronicles, the annalistic year follows the un-italicised abbreviation associated with the published edition, with reconstructed or corrected years in square brackets, as per my other published work. The physical published editions are preferred throughout. *AU* and *AFM* dates do not require correction after the annalistic year 1014 (with some exceptions for *AFM* around 1200).

Sumarliði \*Gilbertsson.<sup>4</sup> He is commonly referred to in English as Somerled, from the Latin Sumerledus (*CRMI* 1102; *CHol* 1153; *CRMI* 1164). Argyll seems to have been used interchangeably with Lorn and/or Glassary and Knapdale, but also to collectively refer to Kintyre, Cowal, Knapdale, Glassary, Lorn, Morvern, and potentially even further north.

The term *Innsi Gall* ('islands of foreigners', first use: *AFM* 939[=941]), occasionally just *na Innsi* ('the islands', *AU* [1005]) or *In(n)si Alban* ('islands of Alba', *CS* [941]), might originally have generally referred to Man, the Hebrides, and possibly even Orkney. The term *Innsi Gall* was predominantly used in Irish sources to at least *AU* 1363 to refer to the (southern) Hebrides, with Man often referred to specifically (e.g. *AU* 1073). Therefore, it is difficult to state over whom or where kings of *Innsi Gall* ruled, especially before the twelfth century. The first secure references to kings are to Maccus, *plurimarum rex insularum* ('king of many islands', John of Worcester: 423, s.a. 995 [=AD 973]), and his brother Guðrøðr Haraldsson, killed as *rí Innsi Gall* in/by (the) Dál Riata (*AU* [989]; *AT* [989]; *CS* [989]). For the previous twenty years, these brothers had been implied as leaders but rarely explicitly described as kings, including in an attack on Man (Ó Ríagáin 2020: 511–16). Echmarcach Rognvaldsson, Guðrøðr's grandson, was at different times (sometimes obliquely) referred to as *mac Ragnaill* (son of Rognvaldr), king of Man (*AT* [1061]), Dublin (*AT* [1036]; *AT* [1046]) in the Rawlinson B.488 annals (or [problematically] the 'Annals of Tigernach'), and *rex Innarenn* ('king of *na Renn*a') in *Mariani Scotti Chronicon* (Waitz 1844: 559, s.a. 1087[=1065]), but not explicitly *Innsi Gall*, and not necessarily all at the same time. Echmarcach's successor on Man was Guðrøðr Sigtryggsson, succeeded in turn by his son Fingall (ob. *CRMI* 1051[=1070]), whose son may have been the Macc Congail who died as king of *na Renn*a (*AI* [1094]; identification Byrne 1982). It is unclear how Fergus the *Gall-Gáedel* came to possess *na Renn*a: possibly by a claim through his mother, and/or through the sponsorship of the kings of England or Scotland. Fingall seems to have been replaced or displaced on Man by Guðrøðr *cró bán* ('white eye-socket/enclosure/ring'), most likely the son of Echmarcach's rival in Dublin, Ívarr son of Haraldr son of Óláfr *Cúarán* Sigtryggsson (see *AT* [1091]), whose descendants, apart from a decade-long interregnum, would rule Man until the late thirteenth century, but not Dublin like Guðrøðr.

The composite nature of the kingdom or group of kingdoms ruled by some of these figures should by now be obvious, and this point is further underlined by the

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<sup>4</sup> No Old Norse text accords this Sumarliði a patronym.

presence of *principes insularum* ('princes of [the] islands') to whom the kings were answerable (*CRMI* 1075; *CRMI* 1077; *CRMI* 1098; *CRMI* 1144; Ó Ríagáin 2020: 513). All of this was later exploited by Somerled, who pushed the claim to kingship of his son Dubgall, who was the son of Óláfr Guðrøðarson's daughter (*CRMI* 1102), resulting in a permanent division of *Innsi Gall* between the descendants of Guðrøðr Ólafsson and Somerled. This is the local context for all of what follows.

### **The ecclesiastical dimension: the dioceses of Sodor and Argyll and their shifting relationships to royal power**

Having introduced the polities of the west, the emergence of the dioceses of Sodor and Argyll and their relationship to the competing projects of centralisation of other kings will now be discussed in order to set up a more in-depth discussion of those projects in the next section. There have been several important studies of the ecclesiastical and political history of the dioceses of Suðreyjar/Sodor and Argyll in the medieval period, including Kolsrud (*DN* 17.2: 308–53); Ashley (1958); Cowan (1978); Watt (1994); Beuermann (2002); Woolf (2003, 2015); Thomas (2010); MacDonald (2013); and Shead *et al.* (2019: 33–52, 252–72).

Similar to the secular sphere, the histories of these dioceses are entangled with one another and with the other dioceses around the northern Irish Sea — not least Whithorn, but also Dublin and Armagh — and with the wider political patterns in the period. Arguably even more complex than the relations of Orkney and Caithness with the Scottish and Norwegian royal regimes in the period being studied, there are many similarities in their histories, demonstrating that the conditions that led to the burning of Bishop Adam were not entirely unique. First, though, a brief outline of the earlier history of these dioceses is required.

### **The early ecclesiastical history of the dioceses**

Bishops were associated with several locations within the territories associated with the two later dioceses. Principal among these was Iona, probably founded by Colum Cille *c.* 563 (*AU* [563]) and primarily ruled by an abbot but with bishops also present across multiple centuries (listed Ó Ríagáin 2020: 1110–18). Bishops were also located at Kingarth on Bute (e.g. Daniél, ob. *AU* [660]; Iolán, ob. *AU* [689]). Only abbots are known

from Lis Mór (Lismore) Mo-Luóc in the Firth of Lorn (Ó Ríagáin 2020: 1073–82), founded by Lugaid/Mo-Luóc/Mo-Lua (ob. *AT* [588] or *AT* [590]), not to be confused with the later foundation Lismore Mo-Chutu (*AI* [638]) on the River Blackwater in County Waterford in southern Ireland. The small number of recorded bishops in the region may have been due to Iona’s role in recording the source material that survives for the region; scribes on Iona may have chosen to omit details of bishops at rival foundations such as Lismore, Kingarth, Holy Island on Arran (associated with Mo-Laisse of the Cenél nGabráin), and Eileach an Naomh in the Garvellachs (associated with Brendan of Ardfert and Clonfert) (Fraser 2005; Ó Ríagáin 2020: 232–52, 1031–1129). It is striking that no site on the adjacent parts of the mainland has firm associations with bishops in the early and high medieval periods. There is little evidence for claims to primacy being made by external institutions until the *Tripartite Life of Patrick* (Stokes 1887: 162), which went through several recensions in the period c. 830×1200, and which ties Armagh in with the origin legend of the Dál Riata having conquered western Scotland from northeast Ireland c. 500 (discussed Ó Ríagáin 2020: 435–63; 2024).

Less information survives for the early ecclesiastical history of Man. The presence of early bishops is indicated in sculptural evidence (Kermode 1907: 36; Trench-Jellicoe 2002: 15). It is also hinted at in the opening passage of the list of bishops of Man/Sodor found at the end of *Cronica Regum Mannie et Insularum* (*CRMI*) in London, British Library, Cotton MS Julius vii, fols 50v–52r, which is treated here as a separate text and referred to as the *Cottonian List*. Located 29 km. from Galloway, 51 km. from County Down, some 50 km. from Cumbria, and 70 km. from Anglesey, we might expect that Man’s ecclesiastical history would be bound up with these regions. There may have been a relationship with bishop Finnian of Movilla, County Down (ob. *AU* [579]), probably identical with Uinniau/Ninian of Whithorn (Clancy 2001), or with Downpatrick (first bishop Fergus, ob. *AU* [584]), or Nendrum, founded by Mo-Choí (ob. *AU* [497] or *AU* [499]). The earliest surviving attested association with Armagh, however, is dated to c. 670, as noted in Muirchú’s *Vita Patricii* (Bieler 1979: 102–7), preserved in the ninth-century *Book of Armagh* (TCD MS 52, fols 2r–8v). Here there is an account of the career of Mac Cuill Moccu Greccae, later (not unproblematically) known as Mochutus, Mo-Chut(h)u, Machaldus, or St Maughold (discussed e.g. Lewis 2014: 30–36), who encountered Patrick as a wild man and bandit before setting himself adrift and landing on the Isle of Man, being received there by Conindrus and Rumilus (TCD MS 52, fol. 6va), the bishops who had converted Man, before becoming bishop of Man himself. The

majority of subsequent lives of Patrick contain this episode, but whether this is evidence for a continued claim by Armagh for primacy over bishops on Man is difficult to determine. If Armagh could have supplanted the evidence of missionary activity on Man before the arrival of someone connectable to Patrick, it would have done so. Therefore, the presence of Conindrus and Rumilus should be taken as evidence for the presence of bishops on Man in the early medieval period (Woolf 2015: 329–30) and could have been used by bishops of Sodor to counter any claims to primacy made by Armagh.<sup>5</sup>

### **The diocese of Suðreyjar/Sodor**

In similar fashion to the contemporary secular sphere, references to pre-twelfth-century bishops in western and northern Britain are usually unclear about the areas over which the bishops had authority *and* the exclusivity of that authority. This would not be anything unusual in Ireland and arguably elsewhere prior to the twelfth century. The obit of Fothud/Fothad mac Bruin/Brain describes him as an excellent scribe who died in old age ‘*episcopus Innsi Alban*’ (‘bishop of the islands of [northern] Britain’, my ed. and trans. of Brussels KBR MS 5301–20; cf. *ARos*: 170, no. 282; also in *AFM* 961 [=963]).<sup>6</sup> Later tradition (Wyntoun VI.x: 192–93) renders Fothad as ‘Fodauche’ and associates him with St Andrews before his banishment by Illulb (ob. *CS* [962] or Dub (ob. *AU* [967]), both kings of Alba. Fothad can also be identified as Bishop ‘Fothach’ who died in the reign of Dub (*CKA*: 151, 159 note 60). It might be special pleading, though, to propose that Fothad administered the diocese of Sodor referred to in high-medieval documents. It is possible that he was based on Iona at some point, but his contemporary Fíngin (ob. *CS* [966]) is

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<sup>5</sup> Lewis (2014: 35) draws attention to Macc Cuill being rendered *méchil* (Bieler 1971: 354–55), a ‘perfectly acceptable Old Welsh spelling of Mechyll’, a saint associated with Anglesey. This may be due to the medieval tendency to merge saints’ cults, but it is worth considering in light of Guy’s (2023: 155) proposition that Kynon and Run/Ruvann, sons of Brychan (possibly the eponym within Brycheiniogin southeast Wales), may be the Conindrus and Rumilus in Muirchú’s account, and that their names could be preserved in the parish names Conchan/Onchan and Marown on Man. This may mean that Armagh did attempt to imprint itself on the narrative of how Man was Christianised, but it may also be related to attempts by Welsh institutions to make claims of primacy over Man by making Macc Cuill British.

<sup>6</sup> When providing an edition of material from a manuscript, I will enclose that material in quotation marks and mark editorial expansions with italics, in line with standard practice. When quoting directly from an edition, I will use the same formatting for expansions as used the editor(s), and again enclose in quotation marks. Where no quotation marks appear to allow for changes in case to accord with the rest of the sentence or where no expansions were necessary, non-English words are in italics. My thanks to the journal’s editors for allowing me to depart from the journal’s set style in the first two sets of instances.

described as bishop of the community of Iona, which may indicate the operation of two separate episcopates, with Fothad based elsewhere. There were several other bishops at Iona in this period. Muigrón was a bishop who died as coarb ('successor') of Colum Cille in Ireland and Alba (*AU* [980]; *AI* [981]; *CS* [980]; *ARos*: 171, no. 290; second item in *AFM* 978[=980] and a synchronic poem attached to fourth item in the latter annal). Another un-named bishop (*AI* [986]), who was also abbot of Iona (*AU* [986]), was killed the same decade and was probably identical to Máel Ciaráin Ua Maigna, coarb of Colum Cille, martyred by Danes in Dublin (*CS* [986]; *ARos*: 171, no. 291; *AClon* 980[=986]; *AFM* 985[=986]). It is uncertain whether any of these figures had episcopal jurisdiction beyond Iona, and if so, what its extent may have been. However, there is at least some indication of connections between Man and Iona in the tenth and eleventh centuries, with stone from Man used in a stone crosshead found on Iona, for example (Ó Ríagáin 2020: 1094–97).

The *Cottonian List* places the foundation of the high-medieval diocese of Suðreyjar/Sodor at some point prior to the reign of Guðrøðr *cró bán* in the era of Bishop Hrólfr (or Ráðrulfr/Rauðúlfr), 'Roolwer' in the text (identification by Munch 1860: 136). Significantly, the *Cottonian List* has Hrólfr buried at *ecclesia Sancti Machuti* ('St Maughold's Church'), which might indicate that this continued to be a site with episcopal associations, either actual or at least remembered (discussed Watt 1994: 108). It is unlikely but not impossible that 'Roolwer' could be a rendering of 'Thorulfus' (Þórulfr), a mid-eleventh-century Hamburg-appointed bishop of *Blascona* (Birsay) (Adam of Bremen, IV.xxxv: 271, notes i and 1; Tschan 2002: 216). Anderson (1922: 96) proposes that 'Roolwer' may be identical to Radulfus, put forward as bishop by Jarl Páll Þórfinnsson of Orkney, who sent a cleric to Thomas de Bayeux of York to request consecration, as mentioned in a letter of Thomas to Lanfranc of Canterbury (Haddan and Stubbs 1873: 162; see also Crawford 2013: 56). It is equally likely that the names are similar, just as there was a similarly named bishop in Orkney the following century, Radulf/Ralph Nowell, for example.

No bishop is mentioned at Iona after 986, which may be due to a general diminishment of references to the site in this period. In relation to Whithorn, Richard Oram (1991: 83) points out that 'no bishop is recorded is recorded between *c.* 833 and the appearance of Gilla-Aldan in *c.* 1128'. This means that there is no surviving evidence for bishops in the Hebrides and *na Renna* at the time Hrólfr was appointed in two of the four elements of a composite kingdom that — at times — also included Man and Dublin. Annie

Ashley suggests that Hrólfr may have been a contemporary of Dúnán, first bishop of Dublin, and that he may have been consecrated by Dúnán ‘or like him by the Archbishop of Canterbury’ (Ashley 1958: 11). D. E. R. Watt (1994: 109–10) sees this as ‘going beyond the evidence’. In his obit, Dúnán is described as ‘ardespoc Gall’ (‘over-bishop of (the) foreigners’, *AU* 1074) or ‘aird espoc Atha Cliath’ (‘over-bishop of Dublin’, my ed. and trans. of Rawlinson B.488 fol. 18vb; cf. *AT* [1074]; closely resembled by *AClon* 1073; *AFM* 1074). The addition of *ard* (‘high/over/arch’) to Dúnán’s title might be hyperbole, but it might indicate that he was at one point bishop over all four elements of the composite kingdom. However, it is important to take note that it is only the *Annals of Ulster* item that hints at a pre-eminent position among the *Gaill*, with all other obits only associating him with Dublin, and *Chronicon Scotorum* (*CS* [1074]) merely describes him as bishop of Dublin.

Alex Woolf (2003: 171–72) proposes that Hrólfr may have been the incumbent at the time of Guðrøðr’s accession, but it is more likely from the wording that Hrólfr completely predated this (Watt 1994: 109–10; Beuermann 2002: 433). That Echmarcach Rognvaldsson submitted along with two other northern kings, Máel Coluim and Mac Bethad, to Knútr of Denmark and England on Knútr’s return to Britain (*ASC/D–F* 1031) could be the context for Hrólfr being established as bishop, especially seeing as Echmarcach himself died either in or en route to Rome (*Mariani Scotti Chronicon* in Waitz 1844: 559, *s.a.* 1087 [=1065]; Mac Niocaill 1959: 339, *s.aa.* 1064–65; cf. *AU* 1064; *AI* [1064]). Hrólfr’s appointment may have been contemporary to the installation of Henricus (Henry or Heinrekr) as bishop of Orkney by Knútr and either the archbishop of York (Haki Antonsson 2007: 85–87) or Canterbury (discussed Ellis 2022: 370–71), having also been the keeper of Knútr’s treasure in England, before later going to Iceland and then Lund (Adam of Bremen: IV.viii, 235–36; *DN* 17.2: 197–98, 294; Shead *et al.* 2019: 315–16; Ellis 2022: 368–71).<sup>7</sup>

Norman Shead (1969: 220, 224) is sceptical about the details regarding the eleventh-century (re)emergence of bishops at Glasgow, or the revival of the see there. However, there may be a kernel of truth wrapped up in York propaganda, in that the York-associated ‘Magsuea’ and John were probably bishops of Cumbria, but whether this included Whithorn or *na Renna* cannot be determined (on the shifting semantics of

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<sup>7</sup> The same general period also saw further bishops of Orkney appointed from Bremen, including one named Þórufr who also had Icelandic associations (Adam of Bremen: III.lxxvii, 222–25).

‘Cumbria’, see e.g. Edmonds 2014). At the very least, though, it demonstrates that several formalised bishoprics were (re)emerging in the documentary evidence in the eleventh-century Irish Sea region, rather than it being solely about Dublin and Man. It also provides a hint that the bishoprics were already being pulled in different political directions, laying the seeds for what would become a much bigger issue in the twelfth century.

According to the *Cottonian List*, Hrólfur was succeeded by William, whose name may indicate that he was French (Woolf 2003: 171), or at least Norman. This might suggest intervention from England after 1066. If Guðrøðr Sigtryggsson, king of Man, had received (sheltered?) Guðrøðr *cró bán* after the Battle of Stamford Bridge, then it may have prompted English action along several axes of social power.

Third on the *Cottonian List* is ‘Hamondus filius Iole Mannicus genere’ (‘Hámundr son of Iola, Manxman by birth’), and the first described as ‘in diebus Godredi Crouan’ (‘in the days of Guðrøðr *cró bán*’, *CRMI*: fol. 50v, Broderick’s underlined expansions), which presumably means that those days started during William’s episcopacy. How long Hámundr lived after Guðrøðr is unknown, and he may well have died in the same plague as Guðrøðr and Donnus (or Donatus), the third named bishop of Dublin (*AI* [1095]; *AHG* 1095; cf. *HNov*: II, 73).

Hámundr’s successor in the *Cottonian List* was an Englishman named ‘Gamaliel’, who was buried at Peterborough in England, followed in turn by ‘Ragnaldus’ (my expansion), probably Ragnarr or Røgnvaldr, a Norwegian. However, comparing between sources indicates that there are names omitted from the list. There may have been a significant vacancy in the diocese after Hámundr, with the diocese administered from elsewhere (Woolf 2015: 334–35). This vacancy may have been caused by the rulership of Man — or at least overlordship over it — passing between Muirchertach Ua Briain of Mumu, Magnús *berfættir* Óláfsson of Norway, and William (II) Rufus and Henry I of England after the death of Guðrøðr *cró bán* in an era of internecine rivalry between his sons Lagmann and Haraldr (*CRMI* 1056[=1075–95]; *CRMI* 1075[1095×98]; *CRMI* 1098[=1098×1103]).

The most significant name omitted from the *Cottonian List* is Wimund. For Barrow (2003a: 59), ‘[t]here is surely no stranger figure in twelfth-century Scottish history than Wimund’. He receives a long and spectacular account in William of Newburgh, where he is described as being of English birth, a monk at Furness elected bishop and sent to Man

by his brethren, before claiming to be a son of the earl of Moray and raiding extensively in the islands and provinces of Scotland in the twelfth century (Howlett 1884: I.xxiv, 73–76; Stevenson 1856c: 431–32). This Wimund is likely identical to the bishop of the Isles reported in *Chronica Pontificum Ecclesiae Eboracensis* as ordained by and professing obedience to archbishop Thomas at York, coming after Michael of Glasgow and before Radulf Nowell of Orkney, and describing himself as *ego Wimundus sanctae ecclesiae de Schith* ('I, Wimund of the holy church of Skye', Raine 1886: 372). Woolf (2003: 173, 2015: 335; contra Shead *et al.* 2019: 253, who propose two Wimunds) argues that the *Chronica*'s author–compiler may have misread Thomas for Thurstan (both were probably expansions from 'T'), noting that Wimund does not appear in Hugh the Chantor's *Archbishops of York*, unlike Michael and Radulf (Raine 1886: 127). This is somewhat surprising if the author of the *Chronica* was copying Hugh's earlier work and if 'Hugh was anxious to demonstrate that the archbishop of York was metropolitan of the Scottish bishops' (Shead 1969: 220).

Some context for the relationship with York might be found in the relationship of Óláfr Guðrøðarson to Henry I of England (*CRMI* 1098[=1102–1103]; discussed Davey 2015: 349, 356–357). Having originally attempted to establish a Cistercian daughter-house of Rievaulx (Beck 1844: 122; Atkinson 1886: 11–12; Davey 2015: 349–50, 352), Óláfr founded Rushden Abbey as a daughter house of the Savignac house at Furness in Cumbria on his own land (*CRMI* 1134). The *Coucher Book of Furness* (Atkinson 1886: 11) gives the foundation date as 1238, likely an error for 1138, and the corrected date probably reflects the lag between the grant and Furness establishing a colony. The holdings of Furness on Man are listed in an 1153 papal confirmation of Eugenius III (Oliver 1861: 10–11).

In founding a Savignac house, Óláfr seems to have been attempting to establish a royal abbey to function for his dynasty similar to how Westminster functioned for kings of England: a venue for royal rituals and dynastic mausoleum (Davey 2015: 356–57), and an important ideological power resource for his rule. This is further reflected by its relative wealth and location close to a centre of secular power, both of which would not be in keeping with its later status as a Cistercian house but would be in line with a Savignac house (Davey 2015: 357). That Óláfr would establish a Savignac house within the lifetime of Henry I, who was a great promotor of the order, would seem to indicate that Óláfr looked to England for inspiration in his attempts at formalising and centralising his power.

