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Rival bishops, rival cathedrals: the election of Cormac, archdeacon of Sodor, as bishop in 1331

Abstract: On 6 July 1331, two procurators arrived in Bergen claiming that Cormac son of Cormac had been elected bishop of Sodor by the clergy of Skye and the canons of Snizort. Their arrival is recorded in a letter sent by Eiliv, archbishop of Nidaros, to two canons of the church of Bergen ordering that there be an examination of the election in the cathedral of Bergen on 12 July 1331. Cormac's election was contentious for three main reasons: firstly, there was already a new bishop of Sodor; secondly the right to elect a bishop of Sodor seems to have lain with the clergy of Man; and thirdly the king of Scots had the right to present the candidate to the archbishop of Nidaros. This paper examines the identities and careers of both Cormac and his successful rival, Thomas de Rossy, and the potential reasons for Cormac's claim and its ultimate failure. Therefore, this study reveals some of the underlying geopolitical realities of the diocese of Sodor in the mid-fourteenth century.

Key words: medieval; Scotland; Norway; Church; papacy; Hebrides

Introduction

In the early fourteenth century, the diocese of Sodor, or *Sudreyjar* meaning Southern Isles in old Norse, encompassed the Isle of Man and the Hebrides. Both the name of the diocese and its place in the ecclesiastical hierarchy were the result of Norwegian settlement and claims to the Hebrides and Man. In 1153, when the new Norwegian province of Nidaros was established, the diocese of Sodor became part of that church province and, despite the Norwegian cession of the Hebrides and Man to Scotland under the terms of the treaty of Perth in 1266, was to remain so until the creation of St Andrews as an archbishopric in 1472.

Until 1331, the bishops of Sodor seem to have been consecrated by the archbishop of Nidaros, their metropolitan. In July of that year, the archbishop of Nidaros was asked to confirm the election of Cormac son of Cormac as bishop of Sodor by the clergy of Skye and the canons of Snizort.¹ Cormac's request for confirmation presented the archbishop with a dilemma; should he confirm a candidate with close links to Nidaros, but who seemed to have been elected by an electoral body of dubious legitimacy? Ultimately, the archbishop may have avoided

¹ *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, ed. Christian C. A. Lange *et al.*, 20 vols (Christiania, 1847–1995) [hereafter *DN*], viii, no. 10.

having to make a decision by the news that the pope had already in June confirmed another cleric as bishop of Sodor.

Cormac's identity

Cormac appears on three occasions in documents published in the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*. On all these occasions he is called Cormac son of Cormac, but given three different titles: archdeacon of Sodor, archdeacon of Skye, and *dominus* Cormac.² He was closely connected to Skye, given his election by the clergy of Skye and the canons of Snizort, a church and parish on Skye, and the designation 'of Skye'. This connection to Skye is underlined by his two procurators in 1331; both were from Skye, one being rector of the parish church of St Comgan's of Duirinish and the other the perpetual vicar of the parish church of the Holy Trinity, later Kilchrist, in Strath.

The forename Cormac was used relatively rarely in the late medieval Hebrides. It is seldom encountered in the genealogies of the main kindreds, for instance the MacDonalds, MacLeods and MacLeans. There are only five instances of men either with the first name Cormac or with fathers called Cormac out of 195 individual clergy in the diocese of Sodor recorded in papal correspondence in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.³ There are a number of possibilities as to which kindred grouping he belonged. The simplest solution is that he was a MacCormick, a minor kindred who may have been present in Skye in the later medieval period. There were two MacCormick clerics in Skye in the fifteenth century, both associated with the parish church of St Comgan's of Duirinish.⁴

There is a Cormac in the pedigree of the MacKinnons and it could be that some MacKinnons were named after this ancestor. An inscription on a late medieval effigy on Iona commemorates, among others, *Finguine, son of Cormac*. Steer and Bannerman suggest that the men commemorated on the inscription equate to men named in the MS

² *DN*, ix, no. 85; *DN*, iv, no. 237; *DN*, xviii, no. 10.

³ These five include Cormac and his father in addition to John MacCormack: *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome*, vol. iv: 1433–1447, ed. Annie I. Dunlop and David MacLauchlan (Glasgow, 1983) [hereafter *CSSR*, iv], 307; Lachlan son of Cormac: *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters*, ed. W. H. Bliss *et al.*, 20 vols (London, 1893–) [hereafter *CPL*], viii, 469; and Niall son of Cormac: *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome*, vol. v: 1447–1471, ed. James Kirk, Roland J. Tanner and Annie I. Dunlop (Glasgow, 1997), 158. The 195 individual clergy are recorded in supplications to the papacy, papal mandates, charters of the Lordship of the Isles, the matriculation lists of Glasgow University and documents published in the *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*.

⁴ *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Petitions to the Pope 1342–1419*, ed. W. H. Bliss (London, 1896) [hereafter *CPP*], 1, 631 (1406–Nonnas/Ninian MacCormack); *CSSR*, iv, 307 (1445–John MacCormack).

1467 MacKinnon genealogy.⁵ It is therefore possible that Cormac and his father were MacKinnons. However, it seems very early for a MacKinnon to be connected with Skye. The MacKinnons were closely linked with the monastery of Iona and Mull and the traditional view, as espoused by Alan Macquarrie, is that it was not until the fifteenth century and the expansion of the MacLeans that the MacKinnons lost their power base in Mull and gained the lands of Strath in southern Skye.⁶

Alternatively, he may have belonged to a legal kindred since in the 1331 letter he is said to be the son of Cormac *iudex*.⁷ These two Cormacs might have belonged to the *Clann MhicGilleMhoire*, later anglicised as the Morrisons, since there are sixteenth-century references to figures who are thought to belong to that kindred, holding lands in Trotternish in Skye. In August 1507, William ‘lawman’ and four other men from Trotternish were granted a letter of protection by the crown.⁸ This William was probably the same William to whom the designation *archiudex* was applied in 1485.⁹ The links of this kindred of lawmen to Trotternish are highlighted by a precept of remission from December 1562 in which a Hugo *Brief* was named as one of the followers from Sleat and Trotternish of the MacDonalds of Sleat.¹⁰ Unfortunately, none of the members of this kindred used the name Cormac, but this is not to say that it was never used, simply that usage of Cormac does not survive in the historical records.

