

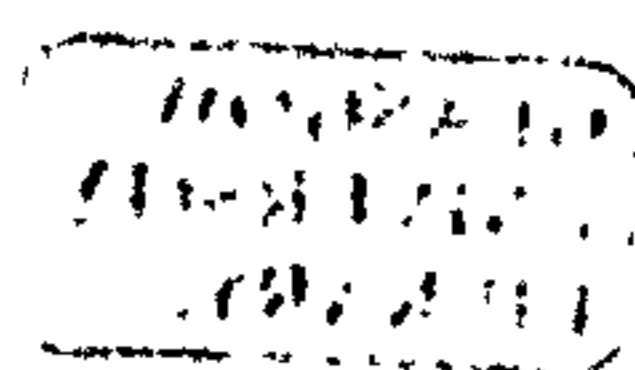
# **Medieval Landscapes and Lordship in South Uist**

**Vol. I**

**John A. Raven**

Submitted for the degree of PhD at the Department of Archaeology, University of  
Glasgow, September 2005

© John A. Raven 2005



## Abstract.

This thesis examines the structures of society and lordship in the Middle Ages in South Uist through historical documentation, oral-tradition, cultural landscapes, monuments and settlement patterns. In this thesis, the medieval period has been defined as that between c. 1000 and c. 1650. The historical evidence is considered along with archaeological evidence to create a holistic understanding of medieval social developments in South Uist. The results have ramifications for interpreting contemporaneous society throughout Scotland and Ireland. The study focuses on rural settlement (farms, townships, field- and transhumance-systems) and high-status monuments (churches, duns and castles). Developments visible in both the historical and archaeological record demonstrate that considerable social, economic and cultural changes took place within the landscape of South Uist throughout the Middle Ages. However, the nature of the evidence polarises the study into two time spheres: the Norse period, c. 1000 – c. 1400, and the Late Medieval period, c. 1550 – c. 1650. Remains belonging to the intervening period have proved difficult to locate.

The Norse period landscape was characterised by dispersed farmsteads, possibly siting within an enclosed field-system. It is probable that these farmsteads originated as the homesteads of Viking Age settlers. Between the eleventh century and the end of the 1300s, there was a trend towards social and economic centralisation and the creation of an increasingly formalised social hierarchy: manifestations of this can be seen in the archaeological record and a new system of taxation. Archaeologically this is revealed by increasing divergence in the sizes of farmsteads, the largest of which also exhibit signs of industrial and agricultural control. Increased social differentiation is additionally reflected in artefact assemblages. The taxation system was composed of units of assessment: pennylands, quarterlands and ouncelands/*tírean unga*, each unit of which corresponds with a level in the social stratum. In the landscape, the *tír unga* boundary became the preferred location for the monuments of power: the assembly site, the church and the dun. Over the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries duns and churches were increasingly monumentalised and in response to European influences. For example, duns were occasionally rebuilt as castles when located at nodal points in the social landscape. By 1400, the landscape of South Uist appears to have been completely ‘feudalised’ with respect to social structures and the nature of lordship.

A gap in the archaeological evidence exists between c. 1400 and c. 1550, when the archaeological record again becomes visible. By this point a considerable change is evident in the society and economy of South Uist. Farming communities now appear organised in small clustered settlements, *bailtean*. These settlements occupied an open field-system concentrated in the arable on the western side of the island. Away from the arable, the pastures and hills stood in contrast to the community-based *bailtean*, providing an open space for individuals to live in relative freedom during the summer months at the shielings and for the elite to hunt. New farms were established in the hills by those with the social and economic influence to act independently of the community.

Alongside this change in settlement morphology, between 1400 and 1550, economic control had been de-centralised and the form of high status dwelling had changed. Monumental expressions of noble status placed less emphasis on the exclusivity manifest in earlier castles, located on the margins of the island's community. Instead, secular elite monuments were placed upon inland lochs, and were related to localised patterns of movement around the island. Late medieval duns also formed part of a collective of monuments that were dispersed through the landscape. Thus they were a departure from the unified type of monument, like the castle. It is apparent that late medieval noble-status dwellings emphasised the inclusiveness of the local community in a less overtly dominant manner. It is possible that these concerns reveal a shift away from European social and hierarchical models, to a social order comparable with Gaelic Ireland. Between 1400 and 1550 the nature of the landscape had changed from a 'feudal' one, to one that may be characterised as one of 'clanship'.

Although no direct evidence for fifteenth-century settlement has been recovered, this is an important transitional point between the 'feudalised'/European landscape of the 1300s and the *bailteam* of the post-1550 period. It is thus highly important to understand what happened during this 'dark age' period, and several possibilities are explored within this study.

## Acknowledgements

My greatest thanks has to go to Steve Driscoll, Colin Breen and Mike Parker Pearson, for all their encouragement and faith in me. The resulting work would undoubtedly not have materialised without them. They are also deserved of my sincere apologies for all I have put them through. Amongst people who have been kind enough to discuss ideas with me, and provide me with unpublished or otherwise inaccessible material are Niall Sharples, Mark Edmonds, Mary MacLeod, Martin MacGregor, Domhnaill Uilleam Stiùbheart, Helen Smith, Jaquie Mulville, Peter Davey, Richard Warner, Cormack O'Burke, Tadgh O'Keeffe, Kieren O'Connor, Alex Woolf, Simon Taylor, Steve Boardman, Wilson McLeod, Michael Robson, R. Andrew McDonald, Trevor Cowie, David Caldwell, Dauvit Broun, Stuart Farrell, Colleen Batey, Alasdair Ross, Thomas Clancy, Ewen Campbell, Alan Lane, Heather James, Beverley Ballin-Smith, Nicholas Maclean-Bristol, Ian Macneil of Barra and Rachel Butter. My thanks go to all of them, and to anybody I have forgotten, who also have my apology. None of the fieldwork would have been possible without the willingness and help of Tim Atkinson and Elsbeth of South Uist Estates, Major Graeme Chubb from the M.O.D, Mary Harman from S.N.H. and of course all the crofters and grazing committees who allowed me to have direct access to their land. The most notable amongst them are: Eric Walis and Laurence Walker, in Iodchar, Mr MacMillan in Frobost, Calum MacDonald and Mr and Mrs Donald MacPhee in Cille Pheadair, Mr and Mrs Collier in Smeircleit, Alasdair Walker of West Cille Bhrìgde, Agnes Currie of Aisgernis, Neil MacCormick, Mr MacPhie and A.M. MacLeod in Baghasdal, Alasdair MacDonald of Stadhlaignearraidh, Donald Walker of Tobha Mor. The fieldwork would also have been impossible without the dedication and aid of a host of students from Sheffield, Bournemouth and King Alfred's universities, including James Folkes, Andre Guimares, Kirsty Owen, Alastair Threlfoll, Owen Raybould, 'Big' Owen, Tegwen Roberts, 'Old' Bob Nunn, Alex Grassam, Jim Holt, Morwena Slade, Hellen Bradley, Stephen Mallet, Tansy Collins, Josh Slater, Mathew Edmonds, Nicola Thorpe, 'Little' Kate Seddon, Richard Ashton, Abi Hackett, Kate Jackson, Hamish Fenton, Dean Williams, Iain, Chris Taylor, Garry, Clare 'Queen of the Blue Box' Cross, Nicola Hall, Helen Robertson, Oliver O'Grady, Sorcha Monk, Mary, Richard Campbell and Thérèse Kearns. Special thanks must also go to the help provided by Alasdair MacKenzie, Euan Wilson of Iodchar, Alex Turner, Glen Hood, Craig Allaker, Meggen Gondek, 'Lizzy' Jones, Chris O'Connor, Tom Ullathorne and Patrick Roy for their selfless help in their varied ways, and also to Tessa Poller, who also aided me with shelf space and interpretative problems. Other parts of the project could not have taken place without the collaboration, and hopefully remaining friendship of Andrew 'Reg' Reynolds, Mike Hamilton and Matthew Shelley. The Comunn Eachdraidh Uibhist a' Deas, and particularly Effie MacMillan, have also shown me great support and helped point me in the way of information. Although all those named above are unstintingly deserved of my greatest gratitude I also have to bow in humbleness to the warmth, encouragement and intellectual inspiration provided on both sides of the Borodale Hotel public bar by South Uist's finest James MacDonald and William MacDonald. At home this work could not have taken place without the toleration shown to my grumpiness, stress and prolonged periods of absence by Petra, Maili and Cara, as well as the patience of my parents. My greatest sorrow is to have to thank Darren Vyce in spirit,



whose friendship, encouragement and physical help supported and sustained the early stages of my studies.

My thanks goes to everybody listed above and is also extended to those I regretfully have not paid homage to in my absentmindedness. Whilst I hope that I have done everybody proud, any mistakes are entirely my own.

## VOLUME I

|                  |      |
|------------------|------|
| Abstract         | i    |
| Acknowledgements | iii  |
| Contents         | v    |
| List of Figures  | viii |

## CONTENTS

|                  |  |            |
|------------------|--|------------|
| <b>CHAPTER 1</b> | <b>INTRODUCTION</b>                                      | <b>1</b>   |
| 1.1              | Introduction   | 1          |
| 1.2              | Study Goals  | 3          |
| 1.3              | Methodology  | 4          |
| 1.4              | Chronological Definitions                                | 7          |
| 1.5              | Research Context   | 8          |
| 1.6              | Theoretical Approaches                                   | 13         |
| 1.7              | Layout of Thesis   | 19         |
| 1.8              | Documentary Sources                                      | 20         |
| 1.9              | Physical Background                                      | 39         |
| <b>SECTION 1</b> | <b>DOCUMENTARY ANALYSES</b>                              | <b>53</b>  |
| <b>CHAPTER 2</b> | <b>A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF LORDSHIP IN SOUTH UIST</b>   | <b>53</b>  |
| 2.1              | Introduction   | 53         |
| 2.2              | Kingdoms in the Isles, Before Somerled                   | 54         |
| 2.3              | The Clann Somhairle and the Uists: 1158 – c. 1300        | 55         |
| 2.4              | Garmoran: Fact or Fiction?                               | 61         |
| 2.5              | The Clann Ruairidh Territories in the Fourteenth Century | 63         |
| 2.6              | The Inheritance of Ami MacRuari                          | 65         |
| 2.7              | The Clann Ragnaill and the Siol Ghoraidh: 1372 – c. 1460 | 66         |
| 2.8              | The Clann Ragnaill Reinvigorated: c. 1460 – 1513         | 71         |
| 2.9              | The Lordship of Gairbhtreín                              | 79         |
| 2.10             | The Age of Feuds: 1513 – c. 1600                         | 82         |
| 2.11             | From the Brink of Extirpation: c. 1600 – c. 1650         | 87         |
| 2.12             | Summary: Lordship and Chiefdoms                          | 94         |
| <b>CHAPTER 3</b> | <b>THE ADMINISTRATIVE LANDSCAPE</b>                      | <b>102</b> |
| 3.1              | Introduction   | 102        |
| 3.2              | Origins  | 103        |
| 3.3              | <i>Tírean Unga</i> and <i>Dabhaichean</i>                | 104        |
| 3.4              | Pennylands, Quarterlands and Merklands                   | 106        |
| 3.5              | Parishes   | 107        |
| 3.6              | Parishes in South Uist                                   | 108        |
| 3.7              | The Parish of Cille Pheadair                             | 110        |
| 3.8              | Farms and Townships in South Uist                        | 113        |
| 3.9              | <i>Tírean Unga</i> in South Uist                         | 117        |
| 3.10             | Boundaries   | 121        |
| 3.11             | Merklands and Later Medieval Lordships                   | 125        |
| 3.12             | Administrative Districts in the Late Middle Ages         | 127        |

|   |   |            |
|---|---|------------|
| 3.13  | Discussion  | 129        |
| <b>SECTION 2 THE NORSE PERIOD, c. 1000 – c. 1266 AD</b> |   | <b>135</b> |
| <b>CHAPTER 4 INTRODUCTION TO THE NORSE PERIOD</b>       |   | <b>135</b> |
| 4.1   | Introduction  | 135        |
| 4.2   | Vikings   | 136        |
| 4.3   | A Gaelic Renaissance?   | 137        |
| 4.4   | The <i>Lochlannich</i> in Folklore and Saga                           | 143        |
| <b>CHAPTER 5 THE SETTLEMENT LANDSCAPE</b>               |   | <b>147</b> |
| 5.1   | Introduction  | 147        |
| 5.2   | Farmsteads in Townships   | 147        |
| 5.3   | The Homesteads of Freeman   | 151        |
| 5.4   | Enclosure as Mentality  | 153        |
| 5.5   | Beyond the Fields   | 153        |
| 5.6   | The Products of the Land  | 155        |
| 5.7   | Discussion  | 156        |
| <b>CHAPTER 6 THE CHURCH</b>                             |   | <b>160</b> |
| 6.1   | Introduction  | 160        |
| 6.2   | <i>Cille</i> Sites, Saints and the Development of the Medieval Church | 160        |
| 6.3   | Site Interpretations and Problems                                     | 166        |
| 6.4   | Hoghmor   | 173        |
| 6.5   | Churches in Benbecula   | 179        |
| 6.6   | Chapels and <i>Tírean Unga</i>  | 181        |
| 6.7   | Discussion  | 185        |
| <b>CHAPTER 7 DUNS IN THE NORSE PERIOD</b>               |   | <b>188</b> |
| 7.1   | Introduction  | 188        |
| 7.2   | Crannog and Dun Studies   | 188        |
| 7.3   | Origins   | 191        |
| 7.4   | Re-Uses   | 191        |
| 7.5   | Genealogical Architecture   | 195        |
| 7.6   | Place-Names and Oral History  | 198        |
| 7.7   | Dun Mhuirchaidh   | 202        |
| 7.8   | The RCAHMS's Late Duns  | 204        |
| 7.9   | Seats and Seasonal Sites  | 206        |
| 7.10  | Civil Defence   | 212        |
| 7.11  | Are there Norse Castles in South Uist?                                | 215        |
| 7.12  | Dun Raouill   | 222        |
| 7.13  | Chapels, Duns and Assemblies  | 223        |
| 7.14  | The Association of <i>Cilles</i> , Duns, Islands Etc. in South Uist   | 225        |
| 7.15  | Assembly Places   | 232        |
| 7.16  | The Functions of Assemblies   | 240        |
| 7.17  | Summary   | 243        |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>SECTION 2 THE LATER MIDDLE AGES: c. 1266 – c. 1600</b>                          | <b>246</b> |
| <b>CHAPTER 8 INTRODUCTION TO THE LATE MEDIEVAL PERIOD</b>                          | <b>246</b> |
| 8.1 Introduction   | 246        |
| 8.2 The Gaelic Revival   | 248        |
| 8.3 Lords and Clansmen at the End of the Middle Ages                               | 248        |
| 8.4 The Later Medieval Church  | 253        |
| 8.5 Bards and Bailies  | 259        |
| <b>CHAPTER 9 MONUMENTS OF THE <i>FINE</i></b>                                      | <b>264</b> |
| 9.1 Introduction   | 264        |
| 9.2 Problems in Hebridean Castle Studies   | 265        |
| 9.3 The Hebridean Castle   | 268        |
| 9.4 The Body of the Chief  | 273        |
| 9.5 Maritime View-Sheds: The Keys to Power?  | 278        |
| 9.6 Defending the Observable   | 285        |
| 9.7 Public Access: Beyond the Walls  | 292        |
| 9.8 Halls, Kitchens and Outhouses  | 297        |
| 9.9 Demesne and Domination   | 300        |
| 9.10 Summary   | 304        |
| <b>CHAPTER 10 DUNS IN THE LATER MEDIEVAL PERIOD</b>                                | <b>307</b> |
| 10.1 Introduction  | 307        |
| 10.2 Chiefs and Their Household  | 308        |
| 10.3 Defence   | 315        |
| 10.4 Prisons   | 322        |
| 10.5 Halls and the Appropriation of Assembly                                       | 326        |
| 10.6 Stacks and Moated-Enclosures  | 331        |
| 10.7 The Function of Islands   | 335        |
| 10.8 Castles and Duns in Late Medieval South Uist                                  | 337        |
| 10.9 Caisteal Bhuirgh in the Later Middle Ages                                     | 351        |
| 10.10 The Decline of the Castle and the Island Dwelling                            | 355        |
| 10.11 Summary  | 361        |
| <b>CHAPTER 11 SETTLEMENT IN THE LATER MIDDLE AGES</b>                              | <b>362</b> |
| 11.1 Introduction  | 362        |
| 11.2 Fourteenth-Century Settlement   | 363        |
| 11.3 Settlement in the Sixteenth Century and After                                 | 364        |
| 11.4 A Shift in Settlement Away from the Machair?                                  | 368        |
| 11.5 Fieldwork into Medieval <i>Bailtean</i> in South Uist                         | 370        |
| 11.6 The Fifteenth Century: A Problem of Recognition, Sand, Plague or Pastoralism? | 373        |
| 11.7 The Ceramic Evidence  | 375        |
| 11.8 Vernacular Architectural Evidence   | 379        |
| 11.9 A Pastoral Hiatus?  | 383        |
| 11.10 Nucleation and the <i>Bailtean</i>   | 390        |
| 11.11 Discussion   | 397        |
| <b>CHAPTER 12 THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF THE <i>BAILTEAN</i></b>           | <b>402</b> |
| 12.1 Introduction  | 402        |
| 12.2 Open-Fields   | 403        |



|       |  |     |
|-------|--|-----|
| 12.3  | The Runrig Community   | 405 |
| 12.4  | Social Forms of Landholding  | 409 |
| 12.5  | <i>Bailtean</i> as Mentality   | 413 |
| 12.6  | Alternatives to <i>Bailtean</i> Life: Shielings, Hunting Grounds and East Coast Settlement | 414 |
| 12.7  | The Shielings  | 414 |
| 12.8  | The Hunting Forest   | 416 |
| 12.9  | The Chief's Pasture  | 419 |
| 12.10 | Settlement on the East Coast   | 421 |
| 12.11 | The Late Medieval Economy  | 427 |
| 12.12 | Arable Resources   | 427 |
| 12.13 | Other Resources  | 433 |
| 12.14 | Fishing in and on the Coasts of South Uist   | 436 |
| 12.15 | Non-Uisteach Exploitation of Hebridean Waters  | 445 |
| 12.16 | Industry   | 446 |
| 12.17 | Summary  | 448 |

|            |   |     |
|------------|---|-----|
| CHAPTER 13 | CONCLUSION                                      | 451 |
| 13.1       | Landscape and Lordship in the Norse Period      | 451 |
| 13.2       | Landscape and Lordship in the Later Middle Ages | 457 |
| 13.3       | Main Conclusions                                | 470 |
| 13.4       | Future Directions                               | 472 |
| 13.5       | End Note  | 474 |

## VOLUME II

|          |   |     |
|----------|---|-----|
| APPENDIX | SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK INTO LATE MEDIEVAL <i>BAILTEAN</i> | 475 |
| A.1      | Introduction  | 475 |
| A.2      | Research Aims   | 475 |
| A.3      | Methodology   | 476 |
| A.4      | Results   | 476 |
| A.5      | Summary   | 484 |

|         |     |
|---------|-----|
| FIGURES | 486 |
|---------|-----|

|              |     |
|--------------|-----|
| BIBLIOGRAPHY | 648 |
|--------------|-----|

## LIST OF FIGURES

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| Fig. 1:  | Location of the Outer Hebrides                           |
| Fig. 2:  | Joannis Blaeu's map of the Uists and Barra               |
| Fig. 3:  | Detail from Timothy Pont's sketch map of South Uist      |
| Fig. 4:  | Detail from Timothy Pont's sketch map of South Uist      |
| Fig. 5:  | Detail from William Bald's map of Baghasdal              |
| Fig. 6:  | Soils map of South Uist                                  |
| Fig. 7:  | Formation of Uist machair                                |
| Fig. 8:  | Hills, sea lochs and sounds around the Uists             |
| Fig. 9:  | Main pathways around South Uist                          |
| Fig. 10: | Chains of inland lochs in the southern end of South Uist |
| Fig. 11: | Chains of inland lochs in the northern end of South Uist |

- Fig. 12:** Location of, and ruins at Phuirt Ruaidh
- Fig. 13:** Genealogy of the Clann Somhairle and Clann Ruairidh
- Fig. 14:** Traditional model of thirteenth-century lordships along the western seaboard
- Fig. 15:** Genealogy of the Clann Ragnaill
- Fig. 16:** Comparative map of grants to members of the Clann Ragnaill and lordship of Gairbhtrian
- Fig. 17:** Townships of South Uist in 1805
- Fig. 18:** Available valuations for lands in the parishes of Benbecula and Sgìre Hogh
- Fig. 19:** Available valuations for lands in the parishes of Cille Pheadair, Ceann a Deas and Barra
- Fig. 20:** The parishes and *dabhaichean/tírean unga* of South Uist
- Fig. 21:** *Tírean unga* and medieval churches in Barra
- Fig. 22:** Model of sequence in place-names and farm expansion in Norse period
- Fig. 23:** Detail from Bald of fossilised *tír unga* and quarterlands in Frobost and Gearraidh Bhailteas
- Fig. 24:** *Tírean unga* and medieval ecclesiastical sites in South Uist and Benbecula
- Fig. 25:** Location of excavated Norse period sites in the Uists
- Fig. 26:** Administrative divisions in the Kingdom of the Isles
- Fig. 27:** Distribution of Viking Age sites on the South Uist machair
- Fig. 28:** Excavated buildings at Bornais
- Fig. 29:** Excavated buildings at Cille Pheadair
- Fig. 30:** Excavated Norse period longhouse at An Udail
- Fig. 31:** Examples of Viking Age and Norse period pottery forms
- Fig. 32:** Aisgernis named as Gill on Blaeu's map
- Fig. 33:** Cille Amhlaidh and Cille Coinnich on Blaeu's map
- Fig. 34:** Location of ecclesiastical sites mentioned in Chapter 6
- Fig. 35:** 'Fallen stone' at Aisgernis
- Fig. 36:** Section of buried chapel in Ensay
- Fig. 37:** Font from Cille Coinnich
- Fig. 38:** Location of Clachan Branagh and Cladh Ard an Dugain on Bald's map
- Fig. 39:** Photographs of remains at Cladh Ard an Dugain
- Fig. 40:** Location and remains at Cille Bhanain
- Fig. 41:** Plan of church at Cille Donnain
- Fig. 42:** Duns and causeway at Loch Dun na Cille, Cille Pheadair
- Fig. 43:** Dun na Cille/Eilean Bhuidhe, Cille Pheadair and causeway
- Fig. 44:** Plan of remains on Dun na Cille
- Fig. 45:** Examples of early bicameral churches
- Fig. 46:** Plan and phasing of Hoghmore ecclesiastical complex
- Fig. 47:** Early Medieval cross at Hoghmore
- Fig. 48:** *In-situ* moulded chancel-arch at Caibeal an t-Sagairt
- Fig. 49:** East facing walls at Caibeal an t-Sagairt and Caibeal Dhughail
- Fig. 50:** Muir's nineteenth-century plan of Hoghmore
- Fig. 51:** Examples of early unicameral churches
- Fig. 52:** Examples of the Early Medieval Irish monasteries
- Fig. 53:** Teampull Mhoire, Baile nan Cailleach
- Fig. 54:** Teampull Challuim Chille, Baile c'Mhanaich
- Fig. 55:** Teampull Bhuirgh
- Fig. 56:** Architectural details from Cille Bharr
- Fig. 57:** Location of duns and castles mentioned in Chapter 7
- Fig. 58:** Location of places in North Uist and Benbecula mentioned in Chapter 7



- Fig. 59: Distribution of occupied islands in South Uist and Benbecula**
- Fig. 60: Location of South Uist duns and castles mentioned in Chapter 7**
- Fig. 61: Examples of re-used duns in South Uist**
- Fig. 62: Examples of western seaboard duns re-used in the medieval period**
- Fig. 63: Examples of western seaboard crannogs re-used in the medieval period**
- Fig. 64: Dun Mhuirchaidh**
- Fig. 65: Macewen's Castle**
- Fig. 66: Dun Ringill**
- Fig. 67: Dun Cnoc a' Bhuidhe**
- Fig. 68: Duns, churches, assembly sites and island dwellings in Gairloch**
- Fig. 69: Resource viewsheds of medieval duns in South Uist**
- Fig. 70: Relationship between beacon and dun in Colonsay**
- Fig. 71: Norse period castles in Orkney and Caithness**
- Fig. 72: Detail from Mercator of 'Borg'**
- Fig. 73: Caisteal Calabhaigh**
- Fig. 74: Junction of tower and curtain walls at Caisteal Calabhaigh**
- Fig. 75: Caisteal Bhuirgh**
- Fig. 76: Dun Raouill**
- Fig. 77: Dun Raouill and Eilean an Tigh**
- Fig. 78: Aerial photograph of Dun Raouill and Eilean an Tigh**
- Fig. 79: Relationship of Cille Donnain monument complex**
- Fig. 80: Relationship of Finlaggan monument complex**
- Fig. 81: Feasting in Gaelic Ireland**
- Fig. 82: Relationship of Cille Bhanain and Loch an Duin Mhoir monument complex**
- Fig. 83: Island dwellings on Loch an Duin Mhoir**
- Fig. 84: Relationship of monument complexes around Tobha Mor, Dreumasdal and Stadhlaigearraidh**
- Fig. 85: Relationship of Dun Mhuirchaidh and Teampull Chaluim Chille**
- Fig. 86: Detail from Bald of place-names at northern end of Loch Bì**
- Fig. 87: Detail from Barlett of gallows upon a crannog**
- Fig. 88: Stone of Judgement in Barra**
- Fig. 89: Stone of Judgement in Beárnaraigh**
- Fig. 90: Detail from Bald of Beárnaraigh, and relationship of monuments there**
- Fig. 91: Relationship of duns, cilles and assembly sites in Colonsay**
- Fig. 92: Alasdair Crotach's tomb recess, Roghadal**
- Fig. 93: Teampull na Trionaid, Cairinis**
- Fig. 94: Teampull Mhìcheil, Griomasaigh**
- Fig. 95: Tomb recess at Cille Donnain, Elgg**
- Fig. 96: Lancet windows at Teampull Mhoire, Hoghmor**
- Fig. 97: Comparative Gothic church plans**
- Fig. 98: Eye Church, Lewis**
- Fig. 99: Oval buildings at Teampull Chaluim Chille, Benbecula**
- Fig. 100: Location of western seaboard castles and duns**
- Fig. 101: Plan and section of Kisimul Castle, Barra**
- Fig. 102: Caisteal Tioram**
- Fig. 103: Phases of building at Caisteal Tioram**
- Fig. 104: Mingarry Castle**
- Fig. 105: Representations of castles in West Highland sculpture**
- Fig. 106: Dunvegan Castle in 1790**
- Fig. 107: Plan of Breachacha Castle, Coll**

- Fig. 108: Ardtornish Castle and outbuildings**
- Fig. 109: Dun Ara**
- Fig. 110: Aros Castle and outbuildings**
- Fig. 111: Outbuildings at Eilean Tioram**
- Fig. 112: Location of duns, crannogs and churches mentioned in Chapter 10**
- Fig. 113: Eilean Bheagram**
- Fig. 114: Aerial photograph of Eilean Bheagram**
- Fig. 115: Table of the date of document issuings in the *Black Book of Taymouth***
- Fig. 116: Location of sites around Loch Tay**
- Fig. 117: Detail from Pont of the west end of Loch Tay**
- Fig. 118: Dun an Sticir**
- Fig. 119: Eilean Loch an Eilean, Rothlemurchus**
- Fig. 120: Islands in Loch Gorme and Loch Sgoltaire**
- Fig. 121: Am Priosan**
- Fig. 122: Islands in Loch Glashan**
- Fig. 123: Table of hall sizes**
- Fig. 124: Graph of hall sizes**
- Fig. 125: Comparative plans of western-seaboard hall-houses and tower-houses**
- Fig. 126: Dun Ban, North Uist**
- Fig. 127: Caisteal Mhorair, Lewis**
- Fig. 128: Detail from Blaeu of Dun Raouill**
- Fig. 129: Comparison of Blaeu's duns around Ormacleit and identified duns**
- Fig. 130: Dun Duchasaich**
- Fig. 131: Loch an Eilean, Baghasdal**
- Fig. 132: Stack Islands**
- Fig. 133: Caisteal a' Bhreabhair**
- Fig. 134: Hut site near Caisteal a' Bhreabhair**
- Fig. 135: Sinclair's Castle, Barra**
- Fig. 136: Later structure and finds from Dun Cuier, Barra**
- Fig. 137: Resource-viewsheds from Caisteal Bhuirgh and Eilean Bheagram**
- Fig. 138: Detail from Bald of lochs around Dreumasdal and Tobha Beag**
- Fig. 139: Detail from Blaeu of Caisteal Bhuirgh's environs**
- Fig. 140: Detail from Bald of Caisteal Bhuirgh's environs**
- Fig. 141: Resource-viewshed from Kisimul Castle**
- Fig. 142: Route between Caisteal Bhuirgh and the Minch**
- Fig. 143: Medieval duns in Benbecula**
- Fig. 144: Dun Aonais, Loch Olabhat, Benbecula**
- Fig. 145: Ormacleit Castle**
- Fig. 146: Cille Bhrighde House**
- Fig. 147: Location of excavated settlements mentioned in Chapter 11**
- Fig. 148: Location of settlement shown on Blaeu's map**
- Fig. 149: Table of *bailtean* size on Bald's map**
- Fig. 150: Late Medieval buildings at An Udail**
- Fig. 151: Gearraidh Bhalteas**
- Fig. 152: Machair Mheadhanach**
- Fig. 153: Cille Donnain and 'Totenamaekan'**
- Fig. 154: Investigated sites in South Uist**
- Fig. 155: Medieval pottery from South Uist**
- Fig. 156: Geophysics results from Sites 96 and 97**
- Fig. 157: Geophysics results from, and trench locations at, Site 138**



- Fig. 158: Metalwork from Machair Mheadhanach**
- Fig. 159: Medieval arrowhead from Machair Mheadhanach**
- Fig. 160: Medieval pottery from An Udail**
- Fig. 161: Medieval pottery from Finlaggan**
- Fig. 162: Medieval pottery from Ulster**
- Fig. 163: Medieval pottery from the Isle of Man**
- Fig. 164: Medieval pottery from Breachacha Castle**
- Fig. 165: Medieval pottery from Gunna**
- Fig. 166: Medieval pottery from North Uist, Coll and Barra**
- Fig. 167: Medieval pottery from Guinnerso, Lewis**
- Fig. 168: Medieval pottery from Freswick, Caithness**
- Fig. 169: Medieval houses in North Uist**
- Fig. 170: A medieval house in Griomasaigh**
- Fig. 171: Medieval houses in Gunna, Achnahaird Sands and Guinnerso**
- Fig. 172: The sixteenth-century Finlaggan *baile***
- Fig. 173: Shielings in Barra**
- Fig. 174: Medieval Irish Creaghts**
- Fig. 175: Medieval Gaelic Irish houses**
- Fig. 176: Distribution of South Uist settlements mentioned in Chapter 12**
- Fig. 177: Distribution of North Uist sites mentioned in the Chapter 12**
- Fig. 178: Distribution of shielings in central South Uist**
- Fig. 179: Examples of shielings in South Uist**
- Fig. 180: Buail' Ormacleit**
- Fig. 181: Relationship between Ormacleit township and Buail' Ormacleit**

**1.1 Introduction**

The archaeology of South Uist throughout the medieval period is one of dynamic development and change. This can only be fully understood by incorporating a wide range of evidence from documentary and archaeological sources. A holistic, landscape approach that takes in the full corpus of available archaeological data allows a valuable understanding of medieval societies and lordships to be developed. It is then possible to witness the impact of Norse, European and Gaelic ideas about how society and lordships should be constructed upon Hebridean communities, and how they reacted and adapted to these influences.

The study of medieval archaeology in Scotland, in both the Highlands and Lowlands, has barely progressed beyond that summarised by Yeoman in 1991 and 1995. The medieval period is occasionally addressed when it cannot be avoided as part of landscape or regional studies, but often the evidence is marginalised in favour of earlier and later material. In part this state of affairs results from a lack of visibility in the archaeological record. However, a paradoxical situation has occurred: as there have been few attempts to draw together the corpus of available data and interpret it, medieval archaeology tends to be further ignored because it cannot be fitted into a pre-established intellectualised framework and many features remain unrecognised as being medieval in date. This lack of recognition is combined with a trend amongst archaeologists to regard medieval studies as the realm of historians, and archaeological scholarship continues to be biased towards prehistoric and/or more visible remains (e.g. industrial archaeology). Whilst there have been attempts to redress this balance (see Morrison 2000) the main impetus of work has gone under the banner of Medieval or Later Rural Settlement (MoLRS). Unfortunately, rural settlement has been interpreted as low-status vernacular housing, rather than incorporating the full spread of medieval monuments. Furthermore, by amalgamating medieval remains with later ones these studies have again been dominated

by the visible record, which is primarily late eighteenth and nineteenth century. Even where intensive programs of survey and excavation have been employed the medieval period largely remains an enigma (see summary in Lelong 2003). Dodgshon (1993a, 421) pre-empted this lack of recovery by noting that the *baile* (the predominant semi-nucleated settlement form in the Highlands and Islands immediately prior to the Clearances) was an entirely new settlement pattern established at the end of the Middle Ages. As a result the earlier medieval pattern was unlikely to have been located underneath eighteenth-century remains and was to be found elsewhere. Despite the value of Dodgshon's work, he was not an archaeologist and the potential of an archaeological approach in locating earlier settlement was not explored. Subsequent studies have continued in limiting their work to low-status settlement, ignoring the rest of the medieval archaeological monument record. A full picture of medieval Hebridean society can only be gained when all the features of the medieval landscape (patterns of tax assessments, low-status settlements, shielings, duns, castles, churches, etc.) are considered together as part of an integrated whole.

Historians of medieval northern and western Scotland have begun to incorporate archaeology into their studies (e.g. McDonald 1997, 234-251; Oram 2000, 218-233), but they tend to concentrate on the monumental: castles and monasteries, and have not developed a critical understanding of the archaeological record, often relying on traditional interpretations of how monuments functioned. Nevertheless, it is only historians who have begun to study the internal structure of medieval Highland lordships (e.g. see volume edited by Boardman & Ross 2003), although the nature of their evidence leads to a preponderance towards a top down perspective. Defining Hebridean and/or Highland lordships as specifically 'Gaelic' has some problems as elite culture in Scotland (north of the Forth) was only polarised between a Lowland and Highland dichotomy from the fourteenth century onwards (Barrow 1989; Cowan 1998; Broun forthcoming). Throughout most of Scotland this conceptual struggle was mediated through two conflicting social models: that of the indigenous past and one of European cultural normalisation, or 'feudalism' (Bartlett 1993, 302-03). In the Hebrides and



western seaboard two further elements influenced political and social culture: an earlier heritage inherited from being incorporated into the Norse Diaspora and a later pull towards a very non-Continental Gaelic Ireland (ibid., 214-17). The lineages which held lordship over the Uists (Fig. 1) in the Middle Ages (first the MacRuaris/Clann Ruairidh, and then the Clan Ranald/Clann Ragnail) have not been subject to a study of the internal infrastructure. Stewart's (1982) work on the Clann Ragnail is mostly concerned with the period after 1650. Nor has there been any previous work conducted on how power was structured in the Hebrides prior to the advent of the main lordships from the twelfth century onwards. This study will attempt to generate an understanding of Norse period and historical lordships. However, through the incorporation of archaeology it is not only possible to embellish and expand upon how monuments and geography were used to create and replicate power structures, but also to offer a bottom-up perspective of medieval societies, that incorporates the lower echelons of society. This position is all the more significant given that the majority of the populace were low in status.

The archaeological potential of South Uist has long been recognised and by using a broad and integrated approach it is possible to generate an understanding of wide sections of medieval Hebridean society. Whilst the bias of both documents and the increased visibility of monuments results in a general skewing of the evidence towards the nobility, it is possible through sustained fieldwork and careful documentary analysis to gain a picture of the remaining populace of medieval society. An archaeologically informed study allows the development of models of how medieval lords administered their estates and used the landscape to express their lordly and ethnic identities, amongst others. Developments in how they organised their lordships have ramifications for understanding the changing nature of Hebridean society throughout the Middle Ages.

## **1.2 Study Goals**

The primary aim of this thesis was assess and interpret the evidence for settlement, landscape and lordship in South Uist over the medieval period, which had been largely



ignored by earlier scholarship, both in terms of location and time period. The form of the archaeological evidence roughly divides the subject of study into two areas, one of the structures of power, and another of settlement morphologies and landscapes.

Additionally, a number of social, economic, political and cultural changes took place over the medieval period: the transformation of Norse period chieftaincies into a feudal society amalgamated under various lordships, followed by the development of a clan-based society. In order to focus the study the following goals were set:

- To develop an understanding of the archaeology and role of the monuments of power (churches, duns, castles and assembly sites) in the medieval landscapes of South Uist.
- To develop an understanding of the settlement morphologies and cultural landscapes of South Uist in the medieval period.
- To develop an understanding of the physical pattern and form of the medieval lordships of the Clann Ruairidh and the Clann Ragnaill.
- To develop an understanding of the physical pattern of the tax assessment systems in the medieval landscape of South Uist and interpret how that related to the pattern and distribution of hierarchies through the landscape.
- To develop an understanding of the social and cultural implications of the changing patterns in settlement, landscape and monument use in South Uist over the medieval period.

### **1.3 Methodology**

To achieve the goals stated above, and exploit the available archaeological and historical resources, three strategies of research were employed in this study: documentary research, rural settlement research and high status monument research. This thesis was originally conceived under the umbrella of the Sheffield Environmental and Archaeological Research Campaign in the Hebrides (SEARCH). Their research, and previous fieldwork undertaken by the author, meant that an awareness of the archaeological potential of the landscape of South Uist had previously been attained.

This was not the case regarding the documentary material, which proved much more extensive and worthwhile than envisaged. As a result this part of the research continued throughout the study period and analysis of the historical evidence forms a substantial part of the text and this work is document-heavy.

Original research was carried out amongst published archives and books, which although mostly well known to students of Hebridean history have largely been ignored by archaeologists working in the Isles. Additional research was carried out at unpublished archives, such as the Lord MacDonald Papers (GD221), held at Armadale Castle, Skye, the Clanranald Papers (GD201) and others at the Scottish Record Office, Edinburgh, the Carmichael Watson Papers (CWP) and Sound Archive (SA), held at the University of Edinburgh, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (SAS) library, and various archives at the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS). Sufficient funds could not be obtained to pay the tariff for research at Dunvegan Castle Library, Skye. The information gained was assimilated and integrated with the archaeological data throughout the main body of the thesis.

As part of the SEARCH program, Professor Michael Parker Pearson has identified over two hundred archaeological sites upon the machair of South Uist (forthcoming a). The vast majority of these are settlement mounds. These are created when areas on the machair are occupied and houses built either directly onto the sand, or the foundations were excavated into it. Often settlement continued in the same place for centuries. The resulting stone and turf building materials, sands compacted through regular activity, accumulated waste and midden material, etc., act as an anchor for the light shifting machair sandy soils, leading to the formation of mounds which cover and preserve abandoned building remains. On occasion whole settlements were buried in a single storm (e.g. MacFarlane 1907, 180; McKay 1980, 64). Throughout the rest of Scotland, and away from the machair in South Uist, archaeological evidence for low-status medieval settlement is almost wholly invisible. The settlement mounds in South Uist thus create an almost unique opportunity for the study of contemporary low status



settlement. Twenty-five machair sites were initially identified as possible areas of medieval settlement. Of these, permission for further research was obtained for fourteen of the sites. These were then geophysically surveyed and areas thought to be of interest were targeted for small-scale trial excavations. Two possible medieval settlement sites were identified on the cnoc-and-lochan for further excavation (further information on the methodology and results of this fieldwork is provided in the Appendix).

Higher status secular settlement in South Uist was initially identified through cartographic, historical and place-name research. Aerial photographs held at the RCAHMS and the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) South Uist office were also analysed, but those available at the RCAHMS for South Uist are largely too small scale to be useful and, although larger scale, coverage at the SNH was fairly limited. Those sites identified were nearly all in inland lochs. First, reconnaissance was carried out, this included other possible sites and other natural islands where settlement was possibly indicated by the presence of causeways or proximity to other sites. Underwater survey was carried in conjunction with Matthew Shelley (University of Edinburgh) to investigate the possibility that islands were wholly or partially artificial and to try and recover dating evidence. Where upstanding remains were identified they were surveyed. In co-operation with students from the King Alfred's College, Winchester, survey was conducted with a total station at a number of sites, and photographic survey carried out for photo rectification at a medieval tower. However, with the exception of some basic results King Alfred's College has not released the material and neither time nor funding allowed this work to be replicated. Two further sites in this group were identified on stacks in the seas around South Uist. These were visited, ground plans were surveyed and a photographic record made of the upstanding walls.

In all twenty-three weeks of fieldwork have been conducted in South Uist, whilst reconnaissance was carried out at countless sites, numerous sites have been subject to a measured survey, geophysical survey was conducted over forty-nine square metres and

ninety-eight test pits have been excavated over one hundred and eighty square metres of ground.

Integration of the fieldwork results with evidence derived from documentary sources also included the synthesis of earlier archaeological work, and antiquarian records conducted from elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands. This material has not previously been brought together to create models of social, political and cultural developments along the western seaboard in the medieval period.

#### **1.4 Chronological Definitions**

In order to maintain some focus and depth within this study, the medieval period has been defined as the period between c. 1000 and c. 1650. However, the form and nature of the evidence, which is strongest for the Norse period and the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, necessitates breaking the thesis into two period-defined sections: the Norse period and the Late Medieval period. This not only allows the structures of Norse period society and landscapes to be fully realised as a defined entity, but also provides a substantiated background for the changes of the later Middle Ages, and the transition into the better evidenced period after 1600. For the purposes of this thesis the term Early Medieval regarding the Hebrides has been avoided: what some archaeologists refer to as the Pictish period has been classified Late Iron Age, and the following period (c. 800 – c. 1000) as the Viking Age. Norse Period has been used to refer to the time between c. 1000 to 1266. All these names possess presuppositions about the cultural affiliations of the people that lived in the Hebrides and must therefore be used with caution. The date of 1266 reveals the inherent problems in using cultural terminology. It has been chosen throughout previous scholarship because this is the date when the Hebrides were ceded from the Norwegian to Scottish kingdoms: however, use of this date suggests that there was some sudden whole, or large-scale change in Hebridean society, either ethnically, politically or culturally. This does not appear to have been the case. As Lamb and Turner point out, rather than being driven by local identities, much



of the Norse period “is really the High Middle-Ages in all their glory” (1991, 168). The period after 1266 is referred to here as the Late Medieval period, although the period up until 1400 may also be considered to be a continuation of the High Middle Ages.

Nevertheless, Pictish, Viking Age and Norse period have been retained for structural clarity. Equally problematic is defining the end of the Middle Ages. Crawford (1967a) has noted that the political and economic developments that describe the beginnings of the Post-Medieval period do not occur in the Western Isles until significantly later than in England. Additionally, it was some time before the impact of political, cultural and economic aspects of the Reformation were felt in southern Outer Hebrides. The seventeenth century has traditionally been seen to be a watershed in Hebridean social and economic history, demarcating the end of the Middle Ages, and the landscape established at this time appears to have continued until the Clearances of the nineteenth century. The pre-Clearance landscape is better provenanced with documentary and surviving archaeological evidence and this provides valuable information on the changes that must have taken place between the more visible landscapes of the Norse period and the end of the Middle Ages. In order to tap into this evidence an arbitrary but convenient cut off date of c. 1650 has been chosen for this thesis. This also conforms with the date chosen for the end of the Middle Ages in Gaelic Ireland (Duffy *et al.* (eds.) 2001).

## **1.5 Research Context**

The state of scholarship regarding settlement in the Highlands and Islands has recently been summarised and analysed by Dalglish (2002), and thus does not need to be fully reiterated here. He has noted the development of more recent historical archaeological studies out of earlier approaches. In the nineteenth century the pseudo-ethnological approaches of Thomas (e.g. 1860; 1868) and Mitchell (1880), and continued by Curwen (1938), emphasised a perceived economic, and thus cultural backwardness of the nineteenth-century Hebrides as a window to prehistory. Over the twentieth century this transformed to ‘folk-studies’, epitomised by I. F. Grant’s *Highland Folk Ways* (1961) and Alexander Fenton’s work (1972; 1977; 1978; 1980; 1986), which reified the details

of agricultural life in the recent past in opposition to less glamorous industrialised modern practices. However, it is perhaps worth providing a brief supplementary historiography specifically focussing on studies of the Middle Ages in the Hebrides.

Donald Gregory (1881) produced the first critical history of the Highland and Islands. He brought together a huge corpus of data, from government records, private charter chests and clan histories. It has not been surpassed in either scope or scholarship since, although this may in part be due to subsequent academic trends. Despite Skene's (1890) incorporation of Hebridean evidence in *Celtic Scotland*, his primary concerns remained in mainland Scotland. W. C. MacKenzie (1903) produced a weighty historical synthesis of historical material for the Outer Hebrides, but the text betrays a Lewis-centric interest. Like many other Hebridean historians (e.g. MacLeod n.d.) MacKenzie evidently wrestled with his conscience and failed to find a compromise between trying to express pride in Gaelic culture and a Protestant rejection of a resoundingly Catholic, Gaelic, medieval past, which by association had to be backward, ignorant and brutish. This meant a whole-hearted acceptance of late medieval government sources written from a similar political perspective, which viewed the clans as uncivilised and economically unproductive and pastoralism as an expression of lazy ungodliness. This conflict seriously undermined the validity of this period in Highland histories at times, but its usefulness cannot be ignored. I. F. Grant (1930; expanded in her analysis of the MacLeods: 1959) was perhaps the first after Gregory to produce a thorough analysis of the social, economic and political history of the Highlands and Islands. Since then, whilst Hebridean histories have formed part of the general Scottish scholarly debate, they have tended to be rather peripheral and interest largely concerned with the genealogical history of various lordships. Only very recently has this begun to be redressed, and more encompassing studies made of how medieval lordships, kindreds and society functioned: however, the number remains small. This more academic work is complimented by a number of local histories.



At the end of the seventeenth century Martin Martin was the first to conduct systematic studies of Hebridean monuments (1994, 84: in this thesis the 1994 edition will be referred to), but this work only really taken up with earnest by Victorian antiquarians. T. S. Muir's (1855) research into churches has rarely been superseded, although perhaps largely due to a lack of interest. The majority of antiquarian work was not so thorough and was mostly conducted by amateurs. Many stumbled on a significant amount of medieval material, which has been largely ignored by later archaeologists! This criticism cannot be levied at Capt. W. F. L. Thomas, who accompanied naval surveyors throughout the Isles, conducting surveys of shielings, souterrains, wheelhouses and duns, and recorded oral traditions regarding them (e.g. 1868; 1878). Thomas (1884; 1886) was also the first to realise the potential of relict tax systems for understanding past societies. His papers (held at the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Library) reveal that his work was often the product of discourse with other enthusiasts, such as M. MacPhaill, Capt. H. Otter, and Alexander Carmichael. Carmichael, better known for his interests in folklore and folksong, conducted surveys of monuments and collected and collated investigations into traditions associated with them, as well as the memories of those that had taken them apart. This material remains largely unpublished (it is held by Edinburgh University Library: Carmichael- Watson Papers – CWP). Of all the antiquarians in the Isles Erskine Beveridge (1911) has by far made the greatest contribution. His extensive survey and excavation on hundreds of sites in North Uist, coupled with historical research, was exemplary for its time and remains unparalleled. The implications of his results for an understanding of the monuments and material culture of all periods are immeasurable to this day. Whilst undeniably important, the RCAHMS 1914 survey (published in 1928) has a severe limitation. They clearly regarded more-recent (medieval and later) occupation of sites as unimportant, although it did record major medieval monuments such as churches and castles. The RCAHMS coverage of island sites were impeded by their lack of access to boats and their work is clearly influenced by the earlier studies of antiquarians, such as Carmichael.



It is only comparatively recently that medieval archaeology has matured as a discipline in Britain, and study of the Middle Ages in the Western Isles has primarily concentrated on Early Medieval Pictish and Viking Age archaeology. Late Medieval archaeology has largely been limited to the excavations of a very small number of sites and survey work that has tended to group medieval and later monuments together. A notable exception to this has been Iain Crawford's research program in North Uist. Although he is most famous for his excavations of the multi-period site at An Udail, it is obvious from the articles he has published and interim reports that this was part of a larger survey of the Uists (e.g. 1965b; 1969; 1983; 1988; Crawford & Switsur 1977). Crawford (1988, 1-4) clearly had a limited view of the potential of adopting an archaeological approach, stating that excavation was little more than a tool for dating presuppositions taken from other schools of thought. Nevertheless, he also appears to have understood the significance of his work for the later Middle Ages: "here [at An Udail] continuity gives us the opportunity to isolate for the first time the local medieval identi-kit and open the way for further work" (ibid., 23). Unfortunately his work is largely unpublished at present and the details of Late Medieval settlement have to be gleaned from summaries, and thus cannot be studied in depth. The one exception to this is Lane's (1983) study of the Late Iron Age and Viking Age pottery from An Udail. In recent years North Uist and north-west Lewis have been the subject of further research projects based at the University of Edinburgh (West of Lewis Landscape Project and the Vallay Strand Project). Both have been fairly encompassing in their scope and medieval evidence has been produced by both. Most of this research has yet to reach publication.

The historical-geographer Robert Dodgshon (1993a, 1993b, 1998) has created a watershed in archaeological approaches to the medieval and Post-Medieval periods in the Western Isles. Coupled with the first intense research of agricultural life and settlement, his realisation that rural settlement had not remained static throughout the period between the Middle Ages and the Clearances has set the agenda for subsequent and future work. Ever since, studies have attempted to discover the remains of pre-mid-eighteenth-century settlements and buildings, and struggled with how to interpret them

(see Hingley (ed.) 1993; Atkinson *et al.* (eds.) 2000; Govan (ed.) 2003). Nevertheless, the later medieval period remains marked by its paucity in archaeological evidence throughout the Highlands and Islands.

After many years of being ignored by historians and archaeologists alike, since the 1970s there has been a growth of interest in High and Late Medieval archaeology and society in Ireland. Whilst some historians have been willing to explore the document-poor world of the Gaelic and/or Gaelicised Irish (e.g. Nicholls 1972; Simms 1987a), it is only recently that archaeologists have begun to pull together an equally ephemeral corpus of evidence (e.g. O'Connor 1998; O'Keeffe 2000a; Duffy *et al.* 2001; Brady 2003). Through critical evaluation this work has huge ramifications for an understanding of Gaelic lordly archaeology and culture in Scotland, and particularly the Outer Hebrides where comparisons are immediately evident.

For some unexplained reason, unlike its neighbours, South Uist was largely ignored by antiquarians. There have been a few archaeological excavations carried out in South Uist over the twentieth century (summarised in Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a, 15-19). Nearly all were primarily concerned with prehistoric or recent remains, and the intervening period was largely ignored. In 1987 SEARCH, based at Sheffield University was established to investigate Barra and South Uist. In South Uist the project has diverged to survey and study remains of many periods, and the staff members now teach at a number of universities. As well as a number of prehistoric sites, two Viking Age and Norse period settlement sites, Cille Pheadair and Bornais, have been subject to large scale excavations by Michael Parker Pearson and Niall Sharples. Parker Pearson also carried out a valuable wide scale survey of the machair and has recovered an ever-growing number of settlement mounds, occasionally datable through pottery recovered through erosion and rabbit scrapes, and which is of particular important for this thesis (forthcoming a). At the same time Jim Symonds has conducted a campaign of research of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century structures surrounding Airigh Mhuillinn, the supposed birthplace of the Jacobite heroine Flora MacDonald. Evidence for



medieval occupation has been recovered, but in small quantities and any large scale understanding of the period remained un-addressed. The results of the SEARCH work in South Uist is largely unpublished, but a summary and overview of all the projects is presented in Parker Pearson *et al.* (2004).

## **1.6 Theoretical Approaches**

Landscape archaeology has now become so established as discourse that it does not need to be fully described or dissected here (see Tuan 1979; Bender (ed.) 1993; Ingold 1993; Tilley 1994; Fleming 1996; Knapp 1997; Muir 1999). A landscape approach may be understood as one that incorporates many strands of evidence and binds them together to create a holistic understanding of all its component parts. The physical and natural environment provides a backdrop that influences, facilitates and limits economic human action. In turn, humans bring their own socially, culturally and ideological informed desires and preconceptions of how the environment is experienced and economic resources should be exploited. Additionally, humans carry with them models about the forms of monument architecture that should be employed in organising and living in a landscape. These responses and reactions create a cultural landscape that can be read archaeologically. For the archaeologist, remains make it possible to interpret the societies that created them. Traditionally, archaeological discourse has tried to understand singular monument types (e.g. tombs, settlement, castles, churches, duns, etc.), and as a result some highly valuable interpretative skills have been developed. However, this has hampered an overall understanding of the social and cultural discourses that resulted in the creation of monuments, with different strands of research developing contrasting models for the same period. A landscape approach allows these restrictions to be overcome as it synthesises data relevant to all the component types. Through analysis of how people move through, encountered and perceived the landscape and its monuments this approach not only encourages the investigation of each monument type, but through studying landscape setting, view-sheds and route-ways it is possible to investigate the spatial relationship between different types and ages of



monuments. The mediation between each monument form and their spatial relations with each other and landscape allows an interpretation of the social structures of past cultures to be created, which compliment and enhance site-centred approaches. Vertical, or hierarchical social stratifications are often the most easy relations to interpret, but landscape archaeology also allows horizontal relationships to be discerned, where society was divided and bound along lines of age, kin, lineage and gender. Each social subgroup would have situated themselves in the landscape differently, experiencing and interpreting elements within the landscape according to their position in society: this poly-vocal understanding allows for a multiplicity of often conflicting interpretations of monuments and landscape to be achieved, all of which may be equally valid. This theoretically un-restrictive and inclusive landscape approach is as relevant for studies of the prehistory of Polynesian islands as it is for the medieval Hebrides.

Austin and Thomas have accused medieval archaeologists of uncritical acceptance of the problems and narratives set by medieval historians. They claimed that, as historians were dependent on documents that were created by and for the elite, their work was inherently biased towards the model of society that the upper echelons of society wished to portray, or which was exposed to being taxed and/or regulated by them. Such perspectives are also usually resoundingly masculine. The world of the poor and undocumented (which are often one and the same) are lost to the historian but can be recovered through archaeological analysis. As a result they called for a total abandonment of use of documents and for an independent purely archaeologically driven agenda to be developed in its stead (Austin 1990; Austin & Thomas 1990). Whilst this work reminded archaeologists of the value and potential of their resource, to remove a whole set of data from an already limited corpus of evidence is highly, and unnecessarily, restrictive. Careful use of documentary evidence complements the archaeological record, and can, importantly, be used to interpret monuments and landscapes in a way previously ignored by historians, largely unconcerned with the geographies of society and material culture. This is especially pertinent in an area where there has been little serious historical synthesis of the limited available documentation,

such as the medieval Hebrides. Through the combination of archaeological information with various archive materials, Simms's comments about studying medieval Gaelic Irish history holds all the more redolence:

*The essential challenge in writing the history of Gaelic Ireland is to utilise threads of evidence from many disparate sources and to weave from them a coherent pattern and a continuous narrative. With patience and scepticism it becomes possible to distil a few guarded certainties from a mass of flamboyant uncertainties. The remainder, instead of being discarded totally, can serve as evidence for ideals, aspirations, and attitudes of mind. Where the source-material is exiguous, it would be criminal to allow any of it to go to waste (1987a, 9).*

The biases of the authors of each set of historical sources and the limitations of the data which they had access to must be acknowledged. However, archaeological material culture (whether ceramics imported or formed locally, building styles, settlement forms or cultural landscapes) is equally the result of social interpretations and perceptions of the self (e.g. Hodder 1982; Driscoll 1988). Through critical awareness of the shortcomings of each data-set, by blending information gained from these resources it is possible to see beyond the constrictions of either, and see how the medieval populace interacted with monuments and the landscape: their differing mentalities and agendas may also be revealed.

