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The Gaelic World and the Early Stewart Court

STEPHEN BOARDMAN

It has become something of a commonplace to assert that the mid- to late fourteenth century saw the 'emergence of the Highlands' in the sense of an increased awareness within Scotland of the division of the kingdom into distinct Highland and Lowland zones which were differentiated from each other in terms of geography, social structure, lifestyle and, above all, language. One of the most important (and certainly the most-quoted) pieces of evidence for this development is the description of Scotland provided by the historian John of Fordun, whose Chronicle can be dated to the mid-1380s.¹ Fordun's comments have been taken as one of the earliest indications of an increasingly hostile attitude on the part of the Lowland Scot toward the Gael; one of the significant milestones on a path leading toward entrenched cultural antagonism and, eventually, attempts at the systematic persecution of Gaelic society and language.

An important assumption in attempts to outline the development of the 'great ill-will of the lowlander' is that, from the early twelfth century onward, Scottish monarchs identified themselves and their economic, social and political interests with the English-speaking Lowlands and therefore shared, or latterly even shaped, hostile attitudes toward Gaelic Scotland. This historical model of the Gaels and their language as the victims of deliberate and sustained establishment repression was developed in response to conditions in later periods, when an ambitious, wealthy and aggressive government could and did embark on programmes which were consciously designed to marginalise or extirpate the Gaelic language as a contributory factor to the supposed 'barbarity' and lawlessness of the Highlands. This model is less appropriate as a way of explaining

¹The dating of Fordun's work, and the increasingly vexed question of the authorship of the oft-quoted passage, are discussed in chapter 2.

the attitude of the Scottish crown toward Gaelic Scotland for much of the later Middle Ages; for the most part, late medieval kings had neither the ability nor the will to impose governmental and legal, let alone cultural or linguistic, norms on all regions of the kingdom.

The first half-century of Stewart rule after 1371 is one period in which the view of the crown as intrinsically hostile to Highland Scotland seems particularly inappropriate. When the first Stewart king, Robert II, came to the throne in 1371 he was already an influential figure in Gaelic Scotland with extensive personal connections to the aristocracy of the Hebrides, Argyll and Highland Perthshire. Most notably, Robert was regarded as the natural leader of the large Gaelic-speaking population incorporated in the Stewart family's long-established regional lordship in the Firth of Clyde. The first Stewart king enjoyed an easy familiarity and sympathy with Gaelic language and culture that clearly affected many aspects of his reign. For the half-century after 1371 the new 'royal' family gave little indication that it thought in terms of a kingdom divided along the lines suggested by John of Fordun. Literary works encouraged by the Stewart kings, such as John Barbour's *Bruce*, had a rather different vision of the place of Gaelic Scots in the kingdom. It is important to stress that Barbour, rather than Fordun, was the 'man of letters' who most closely represented and reflected the views and attitudes of the Stewart royal court after 1371. Contemporary criticisms of Robert II's rule in Lowland sources meanwhile seem, in part, to have been inspired by the perception that the king was far too closely involved with the affairs of Gaelic Scotland.

At the core of Robert II's relationship with Gaelic Scotland was the great regional lordship his ancestors had built up in and around the Firth of Clyde since the twelfth century. At the simplest level the need to exploit the landed resources of the Stewartry ensured that, even after he became king, Robert spent a great deal of his time in areas dominated by Gaelic language and culture. When the chronicler Jean Froissart reported disparagingly how Robert II resided in 'la sauvage Escose' instead of leading his magnates in

Anglo-Scottish warfare, he was no doubt reflecting the judgement and prejudices of his Lowland Scottish informants.² The Stewart lordship in the west, however, was much more than just a collection of estates; the Steward was also a leader of men who needed to cultivate the loyalty and affection of his adherents. In areas such as Cowal and Bute this process inevitably involved the development of a Gaelic 'persona' and a set of historical myths and symbols that made the Steward a natural focus for the devotion of his Gaelic supporters.

The Stewart advance in the Firth of Clyde was part of a story of restless aristocratic expansion which began with the arrival of the progenitor of the family, Walter fitz Alan, in Scotland during the reign of David I (1124–53).³ Walter became steward of King David's household and received from his royal patron extensive lands to the south of the Clyde: the lordships of Renfrew, Mearns, Strathgryfe and North Kyle as well as other estates scattered through the southern shires.⁴ Like many of the men in David's entourage, Walter was the representative of a family that had only recently established itself in Britain. Walter's father was a Breton knight, Alan fitz Flael, who had been granted lands in the honour of Warin in Shropshire by the English king, Henry I. Sir Alan's grandfather, also Alan, had acted as hereditary steward for the bishops of Dol in Brittany.⁵ From their political and territorial base in and around Renfrew Walter's descendants, eventually known as Stewarts after the royal office they came to dominate, extended their lordship into the Firth of Clyde. Late in the twelfth century the family acquired rights of lordship over Bute; certainly Alan son of Walter the Steward felt able, around 1200, to grant the kirk of Kingarth and the lands associated with it in

²Baron H. Kervyn de Lettenhove, *Oeuvres de Froissart publiées avec les variants des divers manuscrits*, 25 vols. (Brussels 1867–77) [Froissart, *Oeuvres*] xi, 213.

³G. W. S. Barrow, *The Anglo-Norman Era in Scottish History* (Oxford 1980), 13–15, 64–70.

⁴*Regesta Regum Scottorum*, vol. i, *The Acts of Malcolm IV, King of Scots 1153–1165*, ed. G. W. S. Barrow (Edinburgh 1960), no. 184.

⁵J. Horace Round, *Studies in Peerage and Family History* (London 1901), 122.

the south of Bute to Paisley abbey, the Cluniac house which had been founded by the Stewarts earlier in the twelfth century.⁶ By the middle of the thirteenth century the Stewarts' territorial empire had also embraced Cowal, the rocky and stern peninsula which lay to the north of Bute.⁷

Stewart influence in the Firth of Clyde was consolidated and underpinned by the family's possession of a formidable chain of fortresses scattered across Bute and Cowal. The network included the strategically vital castle at Dunoon and the strongholds at Carrick and Glendaruel, which collectively dominated the sea lanes round, and the land routes through, Cowal. The key centre for Stewart lordship in the region, however, was the great castle of Rothesay on Bute. The Stewarts' authority in their newly acquired Firth of Clyde lordships may have rested on their intimidating military capacity and economic and political power, but as the thirteenth century progressed the family clearly cultivated a large and loyal following in the Gaelic-speaking population subject to their lordship. The cohesion and constancy of these adherents was encouraged by the development of views of the past that suggested that the territories under Stewart control possessed an ancient unity, in both worship and political allegiance, which marked them off from surrounding lordships. The fact that Bute and the castle at Rothesay were the focal points of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Stewart lordship was projected backwards to suggest that the island had lain at the heart of the religious and political history of the Gael for centuries. A major part of this process was the emergence of St Brendan as the principal focus for the devotion of the inhabitants of Bute.

⁶Barrow, *Anglo-Norman Era*, 67–8; *Registrum Monasterii de Passelet*, ed. Cosmo Innes (Maitland Club: Edinburgh 1832) [*Paisley Reg.*], 15. The steady advance of Stewart secular power was marked by a series of grants made by the family and its retainers, or by those newly absorbed into the Stewart sphere of influence, in favour of Paisley abbey.

⁷Barrow, *Anglo-Norman Era*, 68; G. W. S. Barrow and A. Royan, 'James Fifth Stewart of Scotland, 1260(?)–1309', in *Essays on the Nobility of Medieval Scotland*, ed. Keith J. Stringer (Edinburgh 1985), 166–94, at 167.