However, we ought also to consider the period to which Cormac’s father belonged. We might presume that Cormac’s father would have been around and operating as *iudex* in the early 1300s, possibly as early as the 1290s. This is significant because the Hebrides were only ceded to Scotland in 1266. Prior to that Skye had been part of the Norse kingdom of Man and the Isles. In 1293, John Balliol, king of Scots, granted the earl of Ross the newly erected sheriffdom of Skye.¹¹ However, Nicholson argues that the sheriffdom never functioned properly because of the

⁵ K. A. Steer and J. W. M. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1977), 104.

⁶ A. Macquarrie, ‘Kings, lords and abbots: power and patronage at the medieval monastery of Iona’, *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* [hereafter *TGSI*] 54 (1984–6), 355–75, at 362.

⁷ *DN*, viii, no. 10.

⁸ *Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, ed. M. Livingstone *et al.*, 8 vols (Edinburgh, 1908–82) [hereafter *RSS*], i, no. 1522.

⁹ J. Bannerman, ‘The Scots language and the kin-based society’, in *Gaelic and Scots in Harmony: Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on the Languages of Scotland*, ed. Derick S. Thomson (Glasgow, 1990), 1–19, at 13.

¹⁰ *RSS*, v, no. 1160.

¹¹ *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, ed. Keith M. Brown *et al.* (St Andrews, 2007–8), <http://www.rps.ac.uk>, 1293/2/16 (accessed: 4 December 2008).

ensuing distractions of the Wars of Independence.¹² Therefore, Cormac's father may have been a representative of the older Norse legal system.

The Chronicle of Man contains one reference to a sheriff or *vicecomes* of Skye, Pál Bálkson, who supported Oláfr Godredsson, the king of Man, in his struggle for power with his elder brother, Ragnvald, in the 1220s, and who consequently spent some time in the earldom of Ross in exile.¹³ Pál Bálkson also appears in *Hákon Hákonssonarsaga* in 1229; he seems to have been part of a group who had sailed to Norway in 1228 and left in 1229–30 as part of a larger fleet.¹⁴ The saga described Pál as one of the ship captains but not as sheriff. Cormac and his father were not necessarily related to Pál Bálkson, but Pál Bálkson is important because his presence in Skye indicates that there was a representative of the kingdom of Man and the Isles with some form of legal responsibility.

The possibility that there was a Norse *thing* or assembly in Skye is strengthened by one place-name from the Trotternish peninsula. On the west side of the peninsula, there is a valley called Glen Hinnisdale. Significantly, in an eighteenth-century rental, the glen was recorded as *Tinwhill*.¹⁵ The first element of this name appears to be the Old Norse *þing* which would suggest that during the medieval period there was an assembly site in this valley. Furthermore, just north of where Glen Hinnisdale meets the coast there is a Gaelic place-name, *Ard nan Eireachd*, which means the point of the assembly.

Cormac's career

Cormac had probably held the archdeaconry of Sodor for at least a decade by 1331 since he was already archdeacon in 1320.¹⁶ There seem to have been two distinct archdeaconries in the Sodor diocese: one based in Man and the other in the remainder of the diocese, the Hebrides, as can be seen in Table 1. There is one instance where concurrent archdeacons are mentioned; in December 1373 the executors of a papal provision were named as the abbot of Iona and 'the archdeacons of the Isles and of Man in the church of Sodor'.¹⁷ Four of the five fourteenth-century

¹² Ranald Nicholson, *Scotland: The Later Middle Ages* (Edinburgh, 1974), 45.

¹³ *Cronica Regum Mannie et Insularum: the Chronicle of the Kings of Man and the Isles*, trans. George Broderick, 2nd edn (Douglas, 1996) [hereafter *CM (B)*], fol. 42v. Pál Bálkson is probably an ancestor of the MacPhails of North Uist; see William Matheson, 'The ancestry of the MacLeods', *TGSI* 51 (1978–80), 68–80, at 75.

¹⁴ *The Saga of Hacon, and a fragment of the saga of Magnus*, ed. and trans. G. W. Dasent (London, 1894), 152.

¹⁵ Bridget Gordon, 'Some Norse place-names in Trotternish, Isle of Skye', *Scottish Gaelic Studies* 10 (1963), 82–112, at 90.

¹⁶ *DN*, ix, no. 85.

¹⁷ Glasgow University, Scottish History Department, Ross Fund Collection [hereafter GUS], Registra Avinionensia [Reg. Aven.] 190, fol. 354–354v. I have to thank the anonymous reviewer of this article for drawing my attention to this papal provision and

Table 1: Archdeacons of Sodor and archdeacons of Man

Archdeacon of Sodor/Isles	Archdeacon of Man
c. 1270 – Makaboy?	c. 1257 – Dompnald, archdeacon of Man 1264/6 – unnamed archdeacon of Man 1302 – master ‘A’, archdeacon of Man
c. 1320 to c. 1339 – Cormac son of Cormac 1329 – unnamed archdeacon of Sodor	1349 – John Demester, archdeacon of Man in the church of Sodor
pre 1372 – Nigel Mauricii, archdeaconry of the Isles in the church of Sodor Nov. 1372 – Bean Johannis, archdeaconry of the Isles in the church of Sodor	Dec. 1368 – unnamed archdeacon of Man in the church of Sodor
Dec. 1373 – unnamed archdeacon of the Isles 1382 – unnamed archdeacon of the Isles	Dec. 1373 – unnamed archdeacon of Man in the church of Sodor 1375 – unnamed archdeacon of Man in the church of Sodor

archdeacons of Man are named as ‘archdeacon of Man in the church of Sodor’ whereas six archdeacons are called archdeacon ‘of Sodor’, ‘of the Isles’, ‘of the Isles in the church of Sodor’, or on one occasion ‘of Skye’.¹⁸ The titles of the Man archdeacons seem to be deliberately distinguishing them from the archdeacons of Sodor or the Isles. The area of jurisdiction of the archdeacons of Sodor was probably the Hebrides, judging by the use of the alternative title ‘of the Isles’. The use of distinguishing titles and the concurrent appearance of the two archdeacons in 1373 strongly suggests that there were two separate archdeaconries in the united diocese of Sodor.

There are occasions where the appellation ‘of Man’ was applied to the bishop of Sodor; this could be simply a statement of where the bishop’s seat was, akin to the bishops of Argyll who were also called bishops of Lismore.¹⁹ However, these cases are primarily found in

the staff of the Vatican Archives for confirming the exact wording and then providing a digital image of it.