Both the historical and archaeological resources specifically available for South Uist can be scant, and information for how medieval society dealt with some forms of monuments has to draw upon information from elsewhere in the Hebrides or Highlands. This polarising of information gained from across the western *Gàidhealtachd* to a regionally defined unit raises issues about how relative the data may be. This problem is compounded by the fact that while medieval Norse or Gaelic society may have had some



normative functions, the differences between islands and local reflections and reactions to Norse/Gaelic social ideals may have been starkly different. For example throughout the nineteenth century South Uist was marked out from its immediate neighbour to the south (Barra) as well as other nearby islands (e.g. Lewis and Skye) in its house-styles and general poverty (MacDonald 1810, 94, 792-92; MacCulloch 1824: III, 8, 13-14; Cumming 1883, 128-29, 302-02, 306). Neilson's report (1755) also reveals differences of construction techniques in vernacular architecture throughout regions on the western mainland. Some of these comments are supported archaeologically (Branigan & Merrony 2000). This evidence highlights that there were localised cultures, and that there are some problems in assuming that the archaeology of South Uist is representative of a wider, archaeologically visible, medieval Gaelic or Hebridean culture. However, it would not be fortuitous in an area where so little work has been done to ignore data gained from elsewhere. An awareness of reactions in South Uist to specific culturally informed models necessitates creating a narrative that varies between a broad-brush approach that looks at medieval Norse/Gaelic society in general and the specific local details.

A further driving force behind studies of regions within the *Gàidhealtachd* has been attitudes towards Gaels and Gaelic culture. After centuries of being forced into the background the objectivity of many earlier historians has been clouded by an inferiority complex driven by reactions to old beliefs in the backwardness of Gaels, and many have been guilty of over-compensating for, or over-glorifying a Gaelic past (see Withers 1988, 59-61). As a result many academic historians have ignored the serious information contained within earlier work, and it is only recently that an interest in, and an inclusion of, Gaelic perspectives in studies of the medieval period in west coast has taken off. This study will attempt to follow in this later tradition.

Aside from a general landscape approach, complimented by historical evidence and cultural traditions, there was no theoretical agenda laid out at the beginning of research for this thesis. As with studies of medieval landscapes in Gaelic Ireland, it was not



possible to fit this study into an already established archaeological discourse, with its own related assimilations of raw data and pre-defined theories, debates and issues. As Breen noted:

*The study area represents a 'blank canvas' in terms of our understanding of this area in the later medieval period. Prior to the commencement of this study we essentially knew nothing about the nature of the landscape, the lifeways of the people who lived and worked in it and its broader socio-economic and political contexts. It is then very difficult to theorise about something we basically know nothing about (2003, 3).*

The primary phase of the work addressed here was then designed to identify what remains there were in South Uist, collect and collate information relating to them and only then address ways in which the available evidence could then be interpreted. Within such a context Breen (2003, 3) has also outlined the realisation that although objectivity in interpretation is an ideal that should be strived for, any work is the result of the political and cultural biases of its author. Traditionally, within Scottish historiography, historians have been fairly open about revealing their personal agendas. It is possible that this was a continuation of medieval literary practice: as early as the fourteenth century John Barbour started his 'biography' of 'the Bruce' with a disclaimer about his own objectivity and shortcomings (Duncan 1997, 46–47). Whether or not directly inspired by medieval Scottish academia, it is usual for a reader of modern historical publications to be made aware of the author's religious and political leanings at the outset. As a result of this writer's background a broadly left wing and a-religious agenda will undoubtedly influence the following work.

The terms 'feudal', 'feudalised' and 'feudalisation' have lately fallen out of favour amongst historians. Interpreting the term in its purely legalistic form, and through the debunking of any mistaken belief in a unified European system, Reynolds (1994) has

called for a wholehearted rejection of the use of the word from historical discourse. However, the term retains some relevance in a less specifically legal forum, and an anthropological and/or geographical use of the term is worth utilising. The alternative is to resort to a contrived synonym, such as Wolf's 'tributary mode of production' (1982, 80-83). This term was coined to remove western and medieval connotations from studies of non-western modern societies characterised by a three-tier state-society of an elite, presiding over a class of surplus takers, ranked over subjugated primary producers. It was valid within that academic context, but this thesis is concerned with a western medieval society that was arguably following the Orcadian earldom into statehood (see Barrett *et al.* n.d.) prior to its incorporation into the Scottish state. Additionally, Bartlett (1982) has demonstrated that although the legal structures differed throughout Europe, European medieval society was rapidly and deliberately converging towards a unified structural model that was demonstrated and expressed in similar normative ways. Alongside a confluence in a militarised aristocracy and Roman Catholicism, this can also be seen in the adoption of architectural styles: Romanesque and then Gothic churches and castles. Equally, this European model is visible in regulated localised geographies throughout the continent, although the specific forms of that regulation changed according to regional custom from area to area (Dodgshon 1987, 166-92). Thus, whilst Hebridean lordships may differ from that in central Germany, they are both local interpretations and reactions to the same medieval ideals about lordship, manifested in similar but differing material culture and use of written charters adapted to their localised context (e.g. see Boardman 2003, 96-97). It has long been stated that adoption of material culture cannot be simplistically equated with acceptance of a cultural model. Nevertheless, it is clear in this instance that once removed of its restrictive legalistic interpretation, the word 'feudal' is useful shorthand to express a particular social model that was prevalent in the Middle Ages, and resulted in a specific geography, attitude to documents and an adoption of monument typologies.



## **1.7 Layout of Thesis**

Given the nature of the approach taken within this thesis, before the results of the work can be addressed, it is necessary to provide a brief analysis of the available source material (Section 1.8), and also discuss the landscape of South Uist (Section 1.9). This is not only to show the physical resources of the island's environment, but also how they changed through time. Additionally, route-ways through and around the island is discussed. More importantly, however, this section explores how the environment affected human experiences and perceptions of the landscape and those resources.

The main body of the thesis is presented in three sections: Section 1 - an analysis of the historical evidence for West Highland and Uist society and lordship; Section 2 - the Norse period (c. 1000 – c. 1266); and Section 3 - the Late Medieval period (c. 1266 – c. 1650). Whilst the latter two sections are neatly divided by historical event (the Treaty of Perth), this date also coincidentally demarcates a change in the nature and use of the available evidence.

Section 1 lays out the documentary evidence available for the Hebrides, analysing both the kindreds who held lordship over the Uists (Chapter 2) and the organisation of land divisions that facilitated taxation there (Chapter 3). However, these provide more than a historical backdrop to the archaeology: they show the social infrastructures and geographical frameworks that supported large dispersed Hebridean lordships and more local communities. Throughout, changes in cultural approaches to seigniorial right and political society are also reviewed.

Section 2 dissects the Norse period evidence into several areas. In Chapter 5 the archaeological evidence for settlement, farming and economy is presented and situated within the cultural landscapes of the Norse period. Each type of monument associated with the Norse period elite (Chapter 6 - churches, Chapter 7 - duns and assembly sites) is



then studied. The relationship of these monument forms with each other, the landscape and political structures is considered throughout these chapters.

Chapter 8, the introduction to the Late Medieval Section 3, presents a historical summary of evidence for churches. Added to this is a brief analysis of how poets and bailies fit into the social and geographical structures of later medieval chiefdoms. The remainder of Section 3 focuses on two prongs of evidence: the monuments of the elite and rural settlement. The elite structures are examined separately as castles (Chapter 9) and duns (Chapter 10) and then related to their landscapes and the structures of lordship throughout western Scotland: this evidence is then brought together in specific reference to the changing nature and pattern of lordship in South Uist (Section 10.8). In Chapter 11 what evidence there is for later medieval settlement is then presented. Possible reasons for its elusiveness and its ramifications for understanding developments in Late Medieval Hebridean society are also evaluated. The settlement pattern as it appears at the very end of the Middle Ages, which continues into the following centuries is then placed into its social and economic contexts (Chapter 12). In these chapters developments into the eighteenth century are utilised to show changes that had taken place between the end of the Norse period and the end of the Medieval period. A summary of the results of fieldwork conducted into Late Medieval settlement is presented in the Appendix.

## **1.8 Documentary Sources**

### **1.8.1 *Poetry***

Simms (1987b) has been most active in demonstrating the value of Gaelic poetry for understanding document-impoverished later Medieval Ireland. Poetry has similar ramifications for document-poor Gaelic Scotland (Thomson 1974; MacInnes 1978, 1981). Whilst a little may be made of historical events, the poetry's greatest contribution is to describe places, buildings and landscapes and attitudes and perceptions to them.

Unfortunately, the corpus of Scottish poetry is highly limited, a mere fraction of the contemporary Gaelic Irish material. After the ecclesiastical poems of the Columban era (Clancy & Markus 1995; Clancy 1998, 95-113, 116-120) there is only a handful of surviving texts from Hebrideans in either the Gaelic or Norse tradition (ibid., 148-49, 158-64, 288-94, 302-05, 309). The corpus is so reduced that the majority is preserved in a single manuscript, the sixteenth-century *Book of the Dean of Lismore*. Although much of its contents were composed in Argyll and Ireland, they are equally relevant for the Later Middle Ages in the Hebrides (Watson 1937; Thomson 1974, 20). It is only from the seventeenth century that the data-set greatly expands, with the work of numerous Hebridean poets including: the Clann Mhuirich poet lineage, based in South Uist, MacMhaighstir Alasdair, Mary MacLeod, Iain Luim, John MacCodrum, Roderick Morison (the Blind Harper), and Eachann Bacach (MacDonald & MacDonald 1911, lviii, 342-43; Thomson 1963; 1970; 1976; 1977; Greene 1968; Black 1973; 1978; MacDonald & MacDonald 1924; Carmichael-Watson 1934; MacKenzie 1964; Matheson 1938; Matheson 1970; Ó Baoill 1979). During the 1600s and 1700s the formulaic Classical tradition characteristic of the professional poet class gradually gave way to a vernacular tradition as schools of Gaelic learning declined. Elements of medieval and early modern poems were often preserved in folksong recorded in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most notably by Carmichael (1928-71), but also by others (e.g. Shaw 1955; Campbell & Collinson 1969; 1977; 1981; Fergusson 1978).

Although often composed slightly later than the events they describe many poems contain important and accurate records of historical events. However, a small number are aspiration composed to encourage deeds which did not come to pass (Simms 1987b, 64). The most illustrative incidence of this is a poem, written circa 1310, which celebrates a successful Clann Suibhne attack on Castle Sween, an event which almost certainly never took place. This poem is nevertheless useful as the text contains large bodies of imported material and motif from earlier poems (Meek 1998). This incorporation of earlier material is a common feature of Gaelic poetic tradition until the nineteenth century (Campbell & Collinson 1969-81: III, 18-33). Throughout the



Classical and medieval texts there is an adherence to formulae, stock motifs and common imagery. Many poems are hyperbole that used recognised themes to praise chiefs in both elegy and eulogy: these conventions were reciprocated in satire which turned the established conventions on their head (MacInnes 1978). The inclusion of earlier motifs and stock phrases in later poems is important, as they suggest that some ideals had not become wholly redundant, but remained redolent with meaning for their audience. In some cases it is obvious that these images encourage a reverence for the passing of the old order, but whether these images recount an accurate record of the past or an idealised view of a golden age has to be carefully discerned. Although many Classical poems are concerned with romance and nature, later poets appear to have felt more confident in directly expressing and exploring emotional reactions to the world around them and their work often contains their feelings to the environment, landscapes, architecture and people.

Unlike modern day poetry, which is often private inner speculation, medieval Gaelic poetry was a public affair. Although composed by, and intended for consumption by, members of the Gaelic nobility, or *fine*, the poet and his stanzas had to be credible to a contemporary audience. Additionally, although many poems have a propagandist slant, poets traditionally occupied a position which allowed them to criticise the chief and his policies. That being the case, it seems likely that Gaelic poetry provides a reliable window into the mentality of the *fine*: their wants and desires, their ideal structure of society and their perception of the world.

### 1.8.2 *Clan Histories and Genealogies*

The genealogies and histories composed within the *Gàidhealtachd* provide observations of how Gaels understood and often manipulated their past to create identities for themselves, both as a Gaelic collective and as individual kingroups. Additionally, these documents were often born out of attempts by the nobility to carve out a new place for themselves within contemporary culture and politics. Early examples often betray a



reaction to the de-Gaelicisation of Scottish society (see Barrow 1989; Broun forthcoming), while later ones tried to justify their place in Early Modern Britain (MacGregor 2002, 216-18). Most, however, contain further potential information for understanding cultural developments within Hebridean lordships.

A number of medieval genealogies survive, the most important of these for the Clann Ruairidh, Clann Domhnaill, Clann Ragnaill and the Lordship of the Isles is MS1467 (Skene 1890: 458-90). Valuable recent research has attempted to deconstruct its various components and interpret how the document came to be assembled. Most importantly this work has implications for understanding political changes within the wider Clann Domhnaill over the fifteenth century (Ó Baoill 1988; MacGregor 2000). Over time the majority of kindreds deliberately manipulated, and often fabricated genealogies, filling in gaps and inserting ancestry that tied them to mythical heroic ancestors and/or the most influential contemporary lineages. Whilst some mythical progenitors were drawn from Early Irish myth and legend, and their incorporation into genealogies designed to demonstrate the medieval kindred's Gaelic credentials, others attempted to provide legitimisation for medieval lords' expansionist strategies and links to contemporary royal policies (Sellar 1981a; Gillies 1994; 1997). Thus, while the Clann Domhnaill indulged in a program of air-brushing out Somerled's Norse ancestry and emphasizing links to the High Kings of Ireland, the Clann Caimbeul tied themselves to Anglo-Norman lordship and King Arthur to partly justify their expansion into British Strathclyde and the south east Highlands (Sellar 1973). Nevertheless, Sellar's analysis of MS1467 has emphasised the comparative accuracy of its Clann Domhnaill and Clann Ragnaill genealogies (1986, 12). This accuracy, combined with Ó Baoill's (1988) and MacGregor's (2000) work, means that the issues raised by the genealogies regarding identity and political developments can be explored profitably. In this thesis the genealogy will be shown to greatly enhance our understanding of the geographical organisation of the Clann Ragnaill lordship.

It is widely recognised that the richest and most informative clan histories are the seventeenth-century *Red Book of Clanranald* (RBC) and the *History of the MacDonalds* (HP: I, 5-72). Both concern the Clann Ruairidh and Clann Raghnaill and are directly linked to the region addressed here.

The so-called *Red Book* was written by Niall MacMhuirich, one of a line of hereditary poets and *seanchaidhean* who had once served the Lords of the Isles, but had come under the patronage of the Clann Raghnaill during the mid-sixteenth century (Thomson 1963). Niall's text is clearly a product of this patronage, mostly reflecting a Clann Raghnaill bias, but it also frequently emphasises the virtues of a wider Clann Domhnaill, and by association Gaelic, solidarity (Gillies forthcoming). The *Red Book* is an amalgamation of earlier sources and documents, which it was expected to compliment, but these do not survive. Although its author had been fully trained in the Classical tradition the *Red Book* broke new ground on several levels. Firstly, it blended genealogy, poetry, legend, oral history and analytic *seanchas*, and secondly it was not intended for a public airing: instead, it was targeted for individual reading. The text also contains some near contemporary remembrances of the 'English' Civil War (Gillies 1996; forthcoming).

In contrast, the *History* is much more of a unified, although often disjointed, narrative. Like the *Red Book* it is likely that the text was an amalgamation of earlier sources, but it is much more emotive and opinionated, and contains considerably more oral history and tradition (Gillies 1996, 39; forthcoming). It was composed by one of Niall's contemporaries, Hugh MacDonald/Aodh Beaton, who is thought to have been one of the classically educated Beaton family, hereditary physicians to the Clann Domhnaill of Sleat and living in North Uist (Bannerman 1998, 17-20). Whilst the *History* is heavier in historical narrative than the *Red Book*, Hugh's text is relatively detailed in describing the late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century feuding in the Uists.

The later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century information in these two texts are probably fairly accurate, containing near contemporary personal memories, and are at least



accurate in that they record the perspective of those available for interview or conversation with Niall MacMhuirich or Hugh MacDonald. Prior to the seventeenth century, the historical accuracy of these two texts is hard to ascertain. It is possible that some information was derived from contemporary annals (Gillies 1996, 41), so although the personal perspectives of the annalists must be taken into account, the events they describe probably took place. Additionally, Niall tried to downplay violence in favour of church building (ibid., 31), and emphasised incidents that provided less opportunity for criticism of his patrons. Thus, whilst overall coverage may have been compromised, accuracy need not have been. Without knowledge of either author's sources or how they approached the use of them it is difficult to interpret the historicity of the remainder of the texts. Bannerman highlighted the fact that events described in both documents were frequently confirmed by other evidence (1977, 10), a belief that has found support within MacCoinnich's study of the *History* regarding events on the mainland (2003, 181). Nevertheless, many historians have felt uncomfortable in using these works in the absence of corroboration from other sources. This reluctance is particularly relevant regarding earlier events, such as those relating to Somerled and his contemporaries (e.g. see Duncan & Brown 1957, 195; McDonald 1997, 47). Whilst caution is justified such an approach can be restrictive; here I will utilise those elements of the tradition, subject to critical evaluation of their historic status.

Contemporary recognition of the influence of these two great works can be found in Martin Martin's book (1994, 250): however, over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a number of other clan (or genealogical) histories were committed to paper (MacGregor 2002). Those of importance for this work include two for the Clann Caimbeul - *Ane Accompt of the Genealogie of the Campbells* (HP: II, 70-111) and *The Genealogical and Historicall Account of the Family of Craignish* (Campbell 1893); two regarding the Clann Coinnich/MacKenzies - *The Genealogie of the Surname of M'Kenzie* (HP: II, 5-68) and the *History of the Family of MacKenzie* (Fraser 1876, 462-513); the Frazers - *The Wardlaw MS* (Fraser 1905); the Clann 'ic Rath/MacRaes - *Genealogy of the MacRas* (HP: I, 198-241); and the Earls of Sutherland - *A Genealogical*



*History of the Earldom of Sutherland* (Gordon 1813). To this list may tentatively also be added a text concerning one incident in the history of the Clann Leoid/MacLeods of Lewis *The Ewill Trowbles of the Lewes* (HP: I, 265-79), which although not technically a history as it is concerned with a single event was composed in a similar vein, the *Memoirs of Sir Ewen Cameron of Locheil* (Cameron 1842), *The Black Book of Taymouth* (Innes 1855) and the *Banatyne MS*, which is a particularly late example, probably composed in the early nineteenth century (Grant 1959, 21). The author of this latter document's dependence on unpublished material, Classical verse and oral history differentiate this work from its contemporaries, such as the anonymous *Historical and Genealogical Account of the Clan or Family of Clan Donald* (1819).

Gordon's (1813) work stands out from the other clan histories, as it is redolent with Stuart Protestant and Capitalist political polemic and quotes government documents almost verbatim. However, like the rest of this body of material it leans heavily on oral tradition and includes extensive passages copied from earlier (now lost) documentation (MacGregor 2002, 208). In addition to the possible inaccuracies and recent-interpretation inherent possibly in oral tradition (see below), many of these later histories do not rise to the high levels of scholarship of the *Red Book* and the *History of the MacDonalds*, and are marred by frequent scribal errors and outright clan propaganda (MacGregor 2002, 206-08). Some histories even stray far into fantasy regarding both genealogies and historical events. Events and characters in particular often contain folk-motifs (MacInnes 1992a).

Whilst the use of earlier sources may lend a historicity to these later histories, they often reflect the political needs and desires at the time of their authorship, including the need for these historians to explain contemporary events. With a few exceptions, it seems highly unlikely that for most of the authors of the clan histories there was no reason to demonstrate the use of certain places and archaeological sites by their respective clans. In most cases they had lost their resonance for their readers. Thus it seems unlikely that they came to be utilised in the fabrication of later clan geographies. Whilst reasons for

use could be open to interpretation, physical occupation may often betray historical associations.

The *Red Book*, and to a lesser degree the *History of the MacDonalds*, provide a seventeenth-century Gaelic/Hebridean perspective of the 'big events', the fortunes of lords and the *fine*, as well as their patterns of patronage. The poems in the *Red Book* and the emotional tone of the *History* may reveal aspects of the mind-set of the elite, but, both are highly limited in their illustration of the lower status members of the clan and provide little clue to their world-view and the functioning mechanisms of society.

MacGregor (2002, 204) has suggested that the clan histories of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (e.g. MacKenzie 1881; 1889; MacDonald & MacDonald 1904) can be seen as a second wave of this continuing tradition. While they are often a synthesis of earlier genealogical histories, they often contain previously unrecorded oral tradition. In this light some of the contemporaneous regional studies may also be included along with these sources, although they are not clan based. These often include important additional information on place-names (e.g. Dixon 1886; Christie 1892; Porteous 1912; MacKenzie 1919; 1932; Stewart 1928; Nicolson 1930; Gillies 1938; MacCulloch 1939).

### 1.8.3 *Folklore*

There has been a large corpus of folkloric material collected in the Highlands (e.g. Macdonald n.d.; Goodrich-Freer 1908; Carmichael 1928-71; Murray 1936; CWP; McNeill 1956; Swire 1966; Macdonald 1975; Sharkey 1986; Campbell 2000a). Yet a perceived sense of a lack of academic rigour in folkloric studies and the fact that the meaning of traditions alters depending on the teller has meant that archaeologists have traditionally shied away from using folklore in their work. However, recent work has revealed how it can be interpreted, dissected and incorporated into archaeological analysis (Gazin-Schwartz & Holtorf 1999; Symonds 1999; Gazin-Schwartz 2001). In particular folklore can present a broad picture of how communities and the occupants of



farmsteads situated themselves in the world, both spatially and temporally: how they came to be, how they were situated in the landscape and how they understood the world around them – their world view or mentality. This approach has produced splendid results using data obtained from the Norse sagas (Gurevich 1969; 1992). However, the contemporaneity of Gurevich's sources to his subject matter, which were near contemporary to the world he was studying, cannot be suggested to the same degree for the use of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century folklore to understand medieval Hebrideans. Nevertheless, much of this later material is directly relevant to a society and landscape that was in essence a continuation of the late medieval pattern of *bailtean* and open-fields. Thus this folklore data can be used to provide some indication of how people inhabited and replicated their social ideals within the landscape of this wider time-period.

#### 1.8.4 *Oral history*

From the nineteenth century onwards interest in Gaelic oral history and tradition developed rapidly and much material was collected by a small number of individuals who travelled the Highlands and Islands recording tales as they were told by crofters and local storytellers. Additionally, oral tradition had formed the backbone of written histories from the later Middle Ages onwards and this has often been used to discredit the historicity of their contents. The nature of truth or historical accuracy within oral tradition is notoriously hard to discern. In some examples individuals and communities included elements of pure fantasy in later periods in order to establish new identities and explain the world around them (see Woolf 1988). Whilst this argument can probably be substantiated to some degree regarding Ossianic influences in the Hebrides, the question has to be asked whether this is still the case for material relating to later historical incidents. This is all the more important given the impact oral tradition has had both upon the compilation of medieval and later Hebridean texts, songs and poems as well as the resulting historiography. Several writers have shown that throughout Europe oral tradition cannot be seen to be a monolithic static entity and that the written record,



proscribed beliefs and oral compositions feed into one another (Henige 1974; Lord 1995; Foley 1995). Specifically for the Highlands and Islands MacGregor has demonstrated that ideas and passages in songs and poems could filter both downwards from Classical tradition and upwards from vernacular song and belief (2002, 197-99). In fact the dynamism between folk-culture and high literature has probably been vastly underestimated. In some cases it is possible that oral and written histories fed back on one another. Thus passages from Martin Martin (e.g. 1994, 175) that are reiterated in the nineteenth-century oral record (e.g. Fergusson & Macdonald 1984, 9) need not verify one another, as the latter may directly stem from the first. It is curious that certain incidents became concurrently remembered in a number of sources, both written and oral histories, as well as songs (e.g. compare HP: I, 36-7, 66-69, Carmichael 1928-71: V, 10-15, Thomson 1974, 92, Fergusson 1978, 34, 82, and Fergusson & Macdonald 1984, 136). It is impossible to discern whether such historical incidents were preserved because they were written down and sung about, or vice versa. Nevertheless, many storytellers prided themselves on their accuracy and their ability to reiterate stories verbatim. This has resulted in some stories remaining virtually unchanged between the time they were first recorded and the 1950s (Bruford 1978). As a result many tales may retain vestiges of historical accuracy, and there are a number of incidents where oral tales can be verified by other sources (see Maclean-Bristol 1984; Campbell 1988; 1989; MacInnes 1981; 1992a). However, through the interaction between oral and written tradition many stories began to incorporate motif and formulaic passages (MacInnes 1981; 1992a) and caution must be used to pick apart the truth from its accumulated baggage. This is as true for material that was written down in Gaelic in the seventeenth century and that which was recorded by collectors up to three centuries later. An additional layer of caution must be exercised for this latter class of material as Victorian collectors not only made mistakes in translation, but also deliberately altered their records to suit their readers' sensibilities (e.g. see Gillies 2000). Nevertheless, for many medieval Hebridean sites and events this is the only available information, if used with caution, with an awareness of its potential pitfalls and motifs, oral tradition can provide valuable insight into historical events and the way in which sites were used and perceived.

### 1.8.5 *Early Medieval records*

The Irish annals (e.g. Freeman 1944; Hennessy 1871) make occasional references to the Hebridean elite's interaction in Ireland, but there is little else of relevance for this thesis. Information regarding the sphere of the lords is complemented by no more than a handful of charters that reveal the state of lordship and the political structure of the Isles (e.g. Innes 1832; 1847; Macpherson 1819; Anderson 1908; Lindsey *et al.* 1908; Donaldson 1974). A small number of political narratives, such as the *Saga of Hacon* (Dasent 1894), the *Orkneyinga Saga* (Palsson & Edwards 1978), and the *Chronicle of the Kings of Man and the Isles* (Broderick 1979) on the other hand do contain more details about events in the Hebrides prior to 1266. They are largely confined to the upper echelons, but some information can be picked out regarding social structures and mechanisms and the geography of some Hebridean lordships.

The Icelandic sagas hold much relevant information (e.g. Anderson 1922; Hight 1965; Magnusson & Palsson 1969; Palsson 1971; Hollander 2002: also see Storm's compilation: 1888). The historicity of the sagas is compromised by their compilation in the centuries following the events they describe, coming largely from oral history, and the use of specific details from the sagas can only be used in full awareness of this. Nevertheless, a growing corpus of work has begun to critically evaluate the possibilities that these texts present for tackling social and anthropological issues (for a summary see Byock 1988, 1-48). Through use of this approach the sagas can be interpreted to provide a wide understanding of the social rituals and mechanisms that facilitated the running of society and daily activity. Additionally, they hold clues to the prescribed world-view within the Norse Diaspora (Gurevich 1992). Whilst, these interpretations are important, they are specifically relevant to the world of the thirteenth-century saga writers, and through association they have a relevance for understanding the mentalities and social mechanisms of societies directly influenced and formed by Scandinavian expansion. Direct reference to events, individuals and, perhaps social processes in the Hebrides, that



predate the sagas' composition by several centuries in some instances, must be treated with a great degree of caution and scepticism. This is especially prevalent as any vestiges of historical memory were often manipulated, or totally fabricated, to reflect the political agendas of the saga writers and their patrons. Even when the sagas are corroborated by contemporary evidence the details of the narratives can only be used to illustrate the world of possibilities and cannot be used to demonstrate historical fact, even where the preconceptions of the scribe are obvious.

Other Welsh and Irish narratives, such as *Hanes Gruffyd ap Cynan* (Evans 1990), *Caithreim Cellachain Caisil* (Bugge 1905) and *Cogadh Gaedhel Re Gallaibh* (Todd 1867), were composed later than the events they purport to describe, include many mythological impositions, and are heavy with the political slants of their authors. Although they do make occasional reference to the Hebrides, they are of little relevance for this thesis.

#### 1.8.6 *Government records*

The majority of published governmental documents for the Hebrides over the Middle Ages are solely concerned with the activities of the highest echelons of society (*Acts of Parliament of Scotland* – APS; *Register of the Great Seal of Scotland* – RMS; Webster 1982; *Register of the Privy Seal of Scotland* – RPS). Prior to the end of the fifteenth century charters reveal the names and families of claimants of lordship over various lands and areas, and it appears they are relatively accurate. Alongside the *Acts of the Lords of the Isles* (Munro & Munro 1986) they create a picture of the pattern of lordship and vassalage between the major landholders. Following the decline of the Lordship of the Isles in the fifteenth century there is a greater density of records (*Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland* – ALHT; *Exchequer Rolls of Scotland* – ERS; *Acts of the Lords of Council* – Neilson & Paton 1918; Hannay 1932; Calderwood 1993; *Register of the Privy Seal* – RSS) and the coverage of these widens to incorporate lower levels of landholding under the chiefs, although they are still restricted to the clan gentry. It is



apparent from this period onwards that government strategy was to disenfranchise recalcitrant chiefs by granting out their lands to loyal claimants, thus the accuracy of the charters begins to be compromised. Many charters contain lists of settlement and regional place-names and land-tax assessments, this provides invaluable evidence for how estates were structured and how they developed through time.

It is also from this period that legal proceedings and more of the day to day business of government survives (*Register of the Privy Council of Scotland* – RPSC; *Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland* – CDRS; also see the papers contained throughout HP; Birch 1742; Pitcairn 1833; Firth 1899; Gardiner 1903). This corpus of data provides some clear pictures of the lives and actions of Hebrideans: however, although there are some snippets of information about the agricultural and daily life of the peasantry, the majority of information is again only relevant for the gentry. Due to the legal nature of these documents there is an emphasis on aggressive misbehaviour. Additionally, as they are often calls for the deliverance of justice, the complainants cannot be taken at face value and are likely to contain fabrications. Throughout this material there are frequent references to how places and monuments were used and interacted with.

### 1.8.7 *Religious records*

Pre-Reformation records for the Hebrides are scant but amongst the papal letters relating to Scotland (e.g. McGurk 1976) there are some which provide some instruction on patterns of lordly patronisation and the ecclesiastical organisational structure. However, in the wake of the Irish Catholic missions to the Hebrides from the early seventeenth century onwards there are a number of letters which describe religious and economic life in Barra, the Uists and in parts of the Highlands (e.g. Moran 1861; Dawson 1890; Coste 1920-1925; Mactavash 1943; Giblin 1964; 1975; Hanley 1979).

### 1.8.8 *Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century estate records*

Unlike the archives of the Clann Caimbeul/Campbell lordships (Innes 1855; 1869; Campbell 1933; Dawson 1997) there is little evidence for how Hebridean estates were managed internally, under the level of the lords and chiefs, before 1600. It is only from the seventeenth century onwards that documents survive, or were produced by the Clann Ragnail chiefs (Clanranald Papers – GD201) and MacDonalds of Sleat (Lord MacDonald Papers - GD221). The earliest documents tend to be restricted to tacks to the highest echelons of the gentry, but tacks and other land leases become increasingly common into the eighteenth century. Unfortunately most of the legal documents for the internal machinations, workings and details of estate management do not survive for South Uist and Benbecula until the very late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Rentals also tend to be partial, although these are greatly augmented by a rental in the Forfeited Estate Papers after the 1715 rebellion for the southern half of South Uist (E648). However, more detailed information about how agriculture, the landscape and farming society are managed is available from North Uist and Skye (see Lord MacDonald Papers, the Macleod of Dunvegan Papers – HP2950 and *The Book of Dunvegan*: MacLeod 1938-1939).

### 1.8.9 *Travellers tales and socio-economic studies*

The earliest account that exists for the Isles is contained in John of Fordun's *Chronnica Gentis Scottorum* composed towards the end of the fourteenth century. Fordun was primarily interested in places of economic, religious and military importance and the Uists are only mentioned as a place where whales lived and that had one castle (Skene 1872: II, 44). Whilst this information was probably based on the observations of people at the Scottish court who had visited the Isles (Scott 1979), Fordun introduced Classical models of barbarians to portray Highlanders and Hebrideans. This paved the way for future generations of Lowland Scottish chroniclers who showed little further interest in accurately recording Hebridean life and places (e.g. Aikman 1827; Thomson 1830 Watt

1987: see Cowan 1998). This, however, began to change in the mid-sixteenth century as two bishops, John Lesley (Dalrymple *et al.* 1888-1895) and Donald Munro (Munro 1961) were both keen on presenting evidence of the economic wealth of the Hebrides, and their contribution to Hebridean historiography is invaluable. Munro, as Dean and later Bishop of the Isles, in addition to a detailed account of the agricultural potential of all the western islands and their political structure, also provided important information on ecclesiastical patterns and churches in the Hebrides. The social and political information contained within these texts was added to by an anonymous *Description of the Isles*, composed in the late 1500s, which described the castles, clans and military capacities of the islands (Skene 1890, 428-53). Around the same time the cartographer Rev. Timothy Pont visited the Isles and composed an accompanying chorography (n.d.b.), which complements Munro's work in that although they had similar interests, Pont (who probably had access to Munro's text) occasionally relayed different information or some in more detail. Additionally, Pont obviously interacted with the Islanders as he recorded oral tradition. Several authors published variants on Pont's text (Blaeu 1654; MacFarlane 1907, 144-91; 509-613), but it is unclear if the differences were the result of editing by subsequent owners, such as Robert Gordon who collected and collated Pont's work for publication by Blaeu, or Robert Sibbald who obtained Gordon's papers (MacFarlane 1907, 143; Stone 1989, 15, 19).

At the end of the seventeenth century the current trend of 'philosophy' and science spurred an interest in Hebridean culture. Whilst some were primarily concerned with rites and customs (e.g. James Kirkwood: Campbell 1975), Martin Martin was encouraged to open up the scope of his study to include economic and social life, material culture, antiquities and much more. His work, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland, circa 1695* (1994), is particularly significant as Martin came from Skye and was a Gaelic speaker (Stiùbhart 2003), and thus provides an indigenous understanding of Hebridean activity and attitudes. His primary shortcoming stems from his Protestant realism, which spills from a patronising view of daily rituals, to out-right sectarian polemic. Nevertheless, his study abounds with important insights into the Hebridean world shortly



after the end of the Middle Ages. Its contribution to an understanding of Hebridean history cannot be underestimated, if for no other reason than it encouraged a wave of eighteenth-century travel-writers. Pennant (1774) was inspired by Martin, as were Johnson and Boswell (Chapman 1924), who in turn inspired others to redress the case in favour of Highlanders and Hebrideans. All this literary outflow led to a tourist traffic that lasted into the twentieth century (see Cooper 1979), as well as other visitors who had artistic (MacCulloch 1819; 1824), geological (Miller 1889) and political agendas (Carmichael 1916). A near contemporary to Martin was Edmund Burt, an English officer who served in Inverness and published a series of letters containing his observations of the Highlands (the 1998 edition will be used in this thesis). Although written from an outsider's perspective without the local insights provided by Martin, this allowed Burt to see some things in a fresh light. As with the rest of these travel records, it contains valuable additional material to compliment Martin's book.

Alongside these travellers the government sponsored a number of reports to be compiled about the state of the agriculture and fisheries in the Hebrides. Amongst these reports was one written by Richard Neilson (1755), James Anderson (1785), John Knox (1787) and John Walker (1808; McKay 1980). All were heavily influenced by the Enlightened, Protestant, Capitalist and Improvement philosophy that was popular at the time and their narratives often drift into eloquent political dialogues. Whilst they criticise the social structure of the clan and their interpretation of the social subjugation of most Islanders are almost certainly skewed by political bias, all appear to have been relatively impartial in reporting their actual observations, especially about the social and economic lives of the Hebrideans. Additionally, they recorded the environmental background of the islands and how these landscapes were used, exploited and lived in, and some of the information they recorded would have been lost otherwise. Walker is notable because he gives the impression of have a genuine concern for those he talked to, and he gives lengthy descriptions of forms of landholding which do not appear to be presented with the condescending moral undertone of some other writers.

This Improvement philosophy heavily influenced Hebridean landholders, both James MacDonald of Sleat and James MacDonald, tutor to the Clann Ragnail gentry, were students to the intellectual father of Improvement, Adam Smith. The impact on Sleat's approach to his estates and their occupants can be seen throughout his personal papers, and the other James MacDonald published a book which is a description of agriculture and life in the Hebrides as it was lived, as well as a manual for future Improvement (1810). This book, amongst others in the same vein, was also encouraged by John Sinclair's syntheses of the *Statistical Account* (e.g. Sinclair 1795; Robson 1794; Heron 1794). However, although these recount some new information of interest, these are more heavily affected by polemic than the reports compiled by the local ministers for the first and second *Statistical Accounts* (e.g. Munro 1794; Maclean 1845).

Although described as a travellers account, John Lane Buchanan's book (1997) is more of a catalogue of his observations whilst serving as a minister in Harris. It reflects the Protestant Improvement ethic of his contemporaries, but this is accentuated by a tone that is heavily tainted with personal vitriol, largely resulting from his being ostracised by the Harris community for his drunken lechery (Maclean 1997). Nevertheless, his work is not without merit. Another exception to the main body of this class of investigative travellers are the letters written during the Civil War (Guizot 1838; Reid 1837; Akerman 1856; Firth 1899; Anderson 1908) and the accounts describing the fortunes of Bonnie Prince Charlie during his journeys through the Uists (e.g. Forbes 1895; Blaikie 1897; 1916; Tayler & Tayler 1938).

Throughout all this body of literature there is valuable evidence of how life was lived in the Hebrides in the period that followed the end of the Middle Ages. Study of this material not only allows an understanding of Pre-Clearance social and economic life to be obtained, but it is possible to extract later patterns of landscape use from the physical remains and a clearer picture of earlier settlement to be achieved.



### 1.8.10 Cartography

The early maps of the Hebrides are crude and portray the Isles as amorphous blobs scattered along the western coast of Scotland. Frequently one blob was designated as Mull and another as Lewis, which was often placed away from the rest to the north (see maps published in MacLeod (ed.) 1989, 2, 7, 16, 92). It was only after Gerhard Mercator (who inspired a school of maps that lasted from the mid-1500s to the end of the seventeenth century) that maps began depicting the Uists in any accuracy. These maps show the Uists as divided into four separate blobs, each with a named church (see *ibid.*, 22, 29, 32, 78, 96, 107, 141). Mercator's *Scotiae Regnum* (1595) included a small number of other place-names on the east coast, which may have been portages, but most cannot be identified.

Towards the end of the sixteenth century a minister from Caithness, Timothy Pont, embarked on an extraordinary project: to single-handedly map Scotland. He also described the places he visited and recorded some of the conversations he had with the people he encountered. Whether he completed this mission is unknown, as the majority of his maps have subsequently been lost or destroyed. In the early seventeenth century his maps were collected together by Robert Gordon who amended and added to Pont's work and, after several tribulations, managed to have it published in Joannis Blaeu's *Atlas Novus* in 1654 (Stone 1989; 2001a, 2-15: Fig. 2). The extent of, and reasons for Gordon's editing can only be guessed at: in some cases he clearly corrected mistakes in the cartography, in others it is possible that he recorded changes that had occurred between Pont's original survey and eventual publication (*ibid.*, 7-13; Fleet 2001, 35, 45-48). However, it is highly fortunate that Pont's original manuscript map for the southern end of South Uist survives (n.d.a). This document contains two attempts, one is clearly an earlier draft of that which was published in Blaeu (Fig. 3): the other (Fig. 4) is less easy to interpret. The latter is much more detailed than the published version and reveals a much more accurate representation the real extent of the lakes, rivers, settlements and monuments. However, the map is confused by the number of inclusions and place-

names it relays. It seems likely that although Pont had completed a detailed and relatively accurate map, he deliberately created a tidied up version for inclusion into a future compilation. In places Pont's cartography is skewed, he simplified a complex settlement pattern to its core elements and certain features are exaggerated at the expense of others. One instance of this is the extent of the western plain of South Uist, compared to a thin range of eastern hills. This discrepancy probably resulted from Pont's desire to clarify the details of the area where people lived and where travellers would have visited. Nevertheless, the contents of these maps are surprisingly informative, and the skewing can often be redressed with rudimentary analysis. Blaeu's copies of the Uist maps retained Pont's symbols for the main settlements, and it is possible to interpret churches from crosses on the top of buildings, and important ones that are crudely highlighted in red (some of his other symbols have yet to be fully interpreted: Stone 2001b). As well as demarcating the townships, Pont's surviving maps for the Highlands, and those reproduced by Blaeu, also show buildings on islands and castles, showing that they were in use at the time of Pont's survey.

Two centuries after Pont's survey there was a proliferation of new map making programs instigated by Hebridean landlords as they wished to demarcate, measure, evaluate and assess their estates (Caird 1989, 49-51). In 1805 the Clann Ragnail estates contracted the already experienced sixteen-year-old apprentice William Bald to conduct a survey of their estates (Storrie, 1969, 207-08; Caird 1989, 67-73), and he rapidly produced three large-scale linen maps of the main part of South Uist (1805a), Baghasdal (1805b) and Benbecula (1805c). These were later compressed into small lithographed copies (1829a; 1829b), and that of Benbecula updated (Caird 1989, 70). Bald's maps contain a vital picture of the landscape of South Uist at the time of his survey, including settlement morphology, the extent of the inland lochs prior to drainage later in the century, the demarcation of boundaries, stepping stones, bridges, roads and the extent of infield and outfield land. He also had an evident interest in antiquities and he included castles, crannogs and island duns with their related causeways. His surveying was normally extremely accurate and many of the buildings he recorded can be identified today:

however, on occasion he simplified some of the details (e.g. Hoghmor churchyard is portrayed as a regular group of buildings, when they are actually much more haphazard). The transfer to lithography lost much of the detail of the original maps, which additionally show the layout of rig-and-furrow field-systems (Fig. 5), gardens, etc. In the following years Bald conducted similar surveys of a number of other islands and mainland Highland estates.

Bald's primary contribution to settlement studies, however, is that he provides an accurate and detailed picture of South Uist prior to most Improvements, the Clearances and the introduction of crofting later in the nineteenth century: all three of which culminated in the landscape of South Uist as it is today. On the other side of the Clearances the Ordnance Survey maps (1884) provide an immediate image of how much the landscape had changed as a result. Subsequent surveys allow further developments to be measured and evaluated. An important offshoot of the first Ordnance Survey was the compilation of place-names in their *Name Books*. Unfortunately the rigour and comprehensive research undertaken elsewhere, that also incorporated the study of the folk-lore behind the naming of places, was not exploited in South Uist and Benbecula.

## **1.9 Physical Background**

The physical character of the Uists changes from east to west in north-south running linear strips (Fig. 6). To the west is sandy alkaline machair, beach and dunes face onto the Atlantic, becoming flat plain inland (Fig. 7). Mostly the machair extends below the water table, unless interrupted by a rise in the underground bedrock, mostly Lewisian Gneiss. The central belt, known as blackland, or cnoc-and-lochan is undulating outcrops of bedrock covered in thin peaty soils, heavily interspersed by bogs and lochs. Further east (Fig. 8) the gneiss gradually rises to create a range of hills which often drop sharply into the Minch. At the north end of South Uist the hills fall away, and here is found a wide belt of blanket-peat. This eastern wall of hills is punctuated by a series of inlets: Loch Sgiopoint, Loch Aineort and Loch Baghasdal. To the southeast



the sea separates Uist from Eriskay, a series of smaller islands and Barra. To the north are North Uist and Benbecula, which are connected to South Uist at low tide. Tradition holds that the machair once bound all the islands together, and given the prolific movement of machair sands this is entirely possible.

The resources of these environments have been assessed in economical and geographical terms by Dodgshon (1988b, 1994, 1998: 159-232) and Smith (1994). This section will summarise the resources the environment offered the populace of South Uist and consider the evidence for its exploitation and management.

### 1.9.1 *Arable*

The arable in South Uist is concentrated on the most fertile soil, found where the acidic peat intermingles with the alkaline machair sands. The fertility this rendered on South Uist was worth marking. Walker went so far as to refer to it as “Champaign country” (McKay 1980, 78), commenting; “the rich black Soil, which is frequent in the Island, has afforded crops of Grain immemorially, without any respite” (ibid., 77).

Walker’s further comments that “Bear, Grey Oats and Rye are the only Grains sown in South Wist, which are raised both by the Plough and the Spade” (McKay 1980, 77) reveals that cultivation was also possible in the neighbouring peaty soils, where a spade was the only tool useable. The machair also provided arable, although, when over-farmed this often resulted in destabilisation of the turf layer, which created huge sand blows (see Walker 1808: I, 7; Dodgshon 1998, 23). Agriculture in both areas was dependent on fertilisers such as manure and seaweed (Dodgshon 1994 & Smith 1994, 37-8). The machair also produced roots, which would be consumed by the poor when the crop had failed (Fenton 1986, 123), as well as other plants for dyes and medicines.

### 1.9.2 *Pastures*

In agricultural terms the Hebridean environment is best suited to the raising of livestock, deer could be kept and farm stock pastured, machair grass and heather moorland providing food throughout the year, if carefully managed, as well herbs essential to the health of animals. Arable could be turned over to animals during the winter, which manured the soil as they went, whilst the rest of the ground was limited in use by weather and season.

The hills mainly served as summer pastures. In the medieval period cattle were the mainstay of the Hebridean social-economy, they were a display of wealth as much as they provided food and skins. The chief form of foodstuff they produced were dairy products. Milk, cream, cheese and butter were all eaten by the populace, but the latter two also formed a large portion of rents, prior to being usurped by money rents, and along with hides may have formed part of exports. A woman's social status may have also depended on the quality of her dairy foods (Skjelbred 1994). Not all butter may have been eaten, in the records of Bonnie Prince Charlie's travels through the Islands there is a cursory comment regarding the lightly salted butter being given to him by one of his Irish companions, O'Sullivan. He states it would have usually been used for curing injured horses (Tayler & Tayler 1938, 183).

By the twentieth century, in addition to the arable the machair provided winter grazings (Coull 1968). This contrasts with Walker's records: "there is a great extent of flat country, in the Islands of South and North Uist and Benbecula, which affords excellent pasturage in summer, though in winter it appears but like a sandy plain" (1808: I, 368).

The animals could also be bled if food was scant. Sheep were also present to a lesser extent, mutton being the only meat eaten by the bulk of the population. The wool was poor (Whyte 1979), but must have provided some clothing. The steeper hills lent

themselves to goat rearing, although they were kept to a lesser extent than sheep (Megaw 1963, 1964).

The agricultural system in the Isles was dependent on the removal of grazing stock from the arable in summer. In later periods the crops growing in the unprotected open-fields were allowed to grow, yet even in an enclosed farming landscape the animals were taken to essential fresh pastures. Over the winter, no artificial feed for the animals was provided, so by spring all the edible plant life in the lower areas had been consumed. An often quoted and paraphrased scene at the end of winter is described by MacDonald, revealing the necessity of new pastures:

*One cannot easily believe in August, that the sleek beautiful animals which frolic among the meads ... are the same creatures which he saw in the beginning of May so miserably reduced and weak that they could not rise from the ground without help, or walk to their pastures without staggering like a drunken man (1810, 436).*

### 1.9.3 Seasonal changes

Transhumant use of the summer pastures came to hold a tender place in the hearts of Hebrideans into the nineteenth century, they came to have more than a purely economic and functional role. The love of the summer, the effect on both landscape and human is shown in two poems by Alexander Macdonald (MacMhaighstir Alasdair), who spent his early years in Uist, and his latter in Moidart. In *The Song of Summer* he talks of May, linking it to folded calves, milk, fruit, birds, bees, fish and feelings of the heart:

*Tw'as the sound of your lilting  
At the evening milking  
Roused my humour to sporting  
In that gay woodland scene,*



*And thou gem of performers  
In thy summer-house green ...*

*Loved Beltane of moisture and sunshine,  
Time of marshes and pools;  
With thy rich milky treasures  
Churns and various measures,  
Curds with dishes in plenty,  
Butter vats all around,  
Wealth of kids and lambkins,  
While deer with young ones abound.*

*(Macdonald & Macdonald 1924, 25-27).*

In contrast to this is *Ode to Winter*:

*The mountains and hills will grow pale,  
On the earth deep sadness will fall,  
On the fields, bare, languid, and poor,  
Will descend a desolate pall.*

*Each salmon and herring, each fish,  
Will flee to the depths of the main,  
...  
All quiet in their winter retreat.*

*The knolls have got wrinkled and grim,  
Seared bare are the hills and the glades;  
The green fairy mounds have grown pale ...*

*Mountain and moor have grown dusk*

*The colours have quitted each dell  
...from the marshes the beauty has flown.*

*Month of broth and sumptuous feats,  
Wasteful, greedy for flesh of the swine;  
Porridge, sowens, and cabbage abound  
For the bearded and greedy to dine.  
(ibid., 28-35).*

#### **1.9.4     *Fish***

In addition to the resources offered by the island's land-based environment, the coasts and seas around the island offered a wide range of other resources, including food in the form of fish, shellfish, catecea and sea birds, as well as building material and fuel in the form of wood.

A wide number of species of edible demersal and pelagic fish spawn off the Hebridean shelf, usually before heading off to deeper waters, largely the North Sea and towards the Northern Isles. The most important commercially has always been herring, which spawn twenty to thirty miles off the west coast of the Outer Isles and near Tiree. They then mature in the sea lochs before heading back to the spawning ground. Mackerel are also present nearer land in the summer (Boyd & Boyd 1996a, 61, 64). All these species are liable to fluctuation due to climate change, but in the mid-nineteenth century the best fishing grounds were said to be located nearest to Ness, in Lewis, though there were still profitable fishing grounds, near Eriskay and the 'White Strip' south of Barra (Otter 1874, 2-3). The instability of fish stocks is illustrated by the interruption of fishing in 1858 by a "plague of dog fish" (ibid., 2).

### **1.9.5     *Shellfish***

The rocks and muds on the either coast of Uist, especially in the Minch, have provided an abundance of edible shell fish (Boyd & Boyd 1996a, 65-70). These include the razor fish, cockles and limpets which have formed a large part of Hebridean diets since the Mesolithic, as is shown by the huge shell middens from all periods. Lobsters and crabs were also available for consumption.

### **1.9.6     *Cetecea***

Numerous cetacean species can be found in the Minch (Boyd & Boyd 1996a, 76). Traditionally these were closely associated with the herring shoals, when caught they could provide food and 'oil in plenty', although, porpoises were considered hard to catch (Anderson 1785). Mulville (2002, 37) has suggested that the appearance of whales on sixteenth-century maps of South Uist may indicate the area was associated with whaling. The mapmaker may have taken his information for this from the medieval chronicler, John of Fordun, who said Uist was "where whales and other sea-monsters abound" (Skene 1872: II, 44). Fordun may have been trying to emphasise Uist's remoteness but may also have been recording the truth. Rea (1964, 165) gives a vivid and bloody description of the killing of a school of whales that had entered Loch Boisdale circa 1900 and 360 were said to have been killed after being driven ashore after entering Loch Maddy earlier in the previous century (Otter 1874, 3). However, the archaeological evidence for deliberate whaling from earlier periods is inconclusive (Mulville 2002).

### **1.9.7     *Seabirds***

Seal and sea bird hunting are well known throughout the Hebrides, perhaps so associated with them that in the modern day bird hunting on isolated islands with high cliffs has become an emblem for Outer Hebrideans (e.g. Atkinson 1949; Beatty 1992). In these places, seals, birds and their by-products provided a substantial part of the



rents and dues of islanders from at least the sixteenth century (Munro 1961, 78; McKay 1980, 42, 48; Martin 1994, 161; Ferguson & Macdonald 1984, 247). Although there are a few small islets and rocky skerries around the coasts of South Uist, and a few cliffs on the east coast, they do not appear to have ever provided opportunities for major exploitation (see Boyd & Boyd 1996b, 14, 43).

#### 1.9.8 *Driftwood*

In addition to animal resources the beach also provided driftwood. From the Iron Age (Taylor 2002, 188-89) until the destruction of the American east coast forests in the nineteenth century substantial pieces of wood were being washed up:

*Much of the wood used in the buildings in the smaller and outer islands of the Hebrides must have drifted across the Atlantic, borne eastwards and northwards by the great gulf-stream. Many of the beams and boards, sorely drilled by the Teredo navalis, are of American timber, that from time to time has been cast upon the shore, - a portion of it apparently from timber-laden vessels unfortunate in their voyage, but a portion of it also, with root and branch still attached, bearing the mark of having been swept to the sea by Transatlantic rivers (Miller 1889, 46).*

This drift-wood cannot have provided all the larger timbers necessary for building boats, ploughs and roofing houses, nor the smaller pieces need for the wicker used in fish-traps, baskets etc. There may have been small clumps of smaller bushes but the lack of island-grown wood was noted in John MacCodram's defence of the Uists, *Reply to the Praise of the Mainland*, probably written in the seventeenth century:

*Charming Uist, brim-full of bread, without scarcity of condiment.*

*Honey streams running out of the ground and from the top of the hills.*

*Woe to him who praised the shrivelled mainland because of some sticks of hazel* (Matheson 1938: 51).

The majority of the wood must have been imported from elsewhere. Unlike most other Hebridean areas, the proprietors of South Uist held extensive woodlands on the mainland. These had been managed since at least the 1200s, and were well used for construction purposes (Dye *et al.* 2002, 11, also see Cheape 1993).

### 1.9.9 *Machair lochs*

On the seaward side, the machair consists of sandy dunes, sometimes quite high, which fall away to create the sandy plain described above. These plains tend to dip slightly inland;

*Within which is a range of shallow fresh-water lochs that run along the whole length of the island, the surface of which is so little elevated above the level of the sea, that at high spring-tides the sea flows into these lochs so as to render the water at times a little brackish*  
(Anderson 1785, 138).

In winter the water table rose and the sea more commonly broke through the dunes to flood and expand these already swelled waters. Bald's map reveals the extent of these lochs in 1805, though this post-dates the construction of some of the largest drains. The first and most transformative of which was the canal which drained the machair of Cille Pheadair and Baghasdail into Loch Baghasdail, built by the local tacksman. He boasted that one hundred acres of farmland had been created and communications with every farm enabled (Anderson 1785, 138).

This band of shallow lochs split the machair from the central blacklands but the quantity of lochs is noted in nearly all the descriptions of South Uist, such as Walker: 'In South

Uist, there is a tract of arable land nearly thirty miles in length; yet there is a quantity occupied by fresh water lakes nearly equal to all the arable” (1808: I, 203).

These lochs contain numerous species of edible freshwater fish, salmon and trout being the most well known, the latter faring particularly well in the machair lochs of South Uist. Today, in late winter and early spring salmon run the larger west coast rivers, while sea trout are attracted to west coast estuaries and tidal races (Boyd & Boyd 1996a, 180-82).

#### **1.9.10**    *Routes in and around the island*

Modern route-ways through South Uist give a misleading impression of how settlements and sites would have been encountered prior to the mid-eighteenth century. The A865 road tends to run through the cnoc-and-lochan, often sticking to the higher ground running along just to the west of the hills. The remains of the earlier road can often be seen running parallel to it. This road, in turn, largely follows the route of Improvement roads, such as that constructed around 1755 by Alexander of Boisdale’s east of Loch Bì (GD201/2/13).

#### **1.9.11**    *The ‘machair track’*

“Formerly the highway was through Machairemeanoch. It was a mere passage or bridlepath, on the level plain on the west side of the island. When the county road was made it went through Lochbee” (Macdonald 1930-31: I, 35). Alexander of Boisdale also made a bridge across the loch of Cille Donnain and drained the loch of Cille Pheadair allowing a bridge to be made to Dalabrog (ibid.). The new road was heavily improved by 1827 (GD201/1/338). From Bald’s maps (Fig. 9) it is clear that before the new road was constructed the main path through the island from north to south ran along the machair nearer the coast, very probably where the modern ‘machair track’ is, where subsequent erosion has meant re-routing. Walker described this:



*In the islands of South Uist, North Uist, and Benbecula, the country is so flat, and the natural roads so good, that every heavy article might be transported by wheels; yet no cart has ever made its appearance in these islands (1808: I, 134).*

Bald recorded the way the main track ran up to the machair *bailtean*, in the case of Baghasdal it runs through it, but the regularity of the houses suggests this was a planned settlement, presumably fairly recent. The *bailtean* on the blacklands were linked to the main highway by paths leading directly off it, communication between neighbouring the villages may have through the main track, rather than along smaller local links, although in some cases it seems unlikely that these did not exist. The *bailtean* paths often follow the east-west ridges of higher ground, providing dry access between the settlements.

Many of these branch tracks followed the ridges of gneiss into the hills proving access from the arable to the pastures and hills. Often they follow a low contour between the lower western hills into the valleys and up to the western slopes of the eastern hills. Many of these follow the same path as present day tracks, and may represent a continuity of use. For some of these, this may have been a deliberate attempt to link the winter towns with the east coast sea weed when the kelp industry was at its height (this was estate policy in Benbecula: GD201/1/338).

#### **1.9.12    *Inland waterways***

Oral tradition holds that alongside the machair pathways it was possible to travel by boat along the lochs that run through or near the edge of the machair from one end of the island to the other. Other claims are more modest and suggest slightly more limited distances of loch linkages, such as from Ormacleith to Tobha Mor. The extent of the Improvement drainage has been discussed above, and it is obvious from Bald's map that there were strings of connected lochs that would have allowed shallow bottomed boats,

such as currachs (Fenton 1972) or logboats, which were in use in the medieval period throughout the western seaboard (Cheape 1999), to pass significant distances. This is especially true in the southern half of the island, where large long lochs, such as Hallan, Cille Pheadair and Cille Donnain appear on Bald's maps (Figs. 10 and 11). Despite the likelihood, however, that claims of one continuous passage are exaggerated, it seems plausible that it would have been possible with only a handful of disembarkations on land.