The extent to which Brendan of Clonfert (d. 576) was a figure of general veneration in the islands of the west before the advent of Stewart lordship is difficult to gauge. In Adomnan's *Life of Columba*, (produced ca 700) Brendan enjoyed a brief cameo as one of a party of four Irish Holy men, 'founders of monasteries', which visited Columba on Iona. In this episode St Brendan was accorded a vision of a 'column of light' emanating from the head of St Columba as the latter celebrated mass.⁸ While the *Life* presents Brendan as a contemporary and associate of the pre-eminent Hebridean saint, Columba, it does not suggest that the abbot of Clonfert had his own mission to, or following in, the Hebrides and Scottish west coast in the early medieval period. The proposition that Brendan led a mission to the area, and that his posthumous cult had a significant early following in the region, rests largely on the evidence of kirk dedications, place-names and toponyms, all with relatively late dates of first attestation.⁹ This is certainly the case for the Firth of Clyde, where the undoubted popularity of Brendan's cult in the late medieval period does not seem to have grown from early medieval roots. There is, for example, no evidence that Brendan was particularly revered on Bute alongside saints with a more obvious connection to the island such as Bláán and Rónán. In the early medieval period there was no explicit connection made between Brendan's mission and Bute; the most important local saint was Bláán, a native of Bute, whose kirk at Kingarth in the south of the island was an active religious centre in the seventh and eighth centuries.¹⁰ There are, moreover, no Brendan kirk dedications or topographical features bearing his name in the region that can

⁸ *Adomnán's Life of Columba*, edd. and trans. A. O. Anderson and M. O. Anderson, rev. edn. (Oxford 1991), 206–7 (Book III, chapter 17).

⁹ W. J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh 1926) [Watson, *The History of Celtic Place-Names*], 81, 82, 189, 274; *Early Sources of Scottish History A.D. 500–1286*, collected and trans. Alan Orr Anderson, 2 vols. [Anderson, *Early Sources*] (Edinburgh 1922) i, 17–19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* i, 176–7, 198, 228, 236, 248, 254.

confidently be ascribed to the period before *ca* 1200.¹¹ From around 1200, however, a number of references point towards a growing interest in St Brendan's life and his associations, real or invented, with Scotland in general and the Firth of Clyde in particular. In the late twelfth or early thirteenth century a now lost Latin Life of St Brendan was produced.¹² The provenance and purpose of this hagiography and its linked origin-legend material remain uncertain. Recent work by D. Broun suggests that the saint's life may have been produced in an area of Gaelic Scotland where interaction with Anglo-French culture had been commonplace during the twelfth century; a situation that stimulated the production of hagiographies intended to introduce and explain indigenous saints' cults to the new clerical and aristocratic elites.¹³ Certainly, the appearance of a Latin version of the Life of St Brendan in Scotland roughly coincided with

¹¹St Brendan had no identifiable early medieval 'paruchia' in Scotland and his 'life' was not taken up by any major ecclesiastical institution as an explanation and justification for the lands and churches claimed to be subject to its jurisdiction. The known dedications of churches on Bute did not include Brendan. Kingarth parish had sites associated with St Catán and St Bláán. Rothesay parish church was, by 1323, dedicated to the Virgin Mary (with the suggestion that the original dedication was to St Broc). The chapel in Rothesay castle commemorated St Michael, while another chapel in the burgh was dedicated to St Bridget. *Origines Parochiales Scotiae*, edd. Cosmo Innes *et al.*, 2 vols. in 3 (Bannatyne Club: Edinburgh 1851–5) ii (part 1), 211–12, 221–4. In 1474, the Campbell burgh of barony at Inveraray on Loch Fyne was allowed two fairs, one of which was to be held on St Brendan's day (16 May). The Brendan fair at Inveraray may have been established well before 1474, but he was not the saint first venerated at the site, for the dedication of the kirk at Inveraray, the parish kirk of Kilmalieu, was to a St Liubha or Liba. Watson, *The History of Celtic Place-Names*, 304–5.

¹²Dauvit Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Woodbridge 1999), 88. A number of later Scottish chroniclers make reference to this work, largely because it 'included an account of the origins of the *Scoti*, probably as a preliminary to its treatment of the saint's life'.

¹³*Ibid.*, 114. An alternative view is that the Brendan text emerged from a continental hagiographic tradition that linked the story of individual Irish saints with explanatory material outlining the origins of the Irish people for an audience that was otherwise unfamiliar with this history: *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, gen. ed. D. E. R. Watt, 9 vols. (Aberdeen/Edinburgh 1987–98), vol. i, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen (Aberdeen 1993), xx.

the imposition of Stewart lordship on Bute and Cowal, and may have been inspired by it. It is impossible to know whether the Latin Life attempted to localise any aspect of the saint's story in the territory of the thirteenth-century Scottish kingdom.¹⁴ *Bliocadran*, a French tale written as a prologue to the Perceval story, gives a fleeting hint that a description of Brendan's mission which centred on Scotland rather than Ireland may have reached the continent by the early thirteenth century.¹⁵ More tellingly, a psalter produced in Paris in the first half of the thirteenth century, apparently for a patron with a particular interest in the saints of the Firth of Clyde and Argyll, gave special prominence to the commemoration of St Brendan.¹⁶ Virginia Glenn

¹⁴The origin myths associated with the hagiography give no indication of a peculiarly 'Scottish' outlook, since they were drawn from the standard pseudo-histories which explained the origin of the Gaelic people and could thus have been attached to the life of any early medieval Gaelic saint.

¹⁵Leonora D. Wolfgang, *Bliocadran: A Prologue to the Perceval of Chrétien de Troyes* (Tübingen 1976), 46–52. In this romance Perceval's mother resolves to remove her son from the martial, chivalric milieu that contributed to the death of her husband. She leaves her home pretending to take the child on pilgrimage to 'Saint Brandain d'Escoce' (l. 554) or 'A Saint Brandain qui est d'Escoce' (l. 587). The description might have arisen from a misreading of an earlier Latin source that identified Brendan as *Scotus* (i.e., an Irishman), although Wolfgang argues (not too convincingly) against this possibility. Even if St Brendan was known as 'of Scotland' this need not have indicated a specific connection to the Firth of Clyde.

¹⁶Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Douce 50, fo. xi; Virginia Glenn, 'Court patronage in Scotland 1240–1340', in *Medieval Art and Architecture in the Diocese of Glasgow*, ed. Richard Fawcett, *British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions* 23 (1998) 111–21, at 112–14. In the calendar attached to the psalter Brendan is joined by other saints associated with Bute and Cowal, such as Bláán, Rónán (an abbot of Kingarth, d. 737) and Fintán (of Kilmun), as well as Maelruba of Applecross ('Melrune'). Fintán and Brendan are two of the three Gaelic saints to be picked out in red ink in the calendar (the name of the third, Columba, has subsequently been erased). The litany has amongst the confessors 'munde' (Fintán), Patrick, Malachy, Bláán, Bean, Berchan, Columba, and a 'frchane' (MS Douce 50, fo. 523r). Devotion to Patrick was so widespread as to defy easy localisation. Nevertheless, it may be significant that Patrick's supposed birthplace at Kilpatrick on the north shore of the Clyde was an active pilgrimage centre in the late twelfth century: *Paisley Reg.*, 166–8; Kenneth Veitch, 'A Study of the Extent to which Existing Native Religious Society

argues that the commemoration of St Fintán (calendar) and the appearance of St Fearchar (litany) might indicate that the Lamonts of Cowal commissioned the psalter. This would have occurred at around the same time as the Lamont-controlled areas of southern Cowal were in the process of being absorbed into the Stewart lordship.¹⁷ There are other possibilities. One feature of the calendar is the commemoration, in red ink, of the feasts of the apostles and of four dates associated with St John the Baptist, i.e. Nativity (24 June), Octave (1 July), Beheading (29 August) and Conception (24 September). This might suggest a connection to the Valliscaulian house at Ardchattan, founded *ca* 1230 by Donnchadh mac Dubhghaill, lord of Argyll.¹⁸ The Valliscaulian order was noted for its devotion to St John.¹⁹ Moreover, Brendan, Fintán, Columba, Rónán and Bláán had churches dedicated to them inside the MacDubhghaill lordship as well as in the Firth of Clyde; indeed, Brendan dedications were most numerous on the islands and coastline of the MacDubhghaill heartland of Lorn. Glenn suggests that an Ardchattan/MacDubhghaill association for the psalter is unlikely because of the non-appearance in the calendar or litany of Catán, apparently the saint commemorated in the place-name Ardchattan. However, the calendar as it now stands is incomplete, with the anniversaries for November, December, January and February

helped to shape Scotland's Reformed Monastic Community, 1070–1286', unpublished Ph.D. thesis (Edinburgh 1999), 128–36, 251–2.