¹⁸ Archdeacons of Man – ‘A’, archdeacon of Man (*The Register of the Priory of St Bees*, ed. James Wilson, Surtees Society (Durham, 1915), 77), John Demester (*DN*, vii, no. 222) and unnamed archdeacons of Man in 1368, 1373, 1375 (*DN*, vii, no. 277; GUS, Reg. Aven. 190, fol. 354–354v; *DN*, vii, no. 293). Archdeacons of Sodor/Isles/Skye – Cormac, archdeacon of Sodor (*DN*, ix, no. 85), Cormac, archdeacon of Skye (*DN*, iv, no. 237), archdeaconry of the Isles in the church of Sodor (GUS, Reg. Aven. 183, fols 343v–344), unnamed archdeacons of the Isles (GUS, Reg. Aven. 190, fol. 354–354v; *Calendar of Papal Letters to Scotland of Clement VII of Avignon 1378–1494*, ed. Charles Burns, Scottish History Society (Edinburgh, 1976) [hereafter *CPL Clem. VII*], 84).

¹⁹ *CPL Clem. VII*, 125 (John Dugaldi, bishop of Argyll) and 174 (John Dugaldi, bishop of Lismore).

documents of English origin such as royal letters of protection issued to the bishops.²⁰ In fourteenth- and fifteenth-century papal correspondence and in Scottish royal charters, the bishops are always ‘of Sodor’. There is therefore a notable difference with the archdeacons who are recorded with the different titles in a variety of sources as discussed above.

The distinctiveness of the Manx clergy is also suggested in the introduction of the Synodal Ordinances of Bishop Russell of 1350 where it is stated that the ordinances were agreed by ‘the whole clergy of Man’.²¹ The Manx clergy’s autonomy is also indicated by their forming the electoral body for Bishop Russell in 1348 and Bishop John Duncan in 1374.²² Whilst this independence need not in itself indicate a separate archdeaconry, this combined with the different titles and the reference to concurrent archdeacons in 1373 is fairly conclusive evidence for two archdeacons.

Other dioceses with more than one archdeacon include Orkney, St Andrews and Glasgow; Orkney was divided into the archdeaconries of Orkney and Shetland, whilst St Andrews consisted of St Andrews and Lothian, and Glasgow had the archdeaconries of Glasgow and Teviotdale.²³ In geographical and ecclesiastical terms the diocese of Orkney provides the best comparison for Sodor, since each was an island diocese which was included in the province of Nidaros. The archdeaconry of Shetland may have been established prior to that of Orkney since it seems possible that the archdeacon of Shetland was the senior dignitary and therefore presided over the chapter.²⁴ Smith interprets the existence of an archdeacon of Shetland as necessary ‘because of the distance and dangerous seas between the two groups of islands’.²⁵ He argues that the bishops of Orkney rarely visited Shetland and therefore the archdeacons were the most important dignitaries in the islands.

Similarly, the diocese of Sodor, prior to its split, stretched from the Butt of Lewis in the north to the Isle of Man in the south, a distance of

²⁰ In 1292, Mark, bishop of Man, was a witness to a document relating to the Great Cause negotiations at Berwick: *Monumenta de Insula Manniae*, ed. J. R. Oliver, Manx Society, 3 vols (Douglas, 1860–2) [hereafter *Mons. Ins. Man.*], ii, 119. However, letters of 1296 and 1299 called him Mark, bishop of Sodor: *ibid.*, ii, 132 and 133. Letters of protection – for example one issued to Thomas de Rossy by Edward III in 1341 – called him ‘bishop of Man from Scotland’: *ibid.*, ii, 190.

²¹ ‘Synodal Ordinances of Bishop Russell, A.D. 1350’ in *ibid.*, iii, 202.

²² *CM (B)*, fol. 51v.

²³ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ Medii Aevi Ad Annum 1638*, ed. D. E. R. Watt and A. L. Murray, rev. edn, Scottish Record Society (Edinburgh, 2003), 337, 339 (Orkney and Shetland), 221, 226 (Glasgow and Teviotdale) and 393, 399 (St Andrews and Lothian).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 330.

²⁵ Brian Smith, ‘Archdeacons of Shetland, 1195–1567’, in *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537: Søkelys på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovinsens historie*, ed. Steinar Imsen (Trondheim, 2003), 161–9, at 161.

approximately 300 nautical miles. From the twelfth century, the bishops of Sodor had established their seat at Peel on the Isle of Man. Therefore, dangerous seas and great distances might certainly have formed the basis for the creation of a separate archdeaconry in the Hebrides.

Does the 1331 letter's reference to 'canons of Snizort' suggest a stronger link between the archdeacon and Snizort or is it merely a means by which to strengthen his case? The term *canonicus* was used across the medieval church 'to describe members of non-monastic communities, both capitular, collegiate and quasi-monastic'.²⁶ At cathedrals, such canons usually held a church living, known as a prebend, which would supply them with an adequate income. The canons formed the chapter of the cathedral and were responsible for the management of the cathedral church and its possessions as well as participating in the religious services. Should we be interpreting these canons as a proto-chapter or as officials of the archdeacon providing administrative support? It seems highly unlikely that they were officials of the archdeacon, given that we might expect this to be stated, but perhaps the archdeacon might have used the church of Snizort for some of his official duties. Snizort is in a fairly central position in the northern Hebrides which provides relative ease of access to the parish churches of the Outer Hebrides.

There are two other possible interpretations. The first is that this reference to canons was meant to legitimise Cormac's election; that is by stating that he had the support of an electoral body and a larger group of clergy, Cormac might have been seeking to make his election more canonically correct.²⁷ Alternatively we might see these canons as evidence of Snizort's earlier status as a mother-church or a *monasterium* with associated chapels, probably for the whole of Skye, and that these canons were simply Skye clergy based at Snizort.²⁸ Major churches with communities of clerics or canons are known from eleventh- and twelfth-century Scotland; such as the Céli Dé community at Abernethy or the clerical community at Deer.²⁹ Communities of clergy were to be found at major Welsh pre-conquest churches, known as *clas* or mother-churches;

²⁶ J. Wyn Evans, 'The survival of the *clas* as an institution in medieval Wales: some observations on Llanbadarn Fawr', in *The Early Church in Wales and the West*, ed. Nancy Edwards and Alan Lane (Oxford, 1992), 33–40, at 36.

²⁷ My thanks to the anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

²⁸ I. B. Cowan, 'The medieval church in Argyll and the Isles', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 20 (1978–80), 15–29, at 25.