In his foundation charter, Óláfr granted the right to elect a *pontifex* in his kingdom to Furness (Oliver 1861: 1–3), which he confirmed in a letter to the archbishop of York, requesting that the bishop elect be promoted under the authority of the seal of the archbishop (Oliver 1861: 4–6). For R. A. McDonald (2008: 208), ‘it is possible that Olaf was erecting Man and the Isles into a single diocese along territorial lines’. The full extent of this might be preserved in a much-altered bull ascribed to Gregory IX and dated 30 July 1231 (Poole 1911). The wording of Óláfr’s request, that his kingdom have its own bishop rather than be rendered desolate under strangers and mercenaries who seek their own advantage (Oliver 1861: 2) would seem to be significant. Ashley notes that ‘[t]he union of Man and the other Isles in a combined diocese is traditionally ascribed to [Óláfr], but it is probably more accurate to say that the Church in Man was thenceforward associated less closely than before with the Church in Ireland’ (Ashley 1958: 11).

The series of twelfth-century synods in Ireland placed Armagh over all other Irish dioceses and archdioceses, including Dublin, and removed any bishoprics in Ireland from any claims to primacy by Canterbury (see e.g. Flanagan 2010). The process was not without friction. Cellach, coarb of Patrick, assumed the episcopacy in Dublin on the death of Samuel ua hAingli (*AU* 1121). Samuel’s elected successor Gréne/Gregorius had travelled to England for ordination before returning to find his see in Dublin occupied, prompting his immediate departure to England (*HNov*: VI, 297–298). Cellach continued as bishop, presumably until his death as ‘aird espoc Iarthair Eorpa’ (‘archbishop of Western Europe’) (*AU* 1129).

Óláfr may have acted to avoid being incorporated into Armagh’s orbit, either directly or via Dublin. This is reflected perhaps in a renewed textual effort by Armagh to claim Man via Patrick. Not exclusively, and perhaps more pressingly, Óláfr may have aimed to counteract claims by Dublin, especially after it was elevated to metropolitan status in 1152, but likely also before that if Dublin’s bishops were campaigning for this status prior to then (Beuermann 2002). Óláfr may also have been acting in the context of wider developments in the Irish Sea Zone, with Whithorn (re)emerging in the sources in the late 1120s as the seat of a diocese of Galloway that acknowledged York as its metropolitan well into the thirteenth century (Oram 1991). The York option may have been the best option open to Óláfr, as it did not present quite as much of an immediate precedent for political overlordship than Dublin or Armagh, even if it still could create precedence for political claims from Scotland or England, which helps explain the later move to the metropolitan authority of Trondheim (discussed Beuermann 2002).

Oram (2011: 78) and Woolf (2015: 335) draw attention to William fitz Duncan (or Uilleam mac Donnchada), nephew of David I, being described as *quondam comes de Murreve* ('formerly earl of Moray') in a thirteenth-century memorandum on the descendants of Waltheof/Waldave son of Earl Gospatrick, lords of Allerdale (Wilson 1915: 530–33, no. VI [on 532]; Barrow and Scott 1971: 12–13; Woolf 2003: 173). This would accord with Domnall mac Uilleam launching his attempt to become king of either Moray or Scotland, and it is likely that Domnall was the son of William fitz Duncan and a daughter of Óengus of Moray (Barrow 2003a: 59–60). Domnall was probably born prior to William's later marriage to Alicia de Rumilly (ob. by 1187), daughter of William de Meschin (ob. by 1135), which brought him extensive lands in Copeland and Skipton (Farrer and Clay 1947: iii–iv). Wimund may have been either from another early marriage or fathered extramaritally, most likely while William was in Cumbria with his mother Ethelreda's brother Waltheof of Allerdale after his father Donnchad's murder (*AU* 1094; Oram 2011: 77–79, 103–4). Wimund was probably pushed into the Church for political expediency. As the son of one of David I's nephews, who was also one of David's principal military leaders, Wimund's appointment may have been early evidence for Scottish royal intervention in the ecclesiastical politics of the diocese of Sodor, potentially by David I and/or William fitz Duncan influencing Wimund's election at Furness as a means of strengthening David's hegemony around the northeast Irish Sea.

The right of Furness to elect a bishop of Sodor was confirmed by Guðrøðr Ólafsson in 1154, without mention of metropolitan confirmation (Oliver 1861: 13–14), and again by Rognvaldr Guðrøðarson in 1188 (Oliver 1861: 17–18); the right to election is not specifically mentioned in the 1188 charter, nor is York's metropolitan role. York may not have been mentioned due to a recent attempt by Cardinal Giovanni Papanoni – who, according to John of Salisbury's *Historia Pontificalis*, was on his way to Ireland as papal legate – to establish an archdiocese at St Andrews with authority over 'the Scots, Orkneys and adjacent islands' (Chibnall 1956: 71–72, no. XXXVI), which Watt (1994: 112) proposes may have included the diocese of Sodor.

The death of William fitz Duncan, probably in the late 1140s, may have prompted Wimund's actions, but perhaps he was equally inspired by the death of Henry, earl of Northumbria: David's son and designated heir (*AT* [1152]; *CMel* 1152). Alternatively, Henry's death may have prompted David I to settle the dispute with Wimund, before David's own death (*AT* [1153]; *CHol* 1153) and the succession of Henry's son Máel Coluim, which David must have predicted would be disputed by several claimants. The

move against Wimund may have taken place the same year as Henry's death, as it is referred to as a *fait accompli* by Robert of Torigni *s.a.* 1152 (Howlett 1889: 167). These events broadly coincided with the killing of Óláfr Guðrøðarson by his nephew Rognvaldr Haraldsson while Guðrøðr Ólafsson was in Norway to submit to king Ingi Haraldsson (*CRMI* 1142[=1153]). They were followed shortly by the death of Stephen, king of England, and the coronation of Henry II in 1154 (*Chronica Majora* II: 204). It is hardly surprising that this secular instability would be reflected in the ecclesiastical sphere.

The 1154 confirmation came the same year as a papal bull of Anastasius IV confirming the establishment of Niðaróss as an archdiocese (Haddan and Stubbs 1873: 229–30), to which Sodor and Orkney were to be subject. As Ashley (1958: 14) points out, this seems to have been through the agency of Ingi Haraldsson, king of Norway, to whom Guðrøðr Ólafsson had recently submitted (*CRMI* 1153), as already noted. Ian Beuermann (2002: 430–32) suggests that Guðrøðr may have been involved in the process of transferring metropolitan affiliation while in Norway, with his father Óláfr seeking to distance the diocese of Sodor from the influence of Dublin. The *c.* 1192 *Liber Censuum* (Fabre 1889: 228–29) lists the *episcopatus Sudereiensi* ('diocese/episcopacy of Sodor') in the archdiocese of Niðaróss directly after *episcopatus Horchadensi* ('diocese/episcopacy Orkney'), with Iona set apart.

Iona's status in 1192 is in line with later documentary evidence, and likely indicates the state of affairs earlier in the century — if not in earlier centuries. A letter from Innocent III to Celestine, abbot of Iona (probably identical to Cellach in *AU* 1204), and the brothers of Iona, dated 5 Ides December, 6 Innocent III (9 December 1203), states that the monastery and its possessions were under papal protection (Migne 1855: 193–94; *DN* 7.1: 4–5, no. 4; dated 10 December 1203 in Dunning 1947: 36, no. 12, 1962: 241, no. 29). A 1289 papal letter to the bishop of Argyll gave him the mandate to compel the bishop of Sodor to desist from molesting the monastery of St Columba on Iona in his diocese, stating that it was, according to *Liber Censualis*, immediately subject to the Roman church (5 Nones October, 2 Nicholas IV; Fabre 1889: 229, note 1). Having papal protection makes it all the more striking that a group of Irish bishops would demolish the new buildings on Iona and depose Cellach in favour of Amalgaid (*AU* 1204). The papal association also sheds some light on the ambivalence as regards Iona's status vis-à-vis Niðaróss and the kingdom of Norway more generally, not least the royal sanctioning by Ingi Bárðarson of a raid on the Hebrides that included the plundering of Iona in 1209–10 by combined Baglar and Birkibeinar, with Óspakr son of Dubgall and thus a grandson of

Somerled among the leaders (*Boglunga saga* ch. 117, ÍF 31: 47, 134–38; Einarr Michaëlsson 2015: 30; cf. *Annales regii*, Storm 1888: 122–23, s.a. 1210).

With the exceptions of later bulls confirming the rights of Niðaróss, ‘the earlier popes seem oddly oblivious of the provincial status of the diocese’ of Sodor (Ashley 1958: 14). An 1182 confirmation by Lucius III of the dioceses under the metropolitan authority of Dublin includes *episcopatus insularum* ‘([the] bishopric of [the] islands)’, interpreted as Glendalough or *Insula sancti salvatoris* ‘Island of the Holy Saviour’, Sheehy 1962: 35–37, no. 11). Some scholars interpret this as a reference to Sodor (Duffy 2002: 49, 191; Beuermann 2002: 429), which could help make sense of a 1219 letter from Honorius III warning the prince and others of that diocese of the Isles from hindering the new bishop elected by Furness from being presented to his metropolitan at Dublin (Theiner 1864: 14, no. XXXI; Bliss 1893: 69). This papal uncertainty is further reflected in the 15 February 1244 bull of Innocent IV that refers to the bishops of Sodor being consecrated sometimes by York and sometimes by Niðaróss, and instructing the archbishop of York to consecrate the candidate chosen by Furness due to the remoteness of Man from Niðaróss by being separated by a dangerous sea (*DN* 1: 22, no. 28). Gregory IX took the cathedral of the diocese of Sodor into his protection in 1231 (Moore 1890; Poole 1911), which ‘seems to detract more seriously from the authority of the Norwegian metropolitan’ (Ashley 1958: 15). Gregory IX also wrote in 1236 that the bishopric of Lismore be entrusted to the bishop of Sodor (Ashley 1958: 15), indicating the general ecclesiastical instability across the wider region in this period.

As already noted, the next name on the *Cottonian List* after Hámundr is an Englishman ‘Gamaliel’, buried at Peterborough in England. Whether or not this was due to his losing his position in Sodor in light of its move into the archdiocese of Niðaróss cannot be determined. He was ordained by Roger, archbishop of York (1154–81), according to John of Allhallowgate’s *Chronicon Metricum Ecclesie Eboracensis* (Raine 1886: 462; see Watt 1994: 117; Woolf 2003: 173). Haddan and Stubbs (1873: 228) propose successive dates of 1151 and 1154 for the consecrations of John and Gamaliel as bishops of the Isles. John of Sées in Normandy was consecrated as second bishop of Man by Archbishop Henry of York, with Wimund — who had been blinded at this point — regarded as the first, according to the *Chronicle of Robert of Torigni* s.a. 1152 (Howlett 1889: 167; Watt 1994: 116–17). It seems that Óláfr had previously attempted to have a cleric named Nicholas confirmed as bishop, seemingly against the wishes of Furness, in a letter to the dean and chapter of York dating to 1148×52 (Oliver 1861: 49–52; *DN* 17.2:

320–21; Watt 1994: 116; Shead *et al.* 2019: 254). This may have been due to Wimund still technically being bishop at that point (Woolf 2003: 173) and having too much influence at Furness to be deposed, rather than John and Nicholas being opposing bishops. Their absence from the *Cottonian List* is no indication of their not having been bishops, and John at least does seem to have been consecrated.

The ‘Ragnaldus’ (Ragnall/Rǫgnvaldr or possibly Ragnarr) described as *Norwegiensis genere* (‘of Norwegian heritage’) who succeeded Gamaliel may have been ‘the first bishop to have recognised the metropolitan status of Trondheim as opposed to York’ (McDonald 2008: 207). He may even have been sent from Norway and could have been consecrated by Niðaróss in opposition to York’s consecration of Gamaliel (Beuermann 2002: 431). It was likely Rǫgnvaldr who was the *episcopus insularum Man et aliarum triginta unius, quae sunt inter Scotiam et Hiberniam et Angliam* (‘bishop of the islands of Man and thirty-one others that are between Scotland and Ireland and England’) that accompanied William, king of Scotland,<sup>8</sup> to Mont St Michel per the *Chronicle of Robert of Torigni s.a.* 1166 (Howlett 1889: 228–29).

The ability of the archbishops of Niðaróss to impose their authority for the remainder of the century was diminished by the political situation in Norway. This uncertainty is reflected in the sources, necessitating a move forward in time in order to then proceed from the certain to the less certain. The eighth bishop on the *Cottonian List*, Nicholas (ob. *CRMI* 1217), is likely to be the *Koli byskop til Syðréyia* (‘Koli, bishop of Sodor’) in both *Annales regii* and *Skáholts-Annaler* (Storm 1888: 123, 182, both *s.a.* 1210). The statement in these Icelandic annals that he was bishop of the Suðreyjar 40 years after ‘Nemar’ had been bishop might seem inaccurate, but Woolf (2015: 338) proposes ‘Nemar’ be read as Reinarr, potentially identical to the ‘Ragnaldus’ the Norwegian in the *Cottonian list* (*CRMI*: fol. 50v). This interpretation is also favoured by Ashley (1958: 16) and McDonald (2008: 207). The 40-years statement and its implied/perceived vacancy could indicate that there was more than one bishop at a time in *Innsi Gall* before the situation was regularised in the thirteenth century. However, it might also indicate a lack of a Niðaróss-ordained bishop from the perspective of an Icelandic annalist with

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<sup>8</sup> William fitz Henry (or Uilleam mac Eanric) is described as *ri Alban* (‘king of Alba’) in *AU* 1214, *rex Scotie* (‘king of Scotia/Scotland’) in *CHol* 1174, 1182 and 1186, but *CMel* oscillates between *rex Scotie* and *rex Scottorum* (‘king of Scots’). Due to the second element being abbreviated in charters and other acts, it is difficult to state anything conclusively as to whether he or his administration saw him as one or the other; therefore, I will refer to him as ‘king of Scotland’.

connections to Niðaróss, but that does not necessarily mean that there were no bishops in this period, as bishops may have been ordained elsewhere. York is found doing the same in the 1150s after Wimund with John and Gamaliel, as already mentioned. Despite being elected by the monks of Furness in 1193 (Oliver 1860: 19–20), Nicholas/Koli may well have been the second to recognise the metropolitan authority of Niðaróss, but it could also be that news of every bishop did not reach Iceland. Nicholas may have presided over Rognvaldr Sumarliðarson's programme of construction on Iona and possibly at Saddell in Kintyre (Ó Ríagáin 2020: 564), but Rognvaldr might also have dealt directly with Iona or the papacy.

Nicholas died in Bangor in Ulaid (*CRMI* 1217), which had been refounded as an Augustinian abbey by the 1160s (*AFM* 1163; discussed Ó Ríagáin 2020: 1401–11),<sup>9</sup> and the abbot and canons were subsequently taken into the protection of John, king of England, in 1207 (Sweetman 1875: 50–51, no. 339). Nicholas could have been at Bangor for any number of reasons and may not have chosen to die or be buried there (cf. Duffy 2002: 48–49; Beuermann 2002: 429). He was succeeded by Reginaldus (*CRMI* 1217), described as a man of royal race in the *Cottonian List*. This may be the same individual as the chaplain of John, bishop of Dunkeld (ob. *CMel* 1203), who was in the attestor list of several charters during John's episcopacy (e.g. Easson 1947: 12–16), though it could just be a shared name. Reginald/Rognvaldr's selection was contested by Nicholas de Meaux, who had been elected at Furness (Shead *et al.* 2019: 255–256) and ordained in Dublin but needed a papal order to have the prince of the Isles (probably Óláfr, but possibly Rognvaldr) cease molesting him (1219, 4 Honorius III, Theiner 1864: 14, no. XXXI). Honorius III wrote on Nicholas's behalf to the archbishop of York after Nicholas's expulsion from Sodor in 1224 (Oliver 1861: 67–68). Rognvaldr Guðrøðarson, king of Man, may also have pressed Nicholas's claim due to Bishop Rognvaldr's close relations

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<sup>9</sup> Several scholars favour an earlier date for the refoundation of Bangor as an abbey of Augustinian canons: 1140 (Mabillon 1889: 90), after 1132 (O'Keeffe 2011: 474), when Máel M'Aédóc (AKA Malachy) became archbishop of Armagh, or around 1124, when he — according to his hagiographer — became abbot of Bangor (Reeves 1847: 93–95; Watt 1972: 16–17; Flanagan 2010: 118–20; Bhreathnach 2024: 106; all based on Bernard of Clairvaux, VI.12: 1477–79, who seems to be compressing several events and whose *piratae* were more likely Cenél nEógain campaigns in Ulaid rather than much earlier viking raids). Malachy becoming abbot and Augustinian canons being installed could easily have occurred at different points in time. The refoundation may also have occurred in the period between the plundering of Bangor by Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn of the Cenél nEógain (*AFM* 1149) and the death of Bernard (1153, Mabillon 1889: 94), if not the first mention of canons at Bangor in surviving annals (*AFM* 1163).

with his brother and rival Óláfr Guðrøðarson (*CRMI* 1217[=1207×1226]). Iona's papal protection may have inspired Røgnvaldr Guðrøðarson, *rex Insularum* ('king of the Isles'), to surrender Man to Honorius III in 1219 and hold it as fief from the pope (Theiner 1864: 11, no. XXVI; Bliss 1893: 91). This occurred a year after Røgnvaldr did homage to Henry III in May 1218 (Bain 1881: 122, no. 696), in a period when Røgnvaldr was under serious pressure from his brother Óláfr (*CRMI* 1217[=1207×1226]). Óláfr eventually deposed Røgnvaldr (*CRMI* 1226); Røgnvaldr was subsequently murdered attempting to regain his kingdom (*CRMI* 1228[=1228–1229]). The fractious relationship between king and bishop may have been what prompted a letter dated 20 January 1223 from Honorius III to implore Røgnvaldr Guðrøðarson to allow the churches in his kingdom their financial rights (Oliver 1961: 62–63). Another letter of the same date has Honorius III ordering the people of Sodor to pay *decima de caseo et butiro* ('tithes of cheese and butter', *DN* 7.1: 11, no. 10).

The *Cottonian List* has Cristinus of Argyll and Michael of Man as bishops of the Isles between Ragnaldus and Nicholas. Cristinus, probably Gille-Críst, was the first bishop that took over the diocese of Sodor after the political split of *Innsi Gall* brought about by Somerled and his sons in the 1150s. Watt (1994: 113–14) proposes that this Cristinus was the candidate promoted by Somerled's sons, and that he was deposed in favour of Michael, who died at the Cistercian Fountains Abbey (*CRMI* 1193). Cristinus died at Bangor, which could indicate that he acknowledged the authority of an Irish metropolitan (Duffy 2002: 49). However, he may also have been there on pilgrimage, and there is a link made between Bangor and Lugaid ('Luanus'), founder of Lismore in Argyll, in Bernard of Clairvaux's twelfth-century *Vita Malachiaea* (VI.12: 1477; Jackson Lawlor 1920: 28; see Ó Riagáin 2020: 1073–82). Røgnvaldr Guðrøðarson renewed his grandfather's grants to Furness in 1188 (Oliver 1861: 17–18), a year after Guðrøðr's death and burial on Iona (*CRMI* 1187), and Cristinus's administration of the diocese was probably brought to an end shortly afterwards. Alternatively, Woolf (2003: 175) draws attention to another Cristinus serving as bishop of Whithorn, from 1154 (*CHol* 1154) to his death at Holm Cultram (*CMel* 1186), proposing that the overlap in names, the familial links between Guðrøðr Ólafsson of Man and Lochlann/Roland of Galloway<sup>10</sup> may indicate that Whithorn administered part of the diocese in this period.

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<sup>10</sup> The mother of Guðrøðr Ólafsson was Affreca daughter of Fergus of Galloway (*CRMI* 1102). Lochlann or Roland (ob. *AU* 1200) was the son of Affreca's brother Uhtred, who is described in *Chronica Magistri* II: 63 as *Uchredus vero filius Fergus* ('Uhtred true son of Fergus').

In the early years of Rognvaldr's reign, a new hagiography of Patrick by Jocelin of Furness claimed that Patrick visited Man and set Germanus as its bishop as part of a wider campaign to convert the islands of the sea, with bishops set over each of the islands converted (Messingham 1624: 43, XCVII; Colgan 1647: 86; discussed Ashley 1958: 5; Woolf 2015: 330). As stated in the *Vita's proeme* (Messingham 1624: 2; Colgan 1647: 64), this work was patronised by John de Courcy, *Ulidæ princeps* ('prince of Ulaid'), originally a Cumbrian knight who seized the kingdom of Ulaid in 1177 before being ousted in 1204 by Hugh de Lacy acting for John of England (see Duffy 1995; Flanagan 1999; Flanders 2008; Ó Ríagáin 2020: 528–60). This new Patrick-centred mythos may have served to distance Man from the dioceses in Cumbria, and to possibly move it away from Niðaróss and/or William's Scottish church towards Armagh, but it also should be seen in light of de Courcy's other ecclesiastical myth-building: founding religious houses, making major land donations to the Church (Reeves 1847: 230–31), and, according to Giraldus Cambrensis de Barri (Gerald of Wales), especially his 'finding' the relics of Patrick, Brigid, and Colum Cille at Downpatrick (*Topographia* III.xviii: 163–64, *Expugnatio* II.xxxiv: 383–85; Ó Ríagáin 2020: 534–37). As discussed by Caitlin Ellis and Tom Fairfax earlier in this volume (see page 8), de Courcy was married to Rognvaldr's sister Affreca, who shared in many of his religious endeavours (Otway-Ruthven 1949: 77), and it was to Man that de Courcy fled (*CRMI* 1204) when he lost control of his *comitatus Ultoniæ* ('lordship/earldom of Ulaid/Ulster') (*AHG* 1204), which was followed by a failed attempt to retake his lordship backed by Rognvaldr (*CRMI* 1205).

### **The diocese of Argyll**

It is difficult to determine an exact foundation date for the diocese of Argyll, occasionally also named for the seat of its bishop at Lismore Mo-Luóc in the Firth of Lorn. As Iain MacDonald (2013: 25–29) points out, the appearance or non-appearance of the diocese of Argyll in papal documents does not indicate much as regards the diocese's foundation. It is even more difficult to determine the long-term status of the parishes within the diocese prior to its foundation.