It is tempting to suggest that some of the older looking boat noosts around many of the loch sides could be attributed to this network, as has Maclean (1994). Many are used by the modern gillies for the estate's fishing and most of the older examples are probably related to similar activities of the last two centuries, although an earlier origin it is not totally implausible. A possible substantiation to this may be found in the place-name 'Phuirt-ruaidh' at the edge of what the OS call Loch a' Phuirt-ruaidh, but known locally as Loch an t-Sagairt, in Tobha Beag (Fig. 12). One viable reading of this reference to an inland port may be that it provided a landing place for boats within this system. The red element possibly referring to the colour of the sand at the bottom of the loch, which is a common naming element in Uist (William MacDonald pers. comm.). This may have been an inlet to allow vessels from the Atlantic to enter the inland waterway (Unfortunately the make-up for the raised modern road has obscured any possible remains at the site).

Tradition in North Uist is that coracles were placed on lochs along major route-ways, or for fishing and hunting (Fergusson & Macdonald 1984, 223). This may corroborate possibilities for a managed loch route-way, although there is the possibility that the concept results from a belief in a rose-tinted indigenous past.

### 1.9.13 *Sea routes*

Around the island larger vessels would have gone up through the Minch to the east or along the Atlantic western coast. The passages between Benbecula, Eriskay and Barra were shallow and treacherous. The ford to Benbecula was particularly shallow and the underlying sand was exposed at low tide. Smaller light vessels may have passed through the other waters, but only the sound of Harris was navigable by larger vessels (Knox 1787, 77). Other vessels would have had to sail south around Barra and the Bishops Isles. Unlike Lewis and Harris with their sharper coastline and numerous east coast harbours for smaller boats, the run along the Atlantic side of South Uist would have had to be further out, as the coastal shelf is fairly shallow. Here shipping would have been fully exposed to the Atlantic swell with little access to harbours. The naval surveyor Otter stated of the west coast:

*There is no shelter or place of landing for a boat along the whole coast; in summer time the small boats engaged in lobster fishing are generally hauled up (1874, 89).*

Nevertheless, smaller boats will have found some shelter in the few rocky peninsulas and skerries, and boats certainly called in at the mouth of the Tobha Mor river and Ormacleit in the aftermath of 1745 (Maclean 1982, 45; Maclean & Gibson 1992, 42). The west side of the island certainly would have seen fishing and other mercantile traffic throughout this period, but although the extent cannot be fully ascertained, it is unlikely to have been as busy as the Minch coast.

The Long Isle provided a breakwater for most Atlantic swells, creating a sheltered passage for shipping. Most ships would have stayed in view of land and tried to keep close to coasts and harbours. The accounts of royal fleets coming from the north - such as Norwegian Hakon in 1263 (Dasent 1894, 347) and Scottish James V in 1540 (Gregory 1881, 147-48), also possibly in 1536 (MacKenzie 1903, 131) - tend to indicate for the



fact that after coming round Cape Wrath they headed for Lewis, before heading for the east side of Skye. They missed out Uist altogether: however, other traffic may have followed the modern CalMac ferry route down along Uist, heading inland between Mull and the mainland. The east coast of South Uist provided a number of harbours, as did Benbecula: in the mid-eighteenth century Neil MacEachann claimed that Roisinis and Loch Uisgebhagh were among the best harbours in the Western Isles (Blaikie 1916, 231). However, these, along with other lochs, such as Carnain and Aineort were “all infested with hidden dangers” for those without local knowledge (Otter 1874, 154). The main harbours would have been Loch Baghasdal and Loch Sgiopoint, the last name being derived from the Norse for ‘ship-port’.

## SECTION 1 DOCUMENTARY ANALYSES

### CHAPTER 2 A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF LORDSHIP IN SOUTH UIST

#### 2.1 Introduction

A number of significant works have attempted to create a historical narrative out of the few documents that survive regarding Scotland's Western Seaboard during the Middle Ages (e.g. Gregory 1881; Skene 1890; MacKenzie 1903; Duncan & Brown 1957; Sellar 2000; McDonald 1997). However, academic study of Hebridean history has tended to focus upon the larger and/or picturesque islands as well as upon 'great' individuals and 'big' events: smaller islands and less glamorous kindreds have tended to be overshadowed by the Kings and Lords of the Isles (e.g. MacDonald & MacDonald 1904; Grant 1988; Steer & Bannerman 1977, 201-13; Bannerman 1977). Some lineages descended from the early kings, such as the Clann Ruairidh, have occasionally featured, but as details within genealogical conundrums or as incidental partners in the wider scale of political events in Scotland and Ireland. The form and structure of their lordships have been ignored (although see Stewart 1982; Sellar 1986). Apart from the unpublished manuscript by the Rev. A. Macdonald (1930-31), no in-depth study has been undertaken to place South Uist within a wider picture of historical events, or fit it into the unfolding and changing structures of lordship over the Middle Ages. This chapter will attempt to redress this, and lay out the evidence for South Uist's place within the competing lordships of various lineages. This will be followed by a brief analysis of the nature of Hebridean lordship in later Middle Ages (the nature of kingship in the earlier medieval period will be addressed in Section 4.3). Unfortunately, however, the available data for the earlier Middle Ages is limited, and are mostly restricted to two sagas written down shortly after the events they describe, and two seventeenth-century clan histories, written by two *seanachean* and pregnant with agendas designed to justify their patrons' lordships. It is only in the later period when a greater number of documents become available that reveal a clearer picture of South Uist's history. Much of the study will sow the seeds for debate in later chapters: historians with a wider

knowledge of documentation and linguistics will be better suited to tackle many of the issues raised, and hopefully will do so in the future.

## **2.2 Kingdoms in the Isles, Before Somerled**

We can discern very little concrete information about the Sudreys (the Norse name for the Kingdom of the Isles) prior to the eleventh century. A large number of individuals are named in contemporary Irish annals and later Icelandic and Welsh texts as being king throughout the tenth century, and these are often seen through their interactions in Ireland, mostly, but not exclusively in connection with raiding and the kingdoms of Dublin and Man (see Duffy 1993; Etchingham 2001). By the end of the tenth century and through the eleventh century the Kingdom of Man and the Isles was in the middle of the power struggles between competing dynasties throughout the Irish Sea, to which the elite were intrinsically connected through marriage. They were also the focus for the expanding Earldom of Orkney. The saga evidence indicates that at certain points the Earls of Orkney held sway there, and were perhaps in full command there, however these sources, being composed in Iceland over two centuries after the events they describe, cannot be fully relied upon, and the extent of their dominance is unclear (e.g. see the conflicting narratives composed by McDonald 1997, 30-38 and Woolf 2004, 100-01). Perhaps as a direct result of the conflicts between Orkney, Man and the Irish kingdoms (Power 1986, 116; Duffy 1992, 110-13; Etchingham 2001, 149-53), in 1098, the Norwegian king, Magnus Barelegs undertook an expedition through Orkney, the Hebrides and into the Irish Sea. Whilst later Norwegian chronicles make much of the invasion's impact in the Isles, they perhaps exaggerate the scale of the destruction he caused and its political ramifications. In contrast, there is little conclusive information about his raids in the Hebrides to be gained from contemporary annals (Power 1986), although they were perhaps more concerned with its implications nearer to home. Nevertheless, the raid probably paved the way for its incorporation into the see of Trondheim in 1135. Its lasting impact can be seen in the fact that until 1266 the Hebridean kings consistently looked to Norway for protection and guidance when they needed it (*ibid.*, 130-31), although no Norwegian king returned to the Isles in the meantime.



From the ninth century the title of ‘lord’, ‘king’, *rí*, *righ* or *toiseach* of the Isles was held by numerous figures based in and around the Irish Sea, the title was often contested and fragmented between numerous candidates. However, the relationship between a ‘king’ and the territorial unit is unclear. Sellar’s (2000) translation of these titles as ‘king *in* the Isles’, rather than ‘King *of* the Isles’ is perhaps a more useful interpretation, reflecting the social significance to those that claimed or use the titles, as opposed to referring to a territorial ‘kingdom’ (see Section 4.3). Rulers in the Isles ranged from the Earls of Orkney, who reined in the power of the numerous petty kings of the Sudreys in the early 1000s, to the later Kings of the Isles, based in the Isle of Man, who may have obtained some kind of superiority around 1079. The position of kingship continued to be attested and internecine feuding between claimants was rife. A situation mirrored throughout the Irish Sea region, including Scotland’s Western Seaboard.

### **2.3 The Clann Somhairle and the Uists: 1158 – c. 1300**

In the twelfth century one of the dynastic contestants was a figure who, along with his descendants, came to dominate politics throughout this area from the twelfth century onwards: Somerled. His own origins are obscure, but he created a polity centred on Argyll. In 1156 he forced his brother-in-law Godfrey, the King of Man, to cede all the islands south of Ardnamurchan and control of the rest followed two years later (Duncan & Brown 1957, 196-7). Hugh MacDonald related that Somerled had aided Olaf the Red, Godfrey’s predecessor as King of Man, in subduing “the ancient Danes north of Ardnmurchan” (HP: I, 7). Hugh suggests the inhabitants of the Western Isles had refused Olaf allegiance, although this is contradicted by the *Chronicle of Man* which states Olaf had always ruled “over all the Isles” (Broderick 1979, f.35v.). Olaf himself was said to have “killed MacNicoll in North Uist” (ibid.), suggesting that the Uists were included. This may place Somerled’s usurpation of his nephew’s lands into a context where he was taking back lands that he had helped bring into the realm of the kingdom of the Isles.

The *Chronicle of Man* suggests this divide was both new and lasting, stating that “the kingdom has existed in two parts from that day up until the present time [the mid-thirteenth century], and this was the cause of the break-up of the kingdom of the Isles” (Broderick 1979, f.37v.). However, it seems likely that Skye and the Long Isle had formed two separate administrative districts within the Kingdom of the Isles in the preceding century (Cubbon & Megaw 1942: See section 4.3). Duncan and Brown (1957, 201, 207) have demonstrated the division was one that lasted throughout the thirteenth century, although the kingdom of the Northern Sudreys may have been subject to the Kingdom of Man (also see Johnsen 1969, 33).

Upon Somerled’s death Godfrey, with backing from Norway, recovered much of the Isles (Duncan & Brown 1957, 196-7). This certainly included Man, Lewis and Skye but there is no direct evidence for the Uists and Barra. The territories that did not fall under Godfrey’s influence may have been firstly taken on by Reginald, who in addition to being king of the Isles and lord of Argyll and Kintyre (RMS: II, 678), specifically named himself ‘dominus Inchevald’ and ‘domini Inchevald’ (Innes 1832, 125, 147). By the seventeenth century it was believed that these lands came to be split amongst at least three of Somerled’s male children (RBC, 157: Fig. 13): the aforementioned Reginald (whose children founded the MacDonald/Clann Domhnaill and MacRuari/Clann Ruairidh dynasties), Dugald (progenitor of the MacDougals/Clann Dubhgaill) and Angus. Authors have tended to accept this supposed succession but have been divided upon the succession and the estates involved (Skene 1890, 293; Duncan & Brown 1957, 197-98; McDonald 1997, 70; Woolf 2004, 105). Some stating that the Uists and mainland Scotland north of Ardnamurchan (what came to be known as Garmoran and under the patrimony of the Clann Ruairidh) were part of the original estates, others that they were later additions.

The key to understanding a Clann Somharile presence in the Uists, and ‘Garmoran’ has been the Treaty of Perth, in 1266, when Norwegian sovereignty over the Hebrides was ceded to the Scottish crown after their defeat at the Battle of Largs. Some academics have argued that as Somerled’s descendants were there afterwards, it is possible to assume they were

there beforehand (e.g. Sellar 2000, 193), others have been more cautious (e.g. Duncan & Brown 1957, 202). Gregory (1881, 22) was of the opinion that the Uists had appertained to Man till they were forfeited after Largs, leaving them free to be given to one branch of the Clann Somhairle: the Clann Ruairidh. This would go against the argument laid out for continuity before and after 1266, which is largely based on belief that a clause in the Treaty of Perth was fully upheld. The clause states that:

*Lesser and greater ... for the misdeeds or injuries and damage which they have committed hitherto while they adhered to the ... King of Norway they be no wise punished or molested in their heretages [though] if they wish to retire they may do so, with their goods, lawfully, freely and in full peace* (Donaldson 1974, 35).

However, there is little clear evidence for either a Clann Somhairle or Clann Ruairidh presence in 'Garmoran' or the Western Isles prior to Largs. Earlier in the thirteenth century the Clann Ruairidh were connected to Kintyre and possibly Bute. Although the Bute connection appears to be a red herring (Cowan 1990, 120-22; Sellar 2000, 193; MacDonald 2001; Paterson 2001, 12, 15), the associations with Kintyre were strong enough for Ruari to adopt the title "Dom. de ... Kintyre" (RMS: II, 678). Several suggestions have been put forward to explain how lands in 'Garmoran', the Uists and the Isles may have become part of the Clann Somhairle principality. One possibility is that the Clann Ruairidh received them as compensation for renouncing their southern claims after Largs (Gregory 1881, 22; MacKenzie 1903, 68), or possibly after forfeiting them earlier in the century for backing the failed MacHeth claims upon the Scottish crown (McDonald 1997, 84). Woolf's (2004, 107; forthcoming a) recent reinterpretation may substantiate the latter scenario. He has noted that Ruari had probably married his daughter to Olaf, the King of Man, but had backed the failed claims to the crown while Olaf had favoured the successor, the King of Scots. In light of these events, Olaf had divorced Ruari's daughter in favour of a more politically expedient alliance through a daughter of the Earl of Ross. It is possible that Olaf compensated Ruari for both his lands in Kintyre and daughter's marriage with lands in the Isles, or at least



protected him in his holdings in the Isles. In the *Saga of Hacon*, Ruairi's son Dugald is described as a king, but no territory is specified, however, his role in the peaceful submission of the Clann Domhnaill rulers in Kintyre (Dasent 1894, 348) may just hint that the lineage's tie to Kintyre had not come to an end. Unfortunately, there is little evidence to either confirm or deny the territorial connection between Ruairi and the Isles.

In the seventeenth century the MacDonald *seanachaidh*, recorded Reginald, Somerled's successor, fighting one Muchdanach, ruler of Moidart and Ardnamurchan, and obtaining his lands (HP: I, 12, 17). This is possibly the same Murchad who was recorded in the *Manx Chronicle* as being killed in the same year as Reginald's succession, and was described as "a man of power and energy in the entire kingdom of the Isles" (Broderick 1979, f.40v.). Hugh's text may then highlight a later tradition reflecting a Clann Somhairle intrusion into 'Garmoran' and the Western Isles. Evidence for the Outer Hebrides, however, remains only marginally less obscure. The disputes over lordship in the Isles between the Clann Somhairle and the Godfreysons of Man continued into thirteenth century. In 1248 Harald the King of Man gained the upper hand by marrying a daughter of King Hakon, although Ewen MacDougal and Dugald MacRuairi (Ruairi's son) both sought ratification for kingship over the 'Northern Sudreys' (Dasent 1894, 266). Duncan and Brown (1957, 205) suggest that this probably did not include the Manx possessions in the Hebrides (Skye and Lewis, if not the Uists) as this would have been a direct and open dispute with Man, but this seems inconceivable, as what otherwise would constitute the 'Northern Sudreys'? Harald died shortly after his marriage, and Ewen, who had been granted kingship over the Northern Sudreys was granted royal sanction to the Kingdom of the whole Isles (Dasent 1894, 267; though see Broderick 1979, f.48v.). The apparent ease of this transfer may verify that proposal that the kingdom of the Northern Sudreys was internal to the Kingdom of Man and the Isles (see above). When Alexander II invaded the Isles Ewen ran away to Lewis (Dasent 1894, 271), which may suggest the Clann Somhairle were not entirely cut off from the Long Isle before the Largs campaign. Additionally, prior to Largs Dugald may have established a significant position in the Western Isles: Icelandic sources relate that he "took" the kingdom of the Sudreys in 1248 or 1249 (Storm 1888, 132, 190; Anderson 1922, 554). However, it

was only after his death and in Icelandic and Irish annals that he was ascribed the titles “Sudréyiakonungr”, “Svdureyinga kongr” (Storm 1888, 137, 331, 483; Anderson 1922, 666) and “rí Innsi Gall” (Hennessy 1871, 458), respectively. The fact that he was also titled kingship over Argyll in Irish sources (ibid.; Freeman 1944, 152) may suggest that they are somewhat circumspect on the subject of western Scottish kingdoms. Dugald remained loyal to Hakon, fighting for him against the Danes and later backing him on the Largs campaign, leading an expeditionary force into Loch Lomond to raid the heart of Stewart territory (Cowan 1990, 121). His loyalty remained true; he died in Norway, where his son Eric became a baron of Norway (Sellar 2000, 207). After the Treaty of Perth the Clann Ruairidh estates passed to Dugald’s brother Alan, whose name was not associated with a title in contemporary documents (Anderson 1908, 383; APS: I, 424).

A list of Scottish parliamentary letters from 1282 notes one from the King of Norway regarding the lands of Uist and Eigg (APS: I, 3; thanks to Dauvit Broun for his help in interpreting this document). Although the specific contents are lost, the fact that these two islands are singled out for specific mention, may tentatively indicate Uist was in someway separated from Lewis and Skye (though see Section 4.3), and were linked to the Clann Somhairle shortly after Largs, although this does not contradict the possibility that they had inherited a portion of the forfeited Manx territories (McDonald 1997, 131). When the Sheriffdom of Ross was created in 1293, it included a number of Manx territories (Lewis and Skye) directly alongside the Uists and Barra (APS: I, 91), which may suggest that they too were part of the forfeited estates. That the Clann Ruairidh held lands in the Uists and Barra by this point is clear as the sherrifdom rendered them vassals to the Earls of Ross, which resulted in a century of disputes and resulted in the demise of the lineage (see MacKenzie 1903, 76-79).

Unfortunately, Dugald MacRuairi’s adoption of titles regarding kingship over Innis Gall cannot confirm a direct Clann Somhairle or Clann Ruairidh dominance over the Uists prior to Largs. All that these titles suggest is that they may have had some form of over-lordship over the whole Long Isle, and probably Skye and the Small Isles as well. They need not

necessarily be interpreted as a 'demesne' in the Isles indelibly linked to either lineage. It is only in the wake of Largs that any strong connection of the Clann Ruairidh, the Uists and the Small Isles begins to emerge. However, if the Clann Ruairidh had been territorially relocated from the rich lands of Kintyre to the abandoned Manx islands of Uist they do not appear to have taken it badly. Within less than a decade Alan 'fitz Rother' was fighting for the King of Scots against the "unarmed and naked" Manx (Anderson 1908, 383), although this could be argued to be more of an excuse to fight against their old enemy rather than demonstrative of new loyalties. Not much later, in 1284, Alan, alongside the rest of the leading Clann Somhairle witnessed and consented to the settlement of the Scottish crown regarding the marriage of Alexander III to the Maid of Norway (McDonald 1997, 136). McDonald notes that this reveals not only their coming to terms with the new order but their demotion from 'Kings of the Isles' to 'barons of the realm', true and feudal vassals of the King of Scotland (ibid.). If this was a deliberate policy of tying the Hebridean lords to the new order, it would suggest that the Clann Ruairidh were fairly well established in the Isles both before and after Largs.

Hugh MacDonald's *History* notes that in the late 1200s Angus Mor, head of the Islay Clan Donald;

*had three or four concubines, by whom he had children. The first, John of Ardnamurchan's daughter, by whom he had John, who came to Uist and married Macleod's daughter, by whom he had a son called Murdo. Of him descended the ancient branch of Macdonalds called Shiol Mhurchy or Murdos, descended from Murdo their progenitor (HP: I, 16).*

The presence of this lineage features heavily in the traditional histories of North Uist for the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Beveridge 1911, 76-77) and are possibly connected with the Mhurchaidh who lent his name to a dun in Benbecula (see Section 7.7). This may point to an additional lordship to the Clann Ruairidh within the Uists shortly after the Treaty of Perth.



## 2.4 Garmoran: Fact or Fiction?

Later writers have tended to group these islands estates together with a number on the mainland as one political unit throughout the thirteenth century, and assume that they came to represent the territories under the lordship of the Clann Ruairidh (e.g. Duncan & Brown 1957, 204: Fig. 14). The mainland regions incorporated Moidart, Arisaig, Morar, Knoydart and Morvern (St Kilda and possibly Harris may have also been included, although see MacKenzie 1903, 68). It has been widely accepted that this territory was the ‘Lordship of Garmoran’ (e.g. Gregory 1881, 22). However, it is apparent that it is a misidentification. This title referred to one specific area on the mainland, and the links to the entirety of the Clann Ruairidh lordship is of recent invention.

The earliest reference to ‘Garmoran’ is in a charter of 1343, where it is incorporated into a list of territories being (re)granted to Reginald son of Roderick of the Isles by David II:

*totam insulam de Ywest cum totam suis pertinenciis, totam insulam de Barra ... totam insulam de Egghe ... Romme ... [and the] octo vnnciatas terre de Garw Morwarne videlicat Mudeworth Mordhowor Aresaig Cundeworth cum suis pertinenciis* (Webster 1982, 114-5).

Another summary of the same charter spells the latter as “Garow Morar” (RMS: I, 569). A later 1371 grant, noted as a re-grant of these territories by John, Lord of the Isles, to his son, Ranald (eponym to the Clann Ragnail), lists these territories, but does not mention the title (Munro & Munro 1986, 10-11). It seems obvious in this case that ‘Garw Morwarne’ refers only to the Clann Ruairidh’s mainland territories. MacBain suggests the name derived from “Garbh Morbhairne ... meaning no doubt, the Rough (bounds) of Morvern” (in Skene 1902, 419). The *garbh* element is a common element in names of regions in this area, Arisaig and Morar were called the ‘rough bounds’ or *garbh-chriochan* well into the nineteenth century (MacDonald 1997, 1). Although *garbh* is commonly incorporated into names defining the

western Highlands, and less defined regions in both Scotland and Ireland (McLeod 1999, 8-14), it is possible that the appellation became particularly associated with the Clann Ruairidh lordship. One of the early branches of the Clann Ragnail governed a sub region in the late fourteenth early fifteenth centuries, the holder of which was called “tigherna Ghairbhtreíne” (RBC, 166-67, also see below). It is also possible that the name may also derive from the settlement of territorial disputes between the Clann Domhnaill and the Clann Ragnail after the divorce of Ami MacRuari (Alex. Woolf pers. comm.).

Prior to Gregory’s capitalisation of the word “Lordship” (1881, 22) scholars wrote of the “district extending from Ardnamurchan to Glenelg ... known by the name of Garmoran” (Skene 1890, 293), no mention of lordship was made. However, it appears to have been Skene who was the main perpetrator of the myth: “in the oldest list of the Scottish earldoms which have been preserved, appears the name of Garmoran” (1902, 350). He suggested that previous historians had missed its presence (“at no period embraced by the records do we discover Garmoran as an efficient earldom”), and developed a highly dubious line of reasoning in suggesting the Earls’ roles in Scottish history (ibid.). MacBain, an editor of one edition of Skene’s work, stated it “was never an earldom or district: Skene here is entirely wrong, and the Earldom of Garmoran has no place in Celtic Scotland” (Skene 1902, 419). Whilst this somewhat overstates the point, there is no direct evidence that any title ‘Dominus de Garmoran’ ever existed (Wilson McLeod pers. comm.). However, one “Alexander Makrewri de Garmoran” appears in Bower’s list of those executed in 1428 for their role in the Battle of Harlaw (Watt 1987, 260-61). Additionally, it is possible that the name ‘Garmoran’ derives from *Garbh Maoirne* – “Rough Stewardry”, or *Garbh Mór-roinn* – Rough Province (McLeod 1999, 10), both interpretations suggesting a link with a defined judicial area (see Section 10.6 for a discussion of *Maoirne*). The concept of a mainland region existed in the sixteenth century when, in 1510, Lachlan MacLean of Duart was granted many of the lands around Morar and Morvern “cum officio senescallatus de Garmorane cum ejus libertatibu” (RMS: II, 737).

## 2.5 The Clann Ruairidh Territories in the Fourteenth Century

Despite the concerns about the origins of the Clann Ruairidh influence in the Uists and the validity of the use of the term 'Garmoran', it is clear that the lineage and territories grew together over the fourteenth century.

In 1309 the inheritor of the Clann Ruairidh estates, Christina of Mar, ceded her lands, through Robert the Bruce, to Roderick her illegitimate brother (Gregory 1881, 24), who as a male was probably *de facto* head of the lordship. The re-grant incorporated the whole of the Clann Ruairidh mainland estates that became known as Garmoran (Moidart, Arisaig, Knoydart, and parts of Morar), as well as Eigg, Rum and the parish of 'Kilpedre Blisen' in South Uist, which incorporated Barra (OPS, 363, 366; RMS: I, 428-9). Within the next decade Christina made a similar grant to Arthur Campbell that included nearly all of the same estates (Moidart, Arisaig and Morar), however, significantly, it included Eilean Tioram and omitted the Uists (a transcription of this document has been generously provided by Andrew McDonald). Quite why she was granting almost the whole extent of the Clann Ruairidh lands, including the main seat at Tioram, to others outwith her lineage is not entirely clear, although Alasdair Campbell (2000b, 70-72) argues that they were the prelude to a marriage alliance with the Clann Caimbeul. However, whether intended to pass on the estates to a male head of the clan, or to create an alliance to extend their political influence, these documents should clearly be expected to incorporate the whole Clann Ruairidh territories. It is curious that only part of South Uist was included; Sgìre Hògh, Benbecula and North Uist are absent: does this mean that they were not part of the Clann Ruairidh lordship or to be retained by Christina? The latter possibility seems unlikely if the charter to Arthur Campbell was intended to lead to marriage. However, later fourteenth-century grants to Inchaffray Abbey of Cairinis and Iolaraigh claim to be confirmations of gifts made by Christina (Munro & Munro 1986: 13-14, 28-29). Whilst this possibly indicates that she did have some hold over North Uist, it is possible that her inclusion in the charter was a fabrication intended to legitimate Clann Goraídh claims to North Uist (see Section 2.7). Alternatively, as these are the lands suggested to have been held by the Siol



Mhurchaidh it is possible that their absence from these charters indicates the Clann Ruairidh did not hold lordship there. It is further possible that Christina was chartering off territories previously held and forfeited by her other illegitimate brothers who had fought for the Comyns, or that the lands not covered may have belonged to them. Either way, these possibilities suggest that the Clann Ruairidh lands had been split between children upon the fathers' death, a common inheritance pattern in the Isles (see Section 2.12).

However, it is clear that a short time later, and through the rest of the fourteenth century, all these lands were seen as one united territory. As the Clann Ruairidh fell in and out of favour with the Scottish kings they had forfeited their lands and had them re-granted on several occasions (MacKenzie 1903, 73-76; McDonald 1997, 189), but the component territories remained the same. Whatever the shortcomings of evidence for Clann Ruairidh territories in the Isles at the beginning of the century, by the 1343 charter (Webster 1982, 114-15: cited above) the Uists, Barra and the Small Isles appear to have been united into one defined lordship under one superior lord. McDonald (1997, 186) suggests that the Clann Ruairidh turned 'Garmoran' and their other possessions into a fief through ship service to the Scottish Kings, as part of Robert the Bruce's policy of tying the Isles and Argyll to the state through trade and judicial connections.

Although Roderick brought the Clann Ruairidh some royal influence, their interchanging loyalties throughout the rest of the Wars of Independence caused their estates to be forfeited in 1325 and twice in the 1340s. Although they were reconciled in the intermediate period to fight for David II at Neville's Cross, they refused to pay his ransom. Upon David's return he was set to reduce the Isles; but this was averted through the intervention of the Stewarts, who were negotiating a marriage with John 'Lord of the Isles'. This union paradoxically saved the Clann Ruairidh yet caused a reduction in their influence, as, to marry into the Stewart house, John had to divorce the inheritor of the Clann Ruairidh lands: Ami MacRuari.

Throughout the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Clann Ruairidh had been heavily involved in Irish affairs, becoming part of the mercenary ‘gallowglass’ movement. Some fought alongside Edward Bruce in the 1310s, while others maintained ancient links with the Kings of Connacht (Sellar 1986, 4; 2000, 203-07). In 1318 Irish annalists refer to a MacRuari ‘King of Innse Gall’ being killed at the Battle of Dundalk (Sellar 1986, 4). Paterson (2001, 24) suggests that for this title to be applied to a MacRuari the head of the Clann Domhnaill may have died. So the Clann Ruairidh rise to power may have been based on an ensuing vacuum in Clann Domhnaill power. This seems to downplay the Clann Ruairidh as an independent branch of Clann Somhairle from the Clann Domhnaill for the two centuries prior to John, Lord of the Isles’s and Ami MacRuari’s marriage, when they had inherited earlier titles and positions in the Isles, and exercised a prominent role in Irish Sea politics.

## **2.6 The Inheritance of Ami MacRuari**

As heir to the Clann Ruairidh territories Ami brought to her husband, John of Islay, a vast estate which spread across the western seaboard. John had probably inherited vast Clann Domhnaill estates, and he may have become *Rí Innsi Gall* upon the death of the MacRuari king in Ireland in 1325, but his precise rise to power is obscure, especially as he may have been a minor on the death of his predecessors (Steer & Bannerman 1977, 203; Paterson 2001, 23-26). Through his marriage, along with clever playing of the feudal developments elsewhere across the western seaboard, John transformed his old position, with its old connotations, into a true feudal and vastly encompassing lordship. Although McLeod (2002) is probably correct in his assertion that John’s adoption of the title ‘Dominus Insularum’ in 1336 was in many ways a continuation of older titles, he underestimates the significance of John’s use of Latin. It surely reveals that John perceived his own position as ‘feudalised’ and very much part of the European lordly order (Steer & Bannerman 1977, 201-203; Munro & Munro 1986, 3-4; Grant 1988, 133-34). Despite the territorial and local political advantages of a marriage into the Clann Ruairidh, the wider political benefits of an inter-marriage with the Stewards of Scotland, heirs presumptive to the throne of Scotland

(Steer & Bannerman 1977, 286), was obviously a shrewd move. Seventeenth-century clan historians recorded that Ami and John's relationship was mere concubineage (RBC, 159, HP: I, 25), perhaps reflecting propaganda spread at the time, however, the formality of the marriage is revealed by the necessity of gaining Papal dispensation (HP: I, 73-75). Any problems which may have been caused regarding the inheritance of the Clann Ruairidh lands appear to have been negated by an agreement between John, Ami and their children (RBC, 159; Gregory 1881, 30; MacKenzie 1903, 80: Fig. 15). John managed to gain crown recognition of this superiority and obtained a grant of the core Clann Ruairidh lands (Moidart, Arasaig, Morar, Knoydart, Uist, Barra, Rum, Eigg and St. Kilda) from Robert II in 1372 (RMS: I, 147). Almost immediately this was re-granted to his son by Ami, Ranald (eponym of the Clann Ragnail), along with other Clann Ruairidh lands over which John had also gained superiority (Sunart, Lochaber and Morvern: Munro & Munro 1986, 10-11): royal confirmation followed (RMS: I, 189). Whilst the Clann Domhnaill gained superiority, these charters clearly recognised Ami's children as heirs to the Clann Ruairidh.

## 2.7 The Clann Ragnail and the Siol Ghoraigh: 1372 – c. 1460

Despite John's charter to Ranald, the inheritance of the Clann Ruairidh lands is far from straightforward and it is apparent that Ranald was in dispute over his lordship with his brother Godfrey. Hugh MacDonald's *History* states that Godfrey was the elder, and that:

*in the minority of Donald [John's successor as Lord of the Isles] ...  
Reginald ... became tutor to both Donald and to Godfrey's children, for the  
space of nine of ten years ... Godfrey left four sons ... but none of them ever  
enjoyed their father's patrimony; for Ronald, their uncle, took hold of all  
their share of South Uist to himself (HP: I, 27).*

Later clan historians are agreed that Ranald became a significant figure in the Isles: the *Red Book of Clanranald* claims that he was:



*High Steward over the Isles at the time of his father's death, being in advanced age and ruling over them ... [and] was governor of the whole Northern Coastland and of the Isles (RBC, 161).*

Gregory (1881, 30) reasoned that Ranald's ascendancy resulted from Godfrey's objection to the settlement of the Clann Ruairidh territories: Ranald being rewarded for his pliancy. However, as MacKenzie (1903, 82) noted, there is no supporting evidence for this. Whichever was the elder son, Ranald's feudal superiority did not occur by the disinheritation of his brother. Hugh MacDonald recorded that:

*Of Godfrey descended a branch of the Macdonalds in North Uist ... He had from his father a large portion of land, as North Uist, Benbicula, the one half of South Uist, Boysdale, Canna, Slate and Knoydart. It was he who gave Boisdale to MacNeill of Barra, and gifted Hirta or St Kilda to the laird of Harris. He was very liberal, but his offspring were very unfortunate and lost all (HP: I, 25).*

There may be some problems with accepting this list of lands as those held by Godfrey as Hugh may have been trying to legitimate Clann Uisdean claims to these lands in later periods (see Section 2.11). There is some correspondence to lands not covered in Christina of Mar's charters, which may suggest that these lands were outwith the main Clann Ruairidh patrimony and/or held as a sub-lordship: perhaps by the Siol Mhurchaidh (see Section 2.3). However, the assertion that Ranald stole the rightful inheritance of Godfrey and his children seems to be at odds with a surviving charter for church lands in Cairinis, possibly dated two years after Ranald's death. In this document Godfrey styled himself 'Dominus de Wyste' and issued it "apud castrum nostrum de Elane Tyrim" - 'from *our* castle of Tioram' (Munro & Munro 1986, 13-14). This is directly contradicted by a parallel paragraph of Clann Ragnail propaganda:

*A man of augmenting churches and monasteries was this Ranald, son of John ... He bestowed an Unciata of land in Uist on the monastery of Iona for ever, in honour of God and Columba ... he died in ... 1386, in his own manor of Castle Tirim (RBC, 161).*

Ranald's connection to Tioram is supported by Hugh MacDonald's text (HP: I, 28), but Godfrey's ability to issue charters from the seat reveals a quick and effectual assertion over his claims to the Clann Ruairidh territories. Godfrey's position was certainly consolidated enough for him to be involved in the pastoral care of his lands and to take a role in Clann Domhnaill affairs. A papal letter, dated 1389, survives regarding his installation of a cleric to a church dedicated to 'St Mulrune' where he is described as "Goffred de Wyst, doncel, said diocese, lay patron of the said church" (McGurk 1976, 88-89). The church is likely to be Cille Maelrubha, in Arisaig (see Reeves 1860, 271, 291-92), suggesting that his influence extended to at least part of the Clann Ruairidh mainland territories. In 1388 he had served the Lord of the Isles as his ambassador to the English court, alongside the Bishop of Sodor (MacPherson 1819, 94-95). These two documents certainly go against claims that Ranald had disinherited Godfrey and his children. Additionally the Siol Ghoraidh, as the line of Godfrey are more commonly referred to, appear to have retained some importance in the Uists into the early 1400s. 'Angus Gothrason of the Ylis' appears beside 'Dame Mary of the Ylis and of Rosse' in a deed of 1420 (Munro & Munro 1986, 31-33), Angus's son, Alexander, became an abbot of Saddell in the same year (ibid, 291). The inclusion of the 'clann Gofraidh' in the genealogical list, MS 1467 (Skene 1890, 465), reveals their importance within Hebridean politics after 1400.

Gregory (1881, 31) suggests the people of Uist may have favoured Godfrey, resenting Ranald's presumption and keeping his descendants out of their inheritance there. He went on to stipulate:

*Both Godfrey and Ranald left male issue, who must naturally have been opposed to each other ... we may readily conceive ... that, where so rich a*

*prize was in dispute, much blood would be shed, and many atrocities committed* (ibid., 34).

Whilst feuding may have occurred, it is more than possible that the dissemination of Clann Ruairidh lands reflects a continuation of splitting territories between male heirs, in line with ancient Hebridean tradition rather than under feudal primogeniture. The *Red Book of Clanranald* notes a fairly even distribution amongst Ranald's sons. Allan was his direct heir, Donald as 'Steward of Lochaber', Dugall had at least a manor in 'Reispoll' and Angus Riabhach became "Lord of Garbhthrian" (RBC, 167). There appears to have been some unity, most being buried in Iona with their father, and the line of Ranald being traced through Allan ("Rory, son of Allan, Son of Ranald, assumed the lordship of his father, and of his grandfather": ibid., 167) and it is from Alan the main line of Clann Ragnail gained the epithet *Clann mhic Ailean*. Despite this, Allan and 'Rory' do not appear in the histories to any great effect and no charters survive regarding their territories. The *Red Book* claims they both died in Tioram (ibid.) suggesting they held onto the symbolic seat of the Clann Ruairidh, but this may have been the desired effect of the author.

It seems probable that Alan and Rory's lack of impact on Hebridean politics resulted from the ascendancy of the Siol Ghoraidh in the earlier 1400s. Their superiority is revealed by the fact that 'Alexander MacGorrie' led two thousand Uist men at the Battle of Harlaw in 1411 (Gregory 1881, 34). The *Scotichronicon* noted his name as "Makrewri" (Watt 1987, 260), if this is not simply a scribal error, it may reveal that Godfrey and his descendants believed they were upholding the eponym and lineage of the Clann Ruairidh and had eclipsed the Clann Ragnail. The lack of contemporary note of any Clann Ragnail involvement at Harlaw would also seem to suggest they were fairly minor in this period. Their only claim to fame was when a younger son made an appearance in the front ranks at the Battle of Inverlochy in 1431: "Allan, son to Allan of Muidort" one of "the most principal men of the name" (HP: I, 41). One of the attendees of the feast of Aros in the 1460 was one "John Macdonald, tutor to Roderick his nephew" (HP: I, 45) which may suggest that the head of the Clann mhic Ailean was in the minority at this point in time.



The Clann Goraith appear to have been the superior group in Uist until Alexander, along with John MacArthur pursued claims to other territories. These efforts got lost in the confusion following the murder of John II of the Isles, but resulted in John and Alexander MacGorrie being executed in 1427 (Gregory 1881, 35-6). Bower described John as “a great prince amongst [Alexander’s] followers” (Watt 1987, 261), but he was the inheritor of claims to Clann Ruairidh lands granted by Christina of Mar to his father in the early 1300s (see Section 2.5). These factors may suggest that the Clann Goraith had achieved its position through some alliance with these claimants. After 1427 their Uist holdings appear to have been gradually diminished. In their year of execution Alexander Lord of the Isles granted the southern end of South Uist (Baghasdal) and Barra to the MacNeills/Clann Neill. Clann Neill clan tradition holds that they had held these lands directly from Godfrey beforehand (MacNeil 1923, 41), which if true, may show the Clann Goraith had had to renounce superiority over much of their lands. The absence of any of the Clann Ragnail from the witnesses is also revealing.

By 1460 a member of the Siol Ghoraidh was referred to in the *Red Book* as “laird of the northern end of Uist” (RBC, 169). It is an interesting coincidence that it is this date when Ranald’s lineage makes a reappearance in the clan histories (Alexander “died a powerful, bold-warlike lord of the Clanranald on the island of Abas”: *ibid.*, 169), however, it hints at the Siol Ghoraidh’s decline in influence. Around the same time the Clann Goraith also disappear from the important clan genealogies. MS1467 states that Godfrey’s children “died young and left no male children who had offspring” (Skene 1890, 465). This is an early date for the erasing of the Clann Goraith from the official Clann Domhnaill historiography, which can only really be explained by the new prominence of the rival branch of the Clann Ruairidh line. By the seventeenth century their position had been blotted out from history. Hugh MacDonald stated “none of Godfrey’s offspring” were “anywise qualified to succeed their father” (HP: I, 60), while the MacMhuirich’s recorded that “Godfrey left no offspring, except a few poor people who are in the north end of Uist” (RBC, 211). It may also be around the time of their decline, 1468-69, that oral history

records the Siol Ghoraidh suffered a slaughter in their feud with the Siol Mhurchaidh (Crawford 1965, although Beveridge suggests a later date 1911, 77).

The fact that the Clann Ragnail had been missed out of the original compilation of MS1467, around 1400, only to be added sometime around 1467 (MacGregor 2000a, 133), may reflect the decline and rise in the fortunes of the Clann Ragnail during the fifteenth century. Although the scribe may have had political connections to the Clann Ragnail (ibid., 136, Ó Baoill 1988, 123), they were obviously thought to be some importance by the time they were finally included. Indeed, they were the first branch of the clan to be noted: “the Clan Donald of Erin and Alban, and those descended from them, as are the Clan Ranald of the north” (Skene 1890, 465).

## **2.8 The Clann Ragnail Reinvigorated: c. 1460 – 1513**

The Clann Ragnail fortunes in the latter half of the fifteenth century are rather a paradox. Alongside the division of the Clann Ruairidh estates, with the majority of the Uists granted to a sub-branch of the Clann Domhnaill, Allan MacRuari reinvigorated the clan’s fortunes. His proactive backing of the wider Clann Domhnaill under Angus Og against his father, John Lord of the Isles and his vassals throughout the Highlands and Islands made him highly conspicuous in contemporary documents and subsequent histories. After John’s forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles Allan and his son, Ranald Ban, continued to consolidate the position of the Clann mhic Ailean and the Clann Ragnail as a whole. This renewed vitality was achieved through very different policies of reaction to politics throughout the Scotland and the Isles. Unlike Allan, who forfeited his mainland possessions and only maintained continuing control by the sword, Ranald gained charters for huge Hebridean possessions and obtained crown support for a highly influential lordship, centred in South Uist.

In traditional histories Allan appears terrorising the mainland clans MacIntosh/Clann An Toisich and MacKenzie/Clann Coinnich as far as Inverness-shire and Easter Ross (Gregory

1881, 56-57, MacDonald 1997, 24, 28-30). By the 1480s he features in the *History of the MacDonalds* at the Battle of Bloody Bay fighting in a prominent position alongside Angus Og in the vanguard of the Clann Domhnaill proper against Angus's father, John IV Lord of the Isles and Earl of Ross. He was possibly even beside Angus in Angus's birlinn:

*Angus Ogg and Allan Laird of Mudort attacked Macleod, and took him prisoner, with a great slaughter of his men. Angus Ogg would have hanged Macleod immediately had he not been prevented by the Laird of Mudort saying, he would have none to bicker with if Maclean was gone (HP: I, 50).*

The dispute is normally interpreted as having arisen due to John's increasing patronage of vassal clans (such as the MacLeans/Clann Gill'eoin and Clann Coinnich) and his acceptance of substantial territorial losses in Ross, Kintyre and Knapdale. These were perceived to have occurred at the expense of the posterity and prestige of the central kindred's lordship (see Gregory 1881, 52-53, Paterson 2001, 51-52). If this is true, it suggests that Allan fully accepted the superiority of the Clann Domhnaill. It is an irony that the activities of the core Clann Domhnaill kindreds in wiping out John's support from the vassal lords, led to the eventual demise of the Lordship of the Isles, leading to its final forfeiture in 1493, after which John went to the Scottish Court (*ibid.*, 55). Raids on the castle and lands of Urquhart in 1497 were headed by 'Alan McRory', who led a conglomeration of Clann Ragnaill forces, alongside those of lesser branches of the Clann Domhnaill and their allies (Neilson & Paton 1918, 134-35). The presence of other branches of the Clann Ragnaill shows that Allan was beginning to pull together the kindreds under the superiority of the Clann mhic Ailean.

Allan's notoriety is perhaps best illustrated in a poem by Finlay the Red Bard, a poet in MacGregor/Clann Griogair patrimony, who may have been amongst those who fought beside John IV against Allan. Composed as a satire, in a mock elegy of his death Finlay relayed that:



*The prime devil of the Gael is dead,  
a tale fit to be vaunted,  
who ignobly wounded churches and crosses,  
the bald boar dull and worthless.*

(Watson 1937, 135).

Throughout he is portrayed as a rival of the devil, compared to a beast and receives other taunts, ranging from acts of sacrilege, his baldness (ibid, 134-139) and others:

*It is no wonder that he should be in torment:  
it is long since Allan was gallows-ripe;  
do not talk of the sexual vigour of the man  
who had relations with his mother and his sister.*

(Thomson 1974, 33).

This is somewhat at odds, though not entirely, with the *Red Book* which states:

*Rory had a good son named Allan, son of Rory ... Allan assumed lordship,  
and well worthy of a property was that Allan, for he put his terror and fear  
over enemies and many of this part of Scotland. He enjoyed a long life, and  
left a good progeny after him (RBC, 169).*

The *Red Book* also contains an elegy that praises Allan's patronage of monasteries and may hint at Allan's domination of the Clann Ragnaill and resumption of influence over other Clann Ruairidh lands lost to the Clann mhic Ailean (see Section 2.6). We are informed "he assumed the leadership of the Gael" and "united branches of the valour of Alba that have died" (ibid., 219). However the poem may have been recording the situation after Allan's death, as it appears that Ranald, Allan's son had also died:

*Ranald died after his father;  
Dressed in a fine coat of mail,  
He protected the territory of the Plain of Collas,  
They could not find a better chieftain.*

*Allan was dextrous like Cuchullain;  
The valour of Ranald of the vehement pursuits;  
The severest death for every man is that of his heir,  
This is the saddest case of all.*  
(ibid., 223-25).

Poems and tales aside, Allan's alliance with Angus Og would certainly place him in a prominent position within the Clann Domhnaill. This seems somewhat at odds with John IV's territorial policies. In a charter, probably dating to 1469, John had granted his brother, Hugh, or *Uisdean*, a huge sway of lands in the Isles, including the Sleat peninsula, which lent its name to Uisdean's ensuing branch of Clann Domhnaill, and a large portion of the Uists, including North Uist, Benbecula and the parish of Sgire Hogh (Munro & Munro 1986, 152-54). These appear to be the same territories listed by Hugh MacDonald as appertaining to Godfrey around 1400 (HP: I, 25), which may have been freed by the demise of the kindred. However, the paralleling territories may shed light on Hugh's policy of providing legitimacy for the later Siol Uisdean claims, as, if accepted, they would reveal the lack of substance in the Clann Ragnaill chief's superiority in these islands. The issue had re-ignited in the early 1600s when the then chief of Sleat was trying to impose his feudal rights. All of this may suggest that the Siol Uisdean seized authority in the Uists in a time when both the Clann Goraidh and Clann Ragnaill were vulnerable. Additionally, this may have been an effort by John IV to placate Clann Domhnaill sub-kindreds by granting them superiority over large territories, often at the cost of his allies. By offending his clients John sowed the seeds for future disputes and perhaps resulting in Allan's siding with Angus Og (Paterson 2001, 50).

After the forfeiture of the Lords of the Isles Uisdean of Sleat was confirmed in his territories by the King (RMS: II, 484), two days later MacNeill of Barra was also confirmed in Baghasdal (RMS: II, 485). Both of these charters were issued at Finlaggan, signifying the crown's attempt to bring the Highlands and Islands to order. To this end the King came to the Isles on several occasions, meeting with the lords and granting them their lands, but no charter survives for Allan's territories. Hugh MacDonald's *History* recorded the situation in the Uists between Uisdean and Allan:

*Contemporary with him of his own name was Allan Laird of Muidort, who then possessed the lands of Hough Benbicula, Canna, which he had to that time from the time of Ranald his great grandfather, the first Laird of Muidort. These lands were Godfrey's patrimony ... But Allan Laird of Muidort opposed Austin so far that he was necessitated to apprehend him and carry him where the Lord of the Isles lived and render up the lands to his chief; yet they were never of any profit to Austin's posterity for the lands of Muidort always kept possession of them tho' contrary to right; neither had they any legal title to their holdings till King Charles the Second's time (HP: I, 59-60).*

Despite the propagandist slant of Hugh's text, Uisdean's son John signed his lands over to Ranald, Allan's son and heir, and Angus 'Rewochsoun Makranald' (grandson of the eponymous Ranald) through the King. Gregory (1881, 107) has interpreted this as an attempt by John to disenfranchise his brothers as he had no children of his own, but if he was alive in 1505 to be murdered by one of his brothers (Munro & Munro 1986, 308) the logic of this seems curious.

Ranald Ban was heir to his father's territories but was granted lands in the Uists in his own right during his father's lifetime. Within two days of each other he was issued two grants, one for the old Clann Ruairidh lands in the parish of Cille Pheadair, the other for Sgire Hogh and lands in Eigge and on the mainland (RMS: II, 247). Why he was given this within his



father's lifetime has never been clear, perhaps this was royal policy designed to circumnavigate Allan's divided loyalties and obstruct the creation of a new and large power block along the west coast under the Clann Ragnaill. This policy would account for nearly all the mainland territories of the wider Clann Ragnaill lineages being forfeited by 1501 (Calderwood 1993, 87-88). Allan's forfeiture signifies that the Clann Ragnaill chief was not under the King's trust at this time, Ranald Ban's charter perhaps merely recognised the reality of a position and associated demesne within the lordship, some kind of *táinaiste's* territory perhaps (see Sellar 1989, 14). His presence fighting alongside Allan at Urquhart in 1497 (Neilson & Paton 1918, 134) certainly signifies that son and father were not at odds with one another, which may have been expected if his actions had diminished Allan's standing.

The severance of Allan from his lordship to Lowland eyes is suggested by the lack of references to either Eilean Tioram or Moidart when he was named in contemporary government records (Neilson & Paton 1918, 73; Calderwood 1993, 87). However, even Allan's great detractor, Finlay the Red Bard, situated him firmly in the Clann Ruairidh mainland territories, "from the sea-girt fortress ... between Seile and Subhairne" (Watson 1937, 135, 137). While the 'sea-girt fortress' may refer to an Island origin, foreign to a Gael from the central Highlands, it more probably implies Tioram, signifying that within the *Gàidhealtachd* Allan retained his symbolic links to both his castle and his lordship. His retention of this position at the centre of the Clann Ragnaill further suggests Ranald's assumption of charters for their Hebridean lands took place within the context of a relatively stable local political structure. However, it is possible that the crown was deliberately consolidating Ranald's position so he could deal with the brutal feuding that broke out in the Uists and Skye between the Siol Uisdean. Their prominent role in these affairs is visible in Hugh MacDonald's *History* (HP: I, 66-69). This would also account for Gregory's (1881, 107) interpretation of a later grant of all the Siol Uisdean lands to Ranald Ban in 1505 (RMS: II, 610-11).

Allan died sometime in the first decade of the 1500s: his relationship with the king at that time is disputed; some scholars suggesting he had come into the crown's favour, others that he was executed (see RBC, 169; Gregory 1881, 109-10; Munro & Munro 1986, 297-89).

Given previous crown policy it seems likely that Ranald would have received the renounced Sleat lands in 1505 regardless of his father's favour, especially if it was John of Sleat's wish (see above). Ranald Ban had become a highly influential figure in the Hebrides: according to Hugh MacDonald he commanded a galley at Bloody Bay which "grappled side to side with Macleod of Harris's galley" (HP: I, 50). Hugh additionally revealed that he played a prominent role in the feuding between the Siol Uisdean that ravaged Sleat and North Uist in the late 1400s and early 1500s: aiding his brother in law, Donald Herrach, who sent to South Uist for help, and driving his other infamous brother in law, Archibald, or Gillespie Dubh, out of the Uists (ibid., 66-67).

It is often stated that the charter for the Sleat lands in 1505 stood for nothing (e.g. MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: II, 241): Ranald may have held the paper, but the Clann Domhnaill North held them in reality, by right and/or by the sword. Ranald's role in the feuds probable reveals that his superiority was recognised. If he had been ineffectual it seems unlikely that in 1508 Ranald would have been given further leave to 'set' the lands of Lewis and Waternis along with Alexander MacLeod of Dunvegan (RPS: I, 256, 250-51), although it may have failed by 1511 (MacKenzie 1903, 123). A 1520 bond of manrent involving Donald MacDonald of Dunskaith was witnessed by the then head of the Clann Ragnaill, his brother, 'parson of Ilanfenan', and his two sons: surely revealing the line's retention of influence over old Sleat territories.

By 1503 Ranald was significant enough of a figure in the Isles to appear alongside a list of major landholders commanded by the King to pursue "lauchtlane mclane of dowert et ewin alanesone" for treason, with a reward of half their lands if he brought in any of the head men (APS: III, 248). Additionally in 1508 'Rinaldo filio Alani Makrory' again was included in a list of those charged not to molest the Prioress of Iona in her travels (RPS: I, 273).

Although his name is confused with Donald, Hugh MacDonald, refuted the titles Ranald

received from the Siol Uisdean estates as well as, presumably, the superiority over South Uist, the Small Isles and other lands: “Donald Bain of Muidort died at Perth, having received his charter from the King, which did his family little service as they never came to their hands” (HP, 67). This, along with the continuation of disputes over Allan’s mainland territories, was apparently confirmed in the summary of Ranald’s life contained in the *Red Book*:

*Ranald Ban, son of Allan, assumed the lordship of his father, and he was good in it; for exalted was his position and great was his sway, and good were his laws and regulations of his country during the short time he lived. But having gone before the King to settle finally the affairs which his father was not able to effect, he died in the town of Perth, A.D. 1513 (RBC, 169).*

It is possible that Ranald’s apparent policy of compliance with the king mirrored that of John MacIain of Ardnamurchan, whose activities since 1493 had been strongly rewarded by the crown (Paterson 2001, 58). However, his breach of Clann Domhnaill solidarity and subsequent royal favour made him conspicuous, and he became the focus for the Donald Gallda and Lochalsh insurgencies of the early sixteenth century (ibid., 62-64). There is no evidence that Ranald gained a similar reputation, although it is possible that this may account for his son’s lack of popularity (see below).

It is clear from the *History of the MacDonalds* that South Uist was perceived as the centre to Ranald Ban’s activities (HP: I, 68-69) and with Tioram in dispute, and possible reverence to Allan’s superiority, Ranald adopted a new seat and title; ‘Rinaldo Alansoun de Ylandbigrim’ - Ranald Allanson of Eilean Bheagram. This South Uist fortification was not used as an appellation in Ranald’s charters of 1498, first appearing in 1505 (RMS: II, 610-11), being used throughout 1508 (RPS: I, 246, 250-51).

The title was abandoned by Dugall, Ranald’s son and heir, but Ranald’s connection to South Uist was maintained. Ranald may have died by 1511 (Munro & Munro 1986, 289), and as



early as 1511 Dougall was styling himself as head of the lineage: “Dugal McRynald of Ellantyrn” (Innes 1869, 135) and “Doul Ranaldsone, the son and ayr of wnquhile Ranold Alanson of Alanbigrin” (Innes 1849, 195-96). The rise to prominence of “Dowgall Ranald Allansonis” is signified in 1512 when he was called to justice for piracy on a Spanish shipwreck in the Isles (ALHT, IV, 297, 341). Dugall, however, appears to have been none too popular, even the *Red Book* is non-committal about his contribution to the clan: “I shall leave it to another certain man to relate how he spent and ended his life” (RBC, 171). The MacDonald *seanachaidh* told a more elaborate tale:

*the Laird of Muidort Dougall MacRanald was killed by his own cousin  
germans John and Allan. His two sons, likewise Angus and Alexander were  
apprehended by Alexander of Glengarry and killed (HP: I, 64).*

Dugall may have been killed in Uist as late as 1537 (Anon. 1819, 86), if so he must have been deposed as superior lord of the Clann Ragnaill by a much earlier date (Stewart 1982, 25). In February of 1519 the new face of Clann Ragnaill, another of Allan’s sons and Dugall’s uncle, Alexander, made a bond of manrent with John Campbell of Caulder, wherein he bound “me my sonnys kyn men and servandis to be leyll and trewe men” (Innes 1869, 131-32). This was a fairly normal bond with the exception of one clause, Alexander was to seek John’s “consall in al maner of a actionis that I haof ado and speciale anent my eyne Dowgall M’rannald” (ibid.). The disaffection with Dugall was obviously afoot, at the end of the following year an Indenture of Manrent was made over which made no mention of it, and although he only referred to himself as “appeyrand ayre of Illanteryn” it was clear that Alexander was head of the clan (ibid., 137-38).