²⁹ A. Macquarrie, 'Early Christian religious houses in Scotland: foundation and function', in *Pastoral Care Before the Parish*, ed. John Blair and Richard Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), 110–33, at 129–30. Rogers argues that the church of Abernethy with its five surrounding churches, which were ecclesiastically dependent on Abernethy, was very similar to the minster-type church found in England: J. M. Rogers, 'The Formation of the Parish Unit and Community in Perthshire' (University of Edinburgh, unpublished PhD thesis, 1992), 225.

these communities were called canons in Anglo-Norman sources such as Gerald of Wales' *De Jure et Statu Menevensis Ecclesiae*.³⁰ Some of these churches, for example Llanynys in Dyffryn Clwyd, were portionary churches where the revenues of the church were divided up for the maintenance of clergy or canons.³¹ Llanynys had twenty-four portions and probably covered a large area which was later divided into separate parishes.³² This final option seems to be the most plausible interpretation of the Snizort canons and if so it illustrates the church's importance and offers an explanation for its adoption as the episcopal seat after 1387.

The archdeacon was the disciplinary officer in charge of the clergy of the diocese. His role was administrative rather than spiritual, overseeing the functions of the diocesan structure. Thus, we see that the Synodal Ordinances of Bishop Mark ordered the archdeacon to visit the churches of the diocese and to inspect the priests' vestments and books.³³ As such, the archdeacon was the bishop's representative and might hold considerable influence and power. If the bishops of Sodor rarely visited the northern part of the diocese, could we envisage Cormac as *de facto* bishop? To the clergy of Skye and canons of Snizort, his election may have seemed a logical progression.

The archdeacon might also have participated in the province's administration. Cormac appears on two occasions acting in an official capacity for the archbishop of Nidaros. On the first, in 1320, he was in Norway, probably Bergen, to report to the archbishop of Nidaros on an investigation which he and a prebendary of Nidaros, Grim, had undertaken regarding the bishop of Orkney.³⁴ On the second occasion, in 1339, he was in Bergen presiding over a church court to hear the complaints of a local priest.³⁵

How would he have communicated? As a high-ranking churchman, he would have been expected to be proficient in Latin and the fact that both documents, from 1320 and 1339, are in Latin suggest that the proceedings they report on also took place in Latin. However, we have to speculate whether he would have been able to speak and understand Old Norse. Unless there were interpreters available, an inability to comprehend Old Norse would have hindered both enquiries. During the investigation in Orkney Cormac and Grim questioned the archdeacon, canons and vicars of the church about accusations regarding the bishop's

³⁰ Evans, 'The survival of the *clas*', 35.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

³² A. D. M. Barrell, 'The clergy of a medieval marcher lordship: the evidence of the Dyffryn Clwyd court rolls', *Denbighshire Historical Society Transactions* 44 (1995), 5–23, at 7.

³³ 'Synodal Ordinances of Bishop Mark A.D. 1291', in *Mon. Ins. Man.*, iii, 200.

³⁴ *DN*, ix, no. 85.

³⁵ *DN*, iv, no. 237.

evil character.³⁶ Being able to communicate only in Latin might have limited their ability to investigate the allegations against the bishop fully.

Cormac is the only church official of the Sodor diocese who appears in the records in such capacities in Norway. This is highly unusual in itself. It suggests a degree of importance and familiarity within the Norse world, particularly the investigation of 1319 into the bishop of Orkney. Is that why he felt he might be confirmed as bishop? It is also interesting that despite his failure in 1331, Norwegian regard for Cormac does not seem to have been any less in 1339.

However, there were some problems with Cormac's claim. Firstly, the Manx clergy seem to have assumed the right to elect the bishop and secondly, the patronage of the see was held by the king of Scots. These two problems will be dealt with towards the end of this paper. A further issue is the claim made by Cormac's envoys that he had been elected bishop because the bishopric was vacant after the death of Bishop Gilbert, but this Gilbert was the bishop between 1324/6 and 1328.³⁷ Gilbert's successor, Bernard, formerly abbot of Arbroath and chancellor to Robert I, is completely omitted from the envoys' claim.

Reasons for Cormac's election – resentment at Scottish interference

But perhaps this particular detail gives us a hint as to the underlying motives of Cormac's election. The omitted bishop had perhaps the closest links to the Scottish crown of any of the Sodor bishops. Bernard was abbot of Arbroath and chancellor to Robert I before his promotion to the see in 1328.³⁸ He was also probably one of the negotiators sent to Norway to discuss the renewal of the treaty of Perth which was concluded in Inverness in October 1312.³⁹ Bernard was, according to Nicholson, appointed by the king in order to cement his power and control of the west.⁴⁰ The appointment of a bishop who had so little connection to the diocese might indeed have caused resentment.

³⁶ *DN*, ix, no. 85.

³⁷ *Fasti*, ed. Watt and Murray, 262.

³⁸ *Liber S. Thome de Aberbrothoc*, ed. Cosmo Innes and Patrick Chalmers, Bannatyne Club, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1848–56) [hereafter *Arbroath Liber*], i, no. 357; *The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland*, ed. J. Stuart *et al.*, 23 vols (Edinburgh, 1878–1908), i, 59.

³⁹ *Regesta Regum Scottorum*, vol. v: *The Acts of Robert I, King of Scots 1306–1329*, ed. A. A. M. Duncan, (Edinburgh, 1988) [hereafter *RRS*, v], 200.

⁴⁰ Nicholson, *Scotland: The Later Middle Ages*, 113. Nicholson gives Bernard the surname 'de Linton'. However, Duncan argues that this identification was made by Crawford in 1726 and is based on the presence of a Bernard de Linton, a secular cleric, in the Ragman Rolls. Duncan asserts that it is extremely unlikely that a secular priest would have been promoted to an abbacy and he thus argues that the identification of Bernard, abbot of Arbroath and chancellor, with Bernard de Linton is without foundation: A. A. M. Duncan, 'Introduction', in *RRS*, v, 1–288, at 203.