The traditional account of the formation of the diocese of Argyll in Bower's *Scotichronicon* (vol. 3, vi.39: 386–89, see also notes on 478–79) has John, bishop of Dunkeld, applying to Rome to form it out of the western portion of his own diocese due to being unable to communicate with Gaelic-speaking inhabitants and to assign it to

‘Heroldus’ (either Aralt, Haraldr, or Harold), who was at the time his chaplain and had the requisite language skills. These later, probably interrelated, accounts are heavy in allegory and were more likely related to complaints from Argyll parishioners about Anglophone monoglot Lowlands clerics being imposed on their churches and chapels, as MacDonald (2013: 26–27) points out. Ian Cowan (1978: 21) is also sceptical, noting that ‘if Gaelic was an obstacle in Argyll, this would be also true for the remaining part of Dunkeld’, and questioning ‘whether any medieval bishop would willingly divide his diocese with subsequent loss of revenue’. The incident also echoes the appointment of William, chancellor of Moray, as bishop of Argyll (1239, 14 Kalends of March 12 Gregory IX fol. 70d.) after the bishop of Moray had been asked to fill the vacancy of the see of Argyll (Theiner 1864: 33, no. LXXXIV).

William, king of Scotland, perhaps chose to omit Argyll from the list of dioceses subject to papal oversight due to regarding it as outside his kingdom and associated with his enemies, as MacDonald (2013: 28–29) suggests. Archibald Duncan and Alfred Brown (1959: 209) propose that the bishopric of Argyll ‘had been founded probably between 1183 and 1189, and probably at the instigation of Dugald or Reginald, sons of Somerled’. Somerled and Máel Coluim IV being on opposing sides of a succession dispute in 1153 and Somerled moving against the Stewarts and/or Máel Coluim IV in 1164 does not mean that Somerled’s sons and grandsons were regarded as William’s enemies, with the converse most likely being true, as discussed below in the section on William.

The high-medieval diocese’s earliest surviving appearance in the contemporarily recorded documentary record would seem to be in the *c.* 1192 *Liber Censuum* (Fabre 1889: 232). This text has *in episcopate de Aregarthel qui est domini pape* (‘in the episcopate of Argyll, which is in the lordship of the pope’) as the last item in a list of dioceses in Scotland, coming directly after Caithness and directly before the list of dioceses in Ireland.

In one way or another, the emergence of the diocese of Argyll seems to be connected to the dispute over the succession to the see of St Andrews after the deaths of Richard of St Andrews and Richard of Dunkeld in 1178 that lasted to at least 1188 (see Duncan 1975: 261–77; Barrell 1995: 122–32). The papacy and King William backed opposing candidates, with the papal-backed candidate, John, offered Dunkeld, and William eventually excommunicated for his intransigent support of Hugh, his former chaplain. Whether Argyll was detached to punish John, or whether it had been moved

into Dunkeld to tempt John to accept Dunkeld and relinquish St Andrews is yet another issue that is impossible to determine.

The first surviving explicit and contemporary reference to a named bishop would seem to be from 1228 in the *Moray Register*, which references the grant of lands at Culkessoch by Alexander II to Harald episcopus de Argaythyl ('bishop of Argyll') and his successors at the church of Lismore (Innes 1837: 25, no.32). Prior to this, an un-named bishop of Lismore appears in a papal letter preserved in the *Paisley Register* dated 18 December 1225 appointing him and the abbots of Kilwinning and Dercongal as judges to investigate a dispute between the abbot of Paisley and the bishops of Glasgow and St Andrews (Innes 1832: 319). Further material related to this dispute survives, with the *Paisley Register* preserving a bulla of Gregory IX dated 10 June 1232 (Innes 1832: 342), where he is referred to as Hugo (probably an erroneous expansion of 'H.'), bishop of Lismore, with the wording indicating that he held precedence among the judges. The name may be a scribal slip brought about by the presence of Hugo, archdeacon of Glasgow in the same document, seeing as the appointment of the un-named bishop of Lismore as judge occurred in 1225 and the name Harald was used in 1228. It is tempting to interpret the phrase *coram bone memorie* ('in [the presence of] good memory', Innes 1832: 342) used to describe Hugo/Harald in the same 1232 bulla as indicating that he was not present or perhaps even dead, but that might be stretching the semantics. Such phrases are occasionally used to indicate someone being absent but still involved, and a further possibility is that the bishop was regarded as having a good memory.

Whatever the case may have been, Hugo/Harald was dead by 7 July 1236, when the see was in vacancy, and Gregory IX wrote to the bishop of Moray to remove the bishop of Sodor from the care of the diocese of Argyll and church of Lismore, on the latter bishop's request (Theiner 1864: 33, no. LXXXIV). The bishop of Sodor is named as Stephen, bearer of the cure of the diocese for the pope, in the confirmation of the grant of the church of Kilfinan in Cowal to Paisley by Donnchad son of Ferchar and Lagmann son of Máel Coluim (Innes 1832: 135), which may push his care of the diocese as early as 1231–1232, when the first-named attestor, Walter fitz Alan, became justiciar of Scotland (Barrow 2003b: 85; cf. Bower IX.48: 144; Andrew of Wyntoun VII.ix: 88–89; Easson 1951: 8–9, no. 2).

It may be significant in terms of the diocese's political orientation(s) that it was the bishops of Sodor and Moray (Theiner 1864: 33, no. LXXXIV; Innes 1932: 135–36), and Armagh (Bliss 1893: 209, *ep.* 1244, 12 Kal. June) who acted on behalf of the papacy in the

diocese of Argyll during the two periods when it was without a bishop in the first half of the thirteenth century. However, two further neighbouring bishops, of Glasgow and of Dunblane, were mandated by Innocent IV to transfer the seat of the bishopric of Argyll from Lismore in the Firth of Lorn to the mainland, with Alexander II to cover the costs (Bliss 1893: 251, *ep.* 1249, 4 Non. Jan.).

<b>Bishop</b>	<b>Previous position</b>	<b>First ref. in episcopate (AD)</b>	<b>Final ref. in episcopate (AD)</b>
Haraldr	unknown	1225	1228
[ <i>Simon of Sodor</i> ]	<i>bishop of Sodor</i>	<i>1232×1236</i>	<i>1236</i>
[ <i>bishop of Moray</i> ]	<i>bishop of Moray</i>	<i>1236</i>	
William of Moray	chancellor of Moray	1239	1240
<i>John (bishop elect)</i>	<i>rector of Kilmore St Bean's</i>	<i>1244</i>	<i>1248</i>
Alan	unknown	1253	1262
Laurence	Friar preacher	1262	1296
Andrew	Friar preacher	1300	1333

**TABLE 1** BISHOPS OF ARGYLL TO 1333; VACANCIES INDICATED BY ITALICS; OUTSIDE ADMINISTRATOR DURING PERIOD OF VACANCY IN SQUARE BRACKETS

It might be expected that a diocese of Argyll would have been founded in parallel with that of Caithness, as part of David I's use of the Church as a means of centralisation (see Crawford 1974; Fairfax 2021: 104). This may also have been the case with the diocese of Whithorn. However, there is no surviving evidence of David I intending to found a diocese of Argyll, nor is there any evidence as to how long the parishes in Argyll were tied to the diocese of Dunkeld. Dunkeld had a bishop based there as early as 865, when Tuathal mac Artgussa, 'prim-epscop Fortrenn 7 abbas Duin Caillenn' ('prime-bishop of \*Fortriu [reconstructed nominative] and abbot of Dunkeld') died (my ed. and trans. of TCD MS 1282 fol. 43ra *s.a.* 864[=865]; cf. *AU* [865]). Additionally, only abbots are mentioned at Dunkeld for the next two centuries, which may indicate either that there were no bishops in this period, or that the abbots were also bishops, with their abbatial role emphasised by annalists. The incorporation of the Argyll parishes into Dunkeld may have been a reasonably late development, perhaps to avoid them coming under the authority of the diocese of Sodor and thus into the archdiocese of Niðaróss or Dublin.

Considering that David I died before the bull of confirmation, he had perhaps still intended setting up a diocese of Argyll at the time of his death.

Any process of forming a diocese of Argyll may have been interrupted by the actions of Somerled in the years after David's death. By bringing at least part of *Innsi Gall* under his or his sons' rule, there may have been plans for a unified diocese to reflect his/their sphere of influence. For McDonald (2008: 210), '[i]t is curious that the descendants of Somerled do not appear as more active patrons of the diocese [of Sodor], but since they were, about this time, involved in the creation of the diocese of Argyll, much of their effort must have been reserved for the patronage of this see'. A first step towards creating a new diocese may have been the installation of Cristinus/Gille-Crist as bishop of Sodor. That said, too much should not be read into the origin of a run of three out of six bishops of Sodor in the *Cottonian List* being from Argyll, as these individuals may have had associations with Furness before being appointed bishop. Additionally, clerics born in Argyll might have had the language skills necessary for the job, if we accept that Gaelic and Old Norse were both still spoken in Argyll and Sodor in this period.

### **The secular political dimension of increasing Scottish royal control in the west**

In terms of Scottish royal geopolitics, the starkest difference is between those kings — along with their administrations — that relied on a magnatial policy for the outlying areas of their kingdom and the smaller polities adjacent to the kingdom, and those that sought to bring those areas more firmly under centralised control. However, even then, some kings also sought to bring some territories associated with magnates more directly into their kingdoms, as with David I and Moray, after the battle in 1130 (*AU* 1130), for example.

Like any high-medieval kingdom, there were problems with converting personal authority into institutional rule across generations (see Weber 1979: 1121–64). This led both to succession disputes and to the necessity for the victor in these disputes to impose themselves on the constituent parts of the wider kingdom, especially those ruled by magnates, and on the smaller satellite kingdoms and polities beyond the kingdom proper.

Again like any high-medieval kingdom, Scotland was subject to the 'royal mechanism' or 'feudal paradox', where rulers had to grant power to elements of the second order of nobility in order to keep other elements of the second order of nobility who had

gained too much power in check, in turn leading to the necessity to grant power to yet other elements to bring the earlier grantee under control, and so on (see Elias 2000: 214–19). First, though, it is necessary to take up the analysis from the section on the emergence of polities and their associated terminology.

## Edgar and Magnús

Prior to Edgar (ob. *AU* 1106), there is little surviving evidence for interventions by kings of Alba in the affairs of the west. By the time of Edgar, if not his father Máel Coluim mac Donnchada (ob. *AU* 1093), a body of genealogical material and *senchas* (‘heritage tradition/knowledge’), linked the main line of kings of Alba to the Cenél nGabraín, the principal group within the Dál Riata narrative–dynastic complex.<sup>11</sup>

Edgar has been accused of having little interest in anything other than Lothian (Duncan 1975: 127; critiqued Oram 2011: 55). However, one of the jarls of Orkney at this time, Magnús *inn helgi* Erlendsson, appears to have had close ties to Edgar, and was seemingly granted or confirmed the earldom of Caithness by Edgar after leaving the retinue of Magnús *berfætr* Óláfsson in Wales (*Orkneyinga saga*, ÍF 34: 97–98, where Edgar is mis-named as Melkólmr; discussed Crawford 2013: 171–72). The gift of a camel by Edgar to Muirchertach Ua Briain (*AI* [1105]), the same year as Henry I ousted his brother Robert, should be understood as Edgar taking action within a wider set of elite relationships otherwise invisible to us. Edgar was potentially reacting to Henry I cultivating relations on Man with Óláfr Guðrøðarson, with whom Muirchertach had a complex relationship, both before and after the death of Magnús *berfætr* Óláfsson (*AU* 1103).

Edgar’s reign saw Magnús *berfætr* impose his overlordship on Orkney, the Hebrides, Man, and Anglesey (e.g. *Ágrip*, Driscoll 2008: 68–69, §50; *CMel* 1098; *CRMI* 1098). Some later accounts add that a deal was made between Magnús and of *Melkólmr Skotakonungr* (‘Máel Coluim king of Scots’), in which the king of Scots would retain the mainland and Magnús would acquire the islands, with an island defined as sufficiently separated from the mainland that a ship with rudder could travel between them. This resulted in the story of Magnús being pulled across Tarbert (Saltíriseið,

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<sup>11</sup> This corpus also traces the rival Moray line to the Cenél nEchdach, the dominant group of the rival Cenél Loairn. This textual material treats these lineages as vanished from the west. This has been definitively discussed elsewhere (e.g. Broun 1999, 2019).

‘Kintyre’s isthmus’) in a ship to claim Kintyre (cf. e.g. ÍF 24: 48–49; Anderson and Gade 2000: 301–302; *Fagrskinna*, ÍF 29: 309; Finlay 2004: 247; Snorri Sturlason’s *Magnús saga berfætts*, ÍF 28: 224; Finlay and Faulkes 2015: 136). As Oram (2011: 49–51) points out, this is perhaps more reflective of the concerns of Hákon Hákonarson, whose thirteenth-century direct intervention in the west focussed on Kintyre and Bute. It certainly reflects the claims of several of those allied with Hákon (e.g. *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, ÍF 32: 238–40; discussed Ó Ríagáin 2020: 560–99).

Some sort of agreement between kings of Alba/Scotland and Norway may be behind the last phrase in stanza 203 of the *Prophecy of Berchán*, which states: *fágbhas Albain go gheinntibh* (‘Alba was left to gentiles’, Anderson 1930: 56). This stanza is concerned with Domnall *bán* mac Donnchada, and it could be a reference to his being regarded as the last ‘Gaelic’ king of Alba, and the gentiles here may be Edgar’s English allies (ASC/E 1097; *CMel* 1097) or Magnús’s retinue, with the actual agreement dating to Ingimundr being sent west by Magnús before his own campaign.

According to the *Chronicle of Robert of Torigni s.a.* 1166 (Howlett 1889: 228–29), the *rex Insularum* (‘king of [the] Isles’) held thirty-two islands of the king of Norway, paying a tribute of ten marks of gold to each new king, with nothing else due for the life of the king. This confirms the acknowledgement of Norwegian overlordship in the Isles in this period by external observers. There would have been no need for a treaty if Magnús had simply conquered these territories, which would also have enabled other kings to encroach on those conquests after his death, as his possession of the territories would not have been institutionalised. Some sort of treaty might have been deemed necessary by Magnús to counter a growing influence in the west by Edgar’s family (see e.g. McGuigan 2021: 361–71). This begs the question as to whether the Norwegian king actually lost or gained by this treaty, which might have ramifications for considering the origin of the term *Airer Gáedel* (Argyll).

## **Alexander I and David I**

Oram (2011: 48–55) raises the important point that the failure of (both) Magnús and Muirchertach’s attempts to bring the western area of northern Britain under their overlordship in the first decade of the twelfth century helped create the conditions under which new regional magnates could come to the fore. This is an important consideration for the reign of Edgar’s successor and brother Alexander I. Fergus may have emerged in

Carrick and *na Renn*a in this period, and Gille-Bhrighde further north and west in Argyll, both potentially with the support of external kings. The marriage of an un-named daughter of Gille-Bhrighde to Máel Coluim, the extramarital son of Alexander I, might indicate a relationship between Alexander I and Gille-Bhrighde paralleling Alexander's own marriage to Sibylla, an extramarital daughter of Henry I of England *c.* 1113 (Duncan and Brown 1959: 195; Oram 2011: 56–59). However, Oram (2011: 72, 86) suggests that it was Máel Coluim who had bound himself to Gille-Bhrighde by marriage, and also proposes that the marriage 'had probably occurred by 1125–6'. It is thus worth considering the evidence in more detail here.

The sons of Máel Coluim mac Alaxandair (or Malcolm fitz Alexander) must have been born before his imprisonment in 1134 (*CMel* 1134), if not before the 1130 rebellion. Alexander was probably born after 1070, when his parents were married (*CMel* 1070), and considering that he seems to have been the fourth son of this union, with an unknown number of sisters by the time of his birth, he could have been born several years later. The birth of Máel Coluim mac Alaxandair might then be placed in the period *c.* 1095–1110, with his marriage to the un-named daughter of Gille-Bhrighde coming at some point before 1134. It is unlikely that the marriage occurred while Edgar (ob. *CHol* 1107[=1106]; *AU* 1106) was still king; if Alexander died in 1124 (*CHol* 1124; *AU* 1124), this raises the question as to whether the marriage took place in the reign of Alexander I or David I. Considering Somerled's later activities in support of Máel Coluim mac Alaxandair, it would seem more likely that Alexander I sought to bolster his position by allying with a powerful marcher magnate like Gille-Bhrighde. If so, it may be that Argyll was already considered part of the kingdom of Scotland at this point in time.

The dispute with Máel Coluim mac Alaxandair would seem to be referred to in the speech put in the mouth of Robert de Brus in *Relatio de Standardo* in an attempt to get David to avert what would be the Battle of the Standard (Howlett 1886: 192–95; definitively discussed by Oram 2011: 70–71; Ross 2011: 197–205). This speech draws attention to the support of English nobles for David I in his campaign against Máel Coluim, *paterni odii et persecutionis hæredem* ('heir of his father's hatred and persecution', Howlett 1886: 193), while also stating that the muster of forces at Carlisle, including ships and the construction of fortifications, led to Máel Coluim being betrayed by the Scots and bound and delivered to David (Ross 2011: 201–2). Oram (2011: 72) proposes that Gille-Bhrighde was '[c]hief amongst Malcolm's allies', and that 'reference to a muster at Carlisle and a naval campaign suggests that Malcolm found support in the west coast and islands'.

He also suggests that Gille-Bhrighde entered into the alliance to counter David's growing power in the wider Clyde estuary region (Oram 2011: 86–87).

Oram (2011: 72) further speculates that David's *cáin* ('legal due, tribute', in other contexts 'law, rule') in Argyll and Kintyre 'perhaps marks his victory there'. However, it could also be that David's rights in Argyll and Kintyre reflected a longer-term state of affairs, as hinted at by Duncan (1975: 127, note 15). It might demonstrate that any Norwegian claim to overlordship in Kintyre was unsuccessful, and it could be that David granted it to Gille Bhrighde in the aftermath of the settlement dispute, which would help explain the presence of the men of Lorn in David's forces at the Battle of the Standard (Howlett 1886: 191).

### **Máel Coluim IV**

Much of the turbulence suffered by Máel Coluim (IV) son of Henry son of David I may have been due to the policies of his predecessors, in addition to the more obvious disputes regarding his rushed succession (*CHol* 1153), and to external conditions such as the settlement of the civil war in England by the accession of Henry II (see e.g. Oram 2011: 109–29). The career of Somerled has been touched upon already, and he is one of the best-studied figures in these regions in this period (cf. e.g. Sellar 1966; McDonald 2000, 2004, 2015; Woolf 2005, 2013; Ellis 2020; Ó Ríagáin 2020: 517–22, 560–74).

The chaotic 1150s have already been referred to in the ecclesiastical section above. Somerled and his nephews, the sons of Máel Coluim mac Alaxandair and Somerled's unnamed sister, moved against Máel Coluim IV's regime (*CHol* 1153; identification by Duncan 2002: 65–67). Rather than being a rebellion, this was Somerled supporting his nephews in a succession dispute in which they had a strong claim. Notions of some sort of 'Celtic conservatism' being behind the actions of Somerled and his nephews are not grounded in the evidence, not least due to Máel Coluim mac Alaxandair's claim, like that of William fitz Duncan before him, being stronger than David I's (and thus any of David's descendants) in a system characterised by (strict) primogeniture. However, it was only in the thirteenth century that primogeniture became the undisputed method for royal succession in Scotland; prior to Alexander II succeeding William, a direct father–son transition had occurred very rarely in Scotland or Alba, if at all. Furthermore, the accession of Alexander III was the only undisputed direct father–son succession prior to the fourteenth century (McGuigan 2021: 57). Domnall son of Máel Coluim was captured

at Whithorn and incarcerated with his father (*CHol* 1156; *CMel* 1156), by which point Somerled and his son Dubgall were campaigning against Guðrøðr Ólafsson on Man (*CRMI* 1144[=1156]; *CRMI* 1156[=1157]; *CRMI* 1158; see also *CRMI* 1098[=1102–1103]).

When Somerled mac Gille-Bhrighde was killed alongside his son Gille-Bhrighde, he was styled as ‘rí Indsi Gall 7 Cind Tire’ (‘king of *Innsi Gall* and Kintyre’, my ed. and trans. of Rawlinson B.488 fol. 24vb; cf. *AT* [1164]; *AFM* 1164), and a slaughter of the *Gaill* of Dublin along with them was also noted. This is largely repeated by items in *AU* 1164 and *MCB* 1163[=1164], but Somerled is described as *mac Gilla Adamnáin, rí Innsi Gall* (‘son of Gille-Adomnáin or Mac Gilla-Adomnáin [in the sense of a surname], king of *Innsi Gall*’). *CRMI* 1164 has Somerled arriving in Renfrew with 160 ships but being overcome as divine punishment, killed with an un-named son and an innumerable number of his people. *CMel* 1164 has Somerled rebelling against his natural lord Máel Coluim, landing at Renfrew with a fleet, before being killed with an innumerable number of his people.