## 2.9 The Lordship of Gairbhtreín

The possibility of a territorial sub-lordship within the Clann Ruairidh patrimony has been raised a number of times in the above discussion. There is enough evidence to mark out the boundaries of one such defined unit, that survived from the end of the fourteenth century to

the seventeenth century. According to the *Red Book* Ranald the clan progenitor's son, Angus Riabhach inherited what appears to be a titled territory when he became “*tigherna Ghairbhtreín chlainni Ragnail*” - “Lord of the Garbhthrian of Clanranald” (RBC, 166-67). It is not recorded what territories this lordship incorporated, but it is evident that he held considerable influence, possibly being patron to a branch of the MacMhuirich poet lineage (Ó Baoill 1988, 123). In 1498 his son ‘Angusio Rewochsoun Makranald’ was given a royal grant of lands which had been conceded by Uisdean of Sleat, it seems likely that Angus was inheriting his father's lordship. These lands included Benbecula and portions of Eigg, Morar and other mainland estates, twenty-nine merklands in all (RMS: II, 518).

Considering that ‘Rinaldo Makallane’ the heir apparent to the Clann Ragnail, obtained grants for sixty-eight merklands and thirteen pennylands within days of each other (RMS: II, 247), Angus's lands constitute a large fraction of the old Clann Ruairidh territories: almost a third (Fig. 16). *Ghairbhtreíne* may be interpreted as ‘Rugged Third’. There are some problems with interpreting the latter word, as *trian*, meaning third, because it is indeclinable (Martin MacGregor pers. comm.). Additionally, although the combination of *garbh* with a denominational division in territory is a common feature of Gaelic place-names in both Scotland and Ireland, its use was often more generalised, defining the western mainland Highlands (McLeod 1999, 8-14). However, it is clear from later documents that younger sons could claim, or be granted, a *trian*/third of a father's estates under the system of tanistry (Sellar 1989, 14). This could indicate that this lordship was a recognised and defined territory and suggest that Angus held an influential position in the Isles, which seems verified by his witnessing of one of Angus Og's charters in 1485 (Munro & Munro 1986, 187-88). If Angus's position can be substantiated, it would point to a greater presence in the Uists of the wider Clann Ragnail than suggested by the charters and, given the fragmentary nature of the inheritance pattern, further indicate why the Clann mhic Ailean was not at its most influential during the mid 1400s. However, ‘Angus Reoch Angusson’ appears in a list of followers of Allan on raids around Urquhart in 1497 (Neilson & Paton 1918, 134), possibly suggesting that he acknowledged Allan as his superior, although he may have been present as an independent ally.

Angus's Morar lands were forfeited by 1501 (Calderwood 1993, 87-88), although, it seems he was still in unsanctioned possession of them in 1516. The Earl of Argyll had inherited much of the Clann Ragnail's mainland estates (the King's 'ferm land': Hannay 1932, 79), which included "Moroyne quam Anguis Mackanguis Rewing habet" (RPS: I, 449). MS1467 (the earlier part of which may have been patronised by Angus Riabhach: Ó Baoill 1988, 123; MacGregor 2000a, 133) stated that "Angus Riach had one good son, viz, Angus og, and had in him a bald-headed youth" (Skene 1890, 465), possibly John, who may have succeeded him and died in 1538 leaving no issue (RPS: II, 378). After the demise of the "Sliocht Aonghais Ruabhaig" (RBC, 169) lineage the lands were re-granted together several times.

In 1538 two brothers 'Alane' and 'Lauchlane' McCoule McRannauld were given non-entries into parts of Morar, Eigg, Benbecula and Arisaig, which the charter states had lain empty since the end of the Sliocht Aonghais Riabaigh (RPS: II, 378). 'Alane' and 'Lauchlane' may have been the sons of the then chief's illegitimate brother (Anon. 1819, 87), but it is more likely that they were the sons of the deposed chief, Dugall (MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: III, 251; RBC, 215). The latter theory is verified by a charter of 1540 for Eigg, which states that it had been empty since death of 'Doule M'Ranald' (RPS: II, 590). These charters suggest that Dugall's deposition from the chiefship was achieved through relatively peaceful means, and that through agreement Dugall was placated through his establishment into the sub-territory of 'Garbhthrian'. The fact that he and his progeny continued to be held in some regard is highlighted by their inclusion in list of Iain Moidartach's supporters against a contending chief and his Frazer allies in the 1540s (MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: III, 251).

It was only at the beginning of the seventeenth century when the cohesion of the Garbhthrian territories was finally challenged, although their significance was not fully lost. The mainland region of Morar were retained by Dougall's line (who became the family of Morar: MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: III, 251), and the rest were given to Ranald (soon to become 'of Benbecula', brother to the then chief) in the early 1600s (ibid.: II, 770-73).



However, perhaps the most revealing evidence for the territorial unit's continuing relevance is the fact that it was named and included in the contemporary *Red Book*, which may itself stem from a recognition of the position and antiquity of the lordship then occupied by the House of Benbecula.

## **2.10 The Age of Feuds: 1513 – c. 1600**

Throughout the Highlands and Islands the sixteenth century has traditionally been associated with inter-clan feuding, often thought to have been stimulated by the cessation of the pacifying influence of the Lordship of the Isles. The crown attempted to insert itself into this power vacuum, and tried to keep a control over lands and succession by attempting to validate loyal individuals, with claims to territorial lordship, through the use of charters. Additionally, Lowland government policy attempted to install lieutenants, such as the earls of Argyll, Huntly and Ochiltree, to serve as middlemen in the subjugation of the Gaels, but these often had to be curtailed as they pursued policies of personal aggrandisement. The Clann Caimbeul were quick to enrich themselves on the back of these policies and created a new power bloc that covered much of the western seaboard by 1600. Recent revisionist academic debate has pointed out that the Clann Caimbeul were the natural successors to the Lords of the Isles within Gaelic ideology, patronising poetry and sculpture and maintaining Gaelic institutions, including the use of kinship. Thus they perhaps do not deserve their later reputation as Lowland 'lackies' who introduced Lowland forms of landholding (e.g. Dawson 1988; Boardman 2003). Nevertheless, Duncan Campbell of Lochawe's choice to be buried at Kilmun in a tomb decorated in a Gothic style (RCAHMS 1992, 177, 179-81) rather than in the West Highland school of sculpture surely reveals the clan's cultural ambiguousness. Additionally, there can be little argument that they acted as an antithesis to Clann Domhnaill ambitions throughout much of this period and gained legal royal sanction for their expansionist policies. However, the crown's strategy of granting charters to individuals with little *de facto* hold over land proved largely to be ineffectual until the 1600s, and tended to encourage feuding: most chiefs tried to obtain charters when it suited them and ignored them when they became politically inconvenient. The Clann Ragnail

were no exception, existing without charters for most of their lands for extended periods, and taking a prominent role in warfare throughout the Irish Sea. However, by 1600 this had resulted in their loss of superiority over most of their estates.

The precise mechanism of Alexander's rise over his nephew is unknown, it is likely that the clan elected him as their leader. Alexander was not recognised as chief by Hugh MacDonald, instead he appears as "Tanister of muidort" (HP: I, 60, 69). Even the *Red Book* is rather disparaging about his achievements: "He spent his own turn; he died at Castle Tirim" (RBC, 171).

This seems to be at odds with Alexander's record. In the latter 1400s he had witnessed charters to his brother Ranald Ban (Munro & Munro 1986, 289) and he had accompanied his father in the raids on Urquhart in 1497. However, whereas his brother gained charters for his possessions in the Isles, Alexander does not seem to have ever gained official sanction for his position, either in the Isles or on the mainland estates forfeited by his father. This may have been a direct result of the crown's lack of recognition of tanistry. Alexander's main contribution to clan posterity is that he was the first to be recorded as 'capitan of clan ranald' in 1519/20 (Innes 1869, 137-38).

Alexander was succeeded by his son Iain, who became a highly prominent figure within Scottish and Irish politics. The name, Iain Moidartach, became synonymous with lawlessness at the Scottish court, gaining personal criticism from chroniclers such as Buchanan (Stewart 1982, 199) and Bishop Lesley (Dalrymple *et al.* 1888-95: II, 280, 355), and also Mary Queen of Scots (APS: III, 44). Whether his notoriety fed back to his own chroniclers at the time, or the *Red Book's* rebuttal of Buchanan was a later input cannot be discerned, however, he certainly left an impression upon those that followed him.

*He was a fortunate man in war and peace, in so much that he often spread terror over the territories through fear of him upon Lowlanders and upon Gaels* (RBC, 171).

This reputation may have arisen from his later conduct, which itself may have resulted from his treatment at the hands of the crown. In 1528, possibly while his father was still alive (Munro & Munro 1986, 289), he played a prominent role in a rising designed to reinstate the Lordship of the Isles, under MacDonald of Dunyveg (MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: II, 254; Paterson 2001, 66). Partially as a response to this revolt the crown passed an act which made it compulsory for lords to possess charters, new ones were to be ratified by both Argyll's and the King's council. Argyll and Moray then schemed to manipulate this policy to split the lieutenancy of Isles between themselves. The possible results were realised by numerous clans and it was foiled by the submission of numerous Islesmen to the crown, including that of Iain (MacKenzie 1903, 127-29). Certainly, in 1531 and 1532, he found it prudent to pursue official legitimisation of his birth (RPS: II, 146) and recognition of his position as heir to his grandfather 'Alano Makrory's lands in Moydart, Arisaig, Eigg and 'Skerihoif' (RMS: III, 247). While it is possible that Iain was merely riding political events at the time, it seems more than likely that, despite his father and grandfather's lack of charters, Iain had realised the importance and influence of having the King's sanction. In later years the crown attempted to downplay Iain's influence by retracting his charters and granting them to others. As a result Iain thoroughly cast aside any early belief in royal sanction and indulged in his own form of lordship.

Throughout the mid-sixteenth century Iain was frequently in dispute with the crown and had to see off royally sanctioned claimants on his inheritance, such as Ranald Gallda (RPS: II, 562; RPS: II, 590; MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: II, 259-62; MacDonald 1997, 39, 54; Paterson 2001, 66-67, 70-71), Huntly, Argyll and Atholl (Gregory 1881, 182-85; Paterson 2001, 70-78). Paterson does not seem to be overstating the case when he says that when Mary of Guise took control of Scotland "the problem of law and order was John Moidartach" (2001, 80). Mary Queen of Scots was forced to ask "be quhat means may all Scotland may be brocht to vniuersal obedience and how may Johne Moydart ... be dantonit" (APS: III, 44).



The house of Dunyveg had remained more ambiguous throughout this period. They were tied to the Earls of Argyll in defence of their Irish dominions against the Clann Gill'coin and stayed out of Donald Dubh's rising: benefiting from royal favour for this abstention. It was only after the death of Donald Dubh that James of Dunyveg stepped into claim the title of the Lordship (Paterson 2001, 70-71, 76). In 1545, possibly in an attempt to create an officially sanctioned Lordship of the Isles which could keep the Isles in some kind of order, James was granted the massive Barony of the Bar from the Queen (MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: II, 274-75) which included 'Kandes' in South Uist (RMS: III, 247). Dean Munro's 1549 description of South Uist says that apart from Baghasdal, which belonged to MacNeil of Barra:

*The rest of the Ile callit Peiteris parochin, the parochin of Howf, and the mane land of the mid cuntrey callit Matherhanach perteins to Clan Renald, haldin of the Clan-Donald of Kintyre ... And in the northside of this thair is ane parochin callit Vlmdbhadhle perteining to the said Clan-Donald* (Munro 1961, 76).

This account reveals that the new barony rendered Iain a vassal to the house of Dunyveg, although Cille Pheadair and Benbecula had never been in Iain's hands by royal charter.

In 1538 the Clann Ragnaill island properties were in the hands of Iain's cousins and half-brother. Benbecula passed jointly to his cousins 'Alane and Lauchlane McCoule McRannauld' (RPS: II, 378), and his half-brother 'Farquhar Makallane' gained charters for the whole of South Uist, first for Cille Pheadair (RPS: II, 441; ALHT: VII, 72; ERS: XVII, 770), then Sgire Hogh (RPS: II, 592). The non-entry for the latter stated that Sgire Hogh had lain empty since the death of Ranald Bane (ALHT: VIII, 7), but it had appeared in Iain's only charter of recognition (RMS: III, 247). Whilst this may suggest Farquhar had directly benefited at his half-brother's expense, Iain may have sanctioned this grant as it was to such a close relative (although see Macdonald 1930-32: I, 10). He came to style himself "Ferquhar McAlester of Sceirhow" (RPCS: I, 242).

It was Farquhar who was responsible for the loss of Clann Ragnail superiority over South Uist to James of Dunyveg in 1563:

*the said Ferquhar sall infest, heritable be his charter of alienatioun and precept of saising titulo oneruso with claus of warrandice ... in favour of said James ... xxij land of auld extent, wit hthair pertinentis liand in the Ile of Uyst ... for the quhilk caus, the said James has payit to the said Farquhar the sowme of ane thousand merkis ... and als the said James sall stand gude freind and maister to the said Ferquhar, and do for him in all his honest and lefull actions (RPCS: I, 241-42).*

The grant was confirmed officially in the same year (RMS: IV, 335). If relations between Iain and Farquhar were not tense before this turn of events, their relationship appears to have taken a turn for the worse: Farquhar was eventually killed by Iain's sons (MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: II, 291).

In contrast to Iain's reputation his brother was translated from his position as Parson of Eilean Fhinan to become Bishop-elect of the Isles (Munro & Munro 1986, 289). Iain himself may have changed in later life, after 1574 he:

*spent the end of his life godly and mercifully. He erected a church at Kilmarie in Arasaig, and a church a Kildonan in Eig; and he left funds to erect a chapel at Howmore in Uist, where his body was buried (RBC, 171).*

Iain was succeeded by his son and heir, Allan, whose deeds do not get a great elaboration in the *Red Book* (ibid.). Although, inter-family feuding appears to have been rife throughout his father's time (e.g. see RPS: II, 722) things seem to have escalated during Allan and his son's time. He is singled out for particular blame by the authors of the *Clan Donald*, who cite his numerous marriages, each producing a number of competitive brood of sons. His

divorce of the daughter of Alasdair Crotach MacLeod of Dunvegan led to feuds within and outwith the clan, and the resurrection of the claims of Ranald Gallda's lineage (MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: II, 297).

The inclusion of Benbecula in the charters designed to disinherit the Captains of Clann Ragnaill (OPS, 371) perhaps suggests the Clann Ragnaill hold there was stronger than previously realised. However, a bond of manrent between Allan and Caimbeul of Glenorchy in 1591 stated that Allan was to support him against all, except Angus MacConill (MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: II, 302), which would suggest the superiority of the Clann Domhnaill of Islay remained intact. This may also account for one account of Allan's son and heir Angus's demise, being "put to death by Angus Og, son of James, while he was a prisoner with him at Dunyveg" (RBC, 173).

Despite claims that the Eigg Massacre was a later invention (Paterson 2001, 79-80; although see Campbell 2000a, 127-130), the Clann Leoid feuds with the Clann Ragnaill spanned the latter sixteenth and earlier seventeenth century, and both Clann Ragnaill and Clann Leoid tradition places one of the engagements in South Uist: the Battle of Amhuinn Roag. The chief, Angus, and his brother, Donald, afterwards his successor, were living in South Uist when they were raided by the Clann Leoid. During the ensuing fight, when the Clann Leoid were driven away, Angus was killed while Donald stood aside and watched (MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: II, 300-2). Throughout this period the Clann Ragnaill were also at feud with the Clann Gill'eoin, a fight which spilled over from the Isles to Ireland, where the Clann Ragnaill played a significant role supporting their MacConnell superiors and the Tyrone and O'Neill faction (see RPCS: V, 740-41; VI, 419). They also raided Ross (RPCS: VI, 435) and feuded amongst themselves (Gregory 1881, 339-40).

## **2.11 From the Brink of Extirpation: c. 1600 – c. 1650**

By the time another of Allan's sons, Donald, assumed the captainship, none of the lineage had had charters for their lands for three-quarters of a century (MacDonald & MacDonald



1904: II, 310). However, it is clear from state records that the geographical, nominal and symbolic associations of Allan to Moydart and Eilean Tioram were accepted and unchallenged despite their rocky relationship (RPCS: IV, 159-60, 781-814; V, 53-54). The Earl of Huntly's remit "to reduce the North Isles" included a list of all the Clann Ragnail territories amongst others, it incorporated Uist and "Iland Tyrum" (RPCS: VI, 256).

In the sixteenth century the name of Clann Ragnail had been uttered in the same breath as that of Clann Leoid of Lewis by Lowland authorities for their barbarous behaviour. They only narrowly escaped the fate of extirpation and plantation designed for them by James VI, and executed in Lewis (RPCS: VII, 89-91). In 1607 the Earl of Huntly was attempting to answer the King's call to ensure obedience and rents from the Isles by requesting sureties to be made to him along with payments of the "Auld dewtie". He was also proposing to take advantage of the situation and gaining charters for the Isles:

*seing the North Ilis wer nevir rentallit nor undir a perfyte obedience,  
saufing onlie the half of the Ile of Ust, quhilk being rentallit to sex score  
pundis should be open to bid* (RPCS: VII, 341-42).

It is evident Huntly was making a play for the Clann Ragnail lands. However, Huntly was deeply distrusted by the Privy Council and he was awarded a position much reduced from that he had initially proposed. Nevertheless it was acknowledged "that he end not this service be agreement with the cuntrey people, bot be extirpation of thame" (RPCS: VII, 360-62). Events in Lewis led James to order the Fife Adventurers to join Huntly in a project:

*to extirpat and rute oute the Captane of Clan Rannald, with his hole clan  
and thair followaris within the Ilis, or Knoydert, or Moydert, and als  
McNeill Barra, with his clan, and the hole Clan Donnald in the North ...  
[and] befor the expyryng of this yeare, sall plant those Yllis with civile*

*people and noway ather with Badyenauch or Lochquaber men* (RPCS: VII, 524-25).

Although Huntly may have been held back from this course by some kind of staunch Catholic sympathy (Stewart 1982, 44-45), before this policy could be executed James appears to have changed tack on his stratagem for dealing with the Isles. Instead, he chose to enforce and/or collaborate with the chiefs of the Isles and create the Statutes of Iona (see Goodare 1998). In 1610, only three years after plans for the extermination of the Clann Ragnaill were first set on paper, “Donald McAllane VcEane of Ylantyrin, captain of Clan Ronnald” was commended by the Lowland government as “a peacable subject who has done all he could to reduce his fellow islanders” (RPCS: VIII, 445). It is perhaps with this background that he felt able to drive the Clann Neill from South Uist and claim the whole of South Uist as his. Rory MacNeil had not submitted at Iona and the Privy Council had noted that he was committing all “kynd of barbaritie” on the neighbouring islands; amongst the participators was one “McNeill in Vuistsyde” (RPCS: VIII, 396). Donald may have earned his new found commendation in reducing this particular ‘fellow islander’. Tradition has it that Donald drove the Clann Neill from Baghasdal when on returning from defeating the Clann Coinnich he found the Clann Neill carrying out depredations on the rest of Uist and took his vengeance (Anon. 1819, 110-11). Recognition of his usurpation of this territory was fairly swift, as Donald gained a royal charter for Baghasdal by the end of the year (RMS: VII, 129). Despite this, the transition was perhaps not so straightforward, MacKenzie of Coigach’s feufarm of MacNeil’s possessions in 1621 included “terras lie tiroung de Beagistill in lie South Uist (olim per McKneill de Barray occupat)” (RMS: VIII, 203). Although this claim may have resulted from MacKenzie’s opportunism, Donald was in dire straits regarding the retention of superiority over his Uist lands.

As early as 1596 Donald Gorm of Sleat had gained Sgire Hogh and Benbecula as inheritor of Hugh of Sleat’s fifteenth-century grants (RMS: VI, 161). By 1609 the crown forced him to be answerable for these territories, as well as Moidat, Arisaig, Eigg and Morar and their inhabitants, including “Donald McAllane McEane of Yllantyrin, Captain of Clan Ranald”

(RPCS: VIII, 748). Whilst this signified Donald Gorm's superiority over the Clann Ragnail, confirmation of his feudal superiority over 'Skirhuge' and 'Bainbecula' was obtained 1610 (RMS: VII, 128, 342). Four days later Donald MacAllan was confirmed in the charter given to Joanni McAllaster in 1532 of Moidart, Arisaig and Eigg. Additionally he and his predecessors were recognised as native and "kyndelie tenentes" and were also granted the rest of Arisaig, Morar and "Kyndeis" and "Bowistill in insula de North Wyoist" (RMS: VII, 129).

In the following century MacKenzie of Coigach (RMS: VII, 589-91), Ranald Gallda's line, the Earl of Seaforth, MacKay, Glengarry and the Earl of Argyll all gained varying degrees of superiority over the Uist territories, often through lending money to the Clann Ragnail chiefs (MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: II, 311-25; Stewart 1982, 158, 202). Donald's son Iain bore the brunt of these financial difficulties and was in open dispute with Donald Gorm of Sleat, which ended in 1627 when Donald was granted a wadset of Benbecula and Sgìre Hagh and gained superiority over the remainder of South Uist (ibid., 321). This wadset was then sold to Argyll in 1633/34, who also gained superiority over the Clann Ragnail mainland territories (MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: II, 324-25; Stewart 1982, 202-04). The debts to Argyll crippled the Clann Ragnail chiefs throughout the rest of the century (ibid., 158, 204).

Donald Gorm pursued his rights as landlord, or at least tried to mark his presence, as in 1622 he called for "Iain Moidartach", two of the Clann Mhuirich, and others to be put to the horn: "for not removing themselves and their familie and tennants from ... Skeirhough ... Beannecula ... lying in the Lordship of the Isles" (RPCS: XIII, 741-42).

The lack of superiority does not appear to have diminished Clann Ragnail claims to their core lands; Donald was frequently named as being 'of Moidart' and 'Eilean Tioram'. This had been formally recognised in his 1610 charter which not only stated Donald, like his grandfather, was "de Castelirrim capitani seu principis familie de Clanrannald", but that the lands now given to him were "incorporativ in liberam tenandram de Casteltirrim, ordinando



castrum de C. principale fore meeugiam” (RMS: VII, 129). The connection was maintained by Iain in his early years as chief. There is one contradiction to this when, in 1622, in a list of raiders on the Clann Caimbeul of Barbreck in Ardnamurchan (see Paterson 2001, 120-21), alongside “Johnne McDonald McAllan VcEane, Capitane of the Clan Ronald” was one “Rorie McAllane VcFerquhar, Capitane of Illantyrum” (RPCS: XII, 661). Whether Rorie was a constable of the castle and/or a descendant of the Farquhar who had a claim on South Uist in the mid-1500s is indiscernible. By 1624 Iain was referred to as “of Illantyrum” (RPCS: XIII, 427-28), a title which he maintained through the 1620s (RPCS: II 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 4) and 1630s (RPCS: VI 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 96-97), along with “Moydertiche” in 1635 (RPCS: VI 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 580-81). Although this latter appendage may have been abandoned in the middle of the century (Anon., 1819, 119), the loss was refuted by the author of the *Red Book* who names Iain, “Eóin múideordach” (RBC, 172).

The second Iain Moidartach had been brought up in an atmosphere of distrust of the house of Argyll. In 1615 he had been alongside his father in covert support of the Dunyveg MacDonalds in dispute with the Earl of Argyll and the crown over lands in Kintyre and Ireland (Gregory 1881, 367, 371, 377). Much of this may have been couched in the language of religious intolerance (Paterson 2001, 122) and Iain joined a new group of fanatical militant Catholics that spanned both the Scottish and Irish *Gàidhealtachd*. Paralleling the activities of Philip O’Sullivan Beare, Iain seems to have pictured his problems as a dis-inheritance orchestrated by Calvinist heretics and Scots Lowlanders. He was amongst the first of those who were converted, or at least re-introduced to Catholicism by a group of Irish Franciscan missionaries in 1626 (see Campbell 1953; 1984, 51-63). Within a year, perhaps spurred on with the new-found zealotry of a convert, he wrote to the Pope, complaining of the evils of Scots and heretics and promising that “all the Gaelic-speaking Scots ... will begin war each in his own district to the glory of God” (ibid., 116). Perhaps encouraged by a fear of the spread of Covenanter Calvinism (MacLean 1952, 10) but certainly through anti- Caimbeul sentiment Iain raised his clan for the King during the Civil War, fighting in a prominent position alongside Montrose and Alasdair MacColla (Stewart 1982, 99-101). Closer to home, in Uist, similar reasons probably lay behind the

expulsion of the protestant priest MacPherson (ibid., 339). Catholicism was to remain a prominent feature of state descriptions of the members of Clann Ragnail throughout the seventeenth century, as was their new-found sympathy for Stuart absolutism. Iain's son, Donald, may have been best remembered for his later cruelty (Campbell 1984, 74-85). Donald's son, Allan, was exiled for his role in the 1688 rising. Upon Allan's return he brought his protestant MacKenzie wife with him and moved the principal seat of the chieftainship to a newly built stately home at Ormacleit, only for it to burn down, reputedly on the same day as he was killed at the Battle of Sherrifmuir in 1715, again fighting for the Stuart cause. Although Allan's son, Ranald, became Clann Ragnail, he died young, and with the end of male issue, the Captainship fell to the line of Benbecula (Stewart 1982, 198).

The family of Benbecula were descended from Ranald, brother of Donald Captain of Clann Ragnail at the beginning of the seventeenth century, and uncle to Iain Moidartach. Throughout state records from the 1610s to the 1630s Ranald frequently appears within lists of raiders of the herring fisheries (e.g. RPCS: X, 3, 347, 430; XII, 661; XIII, 37, 742; (2<sup>nd</sup> Ser.) IV, 391; VI, 212) and other activities not endorsed by the Lowland authorities. His brotherly relations also seem to have been strained, in 1615 Donald called for a commission to suppress him and his associates, who had been 'disturbing the Captain's possessions' and 'raising disorders in the Isles' (RPCS: X, 430). Whilst relations with his nephew continued to be rocky in 1622, 'Rorie', 'Ronald' and 'Johnn McAllan VcEane', all of Iain Moidartach's uncles, acted alongside him against Barbreck in Ardnamurchan (RPCS: XII, 661).

Although Ranald may have held Benbecula previously and despite their occasionally fraught relationship Iain gave his uncle a tack for Benbecula, three pennylands of "Machermeanach", in South Uist, and three in Arisaig in 1625 (MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: III, 277). Ranald's descendants gained 'Benbecula' as an epithet. In 1627 a commission was issued for pursuers of the murder of "John McDonald Chleive Hoaster in Wst", it named Ranald as "Ronald McAllane VcEane of Castelvirie" (RPCS: II 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 4). The addition of the castle to his name reveals Ranald's position, although in 1635 it was

stated thar he was “*designed* Laird of Castelborrow” (RPCS: VI 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 580-81: my emphasis), possibly indicating that the title was received with some scepticism. Ranald’s riotous behaviour led him to become a notorious character in Hebridean folklore. He also played a prominent role throughout the Catholic missions to the Uists and Western Seaboard, being a signatory to Iain Moidartach’s crusading letter to the Pope, rescuing a priest on the high seas from government arrest, and harbouring other missionaries (RBC, 173-75; Macdonald 1930-31: I, 15; Stewart 1982, 72, 165; Burnett 1986, 83-84). His character is summed up in the comment in the *Red Book* where it is stated he was “a good man according to the times in which he lived” (RBC, 173).

The house of Benbecula were noted for their Catholicism throughout the eighteenth century (Stewart 1994, Macdonald 1995). Although they followed the Stuarts at Killiecrankie, they stayed out in the ’15, which meant their estates were not forfeited and probably allowed the easy transition to chiefship (Macdonald 1930-31: I, 15). Throughout the seventeenth century the Benbecula family had served as tutors to the Clann Ragnail chiefs, and during their exile managed the estates. This, plus their strong Catholic and Gaelic cultural credentials provided a strong link of continuity from the Civil War to 1715 (Stewart 1982, 162-63), although by this time their main residence had moved from Caisteal Bhuirgh to Nunton House at Baile nan Cailleach.

From the seventeenth century the clarity of landholding becomes clearer due to the increasing use and survival of documentation. In 1625 and 1626 Iain Moidartach gave a handful of large tacks, creating a number of major landholders. These included that given to his uncle of Benbecula and another to his son of Eigg. All were to close kin and from the highest level of gentry. Despite change in the form of payment from hospitality to currency, the main function of these tacks seems to have been mostly concerned with establishing vassalage (Stewart 1982, 235-36). Elsewhere, it is clear that Iain’s closest relatives were in prominent landholding positions, in 1627 his uncles, both called Alexander McDonald, appear in “Skerines” and “Illaray” (RPCS: II 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 4). This was not a new situation,



twelve years earlier the fugitive, Neil MacLeod of Lewis, received aid from a number of the then Captain, Donald's relatives in the Uists:

*Ronald McAllane, brother to the said Donald, Johnn McRonald in Wist,  
Donald Gorme McEane thair, Ronald, his son, thair, Ronald McEane  
VcRorie thair, Angus McEane McAllane thair (RPCS: X, 3-4).*

A number of these had further connections with the Uists, such as births, deaths and burials noted in the *Red Book* (RBC, 173-75), which suggests that they were landholders there. It is tempting to suggest that Iain's tacks of the 1620s, were a new, written, formalised version of previous relations, such as those revealed above in earlier centuries, where a chief parcelled off his estates amongst his children. It further tempting to state that as tacks came to be more prolific over the following century and a half that these also formalised earlier relations and forms of landholding, but this presupposes certain understandings about commercialisation (see Sections 8.2 and 12.4).

## **2.12 Summary: Lordship and Cheifdoms**

Cowan (1990) has realised that one of the primary aims of Hakon IV's 1263 campaign was to impose European 'feudal' lordship upon the Hebrides. He had already pursued a similar policy in Iceland, where he enforced the 'benefits' of secular and ecclesiastical feudalism. Hakon's attempt floundered at Largs and Alexander III introduced an effective level of feudalism to the Hebrides. McDonald has argued that the Treaty of Perth (1266) merely accelerated a pre-existing process of feudalisation in the west. Hebridean politics and culture was a hybrid of Norse and Gaelic ideas, mixed with more general European influences. On top of this, after 1266, the crown introduced European conventions:

*Thus, the Hebridean chieftains utilised Latin charters; they adopted patterns of naming and matrimony that reflected a Scottish influence; they entered into feudal relationships with the Scottish monarchy; they adopted the status*

*and terminology of knighthood; and they even engaged in long-distance trade and commerce* (1997, 156).

The term 'chieftain' has modern cultural connotations, however, and it is more relevant to talk of 'lords' in a very feudal sense when referring to leaders in this period. Hebridean lords had been adopting the trappings of a European order from the end of the twelfth century, if not earlier. The image of the mounted knight was adopted into seals (McDonald 1995), and monumental symbols were patronised, such as castles and churches built in the latest architectural styles. Throughout the early fourteenth century the Clann Ruairidh lords appear to have recognised and trusted the power of charters backed by royal sanction. It could be argued that this was merely a veneer placed upon real socio-political relations. It is far from clear how this related to the power of a *Rí Innse Gall*: did they sanction royal titles? Did they maintain an independent and distinctive institutional or cultural sphere of vassalage, comparable to, but different from those of the Kings of Scots? Whilst political relations between the Lords of the Isles and Kings of Scotland vacillated between warmth and outright hostility (Grant 1988, 124-27), upon the rise of the *Dominus Insularum*, the system of charters often verified and complemented one another. If we strip away royal charters to the Lords of the Isles themselves, or to their vassals after forfeiture, of the one hundred and twenty-nine Acts that survive, at least seventeen, from the whole period of the Lordship's life-span, were confirmed by the Kings of Scotland (Munro & Munro 1986). Eleven of these, however, were issued in the mid-1400s and relate to lands within the Earldom of Ross, recently acquired in disputed circumstances by the Lords of the Isles (Munro 1986; Macdougall 2000). These examples highlight their continued insecurity in their holdings there, and their willingness to use the crown to validate their holdings. This, together with the number of charters sought and obtained by the Lords from the crown, lends weight to the likelihood that whilst the lords wished to act with some degree of autonomy throughout the Isles, as well as in Ross, ultimately they recognised their vassalage to the crown. Whether this was rooted in recognition of their kinship to the royal line and acceptance of the social order (Bannerman 1977), or if it was through political expediency is open to debate. For their part, however, the crown did not challenge the Lordship by issuing

acts to land or powers within the Isles (Grant 1988, 133), perhaps revealing their recognition of the Lords' position: although, again, an inability to enforce any royal power there may have governed their actions.

As has been argued above the 1400s saw a decline in the influence of the Clann mhic Ailean. This is largely due to the influence of the Siol Ghoraidh, also inheritors to the lordship pulled together by the Clann Ruairidh, and the seniority granted out to the sons of the Lords of the Isles by his Stewart wife. By the seventeenth century the superiority of the Sleat branch was acknowledged in the title, Lord of the Isles: as Hugh MacDonald noted "we hear of none of the families of Kintyre, Muidort, Glengarry or Lochabber ever since they became collateral branches of Macdonald" (HP: I, 63).

Seventeenth-century sources often record that the estates of the Kings, Lords and sub-lords of the Isles were shared amongst the king's/Lord's children upon the event of his death. This may reflect an ancient tradition of splitting estates amongst heirs that continued in contrast to the 'Norman' primogeniture. Many writers have seen this phenomenon as a continuation of *gavelkind*, derived from Early Medieval Irish practice. However, the term itself is Kentish (Alex Woolf pers. comm.) and Sellar (2000, 195) has identified similar practice in earlier Orcadian and Manx estates. This indicates that partible inheritance was unlikely to have been a native tradition. Additionally, it is clear that in the Early Medieval period estates were rarely divided, rival claimants to the throne were given lands in return for submission to the king/lord and his recognised heir, the unity of the kingdom/lordship was preserved unless a compromise could not be reached (see Beverley Smith 1986). However, it is possible that a corrupted practice was introduced through mistaken interpretation of early Irish texts (or even contemporary developments in Wales, see *ibid.*) as part of the Gaelic renaissance which was taking place in Ireland in the later thirteenth and early fourteenth century.

*It is often maintained that feudal law was alien to the Gaelic way of life,  
but, as John's career clearly demonstrates, this is quite simply not true. He*



*brought together threads of an inheritance, divided at the time of the death of Somerled in accordance with ancient Celtic custom. In future, although younger sons were to receive an inheritance, the Lords of the Isles remained feudal superior in the whole. Primogeniture was also to become the standard basis for inheritance in the Isles, rather than tanistry, which continued to be practised in the Gaelic lordships of Ireland (Paterson 2001, 26-27).*

The existence of tanistry, whereby any son or near kin to a lord might inherit the lordship, often named during the chief's lifetime (Thomson 1983a, 285; Sellar 1989, 13), would indicate a more organic system of lordship and vassalage than that imposed by primogeniture and the charter. Whilst the term *táinaiste* was employed throughout the fourteenth century it seems to have had different connotations within the fourteenth-century and later Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*, than it may have done elsewhere in earlier periods. John, son of John I, was called *táinaiste* during his brother's lifetime, however, the lordship followed the line of the first born (Paterson 2001, 27), which may suggest primogeniture. Alternatively, this usage may have stemmed from a need to clarify the succession over the whole lordship, when either the whole lordship, or merely the Clann Ruairidh territories may have been disputed by his half brothers, Ranald and Godfrey, the sons of John of the Isles by Ami MacRuari (Sellar 1989, 14). The first instance we have of the term *táinaiste* within the Clann Ragnaill is upon the usurpation of Alexander MacAllan of the chiefship from Dugall, his nephew. Contemporary and later chroniclers of this inheritance were clearly uncomfortable with Alexander's claim upon the chiefship. He was named as heir apparent on a charter during Dugall's lifetime (Innes 1869, 137-38), despite Dugall having children of his own, but it seems that Alexander had assumed the lordship due to Dugall's inability to gain the support of the clan. *Táinaiste* may have been a convenient term at hand to explain his uncertain position. Similar disputed circumstances surround occurrences of tanistry in the succession of the MacLeods of Dunvegan (Grant 1959, 121-22). Like the Clann Ragnaill example they are late in date and there is evidence that there was some reluctance to recognise the new chief's position or territorial title (Steer & Bannerman 1977,

100). Disputed territories and titles occur again in instances of tanistry relating to the MacLeans of Ardgour at the end of the 1400s and the MacNeils of Gigha in the mid-1500s (ibid., 132-33, 148). Whilst there is also confusion in legal terminology between *táinaiste* and tutor (Sellar 1989, 14), it is tempting to ascribe the apparent willingness of the clans in this period to depose unpopular chiefs and ignore charters to the confusion and violence that eclipsed the Isles in the fifteenth century. *Táinaiste* may have come to be used by Hebrideans as a result of the rediscovery of a Gaelic past within Irish circles (Simms 1987, 7-9), and the accompanying adoption of Early Gaelic terminology and social structures that fed into Hebridean political culture as a result.

With the forfeiture of the Lordship of the Isles the feudal structure that held sway in the Isles appears to have collapsed, though whether this was by royal design, to emasculate the Islesmen, or the result of short sighted royal policy is open to debate. After the forfeiture the crown retained ultimate sovereignty over Harris, Uist, Skye and Small Isles (Bannerman 1977, 213). While Stewart (1982, 19-20) has argued that from 1493 the Clann Ragnail moved away from a kin-based society to become more inclusive and European, the situation seems to have been more the other way around. Kinship and less formal ties gradually took increasing prominence in forming the social hierarchy. With 1493 some of the branches of the clan managed to gain royal sanction of their hold on the lands in the Isles, but could not hold on to their mainland heartland. Despite this, however, the social ranking and vassalage to the lord and head of the lineage was maintained, and certain branches appear to have been on good relations with the crown and actively pursued royal charters, as seen in the payment of non-entries and compliance to crown wishes. However, charters ceased to be an effective way of maintaining order in the west and the crown stopped using grants to uphold the status quo and started to reward loyal followers. Thus, when it became apparent that the crown was no longer willing to play the game, Hebrideans began to refuse to recognise their authority and adopt less formal lordships.

The policy of playing off rights and charters to lands between numerous competing individuals and clans had been going on in Trotternish since the 1490s (Grant 1959, 94-95),

and with the disaffection of the first Iain Moidartach, the Clann Ragnail were subjected to it. The introduction of Ranald Gallda's claim was the first time the crown played off elements within the Moidart line in an attempt to bring the lordship into hands sympathetic to the crown. It was a grievance in the main Clann Ragnail line that lasted well into the 1600s. As the Lowland government ignored the actual kin situation in Isles the Clann Ragnail defended their lordship, including the Uists, by the sword (Stewart 1982, 22). However, it is unclear if these new claimants had any impact there, or if the Clann Ragnail maintained their position there through the continuation of tradition.

Popular history focuses on the medieval Highland clan as a social body created from by wide inter-related familial connections from the chief to the lowliest beachcomber. This appears to have been a later creation, based on an amalgam of social myth and real relations. Although MacInnes (1972) attempted to demonstrate some historicity to the concept of inclusive clanship, his argument is too dependent on direct references to the clan gentry to be useful. Evidence for Norse period social relations shows kinship as being highly important, but the picture seen from sagas and law documents in Scandinavia and Iceland again only relates to the social elite and free farmers (see Sections 4.3 and 5.3). Late medieval clanship was a complex amalgam of social and feudal infrastructures (see MacInnes 1996, 1-28; Dodgshon 1998, 31-54). However, at one level it may be summarised by a structure whereby the heads of large and powerful kindreds exerted their influence over their own territories as well as the heads of less powerful client kindreds. In turn chiefs presided over a society composed of close and distantly related clansmen at all levels of society. It is unclear when this system developed.

Genealogical manuscripts from Ireland and Scotland relating to the Gaelic clans are only concerned with a very small group of individuals, the social elite, related to historical stalwarts and mythical figures, such as Somerled or King Arthur (Gillies 1987; 1994; Sellar 1973; 1981a). It seems more than plausible that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Hebridean *clann* was more similar to the model developed for Gaelic Ireland, where it is recognised that the *clann* only related to the upper echelons (see Nicholls 1972, 8-12).



Here, as in the Highlands and Islands, lineages expanded over time, through marriage and dislocation, creating a downward and outward impetus for inclusion in the kindred. This was accentuated as the families of one chief, originally placed in positions of power, were replaced by those closer to succeeding chiefs (e.g. see Grant 1930, 186; Munro 1981, 120-21; Macinnes 1994). The traditional histories of the Uists preserve several accounts of this: the *Red Book* declares that the Siol Ghoraidh were reduced from inheritors to the MacRuari title to poor landholders by the seventeenth century (RBC, 211). A number of other parallels involve the dislocation of Norse chiefs in Lewis, such as the MacPhail/Clann Phail descendants of Paul Balkson, the twelfth-century lawman. In the nineteenth century it was said that "In the course of time they fell into decay and a few peasants only now remaining of a race once numerous and powerful" (*Banatyne MS*, 10). These are examples related to the descendants of early individuals and Munro (1981, 120-21) suggests that the downward mobility largely accelerated in the sixteenth century. Thus in the earlier fifteenth century the Clann mhic Ailean consisted of only a small number of people, all of whom were part of the *fine*: high nobility, but by 1600 the number was considerably larger and would have incorporated chiefs, as well as labourers. The mechanisms of family, fosterage and marriage created a kinship bond and noble line between all levels of society, akin to the modern concept of the clan. The bonds of kinship may have created some sense of togetherness, and may account for the close affection later clansmen for their chiefs. This is unlike the case for contemporary Irish society, where claims to nobility were lost once social debt could no longer be maintained by a lineage (Nicholls 1972, 10-11, 68-71). Nevertheless, the medieval Hebridean *fine* displayed a belief in a strictly hierarchical social structure defined by images of lordship found throughout Europe: seen in physical characteristics, participation in activities like hunting and fighting, and the patronisation of churches and castles (this will be discussed more fully throughout the Late Medieval Section 2). It is possible that as the elite adopted the language of European lordship this was simply a veneer of localised social relationships. However, it is equally possible that at the height of the Middle Ages there was an attempt to restructure Hebridean society along similar European models. If this was the case it was only later that the segregated hierarchy was

gradually eroded as the bonds of kinship widened to encompass a larger group of the populace. Whichever situation took place the sanctity of lordship was maintained.

### 3.1 Introduction

Taxes have an absolute certainty and they have left an indelible mark upon all medieval Scottish landscapes: people, families, farming and social groups were assessed and their lands parcelled up into distinct units. Elements of these units have survived into later medieval and seventeenth and eighteenth-century documentation, where they can be recovered and used to reconstruct earlier tax systems. The earliest available evidence for South Uist reveals a hierarchy of assessment units. At the bottom of the pile is the pennyland, which may be based upon the tax on an actual house or small farming unit. Twenty pennylands made an ounceland (Gaelic - *tír unga*/plural - *tírean unga*), which in turn was divided into quarterlands, each presumably worth five pennylands. By later periods a *tír unga* was at the same time both twenty pennylands, and six merklands; the merkland appearing to be a later imposition on the tax landscape. Later medieval parishes were composed of set numbers of whole *tír unga*. In the Uists the fourteenth century witnessed a change in the structure of parishes: from a random amount of *tírean unga* in a territory or lordship, to a regulated size of thirty merklands (i.e. five *tírean unga*). This suggests that the *tír unga* was the basic building block from which parishes and secular lordships were built. To summarise, the parish equals a set number of *tírean unga*; the *tír unga* was at the same time equal to four quarterlands, six merklands, and twenty pennylands.

Bald's 1805 map of South Uist reveals that the later landscape was divided into townships (Fig. 17), composed of east-west strips across the island, providing each township with a portion of all the environmental resources the island could afford: coast, arable infield and outfield, loch, grazings, peat banks, pastures, etc. Investigation of the available documentation for South Uist (Figs. 18 and 19) reveals that some eighteenth-century townships were composed of ten pennylands, with two five pennyland sub-divisions, conforming to the earlier quarterlands.



Either at the level of the *tír unga* or the quarterland there was a deliberate set access to resources related to those sizes of unit, rather than the lesser pennyland, upon which more localised divisions were levied. Each level of assessment was bounded and is represented by a single unit in the settlement hierarchy, occupied by divisions of the social strata. Thus through reconstructing the physical pattern of South Uist's units of assessment it is thus possible to develop a number of models relating to monument and socially stratified control and access to resources, and the changing nature of lordship and social relationships through time.

### 3.2 Origins

Throughout Scotland in the Early Medieval period various systems of assessing social dues were imposed. Some of these were directly applied to the geographical limits of agricultural production, being measured out in ploughable or grazable acres, others were the physical manifestation of a fiscal unit related to the social debt between lord and vassal (Dodgshon 1981, 76-82; 1998, 144; Thomson 2002, 33). All, however, involved dividing the landscape by the creation and demarcation of boundaries, and once imposed they have proved an enduring feature of pre-improvement Scottish geographies. The numerous systems seen from the Lowlands to the Northern Isles, and possibly including Man and Ireland, were probably born out of a similar cultural and/or political genesis in European multiple-estate taxation systems (Jones 1976, Dodgshon 1981, 58-73, McErlean 1983, Moore 1999). Although the terminology or regulatory features used over different areas often resemble one another, it is likely that in the various regions of Scotland the actual systems evident in later documentation were imposed out of more local independent political hegemonies, sometime before the twelfth century (Williams 2003). In western Scotland Williams makes a tentative suggestion that it was the Orcadian Earl Sigurd, who, the sagas record, was collecting silver tribute there in the late tenth century, introduced this (*ibid.*, 27). Over time, new lords tried to re-assess or re-order their lands, creating landscapes subject to a palimpsest of numerous taxation systems, which neighbour lands with a differing political history resulting in alternate layers of tax systems (Thomson 2002).

There have been numerous attempts to understand how we can interpret the meanings and histories of all the units visible in the documentation (e.g. Thomas 1884; 1886; Easson 1987; Dodgshon 1981; Thomson 2002). None has reached a satisfactory answer. The pattern in the Western Isles has been seen as Dál Riadic, 'Pictish' and Norse, and as the system in use in Uist was firmly embedded by the Norse period, the somewhat fruitless search for a precise origin, based on scant evidence, is outwith the scope of this discussion. Ross (forthcoming) has begun to circumvent a debate about origins and realise the importance of the actual physical form and pattern of the units in the landscape (although he does tackle the origin of the term *dabhach* convincingly).

### 3.3 *Tírean Unga and Dabhaichean*

The ounceland (Scots), *urisland* (Norse found mostly in the Northern Isles), *tír unga* (Scots and Irish Gaelic found mostly in the western seaboard and Ireland), *treen* (Manx) and *unciate* (Latin) are all traditionally seen to be born out of a territory worth or due an ounce of silver. Related to this list is the *dabhach*, which although Gaelic linguistically, may be Pictish in origin. Ross (forthcoming) has successfully debunked myths linking the *dabhach* to Dál Riada, and to a measurable volume of food tribute (as opposed to a sum of money or weight or silver). Instead the *dabhach* appears in mainland Scotland as a fiscal unit sharing many similarities with the *tír unga*, common in Uist, both in its form and the dues it rendered. Division into quarters can be found frequently, although the combination of pennylands varies, most notably between eighteen pennyland ouncelands in the Northern Isles, and twenty in the western seaboard, yet even here there are often localised differences, with *dabhaichean* in Glenelg being worth ten pennylands (Dodgshon 1981, 80). Once merklands are introduced the picture becomes even more confused: whilst in Uist, Tiree and Eigg a *tír unga* was six merklands, Skye was four (ibid, 79-81), although as will be argued below this may be a much later introduction. Both the *dabhach* (Ross forthcoming) and the *tír unga* were probably the unit at which dues and services between a vassal and his lord were assessed, although dues were levied on its lesser components (see below). The *Senchus*

*Fer nAlban* clearly links similar units of assessments to galley service, and numerous writers have been keen to follow this link through time (Marwick 1949; Easson 1987; Rixson 2001a, 2001b). Although it may be a late document designed to illustrate the incorporation of Argyll into the kingdom of Alba (Williams 2003, 22-26), its evidence for connections between the *tír unga* and military duties surely still stands. Additionally, Ross has reinforced the link between *dabhaichean* in Moray and military service as late as the eighteenth century (forthcoming). As well as military dues were other services to the lord in hunting and carriage. Food render and hospitality are commonly highlighted in later texts, and it is possible that there was also a redistributive nature to the rights attached to these units: MacKerrall (1944, 51) noted an Irish poem where three hundred cattle were given to a townland, in four herds. Given the variances between the details of *tírean unga* within specific regions, the differences between *tírean unga*, *urislands*, and *dabhaichean* are really no more than different linguistic names for a similarly functioning unit upon which the normative Early Medieval social processes were mapped out in the landscape.

Williams has argued that over time the terms used became inter-changable and as the original meanings were forgotten, they became almost meaningless, although the divisions became fossilised in the landscape, scribal error and developing landholding policies, meant that the original worth of parcels of land also got changed. Like a process of Chinese whispers, a parish of so many *tírean unga*, worth so many merks or pennies, came to mean a number of different things. Williams (2003, 29-29) illustrates this point by referring to an oft-quoted section of a 1505 North Uist charter, where the clerk has needed to explain his use of terminology: “davatas Scotice dictas le Terungis” (RMS: II, 610-11). The late date of this charter may suggest this view is plausible, but the early charters of the Clann Ruairidh reveal the close knit association of these terms. In 1309 the South Uist parish of Cille Pheadair is referred to as “sex davatas et tria quarteria terre” (RMS I, 428-9), whereas in 1343 the mainland region of Garmoran is numbered “octo vnnciatas terre” (Webster 1982, 114-5). If we are to see these terms as signifiers of early separate political developments this disparity raises some questions for any arguments about the early unity of the territories inherited by the lineage (see Section 2.3). It is only in 1498 that the term *tír unga* makes its first



appearance in West Highland documentation (Willaims 1996, 48). Whilst this reveals the inter-changability of these terms it also shows that we cannot be sure about the precise terminology which was in circulation in any one period in the Hebrides.

However, whilst it is almost impossible to tease out the temporal origins of the original system in one particular area, it is possible to find the physical basis for their layout amongst the pages of the confused later documentation.

### 3.4 Pennylands, Quarterlands and Merklands

Lamont (1981, 71) drew on a belief in the Dál Riadic origins of the pennyland to draw a direct link to the Irish tax on a house, *tigh*. Houses were also grouped together into bigger units of multiples of five and/or twenty. Although the Dál Riadic origin of the whole assessment system has been questioned, MacKerrall recorded an early Hebridean example of the tax of the penny upon the unit of the household. In 1210 ‘Dovenald, son of Reginald’, progenitor of the Clann Domhnaill granted the monks of Paisley “one penny from every house on his territories that emitted smoke” (1944, 59). This use of the word ‘penny’ does not necessarily indicate a precise monetary sum. Some charters suggest that it was at this level that dues could be extracted and/or imposed. An Argyll charter of 1295 stated that two pennylands were “each to provide fighting men, as is customary there” (Thomson 2002, 35). However, another charter for Lismore, in 1240 freed pennylands from the burden of *cain*, *conveth*, *feachd* and *slugagh*: the food, hospitality and military dues and obligations which signified and defined lordship and vassalage. Additionally in Mull there appears to be a direct link of pennylands in documents to the *quowart*, or *cuirt*, a circuit or journey, which was a charge on each pennyland to support the steward and his men during their annual round of rent collecting (ibid., 35). This suggests a wider association of these units with general taxation, and that they were not confined to military duties. The instances mentioned above may have been simply relieving these pennylands from contributing to these particular burdens, rather than confirming that they were the unit at which they were assessed.

Dues were also levied upon the unit of the quarterland, or grouping of five pennylands, although the connection is not made explicit in any records relating to Uist. However, this collective unit appears to be a functional grouping; five houses were supposed to provide enough men to co-operate on the land and make up the crew of a boat (Thomson 2002, 34). The seventeenth-century tacks for South Uist frequently refer to grants of five pennylands, and this much more common in other parts of the Clann Ragnail estates (*ibid.*), suggesting that this may have become an idealised number to be held by tacksmen, who were often part of the chief's own kin-group, perhaps further indicating the unit continued to have some relevance.

Williams (1996, 64-65, 221-32) attempted to deconstruct the previously presented arguments for connecting pennylands in the Northern and Western Isles to the household unit. He showed that there had been much confusion between the physical singular entity of one house-building, and the 'household unit', the latter being defined throughout north-west European Early Medieval tax systems as enough land to support a free farmer, or noble, along with servants or dependant farmers. To illustrate his arguments he showed that pennylands tend to be significantly smaller than other Anglo-Saxon and Manx units thought to be 'household units'. However, it seems clear from Dovenald's charter (mentioned above) and the tax of Peter's Pence (to which the origin of the pennyland has erroneously been assigned: Crawford 1993, 137-143; see Williams 1996, 50, 232) were both levied upon the 'house-building', and that this was an accepted form of tax. It seems probable that the Manx quarterland, which is thought to be a 'household-unit' equates not with the Hebridean pennyland, but with the Hebridean quarterland, and the pennyland refers to the 'house-building'.

### 3.5 Parishes

The origin of the parish structure in Scotland has remained obscure, Early Christian diocese and *paruchia* may have effected its initial creation, but from the twelfth century they were becoming increasingly formalised across Scotland and north western Europe (Cowan 1961,

1978; McDonald 1997, 225-33). One common feature, found throughout this region, was the conformity of the ecclesiastical parish to secular lordships. In the earlier periods the size of the parishes fluctuated, to encompass the territorial fortunes of their lordly patrons. However, as centralised ecclesiastical and state powers consolidated their grip on an area the boundaries of parishes became increasingly formalised, a process that continued into the fourteenth century and possibly beyond (Barrell 2003). Thus, by following the creation and restructuring of parishes through time, it is possible to gain an insight into the political make-up of the Uists.

It is evident that the parishes in Uist were formed from full *tírean unga*, similar to the structure of parishes in Moray, composed of whole *dabhaichean* (Ross forthcoming). Ross has noted that this reveals the importance of these units for the structure and formation of parishes (ibid.). Yet, this surely also highlights their role in the physical and symbolic nature of secular lordship: territories were not only created by the delineation and defining of these units, but they were negotiated and exchanged at this level.

### 3.6 Parishes in South Uist

A series of charters from 1495 for South Uist and Benbecula reveal the island consisted of three parishes, Benbecula, Sgire Hogh and Cille Pheadair (Fig. 20). Jennings (1993) has argued that Iona continued to maintain its authority through the Norse incursions into the islands and that the parish system, and its subdivisions into Dál Riadic style *dabhaichean* may have survived intact. However, Cant (1984) noted that the Gaelic Renaissance of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries may have been responsible for the hybrid Norse and Gaelic nature of the terminology and layout of parishes, therefore highlighting the problems inherent in taking structural similarities as evidence for Pictish-Norse continuity. The parish system visible in the late fifteenth-century charters are likely to have their origins in South Uist sometime after the twelfth century, when parishes were being imposed across Scotland and northern Europe, largely stimulated by the need to collect tithes (Cowan 1961, 1978; McDonald 1997, 225-33). Throughout Britain and Ireland the newly created parishes of the



earlier medieval period clearly reflected secular lordly estates, sharing their boundaries and fates, parish boundaries changing to conform with the territories of the secular elites (Cowan 1961, 50-51; Sharpe 1992, Ní Ghabhláin 1996; McDonald 1997, 225-27). From the fourteenth century it is clear that the parishes of South Uist and Benbecula defined the sub-lordships by which the Clann Ruairidh and Clann Ragnail estates were split up. In many cases these were heritable units, repeatedly visible in grants between father and son, yet over the fourteenth century it is evident that the composition of parishes changed along with political developments.

By the 1490s the two parishes in South Uist, Cille Pheadair and Sgire Hogh, were each composed of thirty merklands (see Figs. 18 and 19). As will be seen below, it is difficult to be certain about Cille Pheadair, although it seems likely that together with Baghasdal and the islands in the north of the Sound of Barra, it became valued as one unit, worth thirty merklands, sometime over the fourteenth century. Benbecula was marked in its own right at 12 merklands (RMS: II, 484; RMS: VII, 128), being composed of two *tírean unga*. Thomson (2002) suggested that the division of the Isles into merklands was laid out on an island basis. However, there is evidently a relation between the later fifteenth-century parishes of Uist and multiples of five *tírean unga*, each worth six merklands, indicating a regularisation of the parish and *tír unga* at a time pre-dating the merkland.

The exception to the five *tír unga* parish is Benbecula, which is split into two *tírean unga*. Although this allocation is presumably due to its small size, and definition from the two Uists by the north and south fords, there may have been a further, socially influenced, reason. Benbecula, may have formed part of a separate sub-lordship within the Clann Ruairidh territories. The fragmentation of Clann Ruairidh lands in the Uists has been outlined in Sections 2.6 and 2.7, but Benbecula becomes clearly isolated from the main Clann Ruairidh lordship after the 1370s, when the Clann Ruairidh lands were split between the offspring of Ami MacRuari. Angus Riabhach gained the Tighearna Garbhtrian, centred on Benbecula, a unit that retained its cohesion into the 1600s (see Section 2.9), and it may be that Benbecula was recognised as a parish in light of this sub-lordship. It also is possible

that the allocation of two *tírean unga* to the parishes of Benbecula and Barra may reveal their importance in the earlier medieval power structures. Ross (forthcoming) noted that in Moray two or three *dabhach* parishes were clustered around power centres and Pictish hillforts. The presence of castles and large ecclesiastical structures in both Benbecula (the castle here was preceded by a large dun) and Barra may reveal that they retained some recognised distinction into the later medieval period.