¹⁷At the time of the psalter's production the Lamonts were in effective control of St Fintán's pilgrimage centre at Kilmun in Cowal. The name Fearchar had been borne by the chief of the family in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century, although the name was not used thereafter. Moreover, the validity of the 'Fearchar' connection depends on reading the St 'frcane' who appears in the litany as a mistake for St Fearchar: Glenn, 'Court patronage', 112–14; MS Douce 50, fo. 523; W. D. H. Sellar, 'Family origins in Cowal and Knapdale', *Scottish Studies* 15 (1971) 21–37, at 23, 26–8.

¹⁸I. B. Cowan and D. E. Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses, Scotland*, 2nd edn. (London 1976), 83–4.

¹⁹In a papal supplication of 27 August 1425 the priory was described as the 'monastery of St Mary and St John the Baptist in Beanedardaloch [Benderloch] ... commonly called Ardkatan': *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome 1423–28*, ed. A. I. Dunlop (Scottish History Society: Edinburgh 1956), 112.

missing. This is significant, because the exact date of St Catán's feast day is rather uncertain. In some (relatively late) Scottish sources the anniversary of St Catán is given as 17 May.²⁰ However, in earlier Irish calendars Catán's anniversary is recorded under the date 1 February.²¹ If the psalter had followed this dating, then any commemoration of Catán would have fallen in the lost section of the calendar.²² Whatever its exact provenance, the psalter reveals that Brendan was an important part of the devotional culture of the inhabitants of the Firth of Clyde and Argyll early in the thirteenth century as Stewart power advanced into the region. It is a reasonable hypothesis that the process of Stewart expansion entailed the family's absorption into the Gaelic world, and the adoption of established symbols of sacred and secular power, as much as it opened up Cowal and Bute to influences from the Stewart lordships to the east of the

²⁰A. P. Forbes, *Kalendars of Scottish Saints* (Edinburgh 1872), 237, 298–9. It seems rather suspicious that this commemoration of 'sanctus Cathanus, Episcopus in Buta Scotiae Insula' should fall on the day following the feast of St Brendan.

²¹*Féilire hÚi Gormáin, The Martyrology of Gorman*, ed. Whitley Stokes (Henry Bradshaw Society: London 1895), 28–9. Whether this Catán was one and the same as the saint apparently commemorated at Ardchattan is another matter. I thank Rachel Butter for the interesting observation that the place-name Ardchattan need not, in any case, have originally been derived from the personal name Catán. The association of the priory with a saint of that name had evidently been made by October 1371, when Prior Martin was described as the 'Prior of Saint 'Kattanus'; *Highland Papers*, ed. J. R. N. MacPhail, 4 vols. (Scottish History Society: Edinburgh 1914–34) ii, 147. However, the papal supplication of 1425 outlined above (n. 19) made no mention of Catán as one of the principal dedicatees of the priory.

²²Watson, *The History of Celtic Place-Names*, 277. In another case of divergence between the general run of Scottish calendars and the Irish martyrologies, the MS Douce 50 Calendar follows the Irish dating. In the martyrologies, St Maelruba of Applecross is commemorated on 21 April. However, Scottish calendars confused Maelruba with St Rufus of Capua and therefore commemorated him on 27 August. MS Douce 50 has St 'Melrune' on 21 April. Forbes, *Kalendars of Scottish Saints*, 11, 120, 133, 160, 209, 240; William Reeves, 'St Maelrubha: his history and churches', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 3 (1857) 258–96. A more important absentee from the calendar in terms of Glenn's objections to an Ardchattan/MacDubhghaill connection may be St Moluag of Lismore (25 June), the chief church of the diocese of Argyll.

Firth of Clyde. Some members of the Stewart kin were certainly familiar with the Gaelic language (and by implication its secular and sacred literature) by the opening decades of the thirteenth century. One indication of this familiarity was the adoption of Gaelic epithets by Stewart lords. In the 1340s a series of documents dealing with the kirk of Tarbolton described Kyle Stewart as ‘Walterochiskile’, which seems to stand for ‘Walter Óg’s Kyle’. The Walter Óg commemorated in the place-name may well have been Walter the Steward (d. 1241).²³ Certainly, this Walter’s younger son, also Walter, was habitually known by a Gaelic byname, *Ballach* ‘spotted’, to the extent that when he supplicated the pope to allow his marriage to the heiress of the earldom of Menteith he styled himself Walter *Ballach*.²⁴ The Stewart/Menteith family descended from Walter *Ballach* adopted other practices associated with the aristocracy of parts of Gaelic Scotland, most notably the commissioning of grave-slabs decorated in the distinctive West Highland style.²⁵

²³*Liber Sancte Marie de Melros*, ed. Cosmo Innes, 2 vols. (Bannatyne Club: Edinburgh 1837) ii, nos. 452 (Walterochiskile/Walterhociskile), 453 (Walterochyskyle), 454 (Walterhochiskile), and 455 (Walterohcciskyle). I am very grateful to Professor G. W. S. Barrow for these references and for the suggestion that they relate to Walter II Stewart (1204–41).

²⁴*Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, ed. W. F. Skene and trans. Felix J. H. Skene, 2 vols. (Edinburgh 1871–2) [*Chron. Fordun*] i, 298; *Vetera Monumenta Hibernorum et Scotorum Historiam Illustrantia*, ed. A. Theiner (Rome 1964), no. 237. Walter’s apparent familiarity with Gaelic raises questions as to his childhood education and (by extension) that of his elder brother, Alexander the Steward. It is unfortunate that so little is known of the marriages of the Stewart family in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

²⁵K. A. Steer and J. W. M. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland [*RCAHMS*]: Edinburgh 1977), 42, 161–2 (no. 107). In October 1357 John Menteith, Lord of Arran and Knapdale, the last of the Menteith-Stewart line, issued a charter at the monastery of Kilwinning which was witnessed by, amongst others, one ‘Comedinus medicus’. The Latin name would seem to represent Gaelic *Gille-coimded* (Steer and Bannerman, *Monumental Sculpture*, 158). Most of the witnesses seem to have been drawn from Menteith’s lordship of Arran and it may be that *Gille-coimded* was a member of an hereditary Gaelic medical family based on the island and in

The Paris Psalter and the Latin Life of St Brendan indicate a quickening interest in St Brendan around the turn of the thirteenth century, perhaps associated with the advance of the Stewarts in the Firth of Clyde. However, the earliest incontestable indication of a belief that Brendan had a historical connection to Bute occurs in a late-thirteenth-century chronicle preserved in John of Fordun's *Chronica Gentis Scottorum*.²⁶ The chronicle narrative explains that Bute was originally known as Rothesay, but that Brendan had 'built a booth (in our language bothy) that is a monastic cell on the island'.²⁷ Thereafter, we are told, the island was known by two names, Rothesay and Bute, the latter arising from the presence of Brendan's monastic cell or *both*.²⁸

Why did Brendan emerge in the thirteenth century as an attractive and compelling figure for veneration in Bute ahead of saints with a more obvious connection to the island? One factor may have been the huge popularity and wide dissemination of the story of St Brendan's seven-year voyage in search of the Promised Land of the saints, a well-known tale that had spread far beyond the Gaelic-speaking world if, in fact, it originated there. By 1200 the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani* had become a standard work across Western Europe, with numerous prose and verse versions in Latin, French and other languages.²⁹ Moreover, the depiction of Brendan in the *Navigatio* as

Menteith's service: *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, edd. J. M. Thomson and J. B. Paul, 11 vols. (Edinburgh 1882–1914) [*RMS*] i, no. 182.