The 1164 campaign would seem to have been directed at Walter the Steward as much as Máel Coluim IV, considering that Somerled was killed in the Stewart lordship of Renfrew (Ellis 2020: 10; Ó Ríagáin 2020: 569–70). The date at which Bute fell under Stewart control is usually proposed as c. 1200. Alan, son of Walter the Steward, granted Kingarth to Paisley Abbey (Innes 1832: 15) in a seeming act of symbolic and/or cultural violence. Rather than see this as occurring in the first decade of the thirteenth century, the *People of Medieval Scotland* entry for the grant draws attention to its early date, due to the presence of Roger de Ness among its attestors (*PoMS* no. 5764). Similar to several other figures on that list, Roger seems to have come from Shropshire to Scotland with Walter, and appears in several of Walter’s charters. If it is accepted that Henry de Ness, who was granted permission by Paisley to have a chapel at his court in 1180 (Innes 1832: 68), was Roger’s heir, then the charter must date to 1177×1180 if Walter died in 1177 (*CMel* 1177). Furthermore, Alan made the grant of Kingarth, but that does not necessarily imply that he had ‘added the Isle of Bute to the family lands’, as G. W. S. Barrow (2003a: 136–37; see also 1980: 68) states. Conversely, Duncan (1975: 199) suggests that Bute possibly came into Walter’s possession after the death of Somerled. However, if it is accepted that the territory referred to as of the *Gall-Gáedil* in the twelfth century included Cowal, then it may be that Bute was awarded to Walter the Steward by Máel Coluim IV for his support in the latter’s 1160 campaign against Fergus de Galloway

(*CHol* 1160; Oram 1991: 119), after Somerled made peace with Máel Coluim (Barrow 1960: 182–85, no. 118). While there is no evidence to link the Clann Somhairle to Cowal and Bute, it may be that the Stewart acquisition of Cowal and Bute was a motivating factor for the 1164 campaign, possibly due to a fear that Kintyre would be next. Subsequent charter evidence in the *Paisley Register* (e.g. Innes 1832: 132–33, 135–36) indicates that the Stewarts may have acted as overlords in southern Cowal and Bute from this time onwards, either making grants in the region or appearing high on the attestor lists of grants by local lords.

### **William, king of Scotland**

As indicated by Noel Murray (2005: 285–287), the consensus that William, having succeeded his brother Máel Coluim IV in 1165 (e.g. *CRMI* 1164[=1165]), adopted a non-interventionist approach in relation to the west during his reign does not quite accord with the evidence (*contra* Duncan and Brown 1959: 197–99; McDonald 2008: 69). Even if there is little material trace of William's policies towards the west, there are some hints in the documentary record that the consolidation of the expansion of the authority of the Scottish kings into the west is evident as ongoing in his reign.

William's confirmation of David I's grants in 1166 (Barrow 1971: 140–42, no. 30, 146–49, no. 39) might have been an assertion of his overlordship in Argyll. So too his probable sponsorship of the establishment of the diocese of Argyll at an indeterminate point within his reign — if it had not already been established in the reign of David.

A grant to Durham and appearance in the list of donors to Durham in the *Liber Vitae Ecclesiae Dunelmensis* (Stevenson 1841: 4, 135) indicates that Dubgall son of Somerled was in Durham at some point. This was most likely in 1175 after having been in William's retinue during the treaty negotiations with Henry II of England and William's subsequent act of homage at York (Duncan and Brown 1959: 198–99; Duncan 1975: 198; see *CMel* 1175). Therefore, Dubgall probably had a relationship with William similar to Somerled's relationship with David I. This might be difficult to reconcile with William's 1172×1174 grant to Holyrood of a cluster of four churches in Galloway held before then by Iona (Innes 1840: 41, no. 51). Barrow (2003a: 131) suggests that this was due to William's alarm at Somerled's 1164 attempt to restore Iona as the seat of the Columban Federation of churches (cf. *AU* 1164, TCD 1282 fol. 76rb only, not in Rawlinson B.489 fol. 56rb). This would not explain the time-lapse between the two events, though. It may

be related to an otherwise unknown campaign aimed at bringing Dubgall under William's control. However, this might be reading too much into the evidence, and it might not have been a confiscation at all; nothing from Iona's archive survives, nor does any cartulary or register (if either had ever been compiled for Iona, see Tucker 2020: 33), and Iona could have been granted something in exchange at the time. An exchange of dispersed properties may have been the case, considering that Fergus of Galloway retired to Holyrood and that Holyrood already held other churches in Kirkcudbrightshire by then, e.g. Dunrod (*CHol* 1160; Innes 1840: 20–21, nos 25–26).

It is likely that William had a similar relationship with Rognvaldr/Ragnall son of Somerled, if it is accepted that it was he that moved against Haraldr Maddaðarson on William's behalf *c.* 1196 rather than Rognvaldr Guðrøðarson (cf. Sellar 2000: 196–97; Oram 2011: 161–62; Ó Ríagáin 2020: 1676–78; *contra* e.g. Murray 2005: 286; McDonald 2012: 157, 2015: 336; Crawford 2013: 250–55). Considering that Rognvaldr son of Somerled had been founding religious houses of Continental orders in his territory (e.g. Balfour Paul 1882: 578, no. 3170), he might be regarded as taking on the trappings of high-medieval lordship if not kingship in this period (cf. Beuermann 2002; McDonald 1995, 2008: 243–47). This may well have occurred under William's direction.

Murray (2005: 288–89) sees Rognvaldr/Ragnall's grant to Paisley Abbey (Innes 1832: 125) as indicating an alliance with the Stewarts. This might also be argued for his sons (see e.g. Innes 1832: 126). It may be that the Stewarts, Rognvaldr, and Dubgall were part of a policy by William of devolving power in the marches to magnates. Murray (2005: 288–89) interprets the absence of the Stewarts from the attestor list of the foundation charter of the burgh at Ayr (Cooper 1883: 1–4) as part of a wider campaign to contain Stewart power in the region, as well as that of Donnchad of Carrick. Donnchad married Avelina daughter of Alan fitz Walter Stewart in 1200 (*Chronica Magistri* IV: 145), and Donnchad was John of England's cousin (Rymer, Sanderson, and Holmes 1745: 52b), and a former hostage of Henry II in 1176 (*Chronica Magistri* II: 105). Therefore, the placement of Ayr and William's strong alliance with Donnchad's first cousin and rival Lochlann/Roland of Galloway might hint at a deliberate royal policy at work in the Firth of Clyde. Murray (2005: 289) also states that 'William forced Alan FitzWalter to grant the parish of the whole of Bute to the Stewart abbey of Paisley'. It is likely that Bute was acquired by Walter, rather than his son Alan, and Alan's grant took place very soon after the death of Walter. Furthermore, the Ayr foundation charter probably dates to after Alan's death (*CMel* 1204). It thus dates to the long minority of Alan's heir, the younger

Walter Stewart (Fraser 1874: 3, no. 3), which would probably explain the lack of Stewarts among the attestors.

Therefore, all the evidence points to William using marcher barons to consolidate the Scottish crown's hold over the west. The dangers of such a policy of granting power to such agents in order to maintain the overall royal position are discussed by Norbert Elias (2000: 195–256). As Murray (2005: 285–89) suggests, William might (eventually) have been alarmed at the alliances built up between magnate families. This might have influenced the policies of his son, Alexander II.

## **Alexander II**

Royal policy in Argyll moved from the use of marcher magnates to a more intensive approach under William's son, Alexander II, who was inaugurated in 1215 (*AU* 1215). Alexander's 1222 military campaign in Argyll is poorly documented and only appears in later sources (e.g. Bower IX.34: 104–7; discussed in Duncan and Brown 1959: 199). It is argued here that it was not aimed at all-out conquest. Rather, the intention was to consolidate territory already nominally held of Alexander II and bring its occupants into line, before moving to break up potentially fractious major marcher lordships by setting up a series of knight's fee holdings in Mid Argyll running from the northeast end of Loch Awe to the Sound of Jura along with a programme of royal and lordly castle construction (Figure 1; outlined in full in Ó Riagáin 2020: 288–95, 574–85, 1170–1220, especially Tables 7.9–7.10). Alexander arguably carried out similar actions in Galloway in the 1230s (Bower IX.34: 148–51; discussed in Oram 2011: 185–94).

Alexander II's actions functioned to counteract any potential coalescence of the various factions in the west under a single leader, as might previously have happened with Somerled and possibly his son Rognvaldr. This could have been what David I was doing on a diocesan level the previous century, while also making inroads into outlying regions by inserting his supporters, where possible, as occurred in Moray, for example. It may have been those supporters that Alexander was moving against, as they had grown too powerful. Alexander was arguably blunter than David or William in his approach. His willingness to conduct brutal punishment of those involved in killing Bishop Adam was perhaps tempered by allowing the payments of fines to reacquire confiscated territories. However, he also purposefully split an earldom of Sutherland from that of Caithness, and in turn pushed to separate Caithness from Orkney (cf. Crawford 1974; Fairfax 2021).

This policy of kings granting holdings ringing a potentially destabilising marcher lordship has parallels across western Europe in this period (Tilly 1992). Such grants often lead in turn to later instability, as the grantees gain more power, necessitating further royal action often in the form of further grants, as part of the process of ‘feudalisation’ (Elias 2000: 195–256, 273). This is what occurred to an even greater degree during Alexander III’s reign (see Ó Ríagáin 2020: 574–85).

Alexander II died on Kerrera while attempting to punish Eógan mac Donnchada Mac Dubgaill of Argyll for failing to assign the king of Scotland overlordship over all his holdings and/or for attempting to take control of Man having been made temporary king of the Isles by Hákon Hákonarson, king of Norway, on the sudden death of Haraldr Óláfsson of Man (*CRMI* 1250[=1249]; *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, ÍF 32: 143, 146–47). Even though Eógan failed to take possession of Man, he invoked the wrath of Alexander II. Eógan seems to have met Alexander II under the protection of four earls after this, but would not give up the four castles that he held of Hákon (*Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, ÍF 32: 146–47) — presumably Cairnburgh, Dùn Chonaill, Aros, and Duart, rather than Dunstaffnage, Achanduin, or Castle Coeffin in Lorn. Eógan fled to Lewis and Alexander II invaded Argyll, before falling ill and dying on Kerrera in 1249 (*CMel* 1249; see Duncan and Brown 1959, 207–8; Brown 2004: 80–81; Woolf 2007: 84–85).

## Conclusions

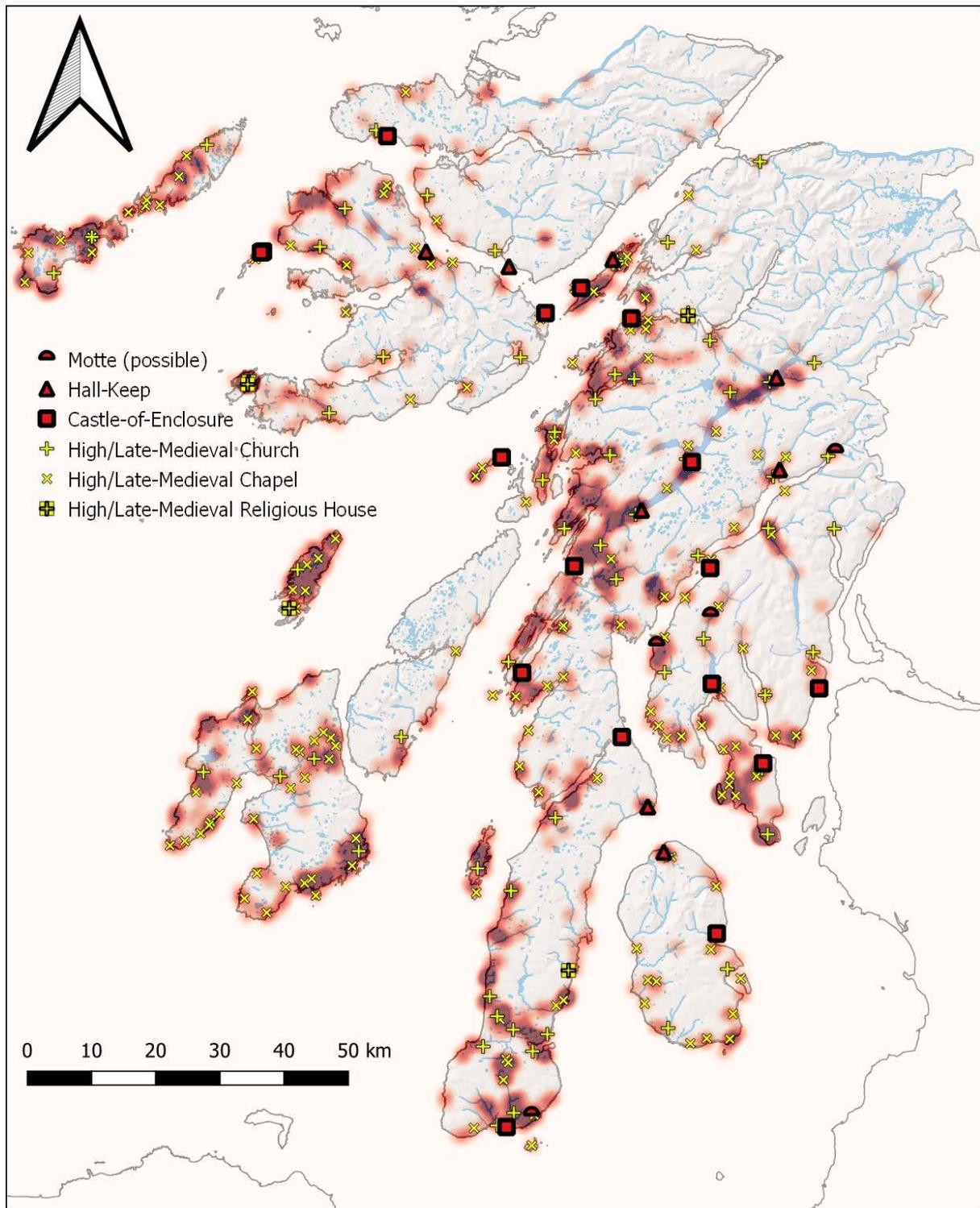
By placing them in their long-term context, this article has sought to portray the entanglements of *Innsi Gall* and Argyll with surrounding polities as fundamental to their nature. The focus has mainly been on the ecclesiastical sphere for Man and *Innsi Gall*, with Argyll featuring more heavily in the series of case studies relating to the non-unilinear trajectory of Scottish royal power in the west. Any division between the ecclesiastical and secular spheres is of course artificial, as demonstrated throughout the article.

The degree to which mainland Scotland and Argyll and the Hebrides were socially entangled is more uncertain than it might seem. The nature of the sources is such that it is difficult to determine whether *Innsi Gall* should be treated as a unitary or composite kingdom at any point in time, and whether any relationship with Dublin was ever formalised. A close examination of the ecclesiastical evidence, while keeping in mind the wider political context, demonstrates the constant tension between centripetal and

centrifugal socio-political forces, and the ways in which events get in the way of processes. This discussion has hopefully demonstrated that the establishment of a diocese could be used to justify the extent of a kingdom — and vice versa — and any acknowledgement of ecclesiastical overlordship could reflect, legitimate, or bring about an acknowledgement of over-kingship. This accounts for the attempts to establish a single diocese of Sodor, and the tug-of-war between York, Canterbury, Armagh, Dublin, and Niðaróss for metropolitan authority over it, and the careful path threaded by kings of Man between these poles. That a discrete diocese of Argyll (re?)emerged much later might in part be explained by its evolving role within the increasing authority of the Scottish kings.

The processes at work were quite similar to those found in another pair of inter-related ‘in-between polities’: Orkney and Caithness. These were subject to the same local–regional–pan-regional tensions, and a social order being pulled in different directions by competing claims to overlordship, often with brutal consequences. This article’s analysis has demonstrated that local rulers sought to use their more powerful neighbours to bolster their own positions. For those powerful neighbours, it helped bring what might be termed as the ‘in-between kingdoms’ more firmly into their orbit, if not directly into their own kingdoms.

Not all neighbours employed the same policies and, even then, neither did they apply their policies consistently, as can be demonstrated from comparing the approaches of Edgar, Alexander I, David I, Máel Coluim IV, William, and Alexander II in the case studies making up the second half of this article. Given that personal authority still had so much influence on the workings of polities, it is not unexpected that none of these kings took exactly the same approach. This is echoed by the approaches of different kings in Man, *Innsi Gall*, and Argyll, but also further afield in Ireland, England, and Norway. It is therefore difficult to speak teleologically of any unilinear trajectory towards centralisation, as the complex interaction of this multitude of factors and actors magnified in-built instabilities, leading to what may have been very unexpected outcomes for many contemporaries and for those of us looking back on this era.



**FIGURE 1** DISTRIBUTION OF THIRTEENTH- AND EARLY FOURTEENTH-CENTURY MASONRY CASTLES AND POSSIBLE MOTTES IN ARGYLL AND THE AREAS OF *INNSI GALL* ASSOCIATED WITH THE DESCENDANTS OF SOMERLED, SET ALONG WITH THE DISTRIBUTION OF HIGH/LATE MEDIEVAL CHURCHES, CHAPELS AND RELIGIOUS HOUSES AND SET OVER A HEATMAP REPRESENTING THE TOTAL OF KNOWN IRON AGE AND EARLY MEDIEVAL SETTLEMENT, WITH THE DARKEST SHADE INDICATING THREE OR MORE ON NAMES WITHIN A 3KM RADIUS.

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# ‘That holy island’: monastic Iona and the late Norse world

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The bishopric of the Isles, and then the archdiocese based at Niðaróss (modern Trondheim) in Norway from 1153, inherited within their territories the ancient Columban monastery on Iona. This formally adopted Benedictine Rule in or before 1203, by which time an Augustinian nunnery had been established on the island (Power 2021, 2025). Beyond these facts we know surprisingly little about the island or its religious communities during the later Norse period of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But, given its significance regarding Ireland and Scotland, and its position in the approximate centre of the Kingdom of Man and the Isles (i.e. the Isle of Man and the islands of both the Inner and Outer Hebrides), we need to consider the roles Iona is likely to have played in political and ecclesiastical relations between the Hebrides and Norway. The knowledge of Iona, direct or indirect, shown in Icelandic and Norwegian texts will also be examined.

This article therefore considers the place of Iona and its male and female religious communities within the context of the twelfth and thirteenth century with regard to both the Norse and Gaelic worlds, as it may have served as a conduit for information, historical and literary, mainly, it may be assumed, by word of mouth. The physical background of Iona is already well-known (*Argyll* 4: 1–4), as is the wider contextual one (Crawford 1987; McDonald 1997, 2007), while the nunnery has been the subject of several recent papers (MacDonald 2010; Power 2021, 2025; also see *Argyll* 4: esp. 152–79). An understanding of Iona from near-contemporary Norse perspectives, including the general political history of the kingdom requires the use of *Böglunga saga*, *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, and various other literary and diplomatic sources. The Scottish perspectives require the use of the occasional and terse entry in the thirteenth-century *Chronicle of Melrose*, and otherwise mainly late references, for example in the works of the Augustinian monk Walter Bower (c. 1385–1449, see Bower 1987–98, vol. 9: 28).

The ruined medieval nunnery on Iona is some 400 metres south of the abbey. Its original structure appears to be of late twelfth-century build (Power 2021, 2025), while

the Columban monastery was re-founded in 1203, according to a charter issued in Rome on that 9th of December (*Chronica*: 152–53, no. 1; Márkus 2024b: 75). The ancient site was venerated throughout Ireland as the place of burial of the saint, and in pre-viking times as the head of the Columban *familia* of monasteries. In consequence of the shift in observance, the male monastic rebuilding work was pulled down the following summer by clergy from Derry and beyond, whose permission to build had not been given (*AU*: 241, 243, s.a. 1204).

Recent research, which uses both archaeological and place-name evidence, indicates that there may have been an earlier nunnery on the island, in the period before the arrival of the Vikings.<sup>1</sup> Lands owned by the nunnery as attested in the later Middle Ages included the southern part of Iona and parcels of land on various neighbouring islands (*Argyll* 4: 8). In addition, the name of the first (or early) known Augustinian prioress, Bethóc, daughter of Somerled of Argyll (d. 1164)<sup>2</sup> is likewise attested in the same sources. The abbey lands are more substantial, and, while the re-founding as Benedictine is, like the Augustinian women's foundation, attributed to Bethóc's brother Rognvaldr (see *Argyll* 4: 49, 143),<sup>3</sup> the extent of the lands, both in quantity and geographical position, suggests a combined effort by the wider family.

Iona was situated within the bishopric of the Isles from the 1130s (see Watt 1994). Although the papal charter of 1203 states that the bishop had no authority within the monastery, it must have had contact with the bishops, whether situated on the Isle of Man

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<sup>1</sup> This has been suggested by Kathryn Forsyth in a paper (2021), and in an email to the author (2022). A previous excavation of human remains excavated by Richard Reece in 1969, dating from a very early period in a field close to Martyrs Bay on the island appeared to indicate some at least were of women who had not borne children. There were, further, no children's bones present. Sam Leggett, whose has examined the bones, confirms the bones are of women and date from about the seventh to tenth centuries (email to author 09/06/2025). The gender has been confirmed by Sam Leggett (2025), who has dated the remains to from the seventh-to-tenth centuries. The burials were found at *An Eala*, 100–150 metres from *Cladh nan Druineach* ('burial ground of the druineachs'). This word *druineach*, which also appears elsewhere on the island in the recorded, but unlocated, *Maol nan Druineach* ('bare hillock of the druineachs'), had previously been interpreted as 'tradesmen' but can also mean skilled women, fabric workers. This role was frequently performed by aristocratic women, including those in religious life.

<sup>2</sup> The name Somerled is rendered in Old Norse as 'Sumarliði'. He will be discussed further below but both this Somerled and his son Rognvaldr are not to be confused with the Orcadian jarls Sumarliði Sigurðsson (r. 1014–c. 1016/18), whose name can also be anglicised as 'Somerled', or his nephew Rognvaldr Brusason (r. 1036–1046).

<sup>3</sup> *Argyll* 4: 49, 143, 145, 178–79, 250 identifies Rognvaldr as Reginald. Other alternate names for the same individual are Ragnall and Reginaldus.

at Peel, at the impoverished mainland Diocese based on the Isle of Lismore at the seaward end of Loch Linnhe, or through the Scottish Church and at times the archbishops of York. The list of bishops of the Isles is thin and has wide gaps (Watt 1994, Woolf 2003), covering both those nominated on the Isle of Man, and those who were accepted by the more northerly part of the diocese largely under Somerled family control. In 1153 the diocese came under the metropolitan of Niðaróss, and while records are few, there must have been the normal, if minimal, contacts of a central administrative body with an outlying bishopric. The degree of contact between Iona and the Cistercian abbey of Rushen on Man, founded in 1134 and close to the bishop's seat at Peel, is uncertain.