### 3.7 The Parish of Cille Pheadair

As there are some problems interpreting the development of the composition of Cille Pheadair as a parish it is perhaps worth considering it in more detail (Fig. 19). A summary of the rents of South Uist compiled in 1724 from 1691 cess books states that Baghasdal was originally incorporated into the parish of ‘Kindess’ (GD201/1/351). Baghasdal appears to have had its own church at Cille Bhrighde, and was granted to “Gilleownan rodrici Murchardi Makneill” of Barra at the end of the fifteenth century (RMS II, 485). In 1633 it is apparent that Baghasdal was considered entirely as separate from the rest of the parish. A charter talks of the “23 merkland of Kindeis and 6 merkland of Bowastill ... which are also held of the crown” (Campbell 1933: I, 464).

However, prior to the split, the parish north of Baghasdal (Fig. 20) is referred to as a list of townships worth twenty-three merklands (1498 - RMS II, 247; 1563 – RMS, IV, 335), ‘Southhead’ (1538 - RPS II, 441) or ‘Kindeis’ (1633 in Campbell 1933: I, 464): ‘Kindess’, presumably being an Anglicisation of *Ceann a Deas*, meaning South Head, the south end of the Uists. The valuation of the lands varied between twenty-three and thirty merklands (ERS, XVII, 380-1; RMS II, 247; RMS, IV, 335). The reasons for this lack of constancy is unclear: however, it is possible that what is evident is the reduction in the status and territorial influence of tacksmen. Many of the earlier tacks are for large groups of pennylands and whole townships that have an early prominence in rentals, but through time they gradually become less extensive, and other townships become notable. Although many of these tacks are later it may reveal the continuation of a process whereby the original

townships were being split up and divided. The fullest information survives for Baghasdal, in 1495 it is referred to as an “unciate” (RMS: I, 247), in 1621 as a “tiroung” (RMS: VIII, 203) and by 1633 as “6 merkland” (Campbell 1933: II, 464m). With the Clann Ragnail forfeiture after the 1715 Jacobite rebellion government rentals for Cille Pheadair and Baghasdal survive (E648/1), but only Baghasdal’s is complete. Including Eriskay and Lingay, it was valued at twenty pennylands, although even this does not correspond to the actual rental given (E648/1).

A charter made in 1372, declaring itself to be a copy of an earlier but undated document, includes “sex davatas et tria quarteria terre in parochia de Kilpedre Blisen” (RMS: I, 428-9), this echoes a possible charter of 1309 (Thomas nd. SAS 2(f); OPS, 366). If taken at face value it suggests a substantial restructuring of the *tírean unga* in South Uist between 1309 and the 1490s. However, this does not appear to have been the case, and that at the beginning of the 1300s the parish of Cille Pheadair included Barra and some of the Bishops Isles, which were then in under the control of the Clann Ruairidh. In the 1309 charter, Cille Pheadair appears within a list of lands being confirmed by Robert the Bruce to a loyal branch of the Clann Ruairidh. It is listed between the Small Isles and Barra, so it seems improbable that it is referring to any other Cille Pheadair than the one in South Uist. Eigg and Rum are included together as ‘sex davatas terre de Egis et de Rum’, which accurately corresponds with the number of *tírean unga* interpretable from the later evidence. By the later Middle Ages Eigg consisted of thirty merklands and thus has five attributable *tírean unga*, while Rum is composed of one (Rixson 2001a, 71-81). Whilst this perhaps mitigates against the possibility of scribal error, and thus indicates that there was substantial reorganisation of the structure of *tírean unga* in what had once been the Clann Ruairidh island territories between the 1309 document and the sixteenth century. The details of the extent of the parish may make the convenient historical ‘side step’ provided by the introduction of inarticulate clerks problematic, and it is possible that it incorporated parts of other parishes.

‘Insularum de Barre’ follows directly in the list, with no tax assessment allocated to it. In 1402 it is recorded that the priest of Cille Pheadair and Barra had abandoned his seat due to a



lack in dispensation (McGurk 1976, 17). Whilst this may be interpretable as an ecclesiastical dispute over pluralism (Barrell 2003, 33) it seems likely that this situation resulted from one parish with one priest and one landlord becoming split into two parishes, subject to two landlords, with no mechanism imposed for the provision of a new priest in Barra. Barra may account for the missing '*dabhach*' and three quarterlands (Fig. 21). Whilst in 1621 Barra, plus Fuideigh, in the Sound of Barra, and 'Killis' (Caolas in Bhatarsaigh) was noted as two *tírean unga* (RMS: VIII, 203), each corresponding to one of the early church sites recorded in Barra (OPS, 363; Muir 1885, 283; RCAHMS 1928, 125-26; 137; Martin 1994, 158; Branigan & Foster 2002, 115), it is likely that Bhatarsaigh was not incorporated into the territory of Barra in 1309. Dean Munro claimed it was part of the Bishop's Isles (Munro 1961, 73), the MacNeils only extending their grasp over the Bishop's Isles after the Reformation (see Campbell 2000a, 94), and it could have been worth the missing quarterland. If Barra was not merely bound to Cille Pheadair in 1309 out of the necessity of pastoral provision and was in fact an institutional stipend to Cille Pheadair, it would also follow that in the following century, as the Clann Neill gained independence from the Clann Ruairidh, Barra would become a parish in its own right. If this pattern of development is accepted, then there are further ramifications for understanding assessment patterns in the southern half of the Long Isle. If Barra was not worth a whole number of *tírean unga* without Bhatarsaigh, then it follows that the *tírean unga* were organised prior to the creation of the Bishop's Isles, and that this took place before 1309.

Whilst it is not inconceivable that there was a substantial reorganisation of the parishes in Uist in the fourteenth or fifteenth century, the underlying pattern of continuity indicated by the *tírean unga* is strongly corroborated by their correlation with early churches. Additionally, the sixty merklands of North Uist is broken down in a charter of 1505 into ten *tírean unga* and ten pennylands (RMS: II, 610-11). MacGregor (1983, 21-22) notes that the pennylands here mostly refer to small islands and lands vulnerable to sand blow to the north of the island and more recently created townships away from the machair. He explains that part of the discrepancy may also originate in the differing origins of the *tír unga* between political orientations. The northernmost two, being part of the patronage of the Clann Leoid,

or at least focused on Lewis, rather than to the Clann Ruairidh to the south (ibid., 3-4). Furthermore, a relationship for the development of settlement around the churches in the *tírean unga* was also suggested (ibid.). While it seems more probable that North Uist developed alongside its southern neighbour and namesake in having separate farms and townships bound together into *tírean unga* with churches, this suggests that the pattern is evident between the Sounds of Bhatarsaigh and Harris.

### 3.8 Farms and Townships in South Uist

It is speculated in Chapter 5 that the physical settlement pattern, consisting of dispersed farmsteads, sitting within an enclosed field-system, was fully established by the eleventh century. At this point each farmstead was focussed upon one large hall, containing the living quarters of the landholder and his servants. It is possible that the hall of each farmstead was the 'house' upon which the penny, of a pennyland, was levied. However, there were several developments that may affect this simple linkage. For instance, the hall appears to have been the main farmstead unit throughout the Viking Age. At a later date the hall lost its prominence at the centre of the farming unit. It was replaced by dispersed groups of several smaller buildings, possibly within the same boundaries. It is tempting to suggest that there may be some correlation with the central farm and the *tír unga* and its offshoots to the beginnings of the quarterland-townships, or the grouping of five pennylands visible in eighteenth-century documents, but there is little hard evidence to support this. Throughout the Scandinavian Diaspora odal landholding can be recognised, whereby a specific ancestor was said to have founded an initial large farm, that was free from terms of vassalage, and that was to remain undivided as a singular unit. The head of such farms in the Hebrides may have been similar to the Icelandic *godí*, chiefs descended from the first person to colonise a farm (Cleasby *et al.* 1957, 200). Sub-divisions could take place as tenant farms in the out-field of the odal farms, but their subjugation to the main farm was retained (see Byock 1988, 99-101), and it is possible that a similar process took place in the Hebrides. Work in Orkney has shown a complex series of place-names can be interpreted to reveal patterns of farm expansion in the Norse period (Morris 1985, 229-32). Hebridean place-names do not

incorporate the same number of types, lacking, for instance, the *byr* suffix that often denotes primary phases of settlement in Orkney (Andersen 1991). Nevertheless, a tentative model for the development of settlement within South Uist is postulated here: where the communities centred on Viking Age and Norse period halls began to colonise the surrounding lands; and that these new farms eventually formed separate farming units, within the same assessment boundaries that had been created by the end of the Viking Age (Fig. 22).

Parker Pearson (1996; forthcoming a) has argued that the township system has its roots within the Iron Age (although see Section 7.14), and that sometime in the medieval period there was an expansion of settlement from the ground with the most fecund arable potential into less fertile outfield arable and pasture lands, termed *gearraidh*. *Gearraidh* is a derivation from the Old Norse *Gardr* for field or enclosure, but it came to have a general meaning as outby or pasture in the Uists by the later historical period (see Raven forthcoming for a fuller discussion). This created a new range of townships with a *gearraidh* place-name element (Fig. 17), such as Gearraidh Bhailteas, Gearraidh Sheilidh, Gearraidh na Monadh, Stadhlai gearraidh, Groigearraidh, Gearraidh Fleugh and possibly Geirinis, although this particular derivation is unclear. Whilst *gearraidh* is a Gaelic derivation of a Norse term, some of these place-names contain further Gaelic elements, such as Gearraidh na Monadh, ‘*gearraidh* (Norse) of the moorland (Gaelic)’, others are predominantly composites of Norse terms, such as Stadhlai gearraidh, although both may have been loan-words and a Norse date cannot be ascertained without skilled etymological, linguistic or onomastic knowledge (such as Cox 2004, 43–44, who suggests Norse terms became loaned into Gaelic at a fairly late date).

Place-name evidence also reveals the presence of the original Viking Age farms: a number contain the element ‘bost’ deriving from the Old Norse *bòlstadr*, meaning ‘farm’ (Nicolaisen 1976, 97). Where these can be traced to a specific site, as opposed to the generic settlement named after the township name, these are associated with sites near or on prime agricultural land, where the machair and peaty soils intermixed. Some names also retain the name of



their founding occupants. One scenario is evident regarding Frobost: the name can be interpreted as 'Fro's bost', comprising the personal name 'Fro' (presumably that of the founder) with *bòlstadr*. By 1805 the actual settlement was located to the east of the machair, but the Viking Age settlement appears to have been on the machair (Parker Pearson forthcoming a). It is probable that this was the site of Fro's *bòlstadr*, but that the township had come to be known by that appellation, and the physical settlement retained its name when was trans-located. Another scenario is revealed at 'Garryhellie'. The place-name has been mis-retranslated into Gaelic by modern road sign makers as Gearraidh Sheilidh, 'gearraidh of the willow' (William MacDonald and Alex Woolf pers. comm.). The name of Hellibost, associated with an area on the township's machair indicates that it derives from Hellie's *gearraidh*. Together, the place-names imply that the township of Gearraidh Sheilidh, may have originated on the *bòlstadr*/main farm on the machair. It further suggests that there was a colonisation onto the less fertile *gearraidh*, the new farm being recognised in place-name form and socially as secondary to the *bòlstadr*, later the *bòlstadr* was abandoned, so that the physical and the conceptual centre of the township was relocated to the *gearraidh*.

Cox (2002, 122-24) has noted that in Lewis some *gearraidh* place-names may belong to between the ninth and twelfth century (the main clue to this is the inclusion of Gaelic terms accompanying Old Norse words in place-names which do not follow later linguistic trends). Over the same period, he argues, the specific meaning of *gearriadh* changed from its meaning as 'enclosure', to express 'the land around a house', additionally suggesting that the association with moorland was a very late development. He does not offer a reason for how he obtained this interpretation, but it may be that he has misunderstood Norse period expansion, interpreting *gearraidh* - land around a house – as single entity in time, with the house first and land later, rather than from (marginal) land which has been settled upon (a process also visible in Viking Age settlement patterns in Norway: Holmsen *et al.* 1956 29-20). However, it may also be that Lewis and Uist place-naming strategies differed throughout the Middle Ages and later. If they do follow a similar pattern, with *gearraidh* transforming into its 'settled-marginal-land' meaning prior to the linguistic changes in Gaelic

that took place after 1200, it may tentatively corroborate the suggestion that this phase of settlement expansion, which is likely to be secondary given its location on marginal land, also took place prior to this date. Traditions, recorded in North Uist in the 1800s, regarding the origins of the feuds of the Siol Ghoraidh at An Udail suggest that the blacklands were in cultivation by the fourteenth century. The raid that sparked off the feud was said to have taken place whilst they were digging the peaty soils surrounding Airidh Mhic Ruairidh, a settlement away from the main area of arable and settlement on the machair (Fergusson & MacDonald 1984, 9). However, the connection of the same personal name, 'Helli' to both a *bòlstadr* and a *gearraidh*, if correct, would seem to imply an earlier origin.

This pattern of farm expansion and colonisation of rougher ground is seen throughout the Norse Atlantic during this period. Evidence from the Northern Isles reveals that well into the 1600s there was a continual growth and splitting of the original Norse period farms, the pattern being linked to inheritance within the odal system (Clouston 1920; 1924; 1927; Thomson 1970). The odal system encouraged the creation of new farms and settlements within the same township, which were still assessed and taxed together, and regarded as one single "legal and economic entity" (Crawford 1987, 150). A similar process appears to have taken place in Uist, with original farms and their offshoots being regarded, in the Norse period, as separate dispersed farming units, that retained some overarching connection for assessment, with, perhaps, some adherence to social subjugation to the inhabitants at the original farm. Only later were the new farms consolidated into fully separate entities, possibly by the thirteenth century but certainly before the 1490s.

In South Uist, by the eighteenth century, Frobost and Gearraidh Bhailteas were ten pennylands each and both were split into two five pennyland units, labelled north and south (Fig. 23; GD201/5/1137; E648/1), probably being fossilised quarterlands. It seems likely that these two examples reveal the core structure lying behind the construction of the *tír unga*, and conform to an ideal layout. Other townships, and their pennyland divisions, must then reflect some form of real difference, either in the social level of their landholder, or in measurable agricultural product. There are two possible reasons for the differences in

pennylands between townships. Firstly it may be that in their original form they also conformed to the ten pennyland idealised pattern, but that later land holders were given differing sizes of territories, reflecting their relationship with the chief. Alternatively, the townships may have been laid out over pre-existing farming units, and that these may have been of varying sizes. Whichever process took place, although the evidence is fragmentary, it seems that most townships, together with a neighbour, formed a twenty pennyland *tír unga*. Additionally, smaller groupings of pennylands within townships were also granted out in tack, although these vary widely, there appears to be an average number of five pennylands in earlier tacks, especially wadsetts (a form of heritable mortgage on a property), which tended to be made out to higher members of the clan elites (e.g. GD201/3/6 and GD201/1/199). Over the eighteenth century the focus on the number of five begins to fade, perhaps revealing a change in the social status of tenants. However, the earlier material indicates that the quaterland, although the name appears to have ceased to be relevant, had become a fossilised unit in some cases, and that there may have been some social significance in that unit.

### 3.9 *Tírean Unga* in South Uist

There are two examples of named *tírean unga* surviving in the documentation available for South Uist (Figs. 19 and 20), although they are recorded after the meanings of the names had become confused. At the north end of the island was located the ‘Davoch of Balgarba’ (1639: GD201/3/6), while at the island’s other extremity was Baghasdal, named as a ‘terras unciate’ (1495: RMS: I, 247) and ‘terras lie tiroung’ (1621: RMS: VIII, 203). Both are noted as being worth six merklands and/or twenty pennylands (Campbell 1933: I, 460; GD201/1/144; E 648/1). There are several possibilities for the survival of these particular *tírean unga*, none of which need be exclusive. Both sit at the either end of the island, and they may have survived through some need to preserve the structure of boundaries in these kinds of location. Baghasdal may have been preserved, as the MacRuaris ceded it to the MacNeils of Barra around 1370 (see Section 2.7). Although, even after it was ‘recovered’ by the Clann Ragnail around 1610, there may have been some need to retain some cohesion



here, and it continued to be rented out in tack to a powerful lineage within the clan, as one unit through to the end of eighteenth century.

In the early seventeenth century ‘Archibald mcqueine minister of Kylevoirie ... in the Sky Island’, commissioner for the presbytery of Skye, wrote a discharge for Clann Ragnaill chief’s payment of tithes for South Uist and Benbecula,

*alwayes exeptand only the Davoch land of Balgarba the five pennie lands of Ardmichell the five pennie lands half pennie of Eriske and kylbride all presently possessed by Jon M’Donald elder of Knoydort (GD201/3/6).*

Although interpretation of this document cannot be fully accurate, as it is post-Reformation, this discharge does raise some possibilities for the function of *tírean unga* by this late period. Cille Bhrighde and Aird Micheill were located within other *tírean unga*, the first being within contemporaneous Baghasdal, yet they bear some significant similarities: both were worth five pennylands, and, more importantly, both were the locations for chapels/*cille* sites (see Section 6.2). Not only were they preserved as territorial units, but, additionally, the owners were responsible for the payment of their own tithes. Tithes were normally only levied by the church on the landlord, suggesting that these lands were in some way independent from being subject to the normal rules of lordship and vassalage.

By the 1490s, apart from Benbecula, the parishes of Uist, Cille Pheadair and Sgire Hagh (the name of the parish centred on the church of Hoghmor in the township of Tobha Mor), were noted as thirty merklands, it follows then that each contained five *tírean unga*. In addition, the correlation of six merklands and twenty pennylands to a *tír unga* enables the reconstruction of most the *tírean unga* in South Uist. The most complete record exists for the parish of Cille Pheadair and the boundaries of the five *tírean unga* can be more readily reconstructed from Bald’s 1805 map (Fig. 24). Although minor changes from the Norse period to 1805 are likely to have taken place as disputes were sorted out and new surveying techniques employed, nearly all boundaries follow rivers, loch edges and rock outcrops,

indicating that such changes are likely to have been minimal. The recognition of the *tírean unga* is further facilitated by the survival of large townships here, illustrated through seventeenth- and eighteenth-century documents largely concerned with pennylands and townships. Most *tírean unga* consist of two townships; these include those with a *gearraidh* place-name element, possibly suggesting the assessment unit of the *tír unga* post-dates their development (although see Section 5.2). Apart from Baghasdal, the *tírean unga* include combinations of Cille Pheadair and Dalabrog, Gearraidh Sheile and Aisgernis, Frobost and Gearraidh Bhailteas, and Cille Donnain and Bornais.

In the parish of Sgìre Hogh the documentation is fragmentary and the townships considerably smaller, but the four *tírean unga*, south of Baile Gharbhaidh may be crudely estimated. Ormacleit and Staoinebrig, possibly with some of the fragmented townships to the north, together formed the most likely identifiable block. Alternatively, some of these may have formed a single *tír unga* along with at least Tobha Mor, Dreumasdal and Stadhlagearraidh. The rest of the townships were probably separated by the natural boundaries of hills and lochs south of Geirnis and Cille Bhanain. The *tírean unga* of South Uist, along with the two six merkland *tírean unga* of Benbecula, have clear relationship with the remains of early church sites, and most also have a secular power base and assembly site (see Section 6.6, 7.13 and 7.14). This correlation strongly suggests that the *tír unga* were more significant than simply a unit of tax assessment, they were also a social or political grouping within the settlement pattern, perhaps defining the area occupied by smaller communities under the influence of a local chieftain.

The township system recorded on Bald's 1805 estate map (Fig. 17) seems fairly well established by the time documents shed any light in the matter, suggesting the probability that the settlement pattern become fossilised sometime before the fourteenth century. The townships were arranged in east-west strips across the islands, proportioning each township an area of shore, machair, moor and hill. Ross's work in Moray reveals the fact that *dabhaichean* there were also laid out in a manner to provide access to all the available resources in that district (forthcoming). In this light it is possible that the origin of the strip

townships in South Uist was formed out of an earlier layout of strip shaped *tírean unga*. Exceptions to this rule in South Uist are interesting.

One example is the clustering of small townships centred on Tobha Mor. Tobha Mor, together with the neighbouring township of Dreumasdal were not allotted a strip of grazings, possibly as they formed a lordly demesne, with this land allotted as a hunting forest and/or pasture for the chiefs' herds (see Section 12.8 and 12.9). Immediately to the south of this, Sniseabhal, which comprises predominantly hill ground, may also be included into this group. However, it seems more likely that together with the thin townships of 'Totahur', Tobha Beag and Peighinn nan Aoireann, they resulted from the splitting of one original quarterland township or *tír unga*. An alternative, highly tentative, possibility is that this land served as the peaty ground or pasture for machair bound regions in the Clann Ruairidh territories. Ross noted that some *dabhaichean* in Moray were 'scattered', composed of dispersed areas, designed to provide each *dabhach* access to a diverse resource base (forthcoming). There is story recorded by Carmichael (1928-71: 2, 282-3) which may note a vestige of the end of such a connection. In the 1870s he encountered Fearachar Beaton, a shepherd in Coradail, who recounted a poem supposedly composed by a very old lady, which linked movement from Heisgeir (off the south end of North Uist) to a "green grey bothy in Corrodale" in height of summer. This may also account for eighteenth- and nineteenth-century evidence for some townships having their shieling grounds, within the bounds of other townships (see Raven forthcoming), although the separation of time means that this must remain conjectural.

In total contrast to the conventional strip arrangement of townships are the shape of townships in the *tírean unga* of Baghasdal and Baile Gharbhaidh. Here, arable on the machair was allocated to the component townships, but the pasture was shared between them. Dempsey (1999) has suggested that in Baghasdal this system revealed differing patterns of landholding between the MacNeil's and the Clann Ragnail in the later Middle Ages. If this was accepted this may suggest that in the Norse period pasture throughout South Uist was held in common and most farms would have used nearby pastures, the access



and rights to which would have been secured through repeated use and tradition. It is possible that whilst Clann Ragnail formalised the situation by creating the townships with their associated pasture into strips, this process was not imposed by the MacNeils. However, there may be an environmental explanation, which would account for the pattern existing in both *tírean unga*. Both cover the ends of the island and the arable is fragmented along the coasts, which made the allocation of pastures harder to define.

### 3.10 Boundaries

The demarcation of boundaries was an essential element of the laying out of the *tír unga* and the township. Not only did it serve to bound the expansion of settlement but it defined ownership over land and rights of access to resources. No records exist which note the boundaries for South Uist in the Norse period. However, evidence from the eighteenth century elsewhere in the Outer Hebrides reveals that although the marking of boundaries was a cause of much dispute between neighbouring townships, most were aligned on natural features and re-enforced through ritual. The ties to topography and social replication suggest that boundaries, once outlined are unlikely to have changed much throughout the intervening period, whether in the Norse period or earlier in prehistory (see Section 7.14). Martin Martin recorded:

*They preserve their boundaries from being liable to any debates by their successors, thus: they lay a quantity of ashes of burnt wood in the ground, and out big stones above the same; and for conveying the knowledge of this for posterity, they carry some boys from both villages next the boundary, and there whip them soundly, which they will be sure to remember, and tell it to their children (1994, 175).*

A process echoed, if not embellished, in a tale, recorded in North Uist in the nineteenth century, about the taking up of land at the Udal by the Siol Ghoraidh, the new boundaries were marked with coal and the whipping of a boy till his buttocks bled (Fergusson &

Macdonald 1984, 9). Similar ‘beating’ of the bounds are also well known throughout the rest of Britain (Alex Woolf pers. comm.). The construction of march dykes became a common inclusion in eighteenth-century tacks, and the likelihood is that dykes marked out boundaries between townships much before this. The enclosure of allotments of land around the boundaries of each township may have also served as a symbolic marker of land at the edges of the community. On occasion supernatural or abnormal occurrences were also invoked to mark out boundaries, as is shown in this tradition recorded by Father Allan Macdonald around the end of the nineteenth century:

*When Clanranald and Boisdale ... were disagreeing about the marches between Kilphedir (the Clanranald property) & Boisdale, and the men ... to settle the dispute on either side were coming to blows a large black headed gull was observed to rise at Eilean I/Dasgaich and to cry out “An rathad so! An rathad so!” This way! And as it flew westward the men followed its track till it reached the sea at Lùl Bhadhasdal and its track was held ever after as the legitimate boundaries of the two properties. A feast was held before this at Askernish when the property was handed over to Boisdale (Macdonald nd./17).*

This method was also utilised in the creation of new crofts in the last century, in one instance a seal was culled and dragged around the boundaries, leaving a train of blood around the boundary (anonymous member of the C.E.U.D. pers. comm.).

Lund and Warren (1997, 25) have speculated that Bald’s linear depiction of the township boundaries are also a simplification of the reality of the situation. However, in the seventeenth century the infamous John Morrison of Bragar is remembered for having used a cable strung up between hill tops and other features in the landscape to settle a dispute between Col Uarach and Col Iarach, in Lewis (Matheson 1970, 218-9). This may account for the incorporation of prehistoric monuments into township boundaries (although see

Section 7.14) and the construction of walls over islands in the centre of lochs, inaccessible to livestock.

Away from the settlement on the arable ground, the boundaries between townships were often delineated by rivers, ridges of hills and other landmarks. In Skye in 1798 the boundary between ‘Torrin’ and ‘Kilmorie’ was described as being:

*the Dyke of Druimuinnan till it enters the Burn of Auttnadounach, and then by the burn up the hill ... follows by the top of the hills to Marser and from thence to the water of Sligichan by Aulnamisrach (GD 221/5078/5).*

Where features and importance faded the detail of the descriptions were less precise:

*the March betwixt Troternish and Strath was from the River of Sligiehein by Aulnamisrach up the hill to the source of Aulnamisrach and from thence to the top of Maisec as wind and weather shares (ibid.).*

Today the footings and remains of turf dykes heading through the hills can be found, marking out township boundaries in the grazings. Many of these are likely to stem from the Improvements, however. Within reports for how to improve the efficiency of farms are statements that clauses should be included into rental agreements forcing the erection of boundary dykes (e.g. MacLeod 1938-39: II, 72-73). This was taken up and later tacks often incorporate such provisions: although it is possible that this was an attempt to formalise earlier activities. The correctness of the boundary was enforced by the co-operation of inhabitants from both townships to construct the dyke, as was that between the same townships in Skye: “the Dyke was annually repaired at Whitsunday and Hallowmass jointly by the possessors of Torrin and Kilmorie” (GD221/5078/5). However, use and ownership was still often under dispute. The relationship between these two townships eventually declined, one of the respecting landowners stated that:



*his tenants jointly with those of Torrin annually repaired the said Dyke ... and ... tenants at Kirkibost supplied a gate for said Dyke every second year, and this was continued till the ninety two when Mr MacAlister broke down the said Dyke (ibid.).*

During the following dispute it appears that use of the land was the prime evidence of ownership, numerous tenants were brought forward as witnesses to the use of the pastures by their forefathers in time past. One amongst them declaring that:

*she has seen some of the tenants of Balmainoch in Troternish have shealbothies at Aultnamisrach, and heard her mother say when a young Lass she herded her Fathers cattle near Aultnamisrach he being then a tenant in Pincherrein (ibid.).*

However another noted:

*that there were always disputes respecting the possession betwixt Aultdarrach & Aultnamisrach as the Deponent saw one day a Shealing erected by the tenants of Sconser broke down by MacKinnon's orders and in eight days thereafter those erected by MacKinnon broke down by the people of Sconser. Depones that at the Depennents return from Inverness Shealings belonging to the people of Aird erected at Corrievrenderan were thrown down according to the information they had received from the said ... MacKinnon that the said Corry belonged to the people of Strath (ibid.)*

This reveals the main way such disputes were settled and the importance of use as a statement of ownership. Other examples of the building and destruction of shielings to demarcate boundaries can be seen in Sutherland (Gordon 1813, 352) and Lorn (RPCS: V, 302). This also seems to have been common in boundaries between islands, although this seems to have taken on a new importance with the development of the kelp industry in the

latter 1700s. In 1781 the march between Berneray and North Uist were disputed, the main witness was an old woman who “first says that she told him she was able to herd Calves before Sir Normand went to the Battle of Wrocester [sic]”, 1651 (GD221/5069/3). However, the opposite camp were quick to point out that even although “it is true that poor Children when very young are in use to herd Calves that is to keep them in a place separate from the pasture of the Cattle”, the woman would still have had to be 3 at the time, which would mean she was of too great an age (i.e. 103) for her story to ring true (ibid.).

Whilst boundaries could be encroached upon, disputed and regularised by improving landlords, it seems highly probable that once laid out, boundaries delineated by the topography would have become part of the collective knowledge, through ritual and story, and are unlikely to have significantly altered from their conception.

### 3.11 Merklands and Later Medieval Lordships

In South Uist, the allocation of twenty pennylands to the *tír unga* clearly does not sit well with six merklands. Elsewhere in the western seaboard, and in the mainland Clann Ragnail territories, one merkland often equals two or two and a half pennylands (Thomson 2002, 30), but South Uist’s three and a third pennylands to the merkland appears an odd fit, which probably indicates they were not contemporaneous impositions in Uist. The allocation of merklands to *tírean unga* and parishes in Uist may however have its origin in the fourteenth century.

Thomson (2002, 32) claims that the Uists fit into a pattern along with Coll and Tiree with frequent small 6-merk *tírean unga* and quaterlands, with limited use of pennylands, although this latter statement is borne out of a lack of familiarity with estate documents. To this list may be added Eigg, and perhaps others of the Small Isles, although the evidence is less clear (Rixson 2001a, 71-81). Why these islands should be grouped together in contrast to Lewis, Skye or the rest of the Inner Hebrides is unclear. Lamont (1981, 70) noted that the *tír unga* is often used in reference to mainland Garmoran, but that for this region, in contrast to the

Uists, parishes were composed of 20 merkland *dabhaichean*, so a later regional connection, linked to a restructuring associated with the Clann Ruairidh cannot be suggested. However, both Eigg and Uist were singled out as a matter of concern in a letter of 1282 sent from the Norwegian to the Scottish king (APS: I, 3). Unfortunately, the letter merely appears in a list, containing no details of the letter's contents, but it is tentatively possible that they formed a contemporaneous political grouping independent from the Manx and Clann Somhairle lordships (see Sections 2.3 and 4.3). If the merklands were attributable to this, it would not account for the inclusion of Coll and Tiree. Alternatively, Thomson (2002, 33) has argued that the pattern found in Lewis, Skye and parts of the mainland is a result of the revaluation of islands previously subject to Norway between the Treaty of Perth and the Wars of Independence, possibly by Alexander of Argyll who was appointed to collect royal debts. It may have been Argyll who was responsible for appointing a flat rate of conversion from *tírean unga* to 10 merklands, the differences in Uist reflecting a real lesser value in taxable worth. This theory ignores the fact that the Hebrides were renowned for their fecundity in the Middle Ages (see Dean Munro's 1549 account: Munro 1961), and while the political context may be correct there is at least one other possibility. Robert II's grant of the Clann Ruairidh lands to John I, Lord of the Isles, while not mentioning land allocations within the Isles, records that all these territories combined to make three hundred merklands (RMS: I, 147), a nice round figure. This may reveal that in the intervening period the lands had been organised into neat groups of merklands for royal taxation, where a *tír unga* in the Uists became worth six merklands, and most parishes thirty. Whether this was directly related to the accession of the Lords of the Isles cannot be proved.

The merkland rarely appears in later tacks concerned with administrative division at a local and agricultural scale. One exception, that involves the merkland as a specific unit of land, is that seen in the creation of the new township around the mill of Milton in 1760 (GD201/5/1152).



### 3.12 Administrative Districts in the Later Middle Ages

By the eighteenth century, when estate records become readily available, the importance of the *tírean unga* had been eroded: instead, the pennyland had become the important unit, as both the sum of ground allotted in rentals and the unit upon which taxes and dues were assessed. The pennyland also had various subdivisions, such as the farthingland and the *clitich*, an eighth. This indicates that whilst there had been some perception of what constituted an acceptable unit which could be allotted for rent to the *duine uaisle* and/or tacksmen, it had become fragmented by the end of the Middle Ages.

In 1309 the parish of Cille Pheadair had been noted as six *dabhaichean* and three quarterlands in 1309 (RMS: I, 128). By 1498, after the cessation of Baghasdal and Barra to the Clann Neill, the parish of Cille Pheadair, it was listed as being composed of “Kilpettir, Askyrnis, Froybost, Garbaltos, Kildonan et duas Borwarnes” (RMS: II, 247). By 1563 the list had acquired “Kerhillie” (RMS, IV, 335), though no mention is made of Dalabrog. Whilst some quarterlands were evidently preserved intact (E648/1; GD201/5/1137; see above), the precise breakdown of *tírean unga* is not always so clear, although this is partially due to the fragmentary tacks of later centuries. The largest surviving value for Cille Pheadair states it was sixteen pennylands in 1633 (Campbell 1933: I, 460), but was only eight by 1721 (E648/1), ‘Dalabroag’, however, then appears for the first time, perhaps worth the missing eight pennylands. However, it is equally possible that this was a new township formed out of two *tírean unga*: Cille Pheadair and that incorporating Asgernis (twelve: GD201/2/10) and Gearraidh Sheile (six: E648/1). The location of Cladh Pheadair on the township boundary between Dalabrog and Cille Pheadair may, however, suggest that some other process was at work. The two Bornais’s mentioned in 1498 were later noted as being worth seven and seven and a half pennylands each (GD201/5/916; E648/1), and Cille Donnain as five pennylands, one farthing and two *clitichs*, eighths (GD201/2/43). This suggests that this *tír unga* had been divided into peculiarly sized units at an early date.

•

Both Cille Donnain and Machair Meadhnach perhaps show that some assessments could reflect a real reduction in worth as both were directly affected by environmental degradation. The latter was downgraded from fourteen to four pennylands, due to being “overcome with sand drift” (GD201/5/1217/24). In 1721 only part of Cille Donnain was rented out, the rest lying waste (E648/1). Today, this township is visibly overcome with sand blow and inundated with dunes, and on Pont’s map it is noted as ‘Totenamaekan’, possibly translatable as ‘machair ruins’.

Over the later medieval period, through to the 1700s, the tacks, which had incorporated large areas of the island, gradually came to be reduced in size. It seems likely that this decline reflects an erosion of the influence of the older independent farm unit of the Norse period, and denotes the de-gentrification of tacksmen. Earlier tacks to the *duine usaile* had involved large portions of land and reflected their status and right to land, later tacks were often for small divisions of townships and rented by the lower echelons of society. The reduction of the size of tacks could be associated with changing concepts of what may have been manageable agriculturally. However, it seems more likely that the decline in the size of tacks was a direct result in the social status of land-holding as the middle-ranking gentry lost status and the lower levels of society became increasingly related to the gentry. Throughout this process, however, in most cases, once a township boundary had been established, there appears to have been little fluctuation in their location, although some minor changes may have taken place.

Shaw (1980, 80-93) has suggested that the origin of the township was as an area ploughable by two or three plough teams, with ten to twelve occupiers. Whether this was intended at their conception is discussed above, but it seems likely that there came to be some general correlation of townships and the division and sharing of agricultural tasks by the time historical records become available. Geddes’s interpretation of Lewis townships in 1718 suggests that they were occupied by several groups of three to six families who shared tasks such as ploughing and boat crew (1948, 54-56), a pattern with parallels to the co-operative ploughland, or *treabh*, in Islay (MacKerrall 1944, 72). This may reflect further divisions

within the township, especially where there were numerous tenants or sub-tenants in a township.

Around the end of the sixteenth century a description of Hebrides directly equated tax assessment with the raising of military forces, taxes, food rents and hospitality (see Skene 1867-90, 430). However, by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the pennyland system became the focus for dues and rights, other than *cain* and *conveth*. Tithes, souming (limiting of stock on pastures), contribution to community posts and activities all became allotted alongside the pennyland (Pennant 1774, 273, 278; Carmichael 1916, 42-9, 162-64). Although this system of allocating community dues by the pennyland may have some antiquity it seems entirely possible that what started out in the earlier Middle Ages as a vague system of tax and military assessment became a convenient structure upon which to apply new taxes, rights and dues.

### 3.13 Discussion

The above discussion reveals the development of a highly regulated and organised system of assessment in the Uists. The regular layout of the units across the landscape perhaps reveals that the pattern was not a haphazard development from an initial settlement base, but the result of an imposed or, at least, heavily negotiated system. Once imposed the units and boundaries were solid enough to remain the main structural components of lordship, the assessment of dues and taxes from the land, and the layout of the agricultural and settlement pattern, into the eighteenth century. The primary unit appears to have been the *tír unga*. It formed the basis for the structure of the larger secular and ecclesiastical power groupings: the lordship and the parish; and it formed an outer boundary within the landscape for smaller divisions, the quarterland and pennyland, by which access to agricultural resources were negotiated. Most of the ten *tírean unga* in South Uist can be clearly mapped out (as can the twenty-five throughout the Uists and Barra), as can some of their divisions into four quarterlands and twenty pennylands. They were also defined as six merklands, although this may have been a fourteenth-century development and the latest assessment in the series. The



development of the parish of Cille Pheadair reveals that by the early fourteenth-century parishes had been laid out over the isles, in a form that reflected local patterns of lordship, but that over the century the parishes were reformed to encompass thirty merklands, equalling five *tírean unga*.

The origin of the *tírean unga* may have lain in the Viking Age or early Norse period farming units. These may have originated as singular farms, owned by free farmers, but sometime before the thirteenth century there had been a process of expansion and colonisation into the outby or pasture land, and that, through partible inheritance (*gavelkind*?), these *gearraidh* farms were later consolidated into separate farming units. Although dispersed through the same farming area, possibly the *tír unga*, it is evident that the new settlements remained encompassed within the same overarching assessment unit. It may be with this expansion and creation of new farmsteads that the creation of quarterlands and pennylands was associated, and that the layout was a fairly organic process. Yet, this takes it as given that at the system's conception there was a direct link between the pennyland and the assessment of a singular household/farming unit. The correlation of the distribution of settlement mounds on the machair with townships (Parker Pearson forthcoming a) would seem to support this theory (see Section 5.2). Further evidence comes from the parish of Cille Pheadair, north of Baghasdal, where land with arable and settlement potential is relatively evenly distributed up the western coast and the *tírean unga* are fairly equal in width. Perhaps the similarity in size of the units directly corresponds with a similarity in the distribution of arable land.

Elsewhere, where cnoc-and-lochan, blanket bog and hill intrude westward into the machair, the varying size of townships may be a result of this irregular distribution of resources. This correlation of *tír unga* size with topography perhaps indicates that the taxable component, whether arable acreage, predicted agricultural produce, or populace was equally distributed in these areas. If this could be accepted it would strongly confirm that there was some real measurable or quantifiable entity within the landscape, that could be assessed and divided and over which the taxation system was laid.

The occupants of an Icelandic house of the Norse period can be taken to be between ten and twenty, if slaves are included (Byock 2001, 42). Studies about slavery in Early Medieval Britain, Scandinavia and around the Irish Sea are often contradictory and inconsistent, and have been prone to making unsubstantiated sweeping statements about the prevalence and presence of slavery. Despite some detailed analysis of the source material they have failed to differentiate between the process of mass slave taking for labour purposes and trade; the taking of slaves as part of raiding designed to have a punitive or retributive effect; and the procurement of high status slave/hostages for political purposes and sexual bondage. The process of slave taking and subjection for household work has also been unsatisfactorily ignored in favour of the study of the transformation of the status of greater numbers of slave families into ‘free’, yet bonded, serfs, or freemen who served as tenants of their former owners, as part of the transformation of European medieval society and developments in the socio-economic basis of farming and landholding (Holm 1986; Karras 1988; Pelteret 1995; Wyatt 2001). However, it seems that slaves were common, if not universal, throughout households across the Norse Diaspora during the Viking Age, and remained so until the practice came to a slow end sometime between the twelfth and thirteenth or fourteenth centuries (Karras 1988, 69-163).

If their presence within households is accepted, and Byock’s figures can be taken as a starting point, the following population for South Uist at the time the system was imposed can be very tentatively postulated:

| Unit        | Populace    |
|-------------|-------------|
| Pennyland   | 10 - 20     |
| Quarterland | 50 - 100    |
| Tír unga    | 200 - 400   |
| Parish      | 1000 - 2000 |
| South Uist  | 2000 - 4000 |

This gives a range between a minimum population of 1,580 in South Uist in 1755, and a maximum of 3,450 in 1794 (McKay 1980, 26-27; Munro 1794, 297-98): although together with Benbecula it did rise to 7,329 in 1831 (Maclean 1845, 526). Whilst the upper end of this scale is likely to have been influenced by the introduction of the potato and the income generated by the kelp industry, a figure of two thousand fits with the earliest records of South Uist's population in the mid-seventeenth century (Coste 1920-1925: V, 116-17; also see Hayes-McCoy 1937, 356-57). This rough figure is not much below modern day census levels, possibly suggesting this is the natural limit of population supportable by the arable ground, and tentatively corroborates the possibility of the extent of the Norse period populace. As slaves would have provided labour, but also consumed the products of the land (although see Karras 1988, 143-53), this postulated population figure could be as relevant for a society composed of slave-owning households, or free tenant farmers.

At odds with this model of a gradual development is the conformity of the number of pennylands to the *tír unga*, and the repetition of the layout of ten *tírean unga* to each of the Uists. No sustainable argument can be made to support a proposition that each island supported exactly the same number of houses, or consisted of the same number of square miles of arable or pasture (although they are likely to have been vague similarities: in the 1770s North Uist supported a population superseding South Uist by around six hundred, but was only half its size, of its surface area North Uist contained only a third of the arable of South Uist: McKay 1980, 26, 63, 74). This regularity would seem to indicate that the system may have ignored the topography of the island and was an entirely, or partially abstracted assessment of social indebtedness.

Neither scenario for the basis of the assessment system, from one totally abstracted from the topography and settlement pattern of the island, to one closely conforming to it, seems to adequately fit the evidence, and it may be that the reality fitted somewhere in-between these two extremes. Whichever pertained to South Uist the system was related to the taxation and subjugation of the populace. At one level the terms outlined above were orientated to assess the provision of food tribute, possibly convertible to a monetary sum in the Norse period or



later, yet at another level it may have been required to produce men for military service. Also, one of the components of the Norse period *tír unga* was a church and assembly site, indicating that it was at this level the populace paid their tithes and received pastoral care, and came together for some kinds of communal governance (see Sections 6.6 and 7.13).

Many European models of Multiple Estates are associated with groupings of four (Jones 1976, Moore 1999), while Anglo-Saxon and Early Irish society appears to have been structured around groupings of five. In Early Gaelic society noble status depended on the ability to retain five clients or tenants (Charles-Edwards 1986, 57-61). Charles-Edwards (1972) has drawn a correlation between the Anglo-Saxon hide and Welsh, Irish and Dál Riadic units of land. Whilst these have complex histories and localised differences in detail, all are based in the creation of a basic unit of land that defined the free status of its owner. In many cases these were incredibly large areas of land (i.e. the Anglo-Saxon hide was roughly 120 acres of arable) and freemen required the support of semi- and un-free tenants. Through time the demographic expansion of the freeman's family, and society as a whole, put pressure on the land available to support status and the boundaries that defined free status were eroded. It is perhaps more than a coincidence that larger estates were arranged into groups of one hundred. Anglo-Saxon hides were grouped into hundreds, Welsh units into *cantref*s and, although there are problems with accepting the early date of the *Senchus fer n-Alban*, it names a territorial unit as the *cét treb*, literally one hundred farms (ibid., 18). Although there may be another problem in accepting *treb* as 'farm', as in Ireland the *treb* was a five-hide-unit, not a singular hide (ibid.), it is interesting that the original parishes of Uist correlate to one hundred pennylands. There are some inherent inconsistencies in making comparisons between these disparate administrative systems and equating land unit levels and status. For example, the arable acreage of an Anglo-Saxon hide was considerably larger than the average for a pennyland (Thomson, 2002, 37, has shown that in Morvern variations existed between one and thirty acres per pennyland, but this does not account for a greater importance of arable resources within the Highlands and Islands). The size of hide may then have been more on par with a quarterland or *tír unga*. Nevertheless, Irish and Anglo-Saxon systems may indicate that there may be some form of symbolic association

between the correlation of five pennylands to the quarterland, four quarterlands to the *tír unga*, and five *tírean unga* to the parish, and levels of stratigraphy suggested for Hebridean society in the Norse period. The pennyland may have been held by a free, semi-free or dependant farmer, the quarterland by a free farmer with enough dependants to express noble status (*bóndi*), the *tír unga* by a local farmer-cum-chieftain (what might have been known as a *god*i in Iceland, the more influential perhaps even as *gædingr* in the Northern Isles: see Section 5.3), the parish by sub-lords (*?tighearn*) and groupings of parishes by earls or sub-kings (*righ*). Broderick (2003, 69-72) has attempted a similar attribution of Manx social structures to Early Medieval Irish nomenclature, with an *ócaire* as a small farmer with a share in a plough, kiln, mill and barn, and a *bóaire* as a big farmer of free status and in control of a Manx quarterland, and it may be worth thinking of these social positions as bilingual expressions of the same order. Each level may also be revealed in the settlement hierarchy. At the base would have been a basic farm. Above several of these was perhaps some of the larger halls, at the centre of farmsteads containing some evidence for the centralisation of agricultural and industrial production (i.e. kilns etc.: see Section 5.6). Churches, duns and assembly sites appear to have been distributed according to the *tír unga* (see Sections 7.13), again revealing its importance as an assessment unit. Some of the larger duns, and later castles may reveal the association of some of these sites, or *tírean unga*, with the higher echelons of later medieval society (see Chapters 9 and 10).

From the fifteenth century onwards the structural relevance of the *tírean unga* diminished, and tacksman were granted increasingly random numbers of pennylands, and fractions of them. This suggests that the link between nobility, or status, was no longer directly equable to the possession of a set amount of land or number of clients. Gradually, the practical considerations of agricultural management appear to have become more important. By the end of the Middle Ages the link of *tírean unga* to the church and secular authorities also diminished, instead being dealt with at the level of the parish or estate.

A recurrent theme throughout this study is that each level of the tax system appertained to types of settlement that can be recognised archaeologically (see Chapters 5, 6 and 7). It is to that settlement evidence that we now turn.

## SECTION 2                    THE NORSE PERIOD, c. 1000 – c. 1266 AD

### CHAPTER 4                    INTRODUCTION TO THE NORSE PERIOD

#### 4.1        Introduction

Studies of the Norse period in the Western Isles, have tended to focus on one major question regarding the contact period: whether the Vikings obliterated Pictish populations, or settled alongside them (for a good overview see Barrett 2003a). The later Norse period has largely been ignored, or treated almost as a secondary footnote. In comparison, settlement and the nature and form of Hebridean society after the processes of adoption into the main Norse world, or the establishment of Gaelic culture, has largely been ignored. Despite excavation of three sites in the Uists (Cille Pheadair, Bornais and An Udail: Fig. 25), which extend through what may be called the Late Norse period into the post-Norse High Medieval period, the debate has remained fairly site specific. At what might be called their Norse zenith, in the eleventh century, these sites manifest a typical Norse settlement form: farmsteads composed of large halls. Unfortunately, there has so far been little consideration of these sites in their contemporary social landscape, containing agricultural and administrative boundaries, and a settlement hierarchy that includes duns, churches and assembly sites. A study of these aspects is largely dependent on comparisons with contemporaneous landscapes in the Northern Isles and Iceland that have attracted considerably more research, and the oral history of the western seaboard. What little evidence is available for the Uists in the Norse period suggests that the excavated sites served as the dispersed farmsteads of independent farmers, sitting within enclosed field-systems. Historical anthropological studies of this period reveal that this pattern reflects the Norse worldview or mentality found throughout the Atlantic. The dispersed and independent nature of the farms can be understood to be reflective of the wider framework of administrative boundaries, which reveal a hierarchy of bounded units, from the pennyland to the *tír unga* and the later parish (see Chapter 3). Rather than being regarded as separate entities, an understanding derived from accumulated knowledge of site types and administrative groupings reveals the physical



pattern of lordship and land-holding forms in the eleventh century. Over the following centuries, these farms colonised other areas, but the centralisation of community and agriculture in the original farms were eroded, becoming dispersed into smaller related buildings. This parallels political and socio-cultural developments through time, as the inhabitants of the Uists started to look away from Norway as their homeland, and look to a newly conceived pseudo-indigenous Hiberno/Gaelic-Norse identity.

## 4.2 Vikings

The arrival of the Vikings on the western seaboard has been the subject of much, often heated, discussion, with the participants falling into two camps. The first favours the position where the Isles were largely depopulated at the time of Viking settlement, either before, as the Pict's fled in fear of the impending invasion, or shortly after, through the direct intervention of the Vikings themselves (e.g. Crawford 1981, although not 1974; Woolf 2001; Smith 2001; Jennings & Kruse forthcoming). This approach is almost entirely dependent on place-name research, noting the lack of pre-Norse names in the Isles as evidence for the obliteration of the pre-Norse culture. This 'violent conquest' group, perhaps paralleling their theory, has tended to be the most vociferous. In contrast to this are ranged a group, consisting mostly of archaeologists, who argue that the material culture suggests some form of continuity and interaction between the two groups (e.g. Ritchie 1974; 1977; Sharples & Parker Pearson 1999; Bäckland 2001; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004b, 251-53). Unfortunately, the 'co-existence' group draw upon flawed evidence, as there are arguably problems with accepting rectilinear buildings as definitive of the Viking arrival (although this is outwith the discussion here as this work is largely concerned with later developments), and there are problems with the clarity of definition between period contexts. Despite these problems there appears to be some continuity of some forms of material culture, especially in the realm of ceramics, which was foreign to the incoming Vikings, although there are slight changes in form and construction technology (Lane 1983, 183-86, 378-79; 1990, 123-24, 129-30). However, Kruse and Jennings (forthcoming), have pointed out that the introduction of ceramics is common in the Northern Isles and Iceland, with the change in manufacturing

techniques mirroring those of Ireland, not the Western Isles. This, along with the use of Gaelic agricultural terms in Iceland, suggests the prevalence of Gaelic speaking Irish slaves in the Atlantic world (also see Sigurdsson 2000), which clouds arguments for a continuity of populace in the Western Isles.

Whereas it may be overstating the case to suggest that the whole Pictish populace disappeared or were slaughtered upon the Viking arrival, most of the available evidence shows a major realignment of the politics and geography of power at this time. Although the archaeological evidence is scant, and occupation and re-use of brochs and duns was in decline throughout the Late 'Pictish' Iron Age, there appears to be a period of abandonment around the eighth or ninth century, which seems best attributable to the removal of the upper echelons of society. The notion of the Picts being reduced to slaves has been argued as one possible scenario, inter-breeding and harmony being others (see Ritchie 1974; 1977). Whilst a harmonious arrival may be rather over-humanistic an interpretation, there is some evidence for continuity of ecclesiastical and territorial organisation (see Section 3.2), which may further indicate there was no clean slate for the Vikings to impose their new culture upon, and they accepted some of the pre-existing principles of landscape organisation.

### 4.3 A Gaelic Renaissance?

On top of this, and perhaps against it, is the notion of a (re-)Gaelicisation of the Western Isles that started in the tenth century at the earliest. The Norse place-name terms, which obliterated the earlier toponymy, became infused with Gaelic terminology. Whilst some may be attributable to an imported Gaelic speaking slave class or indigenous underclass, it is apparent that the Hebridean elite operated across the Irish Sea and increasingly interacted with the Hiberno/Gaelic elite there, creating political and family ties (e.g. see Duffy 1992; Jennings 1994; Etchingham 2001). Ó Corrain (1998) has suggested that they became recognised in contemporary ninth and tenth century Irish annals as a distinct hybridised Gaelic speaking (if not genetically) Hiberno- or Gaelo- Norse group, known as the *Lochlannich*. However, his assertion that Irish chroniclers could not distinguish between

political geographies in Scandinavia and Viking Scotland until the eleventh century has been modified by Etchingham (2001, 151-53), who suggests that *Lochlann* came into its later meaning, specifically referring to Norway, by the mid tenth century, if not earlier (also see Clancy forthcoming, who also demonstrates the inappropriateness of the term Gall-Ghàidheil for inhabitants of the Western Isles). Whatever the Irish called Viking Age Hebrideans, they called the Hebrides *Innse Gall*, the 'Isles of the Foreigners', signifying the extent of Nordification there. Nevertheless, the extent of the eventual Gaelicisation can be seen in the increasing connections with Ireland, the ultimate whole-scale adoption of the Gaelic language, and the later manipulation of genealogies to incorporate a mix of Irish and/or Dál Riadic gene-pools, often at the expense of Norse ones. Although this should not be perceived as a single unified trajectory, especially given the fact that political ties with Norway were strengthened by Magnus Bareleg's expedition to the extent that they lasted until 1266 (Power 1986, 130-31), this is perhaps most evident in the figure of Somerled. If the genealogies ascribed to him by later authors could be accepted as accurate, they would reveal the blending of Norse, Irish and Dál Riadic society. However, as they may be later fabrications (see Sellar 1966) they may reveal that this mix was considered an ideal heritage worth claiming.

Quite where Uist sat linguistically between the almost fully Nordicised Isle of Lewis and the partially Gaelic Inner Hebrides has not been clarified. Paradoxically the lack of evidence is a consequence of academic tradition. Due to a lower concentration of Norse influences in the place-names and dialects in Uist, it has never attracted the same degree of interest from linguistic scholars as Lewis (e.g. Oftedal 1961; Nicolaisen 1969; 1980; Cox 2003; 2004). Moreover, the Inner Hebrides has enough historical evidence to suggest a Gaelic presence by the twelfth century, if not before. Politically Uist does not appear to have been at the heart of the territories where Somerled's progeny exercised most influence, yet it was more Gaelicised than Lewis. Whilst no detailed linguistic study has been made of Uist Gaelic it would appear to be less influenced by Norse terminology than Gaelic in Lewis. Jennings (1994) has made a significant analysis of the Gaelic-Norse interaction throughout the Western Seaboard. Although he ultimately concluded that Uist was as Nordicised as Lewis,



he admitted that there were problems with this model. The occurrence of Norse elements in Uist place-names more resembles that of Mull, Jura, south Skye and parts of Islay, than their northern neighbours, Lewis and northern Skye (ibid., 17-18). Present day dialects in Uist are also generally thought to be marked from those in Lewis by their lack of borrowed Norse terminology. However, whether the Gaelic language took hold in Uist at a later date than it did in the islands further south, cannot be ascertained with any accuracy from present knowledge, and a chronology derived from linguistics cannot be attempted.

The ability of Somerled and his rivals to claim the various kingships along the western seaboard, reveals some form of recognised regional ties of loyalty possibly identifiable as lordships. At the end of the eleventh century, Uist itself appears to have been a “vice regal” principality: Lagman, the Manx King’s son, was named ‘Ivastar Gramr’, Prince of Uist (Fleming & Woolf 1992, 348). Whilst these must have been reasonably stable geographically (Alex Woolf pers. comm.), the bonds between the kings and their adherents may have been expressed in terms of personal loyalty rather than recognised vassalage, perhaps closer to Early Medieval clientship than to a more classical European ‘feudalism’, the difference being that within clientship land was held free from the lord, who extracted military or social dues and whose position was maintained through the creation of social debt through the giving of cattle and various modes of production (Charles-Edwards 2000, 69-72). Byock’s (1988, 77-101) analysis of the nature of Icelandic chiefdoms reveals that the chiefs differed from their European counterparts as Icelandic society lacked the mechanisms that created blatantly coercive strategies. Instead chiefs maintained their position through the manipulation of their hold over land, as well as trade and taxes (including those on access to religious sites and assemblies) to amass sufficient wealth “to purchase support, pay compensation awards, exchange gifts, make loans, and provide feasts and hospitality” (ibid., 77). It seems likely that the Hebridean kings maintained similar practices to a greater degree and managed to incorporate an element of military service. However, the structural mechanics of kingship in the Isles have not been studied in any depth, but it seems likely that there were similarities between Hebridean kingship and Orcadian Earlship, the only real difference being in the terminology used. The use of *konungr* (Old Norse) is a “notably non-

Scandinavian feature” of references to the Hebridean elite, as in Scandinavia it was a specific title reserved for the head of a defined kingdom. The practice of naming a local, petty-, or sub-ruler as a ‘king’ was borrowed from Ireland and the equating of the Norse term with the Old Irish *rí* (McDonald 1997, 31) may serve to show the independence and position of much of the Hebridean elite. The naming of a tenth-century Hebridean leader as “Jarl Gilli” in *Njal’s Saga* (who paid tax/tribute to Jarl Sigurd of Orkney and was influential enough to marry his daughter: Magnusson & Palsson 1960, 182, 196) may verify the similarity of the two terms. Use of the title Jarl in this source may simply be an imposition of a familiar title by a thirteenth century Icelandic author. However, Etchingham (2001, 173-75) has shown that Gilli may also appear in the Irish Annals, entitled *airrí Gall*, ‘royal deputy of the Foreigners’ (i.e. Man and the Isles). The position may have been demarcated by little more than the demonstration of the ability to uplift dues (silver, food, military or social) over a specified area. This may mean that a Hebridean king was similar to an Orcadian Earl, whose power was only enabled through the active support of their chieftains and whose fighting force was formed out of personal ties of loyalty, rather than exacted (Williams 1996, 256-67).