²⁶Broun, *Irish Identity*, 130; *Chron. Fordun* i, 25; ii, 24; *Scotichronicon* i, edd. MacQueen and MacQueen, 69, 147–8. For the late-thirteenth-century strand in Fordun's chronicle, see chapter 2.

²⁷*Scotichronicon* i, edd. MacQueen and MacQueen, 69, 147–8; *Chron. Fordun* i, 25; ii, 24.

²⁸It is impossible to know whether there was some extant physical feature on Bute that was identified with Brendan's *both* (for instance the extensive ruins of Bláán's monastic enclosure at Kingarth?). The 'Bute' tradition may have held that the island had been christianised by Brendan's mission, an interpretation which would have encouraged the well-attested devotion of the islanders to the saint in the period after 1300.

²⁹Carl Selmer, 'The vernacular translations of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*: a bibliographical study', *Medieval Studies* 18 (1956) 145–57 [Selmer, '*Navigatio*];

an intrepid sailor-saint, passing from isle to isle in the course of his long voyage, may well have had a particular resonance for the inhabitants of the region, and especially for the Stewart magnates who sought to impose their lordship on the scattered island communities of the Firth of Clyde.³⁰ One name that could have suggested a connection between the Brendan tale and the Clyde was Inchmarnock, the island lying just off Bute and named from Saint Ernán.³¹ Intriguingly, Brendan's voyage in the *Navagatio* is inspired by the story told by the hermit Barrind on a visit to Brendan's monastery. Barrind narrates how he visited his godson Mernoc, who had founded an eremitical community on an island known as the Delightful Isle, and how the two men sailed west in a successful bid to find the Promised Land of the saints.³²

The international 'glamour' of the Brendan of the *Navagatio* and the appropriateness of his tale to the geography of the region may have been significant, but these factors hardly provide a full explanation as to why the Brendan cult was so readily developed. It would seem that the most significant factor underlying the success of

Benedeit; The Anglo-Norman Voyage of St Brendan, edd. I. Short and B. Merrilees (Manchester 1979), 1–6 [*Benedeit*, edd. Short and Merrilees].

³⁰A localisation of the Brendan tale in the Firth of Clyde would have provided a precedent for treating the islands as a historically linked unit.

³¹Watson, *The History of Celtic Place-Names*, 291–2.

³²*Benedeit*, edd. Short and Merrilees, 16–17, 85, 98. Walter Bower (writing 1441–7) describes Inchmarnock as *Insula Sancti Marnoci* (*Scotichronicon* i, edd. MacQueen and MacQueen, 15) and as 'Inchemernok' 'where there is a monks' cell' (*ibid.*, 187). There is nothing here, or in any extant local traditions, to suggest that an explicit association had been made with Mernoc, the godson of Barrind, but the coincidence of a 'Mernok's island' lying off the west coast of Brendan's *both* is interesting. Brendan's Life may also have appealed to the Stewart lords because it provided a number of links between their ancestral homeland in Brittany and their lordship in the Firth of Clyde. For example, one of Brendan's pupils, St Machutes, was the eponymous founder-saint associated with the Breton bishopric of St Malo: Selmer, 'Navagatio', 148–9; *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, gen. ed. D. E. R. Watt, vol. ii, edd. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen (Aberdeen 1989), 63; vol. iv, edd. and trans. David J. Corner, A. B. Scott, William W. Scott and D. E. R. Watt (Edinburgh 1994), 17.

the saint's cult was the sustenance and protection it received from the Stewart family, and that its growth was encouraged because it provided a powerful historical and ideological underpinning for Stewart ambitions and claims in the Firth of Clyde. Throughout the thirteenth century Stewart lordship in the region faced robust local opposition. Although the Stewarts had obtained physical control of Bute by *ca* 1200, their hold on the lordship was contested by the Norwegian crown, which claimed that the island was subject to its authority, and by a rather enigmatic local dynasty that may have been displaced by the Stewart advance.³³ Norwegian pretensions to overlordship in the Hebrides were backed up by major naval campaigns in 1230 and 1263 that targeted the islands of the Firth of Clyde. On both occasions the Stewart castle at Rothesay was attacked and taken by the Norse and their Hebridean allies.³⁴

Moreover, Bute and the neighbouring islands, including Arran, remained part of the diocese of Sodor (the Isles) and subject, in ecclesiastical terms, to the Norwegian province of Trondheim.³⁵ By the fourteenth century the competition between the Norwegian, Scots and English crowns in the Irish Sea had produced an entrenched threefold division of secular political authority within the Sodor diocese. In 1350, for example, copies of papal letters confirming the election of a new bishop by the clergy of the diocese had to be sent not only to the archbishop of Trondheim, but also to William Montague, lord of Man (subject to the English crown),

³³In 1263 King Haakon was able to leave the assault on Bute to one Ruaidhrí and his brothers who claimed to have a hereditary right to the island. Intriguingly, men using the designation 'of Bute' witnessed charters issued by Aengus Mór MacDomhnaill in the first half of the thirteenth century. Sometime before the death of Alexander II (1249) Aengus issued a charter in favour of Paisley Abbey which was witnessed by one Fearchar 'Nigilli de Buyt'. Another of Aengus' charters was attested by Fearchar 'de Buit' and his brother Donnchadh. *Paisley Reg.*, 127–8.

³⁴Anderson, *Early Sources* ii, 471–7, 620–1.

³⁵A. D. M. Barrell, *The Papacy, Scotland and Northern England, 1342–1378* (Cambridge 1995), 187.

Robert Stewart, lord of Bute, and Eoin MacDomhnaill, lord of Islay.³⁶ In a thoroughly fragmented diocese with a weak ecclesiastical structure (where bishops could often represent ‘hostile’ political interests), the dominant secular lords seem to have attempted to associate their authority with saints’ cults that gave religious expression to the territories over which they held sway. For many in the Hebrides the most important focus for devotion was St Columba.³⁷ In the middle of the thirteenth century Columba was invoked as the spiritual guardian of the political interests of the Norse crown and Hebridean lords opposed to the advance of the influence of the Scottish crown in the west; according to Haakon’s saga, Columba was the final and most threatening of the three saints who appeared in a dream to warn Alexander II of the consequences if he continued his campaign of 1249 against Argyll and the Isles. Needless to say Alexander ignored this timely advice and had the predictable misfortune to die on Kerrera in mid-expedition.³⁸

The status of Columba as an icon for the political adversaries of the Stewart family in and around the Firth of Clyde may well have been a spur to the cultivation of Brendan as a rallying point for the

³⁶*Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters*, ed. W. H. Bliss *et al.*, 18 vols. to date (London/Dublin 1893–) [CPL] iii, 279. The tensions engendered by the opening of the wars of independence would have put further strain on the fragile unity of the diocese of the Isles. The importance of the Steward’s lordship of Rothesay as the principal Scottish stronghold in the diocese was emphasised by the burial of two successive ‘Scottish’ bishops of the Isles in St Mary’s kirk in Rothesay in the 1320s. Andrew (d. 1321) witnessed at least one charter by Walter the Steward (*ca* 1320) dealing with lands in Bute: *Chronica Regum Manniae et Insularum* ed. P. A. Munch (Christiania 1860), 30; *Chronicon Regum Mannie et Insularum, Chronicles of the Kings of Man and the Isles, BL Cotton Julius A vii*, ed. George Broderick, 2nd edn. ([Douglas] 1996), fo. 51v; *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae Medii Aevi, ad annum 1638*, rev. edn., ed. D. E. R. Watt and A. L. Murray (Edinburgh 2003), 262.