Iona's nunnery was much smaller, and weaker in endowments than the male community, and the nuns could not be expected to have travelled as much as the men, nor did they have the same diplomatic and clerical links across the Norwegian, Gaelic, Scottish and wider church authorities. Nevertheless, they cannot be excluded as transmitters of information between the Norse and Gaelic worlds for those who visited Iona. The choir nuns may be assumed to have been members of the ruling houses, where matters of secular and religious politics were discussed, and bilingualism was a necessity for Hebrideans; and more local lay sisters would quite possibly have links among the followers of the leading men. While the evidence of direct links between Iceland and Iona in this period is slight and circumstantial, there was undoubtedly more traffic between Norse and Gaelic worlds through both secular and religious contacts with Norway, from where accounts could have direct influence but could also be transmitted onwards. In turn, Icelanders also had an interest in some aspects of Irish affairs from the Viking Age onwards, as is shown through the numerous Irish people named in *Landnámabók* ('the Book of Settlements').<sup>4</sup>

Some of the political conflicts of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the Isles have been covered elsewhere (Duffy 1992; McDonald 1997, 2007; Beuermann 2002, 2006; Power 2005), and this article will focus instead on how Iona specifically might have been involved. A recent work on some aspects of Norse-Gaelic contacts (Etchingham *et al.* 2019) speculates on the significance of the Isle of Man in the transmission of information

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<sup>4</sup> There is also evidence, most recently explored by Séamus Mac Mathúna (2021) that certain Irish tales were taken to Iceland in the Settlement period by willing and unwilling storytellers, circulated on the island in the following centuries, acclimatized, and are found embedded in some of the medieval sagas. How much, if at all, these stories were perceived as Irish in origin, and whether they were topped up during storytelling exchanges in our period, is an intriguing matter, considered elsewhere but beyond the scope of this paper.

of a literary and a historical nature. While the island's secular and ecclesiastical authorities were in regular contact with Norway, the approach by these writers makes limited reference to the ancient and established position of Iona, founded by a well-known saint, as a point of ongoing links to more northern areas, even though a journey probably meant coming close to the island. Travel from Norway to Man, which passed through waters largely under the control of the rival family descended from Somerled (Sumarliði) of Argyll (d. 1164), could not be undertaken without coming near to Iona or its tributary lands unless by venturing into the more turbulent waters of the Minch, the seas between the Inner and Outer Hebrides. It seems more likely that the ecclesiastics at least put in at Iona, for, while its 1203 charter made the abbey directly responsible to the papacy, it was a foundation of major significance within the diocese of the Isles, and the bishop had an interest in hearing of its function through such visitors. No doubt verbal accounts of the Norse and Gaelic worlds of wider historical and literary interest were exchanged too. The focus here is on Iona, and with the backbone of our understanding of the political situation, it may be possible to consider some of the aspects, like the specific indications in the hagiography concerning Iona's founding saint Columcille in the northern world, where Iona might have been a source. It may also point to the material in the literature that may have been transmitted through the medium of oral storytelling.

A discussion of the thirteenth century must consider the twelfth-century situation and the rise to power in the Norwegian sphere of influence of Somerled of Argyll, who won a naval battle in 1156 over his brother-in-law Guðröðr (*Chronicon Regum Manniæ*: 68–69, s.a. 1156). Guðröðr and his descendants retained the Isle of Man, the Isle of Lewis, and at least initially Skye, while Somerled added the larger part of the Hebrides to his mainland possessions. The splitting of the kingdom is not mentioned in Norse sources until a later, oblique, reference in the late-thirteenth-century *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* (*Hák.* II: 8; Anderson 1922: 464–65). This was a political arrangement and did not change the formal position of the bishopric, which continued to owe allegiance to Niðaróss, though it may be why early bishops were often consecrated elsewhere. Nor was the split entire – though the next century was to show the difficulties of, and hostilities within, the split sub-kingdom, Guðröðr was buried on Iona in 1188 (*Chr. Regum Manniæ*: 78–79), where he may have had work undertaken on the secular mortuary chapel in the royal burial ground of *Reilig Odráin* ('Odrán's Burial Place'), a site then taken over by Somerled's descendants.

Given their significance in the history of this Norwegian territory, and given we know from other sources the names of his sons and daughter, it is remarkable how little the figure of Somerled features in the sagas. In *Orkneyinga saga* there is a reference to Somerled raiding together with Sveinn Ásleifarson (*Orkn.*: 268), and then a passage in which he is killed by Sveinn (*Orkn.*: 274–75). This did not in fact occur, as Somerled died in Renfrew in 1164 (*Melrose*: 36–37, *s.a.* 1164; *AU*: 145, 147, *s.a.* 1164.4; *AT*: 195, *s.a.* 1164.6). The story, which identifies him by his marriage, his sons, and his mainland possessions, may have been confused with that of another man. The name was not uncommon: we have for instance a passing reference in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* to a later and minor king in the Isles called Sumarliði (*Hák.* II: 8; Anderson 1922: 464–65). In spite of the confusing nature of the accounts, which Caitlin Ellis has recently addressed (Ellis 2020: 6–7), it may be of interest that the person that Sumarliði was suspected of shielding when he met his end at Sveinn’s hands was called Gilli Odran (‘servant of Saint Odrán’), after Iona’s secondary saint (*Orkn.*: 273–75).

The position of the bishop in 1164 appears weak in relation to Somerled and to the sons who succeeded him when he died that year, shortly after an unsuccessful attempt to re-orientate monastic Iona back to Ireland as head of the Columban familia of monasteries (*AU*: 144–45, *s.a.* 1164; see Herbert 1996: 120). The archbishopric must have been affected by the violent political split of the kingdom, and there were forceful archbishops who may have had input after this event in the foundation and the choice of the Augustinian Rule for the nuns. Eysteinn Erlendsson (serv. 1161–88), a reformer who established Augustinian canons regular in Norway, is the most likely chronologically, and was followed by two archbishops who were themselves Augustinian, Eiríkr Ívarsson (serv. 1189–1205) and Þórir Guðmundarson (serv. 1206–14) (Woolf 2003: 177). What roles they played in a diocese where there were frequent gaps in provision (Watt 1994), and perhaps a reluctance by non-Hebrideans to serve where the common language was Gaelic, must be a factor for consideration. It may be marginally significant for wider Church engagement that in late 1203, when the new male Benedictine foundation received its papal charter, a potential adviser, Jón Árnason, bishop of Greenland, was in Rome, having arrived by way of his native Norway (see Ólafur Halldórsson 1978: 66–67; Imsen 2003: 15). He no doubt ensured on his journey home that news reached Niðaróss.

To consider the thirteenth-century sources for the late-eleventh century onwards, there are passing references given in several sagas; however, even here detail is limited. The fullest are the related accounts of the visit of Norway’s King Magnús *berfættr*

(‘Barelegs’) to Iona in 1098 and his respect for it in comparison with his raiding of the other Hebridean islands (*Hkr.* III: 219–23; *Msk.* II: 42). These accounts were written in the earlier thirteenth century; and key texts also include the descriptions of the area near Downpatrick where he met his death, which appear to reflect a contemporaneous landscape rather than one of Magnús’ own time (Power 1994). There is even a brief conversation in Irish based on a linguistic trick still in use today and set in the time of Magnús Barelegs, found in the fourteenth-century hagiography of the Icelandic bishop Jón Ögmundarson (*Gísls þ.*: 317–35; also see Power 2000), the words, however garbled, were transmitted through some intermediary to the northern world, and it is unlikely, though not impossible, that they survived from his time.<sup>5</sup> More probably, this age-old trick and the Gaelic words were added after some contact in later times.

There are good, if limited, descriptions of the thirteenth century in the Hebrides, in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*,<sup>6</sup> where we see the gradual extension of Norwegian power not only to summon the Hebridean and Manx rulers to court, but also to act as kingmakers.

Looking elsewhere for direct rather than transmitted links with Iceland, we may consider an event in 1202, as reported in written texts some four to five decades later. This occurs in sources of no direct interest to Norwegians in themselves, a cluster of inter-related sagas, which are either ultimately dependant on each other, or had more than one source from those on board the ship in question. The near-contemporary sources relating to the Icelander Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson describe a voyage he undertook that year on a trading vessel. On board was the bishop-elect of Hólar (the see for northern Iceland), Guðmundr Arason, on his way to his consecration at Niðaróss. In consequence there is a hagiographical tone with respect to this bishop, who was holy in popular view but was never acknowledged formally as a saint. The company was delayed by stormy winds from travelling the northern Iceland route to Norway, and finally took the long one to the west

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<sup>5</sup> An interesting parallel is the transmission of three English words embedded in the early twelfth-century Irish text *Cogadh Gaedhel re Gallaibh*, which include the negative particle ‘Nó’, which has no direct equivalent in Irish. We may speculate on the Anglo-Norman presence at the court of the king Muircherach Ua Briain in 1102–1103, when Magnús and his Norse entourage were also present. See Power 2018: 136.

<sup>6</sup> The preferred text of this medieval saga is the codex Eirspennill, AM 47 fol. This is the primary source for the translations in Alan Orr Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History AD 500–1286*, who switches to the other Norwegian codex, Fríssbók (Codex Frisianus), AM 45 fol., when Eirspennill in its current form ends in 1261. The 2013 Íslenzk fornrit edition is a useful but composite text.

and south of the island. But they were blown off course again finally seeing, or staying at, the island Hirta, in the Saint Kilda archipelago, depending on the text. Setting out again the storm continued, blowing them to the coast of Ireland and almost certain death. When Hrafn took over the steering under Guðmundr's direction, they were blown back to the Hebrides, and came to good harbour at Sandey, that is Canna with its adjoining island Sanda (Stefán Karlsson 1983: 141; Guðrún P. Helgadóttir 1987: 19–23; Power 2005).

The accounts identify the spiritual harms and the blessings that accompany the saintly, if turbulent, Guðmundr, but the weather-pattern is perfectly credible. As noted through discussions with numerous present-day seafarers, the winds from the north-easterly direction can, in our times, blow for weeks, making the north-east passage from Iceland hard to sail, while harbours like those at Saint Kilda and Canna (Sanda, the accompanying tidal island gives its name to both islands in the sagas) can be entered and provide shelter from north-easterly gales. The medieval seamen set out again too early and the same winds carried them onwards to Ireland, then there was a sudden change to the prevailing south-westerlies, blowing them to the Hebrides, where they would have known of the good harbour at Canna, its position marked by the distinctive shapes of the neighbouring and higher islands of Eigg and Rhum. Like the accounts of Magnús Barelegs' raiding in 1098, these seamen clearly knew the Hebrides well. But it may also be significant that in these waters they made for Canna, a dependency of Iona where they may have hoped to avoid the predations of the local Hebrideans, a matter in which they were not entirely successful, as the story goes on to relate.

A year later, in 1203, a new papal charter was issued for the monastery on Iona (*Chronica*: 152–53, no. 1), which apparently became Benedictine as an internal move by most of the existing community (Power 2005: 30), which may have formalised its earlier acceptance of the Benedictine Rule (see Markús 2024a), and certainly led to the rapid construction of a large church and cloister along the forms known in Europe. It continued to own lands already in its possessions and possibly added more. This may be a reason why in 1210 the Hebrides, including Iona, were raided by Norwegians, led by a Hebridean named Óspákr *suðreyski* ('the Hebridean'), who may have also led a Norwegian expedition in 1229, and who was himself a member of the Somerled family (Power 2005: 39). The 1210 raid, which made its way into Iceland's annals as well as to the longer version of *Böglunga saga* (in *Hák*. I: 132–33; Storm 1888: 123, 182) has been explored elsewhere, most extensively by Beuermann (2006: 220–33). It may be of note that there are two small hoards of late twelfth-century workmanship, one of gilded spoons and a

gold circlet found under the nunnery floor during renovations in 1922, and the other found by the nearby corner of St Ronan's church. Both hoards, prized portable objects for use in the church for liturgy and statue-dressing, or held in safe-keeping for others, and now in the National Museum of Scotland (acquisition numbers H.HX 36 and H.HX 39, respectively), may have been hidden at a time of violence such as this. Further violence followed in the 1220s with both the abbot of Iona and bishop of the Isles seeking help in Norway along with secular rulers (*Hák*. I: 270, 318; Storm 1888: 128; also see Power 2005: 43–44).<sup>7</sup>

Iona's position from the Gaelic perspective is no longer so clear after the last annalistic reference in 1204. Irish sources, such as the *Annals of Ulster* and *Annals of Tigernach*, concentrate more on internal events, while Iona's decrease in power in the early thirteenth century has been treated extensively by Beuermann (2006: 126–50). Yet its geographical position, to say nothing of its extensive lands across the Hebrides meant that it could not be easily avoided by travellers.

With regard to the degree to which the northern world had specific knowledge of Iona rather than the Hebrides in general, it is noteworthy that there is, albeit slight, information where Iona itself may be claimed as the source through which information passed, rather than attributing it to travellers from Man or to people in the entourage of the bishop and of Hebridean magnates visiting Norway. One such thread is the fact that, while there were only two known church dedications in Iceland to Iona's saint (Cormack 2022), his name was known in the north both in the Latin form, *Kolumba*, and the Irish, *Kolumkilli* (Etchingham *et al.* 2019: 299, 312–13; Selvage 2022: 46–47; Cormack 2025).<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the names are used interchangeably within sentences of each other or in parallel manuscripts. This usage is not unique: both forms appear in some German and English sources, but the regular use of either in Iceland may indicate a knowledge of Gaelic usage connected to the island itself.<sup>9</sup> It is not always clear whether these dedications and the other Irish saints' dedications Cormack notes are Settlement-Age or later (see Cormack 2025).

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Icelandic Annals, in this case *Annales Regii*, Simon was consecrated bishop of the Isles in 1226 (Storm 1888: 127), a matter that normally would have occurred at Niðaróss.

<sup>8</sup> The latter version, *Kolumkilli*, follows Old Norse weak masculine declension in the oblique cases, that is exchanging the final -i for an -a in the accusative, genitive, and dative cases.

<sup>9</sup> My thanks to Margaret Cormack for information on the dedications, and for ascertaining the regularity and interchangeability of the names of Iona's saint. See Helgi Guðmundsson 1997: 114 for German and English usage.

The Norwegian evidence of the cult of Iona's founding saint has recently been considered by Courtney Selvage (2022), who notes that a church was founded in Bergen in the twelfth century dedicated to Columba, though whether this founding concerned Iona directly or was the desire of the Irish-born king Haraldr *gilli* (an epithet derived from his Irish name *Gillikristr* 'servant of Christ') cannot be determined. In *Morkinskinna* (*Msk.* II: 352; also see Selvage 2022: 47), Haraldr *gilli* is depicted as calling upon the saint when proving his paternity by walking over red-hot ploughshares. Haraldr himself may have been of the royal Uí Briain family on his mother's side (Woolf 2016), and she arrived with him, presumably with an entourage sufficient to impress, and features that were recollected by the reigning king, Sigurðr Magnússon, who had been in Ireland with his father. We know of Haraldr *gilli* relatively slightly, and are given to understand that his sanctity was a passing notion, not producing a surviving cult, and that this was the case too with his Hebridean-born son Eysteinn (see Cormack 1993: 199–200; Power 2018: 142–43). However, they may have been accorded more status within the reigning family than in the sagas, and their Gaelic ancestry was clearly regarded as of some significance, even if their conduct did not furnish material for hagiography. Whether there was influence from the west on their short-lived cults, perhaps based in part on their Ua Briain dynastic credentials if Woolf's suggestion is substantiated, may furnish a subject for further analysis.<sup>10</sup>

Selvage (2022: 48) also raises the marking of the saint's festival day on *primstaver* (wooden calendars that mark time and the seasonal changes) from Bergen, sometimes with the image of a salmon, with or without a cross. This poses intriguing possibilities, for, as Selvage notes, as well as reckoning the start of the salmon season, the choice to include the symbol may relate to the deep resonances in Irish literature. Moreover, the salmon was used in the greatest work of the Iona scriptorium, one that has fortunately survived when much else has been lost, and which the *Annals of Ulster* describe as the 'Great Gospel of Colum Cille [...] the most precious object of the western world' (*AU*: 439, s.a. 1007.11); that is, the *Book of Kells*. While used here largely as a marker over the Christogram XPI, this work incorporates multivalent symbolism, some of it relating to Columba (MacGabhann 2022), and, when taken with the later uses indicated by Selvage, the use of this symbolism may have come to the northern world by way of the island's monastic centres.

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<sup>10</sup> Their stories were written down two or three decades, it is assumed here, before the arrival in Norway, by Iona or some other route, of the text of the marvels of Ireland which was incorporated into *Konungs Skuggsjá* ('The King's Mirror').

Direct contact between Norway and the Gaelic world (or at least interest in it) came, as noted previously, with Haraldr *gilli*, from whom all but one of the twelfth-century kings was descended,<sup>11</sup> as were the later monarchs, including Hákon Hákonarson (r. 1217–63), who later apparently considered taking the offer of the kingship in Ireland (*Hák.* II: 243; Anderson 1922: 622). Two Latin literary texts of Irish origin known at the Norwegian court, *Visio Tnugdali* and *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* (the ‘Vision of Tnugdalus’ and ‘Voyage of Saint Brendan the Abbot’) may have been there by chance, as might the text on the wonders of Ireland that has been placed in the vernacular Old Norwegian court work *Konungs Skuggsjá / Speculum Regale*, (both ‘The King’s Mirror’), for which no direct source is known.<sup>12</sup> We cannot be sure when they arrived but, whatever the links, we cannot exclude Iona as a conduit or reinforcement of the belief that Ireland was a an island of many saints, nor one for the other Irish saints honoured, Brigit, Brendan, and to an extent Patrick, or, indeed, for the belief that may have reinforced the case for (briefly) treating the two slain Gaelic kings of Norway as saints.

More directly concerning Iona, there is the appearance in *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar* of Columcille with two other saints in the dream of Scotland’s King Alexander II, warning him against invasion of the Hebrides. Here the Iona saint appears as *mjök framsnoðinn* (‘very short at the front’); that is, with a more or less bald front of scalp (*Hák.* II: 147; Anderson 1922: 556–57). This detail seems to be a comment on the earlier clerical frontal tonsure abandoned on Iona in 718 (*AT*: 226, *s.a.* 718.6; also see Herbert 1996: 60), a detail that can only have come from someone familiar with Iona’s history. Columba is described as the fiercest of the three saints, the other two being Óláfr of Norway – the *rex perpetuus Norvegiæ* (‘eternal king of Norway’) from whom Hákon claimed collateral ancestry – and Magnús of Orkney, the martyr who attracted pilgrims from throughout Scotland and Scandinavia.<sup>13</sup> In the context of an intended invasion of the Hebrides, Columba is a formidable opponent, and indeed on ignoring the prophetic warning, Alexander dies on Kjarbarey (Kerrera), the first island west of the place where he

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<sup>11</sup> The exception was Magnús Erlingsson (r. 1161–84), who succeeded as a small child and was descended from Magnús Barelegs through a female line. During his reign the relics of the reputedly Irish saint Sunniva were translated to Bergen.

<sup>12</sup> For general discussion of the Irish material in *Konungs skuggsjá* see Meyer 1910; Young 1938; Etchingham *et al.* 2019: 43–121. For recent scholarship on the text as a whole see the collection Kleivane and Johansson 2018.

<sup>13</sup> See Gibbon and Moore’s article in this volume.

stayed on the mainland.<sup>14</sup>

The author of *Hákonar saga Hákonarsonar*, Sturla Þorðarson, was the nephew to the great Icelandic writer Snorri Sturluson and wrote the saga in the 1270s while in Norway, where he had access to people at court who had been to the Hebrides with Hákon. Some other matters of interest are that he, like other Norse writers, uses for Iona the term *ey in helga* ('the holy island') throughout his work. The final journey of King Hákon in 1263, somewhat surprisingly makes no reference at all to Iona, perhaps because their route used in both coming south and going north was through the long Sound of Mull, and by way of Mýlarkálfr (presumably Calve Island off Tobermory). However, Sturla must have known Iona's geographical proximity (*Hák.* II: 258; Anderson 1922: 636). The wounded from Hákon's sea engagement at Largs may have been given into the tending of the religious community of *grámunkar* ('grey monks', i.e. Cistercians) at Saddell on the southern coast of Kintyre, a community who had been assured they would not be harried by Hákon (*Hák.* II: 238; Anderson 1922: 617).

Moving away from the historical, in the realms of saga literature with a historical setting there is the curious account in both *Landnámabók* and in the fourteenth-century *Kjalnesinga saga*, in which a Norse Christian convert, Örlygr, is advised by a Hebridean bishop named Patrekr to make his home in Settlement-Age, and largely pagan, Iceland (*Landn.*: 52–55; *Kjaln.*: 3–4). It is customary for wealthier settlers approaching Iceland to throw their high-seat pillars overboard when approaching land, and then settle at the place they wash ashore. However, this Christian settler is given by Patrekr wood for a church, a *plenarium* (a liturgical book containing formulas and texts for essential church services), an iron bell to call people to services, and consecrated earth to be placed under a corner of the new church. A storm in which he calls upon Patrekr's intercession drives him to north-west Iceland, to a fjord he names Patreksfjörðr, where he spends his first winter. The next year he sails south to Kjalarnes, and settles nearby, where he dedicates his new church, as Bishop Patrekr advised, to Saint Columba. *Kjalnesinga saga* calls the saint by his Irish name, while *Landnámabók* identifies him by his Latin name (*Kjaln.*: 4; *Landn.*: 52–55).<sup>15</sup> This bishop Patrekr is otherwise unknown, but his name corresponds more

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<sup>14</sup> Hákon and his entourage may have stayed at Dunollie Castle, the ruins of which stand on a promontory overlooking the narrow channel between the mainland and Kerrara at the head of Oban Bay, while the larger Dunstaffnage Castle, also thirteenth-century in origin, is in the nearby bay.