This relationship was to change over the following century, as the positions became increasingly formalised. Over the twelfth and thirteenth century Norwegian Kings and Orcadian Earls manipulated the social system to gain rights and ownership of land. The process increased the similarities to feudal vassalage, and it may not be inconceivable that the Kings of Man, or the Clann Somhairle attempted a similar social realignment. Alongside this process, perhaps indicative of it, was the patronage of churches and monasteries that accelerated in the 1100s throughout the western seaboard, which indicates some consolidation of power and resources, although there is no evidence for these in Uist. By 1166 the looseness or independence of the Kings of Man and the Isles from the Kings of Norway is indicated by a claim made by the Bishop of the Sudreys (Man and the Isles) that kingship over the Isles was designated by a significantly small symbol of vassalage: the payment of ten gold marks at each king’s inauguration (Cubbon & Megaw 1942, 58).

In the Northern Isles, a social class can be recognised in the saga literature, under that of the earls, but above that of the free-farmers. This is a group of chieftains with the named rank of *gædingr*. They were related to the same kin-group as the earls and were expected to pay military and administrative dues in return for hereditary right to large estates (summarised by Grieve 1999, 105-10; also see Cleasby *et al.* 1957, 222). The term derives from *gæda*, meaning ‘to bestow and endow’, which implies that the title was given to some form of ‘feudal’ magnate (Alex Woolf pers. comm.). It is possible that this rank existed in the Hebrides under the Hebridean Kings, but no literary evidence survives to confirm this. In light of the socio-cultural differences between the Western and Northern Isles in the later Norse period it is also possible that although a similar class may have been present, they functioned slightly differently as part of a different hierarchical regime and were referred to using different terminology. Williams’s (1996, 256-65) interpretation of events recorded in the *Orkneyinga Saga* shows that the *gædingr* in the Northern Isles were a particularly powerful political group. The more influential controlled large groups of levies loyal to them, rather than the Earls, whilst nearly all had the ability to influence events discussed at public assemblies. It may be possible to postulate an equation between the Orcadian *gædingr* with a late tenth-century group of Hebrideans, named in the Irish Annals and Welsh sources as the *lagmainn*, *lagamainn* and *llagnannaibh* (see Ó Corráin 1998, 308-09; Etchingham 2001, 169-72). These are the plural of the word *lagmann*, which derives from the Old Norse term for lawman. As a result of the use of the plural in the sources, and evidence that Lagman became a personal name within later Manx and Scottish royal dynasties, many authors have suggested that the tenth-century references record a lineage descended from an individual of that name. However, Etchingham has noted that their appearance is directly linked with the administration of retributive justice (*ibid.*, 172), and it is possible that these sources witness the coming together of the forces of a group of Hebridean freeholders who were of high enough status to dominate assemblies and perhaps become involved in the Manx Tynwald (see below).

The Latin *Chronicle of Man* calls the Hebridean leaders *principes insularum*, but two episodes it recounts may shed some light on their involvement in the administration of



kingship. In the mid twelfth century, Godfrey, King of Man and the Isles, was established, “by common decision and agreement” as King of Dublin, this position was defended by the chieftains and *their* forces (Broderick 1979, f.37r.). According to the *Chronicle*, once the Hebridean chiefs realised Godfrey’s tyranny, “Thorfin, son of Ottar, more powerful than the rest” (ibid., f.37v.) offered the kingship of the Isles to Somerled. In order to claim kingship Somerled travelled throughout the Isles and “subjected them all to his sway and received hostages from each island” (ibid.). If the *Chronicle* can be accepted, this story may reveal that the Kingdom of the Isles could, at the same time, be thought of as a whole, as well as confederation of a number semi-independent parts. Thorfin may have acted as a sub-king or head-steward of a unified kingdom, as he must have felt confident that his offer to Somerled was a valid one: however, he may have only been able to act with the agreed support of a large number of relatively independent chieftains. This may be demonstrated in the need for Somerled to process around the kingdom and receive homage from the multiple or single chiefs of each island. Half a century earlier Magnus Barelegs had tried to impose Ingemund as King of the Isles. Upon his arrival “he sent envoys to all the chieftains of the Isles instructing them to hold a convention and make him king” (ibid., f.34.r.). This surely demonstrates that there was a group of chieftains, whatever they were called, who were influential, or powerful, enough to elect their own leaders and raise their own forces.

Prior to the secession of the Hebrides from the Kingdom of Man the Tynwald assembly retained sixteen places for Hebridean representatives, eight of whom came from the Isles that maintained some independence from Somerled. This is likely to have formed two groups, centred on Lewis and Skye (Cubbon & Megaw 1942: Fig. 26), although the precise divisions from which they were allocated, or how those representatives were elected remains unknown. There are, however, some clues. In the thirteenth century Skye appears to have been the home of Paul “son of Boke”, he was described as *uicecomes de ski*, “Sheriff of Skye and a man of vigour and power in all the Kingdom of the Isles” (Broderick 1979, f.42v.), a description that may be backed up by his role in *The Saga of Hacon* (Dasent 1894, 152, 154). Two centuries earlier the name of the king, Lagman, literally translates as ‘law man’; prior to his father’s death he may have also possibly been titled ‘Ivastar Gramr’, Prince of Uist

(Fleming & Woolf 1992, 348), but he is also named in the *Chronicle of Man* as *maior*, steward, although this was scored out by the scribe (Broderick 1979, f.33v.). This may show that as the King of Man's son he held a judicial position in the Uists, which may also be reflected in his being sent to defend the northern Hebrides against Magnus Barelegs (Hollander 2002, 676). Another *maior* may also be revealed in the place-name of the dun, Caisteal a' Mhorair, in Lewis (MacDonald 1984a, 156: also see Section 10.6). The placing of Magnus' incumbent King of Man in Lewis, may reveal an attempt to fill this recognised and established position, and that by filling this post the holder may have been better positioned to extend a claim upon the kingship. If this can be accepted, it would further indicate that Lewis was a sub-region within the kingdom (Power 1986, 116). It is possible that the Uists, along with Eigg, if not the rest of the Small Isles, formed one subdivision of the Lewis group, as they were signalled out together for specific mention in a letter from the King of Norway to the King of Scotland in 1282 (APS: I, 447). However, the inauguration of the Lord of the Isles in Eigg in the late 1300s (RBC, 161) may suggest that the centre lay there, rather than Uist. One of the four members of the Lewis group to attend the Tynwald may have come from this division. Another may have been Harris, as the place-name itself derives from *herad*, a Norse name for an administrative district (Crawford 1999, 117).

#### 4.4 The *Lochlannich* in Folklore and Saga

The Norse left their imprint on the collective mentality of the Hebridean Gael. For many the *Lochlannich* were almost semi-mythical, often being remembered as giants or capable of super-human feats. They were imposed onto origin myths. Some tales record them as being opposed to the Fingallians (Irish and Gaelic), who together left their legacies in all the major forms of the landscape. Standing stones are often thought to be where Finn MacCool, the most famous of the Fingallians, tied his hunting dogs, or where he out cheated a *Lochlannich* King, or his daughter. The *Lochlannich* were thought to have burnt down the forests, whose stumps were visible under the peat in Lewis, whilst in Uist all the chambered tombs and duns are remembered as resulting from the activity of despotic *Lochlannich*, curiously often daughters of the Kings of Norway. This is manifested in numerous names and folk-tales

attached to the duns throughout the Hebrides (CWP 362, II, IV, V; Campbell 1890-93: I, 158; II, 201; III, 302; 1960, 243; McDonald 1902; Goodrich-Freer 1908, 183, 272-307; Dewar 1964, 155; Swire 1966, 27, 80, 108; Campbell 1997, 1-31, 77).

Despite the proliferation of these stories they have rarely received any scholarly attention other than as folkloric literature (e.g. MacDonald 1984b, who refutes any connection between the motif infused myths and historical reality). At a very basic level they reveal a collective memory of this part in the Hebridean past, the relevance of this to duns will be highlighted in Sections 7.5 and 7.6, but there are some curiously contradicting memories regarding clan origins in the Isles. There are numerous clans whose genealogy, mythical or real, places their progenitor in the Norse period, perhaps the most famous being the MacLeods/Clann Leoid, the MacPhaills/Clann Phail, the MacAulays/Clann Amlaidh and the Nicolsons/Clann Neacaill (Matheson 1980a; 1980b; Maclean 1992; Sellar 1998). The Clann Leoid in particular seem to have revelled in their Nordic origins. In contrast to this there is a body of tales of an angry, resentful, relegated underclass of peasants killing their Norse overlords after the Battle of Largs. However, many, such as those propagated by the MacNeils in Barra (see MacGregor 1929, 198-99), almost certainly arise from the need to claim, or highlight, a Gaelic identity in the political order of the later medieval period. Other clans, like the Clann Domhnaill, deliberately expunged any trace of the Norse from their ancestry. There appears to be an interesting general geographical divide to how the *Lochlannich* were regarded. The Norse tend to be seen in a more favourable light in North Uist and Lewis, whilst, further south, they tend to be regarded as vociferous, hated landlords. Although the division is far from clear cut (e.g. see MacKenzie 1903, 67) this trend may suggest something about the prevalence of Norse culture, in these islands (also see McLeod 2004, 30-32).

In tandem with how later Gaels perceived their Norse Hebridean forbears is how Hebrideans are represented in the Icelandic sagas. Despite some good beginnings, such as in *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*, where they are portrayed as “distinguished” Norse chieftains dispossessed by wars in Norway (Hight 1965, 4), they soon fell from grace. The figure of a



“disagreeable Hebridean” is described by Magnusson and Palsson as a “stock villain” of the sagas (1969, 12). In *Laxdaela Saga* Killer-Hrapp (a nick-name that is hardly a good introduction in itself) is introduced as:

*Scottish on his father's side, whereas all his mother's family came from the Hebrides, and Hrapp had been brought up there. He was a big strong man, who would never yield to anyone, whatever the opposition; and because he was so overbearing ... and refused to pay compensation for his misdeeds, he fled to Iceland ... Hrapp did not endear himself to most people. He was aggressive towards his neighbours, and let them know he would make life very difficult for them if they regarded anyone as being superior to him* (ibid., 61-62).

This saga continues the theme in featuring a family of scheming Hebridean sorcerers, who are also described as lazy and belligerent farmers (ibid., 125, 129, 131). A tentative clue to the Hebridean fall from grace may be provided in *The Saga of Grettir the Strong*: here the father of the lord of Barra is named ‘Konal’, perhaps suggesting some Norse-Gaelic inter-marriage. Although an Irish origin is far from improbable, as stated explicitly elsewhere in the saga, Norse named characters with interests in Ireland are ever-present (Hight 1965, 4-5, 9-11). As the sagas were written down some period after the events they describe it is hard to know whether Hebrideans had managed to obtain this reputation for themselves in the Viking Age, or if it was a prejudice imposed by thirteenth-century authors. Whichever the case, it is interesting that the hybrid Gallo-Norse Hebrideans appear to have become marginal to their two political and cultural polarities.

What emerges from the approaches summarised above is that although the impact of the Vikings upon the indigenous ‘Pictish’ population is open to debate, any that survived were fully integrated into the Norse world, becoming immersed in Norse forms of expression, both linguistically and in terms of material culture. However, this should not be confused with ideas that the Hebridean Norse era populations were entirely northward looking in their

search for cultural and political influences. Norse activity, expressed in politics, marriage, trade and settlement, in the Irish Sea created what might be described as a hybrid Norse-Gaelic culture, that spanned north into the Western Isles. In time the eyes of Hebrideans increasingly focussed on the Gaelic element, with the Norse influence falling from favour and in some cases being specifically expurgated from the collective consciousness. In tandem with this cultural process there appears to have been a general shift from a social system based on relatively loose ties of loyalty and vassalage to a more regulated system, perhaps more akin to 'feudalism'.

Through identification and interpretation of the archaeological record it is possible to begin to address issues regarding the structure of society and the creation of identities in the Hebrides throughout the Norse period. This is visible in both the archaeology of farming and settlement (see Chapter 5) and that of the political geography, including church (see Chapter 6), duns and assemblies (see Chapter 7).

### 5.1 Introduction

Ecclesiastical and secular power groups competed over dues from the populace of South Uist throughout the Norse period, and the administrative and settlement hierarchy clearly reflects this. The base level of the social system is manifest in the way that the landscape inhabited and exploited: the settlement pattern, consisting of houses, farms, field-systems, resource exploitation, etc. By looking at the excavated settlements and analysing them in their landscape context, whilst taking into account evidence for control over resources, or modes of production, it is possible to reconstruct the social and economic lives of the farming populace at all levels of society, from poor to rich. Furthermore, from the patterns that emerge, it is possible to reconstruct social and economic developments through time, across the generations. By the beginning of the Norse period the inhabitants of South Uist lived in a settlement pattern that would have been recognised across the Norse world, one of large halls, housing the families of free farmers, and their servants and slaves. These earlier farmers held their land by odal right, and when their sons came of age, new farms were founded on the pasture or outby land, *gearraidh*. However, through time, the original farms and their initial colonies became fossilised, with larger communities living in smaller dwellings occupying the same sites. The poorer farmers may have been tied to some of their more affluent neighbours for access to fishing boats and the means for processing agricultural produce, such as kilns and mills, although the nature of that tie is unclear. Whilst such links could have been structurally enforced by a class system, it seems more likely that some form of negotiation and social debt may have been in place, which allowed for the acknowledgement of free status.

### 5.2 Farmsteads in Townships

In South Uist the available evidence suggests that this settlement was focussed upon the machair along the west coast of the island. Furthermore, it is clear that, where settlement has



been identified, there is a common pattern of one cluster of settlement mounds that have produced evidence for Norse period occupation per modern township (Parker Pearson forthcoming a: Fig. 27). Whilst the association of recovered settlement evidence with townships is, perhaps, not as strong as Parker Pearson suggests, if the *gearraidh* townships (where settlement may have been away from the machair: see Section 3.8) are not considered, and the possibility of lost settlements is allowed, then there does appear to be a relationship. This strongly suggests some correlation of the origin of the township layout with the creation of set and recognised agricultural units. Two of these clusters of mounds have been subject to large-scale, intensive and modern excavations in South Uist: Bornais (Fig. 28) and Cille Pheadair (Fig. 29), while another has been investigated at An Udail, North Uist (Fig. 30). These mound clusters reveal similar patterns of development from the Viking Age through into the fourteenth century, which extends occupation beyond the traditional date for the end of Norse cultural and political influence in the Western Isles. A further Viking Age settlement was partially excavated at Driomor, in South Uist (Maclaren 1974).

The buildings in these mounds tend to be constructed directly into the ruins of recently abandoned structures, suggesting a close continuity between households, as well as continuous occupation of the same settlement throughout their use. The earlier Norse period phases show that the settlements were single longhouses, containing living spaces for both humans and animals, with occasional outhouses. It is possible that the larger of these longhouses housed extended family groups, similar to those in Iceland, accommodating the main house holder and his family, as well as farmhands and slaves, usually between ten and twenty people in all (Byock 2001, 42, 55). Both Bornais and An Udail developed along similar patterns throughout the Norse period. The focus of the settlement shifted away from the main longhouse and became diffused amongst numerous smaller dwellings. This parallels a similar development of farmsteads in Jarlshof (Hamilton 1956, 156-80) and elsewhere in the Northern Isles, where the process is thought to show the expansion of the main landholding family prior to the colonisation of outlying farmland (Crawford 1987, 149). However, this diffusion pattern may differ from later developments in the Western

Isles, where, following expansion into the *gearraidh* lands (see Section 3.8) there does not appear to have been any further land colonisation, the initial farms remaining central to developing townships. Whilst it is obvious from Norse literature that genealogy and kinship were important (see Hastrup 1981), it is unclear how kinship and inheritance might be mapped out accurately within the distribution of settlements within the landscape.

Other changes in the material record may also reflect different cultural and economic forces affecting the population of the Western Isles. At Bornais, there were a number of changes in building style and material culture over the Norse period. In its eleventh-century zenith it consisted of a large hall, although later it was replaced by a series of smaller buildings (Sharples 2000). Towards the end of occupation there was a change in ceramic typology from the bucket-vessels of the earlier period to smaller vessels with slightly everted rims (Parker Pearson pers. comm. Fig. 31). Analysis of imported wares from Cille Pheadair show that in the twelfth century there was a shift away from artefacts of Scandinavian origin to material brought in from south west England and Ireland (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004b, 247). Elsewhere, at An Udail, in North Uist, Crawford (1988, 9) attributed structural stylistic changes to a “Gaelic revanche” of the mid-twelfth century. As he described it “all Norse characteristic disappear”, including platter-ware, with the construction of “massive long buildings with 2m wide double walling ... and there is clearance and redevelopment of the whole site on an unprecedented scale. Drystone walling of excellent technique is employed and turf and enclosures have gone. Mediaeval glazed pottery is gone” (*ibid.*, 21-22). After several rebuilds there was a period of abandonment around the mid fourteenth century (*ibid.*, 23), paralleling the pattern found in South Uist.

Although only two excavated examples from South Uist cannot be taken to be a representative sample of the whole social stratum of Norse period houses and farmsteads, a curious difference exists between the artefactual assemblages recovered from Bornais and Cille Pheadair, which mirrors their respective sizes. In addition to a considerably more wealthy collection of coins and jewellery, faunal evidence from the larger hall at Bornais reveals that deer and prime meat joints were more abundant than from the smaller farmstead

at Cille Pheadair. It is also evident that they had large hunting dogs at Bornais, whereas the dogs at Cille Pheadair were terrier-like beasts (Parker Pearson pers. comm.). It is highly tempting to suggest that not only does this artefactual and faunal divergence reveal differences in social hierarchy and economic wealth, but that it reveals two distinct classes of Norse period society.

It is possible that the machair-based distribution discovered by Parker Pearson (forthcoming a) simply reflects the high archaeological visibility of sites upon the machair and is not a true indicator of the settlement pattern. At Aisgernis there is a site in the blacklands, consisting of what appear to be the denuded remains of a structure sitting upon a raised area of land surrounded by what is now very wet marsh, that tradition holds to be the homestead of the local 'Norse' chieftain (William Macdonald pers. comm.). Additionally, the secondary phase of land occupation, visible in the location of gearraidh townships (see Section 3.8), may also highlight the possibility of so far un-recovered late Viking Age or Norse period settlement. However, rather than contradicting this pattern this serves to augment the idea of singular dispersed farms in this period.

It is evident from the surviving and identifiable physical remains that in South Uist over the Norse period that an initial period of settlement, characterised by the building of large halls, was replaced by a larger number of small clusters of less impressive dwellings. These parallel a shift from large single agricultural units to a numbers of smaller colonisations, possibly semi-independent areas, bounded within the original unit. The central farm and secondary off-shoots form the basis for the township system visible in the later period. This change was also accompanied by a change in ceramic styles, and together it is probable that these reflect changes in perceived or real ethnic, political and economic developments throughout the western seaboard and Irish Sea region.



### 5.3 The Homesteads of Freemen

In the poem *Magnus's Praise* by Gisl Illugisson there is a passage which deals with Magnus Barelegs' suppression of a rebellion in the Hebrides at the end of the eleventh century:

*The King took the lord of Uist off to Skye; the Scot's fled; he kept King  
Lawman in his company. Four heritages of the Island people the king  
subdued by force.*

*Fire played fiercely to the heavens over Lewis; he went over Uist with flame;  
the yeomen lost life and goods. He harried Skye and Tiree. The terror of the  
Scots was his glory. The Lord of Grenland made the maidens weep in the  
Southern Islands; the people of Mull ran for fear. Far over the flate of  
Sanday he warred. There was smoke over Islay: the king's men fed the  
flame. Further south, men in Kintyre bowed beneath the sword's-edge, he  
made the Manxmen to fall. Every way of escape was stopped for Godrod's  
son; the lord of the Thronds banished Lawman from the land (Vigfusson &  
Powell 1883, 241-42).*

This rather staid Victorian translation reveals a specific interpretation of the word *buendr* as 'yeomen'. It has also been interpreted as 'peasants' (Nicolson 1930, 11) and 'people' (CdRA cited in MacKenzie 1903, 22). This is presumably the term *bóndi*, which is described as originally meaning:

*tiller of the ground [or] husbandman, but it has always involved the sense of  
ownership and included all owner land ... from the petty freeholder ... [to  
the] yeoman of England ... hence it came to mean the master of a house  
(Cleasby et al. 1957, 74)*

Throughout the Northern Isles and Iceland the term appears to refer to a class of free farmers, with rights of access to justice and atonement within the law and who may have played a so-far unrealised, although significant role within government (see Crawford 1987, 198 for Orkney and Byock 2001, 13 for Iceland). Alongside this there appears to have been a link to 'odal' rights to landownership, free from the feudal sovereignty of kings. That some form of 'odal' rights had been extant in the Uists is suggested by the place-name 'An Udail' (Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998, 173; although see Beveridge 1911, 96 and Crawford forthcoming who suggest it should instead be interpreted as 'outer dale'). The precise nature of the meaning may have been obscured even by the time this poem was written, with earls and kings imposing or bargaining for superior rights to lands from the twelfth century onwards. However, the concept of these rights is likely to have persisted within the judicial system for some considerable time (Crawford 1987, 202). In Iceland, the first to colonise an area of land became a chieftain-cum-priest, named a *godi*. This position gave Icelandic *godi* a direct role within the legislative process (Cleasby *et al.* 1957, 200), and it may be that in the Hebrides those involved in the original *landnam* and/or were involved in establishing the system of *tírean unga* claimed their odal rights through similar mechanisms.

Nedkvitne's (2000) and Cowan's (1990) examinations of the Hakon inspired expeditions to Iceland reveal his primary aims were to bring the semi-independent farmers and chieftains into ecclesiastical and state control. Amongst the expressed causes for such a vociferous criticism of Icelandic society in this period was the penetration of kinship and hereditary position into church life, a situation bearing much similarity to that recorded for the later medieval Hebridean church. It does not seem implausible that Hakon's next major expedition, to the Hebrides, stemmed from similar motives, to reign in Hebridean divergence from his political and cultural ideals, and complete his hold over a new empire in a European medieval mould loyal to his crown and state.

## 5.4 Enclosure as Mentality

If these were independent or semi-independent farmsteads, possibly with a thrall population too, it is likely that farmland was enclosed in a manner characteristic to that elsewhere in the Norse world. In South Uist there is no hard evidence for field-systems dating to this period. Throughout the western seaboard, (Dodgshon 1993a, 424-31, 1993b, 386-94), and in South Uist (Symonds 2000, 201) redundant field-systems that predate the eighteenth century have been recorded, however, these have proved difficult to date. The concept of enclosure around the farmsteads is central to the Norse perceptions of the landscape and central to the spatial demonstration of the independence of the farming unit, very much at the core of their worldview, or mentality (Gurevich 1969; 1992; Doxater 1990). The house and surrounding fenced-in land, *innangarda*, was a place of order and human culture; beyond the yards, *útangards*, was a place of chaos and lawlessness, perceptions which were backed up through laws and myths. This world was seen from the perspective of single family farmsteads and there was no concept of a village. Where villages did exist they were thought of as groups of separate neighbours, rather than communities (Gurevich 1992, 202). Rights to ownership of certain land and resources had to be shown through genealogy “*till haugs ok till heidni*” (“up to the barrows and heathendom”) (ibid., 202) a connection that survived in folklore until the twentieth century.

## 5.5 Beyond the Fields

The hills were probably reserved for pastures, although some hunting may have existed. However, Norse hunting patterns meant that any kill went to the owner of the ground so there were no chiefly or royal hunting grounds (Gilbertson 1979, 6-9). Shieling sites excavated in Barra show that they were substantial structures by the Norse period (Branigan & Foster 2002, 105). This hints that the practice was well established and of some importance to the Norse period economy in the Hebrides. Whilst it is probable that at least the women took cattle and sheep into the hills the precise shieling-farm relationship cannot



be reconstructed accurately, especially as the relationship varies greatly over the Norse world (see Mahler 1993; Sveinbjarnardóttir 1989).

Magnus Lawmender's thirteenth-century legislation regarding the distribution of whale carcasses is often used to illustrate rights to maritime resources in use in the recent past of the Northern Isles and in the present day Faroe Islands. It was once argued that since they mirrored the odal rights of the Norse period they shared a common Norse origin. Smith (2003) has coherently argued that this is unlikely to be the case, these being the product of later customs. Thus, whilst it is likely that there were procedures for landholders and superiors to control this resource the precise nature of this in the Norse Western Isles cannot be fully reconstructed and that the later modes for dealing with whales (see Section 12.13) cannot be taken to be indicative of Norse period practice in the Uists.

Archaeologically excavated fishbone assemblies suggest that a significant degree of deep and shallow water fishing was also being conducted over the Norse period. The evidence from Bornais suggests that here the herring fishing was located in coastal waters off the continental shelf to the west of the island (Ingrem 2000). The intensification of fishing in this period is seen across Orkney and elsewhere in Europe in what Barrett calls a "fish event horizon", with fish becoming a staple food and traded commodity from the twelfth century (2003b). Different areas specialised in different species with the Western Isles emphasis in herring fishing. Fish middens from Orkney show a specific gearing towards export in this period (Barrett *et al.* 1999). Although evidence for specific export and semi-industrialisation from Bornais is not as definitive until the fourteenth century (Sharples pers. comm., see below), the likelihood is that herring were fished for a distant market. The drive for a market economy and the accumulation of sufficient surplus resources necessary for the acquisition of a fishing fleet strongly suggests that there was involvement of an elite group.

## 5.6 The Products of the Land

Both Bornais and An Udail have produced evidence for corn-drying kilns during the Norse period, but none was found at Cille Pheadair. At Bornais the barn structure containing the kiln has also produced evidence for winnowing (Sharples 1999, 30). The earliest phases of this kiln resemble ones thought to be associated with Norse period and later mills from the Northern Isles (although only one mill has actually been proved to be Norse in date: Batey 1993), while later ones are more akin to Post-Medieval examples from the Uists, this perhaps suggest a continuity in kiln types throughout this period (Sharples 1999, 30). However, although few structures from the intermediate period have been excavated, the fact that they appear to disappear from An Udail by the end of the thirteenth century (although only interim reports cover this phase: Crawford 1965a, 1967b) indicates a possible gap between Norse period kiln use and the eighteenth century (see below).

Both Bornais and An Udail appear to have been high status sites, which together with the lack of a kiln at Cille Pheadair (although one could have been washed out to sea) suggests at least some degree of social control over grain processing in the Norse period. As will be seen below (Section 12.12), by the eighteenth century the kiln and the mill were seen as being integral to one another, the presence of one necessitating the other, and vice versa, the purpose of one unfathomable without the other. If the relationship of kilns and mills can be accepted, it leads to some confusion regarding the Norse period kilns at Bornais and An Udail, notably the absence of the kilns' other half. Neither has either site produced any querns. However, the hills of South Uist have produced no evidence for the horizontal mills that are so frequent in Lewis and elsewhere (the date of which appear to be Norse period or eighteenth century and later). The only possible exception being Beveridge's (1911, 84, 316) interpretation of the place-name 'Malaclett' in North Uist, which he suggests derives from the Norse words *mjöl* or *mala* and *klettr*, meaning 'meal' or 'grinding' rock. Given the proliferation of horizontal mills in parts of Lewis, and in the Northern Isles, it seems highly unlikely that this is a product of poor recovery.

There are Early Medieval examples of tidal mills in Ireland and England (Watts 2002, 68-9, 73), and if they were employed in South Uist little evidence would remain. This, however, seems a rather convenient answer, and the problem of later Norse period control of grain produce and processing must remain an enigma.

## 5.7 Discussion

If a model of a Scandinavian derived pattern of townships can be accepted for the beginning of the Norse period, it would seem that they bounded the agricultural units of independent farmers, occupying a landscape of dispersed farms, sitting within enclosed field systems. It is also evident that there was some form of control over arable produce, in the form of kilns, indicating at least limited social stratification between the free farmers. As Sharples suggests “that the basic agriculture structures of the farming regime was established between the eleventh and twelfth centuries” (1999, 30). Furthermore, it is possible that this fits into the basis of a house-based township taxation system (see Section 3.4) and the adherence to a belief in the free status of the owners of the farming units. This was not a model in stasis, however, by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries farms were expanding, splitting and colonising *gearraidh* land, and then consolidating their own position, perhaps driven by odal tenure. Conversely, the big hall houses of some of the higher status farms were being abandoned in favour of groups of smaller buildings, perhaps as a result in the erosion of odal rights and the development of tenancies within the townships. There is also evidence for the introduction of deep sea fishing for export; this industry established itself more fully over the following century. At the same time the original Norse period farms became the centres for growing townships. The widespread changes in house form, settlement pattern and ceramics, shows a shift away from developments in the Northern Isles, indicating that the two areas were diverging and that the catalyst for these changes may have some basis in a growing perception of a hybridised Gaelicised ethnicity in the Hebrides.

Alex Woolf (pers. comm.) has suggested that the decline in slavery from the eleventh century onwards may have had an impact upon the demography of the Western Isles, and



thus may have influenced the development of settlement patterns throughout the Norse period. Holm's (1986, 334) claims that slave raiding was rife throughout the Kingdom of Man and the Isles, which do not appear to be based on any hard evidence, and tracts from Icelandic sagas (e.g. Palsson & Edwards 1972, 112; see Karras 1988, 49, 204; Jennings 1994, 232-33) provide limited direct evidence that slaves were taken from Hebridean communities. No information exists to show the extent to which slaves taken from elsewhere in north west Europe formed part of the Hebridean populace (although evidence from elsewhere allows an estimate to be achieved: see Section 3.13), nor is there any evidence for how many slaves were taken from the Isles when slavery was at its height. It is possible that the impact upon slave raiding in the Hebrides may have prompted some of the raids on Ireland, to retrieve or maintain a sustainable workforce on Norse period farms. After slaves had been established on farms, as European social models about Christian society and socio-economic concepts of landholding (Karras 1988, 127-63; Pelteret 1995) may have influenced Hebridean social structures, some established slave families may have been transformed into separate tenant households, 'free' but servile to the original odal families. However, this is likely to have been a continuation of a general socio-cultural trend, and it is difficult to conceive of how this complex change in status may have influenced demographics. In the absence of harder evidence it is hard to see how this line of enquiry can benefit the understanding of Hebridean society. The social implications on the impact upon tenant farming could perhaps provide an interesting line of future enquiry, but again, without more detail, especially about the temporal unfolding of this process in the Hebrides, which may have been late, this cannot be achieved at present.

Unfortunately, specific detail regarding Norse period settlement is limited to evidence gained from only two sites, and cannot be said to be representative of the whole settlement pattern, however, it is perhaps possible to draw out some tentative inferences from the present record. Given the social and economic differences between the farmsteads of Bornais and Cille Pheadair it is tempting to recreate a speculative model of the social relationship between classes of Hebridean society. The family living in Cille Pheadair may have been free farmers, but were also comparatively, socially and economically poor, although they

possessed some decorative jewellery, coins and imported pottery (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004b). They were perhaps of a class dependant on richer members of society, those living in places like Bornais, for access to fishing boats and equipment and the modes of production, such as kilns and mills. It is possible that the development of kilns within sites like Bornais reflect an early form of multure, whereby lower status farmers were tied to using their socially superior's mill. However, it seems more likely that this relationship was more negotiable, with access to the tools of production, and perhaps the jewels and coins, being reciprocated for social debt, payable for such things as support in local decision making. It might be too convenient to link the inhabitants of Bornais to the *gædingr*, or their Hebridean equivalent, but the possibility should not be totally discounted. Without more evidence regarding the relative status of other Viking Age and Norse period farms throughout Uist and Bornais, claims that this farm formed the core of political power on the island in this period (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004b, 253) are perhaps premature and overstated. However, large, occasionally monumentalised halls from this period have been discovered in Orkney, where they appear to have dominated the ounceland in which they were situated, as well as having some form of control over satellite farms in neighbouring ones (Thomson 1986; 1993; Owen 1993). Whilst, there are differences between Bornais and these Orcadian examples (for example Bornais does not have a church in the immediate vicinity: see Chapter 6) it is possible that Bornais occupied a similar position within a more localised settlement hierarchy.

Nineteenth-century North Uist tradition held that in the fourteenth century other industries were encouraged. The Siol Ghoraigh were said to have encouraged salt-making and tanning, mainly at Lirinis, and patronised a craft school at Loch nam Madadh, and Christina, the Countess of Mar, encouraged a school at a nunnery, teaching girls manual crafts (Fergusson & Macdonald 1984, 23, 120). These traditions need to be treated with the usual caution, but alongside the fishing industry and possible changes in farming (see below) this may hint that at the end of the late Norse period, into the beginning of the fourteenth century, there was a development of a more commercialised economy, designed to produce products for trade. The Clann Ruairidh, along with other branches of the Clann Somhairle were certainly

engaged in long distance trade, as seen in their applications to run to Bristol and Ireland to buy and sell (McDonald 1997, 153-54).

The Later Norse period landscape is also one peppered with churches (see Chapter 6), duns, assembly sites and, debatably, castles (see Chapter 7), revealing a more complex set of needs than settlement and agriculture, possibly defence and spiritual care, but certainly social segregation of a higher order. By the fourteenth century there is some considerable argument for a considerable intensification of the commercialisation of agriculture and fishing. In South Uist this may even indicate the beginnings of a more traditional medieval, debatably even 'feudal' landscape in a more European model. How this contrasts with the fourteenth-century shift in settlement patterns will be discussed in Section 3.



## CHAPTER 6                    THE CHURCH

### 6.1        Introduction

Ecclesiastical institutions and churches have struggled to control, extract dues from, and administer pastoral care over the populace of the Hebrides since Columba's arrival in the sixth century, if not before. Whilst the existence of pre-Viking Christian monuments is hard to prove, the ecclesiastical pattern that was established after the Viking Age is easier to interpret. It has been argued in Section 3.6 that by the fourteenth century there were two parishes in South Uist, plus one in Benbecula (Fig. 20). This remained the situation into the sixteenth century, only being modified long after the Reformation had left its mark on both Protestant and Catholic congregations. Even the first description of the parish system, by Munro, Dean of the Isles, in 1549 is garbled and somewhat open to interpretation. Fleming and Woolf (1992, 348) read his text as stating there were five parishes in South Uist, only three of which were named. However, Munro's statement about "five parochie kirkis" sits within an opening sentence describing "the great Ile of Vyist" (Munro 1961, 76). The rest of the text contains numerous undefined place-names, but does name two in reference to South Uist: "Peiteris parochin [and] the parochin of Howf", as well as Benbecula and two in North Uist. The origin of these parishes lies in similar obscurity and confusion, a problem that is compounded by the presence of a number of other church sites, which may be earlier or contemporary with Hoghmor (this name will be used exclusively to refer to the ecclesiastical complex, Tobha Mor being the township name and Sgire Hogh the name of the parish) and Cille Pheadair. Through analysis of place-names, dedications and archaeological data a pattern of change throughout the Norse period emerges that may reflect socio-political developments in the Isles.

### 6.2        *Cille* Sites, Saints and the Development of the Medieval Church

The Pabbaigh place-name in Loch Baghasdal, with associated building remains, suggests at least one pre-Norse period settlement in South Uist (for discussion on Pabbay place-names

see Jennings 1993, 48-49; Barrett 2003c, 211; Crawford ed. 2002). Furthermore, there are a number of place-names containing a *cille* prefix (Fig. 24), which may also reveal pre-Norse ecclesiastical sites. Nicolaisen (1976, 143) states that the majority of *cille* place-names predate AD 800, although *cille* names were probably introduced along the western seaboard well after the Norse period, as they were in Ireland (Flanagan 1984, 32).

The *cille* place-names are associated with saints names: Cille Coinnich, Cille Bhrigde, Cille Pheadair, Cille Donnain, Cille Bhanain and Cille Amhlaidh. There are other possible *cille* sites at Aird Mhicheil and Aird Choinnich, which are mentioned respectively by Martin and Blaeu (MacLeod 1997, 74, 79, 83). Martin (1994, 155) also named a chapel dedicated to St Jeremy. Upon the east coast there are two possible church sites with no apparent dedication. One is Kirkidale, the *kirk* element is more likely to be Norse in linguistic origin (Nicolaisen 1976, 109-11). The other is Airigh nam Ban, on the north shore of Loch Aineort, which is remembered as a nunnery (Carmichael 1916, 145). Another possible *cille* site may have existed at Asgeirnis, which appears as 'Gill' on Blaeu's map (Fig. 32), an association that may be backed by archaeology and tradition.

Taylor (1999, 35-38) has summarised the possibilities and problems in taking a literal view of early saint dedications as proof of early (e.g. sixth-century), church foundations. Taking his view that patterns of dedications can reveal political and ecclesiastical leanings in later periods a number of conflicting patterns appear for Uist. Some saint dedications in Uist are clearly Columban, including Columba himself, Coinnech and Scotland's only dedications to Diarmaid (Clancy pers. comm.) at Hoghmor and perhaps another site. Coinnech came from the same Ulster political hegemony as Columba and although he founded a separate Irish monastic tradition, he attracted a cult that spread to the Isles, and appears in Adomnan's *Life of St Columba* as an ally of Columba (Sharpe 1995, 262, although see Herbert 2001). It is possible that the chapel that Martin (1994, 155) recorded as being dedicated to St Jeremy was the chapel at Hoghmor, as Jeremy is a common Anglicisation of Diarmait, but Martin seems fairly emphatic that it was in a separate location:

*The churches here are St Columba and St Mary's at Hogh-mor, the most central place in the Island; St Jeremy's chapels, St Peter's, [etc.] (ibid.).*

Thus, an alternative site for this chapel has to be sought (see below), which raises the possibility of there being two chapels with dedications to Diarmait in South Uist. It is unlikely that the Diarmaid referred to is Columba's companion, who appears in his *Life*; he may have been a literary figure invented for the text (ibid., 274) but also there is only one other instance of a dedication to one of Columba's acolytes: St Oran in Oransay, although this could be a corruption of Norse etymology for a tidal islet adjacent to a larger island, which is found throughout the Hebrides (Watson 1926, 82, 155; Nicolaisen 1980, 119) and would accurately describe Oransay. Instead it is possible that this is Diarmait, abbot of Iona between 814-831, or, perhaps, the seventeenth-century Irish missionary Father Dermot Duggan (discussed below). The ninth-century Abbot Diarmait is an enigmatic figure whose prominence came after the main focus of the saint's cult had moved from Iona to Kells and during a realignment of the monastic community to new political patrons (Clancy 1996, 112-115). However, Jennings (1993, 50) suggests an importance in dedications to Donnain, as they reflect a reference to a pre-Norse monastic tradition in direct conflict with the Columban centre at Iona. Alongside these there is a Patrician saint, Bhannain, who is almost certainly St Patrick's successor Benen or Beningus, and Amhlaidh, or Olaf. Both highlight some further problems. Benen's life in the fifth century places him as roughly contemporary with Columban saints, but his cult is almost certainly predominantly Irish and in later periods the monastic centres of Patrick and Columba were in competition for the benefaction of the same Irish lords. If Amhlaidh can be taken to be the eleventh-century St Olaf, King of Norway, and converter of the Norse world, it suggests a considerably later date of dedication to the ones posed by the 'Celtic' saints. Olaf died in 1030, but his popular cult spread across Norse dominions soon after his martyrdom (Jexlev 1988, 188). His importance in the Norse Hebrides, and his acceptance and incorporation into Columban ideology, is perhaps illustrated in his hagiographic appearance alongside Columba and St Magnus in Alexander II's dream of foreboding and warning upon the eve of his sailing to subjugate the Isles (RCAHMS 1982, 143-44). The close proximity of Cille Amhlaidh and Ard Choinneach,



may indicate that the church there was rededicated, Amhlaidh supplanting the earlier Columban saint, thus accounting for the lack of identification of the latter church site, although Blaeu's 'Kilehainie' appears as an entirely independent township from 'Kileulay' (Fig. 33).

The occurrence of Peter dedications may also be relevant - there are examples in South and North Uist (Fig. 34). The North Uist site sits on a low knoll. Although no structural remains survive, at the end of the nineteenth century numerous human remains were visible in the plough soil (Beveridge 1911, 295-6). It is also the site of a cross which Fisher states must be "no earlier than the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century" (2001, 17, 110), although the cross does not have to be related to the site's earliest phase. The South Uist site has a possible structure attributable to it, upon a crannog (discussed below). This perhaps parallels Lamb's (1995, 262-64) interpretation of Peterkirks in Orkney, where a large number of pre-High Medieval parish church place-names, dedicated to Peter occur alongside large Iron Age broch mounds. In turn this reflects a number of eighth-century Peter dedications sited on defensible settlements across northern Europe. However, St Peter, along with Michael, was a universal saint whose popularity continued through the Middle Ages. Although not a universal saint, Bride was also popular, receiving numerous dedications across the western seaboard throughout this period, thus dedications to her cannot be helpful regarding dating or church origins.

Following Taylor (1999, 35) it might be possible to cast aside these dedications as revelations of 'the footsteps of the saints', of sixth-century date, but what do the saints' links to later monastic centres reveal? All the 'Celtic' saint dedications in South Uist are perhaps attributable to monastic *familia*, which raises the possibility that the churches of Uist were originally subordinate to a number of communities; Columban, Patrician and others who were competing for the patronage, benefices and souls of the lands and people of Uist. Central to this would be the assumption that the churches were directly related to the larger *paruchia* of monastic communities. Whilst this model has formed the backbone of studies of the early church in Ireland, it has been challenged by Sharpe (1992) and Etchingham (1993, 1994) who separate the role of monasteries from that of bishops and churches concerned

with the administration of pastoral care. What evidence there is suggests Iona, for one, in its earlier incarnation was not primarily concerned with pastoral administration (Markus 1999). An alternative model, influenced by the late date of the dedication to Amhlaidh and the inclusion of non-Columban 'Celtic' saints might reveal the links between saints cults (see Clancy 1999) and the subtleties of changing political and ethnic leanings of those who were endowing and establishing the churches for the spiritual benefit for the population.

In addition to possible monastic interests were competing diocesan interests. From the twelfth to fourteenth centuries there were conflicting bishoprics of Sodor and the Isles in Snizort, Skye, and the Isle of Man, which were influenced by Dublin and York, even after they later became subject to Nidaros (McDonald 1997, 208). Whilst it seems obvious that Uist must have been within Sodor, along with the rest of the Long Isle, there is a total absence of documentation for any of its parishes. A document purporting to be from 1231, but probably written in the fourteenth century (Megaw 1976), outlines the islands due to pay tithes to Peel in Man. Nearly all the names are recognisable among Inner Hebridean islands, whilst the Outer Isles are overlooked. There have been some highly imaginative attempts to link the obscure names to the Long Isle (Thomson in Poole 1911, 261-62). For example "Howas" which Lindsay suggests could be Hoghmor (*ibid.*, 263). Although similar linguistically, it covers only one parish within Uist, the connection seems improbable. There may be a similarity here with the lack of church lands in the Northern Isles granted by the Pope to the newly formed Benedictine establishment at Iona (Reeves 1874, 354; RCAHMS 1982, 146-47). On the available evidence it would be imprudent to make any great surmises, but it may be that the Long Isle was possibly too far away to be of much interest to the big churches and were only later brought fully into the ecclesiastical fold. Alternatively, the Uists may have belonged to one of the competing bishoprics. That of Snizort may have had wider influence than previously thought with Uist becoming incorporated more fully into the Diocese of the Isles only when they were absorbed into larger Clann Ruairidh and Clann Domhnaill lordships focussed on the southern Hebrides (see OPS, 235; Nicolson 1930, 18, 71, 92-93; Watt 1969, 197; 1994, 106-07; Cowan 1978, 15-16; MacQuarrie 1987, 369-70). Woolf (forthcoming a) has suggested the possibility that the Clann Somhairle connection to

the bishopric of Argyll/Lismore meant that the two reflected one another in size and distribution. Thus Uist may have been incorporated into both the Clann Somhairle lordship and the see of Argyll until later medieval political developments.

If Uist was outwith the territories of the larger bishoprics and lordships in the early 1200s it could fit well with the hypothesis of Clann Ruairidh interests in Uist only blossoming in the later 1200s. A supposition also perhaps validated by a lack of evidence for the patronage of reformed monastic foundations in the Outer Hebrides until the late thirteenth century, at the earliest. Reginald MacSorley's program of religious benefaction (McDonald 1997, 214-18) does not appear to have extended to the Uists. The clan histories tend to name Reginald as the benefactor behind the 'mortification' of Baile na Cailleach and Heisker to Iona, but there is good reason to look to a later thirteenth-century date (Beveridge 1911, 72). Baile a' Mhanaich's donation may date to 1440 (RCAHMS 1982, 143-49). The seventeenth-century *seanchaidhean* also claim Teampull na Trionaid's, in Cairinis, foundation by Reginald's sister Bethog, Prioress of Iona (RBC, 157). If Macdonald (1972, 6) is correct in his record of the inscription from John Duns Scotus' gravestone, which states he had been educated at Cairinis. Alexander Broadie (Alex Woolf pers. comm.) is adamant that this is a total fabrication, but an association may suggest that it existed as a monastery in the mid-thirteenth century, as he died in 1308. However, it may have only gained monastic links when it was gifted to Inchaffray Abbey, along with Iolaraigh, in the fourteenth century (Innes 1847, 51). This pattern not only contrasts with what seems to have been Clann Somhairle practice but also with Gaelic-Norse lords in Galloway, who founded a number of monasteries throughout the region in order to compensate for their sins and warlike behaviour. This went hand in hand with the wish of the church to create a Christian model of society of secular polities, within an ordered and peaceful society (Stringer 2000). The Galwegian and Clann Somhairle lords were arguably equal neighbours in the Irish Sea, sharing a similar place in the same cultural world, it seems unlikely that the latter would not have behaved in a similar manner, founding monasteries throughout their dominions. In this light the geographical nature and timing of Christina of Mar's grants to Inchaffray, in the heart of Perthshire, take on a new significance. A specific statement was being made



whereby the Clann Ruairidh territories, incorporating Uist, were being brought in from the Norwegian cold into the warm religious glow at the heart of the Scottish kingdom.

### 6.3 Site Interpretations and Problems

Not all the *cille* sites have identifiable remains. Cille Brighde (RCAHMS 1928, 120), Cille Amhlaidh and possibly the *cille* site at Aird Mhicheil (MacLeod 1997, 74, 79) are marked by recent graveyards and recorded by tradition. As well as the Gill place-name Aisgernis is the location for a long stone with an impression in it (Fig. 35), noted by tradition to have holy properties, because it was said to have been a fallen cross (William MacDonald pers. comm.), although there is no physical evidence to support this. Harder evidence is perhaps offered by the graveyard at Cladh Hallan. The site is composed of several mounds, some of which have natural bedrock not far from the surface (James MacDonald pers. comm.), but others appear to have been large settlement mounds (Parker Pearson pers. comm.). One of the artificial mounds sits sheltered from the sea to the west by one of the larger natural mounds, and it is this mound that has produced evidence for Early and Late Medieval gravestones (Fisher 2001, 108). It is possible that this fits a model developed by Thomas (1971, 44) for north western Europe, where graveyards form the earliest trace of church activity, being followed by a process in the sixth or seventh centuries whereby chapels developed in some graveyards but not in others. The size of the mound may, however, indicate otherwise, as it could easily have swallowed any structure. Excavation of a chapel at Manish, in Ensay, in the Sound of Harris revealed the speed at which this process could take place (Fig. 36). The chapel was first swallowed by sand-blow in the 1500s, although it remained in use as a graveyard until the 1960s, accumulating six metres of sand and burial deposits over the top of the top of the 3.6m high gable walls. Despite the huge burial mound, no memory of the chapel was recorded in oral history, and the lack of comment by Martin Martin may indicate that the tradition of its presence had faded over the intervening century (Miles 1989, 8-19, 165-69).

Tradition is about all that exists to locate Airigh nam Ban, Cille Coinnich and Kirkidale, although a stone font (Fig. 37) at the modern church at Trosaraidh is said to have come from Cille Coinnich (Galbraith n.d.). All three sit on the lower slopes of the hills on the east coast, an unusual position compared to the other sites on the island. This suggests they may have functioned as summer congregational sites. Open air congregations met at the shielings on the Scottish mainland in the nineteenth century (Campbell 1895-99), although some church structures have been linked to transhumance in Man and Ireland (Cubbon 1982, 277; Ní Ghabhláin 1996, 44-45). Additionally, they also sit next to good landing points at the mouths of the main lochs, indicating a dual role where they also perhaps marked transitional points between land and sea. Carmichael romantically suggested the fourteenth-century church of Teampull Mhicheil on the west coast of Griomasaigh was “where chiefs and clansmen were wont to pray before and after voyaging” (1928-71: I, 322). This may also account for the *altarach*, or altars “built of loose stones” located at Hafn, near the mouth of Loch Aineort, Coire an t-Sagairt, and Scalabhat (Goodrich-Freer 1903, 176-79). Local tradition holds that these *altarach* belong to a period when Catholicism was made illegal by the state authorities (Alex Woolf pers. comm.). The occurrence of similar monuments at the top of Boreray and Soay, in St Kilda, far from the eyes of a prying state but where they could be recovered by antiquarians (Thomas 1874, 705), makes this presumption of their origin (if not later re-use) seem unlikely. Martin (1994, 162) also noted an altar dedicated to St Christopher on the top of a hill in Barra, but this example was evidently a standing-stone, and may have had a slightly different function.

A program of work by Moreland (1991, 1993) attempted to identify remains at Kirkidale, but excavations found only Neolithic and nineteenth-century remains. This may suggest that the place-name denoted the area was owned by one of the other churches rather than a church was actually sited there. Further survey around Airigh nam Ban also failed to produce any candidates (Moreland nd). In *Origines Parochiales* two other chapels are noted on the inner edge of the hills at Clachan na Branagh and Clachan Cuay (OPS, 366). MacLeod (1997, 83) suggested that Clachan of Branagh was Cladh Ard an Dugain, but both authors have misinterpreted the meaning of the word ‘clachan’. In mainland Scotland the name clachan is

commonly associated with churches, settlements with churches in them, and church-lands: however, in the Western Isles it is often related to causeways, and in Uist dialect *clachan* has a more particular interpretation as ‘stepping stones’ (McDonald & Campbell 1958, 71). Furthermore, it is clear from Bald that these place-names are directly related to causeways across lochs. Cladh Ard an Dugain is in an entirely separate location (Fig. 38) and is sited upon a point of land in an inland loch, cut off from the mainland by a substantial wall, containing and surmounted by numerous cells. At the centre of the peninsula is a large broch/dun like structure with a substantial dry-stone rectilinear cell inserted into it at a later date (Fig. 39). The place-name links it with the mid-seventeenth-century Irish Lazarist missionary Father Dermot Duggan and is possibly where he was buried after he died on the way to St Kilda (Purcell 1973, 49; Campbell 2000a, 7). Alternatively, this may be where he preached and be the site dedicated to St Jeremy mentioned by Martin (1994, 155, see above). Unfortunately, it is impossible to confirm this on structural grounds and there may be an earlier chapel at the site. A late date may also be postulated from its location, which does not follow that of the other *cille* sites. It sits far from arable land and any portages, near the break of slope for the inner range of hills, and the thin soils of the blacklands would not lend themselves to use as a graveyard. If this site could be confirmed as Martin’s St Jeremy’s chapel, it perhaps lends weight to the possibility that Father Duggan was connected to the dedication of Caibeal Diarmaid at Hoghmor, conducting mass at this iconic site as well as at Cladh Ard an Dugain.

There is the possibility that Cille Bhanain may have been at the site of a graveyard (Muir 1861, 227), of which there is no modern trace, but most evidence seems to point to it being located on a crannog in Loch Cille Bhanain (Fig. 40). Although Blaeu does not locate Cille Bhanain upon an island, the place-name may suggest otherwise. The crannog shows evidence for a broch, largely obscured by a huge later building. This is a dry-stone rectangular structure, with a smaller cell around the doorway, but no further evidence for internal divisions. It is composed of extremely large stones, with some evidence for plaster work, and was interpreted as the chapel by the RCAHMS (1928, 120), but as it points north-south rather than east-west, and given its state of preservation this seems unlikely. An



alternative interpretation it may be a seventeenth-century, or later, tacksman's dwelling. The gap between the island and the mainland is silted up, but a causeway is visible through the turf. A denuded bank cuts off the peninsula from the mainland, and a large enclosure sits immediately on the landward side, but any it is impossible to relate these directly to the island.

A bicameral structure has been located in a relict graveyard at Cille Donnain (Fig. 41), and has been interpreted as an early church surrounded by related ancillary structures. The site is located on a peninsula into a loch, the peninsula being demarcated from the mainland by marshy ground and standing dykes. The loch also contains an occupied island to which it is linked by a causeway, and it has been argued that the two are interrelated, forming a late Norse period power centre for the Kings of Man within Uist (Fleming & Woolf 1992, 348). The identification of this site as a church has been "greeted with some scepticism" by Graham-Campbell and Batey (1998, 257), as has the contemporaneity of the surrounding structures (*ibid.*, Armit 1996, 204). This appears to be largely based on the lack of any fine dating rather than constructive reasoning. However, the presence of a graveyard that appears to have gone out of use before record and living memory, would seem to validate the site as the location for a church. Key-hole excavations by Parker Pearson (1995) disproved the existence of one of the proposed buildings around the church but confirmed another. This building sat in a humic garden soil, brought to the site, and interpreted as an extension of the mound upon which the church sat, it contained imported wheel turned pottery from the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. Further examples of these ceramics were found in material that had built up against a wall that surrounded the mound. Whilst both appeared to post-date the main phase of mound and church construction, it could be argued that the theory of a later extension of the mound depends upon a presumption of a twelfth-century date to the church. Although the excavations in no way prove that any of the structures served as a church beyond doubt, its place-name, later use as a burial ground and surrounding structures suggest otherwise. If the likelihood can be accepted, the excavations suggest a construction in or before the Late Norse period.

The identification of the church site at Cille Pheadair is also problematic (Fig. 42). The place-name Loch Dun na Cille provides an important clue. Within the loch is one of the largest crannogs in South Uist (Fig. 43), upon which are the remains of at least two phases of buildings (Fig. 44), the later of which parallels Cille Donnain, in that there are a number of cells surrounding what appears to be a bicameral building. Before looking at this building in more detail it is worth looking at some evidence which may contradict the interpretation of this as the Norse period or medieval church site. Pont's map notes no church there, and his text contains an informative, if not slightly convoluted passage:

*The oldest men report ... ther ar destroyed the townes and paroch churches of Kilmarchir moir and Kilpetil, and the church of Kilmorrie is now called Kilpetil, that is the church of the muir, for so it lay neerest the muirs, but now the sea and the sands have approached it. there be sum remaynes of the destroyed churches yit to be seen, at low tyds or ebbing water (Pont n.d.b).*

Sibbald's text, which certainly derives from Pont, contains more detailed information, although whether this came directly from a separate Pont text, or is Sibbald's own embellishment cannot be ascertained. The quote is attributed to a specific "Ancient man of six or seven score years" who saw it himself:

*and that his father and mother, his grandfather and Grandmother did see another parish Church which was destroyed with the sea long agoe. And that they did call that Church Kilmarchirmore. The next was called Kilpettill, And this church ... was called Killmony which is now called Kilpettill that is to say the Mure Church, because it lyeth next the Mures. Mosses and Mountains. And this Church is below the sands except foure and fyve foot length of the pinnacle of that church ... and the churches were destroyed with the sea which were principall Churches of Ancient. Certaine of them will be seen when the sea ebbs in the summer tyme. And the*

*Countrie people will take Lobsters out of the windowes of the Pinnacle of that which was first called Killpettill (MacFarlane 1905, 180-81).*

The claims of washed away buildings remaining visible in the sea is common in Uist folklore, presumably resulting from either bedrock formation or a 'possibility' embedded within tradition. It is highly unlikely that any mortar was strong enough to retain structural cohesion in the force of the tides. The structures were still said to be visible in 1867, four to five hundred yards from the shore (CWP 362, 220). However, the possibility of an earlier church being washed into the sea or buried in the sand should not be entirely discounted. 'Kilmarchirmore' would almost certainly be translated as Cille Machair Mor, either Big Church of the Machair, or Church of the Big Machair. In the Cille Pheadair machair there is a particularly high mound, named Cladh Pheadair, which has produced human remains and seventeenth-century material (James MacDonald and Parker Pearson pers. comm.). The presence of burials and the link of dedications perhaps hints that this is the site of a buried church, although it would seem likely that, if this had been so, it would not have been forgotten by tradition. Alternatively, as it would be very hard to bury bodies in a crannog, or in the thin soils of the adjacent blackland, this may have served as the burial ground to Cille Pheadair.