³⁷*Paisley Reg.*, 125–6. Grants by Raghnaill son of Somhairle and Raghnaill’s son Domhnall to the monastery of Paisley invoked St Columba’s curse on any who disrupted the terms of the gift or otherwise harmed the monks and monastery.

³⁸Anderson, *Early Sources* ii, 556–7; *Chronica de Mailros*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (Bannatyne Club: Edinburgh 1835), 177–8.

Stewarts' Gaelic adherents. The way in which the cults of Columba and Brendan ebbed and flowed according to the changing fortunes of the political lordships associated with the saints may be hinted at in the history of Skipness castle in Knapdale. Until the second half of the thirteenth century Clann Shuibhne (the MacSweens) controlled Skipness and maintained a chapel dedicated to St Columba near to the stronghold. However, late in the thirteenth century the Stewart-Menteith lords of Knapdale and Arran ousted Clann Shuibhne from Knapdale, obtained possession of Skipness and rebuilt the castle compound, absorbing the existing Columban chapel and apparently replacing it with one dedicated to St Brendan.³⁹ The fact that the commemoration of St Columba was deliberately expunged from the calendar of the thirteenth-century Paris Psalter produced for a patron with connections to Argyll, Cowal and Bute, is also suggestive of some antipathy toward Columba on the part of one subsequent owner of the book. Since, however, it is impossible to determine even an approximate date for the obliteration of Columba's name, it would be dangerous to assume that the context for the deletion was political tension and rivalry in late medieval Argyll.⁴⁰

By the opening of the fourteenth century it was clear that devotion to St Brendan was virtually synonymous with residence on Bute and loyalty to the Stewart lords of the island. So close was the association that fourteenth-century sources simply began to describe the inhabitants of Bute as 'Brendans' in recognition of their collective devotion to the saint.⁴¹ In the fourteenth century the term

³⁹*RCAHMS, Argyll (Kintyre)* i, 116 (no. 277), 165–78 (no. 314); *Paisley Reg.*, 120–1.

⁴⁰Oxford, Bodl. MS Douce 50, fo. xii'. The name of the saint has been erased, leaving 'sancti' and the description 'confessoris' untouched on either side of the erasure. As Columba was one of the three Irish saints originally picked out in red ink (alongside Brendan and Fintán) the individual or ecclesiastical community that first commissioned the psalter clearly venerated the saint. This makes the subsequent obliteration of Columba from the calendar even more curious.

⁴¹Thus, according to Scottish sources, a Sir John Stewart was killed at the battle of Falkirk in 1298 'cum Brendanis': *Chron. Fordun* i, 330. However, the near contemporary English chronicler, Walter of Guisborough, mentions a Sir John Stewart leading a contingent of bowmen from Selkirk forest during the battle: *The*

was evidently widely understood and in common use both within and outwith Scotland. When northern English chroniclers commented on the army led into England by Robert I on the Byland campaign of 1322, they noted that it was made up of ‘Scots, Brendans and Islesmen’.⁴² The Brendans made their most sustained and heroic appearance in an anonymous Scottish chronicle of the 1390s that was later incorporated into the work of Andrew of Wyntoun and Walter Bower. After the disastrous defeat of Scottish armies at the battles of Dupplin (1332) and Halidon Hill (1333) the then lord of Bute, the sixteen-year-old Robert the Steward (the future Robert II) saw his lands and lordships, including Bute and Cowal, occupied by men acting on behalf of Edward Balliol and the English crown. In 1334 Robert attempted to reclaim his patrimony and launched a successful assault on Dunoon castle in Cowal. The inhabitants of Bute, aware of Robert’s presence in the Firth of Clyde, rose in a spontaneous revolt against the pro-Balliol sheriff, killing him and many of his men at the so-called ‘Batal Dormange’ (*Batail nan Doirneag*), ‘Battle of the

Chronicle of Walter of Guisborough, ed. Harry Rothwell (Camden Series: London 1957), 328. It is, of course, possible that there were two entirely different John Stewarts involved in the conflict. See also *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, gen. ed. D. E. R. Watt, vol. vi, edd. and trans. Norman F. Shead, Wendy B. Stevenson, and D. E. R. Watt *et al.* (Aberdeen 1991), 97; vol. vii, edd. and trans. A. B. Scott and D. E. R. Watt *et al.* (Edinburgh 1996), 105; *The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, ed. F. J. Amours, 6 vols. (Scottish Texts Society: Edinburgh 1903–14) [*Chron. Wyntoun* (Amours)] v, 316–17.

⁴²‘exercitus Scottorum, Brandanorum et Insulanorum’: *Chronicon Monasterii de Melsa*, ed. Edward A. Bond, 2 vols. (Rolls Series: London 1866–7) ii, 346; *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. Joseph Stevenson (Bannatyne and Maitland Clubs: Edinburgh 1839), 247. In the section covering the Byland campaign the printed ‘Lanercost’ in fact reflects a chronicle probably composed in a Franciscan house in Carlisle: see Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 2 vols. (London 1974–82) ii, 12–13, 101, 115. Both chronicles saw the Brendans as a quite distinct element in the Scottish army, distinguishing them from the Scots recruited from both sides of the Scottish sea (the Forth) and the Islesmen, e.g. *Chronicon de Lanercost*, ed. Stevenson, 247: ‘Post reditum autem regis Anglie, congregavit rex Scotiae totam fortitudinem suam citra mare Scoticanum et ultra, et de Insulis et *Brandanis*, et in crastino post festum Sancti Michaelis [September 30] intravit Angliam apud Solewath’.

Casting Stones', and sending his head to the Steward.⁴³ It seems likely that the Brendans' rebellion and the defeat of Balliol's men occurred on or around the feast of St Brendan on 16 May.⁴⁴ After 1334, the anniversaries of Brendan and *Batail nan Doirneag* may well have been bound together in an annual celebration of the sacred and secular ties that underpinned Stewart lordship in the island. The Steward certainly displayed affection for the islanders and their saint for the remainder of his long life. As a reward for their loyalty in 1334 the Brandans asked to hold their lands from the Steward free of multure duty and 'this he [the Steward] granted gratefully, and as long as he lived he embraced them with great favour'.⁴⁵ More striking is the fact that, even after he became king in 1371, Robert regularly returned to Bute in the month of May, probably to participate in the celebration of the feast of Brendan and the anniversary of the conflict of 1334 and, on occasion, combining these events with observance of the great festival of 'Pasche' (Easter) when the latter fell in May.⁴⁶

The localisation of the Brendan cult on Bute was not the only way in which precedents were found for the prominence of Stewart lordship in the Firth of Clyde. An account (probably written late in the thirteenth century) of the conclusion of the Treaty of Perth between the Norse and the Scots in 1266, suggests that the agreement (which saw the Norwegian king receive payment for

⁴³*Chron. Wyntoun* (Amours) vi, 42–3; Stephen. I. Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings: Robert II and Robert III 1371–1406* (East Linton 1996), 4–5.