<sup>15</sup> The Íslenzk Fornrit edition of *Landnámabók* presents two facing versions of the text, one from Sturlabók (S; c. 1275–80) and the other from Hauksbók (H; c. 1306–8). As a result, both the Latin *Kolumba* (p. 54) and the Old Irish *Kolumkilli* (p. 55), can be seen in *Landnámabók*.

closely to the Gaelic Pátraic than the Latin Patricius. *Kjalnesinga saga* has a similar account (*Kjaln.*: 3–5) and ends with the note that the bell was rusted through by the thirteenth-century when Árni Þorláksson (serv. 1269–98), who was bishop of Skálholt (the ecclesiastical see for southern Iceland), sent the *plenarium* to the episcopal seat, and had it preserved. Furthermore, according to the *Kjalnesinga saga* account, the *plenarium* was written in *írskt letr* ('Irish letters', *Kjaln.*: 43–44), presumably, that is, in an insular script; although whether this attribution was based on anything other than the traditional tale of its arrival is unknowable.

The details tally with what can be expected from the Gaelic world, where a saint's bell was important as a relic, and it is a useful subsidiary account, showing at the very least a continuing interest in matters Irish and Hebridean into this high medieval period. Another text shows more clearly a direct link with Iona, where surviving religious artefacts may have influenced the saga-telling. The medieval Icelandic *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds* ('The Saga of Hallfreðr the Troublesome-Poet') has as its central character an Icelander, Hallfreðr, who lived from about 965 to about 1007, and was for a time court poet to Norway's King Óláfr Tryggvason (r. 995–1000). This king is credited with introducing Christianity to Iceland as well as with personally converting his talented but often backsliding poet. Óláfr on one occasion gives Hallfreðr three gifts: a *pellsskikkja* (a mantle of costly fabric, such as velvet or a brocade); a helmet; and an arm-ring, prophesying that these will go into his coffin when he is buried at sea. He is indeed buried at sea by his son and companions, during bad weather when journeying home from Sweden to Iceland. These items are placed in a coffin which is sent overboard and washes up on Iona. Here he is eventually buried in the churchyard, while the mantle is made into an altar-cloth, the helmet into a candleholder, and the arm-ring into a chalice (*Hallfr.*: 198–99).

The story is a literary one, composed much later than the alleged events, in part echoing an event in both *Landnámabók* and *Egils saga Skallagrímssonar* where a coffin containing the deceased Kveld-Úlfr Bjálfason, grandfather of Egill Skallagrímsson, is sent overboard to be washed up at Borg in western Iceland (*Landn.*: 69–70; *Egils*: 70–71). In *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*, however, the account is clearly hagiographical in tone, part of an attempt by medieval Icelanders to give credit for the peaceful conversion of Iceland in the year 1000 to King Óláfr Tryggvason rather than to Norway's acclaimed King (and later Saint) Óláfr Haraldsson of Norway (r. 1015–28). The literary nuances concern the poet and the king, and the tensions between the old religion and the new in the

northern world, but the final details may be significant for other reasons. Hallfreðr is buried on *ey in helga*, which is not normally encountered on voyages from Sweden to Iceland, however bad the weather. The author in all probability knew the geography well enough: the writers of the 1220s who listed the Hebrides in prose and the older verses knew the order in which the islands would be found, had knowledge of the Orkneys and Shetlands, and doubtless knew this part of the northern Atlantic well. This lengthy sea journey for the coffin must be seen in terms of the generally known spiritual significance of Iona, an island not mentioned previously in *Hallfreðar saga vandræðaskálds*.

It is not necessary to attribute to Hallfreðr himself the possibility that a wealthy deceased person of Norse Christian background had such items accompanying his coffin (which presumably arrived by more conventional means), intended as donations to cover both the burial costs and to support a religious community that will pray for his soul. It is feasible that the items named were indeed refashioned from personal adornment and military use to Christian usage; and were still on the island and had stories attached to them in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It seems that, directly, or through Norway, the stories reached Iceland, where they provided a fitting end to the tale of the poet who struggled with his new faith, but who was ultimately saved by the king. Indeed, the sanctity theme is pressed home, for, when the coffin first arrives on the shores of Iona it is found by servants of the abbot, who break it open, steal the valuables and throw the body in a bog. Óláfr Tryggvason informs the abbot about the wrongdoing in a dream, the abbot (as is common in such tales) recognizes the king, the servants confess, and Hallfreðr's body is recovered and buried in the churchyard. The king's honour and apparent sanctity are enhanced, and all ends as well as possible for his poet.

These stories give hints of accounts moving to the Norse world, but tell us nothing of course of transmission in the opposite direction, which is the subject for another discussion. The Nordic influence on this Irish-derived monastic community, though within the archdiocese of Niðaróss at the time, remains uncertain, though Selvage (2022, especially pp. 47–49) indicates evidence of an interest in his cult that continued after the island and its monastic community diminished in stature. Where information passed orally from the island to Norway, it was most probably largely by transmission by seafarers, both clerical and secular. However, due to intent or foul weather, Iona with its religious communities was central to the kingdom of Man and the Hebrides, revered and relevant to Scotland from ancient times, and part of the Irish sphere of influence until at least the early thirteenth century. The silence in Norse sources is remarkable, for it

continued as a major centre of pilgrimage, probably including Scandinavians. The abbey church was regularly altered and enlarged to accommodate pilgrims throughout this period, the nunnery is thought to have had a women's hostel, while the fifteenth century saw considerable rebuilding of both nunnery and abbey (*Argyll* 4). The monastic communities' role in transmission, their relevance as part of the kingdom and bishopric of the Isles, place in both the kingdom of Norway and the archbishopric, and most of all the foundation by and place of burial of Columcille, ensured a significance greater than the surviving texts indicate. It must have been significant in the northern world, though only fragments of evidence survive.

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# In Remotest Parts: The Organisation of the See of Caithness under Bishops Adam and Gilbert

Richard Oram

**M**ost discussion of the state of the episcopal see of Caithness under its first three bishops is short and concentrates on the gruesome events of 11 September 1222 in which the third bishop, Adam, perished and on the royal campaign of retribution that followed (e.g. Duncan 1978: 528). Diocesan organisation figures little in any account. Medieval chronicle accounts and most modern narrative interpretations have been expressed in secular and political terms, where the events were presented as examples of regional resistance to the centralising tendencies of the expanding Scottish state and its intrusion of its agents into the *extremis finibus* ('remotest territories') of mainland Scotland (*Lanercost*: 40, s.a. 1230; Anderson 1922: 471),<sup>1</sup> where they were resented and opposed as the unwanted agents of an alien power and foreign culture. In most late twentieth and early twenty-first century treatments, for example in my secular-political version of the account (Oram 2013), Adam's slaying and King Alexander II's avenging campaign have been bundled within broader narratives of conflict between the Scottish royal house and its Meic Uilleim kinsmen, and rivals, as an example of the twin advance of royal and ecclesiastical authority and the responses it provoked, but contemporary processes of ecclesiastical configuration are largely ignored. Even where the ecclesiastical dimension of the affair has been explored, it was viewed through a geopolitical lens as a consequence of clashes over jurisdictional right and territorial authority. Otherwise, it resulted from overzealous exercise of innovatory church rights by an intruding foreigner who lacked understanding of their implication in a pastoral economy like that of Caithness, or sympathy with the farmers on whom they were imposed. That subtext, for example, can be identified as an undercurrent in the most

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<sup>1</sup> The much-used phrase is drawn from Alan Orr Anderson's translation of the account in the *Chronicle of Lanercost* of the 1230 rising by the last male representatives of the Meic Uilleim line: *Quo anno emerserunt in Scotia quidam iniqui, de genere Mach William videlicet, et filius ejus, et quidam Rotherike, insidias agentes in extremis finibus Scotie*, ('In this year, there arose in Scotland certain wicked men of the race of Mac-William; and his son; and one Roderic. They raised up treachery in the remotest territories of Scotland') (*Lanercost*: 40, s.a.1230; Anderson 1922: 471).

extensive modern exploration of the affair (Crawford 2013: 268–73), which is one of the few to offer a local perspective on what has been treated elsewhere as an episode of reaction in the progressive intrusion of Scottish power into a fractious province. Nevertheless, even the broadest treatments skate lightly over the canon law and wider ecclesiastical dimensions of the contemporary context within which the conflict played out. This present study seeks to reconsider the broader domestic and international political and ecclesiastical contexts of the events of 1222 and re-evaluate the place of the see of Caithness within the wider (re)construction of the northernmost dioceses of the *ecclesia Scoticana* ('Scottish church') that were underway in the first quarter of the thirteenth century.

Through whichever perspective it is viewed, the burning of Bishop Adam at Halkirk is the stuff of high drama. It lends itself to representation in clerical accounts, papal letters, and monastic chronicles as the martyrdom of a devout, conscientious, and committed pastor at the hands of a degenerate, un-Christian, and bestial mob incited by the local secular power who should have assisted him. Alternatively, in the local perspective, presented in an account referred to as *Brenna Adams Byskups saga* that survives only within the late fourteenth-century Icelandic compendium known as *Flateyjarbók*, translated most recently by Tom Fairfax (2021), while the friction between the Caithness-men and their diocesan was blamed largely on the actions of 'a certain [unnamed] monk who was with him', Adam was presented as an antagonistic, high-handed and inflexible cleric obsessed with his 'right' and unable to compromise, left to face the consequences of his rigidity by an exasperated earl who refused to mediate further between the parties (Jón Hjaltalin *et al.* 1873: 200–201; Fairfax 2021). The earl, Jón Haraldsson, has been presented consistently as a villain of the piece, either taking an active part in Adam's murder or encouraging the Caithness-men by his refusal to intervene. The shocking brutality of the event, however, has overshadowed both the actions that triggered them, and the question of what Adam was seeking to achieve that so angered his flock that they burned him to death.

Like many violent acts in the Middle Ages, our relatively abundant contemporary accounts of Adam's death agree that the root cause was control of resources and the novel imposition of an obligation to render a portion of them to the church. The divide, however, between the clerical version presenting the Scottish view and the secular version offering the local perspective is stark. Despite the polemic and ecclesiastical agenda within them, however, it is the clerical reports that place the bishop's death into a broader

contemporary context beyond the local conditions of his diocese. The nub of matter is embedded in the words of the Melrose chronicler:

[...] *precipue cum pro rigore justicie, videlicet pro exaccione decimarum juxta consuetudinem institutionis ecclesiastice, mori magis elegerit, et instar pastoris optimi animam pro ovibus ponere quam gregem sibi creditum in errore pristino diucius sineret permanere.*

[...] he chose rather to die for strict justice, namely for the exaction of tithes according to the custom of ecclesiastical taxation, and like the best Shepherd to give his life for his sheep rather than to permit the flock entrusted to him to continue longer in its former straying (*Mailros*: 139, s.a. 1222; Anderson 1922: 450).

Despite Adam's Melrose origins, the chronicler otherwise offered few details of actual events. However, the fuller accounts offered in the near contemporary *Chronicle of Lanercost*, in the later thirteenth-century material incorporated into the late fourteenth-century *Gesta Annalia I* section of the chronicle compendium attributed to John of Fordoun, and in the early fifteenth-century verse chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun, indicate that a broader report circulated within Scottish ecclesiastical networks soon after the event. It included the claim that Adam was martyred *eo quod Christianas et legales exigebat a subditis decimas* ('because he was exacting the Christian and legal tithes from his diocese', *Lanercost*: 29–30, s.a. 1222; author's translation). This account perhaps drew on the letter sent by the bishops of St Andrews, Glasgow, Dunkeld, and Dunblane to Pope Honorius III late in 1222. The compilers of the thirteenth-century content in both *Lanercost* and *Gesta Annalia I* attributed the act to the unreasonable fury that Adam's just, legal, and Christian efforts to take teind-payment (in England referred to as *tithes*, that is the render due to the church, comprising mainly of one tenth of the annual yield and increase in crops – including hay – and livestock) and other unspecified ecclesiastical dues from his diocese had kindled (*Lanercost*: 29–30, s.a. 1222; *Fordun*: 284–85, no. XLI; Bower 1990: 113, no. 37). The near-contemporary annals of the Augustinian priory at Dunstable in Bedfordshire, incorporating selected material from the 'newsletter' but otherwise reflecting general outrage in ecclesiastical circles at the atrocity, provided a highly coloured version of events. They also expanded on the circumstances behind the

murder, attributing Adam's death to a quarrel between him and Earl Jón. Adam, the Dunstable chronicler explained:

[...] *petiit a subditis decimas foeni, de quibus tam ipse quam comes de Catenes in regem Scotise compromiserunt. Qui cum pro episcopo arbitratus esset, arbitrium suum vallari fecit tam sigillo regali quam sigillo comitis.*[...] sought from his subjects the hay teinds concerning which both he and the earl of Caithness had made commitment to the King of Scotland. And, while making his decree [on this] as bishop, he caused his decree to be fortified with both the royal seal and that of the earl (Luard 1866: 77, s.a. 1222; Webster and Preest 2018: 47).<sup>2</sup>

Dunstable's chronicler continued that Jón quickly regretted this settlement and demanded that Adam surrender the document to him. When Adam refused, Jón unleashed an assault on the bishop and his household at Halkirk that resulted in the deaths of Adam, his nephew, and a chaplain. King Alexander, it added, led an army to punish the sacrilege and Jón submitted, committing himself, his heirs, and the people of Caithness to the payment of the disputed hay teind. As Barbara Crawford has observed, this identification of Earl Jón as a prime mover and direct participant in the action at Halkirk departs from wider Scottish chronicle and Icelandic saga traditions on this affair, and, importantly, the version reported to the papacy (Crawford 2013: 268–71).

Pope Honorius III's reply to the bishops of 13 January 1223 restated the 'official line' transmitted by them to the curia. It observed:

[...] *quod orta inter recolende memorie A. Cathanensem episcopum ex parte una, et parochianos suos ex altera super decimis et aliis Katanensis ecclesie iuribus questione, ipsaque in presentia Regis ipsius mediantibus quibusdam personis ecclesiasticis amicabile compositione sopita, cedente tandem episcopo ad propria [...]*

[...] a question arising between A[dam] the bishop of Caithness, of honourable memory, on the one hand, and his flock on the other, over the tithes and other rights of the church of Caithness, an amicable agreement had been reached in the presence of the king, by mediation of certain ecclesiastical persons, yielding at last to the bishop his own proper dues [...] (Theiner 1864: 21, no. XLIX; Author's translation).

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<sup>2</sup> For discussion of the chronicle's authorship, composition, and purpose, see Webster 2020.

The earl and his people, however, had reneged on the deal when Adam returned to Caithness and King Alexander was safely distant. Honorius commended Alexander for his swift and ruthless response to the heinous crime and approved the Scottish bishops' excommunication of the perpetrators and interdict on the province of Caithness. The papal letter finished with Honorius's instruction to maintain the interdict rigorously until adequate satisfaction for the crime had been received. What such satisfaction might have comprised of was not specified, but it is likely that the settlement detailed in the Dunstable account offers a good reflection of the punishment extracted.

Setting aside the question of agency in the attack on Adam and his household, all contemporary accounts and most modern interpretations agree that his efforts to enforce ecclesiastical rights to payment of teinds catalysed opposition. In Archibald Duncan's words, Adam had 'set about the extraction of teinds with more zeal than discretion' (Duncan 1978: 528). Although well established in practice as a key source of church finance throughout western Christendom by the eleventh century, teinding in Scotland was apparently largely an innovation introduced and applied with increasing rigour only from the reign of King David I (r. 1124–53) onwards. While the attribution to David by his successors of a single enactment for national systems of parishes and teind-paying has been long questioned, it was agreed that his reign saw a growing trend towards legal enforcement of such arrangements (*RRS* 1: 65–66; Duncan 1978: 298). While it remains likely that David began to enforce teind payment, the record evidence attributing the establishment of collection arrangements and processes for the punishment of non-payers, has been shown to be a later confection that appropriated David's name and reputation to give it the added authority of a king who was otherwise being advanced as the first great enactor and codifier of Scots Law (Taylor 2016: 63–64). Although the processes set out in the later twelfth-century text known as the *Assise David Regis* (Taylor 2009) are clearly anachronistic in the context of David's reign, there is some more confidence that there was an earlier royal assise for the diocese of St Andrews, which was used subsequently as a model for practices elsewhere, then expanded and given legal 'teeth' during King William I's reign (1165–1214). There is, however, no evidence that this Davidian enactment was in any sense a 'national' assise. On no good evidence, Geoffrey Barrow suggested that the Davidian enactment applied also to Dunkeld, Brechin, and Aberdeen dioceses, and that David and his heirs planned to use their royal authority to enforce payment nationwide (*RRS* 1: 66). David I may well have intended his arrangements in respect of St Andrews to have wider application, but the briefs of both Malcolm IV and William I concerning

teind in the dioceses of Glasgow and Moray signal *ad hoc* localised introductions rather than blanket enforcement of a broader, earlier *assise*. It is likely, therefore, that areas remote from the centres of royal authority, and where the structures of royal, diocesan, and parochial government were least well developed, like Caithness, had seen little progress by the first quarter of the thirteenth century to implement regular teinding practices (Taylor 2016: 154–57).

Even in the kingdom's largest dioceses, St Andrews and Glasgow, teind payment is likely to have been gathered generally and effectively only from later in the third quarter of the twelfth century, when the network of secular agencies capable of enforcing the king's mandates there was well established. We can see this development in an undated brieve of King Malcolm IV (1153×1165) directed to all secular authorities and laymen within the diocese of Glasgow. It informed them that he had ordered teinds and other ecclesiastical dues to be paid fully in all dioceses throughout his realm but was fortifying that decree by more specific commands directed to the people of individual dioceses, with local officers ordered to assist ecclesiastical authorities with collection (*RRS* 1: 272–73, no. 258). If this Glasgow model was followed elsewhere in the kingdom, the still rudimentary apparatus of royal administration in northern districts constituted a significant impediment to enforcement, a situation compounded by the unsophisticated and immature mechanisms of diocesan government and parochial organisation in Moray, Ross, and Caithness (Fawcett and Oram 2014: 25–31, 117–26). Even in the best developed of these dioceses, Moray, where teind payment had been mandated on royal authority since 1172 (*RRS* 2: 208, no. 132), it was only after 1200 that an effective teinding system became established through the crystallisation of the parochial pattern, the introduction of canonically approved priests to serve within it, and the compliance of local secular authorities with royal and episcopal commands for payment.

Malcolm IV's Glasgow mandate is instructive in that it listed the commodities on which teind was levied there: grain, flax, wool, cheese, butter, lambs, calves, piglets, horses and foals 'and all else from which Christian law requires that teind should be paid' (*RRS* 1: 272–73, no. 258). In Moray, a further grant of 1172×74 concerning the award to the bishop of a teind of King William's annual produce-render receipts listed cattle, pigs, grain, malt, fodder, cheese, and butter, and ordered his bailies in Moray to make payment annually thereafter (*RRS* 2: 212, no. 139).<sup>3</sup> William's previous general mandate is

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<sup>3</sup> In his rubric, Barrow expresses *the vaccis et porcis, de frumento et braseo, et prebenda, et de caseo et butiro* inaccurately as 'cows, pigs, wheat, malt and oats, and in cheese and butter'. Contrary to his earlier

also instructive in charting the burdens of responsibility for ensuring payment, being directed to sheriffs and officers throughout the diocese and instructing the sheriffs to compel payment from anyone who withheld his dues, ‘in the same manner as teinds are paid in the diocese of St Andrews and he shall take the same forfeiture as is taken in that diocese’ (*RRS* 2: 208, no. 132). There is an explicit obligation here on local representatives of royal authority to ensure payment and to act against recalcitrants. Such an enjoinder, however, was only as effective as the king’s reach and compliance with his will by those with authority locally to enforce his decrees. Given the fractious relationship with King William of the chief secular power in Caithness, Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson, for much of the period 1174–1202, it is unlikely that Adam’s predecessor Bishop John had made headway in regularising and normalising teind payment (Topping 1983; Oram 1999). That may have begun to change under Haraldr’s successors but the absence of an incumbent in the bishopric from John’s death in 1202 until Adam’s election in 1213 probably halted implementation. Herein likely lies the root of the later tensions between Bishop Adam and Earl Jón, with the bishop viewing him as responsible for ensuring that his tenants paid their dues in all teindable commodities, but the earl having adopted a *laissez-faire* approach during the *sede vacante* years. As former Abbot of Melrose and a prominent cleric of the diocese of Glasgow, Adam is likely to have entered his episcopate on his consecration in May 1214 with the expectation that teind rules were applied in his diocese just as elsewhere in the kingdom and that the local secular agencies would aid him readily, if not willingly, in collection. However, by harvest-time 1214, Adam was already likely to have been well disabused of that misconception.

Following the death of William I in December 1214, the ascension of his successor Alexander II (r. 1214–1249), and the new king’s attention being focused on relations with England’s King John, Adam is unlikely to have elicited royal support with teind-gathering beyond the Scottish-dominated southern portion of his diocese. But for Adam and all other Scottish diocesans, an unsystematised situation in respect of teind was in theory regularised by the outcomes of the Fourth Lateran Council of November 1215. At least three Scottish bishops – Glasgow, Moray, and St Andrews (*Chron. Melrose*: 59–61, s.a. 1215; *Mailros*: 121, s.a. 1215; Anderson 1922: 405)<sup>4</sup> – attended Pope Innocent III’s great

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inference (*RRS* 1: 65), the Moray grant did not make any reference to fishing.

<sup>4</sup> The *Chronicle of Melrose* names only the bishops of St Andrews and Moray, as well as the abbot of Kelso, as travelling to Rome in 1215, but then adds that the bishop of Glasgow returned from it in 1217. It is unclear from where Archibald Duncan (1978: 528) drew his evidence for Adam’s attendance at the Fourth Lateran Council.

reforming council. Although long viewed as a decisive moment in the movement towards standardisation of practice throughout western Christendom, more recent analysis of the transmission and application of its outcomes has emphasised how there was no circulation of manuscript copies of the seventy-one canons, with the intention instead being that provincial synods would be the venue for their adoption into diocesan statutes and subsequent application (Wayno 2018). In practice, even bishops who attended the council received little direction on rigorous enforcement and so chose to adopt and implement certain canons, vary wording from the 'official' language of the papal version, and disregard those enactments felt to be inappropriate, unworkable, or more dilute than already existing local provisions.