It is possible that the crannog is Pont's 'Kilmorrie', Pont's interpretation of mor as 'moor' instead of *mor*, 'big', or more probably *Moire*, Mary, is odd, and perhaps reveals a lack of an understanding of Gaelic, but the locational information need not be discounted. Any church site in the blacklands should have left an archaeological trace and the only presently available candidate is the island in the loch.

According to the Ordnance Survey the crannog had gained the name Eilean Buidhe by the nineteenth century, although the first edition names it as Dun na Cille, indicating that the *cille* name was associated directly with the crannog. To get to the island it would have been possible to take either arm of the causeway on the eastern, hillside of the loch, opposite the main area of settlement on the western machair. These arms, themselves a unique feature



amongst Uist duns, combine to create the largest (2m wide) and most substantial causeway of any surveyed in the Isles. To get onto the surface of the island from the causeway it is necessary to cross two boundaries, one low stone bulwark near the island itself, the other at the top of the island, circumventing the western side of the island. The alternative route, by boat across the loch, is provided for by two possible boat landings and noosts, one on the outer side of the island bulwark, the other on the western loch-side of the island.

The earliest visible phase of construction consists of low wall footings of three structures across the central space. These are overlain by four sub-rectangular heavily turfed-over buildings around the outer edge (7mx4.6m, 5.5mx5m, 6.5mx5.5m), resembling the cells surrounding Cille Donnain.

At the south end of the island is an east-west oriented structure. Although slightly cellular in plan this appears to be the result of decomposition, robbing out, and turfing over. The original plan looks to be two rectangular cells, with the best preserved area of walling being a sharp right angled corner. The whole structure is 18.5m long, externally, with 1m thick walls. The eastern 10m possibly being a 7.5m wide nave, and a putative chancel, 8m long and 4.5m wide, separated by a highly denuded wall. Although less well preserved than Cille Donnain the parallels are obvious, although the interpretation will be open to the same criticisms. This may be somewhat of a cursory resemblance, however, as the dimensions are particularly large in comparison to other examples of early bicameral churches in the Northern Isles (eg. see Fleming & Woolf 1992, 349: Fig. 45) and Inchmarnock in Bute (CANMORE). Without excavation the likelihood can only be suggested, although this need not negate the possibility that it is an Early Medieval, or even later church.

Of the non-moorland *cille* sites, Cille Pheadair, Cille Donnain and Cille Bhanain all sit on crannogs, or peninsulas in freshwater inland lochs. It would appear from Bald's map, which was made in midst of a huge program of loch drainage, the first two sit on two separate strings of lochs that may have formed the main inland transit route in the island (see Section 1.9.12 and Fig. 10), one being named Loch Cille Donnain. Loch Dun na Cille was also

connected to one of the longest, Loch Hallan, upon which sat Cladh Hallan, perhaps strengthening the interpretation of this site as that of an early chapel. The inland loch side location contrasts with Cille Amhlaidh, Ard Choinneach and Cille Mhicheil. These sites sit on rocky coastal peninsulas, discounting the possibility of any significant shift in machair distribution. All occupy marginal locations, near but separate from arable and settlement sites. There is also a clear correlation of their locations with that of duns.

#### 6.4 Hoghmor

In contrast to the paucity of hard evidence and structural degradation at the *cille* sites, are the standing buildings in a relatively good state of preservation at Hoghmor (Fig. 46). The earliest feature at the site is an Early Medieval cross-incised slab (Fisher 2001, 108: Fig. 47), possibly a sign of the presence of an early monastic community. However, the dominant structures are a complex of relatively well preserved later ecclesiastical buildings, which consists of two large churches, three smaller chapels and two burial enclosures. One of the chapels (Caibeal an t-Sagairt) and the enclosures are of a much later date. Whilst numerous walls of the larger churches have fallen and been cleared, there are substantial standing remains, all well bonded by mortar. Although modified in the following centuries, recent work by Reynolds, Hamilton and Raven (2004) reveals an early core to one of the churches, Caibeal Dhiarmaid, also dedicated to Colum Cille, and two of the upstanding chapels. The remnants of dog-tooth moulding upon an *in-situ* chancel arch within Caibeal Chlann 'ic Ailein (Fig. 48) is broadly dateable to the twelfth century (although in Scotland it remained a popular style into thirteenth century and there are late fourteenth-century examples; Fawcett 2002, 52-55). This phase is the third at the chapel, allowing a series of earlier architectural details to become evident, and thus a sequential understanding of the whole site to be interpreted. Whilst these earlier features cannot be accurately dated, their stratigraphic positioning suggests their origin substantially predated the twelfth century. The presence of small eastern facing windows, capped by an externally protruding stone is a feature present in this chapel, in Caibeal Dhiarmaid and in Caibeal Dhughail (Fig. 49). Chapels Chlann 'ic Ailein and Dhughail are differentiated from Caibeal Dhiarmaid, in that the east facing

windows are located above east facing doorways and their lintels are not carved into an arch, being flat instead. There is no evidence for a doorway at Caibéal Dhiarmaid, suggesting that the original entrance was in the west or southern wall following a pattern common throughout Ireland and Western Scotland. East facing doorways are not at all common, although they are not unique. At least two examples are known in Ireland: the curiously small divided 'Confessional' at Inis Cealtra, on Lough Derg (Champneys 1910, 109-10); and an oratory at Inishuickallane, in Dingle, where the surveyor noted the door's unusualness (Cuppage *et al.* 1986, 299-300). Ó Carragáin *et al.* (2005, 36-37) have stated that the western orientation of doorways was a "rigidly observed" component of pre-Romanesque Irish architecture. Yet, they have suggested that the builders of chapels built away from the control of ecclesiastical centres felt free to orient their doorways in any way they chose, especially in order to avoid the prevailing elements. This is a highly over-functional explanation at best, especially in the case of Hoghmor, where an doorway facing east would seem to contravene one of the most common rules of church architecture, although at Hoghmor a western doorway would have been fully exposed to the Atlantic wind and rain. Instead, the door orientations perhaps suggest that these two chapels had served a different function when they were first constructed, either as sacristies, reliquies (although eastern facing doorways are not amongst the features of Irish tomb-shrines noted by Herity: 1993, 193-94) or cells for *celi Dé*(?-like) monks centred on a church at Caibéal Dhiarmaid. At Caibéal Dhughail the entrance is composed of two sloping jambs, again a characteristic of early churches (see below), but the number of windows, one in each wall is also unusual. The door does not appear to have been blocked up at a later date, unlike the door in Caibéal Chlann 'ic Ailein. Chapels Chlann 'ic Ailein and Dhughail are 5.5m and 7m long externally. Muir described a destroyed chapel, "the smallest and most characteristic of the group", to the southwest of the main group, however, there is some appears to be some confusions, as his description fits Caibéal Dhughail, to the south west, perfectly in form and location. His descriptions of the remaining buildings are less accurate, missing the doorway and placing a window at the eastern end of Caibéal Chlann 'ic Ailein, but there is one description which does not fit that of any of those now remaining: "19 feet 4 inches in length, - the west wall, in which there was a doorway nearly down, the other walls and the



altar nearly entire” (Muir 1885, 51). From his plan (Fig. 50) it is clear there was a structure standing where Caibéal an t-Sagairt now stands (ibid., 53), but this structure is integrally bonded with the enclosure wall which post-dated Muir’s travels (Reynolds, Hamilton & Raven 2004). It thus seems likely that the present building was built in place of another earlier structure, possibly to mimic or pay homage to it, however, its placing reveals that it would have cut through the now destroyed nave and chancel phase of Caibéal Chlann ‘ic Ailein, and therefore was of a later date. It is evident that Caibéal Dhiarmaid was widened at a much later date, revealing that the four early structures were small mortar bonded rectangular structures, not bicameral churches, such as those proposed for Cille Donnain and Cille Pheadair.

Similar examples of small rectangular mortared chapels can be found throughout Western Scotland, the Isle of Man and Ireland (Fig. 51). Mostly, they survive as footings, so direct parallels are hard to draw, and they are notoriously hard to date. Hoghmore has no direct parallel, with the same architectural features grouped together in one place or building, and is possible that the overhanging-lintels are unique to it. However, broad parallels are immediately obvious regarding a generally small size and shape (although the Hoghmore chapels are at the small end of the scale regarding both plan and gable), small splayed windows in the eastern and southern wall, and lintelled, splayed doorways (Leask 1955, 56-60). The window at Caibéal Diarmaid, with the arch carved into its single lintel is common (e.g. Glendalough: ibid., 58). Comparison to the well-known Irish dry-stone and corbelled chapels of Ireland, including the *gallerus*, is very tempting but their mode of construction, with mortar and timber or timber-framed roofs sets them apart. Nevertheless, this is not to say that there was a deliberate attempt by the architects of Hoghmore to make a direct architectural reference to these Irish examples.

In Ireland small, simple mortared churches only appear to become common in the eleventh or twelfth centuries, and seem to remain the norm even at the most developed ecclesiastical centres (Hare & Hamlin 1986, 131). Harbison (1982) divided rectangular chapels without corbelled roofs into two sub-classifications, those with and those without antae, the first

group he tentatively dates to the twelfth century, and would appear to be the group closest in relation to those at Hoghmore. However, Manning and Ó Carragáin, have recently claimed that they have proved earlier speculation that Irish stone chapels do not predate the tenth century, and that those without antae are unlikely to predate the twelfth century (Campbell forthcoming a). Any tentative comparison and dating would, however, be compromised by the fact that smaller stone chapels without antae are primarily distributed in the middle of the west coast of Ireland, not the north, from where the strongest influence is likely to have been exerted. However, pilgrimages from Barra to Croagh Patrick, in Mayo (Campbell 1982, 4) may suggest stronger political or ecclesiastical links to western Ireland than so far suggested. This is only recorded in 1593, possibility suggesting the pilgrimage was a reaction to the reformation rather than being reflective of pre-Clann Ruairidh ties: this must serve as a warning against making over simplified direct parallels with later ties between churches in the Atlantic seaboard. Leask (1955, 49) and Cubbon (1982, 275) proposed that earlier Irish and Manx chapels could be identified by the relations of wall measurements, length being one and a half times the breadth. Similar measurements may be drawn from unicameral examples in Islay (see Crawford 1987, 183) and Hoghmore's un-modified chapels, Caibéal Dhughail and the missing one, neatly conform with this ratio. Whilst far from definitive, these parallels appear to substantiate proposals that Hoghmore's origins substantially predated the twelfth century. Given the paucity of dedications to Diarmaid in Scotland (Clancy pers. comm.), if the ninth-century Abbot of Iona can be accurately tied to the chapel at Hoghmore (see above), it is almost too tempting to use his intrinsic link to ninth-century monastic reform and the *céli Dé* throughout Scotland (Clancy 1996) to tie both him and the *céli Dé* to Hoghmore. This movement lasted to the thirteenth century and is associated with a strict interpretation of monastic observances and an austere and ermetic lifestyle. In later periods they were often, but not always, associated with larger monasteries of canons regular (see Reeves 1864; MacKinnon 1939; Cowan 1974, although see O'Dwyer 1989; Clancy & Markus 1995, 17-26 for an analysis of their devotional practice). Turgot, writing around 1100 gives a succinct account of their habits, which could be said to fit with Hoghmore's cells:

*They lived in various places in the flesh but not according to the flesh,  
inhabiting separate cells, practising great self-denial; and, even on earth,  
lived the life of angels* (cited in MacKinnon 1939, 5).

Cowan (1974, 256) has noted that *céli Dé* communities at other small monasteries along the west coast, Applecross and Lismore, had disappeared by the twelfth century, or had become served by lay bishops and it is possible that Hoghmor may fit with this pattern.

Unfortunately there is no further literary (e.g. see Reeves 1864; MacKinnon 1939; Cowan 1974) or archaeological evidence to support such a supposition, only to say it was composed of a number of small cells prior to changes in the twelfth century. An alternative possibility was that these cells served as housing for relics relating to the saints, which were an integral part of early churches and monastic communities in Ireland and Scotland (MacDonald 1999; Fawcett 2002, 247). Any tentative monastic community at Hoghmor is likely to have abandoned the site by the time it became a parish church. Beveridge has argued that Cairinis's monastic status was evidenced in that it does not appear to have ever served as a parish church (Beveridge 1911, 281). If monastic status can be assigned to Hoghmor, the standing buildings, if they were contemporaneous, suggest that they were laid out in a linear pattern from north to south, with the lost chapel somewhere to the southwest. If Irish parallels (see Herity 1984) can be used to understand Hoghmor, the two structures at either end, differentiated by east facing doorways possibly serving as oratories or reliquary to the main church in the centre. This would have perhaps created a layout seen throughout early Irish monasteries (Fig. 52), where an eastern and southern facade created a western space, or *plateola*, where monks congregated on special occasions (ibid., 108-10). If this is the case, the monks' accommodation should be located on the ground to its west.

Irish examples of bicameral churches only become common from the twelfth century onwards, and are notable by the departure from small cells (which can only have housed a priest, an altar and a highly limited congregation if any), to a larger public space (for larger community based congregations). Most Irish bicameral churches appear to result from one phase of construction (Hare & Hamlin 1986, 134), although Leask (1955, 32, 64-66)



recorded four twelfth-century examples, where an earlier cell was retained as a chancel during the addition of a new nave. The use of an original cell as a chancel, is however far from ubiquitous (O’Keeffe 2003, 39, 284), leading to the question of why some cells retained sacred connotations, while others were allowed to become places for public worship. The development of Caibéal Chlann ‘ic Ailein may reflect similar and contemporary developments, with the introduction of a sculpted chancel arch between the two areas. In this instance the original east facing doorway may indicate that this had served as a sacristy, or possibly a founder tomb, which would explain why the cell was retained as a chancel. Without further work there is no way of telling how large a nave was constructed here, for comparison with other examples elsewhere in Uist. The altering of this chapel may have gone hand in hand with the building of the other bicameral churches, but given their present condition and upon the available evidence, the others appear to have been substantially less impressive structures. If a tentative twelfth-century date can be accepted a direct Norse cultural link seems less obvious, and that the bicameral churches reflect changes in church architecture throughout the Atlantic Seaboard. In the following century Teampull Mhoire was built and Caibéal Dhiarmaid was expanded, forming two very large, well-constructed churches on a totally different level to those elsewhere in South Uist and those that had preceded them at Hoghmore. The dimensions and recordable features of these churches resemble closely other churches further north in the Long Isle that attracted continuing patronage into the later medieval period. This surely marks an accentuation of the divergence in building traditions between South Uist churches and Hoghmore that had begun in the twelfth century.

To the east of Hoghmore, within Schoolhouse Loch, lies a natural island with several denuded mortar-bonded walls built upon it. There are three parallel walls between 3m and 4m long and 1m-1.5m thick, the central wall is ‘L’-shaped, but no relationship between the walls could be ascertained amongst the heavy, thorny undergrowth. Whilst there is no direct evidence to support any connection between the two sites, there is the possibility that the island served as an oratory to Hoghmore in a similar way to that suggested below in Benbecula. Other islands or crannogs have been tentatively suggested as oratories related to

small monastic communities, one in Castle Loch, in Galloway may have been a hermitage to Barhobble (Cormack 1995, 54), as did 'Elinanabb', Abbot's Isle, near Achnacloich, to Ardchattan Priory (Linsey *et al.* 1908, 322). Hoghmor's siting in the landscape, nestled in a hollow near, but out of sight of the sea, also parallels the early monastic communities at Barhobble and St Blane's in Bute, locations differentiating them from parish churches, which are adjacent to arable land (Cormack 1995, 53-54).

## 6.5 Churches in Benbecula

Ignoring a hagiographic claim for a very early church to the north of the island (Burnett 1986, 18-19), there are five possible church sites in Benbecula which are worth noting as comparisons and contrasts to those in South Uist. Two are predominantly noted as *teampull*, rather than *cille*, although Blaue's map suggests at least one contained a *cille* prefix in the past. The *teampull* prefix may have originated with protestant tacksmen, a class who were most likely to be informants on place-names, who were imported to South Uist from Lewis and Skye where the *teampull* prefix is common. However, there is a possibility that as in Ireland *teampull* names were a post-twelfth century place-name development (Flanagan 1984, 38-40). Two monastic communities were formed in Benbecula, a nunnery at Baile nan Cailleach (Nunton) and a monastery at Baile a' Mhanaich. As religious communities both were probably fourteenth or fifteenth-century in date, although there is some evidence to suggest an earlier origin. All that remains at Baile nan Cailleach is a graveyard surrounding a mortar built rectangular chapel (Fig. 53), thought to be named Cille Mhoire (MacLeod 1997, 72), although the reference is not clear. The dimension of 8mx5m only partially resemble the early churches at Hoghmor, and there is small window in the eastern end, although the entrance appears to be in the western gable (RCAHMS 1928, 99). There are no further architectural similarities, perhaps suggesting a later date in origin.

Carmichael "conjectured" that Dun Torcusay, 850 metres to the south east of Baile nan Cailleach, "was a private oratory to which the fair recluses at the nunnery in the neighbourhood retreated for their private devotions" (CWP 362). He claimed that his "view

is strengthened by the description of articles found in this place when explored”, although unfortunately, he never fulfilled his clear intention to find out what those items were. His informants were named but the finds were not. Although the dun was levelled before the Royal Commissions survey, Carmichael’s record of descriptions of it beforehand sound like a broch: “a most curious dun this was – with its cells and stairs” (ibid.).

Whilst Baile a’ Mhanaich is to the west of Teampull Chaluim Cille (Fig. 54), the latter is thought to be the monastery’s main church. There may be some indication of a rededication of the site from St Tarran to Columba (Carmicheal 1928-71: II, 78) but this is tentative. Of the upstanding remains, there is a rectangular mortared building, which is substantially larger than the earlier churches at Hoghmor, being 19m by 8m externally, although the 6m long chancel at the eastern end has been remodelled, probably added on, at a later date. A 13m long nave is still substantially larger, however. Thomas and Muir (1890, 241) compared the sloping jambs of the entrance directly to Hoghmor, possibly indicating an early date of construction. These authors and Carmicheal certainly believed it to be “beyond all doubt the oldest architectural ruin in the Long Island” (CWP 362). The church is not only sited next to a holy well, but also stood upon a crannog within a loch, which was drained sometime in the nineteenth century. Blaeu’s map shows Baile a’ Mhanaich as separate from ‘Kilcholambkil’, located in a loch to its west, raising the possibility that the chapel was not connected to the monastery, but the township.

Teampull Bhuirgh (Fig. 55) is of unknown date, with no mention of it made in any documentation of any period. The *OS Name Book* records that the building had been lost to posterity and tradition until it had been dug out shortly before their visit in the middle of the nineteenth century (*Book 10*, 81). The structure is a ‘roughly mortared’ rectangle, 16mx6m, excavated into the top of one of the largest prehistoric settlement mounds on the machair of the Uists, very probably containing a high status pre-Norse site. It may have once stood on the edge of a loch, opposite Caisteal Bhuirgh. The use of the same place-name as the castle may suggest that it served as its chapel, and thus suggests that is later in date.



In the south-west of the island there are two *cille* place-names, Cille Eireabhagh and Eilean na Cille. The derivation of Cille Eireabhagh is peculiar and may be a mis-translation. Neither site is the location for any identified remains, or mentioned in any early records, although a possible dedication may be found in another place-name, Port Pheadair, whose present-day jetty is sited on Eilean na Cille (Burnett 1986, 124). Until the nineteenth century both places were considered as remote summer grazings (ibid., 123-25), so if either had been a church, they may have been there to service communities at the shielings or at portages, as suggested for Airigh nam Ban, Cille Coinnich and Kirkidale in South Uist.

## 6.6 Chapels and *Tírean Unga*

Why these *cille* sites occur within two parishes and *tírean unga* has not previously been ascertained. There are several possible interpretations, which reflect differing periods of reorganisation of the original ecclesiastical geography. Firstly, if those who argue for a genocidal preoccupation amongst the first Viking raiders are correct, the Norse may have obliterated the ecclesiastical map of the island necessitating the establishment of a new one upon their conversion, a conversion which took place either unofficially through interaction with the local populace (or Gaelic slaves), or after the conversion of the Norse. According to the Norse sagas, composed under royal patronage, this may have happened after 995 when Olaf Trygvasson declared Christianity to be the official religion. Cant (1984, 3) suggests that this sanction may have directly influenced, encouraged or, at least, paved the way for chapels to be built across the Norse world. Recent geophysical survey at Cille Bharr in Barra reveals anomalies that resemble bow-shaped buildings of Norse type underneath the existing structures (Hamilton & Raven forthcoming). Although the interpretation cannot be tested, if accurate, this could suggest that this church was built into a Viking Age settlement mound, discounting any ideas for ecclesiastical continuity, at least at this particular site. Secondly, whether or not Iona retained its influence in the Isles throughout the Viking Age (Jennings 1993), there is the possibility that, sometime after conversion, there was a later ecclesiastical reorganisation. Cant (1984, 6) has suggested that one possibility, informed by the Norse sagas, is that this may have taken place between the 1020s and 1060s, when the

Isles were subject to the Bishopric of Orkney. However, Alex Woolf (2004, 99-101) has challenged the assumption that the Orcadian Earls ever established full control over the kingdom of Man and the Isles. A later possibility is also highlighted by Cant (1984, 6), that ecclesiastical reorganisation took place after the establishment of the Bishopric of Man, although this may have been in competition with another in Snizort, in Skye.

Alternatively, Fleming and Woolf (1992, 347) have suggested that the shift may have had more of an overt political origin, and that the Clann Somhairle dynasties may have attempted to erase the Norse/Manx centres of power through the creation of new ones. These churches possess a more Dál Riadic flavour, through references to the monastery at Iona, expressed by dedications to Colum Cille and Mary. In turn this may have gone hand in hand with a reorganisation of the church throughout Europe in the twelfth century. In Scotland this was imposed at some time during or after the second quarter of the twelfth century as both church and state tried to impose and extract tithes. This process necessitated the definition of parishes and diocese. To aid implementation, these parishes often shared the same boundaries as secular estates (Cowan 1961, 43-51; Watt 1988, 25-7; McDonald 1997, 200-233).

Cant (1984, 9-11) also makes the point that the parish system may have an earlier origin and that most of the churches represented by *cille* place-names were chapels, served by one parish priest, based at the main parish churches of Houghmor and Cille Pheadair. In the late 1500s Pont's description of South Uist noted "one church ... at the south end called Kilfadrik – whair is a town with thrie churches in it" (n.d.b). There are some problems in interpreting this sentence as 'Kilfadrik', which appears to be Cille Patrick, is either wrong or misidentified, possibly being Cille Pheadair. If this is the case it is curious that Pont made the claim that it had three churches, that may indicate that the parish contained three chapels. The three almost certainly would incorporate Cille Bhrighde and Cille Donnain, but whether the dubious Cille Coinnich, Cladh Hallan, or the main church of Cille Pheadair (mentioned separately) are meant must remain unknown. Whatever the case it perhaps validates Cant's claims and further suggests that they remained in use after any twelfth-century

reorganisation. Further insight into twelfth-century developments and the nature of patronage may be provided through comparison of the architectural details of Hoghmor and Cille Bharr, in Barra, both of which may have been extant within the same lordship throughout most of the twelfth century. Whereas the structures at Hoghmor have a distinct style, with jambed, lintelled doorways and small windows with flat and arched protruding lintel stones, later coming to incorporate dog-tooth moulding, borrowed from styles seen in monasteries elsewhere in the Isles and Argyll, Cille Bharr (Fig.56) is entirely different in nature. From conception the main church appears to have been unicameral, with a portal decorated by double recessed arches and dual lintels, formed from using small stones to create the appearance of moulding, and complex windows with dual lintels and rounded stones flush to the rest of the wall. The appearance and style again borrows from Irish parallels (e.g. see windows at Kilcananagh, Aran, Trinity Church, Glendalough, and similar portals at Kilmacduagh, Co. Galway, Kilmurry, Aran, Kilmalkedar, Co. Kerry and Glendalough: Petrie 1845, 176-84; Champneys 1910, 36-37, 107; Leask 1955, 71), but they are in complete contrast to Hoghmor and must have been a deliberate choice and designed to make some form of statement. Whether that message was meant to be about ecclesiastical or political independence, by demonstrating the ability to patronise a building independent of an earlier foundation, or merely showing off access to the latest architectural trends (see O’Keeffe 2004), is perhaps harder to establish, especially without dating evidence. Curiously, the differing architectural details at Hoghmor and Cille Bharr often occur alongside one another at the same ecclesiastical complexes (e.g. the arched and dual lintelled windows both occur at Glendalough: Leask 1955, 58) and there may be a more subtle message that is lost to us. Certainly the incorporation of a newer style, in the dog-tooth chancel arch at Hoghmor, could well have been a case of ‘one-upmanship’ in some form, or a restatement of the hierarchical position of that particular site.

When the locations of the nine west coast *cille* sites are mapped out against the distribution of the ten South Uist *tírean unga* a direct relationship becomes apparent. Baile Gharbhaidh has two almost on top of one another, which may suggest that they were not contemporary; if this is discounted there are four per parish. Although this may hint at a multiple-estate



model, based on multiples of four land units (see above) this seems unlikely given the probability that once imposed the *tírean unga* would have become fossilised in the landscape and it would mean that two of the *tírean unga* would have been abnormally large. In each parish it is evident that there is one *tír unga* which does not contain a *cille* site. This cannot be resolved by including the east coast examples. Of course there may be lost or missing sites, but this may be an authentic distribution to be explained. In some *tírean unga* the *cille* sits roughly in its centre. Cille Brighde may be seen to be central to Baghasdal, if the islands in the Sound of Barra are included within its territory, alternatively its location at South Uist's southern tip, near a possible embarkation point, may be significant. However, most others fall near the edge of the *tír unga*. In the Cille Pheadair parish, where later documentation means that *tírean unga* can be confidently identified as units of twenty pennylands with identifiable boundaries, this includes Cille Pheadair, Cladh Hallan and Cille Donnain. Cille Pheadair itself falls on the townships boundary with Baghasdal, at the opposite end to Cille Bhrighde. Interestingly, Cladh Pheadair sits in the centre of the Cille Pheadair/Dalabrog *tír unga*, on the border between the two townships. A location which perhaps signifies it was indeed the location for the original parish church, but it must be remembered that later burial grounds were also established on the boundaries between townships, such as that found on the border between North and South Baghasdal near the beginning of the nineteenth century. It seems more than a coincidence that Cille Donnain sits near the border of the Bornais/Cille Donnain *tír unga* with the Frobost/Gearraidh Bhailteas *tír unga*, to its south, possibly suggesting that the populace of this area attained their pastoral care at Cille Donnain. The location of Cladh Hallan at the furthestmost part of the next *tír unga* south from Frobost/Gearraidh Bhailteas may also lend weight to this assumption. Cladh Ard an Dugan is to be found in this *tír unga*, possibly counteracting the later date argued for it above, and a case could be made for a missing *cille* in Hoghmor parish, possibly Pont's Kilmarchirmore as there is a wide strip of machair south of Cille Bhannain. However, the fact that the pattern holds for each parish would seem to hint it is not a mishap of site recovery.

In Hoghmor's parish the *tírean unga* are less identifiable. Cille Mhicheil is likely to be central to one that incorporated Ormacleit, Staoinebrig and possibly some of the smaller

townships to the north, as are Cille Amhlaidh and Ard Choinneach to Baile Gharbhaidh. There are also two possible border examples here. Cille Bhanain's location probably sat in a string of lochs and the break of slope between two *tírean unga*, alternatively it is very tempting to put forward Hoghmor and its river entrance as a divide, further suggesting this as a reason for the construction of the two churches there. Without further work this has to remain tentative, however.

The occurrence of chapels near *tír unga* boundaries possibly suggests that they post-date the division of the island into its administrative units, although this needs further investigation.

## 6.7 Discussion

Together, the evidence presented above highlights the association of churches with island sites and graveyards in South Uist, and that this relationship may date from around the middle of the twelfth century, if not earlier. Some of the islands served as the location for the church building itself, while others contained secular settlements and/or assembly sites (see Section 7.14), the church and the graveyard in these cases being sites on the immediately adjacent mainland. The largest problem in accepting all the evidence at hand is the issue of preservation. Few potential church buildings survive to any great degree, some are perhaps swamped by their adjacent graveyards, others robbed of their stone at a later date. Stone robbing is certainly a feature of recent folklore: a local tradition records a stone being taken from Cille Pheadair, which when located in its new home caused it to be haunted, bad luck continued to befall the householder until the stone was replaced (J. MacLellan pers. comm.).

The relatively good preservation of Hoghmor compared to the other church sites, may, as Fleming and Woolf (1992, 347) point out, be a consequence of the abandonment of the earlier churches at the time Hoghmor became important. Its rise may have come about as the earlier ecclesiastical system was restructured into parishes by the church, or later as local resources were appropriated to larger churches, as elsewhere in later medieval Scotland. We

may need to imagine a contemporary church at Cille Pheadair, possibly rivalling Hoghmor in size and serving as the nodal point of South Uist's other parish, which has been lost to the sea or the sand. It is possible that parishes were constructed in tandem to a redrawing of the political map of the Isles by the ascendancy of the Clann Somhairle, in the mid-twelfth century. It seems that a number of the smaller chapels, or *cille* sites, remained in active use until the sixteenth century, although we still have to account for their poor state of preservation. As local chapels they probably were not so well built, South Uist tradition remembers a number of these not as chapels, but as prayer or meeting houses (MacDhòmhnaill 1981, 12-13), raising the possibility that they could have been turf built structures. In many cases it was only after the end of the seventeenth century that Hebridean Catholics were able to build public places of worship, and even after that there were occasional programs of demolition by government authorities. As late as the early nineteenth century meeting houses were consistently recorded as being roughly built, half-derelict, thatched, turf and/or dry-stone constructions (Anson 1970, 39, 146, 261-62; although also see Miller 1889, 90-91). There is an abundance of evidence, both literary and archaeological, for turf, timber and wattle-and-daub churches throughout Ireland and western Scotland prior to the twelfth century, when there was a general shift to mortared masonry buildings (Petrie 1845, 126; Reeves 1857, 177; Leask 1955, 5-10; Thomas 1971, 69-73; Harbison 1982, 624-29; Cormack 1995, 50-52). It is more than plausible that the practice continued in the Uists. Over the fourteenth and fifteenth century it is obvious that there was a problem filling the clerical posts of the larger churches in Uist and Barra. This situation was mirrored across the western seaboard (Barrell 2003), possibly due to the realignment of the Isles from the arch-bishopric of Trondheim to Iona, or to the feuding that broke out either between the sons of Ami MacRuari in the 1370s or in the 'Age of Raids' after the forfeiture of the Lords of the Isles. So it is furthermore possible that these smaller chapels began fading from use as little more than burial grounds long before the sixteenth century, accounting for their absence on sixteenth-century maps but inclusion in travellers tales.

A shift from the smaller earlier chapels to larger parish churches may also be revealed in a change in dedications. The smaller churches are dedicated to 'Celtic' and Norse saints,



whereas those in South Uist and Benbecula that were of enough importance to be mentioned in later texts are dedicated to Colum Cille, showing links to Iona, as well as universal saints, St Mary, St Michael and St Peter.

Despite the conflicting nature of the evidence the, weight of evidence does suggest that by or during the twelfth century a parish system had been imposed within Uist and that that church was an integral part of the geography of power within the Isles. The parish system and the extraction of tithes cannot have been operated without the co-operation of the secular powers, who actively engaged in the patronage of some of those churches and participated in the construction of some architecturally embellished churches. From the physical relationship between ecclesiastical sites and the private and public monuments of secular power the relationship and tensions between the church, their flocks and their patrons become apparent, and these are discussed below.

## CHAPTER 7                      DUNS IN THE NORSE PERIOD

### 7.1      Introduction

Crannogs, brochs and duns are an integral part of medieval landscapes throughout Scotland's western seaboard, yet they have rarely been studied outside their prehistoric origins. Given the proliferation of lochs in the topography of South Uist, here duns and brochs were all built upon artificial islands. Much of the evidence comes from outside South Uist, from antiquarian, historical and traditional evidence originating from throughout the Highlands and Islands (Figs. 57 and 58), however, the weight of associated material reveals that their use played an essential role within the manifestation of lordship from the twelfth century onwards. As Norse lords and chiefs in the Hebrides became increasingly Gaelicised these monuments' prehistoric origins were drawn upon to legitimise proprietorship of lands, and once established as seats of power, these links caused these sites to be targeted and supplanted by new incoming lords with expansive appetites. Some duns and crannogs may have been permanently occupied, while others were possibly used seasonally, as lords moved around their estates, and/or communities moved up to the hills, and/or hunting residences. It is possible that some of the castles in the Western Isles may also date from the Norse period, and they fitted into a similar pattern of use. Duns are closely associated with churches, assembly sites and *tírean unga*, and it is clear that this relationship reflects the nature and structure of Norse period Hebridean society.

### 7.2      Crannog and Dun Studies

In order to understand the lake dwellings of South Uist seven weeks of survey were carried out by the author between 2001 and 2003. All previously identified brochs and duns were visited, and the majority of freshwater lochs in the lowland western side of the island were also investigated to highlight the extent of island occupation and crannog building. Where secondary use of crannogs and/or historic occupation was determined the upstanding remains and viewsheds were recorded, the possibility of lakeside settlement was also investigated.

Additionally, in order to study the construction of the crannogs and to recover possible dating evidence underwater survey was undertaken along with Matthew Shelley (University of Edinburgh) at the majority of sites where it was possible. The full results of this survey is to be deposited at the NMRS.

The abundance of lochs in the landscape of the Uists made it an ideal place for the construction of artificial islands. In South Uist at least thirty crannogs have been identified (Figs. 59, 60 & 61), fifteen with definitive evidence for duns built upon them. Six are in such a denuded state of preservation that no structural evidence survives, having either been robbed of their stones to build estate houses in the nineteenth century, such as Dun Bhuidhe in Loch Druidibeg which was quarried to build Stadhlaigearraidh Schoolhouse (Calum Luing pers. comm.), or become the focus for settlement when population pressure became too high as crofting was imposed, such as the duns of Iodchar. Pairs of crannogs occur in four lochs. Additionally, there are eleven natural islands with settlement upon them, but none of which are brochs. Benbecula contains a further eleven crannogs: seven of which with evidence for brochs/duns upon them; two with denuded surfaces; and another two on the east coast which have not been surveyed. Although at least one timber constructed crannog has been discovered in Lewis (Munro 1882, 60; also see Blundell 1913, 300-1) the vast majority in the Outer Hebrides are stone built. A large number of these support brochs and duns of later prehistoric date, and in turn many became the focus for occupation within the medieval period. Here, following Barber and Crone (1993, 520), the term crannog will be used loosely to describe wholly or partially modified islands, regardless of whether timber was used in construction. This mirrors a little explored period of re-use of duns, brochs, hillforts and un-modified crannogs throughout the western seaboard.

Brochs, duns and crannogs have been the focus of debate since the nineteenth century, discussion has largely been dominated by definition and classification, yet the terms describe essentially the same phenomenon. The first two types of monument have generally come to be acknowledged as Middle Iron Age in origin and have similar distributions. In South Uist brochs and duns are all built upon artificial islands, which are often assumed to be of the



same date. However, excavations at Eilean Domhnuill, Loch Olabhat, which was not used as a broch/dun, have revealed Neolithic foundations (Armit 1996, 45). This raises the possibility that the crannogs underneath some of the duns have earlier prehistoric origins. Crannogs in the Western Isles have rarely been studied except by prehistorians, and attention has generally been focussed on and concerned with construction techniques (see Blundell 1909; 1910; 1913; Dixon & Topping 1986; Dixon 1991). Early and late medieval dates have been recovered from a number of crannogs in Perthshire (Dixon & Shelley 2004), which may indicate that some crannogs were still being constructed into the sixteenth century, but it is unclear whether samples have been taken from primary or secondary phases. Recent attempts to extend debate further have remained concerned with classifications (Henderson 1998a). Only Morrison (1985), the father of modern crannog studies, has tried to look at the way these monuments were used, lived in and experienced, from the geographical perspective of landscape analysis. His work stands up to scrutiny due to his understanding of historical land-use, unfortunately, this cannot be said of more recent studies in his wake. Holley (2000, 77-87) and Henderson (1998b) used modern geological soil classifications to try to map out a relationship between crannogs and arable land. This seems to ignore land-use history, be subject to an over valuing of arable resources, at the expense of pastoral resources and its importance in medieval Gaelic societies, and ignorant of other influences on site location, such as visibility, etc. Only in Ireland has the debate moved in any worthwhile direction and extended beyond structural considerations. O'Sullivan (1998) began to look at landscape setting and crannog use in his summarisation of Irish crannog studies, and Fredengren (2002) has taken this to another theoretical level. Both these authors (O'Sullivan 1998; 2001a; 2001b; Fredengren 2002) and others (e.g. Warner 1994; O'Conor 1998, 77-89) have begun to successfully explore their use throughout the medieval period.

It is an unfortunate situation that in order to begin to reconsider and refocus the role of crannogs in medieval Scottish contexts it is necessary to largely ignore the last few decades of Scottish scholarship and re-analyse the work of the first antiquarians to works in the Isles, such as Carmichael (CWP), Thomas (1890) and Beveridge (1911).

As no corpus of medieval crannog excavation exists, study of these monuments is partly dependent upon documentary evidence and oral tradition, but further information can be gleaned from survey work, which sheds light upon patterns of the medieval re-use of crannogs and place them in their landscape setting. However, the evidence for contemporaneous occupation of crannogs is strongest for the later medieval material, which means that certain issues will be concentrated on more fully in Chapter 10.

### **7.3 Origins**

More recent interpretations of brochs/duns in the Iron Age treat them as the monumental farmsteads housing small-scale elites. Although looking primarily defensive, studies have repeatedly shown they would have only provided reprieve from short attacks, probably the threat presented by local raiding parties. Throughout the Atlantic Seaboard they appear to have been located near, but on the margins of prime agricultural land, either just above the break of slope of hills overlooking the arable, on islands/islets in lochs or on the coast (Fojut 1982; Parker Pearson & Sharples 1999a, 10-12). Parker Pearson and Sharples (1999b, 363-64) have suggested the marginal locations may have been symbolically liminal settings between arable and sea/water or pasture. More traditional views see this as the statement of control over route-ways through the different environmental and farming zones, but Parker Pearson (1996; Parker Pearson & Sharples 1999, 363-64; Parker Pearson forthcoming a) has argued that the pattern of brochs/duns in South Uist reflects a system of proto-townships, which became fossilised into the template for the present-day township pattern. Although this idea has not been fully developed, the close relationship of these monuments to modern townships is seen in Barra and North Uist (Armit 1988, 1992).

### **7.4 Re-uses**

Although originating as an architectural form sometime in the Middle Iron Age, nearly all excavated brochs/duns have revealed numerous phases of later occupation. Throughout Atlantic Scotland there appears to be continuous occupation until the end of Late Iron Age

Pictish cellular tradition, after which all excavated examples appear to have been abandoned (Alcock & Alcock 1987, 127-36; Armit 1996, 159-85). Many in the Hebrides were reoccupied in the twelfth/thirteenth century, or Norse period. The common period of abandonment corresponds with the beginning of the Viking Age. The precise reason for this break in occupation is uncertain, either stemming from the obliteration or displacement of the Pictish elite by the incoming Vikings. The abandonment of the monuments of power is not observed at the two best documented domestic sites, An Udail and Bornais, where settlement appears to have been more or less continuous. However, although there are no stratigraphical relationships, there are two places where a broch seems to have retained some degree of importance. In South Uist, after the abandonment of the broch at Dun Vulcan, the township of Bornais remained the focus for high status settlement, and at Loch na Berie, Lewis, on the edge of the loch surrounding an abandoned broch, there is a probable Norse settlement (MacLeod, 2001). This may add some evidence to the idea that the 'Pictish' power structures were displaced rather than replaced.

The Norse sagas do mention the occasional broch, but they tend to be described in terms reflective of temporary refuges (Talbot 1974, 42-3). The only possible exception is found in a passage in the *Orkneyinga Saga*, where Erlend the Young abducts his love and "took her north to Shetland and settled down in the Broch on Mousa where everything had been made ready" (Palsson & Edwards 1978, 190). This tantalising glimpse does not specify what 'making ready' implied, nor the proposed length of the stay. However, it may imply that during the time that the sagas were being composed and written, in the mid-thirteenth century, the indigenous centres of power and fortifications were not considered significant.

The apparent period of reoccupation, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, is potentially revealing. It is a time when local elites may have been consolidating their grip on the islands as the political sphere stabilised after the period of the Viking raids. In tandem with the growth of connections with kingdoms centred in the Irish Sea, a new, at least semi-, Gaelicised identity was emerging, and it seems probable that through the re-occupation of brochs the Hebrideans were trying to develop and demonstrate their cultural and political



independence from Norway. Whilst violence and feuding continued, it does not seem to have substantially escalated in this period (see Duffy 1992; McDonald 1997; Etchingham 2001), which means that other catalysts for occupation in this period need to be sought for. Although little direct evidence survives of the Norse system of governance in the Isles, it is in this time when the *tírean unga* and their relation to the church may have becoming consolidated (see Section 6.6) and as will become apparent there is a further connection with duns. This combination of sites, incorporating a blend of ecclesiastical and secular power bases, is reminiscent of Norse Orcadian, Icelandic and Scandinavian elite structures and relationships (Byock 1988, 91-93; Reisnert 1989, 148-49; Anglert 1989, 241; Owen 1993, 323-24; Grieve 1999, 110, 114; Nedkvitne 2000, 36-39; Hansson 2003). The reoccupation of sites associated with social or military power is found across the Atlantic Seaboard in this period.

Throughout the western seaboard a large proportion of excavated Iron Age brochs, hillforts and duns show signs of reoccupation (Morrison 1974: Fig. 62). The galleries of Dun Lagaidh, Wester Ross (Selkirk 1969), and Kildonan, Kintyre (Fairhurst 1939, 207-10), were blocked up, access was aided by the construction of steps, and buildings were built in the interior (it may be important, however, that the buildings at Kildonan were rather ephemeral). Structures were also inserted within the walls of Dun Bheag, Skye (Callander 1921) and MacEwen's Castle, Cowal (Marshall 1983, 131-36), also possibly Dun Fhinn, Kintyre, and Dun Mor Vaul, Tiree. Although the excavator of Dun Fhinn interpreted two ranges of postholes as the outer walls of an inner range of small buildings, the overall internal width of the dun was 5.8m, a small space that would have easily been roofed over (RCAHMS 1971, 83-84). Instead, it seems more likely that these postholes represent support for the dun's roof, or some other form of internal partitioning. Evidence for re-use at Dun Mor Vaul is restricted to one collapsed cell, which sealed off some Norse deposits, including two burials, one of which had a brutal death (MacKie 1974, 90-91; RCAHMS 1980, 94): although not conclusive it does suggest a period of later occupation. Medieval buildings were also located outside Dun Vulcan, South Uist (Parker Pearson & Sharples 1999b, 348), and it is possible that internal buildings were destroyed by subsequent

occupation, such as that recorded there in the twentieth century. Importantly the dateable material from all these sites indicates that re-use conformed to a concentrated period between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In the southern Hebrides and mainland Argyll castles at Innis Chonnell, Dunollie and Cairnburgh were also built on sites with Early Medieval associations (Grant 1935, 86; McDonald 1997, 239-40). In Mull, the crannog at Ledmore has also produced a date from this period (Holley & Ralston 1995). The excavation evidence indicates the ubiquity of reoccupation of these earlier monuments in this period. Earlier excavations, such as that at Dun Cuier, Barra, missed Pictish phases of occupation (Armit 1996, 171) and Late Medieval intrusions were largely dismissed (Young 1956, 294-96). Is it unlikely that later occupations were also overlooked? Thomas's (1890) rough surveys, both of remains and traditions, also suggests a large amount of dun re-use of Norse or later medieval date, including the mortaring and consolidation of Dun Carloway, possibly suggesting occupation was more than the short-lived defence recorded in traditions of the inter-clan feuds, and may be earlier. The rapid RCAHMS (1928) survey of the Western Isles picked up a handful of later settlements on these sites, yet even the author's cursory survey of the Aerial Photographs held in the RCAHMS archive seems to show that these were more widespread in South Uist. Yet more have been identified throughout the western seaboard (Fig. 63).

As well as noting cartographic and oral-history sources for medieval use of duns in North Uist, Beveridge noted rectangular structures at several duns in North Uist (1911, 158, 160-61, 166, 180, 197-98): although Eilean an Tighe should serve as a caution for directly interpreting rectangular structures with the medieval period. Beveridge recorded several rectangular building ruins on the island (*ibid.*, 222), some of which, upon excavation, were revealed to be Neolithic (Scott 1953). Beveridge's excavations at Dun A'Ghallain found a 'dirk' and clinker nails in a midden associated with a secondary structure (1911, 197), and Carmichael interviewed Neil MacCuiein who had partaken in the demolition of Dun Sgealoir sixty years beforehand. His informant remembered that "numbers of coins and pins of bronze, bone and ivory and crogain-urns – containing ashes, probably human ashes were

found in the dun” (CWP 362, V). Whilst much of the artefactual evidence for medieval occupation cannot be dated with any greater accuracy, and is unstratified it does add to the weight of evidence for medieval occupation in South Uist.

## 7.5 Genealogical Architecture

It is not uncommon for new or developing groups to create myths designed to illustrate their ancient (and thus naturalised) links to the land and their power over it. By laying claim to earlier monuments they can imply that their position had existed for time in memorial, and/or that they were the inheritors of the previous order to claim legitimation of their own positions, and thus that this reflected the cosmological order (Hobsbawm 1983; Bradley 1987). It is probable that the upper echelons of Hebridean Norse society, who were becoming associated with particular areas of land made ideological use of these earlier ‘indigenous’ monuments. This is a period when the Norse in the Hebrides were trying to alienate themselves from their Norwegian cultural origins and attempting to realign themselves within a new hybrid Gaelic-Norse order throughout the western seaboard. Just as, in the fourteenth century, genealogies and family histories were manipulated to highlight pre-Norse familial connections and claims to lands (e.g. Gillies 1987; 1994; Sellar 1973; 1981a), the occupation of monuments symbolic of an older pre-existing order was a deliberate attempt to assert similar claims through a physical medium. There are numerous links in place-names to kingroup founders and later associations as seats of clans, further emphasising the links between genealogy, duns and the land. This is likely to have been reflective of the *dindshenchas*, place-name lore, found in Early Medieval Ireland, where myth was combined with historical memory to imbibe the landscape with features that legitimised contemporary power structures: one common feature of *dindshenchas* was the naming of founders of monuments (Aitchison 1994, 22-24). In many ways occupation of a dun may have symbolised the occupation of the land, a metaphor that is analogous to the footprints associated with Early Medieval royal centres. The incorporation of one of these footprints into the Lords of the Isles’ *caput* of Finlaggan, or the siting of Finlaggan upon one (Caldwell 2003), reveals the close correlation of these symbols of lordship.



The re-use of duns in the Norse period is not uniform across Scotland. In Caithness and the Northern Isles many became the focus for burial (Batey 2002). By the Norse period these examples may have differed from the island duns of the Uists, and the surviving towers of Carloway or Mousa in one major way. Standing towers and crannogs probably still appeared to be domestic, and/or high status indigenous power centres, while the upland examples, perhaps denuded and grassed over, may have appeared more like ancient burial mounds. Whilst the form of re-use diverged in these geographically and topographically differentiated areas, the motivation behind that use was similar. The reoccupation of brochs/duns, and their use as burial mounds are both appropriations of the indigenous monuments by the burgeoning Gaelic-Norse landlords, naturalising and legitimating their position.

It is worth noting that in local traditions, from Islay to Lewis, brochs were almost entirely thought of as belonging to the *Lochlannich*. This can be seen in both place-names and folk-stories. Often in place-names *Lochlannich* appears to have been Anglicised as 'Danish'. It was only with the advent of antiquarianism and archaeological excavation that they began to be associated with Pictish and the Iron Age (MacKay 1990). The derivation of *Lochlannich* as 'Danish' highlights several complex layers of problems related to the use of place-names and oral tradition. There is a lack of clarity in how information was passed onto and translated by folklore collectors. Many translators, tradition bearer/storyteller and collectors would have been members of the gentry. The gentry would have been educated in England and could have perhaps transposed 'Danish' from English historiography into Hebridean settings, either being led by the ethnic origin of Vikings in England, or by using 'Danish' as a sort of kenning for 'old', as is common in traditions regarding monuments throughout much of Britain (e.g. see Piggot 1989, 104, 115-17, 119, 121, 138). However, it is clear from many place-names and traditional tales that there was a direct connection between duns and the Gaelic term *Lochlannich* (e.g. CWP 362, II, IV, V). In folklore the *Lochlannich* are a mixed confusion of myth and vague historical memory. In many stories they are fantastical beings, or giants, occasionally belonging to a sea-kingdom. In others there was clearly some connection with Norway, with individuals being named as the King of Bergen

and some fairly detailed accounts being ‘remembered’. There is a tendency of Gaelic tradition to wrap man-made and natural features within ‘known’ - familiar historical events, whether mythical or real and Gaelic place-names and folk-stories frequently used the ‘Fenian’, ‘Fingallian’ or ‘Ossianic’ heroes to refer to a Gaelic ‘prehistory’. However, in many of these tales, these mythical ‘Gaelic’ heroes are fundamentally juxtaposed against the foreign foes, the *Lochlannich*. In a number of stories this opposition clearly reflects a later interpretation of an Irish Gaelic versus foreign Norse struggle for the Hebrides (for examples of these stories compare and contrast traditions in CWP 362, II, IV; Campbell 1890-93: I, 158; II, 201; III, 302; 1960, 243; McDonald 1902; Goodrich-Freer 1908, 183, 272-307; Dewar 1964, 155; Swire 1966, 27, 80, 108; Fergusson & Macdonald 1984; Campbell 1997, 1-31, 77, also see Section 4.4). Medieval Hebrideans were certainly capable of identifying the *Lochlannich* with the Norse. In the ninth century, the word may have referred to the Scandinavian-Hebridean inhabitants of the Western Isles (Ó Corráin 1998), but perhaps as early as the tenth century it had come to mean Norwegian (Etchingham 2001, 151-53), before settling at its modern meaning of ‘Scandinavian’. That it retained this association throughout the intervening period is shown in its use in the *Red Book of Clanrannald*, compiled in the seventeenth century, referring to Somerled’s expulsion of the Norse from Argyll (RBC, 154). The oral history and traditions would then seem to suggest a likelihood that in folk-memory mythical motif had become conjoined with historical memory, the mythological element in these tales do not mean that some connection of the *Lochlannich* with Norse use of the duns should be discounted, and that in some cases the oral histories may not be as inaccurate as sometimes assumed.

Throughout the Western Isles duns became the focus for lesser kin-groups, some were later enhanced, eventually becoming castles, other were not, but retained their importance well after 1266. Of the early Clann Leoid strongholds in Skye and Lewis, Tolsta and Cnoc Aird appear to have been abandoned, whereas Stornoway and Dunvegan were developed (Sharpe 1982, 35). Stornoway Castle is said to have been built by the Clann Neacail before the mid-thirteenth century (MacKenzie 1919, 27), although like Dunvegan it seems to have been acquired by the up-and-coming Clann Leoid, the heads of which who may have undertaken

building programs at both. Little is known about the two duns at Tolsta. Some of the traditions associated with Dun Othail are linked to the Clann Neacail, although one appears to post-date the advent of the Clann Leoid (MacDonald 1967, 241). At the end of the sixteenth century it was the site of three 'bothies', one serving as a chapel, belonging to the chief, although whether this was in memory of any intervening tradition is unknown (MacDonald 1984a, 157). Caisteal a' Mhorair (Morraer), in Lewis, is a stack associated with the Earls of Ross and has produced architectural evidence and pottery which may suggest a medieval date, although this and its history has not been substantiated (ibid., 156; RCAHMS 1928, 15). Although no evidence has been published for the dun at An Udail, North Uist, beyond a note of the discovery of bones possibly associated with a 1468/69 massacre, and a small outbuilding, possibly fifteenth century in date (Crawford 1964, 4; 1965a, 11), the area became the focus for a disinherited lineage, the Siol Ghoraigh in the fourteenth-century. It is possible that they already had a hold on the area, although this is unclear (see Section 2.7). Nevertheless, the locality remained associated with them as their influence declined down to the seventeenth century, by which time they were small time tacksmen (Crawford n.d.; 1983). This durability of the connection of a lineage with a place, whether dun or associated land, lasting at least three hundred years, reveals the importance and the depth of meaning placed in such heritable and genealogical links. Further evidence comes from Pont's early seventeenth-century map of South Uist, which reveals a number of contemporaneously inhabited islands. Although there seems to be a second wave of dun reoccupation in the sixteenth century, it is likely that these were the occupied by the upper gentry and/or tacksmen, and that many had been inhabited for a substantial period beforehand, perhaps continuously since the Norse period.

## **7.6 Place-names and Oral History**

As early as 1698 Martin Martin noted the implications place-names had for understanding duns in the Hebrides: "The forts are commonly named after the place where they are, or the person that built them" (1994, 207). However, in subsequent work there is an unexplained discrepancy in the work of the antiquarians and folklorists in the antiquities of the Isles, in



which South Uist has been continuously overlooked. Beveridge's (1911) concentration of research in North Uist can be explained by his living in Vallay and much later work has, understandably, sought to expand and build on the corpus of information provided by his legacy. However, Thomas's survey predated this by twenty years, and, again, South Uist is conspicuously ignored in relation to the islands in the north. After recording forty-one brochs and duns in Lewis and thirteen in Harris, Thomas's work (1890) tailed off in the south, noting three in North Uist, one each in Benbecula and South Uist, and two in Barra. His work was largely conducted through correspondence with MacPhaill, Otter and Carmichael. The latter, who even spent time living in South Uist, surveyed many broch remains, questioned those that had dismantled them for the construction of estate buildings, and recorded traditions associated with them. Yet, while he took some limited notes and records for the duns in Benbecula, his work focused on North Uist, the duns of South Uist do not even appear in his surviving papers. It is possible that the lack of information recorded for duns in South Uist in the work of these antiquarians stemmed from a real paucity of oral tradition in South Uist. Many of the *seanachaidhean* or people who would have remembered the old stories may have been forced to leave during the extensive Clearances of the mid-nineteenth century, or left voluntarily during the emigrations of the previous century. An alternative possibility is that work in South Uist was discouraged by a hostile landlord, however, Gordon of Cluny, the new proprietor of South Uist in the 1850s is recorded as having an interest in archaeology (see Cowie 1994, 10).

The *OS Name Books* reveal that only one dun in South Uist was associated with a personal name, Dun Uisealan, in Iodchar. Iodchar was one of the few townships not to be Cleared prior to the OS survey, which may account for the preservation of this place-name. This is in contrast to those in North Uist and Benbecula where duns with personal names are much more common. Instead, in South Uist, they are either known as *mor* (big), *beag* (little), *buidhe* (yellow) and *ruadh* (red), or after vegetation found upon them. The *buidhe* element is extremely common: this has been ascribed to plant life, machair sand in the loch bed (M. MacGregor pers. comm.) and/or the effects of bird droppings (Mary MacLeod pers. comm.), but these do not appear to reflect the sites or their situations. Father Allen McDonald noted

that in the late nineteenth century the people living on the east coast of South Uist differentiated between the duns at Dalabrog and Staoinebrig, respectively as Dun Beag and Dun Mor. Unfortunately, he does not appear to have reached a conclusion as to the reason behind it (n.d.b, 36).