The omission of Bernard may mean that Cormac and his supporters did not recognise him. Bernard was included in the Chronicle of Man's list of bishops, which indicates that he was accepted on Man.⁴¹ However, his burial at Kilwinning implies no great loyalty to the diocese.⁴² It is clear that he resigned as abbot of Arbroath and as chancellor and in April 1328 he was awarded a portion of the revenues of the abbey for seven years to cover some of his expenses related to his election as bishop of Sodor.⁴³ His appearance as a witness to only one royal charter in 1328 may suggest that he was resident in his diocese.⁴⁴ It could be that he was recognised only in Man and not in the rest of the diocese. However, it seems rather unlikely that Cormac, in his role as archdeacon, did not know of Bernard. Cormac's election might have been, as Woolf has suggested, a manifestation of resentment at Scottish interference in the diocese.⁴⁵

Nevertheless, Gilbert MacLellan was probably nominated by Robert I for the see and consecrated in Norway. He was also a witness to seven royal charters and attended the Scottish parliament during his episcopate.⁴⁶ He was therefore quite closely linked with the king of Scots. He did not come from the Hebrides either; instead, he originated in Galloway and was probably a member of the powerful MacLellan kindred. However, a Galwegian bishop, who would almost certainly have been a Gaelic speaker, may have been more acceptable than one from eastern Scotland.

Opportunism

Should we see Cormac's election as an opportunistic act, taking advantage of the fluid political situation on the mainland of Scotland? Robert I died in 1329, leaving his five-year-old son, David, as king.⁴⁷ Initially, after Robert's death, the kingdom seems to have been quite stable, probably because the royal government from 1329 until 1332 remained very similar to that of Robert I. However, it does appear that there was trouble brewing, particularly in the north and west and especially from 1330 onwards. In 1331, the sole guardian was Thomas Randolph, earl of Moray. Randolph seems to have maintained control fairly well, although the hanging of thirty wrong-doers off the walls of Eilean Donan castle in Wester Ross points to serious trouble in the

⁴¹ *CM (B)*, fol. 51v.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Arbroath Liber*, i, no. 358.

⁴⁴ *RRS*, v, 612.

⁴⁵ Alex Woolf, 'The diocese of Sudreyar', in *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153–1537*, ed. Imsen, 171–81, at 179.

⁴⁶ *RRS*, v, 523, 525, 531, 537, 548, 551 and 562.

⁴⁷ Michael Penman, *David II, 1329–71* (Edinburgh, 2004), 36.

north-west which he was trying to suppress.⁴⁸ Matheson suggests, on the basis of MacKenzie tradition, that the MacKenzies in Wester Ross had not accepted the earl of Ross's allegiance to Bruce and that it was the earl who took the action against Eilean Donan for Randolph.⁴⁹ However, there is no contemporary evidence for this tradition.

It is likely that there were tensions between the earl of Ross and Randolph which escalated later in the 1330s. Local leaders such as John MacDonald of the Isles and Hugh, earl of Ross, were not unerringly loyal to David II and the Bruces. Penman has described the earls of Ross 'as laws unto themselves in the north in the 1330s', and John MacDonald of the Isles repeatedly swapped allegiance between Bruce and Balliol in the 1330s.⁵⁰ The uncertainty of the central leadership must have involved local leaders jockeying for position and trying to assert their control.

A crucial point may have been control of Skye: the island was probably under the control of the earl of Ross in the 1320s and 1330s, although John MacDonald of the Isles seems to have had ambitions to gain control. William, earl of Ross, had been awarded the new sheriffdom of Skye in 1293, although it may never have functioned.⁵¹ Robert I granted Skye and then the lands of Trotternish to Hugh, earl of Ross, in around 1324.⁵² However, with the death of Robert I, John MacDonald of the Isles seems to have pressed his claims to Skye. In 1336, Edward Balliol's confirmation of John's lands included Skye, and in 1341 David II confirmed Skye amongst John's lands.⁵³ It could be that in 1331 both the earls of Ross and the MacDonalds were vying for control of Skye. It is within this context that Cormac was elected and his election may be symptomatic of these power struggles.

A new cathedral?

Alternatively, the 1331 letter may be recognition of the Isle of Man's redundancy as the centre for the Sodor diocese. Man's geographical position at the southernmost end of the diocese must have made diocesan administration difficult. As already discussed, the two archdeaconries were probably intended to counteract the geographical problems. The

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁹ William Matheson, 'Traditions of the MacKenzies', *TGSI* 39/40 (1942–50), 193–228, at 201–2.

⁵⁰ Penman, *David II*, 33.

⁵¹ *The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, ed. Thomas Thomson and Cosmo Innes, 12 vols (Edinburgh, 1814–75), i, 447.

⁵² *Registrum Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, ed. John Maitland Thomson *et al.*, 11 vols (Edinburgh, 1882–1914), i, Appendix 2, Index A, 61 and 63.

⁵³ *Acts of the Lords of the Isles, 1336–1493*, ed. Jean Munro and R. W. Munro (Edinburgh, 1986), no. 1; Penman, *David II*, 84.

uncertainties over secular control of Man might also have encouraged ideas of separating the ecclesiastical governance of the Hebrides from Man. The Hebrides were part of the kingdom of the Scots, but control of Man from the 1290s onwards was disputed between England and Scotland. The succession crisis which ensued after the deaths of Alexander III and his granddaughter Margaret meant that Edward I of England tried to claim overlordship of all the lands of the king of Scots, including the Isle of Man. Edward I gave the lordship of Man to Anthony Bek, bishop of Durham, in 1298. The English seem to have attempted to interfere in the affairs of the diocese too. Bek imposed his candidate for bishop, Alan of Galloway or *de Wigtown*, on the diocese of Sodor between 1303 and 1305.⁵⁴ The interference in the diocese, along with the struggle for control of Man, might have augmented separatist feelings.

After Bek's death in 1311, the Scots seem to have temporarily regained Man through Robert I's attack in May 1313.⁵⁵ However, the English soon recovered it through the actions of John of Argyll in 1314/15.⁵⁶ With the revival of Scottish royal power under Robert I, Man was reclaimed by the Scots. In 1318, Robert I rewarded one of his key supporters, his nephew, Thomas Randolph, with the lordships of Annandale and Man.⁵⁷ However, Scots hegemony was short-lived, with the turbulence that ensued after the death of Robert I in 1329 and the flight of his young son, David II, to France; in 1333, Edward III seized the island. Therefore, as Man passed backwards and forwards between England and Scotland during the remainder of the fourteenth century, the bishops must have found the situation more and more insufferable. In 1363, Bishop William Russell complained that his cathedral church had been taken over and fortified during the wars of England and Scotland.⁵⁸ It is therefore possible that the election of a Skye-based cleric might be partly due to restricted access to the diocesan centre. The removal of ecclesiastical governance to the Hebrides was perhaps a pragmatic move to create an alternative or rival cathedral seat at Snizort in Skye.