⁴⁴Bute was evidently in the young lord's possession by 25 May 1334, when Robert issued a charter from the island; *Highland Papers*, ed. MacPhail iv, 11. This was nine days after the feast of St Brendan. The battle was given the title because the Bute men defeated their opponents by bombarding them with stones. Presumably the Brendans employed slings, an effective form of missile warfare that was also deployed in larger and more formal Scottish hosts. See G. W. S. Barrow, 'The army of Alexander III's Scotland', in *Scotland in the Reign of Alexander III*, ed. Norman H. Reid (Edinburgh 1990), 132–147, at 139.

⁴⁵*Scotichronicon* vii, edd. Scott, Watt *et al.*, 105.

⁴⁶Boardman, *Early Stewarts*, 94. On at least some of these occasions Robert's stay on Bute also coincided with the celebration of Easter.

abandoning his claims to the 'islands between Scotland and Ireland') was resented by many because 'the Scots had inhabited the foresaid islands for a very long time before they came to Britain when they were brought there by Eochaid Rothay, one of their leaders; and undisturbed by any incursion, they had held them in uninterrupted possession right up to that ill-fated time of strife between the sons of Malcolm Canmore king of Scotland and Donald Ban, the uncle of the said sons'.⁴⁷ As Dauvit Broun has shown, Eochaid 'Rothay' was a ghost figure resulting from a mistranscription of a genealogy in the twelfth century. His name was subsequently used (certainly before the end of the thirteenth century) as an explanation for the origin of the name Rothesay.⁴⁸ It is easy to see how this figure might have been deployed in the fight against Norse claims in the Clyde and elsewhere during the thirteenth century. As the observation on the 1266 agreement suggests, Eochaid 'Rothay' provided historical validation for the reclamation of the territories he and his descendants had held and which had subsequently been lost to the Norse and their supporters. Presumably, the Stewart lords of Rothesay made use of Eochaid 'Rothay' as a justification for their expansion in the Clyde in the thirteenth century and as a counter to Norse claims to superiority over Bute and Arran.⁴⁹

⁴⁷*Scotichronicon* by Walter Bower in *Latin and English*, gen. ed. D. E. R. Watt, vol. v, edd. and trans. Simon Taylor and D. E. R. Watt *et al.* (Aberdeen 1990), 351 (ultimately *Chron. Fordun* i, 301–2; ii, 297). See also *Scotichronicon* iii, edd. and trans. John MacQueen, Winifred MacQueen, and D. E. R. Watt (Edinburgh 1995), 87 (ultimately *Chron. Fordun* i, 223–4; ii, 213–14) where Magnus' expedition is seen to take control of islands 'which had previously belonged to Scotland by ancient right. For from the time of Eochaid Rothay ... the Scots possessed these islands continuously without interruption'.

⁴⁸Broun, *Irish Identity*, 88.

⁴⁹As the comment on the 1266 settlement implies, Eochaid 'Rothay' was especially useful in providing a precedent for Scottish control of the western islands which predated the late eleventh century and the supposed cession of the Western Isles to the Norse king Magnus Barelegs. It seems probable, therefore, that the Norse attempts to justify their dominion in the west concentrated heavily on Magnus' supposed expedition of 1098.

If the first Stewart king inherited his family's long and deep association with the Brendans of Bute and the Gaelic aristocracy of the Firth of Clyde, then the other links with Gaelic Scotland that he brought to the throne in 1371 were very much the product of his own lifetime. A notable feature of Robert's career before he became king was his rapid acquisition of a series of earldoms and lordships across central Scotland. Atholl, the Appin of Dull, Strath Tay, Strath Braan, Strathearn and Badenoch all came under Robert's control between 1342 and 1357, while in 1361 Robert's son, also Robert, acquired the earldom of Menteith through marriage.⁵⁰ It hardly needs to be emphasised that these were all Gaelic-speaking areas. Robert's own marital and romantic liaisons also tended to reflect his wide-ranging political and territorial interests in Gaelic Scotland. Robert's second wife, whom he married around 1355, was Euphemia, sister of William earl of Ross.⁵¹ Perhaps more important in terms of the functioning of the royal court after 1371 was the fact that Robert's most favoured mistress was Mariota, daughter of the lord of Cardeny (near Dunkeld) and Foss (near Loch Tummel).⁵² The marriage of Robert's daughter Margaret to Eoin MacDomhnaill lord of Islay in 1350 provided yet another connection to a major figure in Gaelic society.⁵³ Given Robert's position as a great lord within Gaelic Scotland it is hardly a surprise that in the 1360s, when David II's regime began to pass legislation aimed at making Highland areas more amenable to royal agents and taxation, the Steward was identified as one of the key intermediaries between the crown and the inhabitants of the west and north.⁵⁴

⁵⁰Boardman, *Early Stewarts*, 7, 11–12, 16.

⁵¹*Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Petitions to the Pope* [CPP], vol. i, ed. W. H. Bliss (London 1896), 287; Boardman, *Early Stewarts*, 11.

⁵²RMS i, nos. 552, 729–731; *Highland Papers*, ed. MacPhail i, 111–12; *The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland*, edd. J. Stuart *et al.*, 23 vols. (Edinburgh 1878–1908) [ER] ii, 557; CPL iv, 226.

⁵³CPL iii, 381.

⁵⁴*The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, edd. T. Thomson and C. Innes, 12 vols. (Edinburgh 1814–75) [APS] i, 506–7.

After 1371 Robert showed little sign of abandoning his many ties to Gaelic Scotland. The itinerary of the king gives some credence to Froissart's observation that the first Stewart monarch spent an unusual amount of his time in the Highlands. There were significant recurring patterns in Robert's annual peregrinations around his kingdom. In May, as we have seen, the king was normally to be found back on Bute, presumably for the feast day of Brendan, or Easter, or both.⁵⁵ The regular crossings to the Firth of Clyde lordships resulted in the almost surreal status of Ardsheil (Portencross) as the seventh most likely place for the issuing of royal charters between 1371 and 1390. In August Robert headed for Kindrochit castle and the hunting grounds of the Braes of Mar. The hunting seats of Highland Perthshire and Angus were also occasionally visited—Methven, Glen Finglas, Strath Braan, Glen Almond, Glen Shee, Glen Prosen—as well as Badenoch and the Cumbræ.⁵⁶ It is hard to escape a nineteenth- and twentieth-century view of any excursion away from established seats of administration in the lowlands as a form of leisure, a retreat from government. However, it would be well to remember the amount of judicial and political business that could be conducted by a medieval king in an informal context. If government was where the king and his household were, then Robert II's reign was one in which a sizeable swathe of Gaelic Scotland, stretching from the Firth of Clyde to the uplands of Mar, experienced direct, sustained and relatively friendly royal 'governance'. This may go some way to explaining the positive tone of traditional Highland tales attached to Robert II. It may be significant that Robert, given that he never acquired the iconic status that would have inspired his inclusion in stories not initially relating to him, appeared in these at all. The seventeenth-century *History of Clann Domhnaill* relates a curious story in which Robert II was first arrested and then given a

⁵⁵St Broc (1 May) and St Rónán (22 May) also had feast days in the same month.