We have no record account of Adam's response to the council's outcomes. The political upheavals of the war against King John, interdict placed on Scotland by the papal legate (Cardinal) Gualo, and suspension of those bishops who were in the kingdom at that time, probably delayed application of the council's provisions (*Chron. Melrose*: 71–72, s.a. 1218; *Mailros*: 132–35, s.a. 1218; Anderson 1922: 432–35); news of the council's canons in any case cannot have circulated in Scotland until after his colleagues' return in 1217/18. The interdict on the Scottish church and suspension of the Scottish bishops also meant that any acts they instituted in their episcopal office until they had received absolution lacked spiritual authority, so it is unlikely that much was done immediately. Adam, moreover, was obliged to travel to Rome to secure personal absolution and relief from his suspension at the hands of Pope Honorius. According to the *Chronicle of Melrose*, that did not occur until late in 1218, when he travelled in the company of the similarly interdicted Bishop Brice of Moray and Bishop Walter of Glasgow (*Chron. Melrose*: 71–72, s.a. 1218; *Mailros*: 135, s.a. 1218; Anderson 1922: 435). Their journey is likely to have afforded opportunities to discuss the council's decrees and how to implement them in their dioceses; Brice's experience in Moray probably was most relevant for Adam, for that diocese was still considerably less well-developed institutionally than Glasgow. Likewise, Adam's attendance at the *curia* permitted meetings with the leading canonists in Rome, to obtain clarification of any points of uncertainty. Absolved and eager to resume his spiritual duties, he returned to Scotland that following winter. It is likely, therefore, that it was in spring 1219 that Adam reached his diocese and commenced the enthusiastic application of at least one Lateran decision, Canon 54, which ordained that *ut decimae ante tributa solvantur* 'tithes should be paid before taxes' and enjoined secular authorities to

ensure that this was done (Tanner 2016: 260).<sup>5</sup> It was that instruction which presumably lay behind the apparent recourse to the king and senior Scottish clergy to broker the agreement which proved to be Bishop Adam's death sentence.

All accounts are explicit that an agreement on teind collection was reached at some unknown point between spring 1219 and summer 1222, formalised on parchment and reinforced by the seals of the king, bishop, and earl. We have no record of what that now non-extant document contained but, in common with the surviving examples from elsewhere in Scotland, it was likely to have been a straightforward royal command to the men of the diocese, combined with an instruction to the earl and other competent secular authorities to enforce payment from their men, and a narration of the procedures and penalties to be applied against those who withheld teind. The format of such a royal mandate is likely to have followed that issued 1203×07 by King William to his baillies in Moray, commanding their assistance to the bishop in collecting teinds and other dues (*RRS* 2: 439, no. 478). Breaches of any of these instructions, therefore, were not only breaches of canon law but also acts in defiance of royal decree. Episcopal action was, therefore, backed by royal power and refusal to comply carried the threat of royal retribution. Additionally, Earl Jón Haraldsson had set his seal to that, explicitly recognising the subordination of his authority to that of the Scottish king in a manner that far exceeded the defining of the relationship between their fathers reached in 1196/97 and 1202 (*Fordun*: 271–72, no. XXIV; *Chronica*: 10–12, s.a. 1196; discussion in Duncan 1999). When the first test of Jón's new, parchment-defined relationship arose in 1222, rather than act as he was obliged to do by royal mandate he chose to prevaricate and allow

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<sup>5</sup> Per Tanner, a summary of Canon 54 states: The payment of tithes takes precedence over the payment of taxes and other expenses, and those who invert this order are to be punished.

The full text being: 'Since it is not in the power of man that the seed yield a return to the sower, because according to the words of the Apostle, "Neither he that planteth is anything, nor he that watereth; but God who giveth the increase" (I Cor. 3.7), the decayed seed producing much fruit, some impelled too much by avarice strive to defraud in the matter of tithes, deducting from the profits and first fruits taxes and other expenses on which at times they thus escape the payment of tithes. But since the Lord, as a sign of His universal dominion, formerly reserved tithes to Himself by a special title, we, wishing to safeguard the churches against loss and souls against danger, decree that by the prerogative of general dominion the payment of tithes precedes the payment of taxes and other expenses, or at least they to whom the taxes and other expenses are paid but from which the tithes have not been deducted, should be compelled by ecclesiastical censure to pay the tithes to the churches to which they are legally due, since the obligation that attaches to a thing passes with the thing from one possessor to another'.

Adam to gain appreciation of the hostility which his zealous teind-gathering had caused. Even Jón, however, was probably appalled at the consequences of his inaction.

Adam's enthusiasm for teind collection was not simply a quest for revenue but had broader imperatives behind it. Of the nineteen parishes probably in existence within Caithness diocese in his day, thirteen were located in the northern part of his see where he encountered the greatest resistance to his teind plans (McNeill and MacQueen 1996: 378). Without access to that resource, he would have been unable to fund even a modest cathedral chapter like that of Bishop Brice at Spynie in Moray (Fawcett and Oram 2014: 28–29). The limited evidence that we have for the careers of the bishops before Adam's time and the even less evidence that we have for the clerical servants who supported them, suggests that he had made little progress in introducing even a rudimentary system of ecclesiastical organisation such as had existed by 1200 in most of Scotland's mainland dioceses. No other cleric who might have assisted either bishops Andrew or John is known, and for Adam we have only his probable personal chaplain, Serlo, a former Newbattle Abbey monk and deacon, who perished with him in 1222 (*Chron. Melrose*: 76–77, *s.a.* 1222; *Mailros*: 139, *s.a.* 1222; Anderson 1922: 439). Furthermore, this Serlo was presumably the unnamed monk who died alongside the bishop in the *Brenna Adams Byskups* account found in *Flateyjarbók* (Fairfax 2021: 118). Indeed, we have no record from before the time of Bishop Gilbert's constitution of *c.* 1238 of any dignitaries, no archdeacon and no rural deans, nor judicial deputy or official, who elsewhere were the executive and judicial officers upon whom bishops relied for localised administration in their dioceses, oversight and discipline of local clergy, and application and enforcement of canon law (Watt and Murray 2003: 79–98).

Although the abundant pieces of sculptural evidence from many medieval parish churches within Caithness diocese indicate a long pre-thirteenth-century ecclesiastical history at those places, only one – Kildonan – is identified as a parish church in a pre-Bishop Gilbert document (Innes 1843: 67). An ecclesiastical function can be assumed for Dornoch on the basis of a brieve issued by David I to the monks of Dunfermline (Barrow 1999: 127–28, no. 155), whilst Skinnet seems likely to be the unnamed baptismal church referred to in the *Chronicle of Melrose* (Anderson 1922: 450). A further sixteen parish churches are named in Caithness diocese in Gilbert's time, the majority of which probably existed by 1222 (Shead 2020: 50–57, no. 41). With probably a maximum of nineteen parishes during Adam's episcopate, there was limited scope or need for the development of multiple rural deaneries to support the work of an archdeacon and there is no evidence

for the existence of such an officer until Gilbert's constitution (Watt and Murray 2003: 82–83, 93; Shead 2020: 53, no. 41). As the bishop's deputy responsible for application and enforcement of canon law, oversight of church courts in which the spiritual and moral behaviour of both the clerical and lay population of the diocese was regulated and exercised, and whose duties were emphasised within the canons of the Lateran council, the absence of such an officer in Caithness must have become a wrong that Adam was eager to right. But what was regarded in the early 1200s as the minimum corps of senior clerics required to deliver both an effective diocesan administration and a minimum standard of religious service in a cathedral extended far beyond an archdeacon (Cowan 1995). Besides his chaplain and the reference to otherwise anonymous servants in 1222, we have no record of even clerical provision within Adam's household, of the presence of men to: write his letters; record his decrees; list, receive, account for, and discharge his revenues; or provide legal opinion on contentious business. Nor do we have evidence for officers responsible for liturgical delivery standards at the bishop's see or in any church within the diocese. Even allowing for the loss of late twelfth- and earlier thirteenth-century evidence, Adam appears remarkably isolated in comparison even to the bishops of other poorly-resourced dioceses like Argyll, Brechin, Dunblane, Ross or Whithorn (see, e.g. Watt and Murray 2003: 37–39, 57, 104, 175–77, 352). Indeed, he cut a solitary figure, struggling to function as the kind of bishop that was required in the increasingly bureaucratic ecclesiastical and secular contexts of the post-Lateran IV era. Gilbert's constitution underscores how he understood revenue to be the key to implementation of required management structures; revenues that, unless inroads were made into the fruits of his mensal churches, could only be obtained through enforcement of teind obligations. It is unlikely that Adam saw the position any differently and his zealous but heavy-handed efforts to gather teind were likely driven by his need to secure resources to fund a formalised diocesan administration. With limited income other than teind available to finance this structure, his probable nineteen parishes would have had to be aligned to the larger needs of the diocese. Certainly, that was the basis of Gilbert's plan, which saw all parishes not already annexed to his *mensa* or other ecclesiastical institutions appropriated to fund prebends in his new chapter (Cowan 1995: 92).

While Bishop Brice's Moray chapter first comprised of eight prebendaries and Bishop Andrew's of eighteen, later increased to twenty-six (*Moray Reg.*: 40–43, 64–65, 73–76, nos 46, 58, 69; Oram and Fawcett 2014: 123–24), Gilbert's had just ten (Innes 1855: 11–14, 17–21, no. I). Of these, he was the head and received the revenues of six

(unnamed) parish churches, which from later evidence of the *Books of Assumption of the Thirds of Benefices* (Innes 1855; Kirk 1995: 628–29) we can identify as Kilmalie, Latheron, Loth, Reay, Thurso, and Wick, four of which lay in the region where Adam had met resistance. Dornoch's revenues were split among all the dignitaries of the cathedral, possibly reflecting some distribution of portions of land between the former *manaig* of an older, non-Benedictine community there, whose presence is discussed below. Of the other churches, the dean received Clyne kirk, the chanter Creich, chancellor Rogart, treasurer Lairg, and archdeacon Bower and Watten. Three simple canonries received the churches of Canisbay, Dunnet, and Olig, while Farr and Skinnet were held by all in common. Durness was essentially a seventh mensal church but was assigned by the bishop to provide incense and oil and wax for the lights of the cathedral. The nineteenth church was Kildonan, which had been granted previously to the canons of Scone Abbey, and by virtue of which the abbot of Scone became the fourth simple canon in the Caithness chapter. Appropriation on such a scale as a single act required a close relationship with local secular authorities; as without their active support and that of royal officials who elsewhere enforced payment by peasant farmers – who were doubtless no less keen to disgorge their hard-earned produce than were the men of Caithness – failure was perhaps inevitable. As repeated mandates preserved in surviving diocesan records from other bishoprics hint, Adam was not unique in the resistance he faced. Where he was unique was the violence in which his efforts ended.

There is a sense within both the Scottish and Norse saga sources of immediate awareness amongst the perpetrators of their having gone too far. King Alexander's swift and ruthless response dominates modern accounts of the aftermath but a second strand in the narrative is the speedy appointment of a new bishop, Gilbert, archdeacon of Moray. He was already lord of extensive estates in south-eastern Sutherland, centred on Skelbo and extending up the Kyles of Sutherland to Invershin (*Moray Reg.*: 3–5, nos 1–3) and, as a member of the regionally powerful de Moravia family, embedded within an extensive social network from which he could draw support. Elected during the campaign in the company of the king and his army (*Fordun*: 285–86, no. XLII), there can be no doubt that this was a political appointment of a man with the lay connections necessary for success in the north. It was also an astute ecclesiastical move, for he had first-hand experience of diocese-building in Moray. Indeed, as Gilbert's subsequent blueprint for diocesan government indicates, his ecclesiastical management experience might have been the key determinant rather than his secular connections. Oddly, however, considering the

crushing success of the 1222 campaign and Earl Jón's humbling by the king, the new bishop is said to have been so unsure of his safety in the northern part of his diocese that he moved his see south to Dornoch for protection among his kinsmen (Crawford 2013: 150). Given, however, that the constitution which he produced, which confirmed Dornoch as his cathedral, was not authorised by the pope until 1238×39, that interpretation seems distinctly unlikely. By then, northern challenges to royal power were extinguished; the last Meic Uilleim had perished in 1231, Earl Jón had been murdered in 1230 and the earldom of Caithness had passed to a cadet line of the safely loyal earls of Angus, and Bishop Gilbert's kinsman, William de Moravia, had been elevated to a new earldom of Sutherland (Crawford 2013: 264–67, 274–77). Less than a decade after Adam's death, Caithness was secure within the Scottish kingdom and in the hands of men complaisant with the king's will.

So why, nearly two decades after the events of 1222, did Gilbert allegedly opt to fix his see in a new location? Most modern historiography assumes that Adam had been at Halkirk in autumn 1222 because the church there functioned as his cathedral. Gordon Donaldson (1985: 23), argued for the original inclusion of Caithness within the sphere of the bishops of Orkney and the retention of northern locations for its see even after the establishment of the separate diocese in the 1140s, with its seats at Halkirk and, apparently, Scrabster. Barbara Crawford has also argued for this status, describing it as 'the chief church of the diocese at the time' and supporting the traditional historiographical view that its status – reflected in the placename Halkirk (Old Norse: *há-kirkja* = 'high church') – dated from its eleventh- and earlier twelfth-century association with the Orkney bishops whose ordinary authority had perhaps originally extended over all territories controlled by the Orkney earls (Crawford 2013: 149–50, 266, 269). Located across the River Thurso from the earldom castle at Braal, its name in Crawford's view reflected the elevated political status that is expressed physically in this juxtaposition of comital and episcopal power. Thus, as their diocesan centre, it is further assumed that this was where the bishops were normally resident and where teind were received from north-eastern Caithness. But there are problems with this view of Halkirk's ecclesiastical position, not least in respect of what its historic status as a 'high' church meant in reality by the 1220s.

Firstly, other than the place-name, we have no evidence for the existence of a church at Halkirk before 1275, when it was listed in the tax-rolls of the papal collector, Master Boiamund de Vitia (Dunlop 1939: 51). Although it was by 1275 the church of an

independent parish, we do not know if the *Chronicle of Melrose's* reference to Adam's 1222 interment in the unnamed baptismal church of the district in which his place of death was located is to Halkirk (*Chron. Melrose: 76–77, s.a. 1222; Mailros: 139, s.a. 1222; Anderson 1922: 450; Bower 1990: 243, notes 13 and 15*). Since Halkirk's parsonage teinds had already been appropriated by 1275, and the parish then being listed as a vicarage, it seems likely that it had been part of a larger unit whose parsonage revenues had been annexed to fund prebends under Gilbert's chapter constitution (Innes 1855: 17–21, no. I). As late as 1560, Halkirk's parsonage teinds contributed to the common funds of the simple canonries in the cathedral. So too did those of Skinnet, the neighbouring parish church to the north, which, unlike Halkirk, was named as one of the annexed churches in the thirteenth-century constitution (Innes 1855: 13, 19, no. I). The spread of appropriation to annexe most of the parish churches to the cathedral and diocesan officials' prebends can be seen in the Bagimond Rolls lists (Dunlop 1939: 51–52). As discussed by Ian Cowan (1967: 80, 183), there is no record of a relationship between the two churches before c. 1500, by which time Halkirk's revenues had been united with Skinnet, but this union might reflect a reversion to an earlier arrangement. There is no record evidence for the original extent of Skinnet's parish, but it is probable that it encompassed central and upper Thursodale at the time of Adam's death and continued to do so when Gilbert was drafting his constitution. At some point after Gilbert's provisions but before the collection of the papal tax in 1274/75, this large parish was subdivided into Halkirk and Skinnet. Reflecting the earlier annexation of its parsonage teinds whilst probably part of Skinnet parish, Halkirk's revenues were automatically so annexed on partition.

If any separate ecclesiastical establishment existed at the episcopal residence at Halkirk prior to the erection of a parish there, despite its possibly 'high' symbolic status it can have been no more than a chapel or oratory dependent on Skinnet. It is, on this reasoning, most likely to have been at Skinnet rather than at the chapel of his episcopal manor that Adam was buried, as the *Chronicle of Melrose* reports, *in ecclesia baptismali coram sancto altari honorifice* ('honourably beside the holy altar in the baptismal church', *Chron. Melrose: 76–77, s.a. 1222; Mailros: 139, s.a. 1222; Anderson 1922: 450*). Lack of parish status, however, does not of itself preclude a chapel at Halkirk from having served as the location of Adam's see. Indeed, there was no requirement in canon law for a cathedral to provide any parochial function and in Scotland those at St Andrews, Dunkeld, Elgin, and Fortrose stood within the parishes of churches that were otherwise annexed to them. Even without parish status, however, these cathedrals all held

importance as places of sepulture from their inception, particularly for their bishops, and if Halkirk was indeed the seat of Adam's bishopric and adjacent to the place of his death, it is highly unusual that he was not buried within the building there instead of the nearest parish church.

Even cumulatively, the limited surviving evidence offers no support to the confident identification of Halkirk as the location of the see of Caithness prior to 1222. Most tellingly, despite assumptions to the contrary, there is no evidence within the surviving draft of Gilbert's constitution to support the commonly cited idea that his promotion of Dornoch marked a retreat from north-eastern Caithness to the relative security of south-eastern Sutherland (Crawford 2013: 266). Crawford has argued that its description of the church in which the see had been located prior to his episcopate as having been served by only one priest and being both impoverished and disturbed by frequent hostilities, 'must be a reference to the circumstances of the previous chief church of Halkirk' (Crawford 2013: 266, note 101). That, however, is not quite how the constitution expresses the prior situation, saying instead that:

*Cum in temporibus precedentibus tempus administracionis nostre in cathedrali ecclesia nostra non esset nisi unicus sacerdos deo ministrans tum propter loci paupertatem tum propter frequentem hostilitatem Nos ad honorem domini nostri ihesu christi et beatissime Marie matris eius et omnium sanctorum desiderantes in eadem cultum diuinum ampliare habito super hoc diligenti tractatu et consilio virorum discretorum, decreuimus ipsam cathedralem ecclesiam sumptibus proprijs edificare in honorem supramemoratae dei genetricis dedicatam, pro modulo paupertatis nostre conuentualem erigere.*

Since in times preceding the time of our administration in our cathedral there was only one priest ministering to God, on account of both the poverty of the place and frequent hostility, we in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ and the Blessed Mary his mother, and of all saints, desiring to amplify divine worship in the same, having treated carefully and taken counsel of discreet men, have decided to build the cathedral church itself at our own expense and dedicate the same to the mother of God aforementioned, and, according to the measure of our poverty, to erect a convent (Innes 1855: 18, no. I; Shead 2020: 51–57, no. 41, at p. 53; Author's translation).

There is an important distinction here in that Gilbert does not talk of relocating his see from an impoverished and disturbed location but that he had determined to build a new church in the same place and to introduce a ‘convent’ of clergy according to his abilities. Gilbert was not withdrawing to a safer location, he was enriching, enlarging and enhancing an under-resourced existing see. The statement of intent in the constitution, moreover, has striking echoes of the declaration made by bishops William of Glasgow and Geoffrey of Dunkeld in 1239 in their report on the position of the see of Dunblane, which was being reorganised following the appointment of the Dominican, Bishop Clement in 1233 (Theiner 1864: 95, no. XCI; Watt and Murray 2003: 104). There, they announced, Clement had found the place so desolate that there was no place for him to lay his head at the cathedral, there was no college of clergy, and the church was roofless and with only a *capellanus ruralis* (‘rural chaplain’) celebrating the divine offices there (Fraser 1872: 162–65, no. 125).<sup>6</sup> Rather than being an accurate reflection of the situation at his unnamed see in 1222 and a rationale for a move to Dornoch, when viewed alongside the near contemporary Dunblane report, Gilbert’s references to poor provision appear as *topoi* deployed as justification for his reorganisation and enlargement at that church.

A further argument against a relocation of the Caithness see from Halkirk to Dornoch lies in the absence of any record of processes like those required in Moray for the successive fixing of its see at Spynie and Elgin between 1207 and 1224. There, as we have already seen, the first move was the work of Bishop Brice, who relocated his see from what was probably the church at Kinneddar, north of the tidal loch covering the central area of the Laich of Moray – described as being difficult of access to his parishioners – to the more conveniently sited church at Spynie, on the southern shore (*Moray Reg.*: 39–40, no. 45). Adam cannot have been unaware of what was involved in the move and may have been made more aware of the procedure by Brice during their travels to Rome. Gilbert, however, was personally familiar with the mechanics of the process, for he was archdeacon of Moray at the time of the Spynie move and remained in that office until his election to Caithness, by which time the Elgin relocation was most likely already being considered. As archdeacon, Gilbert would have been involved deeply in the complex formal and legal processes that enabled what, at face value, appear to be simple moves from one place to another. Having experienced first-hand the process there, Gilbert understood the complexities of establishing a properly constituted cathedral chapter, for in Moray the

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<sup>6</sup> [...] *episcopus invenit adeo desolatam, quod non reciperet ubi possit caput in cathedrali ecclesia reclinare, nullumque collegium erat ibi, sed in ecclesia ipsa discooperta quidam capellanus ruralis divina officia celebrabat.*

move to Spynie was accompanied by Brice's introduction there of a constitution for his new cathedral. Moray's new institutional structure was modelled on that of Lincoln and the establishment of a chapter that consisted of eight canonries – a dean, chanter, treasurer, chancellor, archdeacon, and three 'simple' canonries – supported on prebends funded from the teinds of twelve appropriated parish churches and income from various pieces of property, was the same model that Gilbert chose to introduce to his diocese (*Moray Reg.*: 40–43, no. 46; Fawcett and Oram 2014: 28–29, 123).