If it was, there was already a church of some size and status at Snizort which might have been used as the cathedral seat. This

⁵⁴ *Mons. Ins. Man.*, ii, 104; *Fasti*, ed. Watt and Murray, 261–2. Barrow suggested that Alan was probably accepted by Robert I by 1314 and his burial at Rothesay in Stewart lands implies acceptance: G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and The Community of the Realm of Scotland*, 3rd edn (Edinburgh, 1988), 266.

⁵⁵ R. Andrew McDonald, *The Kingdom of the Isles: Scotland's Western Seaboard, c.1100–c.1336* (East Linton, 1997), 197.

⁵⁶ Norman H. Reid, 'Crown and community under Robert I', in *Medieval Scotland: Crown, Lordship and Community: Essays Presented to G. W. S. Barrow*, ed. Alexander Grant and Keith J. Stringer (Edinburgh, 1998), 203–22, at 212.

⁵⁷ Penman, *David II*, 22.

⁵⁸ *CPP*, 398.

church, dedicated to St Columba, is located on a small island, now known as Skeabost Island, in the river Snizort in northern Skye.⁵⁹ It is apparently here that Cormac's canons were located. The foundations of the church are still visible and significant architectural fragments have been found on the island. The church is one of the largest churches in the Hebrides (excluding Iona) measuring 23m by 5.3m with a total area of 121m².⁶⁰ Probably the most significant architectural fragment is a fluted or reeded column capital, recorded in a photograph taken by Ian Fisher of the RCAHMS in the 1970s on Skeabost Island.⁶¹ There are close parallels to two early thirteenth-century column capitals from Iona.⁶² The ornamentation on all three column capitals could also be described as multi-scalloped. Snizort was a significant enough site to have had masons with links to Iona involved in its construction. It is all the more important because most medieval churches in the Hebrides were constructed using random rubble with a large amount of shell mortar with very few, if any, mouldings or other architectural features.

Churches of a comparable size in the Hebrides include St Columba's of Eye on Lewis which measures 18.85m by 5m with a total area of 94.3m²; Kildalton on Islay measuring 17.3m by 5.7m amounting to 98.6m²; and Kirkapoll on Tiree measuring 11.3m by 5.2m equalling 58.8m².⁶³ However, in comparison to established cathedral churches such as St Moluag on Lismore and Peel on Man, it is very small. The cathedral church of St Moluag on Lismore measured 38m east–west by 7.2m north–south with a total area of 273.6m².⁶⁴ If we compare the dimensions and area of the Snizort cathedral with its rival on Man, St German's, we see how comparatively small Snizort is. St German's measures approximately 37m by 6.5m with an area of 240.5m².⁶⁵ Yet, although Snizort is small in the context of cathedral churches it is not within a Hebridean context. Thus, Cormac's election could be seen as a

⁵⁹ *CSSR*, iv, 188.

⁶⁰ S. E. Thomas, 'A Topographic Survey of Skeabost Island, Skye' (Unpublished report for Historic Scotland, 2006), 12.

⁶¹ Ian Fisher kindly gave me a copy of his photograph of the column capital. The capital is in the care of Dualchas, the heritage service for Skye and Lochalsh.

⁶² *Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, Argyll: An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments*, 7 vols (Edinburgh, 1971–92) [hereafter *RCAHMS Argyll*], iv, 268 n. 118.

⁶³ *Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments and Constructions of Scotland, Ninth Report with Inventory of Monuments and Constructions in the Outer Hebrides, Skye and the Small Isles* (Edinburgh, 1928), 12; *RCAHMS Argyll*, v, 203 and iii, 153.

⁶⁴ *RCAHMS Argyll*, ii, 156.

⁶⁵ A. M. Cubbon, 'The early church in the Isle of Man', in *The Early Church in Western Britain and Ireland*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (Oxford, 1982), 257–82, at 278.

re-orientation of the diocese, not necessarily to split it, from the south to Skye in the north.

Unfortunately, we do not know for certain the decision of the meeting called by the archbishop for 12 July 1331. Our only evidence for Cormac's failure is his aforementioned appearance in Bergen in 1339. However, it seems likely that the archbishop and his canons refused to confirm Cormac. Why would they have refused his confirmation? There were probably three key points: the validity of his election; Norwegian-Scottish relations and the patronage of the see; and the possible arrival of a letter from Avignon.

Cormac's election was both unconventional and traditional; unconventional because of the electoral body, but traditional because election by cathedral chapter was well established in canon law. The monks of Furness abbey in Cumbria were granted the right to elect the bishop of Sodor in around 1134 by Óláfr of Man.⁶⁶ The monks' election rights were last confirmed by the pope in the late twelfth century, in either 1194 or 1195.⁶⁷ The treaty of Perth of 1266 neither confirmed nor denied this right, but gave patronage of the episcopal see to the king of Scots.⁶⁸ The subsequent four bishops were all presented to the archbishop of Nidaros for consecration as the candidates supported by the king of Scots. Furness's right to elect seems to have passed to the clergy of Man by the late thirteenth century; for example, in 1275, Gilbert, abbot of Rushen, was elected bishop by the clergy and people of Man.⁶⁹ However, the monks of Furness clearly believed that they had not relinquished their rights entirely because they objected to the imposition of a new bishop by Anthony Bek, lord of Man, in the early fourteenth century.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, their objection seems to have been ignored and subsequently later fourteenth-century bishops were elected by the clergy of Man.⁷¹

How much of a disqualifying factor was the apparent absence of support from the king of Scots for Cormac? Might Norwegian relations with Scotland have been an issue considered by the archbishop? This has to be examined in the context of the treaty of Perth of 1266 which contained some compensation for the Norwegian loss: the king of Scots and his successors were to pay 100 merks annually to Norway.⁷² This annual

⁶⁶ 'Charter of Godred, A.D. 1154', in *Mons. Ins. Man.*, ii, 13.

⁶⁷ *The Coucher Book of Furness Abbey*, ed. J. C. Atkinson and John Brownbill, Chetham Society, 2 vols (Manchester, 1886–1919), ii, 642–3.

⁶⁸ *DN*, viii, no. 9.

⁶⁹ *Fasti*, ed. Watt and Murray, 261. This election was subsequently annulled by King Alexander III.

⁷⁰ *Furness Coucher Bk*, ii, 694.