⁵⁶See D. E. Meek, 'The Gaelic ballads of medieval Scotland', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 60 (1986–7) 47–72, at 52–6, for the interesting localisation of a Gaelic ballad concerning the death (during a hunt) of the Fian warrior Diarmaid Ua Duibhne to the area around Glen Shee ca 1400.

guard of honour by members of Clann Donnchaidh while he journeyed ‘accompanied only by one gentleman (as often his manner was)’.⁵⁷ Although this is a problematic source and the tale is rather confused and full of stock motifs, there is nothing remotely improbable in the tradition of Clann Donnchaidh providing hospitality for Robert on intimate terms either before or after he became king. In the 1340s, when Robert the Steward obtained effective control of Strath Braan as bailie for the earl of Fife, the chief forester of the lordship, the man responsible for the maintenance of the overlord’s hunting rights, was none other than Donnchadh mac Anndra, the head of Clann Donnchaidh.⁵⁸

Another tale of Robert II that may well have been grounded in reality described how the king was cured of a crippling leg injury by Fearchar the Leech, identified by John Bannerman as one of the Beaton medical kindred.⁵⁹ The king undoubtedly knew and approved of Fearchar’s work, confirming a charter by his third son Alexander to Fearchar in 1379, and then granting him further lands in Strathnaver in December 1386.⁶⁰

Do we have indications of the work of other members of the Gaelic learned orders in and around Robert II’s court? It has to be admitted that here the evidence is disappointingly slim. We know that Robert’s father, Walter, had a harper (‘harpour’), evidently a man of high status, who was mistakenly arrested in London in 1325

⁵⁷*Highland Papers*, ed. MacPhail i, 18–20. The History gives a wholly fabulous account of the origin of Clann Donnchaidh as an offshoot of Clann Domhnaill. While this hardly inspires confidence, the encounter with Robert II may originally have been a free-standing tale genuinely attached to a leader of Clann Donnchaidh.

⁵⁸National Archives of Scotland [NAS], Murthly Castle Muniments, GD 121/Box 4/Bundle 10/no. 3; Sir William Fraser, *The Red Book of Grandtully*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh 1868) i, 2–3, nos. 2–3; *RMSi*, App. 2., no. 1396.

⁵⁹J. F. Campbell, *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, 4 vols. (Paisley 1890–3) ii, 379–80; John Bannerman, *The Beatons: a Medical Kindred in the Classical Gaelic Tradition* (Edinburgh 1986), 62.

⁶⁰NAS, RH 6/174 and 186.

while under safe conduct.⁶¹ But we search in vain for the names of harpists, poets and historians in the employ of the first Stewart king. The most serious gap, of course, is the lack of any extant evidence for Robert II acting as a patron for the production of Gaelic literature. We can, of course, legitimately ask whether we should expect any such work to survive. The corpus of Gaelic poetry is certainly not replete with work produced at the behest of fourteenth-century Scottish patrons. Moreover, such material as does survive is usually preserved in sixteenth- or seventeenth-century collections.⁶² If Robert, lord of Bute, was the subject of Gaelic praise poems it is difficult to see these being lovingly re-recorded for posterity in the court of James V or James VI.

There is, however, one contemporary source that may give some indication of the early Stewart court's familiarity with Gaelic tales and literature. John Barbour's *Bruce*, one of the landmarks in the development of vernacular Scots as a literary language, is also interesting for the attitudes it displays towards the Gaelic world. While the work is dominated by the affairs of Lowland magnates, particularly Sir James Douglas, it makes some interesting and illuminating diversions into Highland Scotland. One general point can be made about Barbour's work: the sour and pejorative comments on the Gael typical of Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon*, for example, are simply not to be found. Barbour's observations on the social customs of Argyll and Ireland are well informed, dispassionate, and entirely divorced from the clerical intellectual framework that presented the Gael as lying on the wrong side of the division between civilisation and barbarity.⁶³ Barbour's work also raises more

⁶¹ *Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland*, ed. J. Bain, 4 vols. (Edinburgh 1881–8) iii, 871.

⁶² Most notably the sixteenth-century *Book of the Dean of Lismore*. See *Scottish Verse from the Book of the Dean of Lismore*, ed. William J. Watson (Scottish Gaelic Texts Society: Edinburgh 1937).

⁶³ The impartial commentary provided by Barbour (through his sources?) is exemplified by the way in which the notably unchivalric battlefield tactics of the native Irish lords supporting Edward Bruce in 1315–18 are explained. See Katherine

specific questions, notably in relation to the author's sources for episodes set in Highland Scotland. Barbour's selection of tales and his interpretation of the history of the early fourteenth century seem to have been heavily influenced by the political and social interests of his Stewart patron. Barbour's narrative of Robert I's escape from his pursuers in 1306–7, for example, lauds the critical role of Niall Caimbeul and Aengus Óg MacDomhnaill, neither of whom is mentioned in the account of the same episode provided in *Gesta Annalia*.⁶⁴ Niall's grandson, Gill-easbuig Caimbeul of Lochawe, was one of Robert II's most committed adherents, while Aengus' son Eoin MacDomhnaill of Islay was, in 1375, the king's son-in-law.⁶⁵ Moreover, Barbour was surely putting forward Robert II's vision of MacDomhnaill co-operation with the crown late in the fourteenth century when he named Aengus Óg as the leader of men from the Isles (and possibly Kintyre and Argyll) in the division commanded by Bruce himself at the battle of Bannockburn.⁶⁶ One of the intriguing sub-themes of Barbour's epic, the great feud between Bruce and Eoin MacDubhghaill of Lorn, also seems to have been

Simms, 'Warfare in the medieval Gaelic lordships', *The Irish Sword* 12 (1975–6) 98–108, at 98.

⁶⁴*Barbour's Bruce*, edd. Matthew P. McDiarmid and James A. C. Stevenson, 3 vols. (Scottish Text Society: Edinburgh 1980–5) [*Barbour's Bruce*, edd. McDiarmid and Stevenson] ii, 59–60 (III, ll. 385–404), 66 (III, ll. 571–4), 69 (III, ll. 659–79).

⁶⁵Gill-easbuig openly acknowledged his dependence on Robert the Steward as a regional lord in the Firth of Clyde in the pre-1371 period. The description of Aengus as 'lord and ledar off Kyntyr' and possessor of the castle of Dunaverty is also interesting, since the lordship of Kintyre had been in dispute between the Stewarts and Clann Domhnaill for most of the fourteenth century. Barbour's acknowledgement of the status of Aengus as lord of Kintyre presumably cannot predate Eoin MacDomhnaill's settlement of the dispute with Robert the Steward in or around 1350.

⁶⁶*Barbour's Bruce*, edd. McDiarmid and Stevenson iii, 14 (XI, ll. 339–43). See Sonja Cameron, 'Keeping the customer satisfied: Barbour's *Bruce* and a phantom division at Bannockburn', in *The Polar Twins*, edd. Edward J. Cowan and Douglas Gifford (Edinburgh 1999), 61–74, for an illustration of how Barbour manipulated his account to give greater prominence and honour to men whose descendants were influential in the 1370s.

heavily influenced by the concerns of the 1370s. Eoin MacDubhghaill, who emerges in the work as the king's most relentless and implacable foe, had a grandson (also Eoin) who was partly restored to the MacDubhghaill lordship in the west by David II in the 1350s. The younger Eoin had thereafter made himself obnoxious to Robert the Steward, a fact that may well have contributed to Barbour's hostile depiction of the conduct of the MacDubhghaill lord's ancestor earlier in the century.⁶⁷

Ironically, it is the material apparently written from the viewpoint of Eoin MacDubhghaill and his followers that provides the clearest indication of Barbour's familiarity with a Gaelic source. Barbour's account of Bruce's heroic conduct after he and his men were ambushed by Eoin and a great force of 'barownys off Argyle' at the head of the river Tay is particularly interesting. The reported speech of the exasperated lord of Lorn as Bruce thwarted the ambush compares the king's exploit to a feat of Goll mac Morna in his struggle against Fionn mac Cumhaill.⁶⁸ Intriguingly, the reference to two heroes of the Fenian cycle receives no further elaboration from Barbour. We would be left to conclude that the poet assumed all his audience was familiar with the story if it were not for the fact that he then provides what he describes as a more appropriate (*mar manerlik*) analogy for Bruce's bravery in the behaviour of Gadifer of Laris (from the *Roman d'Alixandre*).⁶⁹ In addition, at this point in

⁶⁷S. I. Boardman, 'The tale of Leper John and the Campbell acquisition of Lorn', in *Alba. Celtic Scotland in the Middle Ages*, edd. Edward J. Cowan and R. Andrew McDonald (East Linton 2000), 219–47, at 231–2.