From his experience in Moray, Gilbert would have understood that papal approval for any move from an established location to a new church was a prerequisite. He had seen, moreover, how papal mandatories would investigate the rigour and adequacy of arrangements for its appropriate funding. Indeed, as demonstrated by the extensive record of formal negotiation of the transference surviving from Moray from 1206/7 and 1224/26 and from Ross, where the see moved from Rosemarkie a mere 1.5km to Fortrose in 1255/56 (Theiner 1864: 32, 69–70, nos LXXX, CLXXXII), or the reorganisation of the see of Dunblane in 1239, Scottish bishops were alive to the lengthy and potentially litigious process involved, starting with the provision for the appointment of papal mandatories to investigate the situation and report back to the curia in advance of papal ratification of new arrangements. Even the relocation of a parish church was not an act of whim but required approval of both the diocesan and, from the fourteenth century onward, the pope. Moving an episcopal see was a different order of magnitude and entailed significant negotiation. No evidence survives in any Scottish or papal source to indicate that such discussions were entered into concerning the relocation of the see of Caithness, which brings us to the inescapable conclusion that no relocation occurred.

So, if not at Halkirk, can we be any surer that Dornoch was where Gilbert's predecessors had their see? Most discussion of its possible location in the time of the first bishop, Andrew, has focused on a brieve of King David I copied into the *registrum* ('register') of Dunfermline Abbey, datable to c. 1145×51. That document enjoined Earl Rognvaldr of Orkney and another unnamed earl, possibly Haraldr of Caithness, to 'love' the *manachos* (Gaelic *manaig*), their *homines* ('men' or 'dependent tenants'), their *res* ('property'), dwelling at Caithness, and to maintain and protect them (Barrow 1999: 127–28, no.155). Cosmo Innes, in the Bannatyne Club edition of the Dunfermline *Registrum*, and Sir Archibald Lawrie, in *Early Scottish Charters*, misrepresented the key noun in the accusative case as *monachos* ('monks'), which in the original text is clearly rendered as *manachos* (*Dunf. Reg.*: 14, no. 23; Lawrie 1905: 100, no. CXXXII). In Scotland, that

latinised Gaelic term can also mean monks, but in this period it was acquiring a sense of ‘monastic dependent’ or ‘client’, as explored for Ireland by Roy Flechner (2017). The reference to *manachos et homines eorum* (‘monks and their men’), however, is suggestive of both monks and their dependents being present at the time the brieve was issued. As the brieve is preserved in the records of Dunfermline and the first bishop of Caithness was drawn from that community, it has been suggested that these *manachos* were members of a Benedictine cell perhaps brought north by Bishop Andrew from his former monastery, although Geoffrey Barrow cautioned that it was only the presence of the writ in the Dunfermline records (rather than any statement within it) that might suggest that interpretation (Cowan and Easson 1976: 61; Barrow 2003: 167, note 105). Building upon the Dunfermline hypothesis, however, Cowan and Easson conjectured that Andrew perhaps had intended to establish a monastic cathedral for his new diocese (Cowan and Easson 1976: 203). *Prima facie*, the proposition has much to commend it, given Dunfermline’s close ties with two of the most important Benedictine monastic cathedral communities in England at Canterbury and Durham, but the absence of any further reference to such an establishment and the failure of any of David’s other monk-bishops – at Glasgow especially – to pursue this model of constitution perhaps renders this arrangement unlikely.

If not a Benedictine convent, then to what *manachi* does the brieve refer? There is a persistent tradition of a *Céli Dé* presence at Dornoch based on a single and very ambivalent reference amongst a list of Scottish ecclesiastical establishments in the later twelfth-century Latin text composed in England, *De partitione Anglie per comitatus et domibus religiosis in eis contentis* (‘Concerning the parts of England by counties and the houses of religious they contain’), usually shortened to *De Domibus Religiosis* (Anderson 1922: 700; Veitch 1996). The text, however, does not precisely locate this monastic community, stating only that it was the organisational arrangement of the bishopric of Caithness, in common with the arrangements noted at the bishoprics of St Andrews, Dunkeld, Brechin, Ross, Dunblane, and Argyll. Cowan and Easson, however, read it as referring to Dornoch, classed this possible non-Benedictine monastic establishment as ‘uncertain’ in their list of ‘Early Religious Foundations’ and yet maintained the ambivalence that they had expressed in respect of its status as a short-lived Dunfermline cell (Cowan and Easson 1976: 52). Kenneth Veitch, in his ground-breaking reanalysis of the Scottish material in the list, posited a Dunfermline source and thus the likely accuracy of the data presented (Veitch 1996: 23). He did not, however, offer any suggestion of

where in Caithness the *Céli Dé* were to be found. Geoffrey Barrow, who identified the mistranscription of *manachos* as *monachos* in the Dunfermline brieve and offered the suggestion that the *manaig* to which it referred were members of a non-Benedictine community, ruled out Halkirk in favour of Dornoch, to which the David I brieve made an explicit link. Although he cautioned that no document names the location of Andrew's see at the time of his appointment, he suggests that David I might have planned such an arrangement, which would have matched the position at the majority of Scottish sees as they existed in his reign (Barrow 1997). As Barrow went on to suggest, the likelihood of a *Céli Dé* community at Halkirk in the last decade of the twelfth century is inherently improbable but at Dornoch it was certainly possible.

A strong local tradition of a church and cemetery dedicated to St Bar/Barr or Finbarr adjacent to the present cathedral at Dornoch, maintained as the parish church after Bishop Gilbert built his new see (Cowan 1995: 35), preserves a memory of the pre-1222 institution at which these *Céli Dé* had perhaps been based. Archaeological evaluation of the area around the cathedral in the late 1960s drew together the placename and literary evidence for the Finbarr establishment that was known at that time, which MacDonald and Laing concluded constituted a 'vague case' for inclusion in their list of Scottish early monastic sites (MacDonald and Laing 1969–70: 133–34). However, the cult of St Finbarr at Dornoch – including offerings made on his feast day (25 September) – is recorded in the early sixteenth-century *Aberdeen Breviary* and there was a St Barr's Faire held in the burgh into the later seventeenth century, which together are suggestive of a vigorous medieval tradition locally associated with that saint. The Aberdeen account of the celebration of the feast-day of Finbarr is incorporated into a reworking of older material from a vita of St Duthac of Tain in Ross, immediately south across the Dornoch Firth from Dornoch itself (Macquarrie 2012: 75, 354). The breviary's patron Bishop William Elphinstone had probably encountered the Duthac tradition during his brief tenure (r. 1481–83) of the bishopric of Ross prior to his translation to Aberdeen (Watt and Murray 2003: 4, 349–50), or maintained sufficient connection with his former see to secure materials from there for incorporation into the compendium of Scottish saints' lives he was composing around which to organise a nationalistically Scottish liturgical calendar to replace the Sarum Use that was still followed in most Scottish dioceses. Although a sixth-century date has been ascribed to a putative monastic foundation at Dornoch, on the basis of Finbarr's identification as the teacher of St Columba, it appears that the cult of an Irish saint of that name from Cork was appropriated for a Caithness figure of

uncertain date (Macquarrie 2012: 234–37, 361–62), but most likely of the later seventh or early eighth century, similar to Curadán/Boniface at Rosemarkie (MacDonald 1992; Macquarrie 2012: 84–87, 330 notes). It must be stressed that there is no surviving record evidence to confirm the existence of an early monastic centre and MacDonald and Laing were unconvinced of the date and nature of the recorded St Barr church at Dornoch, but the distribution of Finbarr dedications in the northern mainland of Scotland provides some circumstantial evidence for a network of church properties associated with a monastic centre and the potential reach of influence of such a community. It is a topic that deserves focused research. What can be said at present, however, is that St Finbarr's as an institution preceded the cathedral, continued to serve as the parish church after Bishop Gilbert built his new church, and was maintained in that capacity down to the Reformation. It survived as a ruin into the seventeenth century, having been abandoned for the more spacious crossing and eastern limb of the cathedral, and seems to have been adjacent to, but distinct from, the thirteenth-century building. Separate parish churches from the church which housed the *cathedra* ('bishop's throne') are not uncommon in Scotland, being known at Dunkeld and St Andrews from the twelfth century and at Elgin after the cathedral's relocation there in the 1220s, pointing to their prior existence in all of those cases before the cathedrals' construction.

None of this evidence constitutes proof positive that a *Céli Dé* community had either survived the upheavals of the ninth century in the north of Scotland or been re-established at Dornoch as part of the progressive conversion of Norse colonists in the region through the tenth and earlier eleventh centuries. Cumulatively, however, the fragments of evidence are suggestive of an establishment of some antiquity by the time of Bishop Andrew's appointment in the twelfth century and that he had envisaged 'modernising' a still-functioning monastic community there to form the Benedictine chapter of his new diocesan centre, following the model of his home monastery at Dunfermline's motherhouse at Canterbury. That his plan was stillborn does not mean that the non-Benedictine community died with his failure. Indeed, as I have discussed elsewhere, despite a deeply ingrained historiographical tradition that they were at best moribund or more likely secularised communities, *Céli Dé* establishments still functioned at other locations in Scotland into the second half of the thirteenth century, with most seeing progressive reorganisation into either Augustinian convents or colleges of secular canons by the 1270s (Oram 2016). Furthermore on the strength of the probable Dunfermline contribution to *De Domibus Religiosis*, we can go further and say that this

church at Dornoch was where a Scottish cleric based in a well-connected monastic community that had extensive property interests in the Moray coastlands believed the see was still located in the time of Bishop John (r. 1185–1202), Adam's predecessor who was infamously mutilated on the instructions of Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson at Scrabster, just 10km from the location of the events of 1222. Even if that community was effectively defunct by the time of Gilbert's late 1230s constitution – and we have no reason to suppose that it was – *De Domibus Religiosis* offers us a glimpse of the conditions that perhaps determined the location of his predecessors' see.

In conclusion, this material collectively is still a fragmentary basis upon which to found any analysis of the development of Caithness diocese down to the episcopates of bishops Adam and Gilbert. Nevertheless, the individual pieces of data assembled here point to the beginnings of an attempt under Bishop Adam to regularise teind payment following the decrees of the Fourth Lateran Council, perhaps with the aim of using them to fund a full structure of diocesan government. Royal and, it seems, comital support for that was secured, but the latter was lukewarm and when Adam's dogmatic insistence on payment from the earldom's politically influential Caithness farmers provoked confrontation, the earl failed to protect him. Adam's death at Halkirk was coincidental on that being the principal episcopal property in the district, where teind would have been gathered, but has generated an elevated view of that place as an ecclesiastical centre. Whatever Halkirk's status under a previous jurisdiction within Caithness associated with Orkney-based bishops, by Adam's time it was only an episcopal residence and administrative centre for his property in the north of his diocese and not a 'high church' in which he placed his see. Whatever he was doing there in early September 1222, it was not fulfilling episcopal duties as a diocesan at his cathedral. For Dornoch, by way of contrast, we can posit the existence of a *Céli Dé* community in the mid-twelfth century and, according to the witness of the informant of the information to the compiler of *De Domibus Religiosis*, such a community was still present at the see of Caithness in the 1190s. There is, however, no explicit identification of the Dunfermline brieve's *manachi* at Dornoch as predecessors of the *Céli Dé* of the later list. It is only with the papal approval of Bishop Gilbert's chapter constitution and its reference to Dornoch as the diocesan see in 1238×39 that the location of the cathedral church of the bishops of Caithness is finally confirmed (Cowan and Easson 1976: 204). The first record of that status, as preserved in Pope Gregory IX's 1238×39 confirmation of Gilbert's proposed constitution, however, is simply that: a first notice. Nowhere in that letter nor in any other source is it said that

Gilbert moved his see from Halkirk – or indeed any other church – to a new location. Dornoch was already in the 1230s and probably continuously since the creation of the diocese, the cathedral church of Caithness.

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# Epilogue

Barbara E. Crawford

**T**he relationship between earls and bishops in Caithness is of outstanding interest in the annals of European medieval history. Their particular relationship dramatically exemplifies the tension between Church and State which underlies the history of medieval Europe as a whole. Caithness, far from the political centres of power in Norway and Scotland, and even further from the ecclesiastical centre of church power in Rome, was just as subject to the growing powers of kings and states, and to the authority of the universal church, as any power centres in Europe. This is one of the most interesting aspects of the tension apparent in the history of the earls and bishops of Caithness in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Another aspect is the political situation, whereby the two earldoms of Caithness and Orkney were based in different kingdoms which had developed out of different ethnic situations: the island earldom of Orkney with its Norse/viking origins, bound to the Scandinavian kingdom of Norway, and the mainland earldom of Caithness, which was territorially part of the Scottish kingdom and had an ethnically diverse population, consisting of Pictish and Gaelic peoples dominated by a Norse/viking overlordship which eventually submitted to Scottish political authority. The clashes with the Church played no small part in the realisation of this situation.

When I explored the circumstances of 'Norse earls and Scottish bishops' in 1993 (Crawford 1993), I defined the situation as 'a clash of cultures', suggesting that the violence of the period had perhaps reflected the unusual nature of the circumstances in northern Scotland – where Scottish bishops and Scottish kings moved into a society based on Norse ecclesiastical and secular customs. These customs went back to those established in northern Scotland by viking settlers who had moved into the area from Orkney in the tenth century.

This interpretation suggested that the Norse earls and Scottish bishops were opposed to each other because of their cultural differences, and that it was these differences which caused the violent outcomes of the disputes between them. There were attacks on two bishops, first in 1201 and second in 1222. The particular background to the events of 1222 and the murder of Bishop Adam was explored by the conference papers on the 800th anniversary of his murder. The two disagreements in the early

thirteenth century are linked in their causes and manifestations although arising over different circumstances and resulting in different outcomes, which are worth exploring.

In the first instance, we have evidence of an attack on Bishop John of Caithness in the bishop's castle at Scrabster on the north coast of Caithness by a mob led by Earl Haraldr Maddaðarson, as a result of which the bishop suffered physical impairment to his tongue and the loss of his sight in one eye. This was the result of a very tense relationship between the bishop and earl which had developed earlier, and had featured, in particular, a dispute over the grant of a payment of one penny from every inhabited house in Caithness. This payment was made by Earl Haraldr to the benefit of the Church in Rome in the time of the first Scottish bishop of Caithness, Andrew. However, John, Andrew's successor, *eam ab his qui sunt in sua diocesi constituti auctoritate propria interdixit exsolvi* ('forbade the payment thereof by such as were appointed by his authority in his diocese'), as a result of which Earl Haraldr complained to Pope Innocent III (*CSR*: 3–5, no. 3). One of the very first letters written by that powerful pope was to the bishops of Orkney and Ross ordering them to compel Bishop John to allow the payment of one penny from every inhabited house in Caithness to continue. Such a written order brings the significance of the clash out into the open and helps us to realise what an extreme situation was engendered. This was no ordinary example of the church's determination to enforce its will over an individual member of the church but was rather a dramatic legal tussle involving a bishop and an earl – the highest ranks of ecclesiastical and secular society, respectively. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this legal clash had violent repercussions, and resulted in the physical attack on Bishop John at Scrabster in 1201.

Although Earl Haraldr had been described as [*d*]ilectus filius nobilis vir H[araldus], *Catanensis et Orchardensis Comes* ('the beloved, well-born man Haraldr, earl of Caithness and Orkney') in the papal letter of 27 May 1198 describing the grant he had made of one penny from every house within his earldom of Caithness, the ensuing attack on Bishop John meant that he was no longer considered a *dilectus filius* ('beloved son') but a dangerous opponent of church personnel (*CSR*: 3–5, no. 3). Earl Haraldr therefore made sure that the main blame for the attack on Bishop John rested on the shoulders of one 'Lumberd', a member of the earl's following, and a second letter from Pope Innocent, addressed to Bishop Bjarne of Orkney, which Lumberd himself brought back from Rome, gives details of the penance he had to pay (*CSR*: 5–7, no. 4; also see Crawford 1993: 135). This is 'remarkable evidence' of the concern of the head of the western Church for outrageous events which had occurred on the northernmost fringes of Europe (Crawford

1993: 135), and it is likely that Earl Haraldr would have overseen the fulfilment of the papal directive alongside his cousin Bishop Bjarni. This attack on a bishop was considered to be *gravis [...] et grandis excessus* ('a terrible and great outrage') and the earl participated in the retribution by coming to terms with King William 'the Lion' and paying two thousand pounds of silver to the king and swearing that in all things he would stand by the judgement of the church (as reported by *Fordun: 271–72; ES: 356*), which probably meant payment of compensation.

This first piece of evidence of violent hostile relations between earl and bishop is remarkable enough (and parallels for such an incident are difficult to find). Retribution for an attack on the person of a bishop was more extreme in the second of our Caithness examples, the murder of Bishop Adam in 1222 (the theme of this special issue). But then the murder of a cleric, and moreover a bishop, one of the princes of the church, was exceedingly unusual and merited the most extreme retribution. When searching for similar events, one has only to look at the murder of Archbishop Thomas Becket some decades prior to the murder of Bishop Adam to find any comparable situation. Admittedly the murder of Thomas Becket in his own cathedral heightened this offence, and the involvement or responsibility of the king, Henry II, gave it an added component, which the events of 1222 do not really match up to. Nonetheless, the attack on Bishop Adam on his episcopal estate in Caithness, the murder of his chaplain, and the added indignity of both having been burned in the kitchen of the episcopal manor, gives this event some particular resonance for historians to quantify.

The cause of this offensive treatment is quite different from the cause of the attack on Bishop John, although money was again involved. The payment of tithes (*teinds*) was the cause of simmering resentment among the Caithness farmers (Old Norse *bóndi*) and was also a problem in other parts of Europe. Firstly, there was the raising of the butter teind from a customary rate of one *spann* ('bucket' or 'measure', denoting a unit of measurement) of butter collected for every twenty cows to one for fifteen and then twelve and then ten, which virtually doubled the amount due. Caithness was an area dominated by a pastoral economy, suggesting that butter was an important item in the local harvest, particularly so as there were not the extensive fertile barley and corn fields as in Orkney. The same would be the case for another tithe, the hay teind, which one monastic chronicle says had caused the earl to raise objections, as there had been increased demands by the church, and about which the earl and the bishop had made promises to the king (presumably the earl agreeing to the increase).

The extent to which the earl was involved in the ensuing refusal to pay is unclear. Different accounts give him varying roles in the outcome of the tense situation, and report his disinclination to play any role in helping to calm the situation down. The anger of the farmers was inflamed at a meeting held on a hill in the vicinity of the bishop's manor house, where the bishop was staying at the time, and it was fully realised by the Lawman that there were going to be violent consequences. But Earl John would not interfere and is reported as saying ominously that there were two alternatives, one of which was that the situation was not to be endured. But he did little to avoid the consequences and, as a result, *a multis eiusdem sceleris reus esse credebatur* 'it was because of this that many believed him to be party to the crime' which followed (Crawford 2023: 270; *Scotichron.* vol. 5, IX: 115, no. 37). Chroniclers of some Cistercian houses see the earl as leading the attack on Bishop Adam and on his chaplain, who would not give up the charter which the earl had previously sealed, and relate that Earl Jon gave the orders for the bishop to be bound to the doorpost of the kitchen and the house to be set on fire. The resulting conflagration was evidently the work of the earl and for which he received some blame; this only added to the justification for King Alexander to bear down hard on him in the ensuing punishment process.

The righteous vengeance inflicted on Earl John and the Caithness farmers is the most horrific result of this dreadful incident in the history of the Caithness earldom (details in Crawford 1993: 271). It was well known throughout the northern world and must have compounded the earlier violent incident of 1201 inflicted on Bishop John, giving the Caithness farmers and their earls in the early thirteenth century a reputation for being anti-church and opposed to ecclesiastical authority. Yet, there is positive evidence that the earls at any rate were pious benefactors of the church in Caithness, Haraldr Maddaðarson in particular (Crawford 1993: 258). The public acts of piety may of course have served his political interests, and certainly served his family interests. Determination to rule his earldoms without any rival and without the intervention of any royal official is evident in both Orkney and Caithness against Norwegian authority, as well as against the king of Scots.

The wider issue of the clash between the two societies in Orkney and Caithness, and the difference between the Norwegian culture in the islands and the growing Scottish culture in the mainland territory of Caithness, is also relevant and possibly significant for our understanding of the reasons behind this turbulent period of northern history and the violent outcomes. The reason behind the enforcement of the tithes of butter and hay may

have been the forcing of Caithness custom into line with the rest of the Scottish church which Caithness was now part of. Similarly, the earlier struggle between Haraldr and Bishop John may have arisen out of contention between what the Scottish bishop saw as his role in the diocese and the earl's traditional powers (Crawford 1993: 252). Antagonism between the two according to Fordun was due to the earl blaming the bishop for 'encouraging discord and opening up a breach between himself and the lord king' (*ES*: 356; *Fordun*: 271–72), which takes us back to the problems resulting from the earl's earlier involvement in the troubles in the province of Moray to the south of their earldom. Political tensions were enhanced by the complex ecclesiastical situation.

In the end, Earl Haraldr submitted voluntarily to the king and was accompanied by the bishop of St Andrews to the king at Perth where he reached an agreement, swearing that in all things he would abide by the judgement of the Church. He paid a large amount of money, namely 2000 pounds of silver, to the king and was restored to his earldom, along with the condition that the farmers and leading men of Caithness would pay a quarter of all they possessed to the king. But he did not fulfil all the conditions which the church imposed and refused to take back his first wife, although that was demanded by King William. The results of Earl John's submission in 1222 resulted in harsh reprisals and heavy penalties being imposed on the people of Caithness, who had to pay dearly for the redemption of their lands. This was a frontier zone, in which the complex webs of conflicting loyalties and political systems brought their own problems. This frontier zone provides remarkable accounts of the violence which ensued when two political zones attempted to provide their own solutions to a disparate situation, and a desperate problem. Historians of the northern societies of Scotland are fortunate in having this evidence of medieval frontier societies and their problems to interpret.

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Each of the articles within this volume discusses and analyses the various political and social events of the time, which either directly or indirectly led to the murder. Additionally, each of these articles have utilised multiple sources to complete their analyses, including, but not limited to: Old Norse sagas, as well as Scottish-, and Irish chronicles and annals.