⁷¹ *CM (B)*, fol. 51v.

⁷² *DN*, viii, no. 9.

payment seems to have been made only intermittently. In October 1312, the treaty was renewed in Inverness unaltered, thus confirming that the annuity of 100 merks was to be continued.⁷³ However, the annuity continued to be a point of friction because the Scots still failed to pay up.⁷⁴

There was more to the relationship between Norway and Scotland than this treaty. There were two marriage alliances in the late thirteenth century: Eirik II Magnusson's first wife was Margaret, daughter of Alexander III, and his second wife was Isabella Bruce, sister of Robert I.⁷⁵ For this paper it is his second marriage which is most interesting. It was short-lived since Eirik died in 1299, but Isabella seems to have lived as a widow and dowager queen in Norway until her death in around 1357. She was certainly still alive in the early 1340s when she was in communication with her sister, Lady Christian Bruce of Moray.⁷⁶ It is possible that Isabella was involved in the negotiations for the 1312 treaty of Inverness.

Isabella would surely have been aware of the importance of good relations between the two countries. Barrow suggests that the likely participation of Robert I's chancellor, Bernard, in the negotiations demonstrates the importance of such relations to Robert I.⁷⁷ Yet, it might have been expected that Norway's relationship with Scotland became less important as Norway continued its aggressive policies towards Denmark. Nonetheless, Håkon Magnusson is seen by Norwegian historians as a Norwegian king who built on the connection with the Bruce family in Scotland.⁷⁸ The Norwegians could have been concerned to keep good relations with Scotland whilst their military focus was on the south and east.

This desire to maintain cordial relations with Scotland might have been a factor in the apparent refusal to confirm Cormac. Given that the treaty of Perth had granted the right of patronage of the see to the king of Scots, the archbishop, whilst he was not obliged to confirm the king's candidate, might have been wary of confirming a candidate without the explicit support of the king of Scots. Yet from an ecclesiastical perspective, Cormac must have been an attractive candidate for the archbishop of Nidaros since he seems to have been known to the archbishop. Had he become bishop, it might have resulted in more contact between the diocese of Sodor and its metropolitan. However, the archbishop may not have felt able to approve Cormac's election due to

⁷³ *DN*, xix, no. 482.

⁷⁴ Barbara E. Crawford, 'Weland of Stiklaw: a Scottish royal servant at the Norwegian court', *Historisk Tidsskrift* 52 (1973), 329–39, at 337 n. 39.

⁷⁵ *DN*, xix, no. 390.

⁷⁶ *DN*, xix, no. 560.

⁷⁷ Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 288.

⁷⁸ Knut Helle, *Norge blir en stat 1130–1319* (Kristiansand, 1974), 267.

the apparent importance placed on the relationship with Scotland and the questionable electoral body.

However, it is possible that the need to examine the validity of Cormac's election was rendered unnecessary by the arrival of a letter from Avignon announcing that the pope had provided a new bishop to the diocese of Sodor. As the metropolitan of the Sodor diocese, the archbishop would have been sent a copy of the letter announcing the provision of Thomas de Rossy as bishop on 10 June 1331. It seems highly unlikely that this letter would have reached the archbishop by 6 July given that it would probably have taken over a month for the papal letters informing all interested parties of Thomas's provision to arrive. Cowan suggests that it would have taken about four to six weeks to travel between Arbroath and Avignon and it is an estimate which probably stands for both the diocese of Sodor and Nidaros or Bergen.⁷⁹ It is possible that the letter had arrived by 12 July 1331. It seems exceedingly improbable that the archbishop would choose to ignore the actions of the pope himself.

The successful bishop – Thomas de Rossy

Cormac's successful rival for the bishopric was Thomas de Rossy. A canon of Dunkeld, he was provided to the bishopric in Avignon on 10 June 1331, a full month before Cormac's envoys arrived in Bergen seeking his confirmation as bishop.⁸⁰ Thomas de Rossy seems to have belonged to a family from Angus in eastern Scotland who held lands immediately to the south of the Montrose basin. In around 1246, Thomas de Rossie, son of Robert de Rossie, received the lands of Rossie in a charter from Hugo Malherbe.⁸¹ By a charter of Robert I, Henry Rossie was granted the lands of Inrony, Ionyoney or Anany, which seem to have been close to Rossie.⁸² Thomas de Rossy himself held the church of Idvies in the deanery of Angus in the diocese of St Andrews, which he may have continued to hold for some time after he was consecrated bishop, since another cleric was provided to it only in April 1346.⁸³ Thomas's links to central and eastern Scotland, rather than the west, are emphasised by his place of burial. According to the Chronicle of Man, he

⁷⁹ E. J. Cowan, *'For Freedom Alone': The Declaration of Arbroath, 1320* (East Linton, 2003), 84.

⁸⁰ *Jean XXII (1316–1334): Lettres Communes*, ed. G. Mollat, 16 vols (Paris, 1904–47), x, 230.

⁸¹ *Arbroath Liber*, i, Appendix, no. x.

⁸² *RRS*, v, 574.

⁸³ GUS, Collectorie 282, fol. 193r. In order to hold Idvies after his consecration, Rossy would have had to have received a faculty to retain it *in commendam*. My thanks to the anonymous reviewer for highlighting this point.

was buried at Scone, only fifteen miles from Dunkeld, about forty miles from Idvies and approximately fifty miles from Rossie.⁸⁴

It is uncertain what kind of papal chaplain Thomas was. There seem to have been two distinct groups of papal chaplains: those who served the pope at the curia and those who normally lived outside the curia and had no specific role to perform therein.⁸⁵ Before the reign of Clement VI, the title assigned does not distinguish between these two groups of papal chaplains.⁸⁶ However, during Clement VI's reign, this latter group were titled 'honorary'.⁸⁷ These honorary chaplains did not receive any financial rewards, but instead had privileges such as exemption from the jurisdiction of their ordinary. In contrast, the resident chaplains received a salary of between 100 and 200 florins depending on whether they were *capellani intrinseci* or *capellani commensales*.⁸⁸

The disparities between the two groups are clear when the appointments of Pope John XXII are examined. He appointed 431 chaplains, but he paid only 28 of them during the eighteen years of his reign.⁸⁹ His successor, Benedict XII, recruited only 113, but from these there were only 36 personal chaplains and 16 commensal chaplains.⁹⁰ If Thomas de Rossy had been a papal chaplain resident at the curia at Avignon, it could explain his selection as bishop of Sodor. He was perhaps in the right place at the right time and known in the papal court. Indeed, Thomas de Rossy was probably not the first cleric active at the curia to be chosen as bishop of Sodor. Bishop Richard had been a canon of St Andrews priory but was serving in the curia when he was appointed to the bishopric of Sodor in 1253.⁹¹ Perhaps the greatest difference between Cormac and Thomas de Rossy would have been linguistic: Cormac was a Gaelic speaker with perhaps some Norse and Thomas was presumably English speaking with little or no Gaelic.