⁶⁸*Barbour's Bruce*, edd. McDiarmid and Stevenson ii, 48 (III, ll. 67–70).

⁶⁹*Ibid.* ii, 48–9 (III, ll. 73–92); i, 73 (notes). Although apparently simply grading the relative dignity and worth of the two stories, Barbour's intervention may have been intended to highlight a better-known parallel tale, effectively providing an explanation of the reference for those unfamiliar with the story of Goll mac Morna. MacDubhghaill's use of a literary analogy which Barbour felt compelled to cross-reference raises the possibility that the poet was dealing, either directly or indirectly, with a written account. Alternatively, could Barbour have been familiar enough with the literary tastes of Highland magnates to have provided the Goll mac Morna allusion himself in order to have Eoin speak 'in character'?

Barbour's narrative what may have been an originally quite distinct tale about Bruce's handling of three brothers with the surname 'Makyne Drosser' [Mac an Dorsair], who were intent on assassinating the king, is incorporated in the description of the battle with Lorn's men. Barbour helpfully provides a Scots translation of the brothers' surname: 'That is al-so mekill to say her, As the Durwarth sonnys'.⁷⁰

How did these tales of Bruce from the Gaelic world find their way to Barbour? A MacDubhghaill source is certainly not impossible, although the critical view of Eoin of Lorn may make this seem unlikely.⁷¹ Significantly perhaps, the only adherent of Eoin MacDubhghaill named by Barbour is the 'baroune Maknaughtan' whose sole contribution to the narrative is to wax lyrical about the prowess of Bruce, much to MacDubhghaill's annoyance, while the king was gleefully dispatching Lorn's men to an early grave. There was a MacNeachdainn connection to Robert II's court through the family of the king's mistress, Mariota of Cardeny. At some point before 1385 Mariota, or perhaps an unidentified sister of Mariota's, had a child, Domhnall, by a MacNeachdainn lord.⁷² In short,

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 49–51 (III, ll. 93–146).

⁷¹A potential candidate is Dubhghall *de Ergadia* or 'of Lorn', almost certainly a scion of the Lorn family, who witnessed transactions involving Eoin MacDubhghaill in 1371, but who by 1380 was chaplain and secretary to Robert II's son, Robert, earl of Fife and Menteith. Dubhghall went on to become bishop of Dunblane: D. E. R. Watt, *A Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Graduates to A.D. 1410* (Oxford 1977), 359–60; *CPP* i, 554.

⁷²Robert of Cardeny, bishop of Dunkeld, is said to have obtained his bishopric through the influence of his sister. It is assumed this means he was the brother of Robert II's mistress Mariota. Domhnall MacNeachdainn was Bishop Robert's nephew *ex sorore*. The deduction that Mariota was Domhnall's mother is reasonable, but he could equally have been the son of another of Robert's sisters. Domhnall's likely date of birth shortly before 1385 means that the MacNeachdainn/Cardeny liaison cannot be dated with certainty to the period in which Barbour was working on *The Bruce*, but he may not have been the couple's eldest child: Watt, *Biographical Dictionary*, 80–1, 368–70; Alexander Myln, *Vitae Dunkeldensis Ecclesiae Episcoporum*, ed. Thomas Thomson, rev. ed. Cosmo Innes (Bannatyne Club: Edinburgh 1831), 16–18; *Extracta e Variis Cronicis Scocie*, ed. W. B. D. D. Turnbull (Abbotsford Club: Edinburgh 1842), 204, 235.

Barbour's stories of Bruce in the Highlands seem to have been designed to flatter and please Robert II's friends and allies in the region and discredit his enemies, and it is more than possible that they were gathered by Barbour in and around the royal court. The notion that the early Stewart court acted, in some senses, as a conduit by which tales of Gaelic Scotland found their way into Lowland literature is strengthened by the inclusion of details of Robert II's hosting on the Clyde in 1334 and the triumph of the Brendans of Bute at *Batail nan Doirneag* in the anonymous (but distinctly pro-Stewart) chronicle composed shortly after Robert II's death in 1390.⁷³

The royal dynasty's links to Gaelic Scotland were not severed as a result of Robert II's demise. The king's son Robert, duke of Albany, constructed a territorial empire that embraced Lennox, Glen Dochart and Menteith, and Ross in the north, while one of his daughters married the Caimbeul lord of Argyll, and another married the Stewart lord of Lorn. Albany's position as governor or guardian of the kingdom for much of the period between 1388 and his death in 1420 meant that a figure with extensive interests inside Gaelic Scotland continued to direct the affairs of the crown. If the 'Great Ill-will of the Lowlander' was a significant cultural and political force in early Stewart Scotland, then it hardly seems a phenomenon that was actively promoted and encouraged by those who wielded royal power between 1371 and 1424. The return of James I to Scotland in 1424 and his subsequent destruction of the Albany family may have marked a significant shift in the relationship between the Stewart dynasty and Gaelic Scotland, but this case remains to be made rather than assumed.⁷⁴ The emergence after 1424 of a more active, aggressive and ambitious style of kingship was allied to the waning of the personal ties of residence and kinship that had bound Robert

⁷³S. I. Boardman, 'Chronicle propaganda in fourteenth-century Scotland: Robert the Steward, John of Fordun and the 'Anonymous Chronicle'', *Scottish Historical Review* 76 (1997) 23–43.

⁷⁴Boardman, *Early Stewarts*, 181–5, 257–8, 306–11; Michael Brown, *James I* (Edinburgh 1994), chaps. 1–3.

II and the Albany Stewarts to Gaelic Scotland. Moreover, James' innate suspicion of those areas associated with Albany lordship was combined with an increasing emphasis on the projection of royal power through the imposition of uniform administrative, legal, and bureaucratic systems on all the regions of the kingdom. The models for these systems were all drawn from the relationship between the crown and the inhabitants of the more intensively governed south and east of the kingdom; inevitably the language and culture of this region was also taken to be the preferred norm. The Stewart monarchy of the late fifteenth century saw less room for the diversity of great regional lordships, both Highland and Lowland, that had been the hallmark of the period 1371–1424; the cultural eclecticism of Robert II and the Albanys was gradually replaced by a far more assertive and prescriptive regime. Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon* (1441–7), written shortly after James I's death, suggests a new rancour in the relationship between the royal establishment and the Gael, and the stigmatisation of the latter as an inveterate rebel and defier of the king's laws and government. These were themes that would be taken up by many others in the years to follow.⁷⁵

⁷⁵Yet it might be unwise to let the abbot of Inchcolm stand as the only or most reliable witness to the relationship between the royal house and Gaelic Scotland after 1424. The legislation of a parliament held by James I in 1427, for example, betrayed sentiments and sensitivities that sit oddly with Bower's haughty dismissal of the Gaels of Scotland and Ireland. Anxious about the possible return to Scotland of an exiled Albany Stewart rebel with substantial Irish and Hebridean military support, King James issued instructions for the restriction of shipping between Scotland and Ireland. The royal deputies appointed to enforce the regulation of shipping contacts were commanded to make clear to those affected, 'that this [action] is not done for hatred nor breaking of the alde frendschip betuix the king of Scotlande and his liegis ande the gude alde frendis of Erschry of Irelande but only to eschew the perils forsaid': *APS* ii, 11. Although the declaration could have been largely inspired by royal insecurity and or representations and complaints made in the parliament, it nonetheless reveals an administration anxious to avoid alienating the King's 'liegis' in Gaelic Scotland.