However, ultimately Cormac did not become bishop because he did not realise or know that the pope was increasingly making use of his

⁸⁴ *CM (B)*, fol. 51v.

⁸⁵ Charles Burns, 'Vatican sources and the honorary papal chaplains of the fourteenth century', in *Römische Kurie. Kirchliche Finanzen. Vatikanisches Archiv. Studien zu Ehren von Hermann Hoberg*, ed. Ermin Gatz (Rome, 1979), 65–93, at 65.

⁸⁶ Bernard Guillemain, 'Les chapelains d'honneur des papes d'Avignon', *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire* 64 (1952), 217–38, at 218.

⁸⁷ Pierre Jugie, 'Papal chaplain', in *The Papacy: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Philippe Levillain, 3 vols (London, 2002), i, 300–1, at 300.

⁸⁸ G. Mollat, *The Popes at Avignon, 1305–1378*, trans. Janet Love (Edinburgh, 1963), 282.

⁸⁹ Guillemain, 'Les chapelains d'honneur', 219.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Fasti*, ed. Watt and Murray, 261.

right to provide.⁹² The centralisation of the Church had developed greatly during the Avignon papacy and as a result the popes could nominate or provide a candidate for a bishopric by mandate.⁹³ Barrell argues that ‘by the middle of the fourteenth century, the practice of having bishops elected by their cathedral chapters was beginning to be seriously affected by the extensive use of the papal right to provide’.⁹⁴ Additionally, the bishops were now obliged to swear an oath of loyalty to the pope and to visit him.⁹⁵ Papal provisions to bishoprics sometimes did prove controversial because there might be a local candidate who had been elected in the traditional manner.⁹⁶

Until 1331, the bishops of Sodor seem to have been consecrated by the archbishop of Nidaros. These consecrations generally took place in Norway, usually in Bergen, although we know that Bishop Mark was consecrated in Tonsberg in eastern Norway in 1275.⁹⁷ There is one known exception to this general rule: Bishop Richard was consecrated in the curia in 1253 but by the archbishop of Nidaros, not the pope.⁹⁸ However, the majority of Thomas de Rossy’s successors as bishop of Sodor were consecrated at the curia by the pope.⁹⁹ Indeed in 1349, Bishop William Russell was dispensed from having to travel to Nidaros to profess his obedience because he did not ‘dare to face the dangers of the long sea voyage’.¹⁰⁰ These fears of the sea voyage do not seem to be entirely logical given that he travelled to the curia in that year and land travel was probably just as dangerous, if for different reasons.

There are examples of cases where the papal provision of a candidate for bishop conflicted with the candidate chosen either by the electing body or by royal authority. A similar case is that of Thomas de Wedale

⁹² A. D. M. Barrell, *The Papacy, Scotland and Northern England, 1342–1378* (Cambridge, 1995), 191.

⁹³ Yves Renouard, *The Avignon Papacy, 1305–1403*, trans. Denis Bethell (London, 1970), 98.

⁹⁴ Barrell, *Papacy, Scotland and Northern England*, 191.

⁹⁵ Renouard, *Avignon Papacy*, 105.

⁹⁶ Barrell, *Papacy, Scotland and Northern England*, 193.

⁹⁷ *Islandske Annaler indtil 1578*, ed. Gustav Storm (Christiania, 1888), 336 [‘Markus var vigdr til biskups i Tunsbergi til Sudur eya’ – my translation].

⁹⁸ *CM (B)*, fol. 51r.

⁹⁹ William Russell was consecrated in Avignon by 6 May 1349 (*CPL*, iii, 285), John Duncan was consecrated in Avignon on 25 or 26 November 1374 (*CM (B)*, fol. 51v), Michael was possibly consecrated in Avignon in August 1387 when he promised to pay 166 florins in service taxes (*DN*, xvii, no. 167), Angus de Insulis was consecrated in Rome in February 1428 (*The Apostolic Camera and Scottish Benefices, 1418–88*, ed. Annie I. Cameron (Oxford, 1934), 8–9) and John MacLean was probably consecrated in Rome in November 1441 when he promised his common services in person (*ibid.*, 30). The only bishop whose consecration location is unknown is Richard Pawlie, bishop in the early fifteenth century (*Fasti*, ed. Watt and Murray, 263–4).

¹⁰⁰ *CPP*, 168.

who was provided to the see of Whithorn on 31 December 1359 and whose provision ignored the election of a local cleric named Thomas Macdowell. Barrell argues that Thomas de Wedale's 'position at the curia and his services to the Holy See would have made him just the type of man who might petition the pope for a bishopric as a reward for his labours'.¹⁰¹

It seems likely that Thomas de Rossy happened to be at the curia when the death of Bernard was announced and he was able to lobby the pope to provide him to a diocese to which he had very little connection. Cormac and Thomas de Rossy seem to be key examples of what might happen when papal provisions overrode local concerns.

Conclusion

Cormac's claim for the bishopric of Sodor is complicated. Cormac seems to have been local to Skye and may have had some connection with a legal kindred such as the Morrisons. It is likely that he acted in an official capacity for the archbishop of Nidaros on one occasion before 1331. As archdeacon of Sodor with responsibility for overseeing the clergy of the Hebrides, he would have known a substantial area of the diocese well. His election as bishop by the canons of Snizort and the clergy of Skye was irregular, but might not have been an insurmountable obstacle to his confirmation. His election by this group does appear to be a move towards splitting the diocese or at least shifting the focus from the Isle of Man to Skye. Cormac's election could be seen as a reflection of the geopolitical realities which the provision of Thomas masked and delayed. It was not until the Great Schism that the diocese split when the English Isle of Man supported the Roman popes and the Scottish Hebrides sided with Avignon. Only with the Great Schism would Snizort in Skye gain the status of a cathedral church.

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¹⁰¹ Barrell, *Papacy, Scotland and Northern England*, 193.