Many duns in North Uist are named after the *Lochlannich* and/or personal names. The *Lochlannich* appear as folkloric figures in legends attached to the duns. Some, such as Dun Sgealoir refer to golden knights and princes (CWP 362, II), while others are named after the Kings of the *Lochlannich*, or rather their daughters, for example: Dun Nighean Righ Lochlainn (Beveridge 1911, 146–47) and Dun Nighean Righ Eidinn in North Uist; and Dun Seibhe Nighean Righ Lochlann, in Loch Uisgebhagh, in Benbecula (CWP 362, IV). Carmichael, in a rather flowery romantic prose, retold the tale of one of the most barbarous of these *Lochlannich* haridans, associated with Dun Ban in Loch Huna, North Uist:

*Una the fair owner of this dun is said to have been a daughter of the king of Loch-Unathan Nuighean Ni Loch- She lived here as became a princess and huntress fair and kept many people about her. She would lead her men to battle and be foremost in the chase and rivalled Boudacia in her bravery. But she was as imperious as she was brave and when her subjects – which probably numbered more than those within the castle – offended her she punished them severely. She and her sagairstan priests worshiped the stone pillars on the shoulder of Unival – Carradhchum Uineval – and when any of her followers declined to imitate her for example they were sginssed [whipped] by the fair Unas own fair hands and sent as a penance to collect the stones from the ... of the country and pile them in heaps and these heaps are called barps. It was thus Barpa Langais [a chambered cairn on the opposite site of the hill from the dun] was collected by Unas people when she punished them for any disobedience of which they might be guilty (CWP 362, II).*

Whilst this is heavily clouded in flights of fancy, it hints at a core memory of Norse occupation at the site. The remains certainly appear to be more medieval than prehistoric, being described by Carmichael thus: “the ruins of the dun are oblong” (CWP 362, II), or composed of a “group of rectangular foundations enclosed at the waters edge by a strong defensive rampart (Beveridge 1911, 134). Strong and barbarous *Lochlannich* women are a common feature in the oral history of North Uist perhaps emanating from a need to show the otherness of the earlier Norse overlords, also exemplifying the place of women in later Hebridean society. However, as will be seen below (Section 10.2), there may even be a case for linking women to crannogs and duns in the later Middle Ages.

The place-names incorporating personal names may also be significant, some are possibly more political in origin but others may indicate a more deep-seated memory of a historical figure. In North Uist, Dun Torcuill is said to have been built by Leod, son of Olaf the Black and progenitor of the Clann Leoid (Beveridge 1911, 151-52). The naming could be seen as a deliberate attempt to tie this figure to the north eastern corner of North Uist, as in later periods the Clann Leoid were claiming rights to its ownership. Blaeu’s map certainly indicates the dun was occupied at the height of the dispute, and a big rectangular structure inserted into the middle of the broch probably dates to this time (Beveridge 1911, 149-52). However, Dun Torcasaich in Benbecula cannot be explained away in this manner and it will be clear from later examples, to be noted in Section 10.9 that there may be direct links between the duns of Benbecula and new lineages establishing themselves in the sixteenth century. All but one of the Glenelg brochs may also be named after the first of the MacLennans/Clann Gill’innein to establish themselves there (Matheson 1950, 203). Unfortunately, these sites were either excavated very poorly or had been cleaned out previously, as is apparent from the paucity of finds and thinness of floor deposits (Curle 1916; 1921; Feacham letter cited on CANMORE), so it is impossible to accurately confirm medieval occupation. At Dun Grugaig Bogle noted “traces of walls existed in the interior” (1895, 182-83). The remaining dun, Caisteal MhicLeod, is named after the new landlords and there were traces of linear walling inserted within the walls (Bogle 1895, 185-87). Bogle dismissed a casual interpretation of one feature he recorded: “there are traces of a



hollow in the N. wall, such as might be caused by a window” (ibid., 186). This is not unlikely, as windows are a common feature found in Late Medieval occupation of duns in the Uists. Dun Uisealan is perhaps an example of a Norse personal name and a dun in South Uist, but the tradition has been forgotten. Another, possibly slightly later dun, Dun Raouill, will be looked at below.

## **7.7 Dun Mhuirchaidh**

In Benbecula a place-name and a series of traditions associated with one particular dun reveals the way in which these two sources can be brought together to uncover an understanding of the use of duns as the physical manifestation of the seat of power by subsequent kin-groups. Dun Mhuirchaidh, or Dun Bhuidhe in Loch an Dun Mhuirchaidh, also possibly the dun in the place-name of the nearby settlement of Dun Gainmhich, is clearly associated with the name Muirchaidh. Recently, a widely held tradition stated that the Clann Ragnaill lived there at one point (Pochin Mould 1953, 71), but as will become apparent there may also be an association with their ancestors: the Clann Ruairidh. Whilst no fully comprehensive genealogy survives for the Clann Ruairidh (see RBC, 157-167; Skene 1890, 465) the name Muirchaidh does not appear to have been common among them. Alternatively, a link with the progenitor of the Siol Mhuirchaidh seems much more probable. It has been argued elsewhere (Sections 2.3) that this lineage may have been connected with the Uists in the later thirteenth century, before the Clann Ruairidh ascendancy. By the fifteenth century their lands were probably reduced to a fraction of North Uist, but in the preceding century this may have included Benbecula. They appear to have been closely connected with the Clann Ruairidh and the Clann Ragnaill. Tradition holds that they colluded together to disinherit their mutual rivals for territories in the Uists, the Siol Ghoraidh (Ferguson & Macdonald 1984, 9), but whether they were serving as vassals to the Clann Ruairidh, or acting as their partners is unclear. The link between the Siol Mhuirchaidh and Benbecula may be tenuous, but, unless their claims had some basis in historical fact, there seems to be no alternative explanation for the Clann Ruairidh’s retention of a place-name (one linked to their primary seat at that) that served to propagate opposing claims to

their territories. This may be especially relevant when rights to land may have been primarily retained within the oral record. If the Siol Mhuirchaidh were based at the dun, it would also provide some indication to why the Clann Ruairidh settled at the site. As the central dun in the Uists, its occupation would have demonstrated the occupier's connection to the earlier naturalised power structure in the islands, and placed them at the top of the social and landscape hierarchy.

Stories about the dun in Iolaraigh regarding the Muirchaidhs highlight the supplantation of the earlier order by dun occupation as a recognised process in operation. It may also tentatively verify a considerably earlier presence of the Siol Mhuirchaidh in the Uists. When Godfrey first came to the Uists, he went to Iolaraigh, where Ami MacRuari, his mother was living, then proceeded to “the stronghold built by Murdoch at Fort Isle [which] had been abandoned for 50 years previously and he took the furniture” (Ferguson & Macdonald 1984, 207). It was even noted that Muirchaidh had built his fort on top of an earlier one, occupied in the Norse period (ibid.), although this could be the broch itself.

Oral-tradition recorded by Carmichael holds a further key to understanding this site:

*The origin of this Castle was as follows. While one of the Mac ic Ailein cuisteasan or Gillean Mora [head servant] was returning home one night to Dun-Buidhe where the Clanrannalds had their pist tuineachas [main dwelling] he saw a loireag or bean nithidh [fairy washer-woman] washing a shirt at the side of the clachan to the Dun. For whom are you washing that shirt said he? For Mac ic Ailein. For his day is doomed and he shall never again cross this clachan. The cruistiar went home and told his chief of the Bean-nithi and her threat. If early rose the sun still earlier rose ClanRanald the following morning and crossed from his Dun by a boat or coit or currach and never returned to it again. He began building his next residence on a sgeir ruhara – which is this Borge Castle (CWP 362 II).*

Fairy washerwoman and prophetess of doom aside, the tale directly connects the use and status of Dun Mhuirchaidh with that more readily recognisable with the castle at Bhuirgh.

The remains of this dun (Fig. 63) reveal it was the most impressive of duns in the Uists. Its circumference is surrounded by a huge stone-built outer ring work, which would have created an extensive outer face, probably descending directly into the loch. It is now almost totally obscured by rubble, but where visible this wall is at least 2m high. The internal platform, 48m in diameter, is surmounted by an 18m wide broch/dun, apparently with a rectangular building inserted into the rubble at a later date, and nine sub-rectangular structures of various dates, a large portion of the island is obscured by a later sheep fold. Some of the buildings may be prehistoric and three are certainly nineteenth-century on structural grounds, also appearing on the first edition OS map (1851). Others, however, on stylistic comparison appear to be medieval, especially two denuded examples with entrances in the gable ends, which is far from being a definitive feature, but is often found on earlier medieval houses. Many of the structures may be later, however, as it appears from Blaeu that it was still occupied towards the end of the sixteenth century. Its size and complexity far exceeds any evident elsewhere, and may be a castle in all but mortar and name, a castle on the cheap? A causeway which makes use of a natural island, with no evidence for pre-nineteenth-century settlement, and a vague association with the church of Callum Cille outside Baile a' Mhainich, links this with the pattern of associated duns, churches and meeting places from the Norse period.

## **7.8 The RCAHMS's Late Duns**

The form of Dun Mhuirchaidh, with an outer ring work and internal buildings, is replicated at two other duns in South Uist, Dun Loch Druim an Iasgair and Eilean an Staoir. Both were highlighted by the RCAHMS (1928, xl) as late duns, separate in form from the prehistoric brochs/duns. They are much smaller in diameter, respectively around 10m and 14m in diameter, without causeways, and have two dry-stone sub-oval/rectangular structures within the outer wall, between 2m and 4m in length. The first is much lower to the present water



level, although the walls extend straight down in to the loch to a depth of 2.5m in places. The latter appears to have been built into the top of a broch/dun, sitting high above the present water level with later structures sitting around the base of the broch mound. If they are later duns, both are marked in that they do not appear on Blaeu's map, although it is possible that he did not record all of them. Additionally, Loch Druim an Iasgair is far from any route-way through the islands, being situated in the middle of the plain of blanket bog and cnoc-and-lochan at the north end of the island. The distinctive appearance of these duns may reveal that they are late examples, similar in form to, and contemporary with Dun Mhurichaidh, and possibly Dun Loch Huna (discussed above). A possible parallel of this type of monument may be found at Macewen's Castle, in Cowal (Fig. 65), where an earlier vitrified fort was enhanced by the building of an outwork rampart with timber stakes, turf and stone buildings being constructed in the resulting enclosure. Excavation revealed numerous finds, unfortunately from insecure contexts, but there was rough evidence for intermittent use from the twelfth to the seventeenth centuries (Marshall 1983). Dun Lagaidh, Wester Ross (Selkirk 1969) and Dun Ringill, in Skye (Miket & Roberts 1990, 45-48: Fig. 66), are both duns that were re-used in the Middle Ages by the insertion of free-standing structures, possibly reflecting an extension of this form. The internal divisions described by eighteenth-century travellers in Dun Beag, in Skye, but which were removed before any excavation could be made, may also fit this type of broch re-use, the finds from this dun certainly strongly support medieval occupation (Callander 1921, 124-28).

Structures of outworks and internal buildings are not uniform features of medieval patterns of dun re-use. The surviving broch/dun mounds of Dun Uisealan and Dun Cnoc a' Bhuidhe (Fig. 67) have small single rectangular structures inserted directly into the top, filling up the entire space in the centre of the broch, so that the walls are no longer solely integral to either structure. Dun Loch an Duin, Gearraidh Sheile, may also fit this pattern, consisting of two or three small inter-locking sub-rectangular structures constructed into the top of a broch/dun mound. These are differentiated in size from the large buildings inserted into brochs in the later medieval period, but may be more akin to the smaller sub-rectangular structures that appear at the end of the Middle Ages (see Section 11.8). Unfortunately, whilst it is possible

to interpret a date of construction for these cells at a later date to the brochs they are built in, there is no way to accurately tie in that date to a more specific time frame upon present information. Other examples of these forms of duns may be found from those heavily denuded, built over and robbed-out duns, but there is no way to prove this.

## **7.9      Seats and Seasonal Sites**

Numerous tales survive from the sixteenth century regarding the use and occupation of duns throughout the western seaboard. Some stories show that there was a direct correlation of dun occupation with land-ownership. One example is that relating to the MacVicars/Clann Biocair of North Uist: prior to their supplantation, eviction and extermination in the sixteenth century they were one of the most prominent landholders there. The father and the four sons held four divisions between them, the youngest sharing the father's territory, and each held a dun in their area. However, we only get a picture of this due to the activities of the notorious Skye MacDonald, Uisdean MacGillesbuig Clerich (MacDonald n.d., 36) at a time of great unrest throughout the Highlands and Islands. The setting of traditions in the 'Age of Forays', by its very nature, obscures, or at least skews, the impression to be gained from an investigation of duns from this resource. Duns owe their presence to their use as hideaways and refuges, and are associated with violent and treacherous acts. Tales from earlier periods are rarer, perhaps due to the fact that acts of slaughter and heroic deeds make for more intriguing story telling than peaceful domesticity. Where they do appear they are still often intertwined with murderous actions, yet it is evident that they served as much more than defences for their inhabitants.

The link of duns and crannogs to hereditary proprietorship of land has been highlighted above for Lewis and North Uist. The traditions of Gairloch (Fig. 68) reveal the way in which duns were targeted during the expansive strategies of the clan wars: their inhabitants expelled, supplanted and replaced by members of the new lineage in an effort to demonstrate the right of the new lordship to the land. However, one historical episode reveals that crannogs had other, less martial, roles within Gaelic lordship. When the Clann Leoid took

power in the early 1400s, they ousted the previous lineage, the MacBeaths from the crannogs of Eilean Gruidh, in Loch Maree, and Eilean Loch Tollie, as well as the dun, Dun na Gairloch (Dixon 1886, 21; Mackenzie 1889, 307). Around 1480 the tale surrounding the murder of Allan mac Ruairidh, MacLeod of Gairloch, reveals not only that the crannog on Loch Tollie had been reoccupied, but that its occupation was domestic, possibly even pastoral. Allan is described as “a peaceful man, [who] occupied himself to a great extent with the sport the country afforded” (Dixon 1886, 26). When his brothers decided to murder him they found him outside his crannog, fishing at a nearby river, where they “made him short by the head” (Mackenzie 1889, 342). The brothers then proceeded to the crannog unopposed where they captured his wife and children (ibid.): i.e. there were no defences to stop them and the presence of his family there suggests its use as a dwelling rather than a refuge.

The incorporation of fishing into this tale highlights another aspect to crannog and dun occupation that is also evident in Robert Gordon’s descriptions of Sutherland and Strathnaver in the early seventeenth century:

*There are in Southerland divers loghes or laikes ... full of good fishes, dispersed thorow the forests and mountains ... In sundrie of these laikes ther ar ileands with habitations ... In Loch-Broray [Loch Bhuidhe?] ther is ane ileland where the erle of Southerland hes a delectable habitation and pleasant for hunting of reid deir and roes, in the woods on both syds of the laik ... Ther are four ilands in Loch-Shin [Loch Shinn] ... all pleasant duellings in summer. To these ilands ther doe resort good store of wild goosse, swanes, and reid deir (1813, 5).*

*Ther are divers leakes or loches in Strathnaver ... full of good fishes. In Loch-Leyole [Loch Loyal] ther is ane iland which is a pleasant habitation in the summer season. Macky hath also a summer dwelling in ane iland (ibid., 11).*



Antiquarians in Sutherland recorded further evidence for this usage:

*Loch-an-Hacon [Loch an Hakel] ... in which there is an island with the remains of a castle on it, said to have been built by Hacon for a hunting seat ... built without mortar, and with flat stones the same as the Pictish towers*  
(Horsburgh 1868, 276).

It is more than evident that South Uist's artificial islands became prime areas for fowling and fishing in later centuries. Maps provided by South Uist Estates of prime angling spots, frequently highlight that the best are to be found on one side or another of crannogs, and shooting butts have been constructed upon nearly all of them. The RCAHMS's (mis-) interpretation of features on the walls of Dun Raouill was specifically attributed to "butts for sportsmen shooting the wild geese" (1928, 111). Walker noted that South Uist's proneness to plagues of geese was partially due to its islets in fresh water lakes (McKay 1980, 79). Although it cannot be stated with any certainty whether crannogs were deliberately placed to exploit these resources, or whether their construction created environmental niches that were preferred by these species, the correlation of duns and hunting resources should not be ignored in understanding their use in the medieval period. Additionally, some of the more western duns, such as Dun Raouill, were placed in good situations to access the moors, for deer hunting.

Although swans over-winter in Uist, the geese are most common in the Uists in the summer (Boyd & Boyd 1996b, 65-67), similarly salmon come to the rivers from February, peaking in July, when other species, such as trout, also become common until August (Boyd & Boyd 1996a, 178-84). This shows that if one of the myriad functions of some duns was to provide hunting residences, occupation must have been centred on the summer months. An additional element affecting, imposing even, seasonal activity at duns is the variance in water levels in the lochs. Heavy rains can significantly raise water levels in poorly draining lochs and this is particularly extreme over the winter months, when many lochs swell over their banks and both peat and low lying machair becomes heavily water logged. In such

circumstances many of the lower lying crannogs, and the outbuildings around some of larger ones, may have been rendered uninhabitable for many months of the year. Seasonal swelling of water levels may also provide one tentative, functional, explanation for the construction of artificial islands for habitation, rather than the occupation and modification of the naturally occurring islands in many of the lochs with crannogs in them. Through using stones, a solid base was constructed, although the spaces in between the stones may have allowed waters to drain freely when flooding occurred. Palaeo-environmental evidence from the Early Medieval crannog at Buiston, Ayrshire, also suggests periodic flooding, and more tentatively seasonal occupation, which perhaps suggests that flooding and summer use were widespread features of crannog life across the board (Kenward *et al.* 2000, 100-101, Crone 2000, 110).

Some of the crannogs are higher above the water level, and it is possible that these need not have been abandoned in the winter. This raises the possibility that dun utilisation may have mirrored the transhumance patterns of movement use by the rest of Hebridean society. Some of the higher duns may have been lived in during the winter, being part of the lowland arable landscape, to be abandoned in the summer, for those lower lying duns nearer the pastures and hunting grounds (to be discussed more fully in Section 10.8).

The above information raises the strong probability that not all duns were regarded as seats of power, although there is no reason why the two roles could not co-exist. Even where they did serve as seats, there is no need to necessarily presume, on the presently available evidence, that they were occupied permanently, or all year-round. The suggestion of seasonal occupation should in no way correlate with a conceptual loss of the status of these sites or detract from their importance. The picture that emerges from later records is that they could have served as periodic local seats to accommodate chiefs and their retinue as they travelled around their estates. Such circuits were necessary for the uplifting their rents and dues, in the form of *cuidhe oidhche*, as well as dispensing judgement, both enforcing and receiving acknowledgement of their domination over their lands (Alcock 2003, 49-50).

Early Medieval Ireland shows similar connections and roles for crannogs. There, crannogs were associated with royal sites, but the nature of that relationship has yet to be identified (Warner 1994). Ballinderry II Crannog was built upon a hunting site (Newman 2003), while O'Sullivan (1998, 143-45) has argued that their location and faunal assemblages show a link to pastoral activity. A large proportion of the duns of South Uist are located in the moorlands, but only a few have any visibility of arable land (Fig. 69). At least two, Dun Cnoc an Bhuidhe and Dun Raouill, are located on later major route-ways between the arable and upland summer grazings (Fig. 9). Dun Raouill does not appear to have been built upon prehistoric foundations, revealing that a preoccupation with pasture was also prevalent in the Middle Ages. That duns should be associated with moorlands in a society largely concerned with cattle, and that settlement focused on seasonally exploited land is not surprising. It is only a modern preoccupation with the importance of arable, and the need to define permanence of occupation from summer and winter houses that has led to a trend in modern academia that sees a proximity to pasture as signifier of a monument's lack of importance. It would be far more productive and poignant to consider pasture as an important resource and recognise the significance of the place of cattle in a 'cattle-economy'. One of the place-names for the crannog in Loch Eadarloch, appears to reveal a connection to summer occupation, possibly specifically to movement between summer grazings; Eilean Ruighe na Slighe may be interpreted as 'Island of the shieling of the track' (Ritchie 1942, 17). The other place-names recorded for this island, such as Eilean na Comhairle, Eilean Tigh nam Fiodh (Wooden House Island) or Treaty Island (ibid., 18) need not conflict with this one, revealing the multiplicity of functions performed at these sites.

It seems probable that as the medieval period unfolded, the seasonal or occasional use of duns may have increased. Above, the occupation of a dun has been argued to be conceptually analogous to rights over land (in some cases the *tír unga*, in others whole islands or regions), which in some cases may have been similar to the occupant's demesne. In the earlier Norse period duns' owners may have belonged to a class of local 'chieftains', subject to a king or lord, to whom they are likely to have had some form of kinship link. However, as kin-groups expanded the influence of an individual, seen as the head of the



lineage, would have extended over wider and wider geographical areas. Additionally, ambitious lords would have used their power, both social and military, to manipulate political situations to extend their lordships through dominance kin-groups and regions often spread over disparate areas. A lord whose dominance covered a number of separate areas, would have had to visit each of these areas to uplift his dues and demonstrate his lordship: in each area he would have made use of a dun. Each dun would have provided him and his retinue with accommodation, but it was also likely to have been the conceptual centre of that region. Previously, the duns would have been occupied by a chiefly lineage that had used it to demonstrate their own tie to the land before being dislodged by the new lord. By the later medieval period MacLeod of Dunvegan had lands in Harris (including the islands in the Sound), Skye, and Glenelg in each of these areas he had a dun which was traditionally associated with him. In the case of Pabbay, the dun was occupied in his absence by a warden, who administered to judicial affairs while the chief was in his other estates (*Banatyne MS*, 54). Throughout the western seaboard castles were provided with individuals to occupy and run the castle while its lord was away, in the genealogical histories and folk-literature they are referred to as chamberlains, wardens and constables. Given the lateness of the sources little can be made of specific variations in the titles, they appear to reflect a general position, to which, perhaps, also might be added castellan. The point is that these were not merely gatekeepers, but the heads of powerful lineages. The confirmation of this position revealed the relationship between lord and subject, and allowed the lord to visit and use the castle at his will (the process will be discussed more fully in Section 10.2). Such a process signified the social right of both the local land holder and the chief. In lordships with similar geographic situations many duns could not have been occupied permanently. Although they were seen as the local seat in earlier periods, the significance of this particular function may have diminished over time, and the duns may have become more associated with other activities that took place there, such as hunting or fishing.

## 7.10 Civil Defence

The best evidence for the defensive capabilities of crannogs and duns comes from the Late Medieval period. They may immediately appear to be defensive in nature and clearly they could provide short-term respite from raiding parties. Yet given the emphasis that Ross (forthcoming) and Williams (2003) place on the role of *dabhaichean* in the administration of military service the place of duns at the centre of the *tírean unga* may be significant. It may be that they somehow functioned at the hub of a system of civil defence, where the populace of the country could be mustered when raiding parties were thought to be coming, or that the local king or lord needed an army for raiding of his own (for a good analysis see Williams 1996, 240-54). This is perhaps verified by the connection of some duns with signalling places that appear to be at the heart of a system of beacon signals throughout the Isles. Similar patterns have been recovered for Anglo-Saxon England, covering vast areas of Kent and penetrating deep inland, where it has also been connected to the raising of local levies (Hill & Sharp 1997). In the Hebrides it is an idea with a considerable pedigree, being first put to paper by Martin Martin regarding those duns in Skye:

*All these forts stand upon eminences, and are so disposed that there is not one of them which is not in view of some other; and by this means, when a fire is made upon a beacon in any one fort, it is in a few moments after communicated to all the rest; and this hath been always observed upon sight of any number of foreign vessels, or boats approaching the coast* (1994, 206).

If such a warning network could be traced spanning throughout the Hebrides it must surely indicate that there was an idea of unified region in the Norse period. One where people in Lewis could be mobilised to warn the inhabitants of Islay that danger was approaching from the north, and vice versa, and where all Hebrideans could be unified in its defence. A pan-Hebridean system of civil defence would have ramifications for understanding the position of the Norwegian sovereigns, Orcadian Earls or Kings of the Isles, who implemented such a

system. Unfortunately, however, the available evidence is fragmentary, but it is worth highlighting what information there is.

The famous tradition bearer of Barra, Nan Mackinnon, summed up a commonly held myth about Norse duns when she stated that “each island had its own dùn, built by the Vikings. They were always built on high ground so they could use lights to send warning to one another” (SA 1960/122/134). Carmichael noted one such tradition regarding North Uist:

*In the top of Dunshealoir there was a place for a “warning fire”. When danger was apprehended from the east a “warning fire” was lighted on the top of Dun –rosail at Clachan Shaunda (or Clachan Heaunda) to warn Dunsgealoin while that on top of Dunsgealoin warned those duns to the westward (CWP 362, V).*

Carmichael even quoted a passage from MacPherson’s *Ossian*, ‘Carraig Thura’ to illustrate this, which he claimed he translated closely, but differs slightly from the version published in the 1996 edition (Macpherson 1996, 160):

*Morning arose brightening from the east,  
Blue on the sea was the wave,  
The king commanded his sails to mast,  
The wind came over from the hill,  
Innis Or (?Orkney) slowly rose to sight.  
And Carraig Thura ocean’s guiding mark,  
The sign of danger was on the top.  
The warning flame edged in smoke.  
The King struck his chest in wrath  
Distantly he took his large spear from behind him,  
His aid the wind because of fate,  
His locks were playing upon his back.*



*The silence of the King was with meaning (CWP 362, V).*

Although the passage from *Ossian* cannot be taken to be an authentic historic tradition, recent work has suggested that Macpherson was less an outright fraud, than a mediator between Gaelic culture and the lay Lowland reader (Stafford in Macpherson 1996, viii). The most optimistic interpretation of this quote would be to see it as a piece of oral tradition romanticised for a new audience, but even a more sceptical approach should be able to use this to illustrate the prevalence of the idea of a warning beacon associated with a dun. Whilst such a conspicuous location may be true for Dun Cuier, Barra, where a recent commemorative bonfire could be seen across the island (Young 1956, 296), it cannot be true of most duns, especially those sited in lochs. As Carmichael noted in a different dissertation to the one containing his use of *Ossian*:

*It has been foolishly asserted that these towers are along in sight of one another, the author of this speculation supposing that they were built for the purpose of signalling along the coast. Where there are so many it would be strange if some of them were not mutually in sight; but as a rule no worse positions could have been selected for communication. They are very seldom in a conspicuous situation and in many cases are completely shut in by surrounding hills (CWP 362, II).*

However, the connection of duns, and perhaps *tírean unga*, with a system of civil defence in the form of warning beacons should not be totally discounted. Near Castle Grugag, at the highest point to its south west was called 'Faire an Dun', the watching place of the dun (Wallace 1895, 112), revealing that a beacon nearby could be integrally linked with the dun. Additionally, in Colonsay *Carn na Cainnle*, 'Candle hill', is located in a conspicuous position in relation to Dun Eibhinn (Fig. 70), the most prominent dun on the island during the medieval period (Grieve 1923: II, 254). The *Orkneyinga Saga* shows that warning beacons were organised by the Orcadian Earls, in Fair Isle in the Norse period to make sure forces could be readied on the approach of a hostile fleet. Peat fuelled beacons were known

here upon Ward Hill, the highest point on island, through into the seventeenth century (Hunter 1996, 105). Tradition records that a similar Norse period case appears to have existed in the Western Isles:

*Harold [ob. c.1250], sone of Gordred Dound ... was obliged to pey 100 merks yeirly for releive of the Scots King to the King of Norway, and at a certaine time of the yeir to keip tuo fired beacons, on in Lewis, ane other in the Ile of Skye, for directing the Norwegian shippes in their navigationes of the coasts (Frazer 1876, 110).*

A burning mountain came to form part of the armorial bearings of Harold (ibid.) and the MacLeods of Lewis (Halford-Macleod 1994, 200), possibly indicating that the role was considered a semi-official position, which could be passed on hereditarily. A similar situation may be visible in North Uist where the Clann MhicMagnus, were believed to have had the rights to the succour of the ocean, castaways and ceteacea, and to be charged with the policing of the sea, since the Norse period (Ferguson & Macdonald 1984, 120). The Clann 'ic Asgaill/MacAskils of Ru 'n Dunain, were not only the hereditary coast watchers of the Clann Leoid since at least 1395 and possibly since the days of the Kings of Man, but were also constables of Dun Sgathaich, in Skye (Nicolson 1930, 30, 361). This may show that the two posts were integrally connected. Although no 'ward', Old Norse *varda*, place-name has been uncovered for the Uists, there is a tradition that one of the hills on Ronaigh, to the south east of North Uist, was named Beinn na Aire – watch hill – and had a beacon upon it in the days of the Lordship of the Isles which warned other sites within sight of it, such as Cnoc na Forud – lookout hill – in Iolaraigh (Fergusson 1978, 214). Whilst these traditions cannot be corroborated it does not seem unlikely that there were similar warning processes there, and that there was a system of 'civic' defence which extended beyond the call to arms stipulated in military dues.

### **7.11 Are there Norse Castles in South Uist?**

The *Saga of Hacon* stated that during Hakon's Largs campaign in 1263, the Hebridean lords held Cairburgh and three other castles directly from him. None are specifically identified but one was probably located in southern Kintyre (Dasent 1894, 271, although see Duncan & Brown 1957, 208). Cruden (1960), using architectural evidence, was keen to push the

origins of castles on the western seaboard futher back into the Norse period, but recently his deductions have been queried. Castles, such as Kisimul, Barra, have since been reinterpreted as being the product of later phases of castle building (Dunbar 1978a; also see Talbot 1974). This dependency on architectural detail has restricted debate to looking for the birth of the castle in the middle of the thirteenth century. In the Inner Hebrides and Kintyre a number of castles have been proved to be of Norse period date (RCAHMS 1997, 1-7; Tabraham 1997: 31-37), perhaps the strongest evidence survives for Castle Sween/Caisteal Suibhne in architectural form and poetry (RCAHMS 1997, 78-90). More recent scholars have directly linked early castle construction to the aspirations and incursions of Alexander II and Hacon IV, the kings of the two states competing for sovereignty and jurisdiction of the Western Isles (Cruden 1960; Stell 1985; Cowan 1990; Watson 1998). The problem, as W. C. MacKenzie coined it, is that “old castles are like modern women: it is not always easy to tell their age” (1919, 23). Even if the surviving remains of castles post-date the Treaty of Perth, many castles are built on earlier sites, some of which have their origins in Iron Age. The use of the term castle implies more than a structure; it describes a concept or social ideal. There are some arguments for a Norse date to some of the castellated structures in the Uist, which will be covered here.

Castles, in the form of simple towers like Cubbie Roo’s Castle, Wyre, had been built in Orkney prior to the thirteenth century and have close parallels in Norway. Other early ‘Norse’ examples have been argued for Caithness and Sutherland (Talbot 1974, 40-43; Miller 1989, 156-64: Fig. 71). However, because castles are not found in other parts of the Norse Atlantic, such as Iceland, the Faeroes or Shetland, this led Grieve (1999, 104) to seek their origins in mainland Europe and/or experiences on the crusades. By looking at their historical context Grieve realised that Orcadian Norse castles in the twelfth century could be seen as the defensive farmsteads of a high social stratum of chiefs, or *gædingr*. These chiefs held their position in return for food rents, hospitality and the provision of a naval levy but seem to have held a degree of local autonomy. Their farmsteads were usually located near good arable farmland and a church (ibid., 110-114). An impressive, if not exceptional, example of these Orcadian monuments is the Brough of Birsay, where the Earls of Orkney



had their hall, minster and other outbuildings prior to the site's eclipse by Kirkwall, with its Cathedral, in the twelfth century (see Thomson (ed.) 1983b; Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998, 188-90). Although these monuments differ physically from the Hebridean duns and crannogs the social and locational parallels seem obvious. In this light, it could be said that dun occupation was simply a local reaction to the building of motte-and-baileys at the heart of seigniorial and manorial regimes seen throughout Scotland, Britain and Ireland, where they are often linked to the (Anglo-)Normanisation, or feudalisation, of society (e.g. see Cruden 1960, 6-10; Barrow 1973, 25-74; 1980, 30-60; Tabraham 1984; 1997, 13-26 Simpson & Webster 1985; Yeoman 1988; O'Connor 1998, 26-38; O'Keefe 2000, 15-33). Whilst there are problems with accepting a direct correlation between mottes and the Normanisation of society (see Oram 2000, 218-33), Driscoll (1998, 39-47) has noted that over the eleventh and twelfth centuries thanes on the Scottish mainland were following earlier Late Anglo-Saxon estate owners in building *caputs*, similar to Goltho, in Lincolnshire (Beresford 1987). At Goltho, and other Late Anglo-Saxon royal and *thegnly* sites a hall and service buildings were grouped together within an enclosure, a church was also often incorporated within the settlement, or can be found adjacent to the site (Reynolds 1999, 112-37). The link between Later Anglo-Saxon *caputs* and those in Scotland in later periods has found support from O'Keefe (2004, 16-20). Comparison between these and Hebridean duns are apparent. However, although there may be an argument for seeing islands as forms of enclosure (see Section 10.7), the western seaboard examples do not incorporate the same range of buildings. Whilst churches are often found alongside duns, so are assembly sites, which are not a feature of Anglo-Saxon sites. More importantly though, the dun, the church and the assembly site are each contained and separate entities, within their own enclosed, or defined, piece of land (see below and Sections 10.7 and 10.8), they are not incorporated together within one enclosure. The most distinctive feature of Hebridean duns is, however, their location within, and upon, the remains of earlier fortifications, which led gave the duns' occupants a claim on genealogical and historical links to the past, and show much more concern with locating chiefs/lords in space, time and place. If a claim upon feudal ideology had been the desired effect of the Hebridean elite the building of earthwork castles or other forms of enclosure would not have been beyond their means. Thus, whilst there may be

some ideological connection with the *caputs* or mottes of Late Anglo-Saxon or contemporary Scottish societies, the duns were a deliberate and specific Hebridean reaction and interpretation to them.

At An Udail Crawford (1981, 266-67; Crawford & Switsur 1977, 130-32; Selkirk 1996, 86-89) identified a structure that he suggested was a ninth-century fortification, directly linked to the Viking *landnam*. It was composed of the foundations for a massive-built wall, forming a sub-rectangular enclosure, around seven metres across, situated at the highest point of the site, although no evidence for internal buildings was produced. Unfortunately, without further publication it is not possible to test or verify his interpretations. At any rate, if its date can be accepted, its construction may lead to a further number of tentative conclusions: that duns were alien to the incoming Vikings and that they were capable of building their own fortifications if need be. Additionally, as its occupation appears to have been very short lived, fortifications were not perceived to be a necessary element within Viking Age or Norse period settlement patterns. Castles that are often thought to be twelfth century or later Norse period date are known from across the area of Norse domination in the northern seaboard (very little dating exists, however, to substantiate the date of many of these sites): nearly all take the form of small towers. Cubbie Roo's Castle; the Wirk; the Earl's Bu at Orphir; and possibly Clouston Castle in Orkney; and Borge; Castle of Brough; Wick; Bucholie; and Dun Creich in Caithness and Sutherland (RCAHMS 1946: II, 145-48, 174-75, 323-24, 191-92; Talbot 1974, 41-43; Lamb 1980, 90-96; Grieve 1999) have similar dimensions: with external measurements over 10m, with mortared walls, 1.5m thick (*ibid.*). There are a number of very small rectangular towers in the Outer Hebrides: Caisteal a Bhreabhar, Caisteal Calabhaigh, and Caisteal Bheagram in South Uist, St. Clair's Castle and possibly Dun Cuier in Barra, as well as Dun Eistean in Lewis. The recent identification of the latter (Barrowman & Driscoll 2001, 8, 10) raises the possibility that others have been mis-identified as brochs. It is possible that these are Norse in date, but it will be argued in Section 10.8 that the minimal archaeological evidence and traditional history points to a late fifteenth-century date.

MacGregor (1929, 198-99) recorded some of the traditions associated with Kisimul, Barra and Caisteal Calabhaigh, in South Uist. One stated that they were fought over by the occupying *Lochlannich* and the MacNeils returning from their enforced exile in Ireland. The latter was won by a *bodach* of MacNeil's, 'mak siccar' of Sandray, who deceived the guard into thinking an enemy was approaching, so the chief man put his head out of a peephole and was shot with an arrow. The last of the *Lochlannich* leaders were then put to sword.

Another tradition was told by Donald MacDonald (cited Sharkey 1986, 58-60, although see other version by Mac Iain, n.d.). Caisteal Calabhaigh's last mortal occupant was a giant called Iain Breschid (John the Pox), a pirate who terrorised the local populace. He fell in love with and kidnapped a beautiful local maiden, which provoked the local folk to set fire to the windward side of the castle with heather. They then stood on one another's shoulders till they reached the window and rescued the maiden. Iain escaped by jumping over the gap between the island and the mainland and ran to South Loch Baghasdal, where he fell asleep, until the locals found him and crushed him with a huge boulder which is still there to this day. The gap is known as Beallach Iain/John's Gap, preserving the tale.

But do these tales record historical fact? The first tale may reflect the desire for the Clann Neill to create an ancient Gaelic link to their dominions and may arise out of the many tales connected with the *Lochlannich*. As for the other, across the Atlantic Seaboard traditions of giants are connected to boulders and standing stones (Grieve 1999, 45-47). They are usually quarrelsome, throw stones, build causeways because they hate getting their feet wet and they imprison women in high towers (ibid.). In Norse folklore giants capture women to do housework (Wylie & Margolin 1981, 66-69). The giant and women-in-castles motifs may post-date the Norse period perhaps deriving from chivalric romances (Grieve 1999, 47). Nevertheless, this does not discount the possibility of giants and related features being tied to historical figures or acts. Cubbie Roo is perhaps the best example of this, he is based on a historical figure, but has been transformed in folk tradition into a giant who undertook all the behaviour expected from them, he is even buried under a stone pile (ibid.). However, the close correspondence of Cubbie Roo to Iain Breschid need not negate its historicity. In both



cases there is the possibility of real figure with a big reputation, becoming larger than life in tradition (see *ibid.*).

One possible derivation of the place-name, Baghasdal, may support evidence for a Norse period castle at Calabhaigh. MacKenzie (1932, 334) argued that earlier medieval spellings, such as 'Baegastallis', 'Vayhastill' or 'Baghastill', revealed it's meaning came from Bagh a Chaisteal, Castle Bay, a theory which is supported by Macneil (1964, 90). Part of his reasoning came from the name's reference to a loch, rather than a valley, but it is far from clear whether the *tír unga* of Baghasdal, to its south, gained its name from the loch, or vice-versa. The land south of the loch on the east coast consists of a ring of hills surrounding a valley, and is possible that it is this valley which this place-name refers to. Yet even this may come from far too pedantic interpretation of valley, as the loch had hills on either side. Whichever the case, a personal-name, sounding something like Boi, could have lent his name as a prefix to the loch valley, thus 'Boi's dale'. Additionally, the township name of Dalabrog appears on the opposite side of the island to the castle, and provides a geographical place-name counter balance to 'Castle Bay', possibly meaning 'dale of the *borg*'. The *borg* element may result from the Norse word for fort, and although it could refer to a local dun, such as that in Loch nam Faoileann, it could just as easily denote Caisteal Calabhaigh. Gerhard Mercator noted a 'borg' roughly in the location of the castle in 1595 (Fig. 72). Interpretation of Dalabrog as 'dale of the *borg*' may, however, be slightly problematic, as the arrangement of the Norse 'dale' and '*borg*' suggests a Gaelic, and thus later, origin, a Norse name should read '*borg*-dale'. However, it could be that both words had been adopted into Gaelic use after the Norse period, which could account for the word arrangement. If a Norse period, or earlier fortification was built at Calabhaigh, no trace of it now survives. The earliest phase appears to be the small tower in the south western corner (Figs. 73 and 74), which, it will be argued in Section 10.8, is likely to date from the late fifteenth century at the earliest.

The *borg* place-name element is also evident in the name of Caisteal Bhuirgh/Borve in Benbecula, which may reveal an early, or Norse phase at the site. The entry for South Uist

in the Old Statistical Account states that it was named Dun Elvine nean Ruarie built by a Norse princess of the same name (Munro 1794, 299), although this is clearly confused with Ami MacRuari who is said to have built it in the mid-1300s (HP: I, 26). The dun prefix is important here as it may point to an early date and perhaps indicated that focus on the study of the castle's name should move away from its *borg* suffix, especially as it is not possible to be entirely positive that the *borg* was always related to the castle. Blaeu's map shows 'Castel Vrigh' as separate from 'Borg', although this could be explained as a need to differentiate the castle from the townships of Torlum, Buirgh, Lionacleit and possibly Creag Ghoraidh, but why then the place-name difference? The castle is mentioned twice in the 1370s as the castle of "Univawle" (Munro & Munro 1986, 10) and "Benwewyl" (Skene 1872: I, 44), not *buirgh*. This almost certainly relates to one of the two names for Benbecula suggested by MacKenzie (1932, 321-23): Beinn a' Mhaoil, bare rounded hill, different from Benbecula, which he suggested came from a meaning for a hill for watching herds. Unfortunately, the link to the island name neither furthers, nor disproves any connection of the castle to the place-name or township of *Buirgh*. Numerous duns are located nearby and it is possible that the name was originally connected to one of them. The remains of the castle are highly denuded and few features remain (Fig. 75), rendering dating from architectural features almost impossible. Until recently it has often been thought of as a small tower-house (CANMORE), however, recently Addyman (2000a, 97) raised the possibility that it is a hall house, although this was not discussed in the full report (Addyman & Kay 2000, 35-42). In comparison to other examples, a lack of vaulting (Millar & Kirkhope 1965) and of other features typical of later tower-houses, may confirm this interpretation (following McNeill's definitions; 1997, 149-55). Amongst the features of Irish hall houses noted by Sweetman (1999, 89-104) is the presence of an external stairway to an entrance on an upper floor. At Buirgh an area of fallen wall has been interpreted as an entrance, served by a porch, which may be a later addition. If this is a porch the correlating gap would seem to be best understood as the site of the old doorway. Alternatively, it is possible that the gap results from the decay of the monument, and that the 'porch' originally served as a support for an outer stairway (MacGibbon & Ross 1887-92: III, 115-17; Millar & Kirkhope 1965), furthering interpretation of Buirgh as a hall house. Sweetman's (1999, 104) claims of hall

houses being built in Ireland in the early 1200s raises the possibility that Buirgh existed in a castellated form in the Norse period. However, most Irish and many Scottish examples are dated to later in the century, with examples being constructed up until around 1350 (Stell 1985, 203; McNeill 1997, 150; Tabraham 1997, 37, 55). It seems most likely that, even if there was a dun at Buirgh, it only became a castle after the Norse period.

Whilst a case could be made for Norse castles in the Uists, using place-name evidence, and doubtful folktales, it seems improbable. The weight of the evidence points to a later advent of the castle.

## 7.12 Dun Raouill

Dun Raouill, in Loch Druidibeg, South Uist is a curious hybrid between a castle and a prehistoric dun. It is of an un-mortared dry-stone build, but is rectangular and does not appear to have been built upon an earlier site, or crannog (Fig. 76). The island that it sits on may be slightly modified in the north western corner. The loch contains a multitude of other natural islands with structures upon them, one to its east, Eilean na Taigh (Figs. 77 and 78), contains an enclosure and a number of houses, which are almost certainly related to the dun. Two islands in the loch to its north support cairns, with another two sitting up on the hillside to its south. The remains reveal several phases of construction, and was certainly in some form of use in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but little evidence survives to suggest an original date of construction. Hugh MacDonald, the seventeenth-century *seanachaidh*, stated that it may have been built by Ami MacRuari as part of her mid-fourteenth-century building program throughout the isles (HP: I, 26). The lack of mortar singles this monuments out in relation to her other projects, indicating that this is an unlikely possibility. The place-name, *dún*, may hint at an earlier date (see Section 9.3), while Raouill is most likely to be a corruption of Ruairidh, perhaps providing a direct link of the dun with the Clann Ruairidh. Whilst it may have twelfth-century origins this dun can only really be considered as part of a later landscape, so will be discussed more fully in Section 10.8.



### 7.13 Chapels, Duns and Assemblies

Throughout the western seaboard it is evident that there was a strong correlation of chapel sites, secular lordly settlement, assembly places (meeting places for the local community with a wide range of functions, from local decision making to judicial administration and the inauguration of chiefs, often also associated with fairs), and execution sites. Although the location of each component is distinct from the others, they are usually placed in close proximity to one another. Even when they are more spread out there is evidence that they were connected by route-ways. There is clear association of this collection of sites with islands and/or crannogs, in most cases at least one element is sited on one, although which precise element(s) occur upon the island/crannog or adjacent mainland varies. In some instances the church is on the crannog, the secular dun upon a natural island and the assembly site upon the mainland. In other locations the church is on the mainland, the dun upon the crannog, and the assembly site on the natural island. However, all three elements and all three locations are consistently present, even if the precise relationship appears to have been conceptually interchangeable. The distribution of *cille* sites to *tírean unga* suggests that at the heart of each *tír unga* was also an assembly site, confirming the judicial and communal nature of the *tír unga* as a settlement unit.

Perhaps the most compelling example of a relationship between a church, an unoccupied island and a secular settlement, in this case also on an island, was noted by Fleming and Woolf (1992, 341–43) at Cille Donnain in South Uist (Fig. 79). Here the church and graveyard, located on a peninsula in Loch Cille Donnain, were connected by a causeway to an island, with no trace of occupation, which led to another causeway to Eilean Mor where the remains of four sub-rectangular structures were identified, which were probably medieval in date. Local tradition also recorded that this site was used for assembly.

The most obvious parallel of this relationship between crannog, island and church is the centre of the Kingdom of the Isles and their later successors, the Lords of the Isles, at Finlaggan (Fleming & Woolf 1992, 343: Fig. 80). The site is thought to be the inaugural site

of the Lords themselves, and although a chapel was built on the site (Caldwell 2003), descriptions place priests and a bishop at the heart of the ceremony itself (HP: I, 23-24; Martin 1994, 273). Additionally, part of this complex was the Council Isle, confirming the association of these collective sites with a wide range of assembly activity. It is tempting to suggest the islands intermediate between the mainland and the duns, with no signs of settlement upon them, served as good location for similar assemblies, perhaps symbolising their separation from the normal rules of the world. Another possibility is that some had a more strict function, as small islands feature as a place set aside for duelling from the Norse period to the eighteenth century (Morrison 1978), although some of these other natural islands would appear to be too large to fit this pattern accurately.

The Law Ting Holm at Tingwall in Shetland is perhaps the closest parallel of a similar meeting place in the Norse world, it too is situated on a spit of land, perhaps occasionally an island in a loch. Crawford (1987, 206) suggests it developed after 1195 when Shetland escaped the rule of the Earls and came under the direct control of the Norwegian Kings. However, thing assemblies probably pre-date this development, with other Norse examples in Iceland developing in the tenth century (Byock 2001, 171), not discounting Early Medieval assembly sites throughout Britain. The Norse cases indicate that participants at these meetings were 'free' or odal farmers (ibid., 171-84), which may have ramifications for our understanding of access to assembly in this period. Given the distribution of one dun and *cille* to a *tír unga* (see Section 6.6), it reveals that acts of assembly must have, occasionally at least, been targeted towards the local populace. If the conjectural figures seen in Section 3.13 are in any way correct, it could have meant that two to four hundred people could have been affected by the outcomes of the assemblies. Where they are situated on islands, surrounded by water, access must have been limited to a very small, high-status group, the rest of the populace able to watch the proceedings from afar, perhaps even hear them, but not participate unless specifically summoned, for instance to answer for their role in a judicial case. The presence of a select group meeting at some sites is demonstrated in descriptions of assembly at both Finlaggan (Munro 1961, 102-05) and Tynwald, in Man (Broderick 2003, 60-61). The latter is clearly associated with fairs and horse racing games,

attended by the larger populace (ibid.). The association of crannogs with churches on them and fairs is apparent in a later medieval document regarding the shift in location of fairs around Loch Tay, when the connection was becoming less important:

*the margat was haldin and begwn at the Kenmore at the end of Lochthay  
and ther was na margat nor fayr haldin at Inchadin quhar it was wynt tilbe  
haldin* (Innes 1855, 140).

Black (1999, 1-19) has explored the connections between fairs and the church throughout the Middle Ages across Scotland, and it is clear that outside the Central Belt the fencing off of fairs often involved locating fairs upon islands. It is possible that this reflects a connection with assembly in its more political guise. Additionally, in his 1584 treatise *On Ireland's Past*, Stanihurst noted that feasting took place after Irish assemblies in the sixteenth century (Lennon 1981, 150), and it is clear from John Derrick's woodcuts (1581: Fig. 81) that these often took place outside in the open-air (although the text accompanying the image states that the feast took place "when into their fenced holdes, the knaues are entered in").

#### **7.14 The Association of *Cilles*, Duns, Islands etc. in South Uist**

In addition to Cille Donnain a significant number of South Uist's church sites are associated with duns, and islands, and presumably assembly sites. Cille Bhanain may be situated on or next to an island dun on Loch Cille Bhanain, but this is directly adjacent to Loch an Duin Mhoir (Fig. 82), which has two conspicuously large crannogs and a natural island, all with sub-rectilinear structures built upon them (Fig. 83). One crannog has a multi-cellular building upon it, that only takes up a very small portion of the island, while the other is surmounted by a large broch surrounded by a plethora of small sub-rectangular structures filling up the whole surface of the crannog. The natural island contains a small sub-rectangular structure, although it may be entirely separate from the dwellings on the crannogs.



Hoghmor is only just out of sight of Caisteal Bheagram in Loch an Eilean, which prior to drainage contained another island that appears to have been built up by the construction of a revetment wall. Caisteal Bheagram may be a much later dun, however, and Hoghmor may have been connected to Dun Raouill, which may have been contemporary with its earlier use (Fig. 84). The intervening space, nearly a mile and a half, mostly consists of a ridge of high ground, but the land nearest the dun is connected to two intermediate islands by a series of causeways that point directly out to the dun on the loch. The last leg of the journey would have been by boat. Although no tradition is known associating Hoghmor to political or communal assembly, the place-name is strongly indicative of one. Modern road signs translate the Gaelic township name as *tobha mor*, ‘big sandbank’, this presumably also manifests itself in the place-name of the neighbouring township Tobha Beag, ‘little sandbank’. These names relate to the large sandbank thrown up by an estuary which separates the two townships, but it is clear from early charters that the parish named after the church in Tobha Mor, was called Sgire Hagh (Skerehowg in 1495, Skeryhof in 1498, Skerihof in 1531, Skirhuge in 1610 and Skerich in 1541: RMS: II, 247, 484: III, 247: VII, 342: ALHT: VIII, 7), being a combination of two elements: *sgire* meaning parish and ‘hagh’. In this context the ‘hagh’ element is unlikely to derive from *tobha*, no other church is known by a topographic description, in nearly all cases they are named through their dedications. The presence of two churches with different dedications may explain such a disparity at Hoghmor. Instead, it is much more probable that it derives from the Norse *haug/hög*, literally meaning ‘mound’, but in Scandinavia is predominantly associated with assembly mounds, which were often prehistoric burial mounds with later churches built on or near them (Brink 2003, 64-66). Traditional associations of the founding of Hoghmor with the burial of a *Lochlannich* princess (Campbell 1997a, 77) may account for the introduction of the *haug/hög* element into this Hebridean place-name. However, by the time of the Viking Age in the Hebrides *haug/hög* was an incredibly important part of Norse assembly phraseology (Brink 2003, 64-66), and its use must surely denote Hoghmor’s significance as an important assembly site, with ecclesiastical associations, at an early Viking Age, date. *Hogh* also appears in place-names associated in one locality in each North Uist, Coll and Tiree (also possibly Barra: Borgström 1936, 231). Little can be said of the examples from

Coll and Tìree, the latter is now associated with a farmhouse equidistant from two *cille* sites (Beveridge 1903, 121-22), whilst the former may be vaguely associated with a hill full of duns (one named An Caisteal), a prehistoric burial cairn and a rocking-stone (ibid., 11-13; RCAHMS 1980, 52-53; CANMORE). The cairn may allow an interpretation that associates the *hogh* place-name with a burial, rather than an assembly site. In contrast, the North Uist *hogh*-site (represented in the adjacent place-names of Hogh and Hogh Gearraidh) can more readily be associated with both a *cille* site and an *oda*: horse fairs often associated with assembly. Nearby is another *caisteal* place-name (Beveridge 1911, 292-94, 326) which may be no more than a coincidence in reference to Coll, but there may be a more important inference, which is lost at present.

There is an alternative possible derivation to the place-name, however. The surviving references to the complex and the parish can be broken down into three groups:

- i) those that refer to the parish and appear to follow the Sgìre Hogh derivation discussed above: Skerehowg in 1495, Skirhuge in 1610 and Skerich in 1541 (RMS: II, 484; VII, 342; ALHT: VIII, 7);
- ii) those that refer to the church itself: Hogmór (in a reference to 1574 in the seventeenth-century RBC, 170) and Howmoir in 1561 (CdRA, 3);
- iii) and three others that also refer to the parish: Skeryhof in 1498, Skerihof in 1531 and the parish of Howf in 1547 (RMS: II, 247; III, 247; Munro 1961, 76)

In this last group Sgìre Hogh does not end in Hogh, but 'hof'. There is a possibility that this may derive from Old Norse *hof*, meaning temple (Cleasby *et al.* 1957, 277-78). It is perhaps too anachronistic a term to refer to a Hebridean Christian church, but not impossible, and the term is usually used in connotation with a pagan temple. A previously undiscovered earlier pagan temple at the site is not impossible. However, Simon Taylor (pers. comm.), notes that the 'F' end-sound is a product of documents referring to Gaelic place-names being complied within a Scots speaking environment, where the replacement of 'G' or 'CH/GH'

with an ‘F’ is a common occurrence. Therefore, he states that the *hogh* prefix to the Hoghmor place-name almost certainly derives from the Old Norse *haug*.

Cille Mhicheil is also situated next to a series of heavily drained lochs, but there are two crannogs with probable medieval settlement upon them in the vicinity. The site was also the focus for *oda* (see below) in the nineteenth century (Carmichael 1928-71: 3, 145). There are no demonstrable medieval occupied duns near Cille Pheadair, but the church itself sits on a crannog (see Section 6.3). If the chapel was re-built there in the sixteenth century it may account for why it was built in this particular location. However, there is also another crannog in the loch - Dun na Creamh - which was used as a garden in the nineteenth century (Fig. 42).

There are no directly identifiable relationships between the churches at Cille Amhlaidh and Ard Choinnich and duns and assembly sites. Although a number of duns are scattered across the north end of the island with associated late settlement none are in the immediate vicinity of the church, and the duns nearer the churches have been largely obscured by nineteenth or twentieth-century structures. Cille Bhrighde also has no clearly visible secular power base in the near vicinity, although there may have been one prior to the construction of Baghasdal House in the late eighteenth century. Cladh Hallan has two somewhat tentative relationships with duns, one is a crannog with later settlement on in Loch an Duin, to its the north east, the other is Dun Ruaidh. No trace of Dun Ruaidh is evident other than the place-name, leading Parker Pearson to question its existence (forthcoming a). It may be that the Aisgernis Games and animal fair, which were in existence by the late nineteenth century are a relict of the *oda* horse-fairs associated with assembly, but there is little evidence to confirm it pre-dated the 1800s, the last in North Uist taking place as late as 1902 (MacRury 1950, 17).

It is possible that Cille Coinneach was connected to Weaver’s Castle across Loch Baghasdal. A similar relationship has already been suggested between Caisteal and Teampull Bhuirgh in Benbecula, which may have been separated by a sea loch, now filled in with machair. This island’s other parish church Teampull Challuim Chille sits on a crannog and is less than half



a mile from Dun Buidhe in Loch Dun Mhurchaidh. This is a massive dun, covered in sub-rectangular buildings, possibly linked by place-name to pre-Clann Ruairidh lords of Uist. It is connected to the mainland by a long causeway that makes use of a large intervening island. Although there is settlement upon this intermediate island it is evidently nineteenth century in date (Fig. 85).

At Cille Donnain the connection of the assembly place to the island has to be tentative, especially as there is also a standing stone nearby. These are often recorded as meeting places in traditional histories and occasionally appear in documentation (see Fraser-Mackintosh 1866, 1; Macbain 1890, 154; Christison 1891, 213; Simpson 1949, 81; Sharkey 1986, 124; Lawson 2002, viii). The carvings on Sueno's stone may even portray a royal inauguration that may have taken place nearby (Sellar 1993). Other standing stones are located near Cille Mhicheil and Cille Bhrighde, and this may also account for the tradition associated with the stone, thought to be a cross at Aisgernis, near Cladh Hallan. What may be the connecting factor here, however, is the relationship of these assembly sites with the *cilles*. The causeway at Law Ting Holm led directly to the parish church (Crawford 1987, 206) and the *Orkneyinga Saga* ties the Earls' assemblies with the farmers to the church at Kirkwall (Palsson & Edwards 1978, 139-42). In Man the Tynwald assembly was closely inter-linked with the church. The local name for the site is Cronk Keeill Eoin, the knoll of St John's Church, the church is sited immediately next to the mound and the church was visited prior to assembly. When the assembly was held away from the Tynwald mound, the connection with church is evident, being convened at the Hill of Reneurling, Cronk Urley, Kirk Michael in 1422 and Keeill Abban in 1429. Even when it was held within the walls of Castle Rushen in 1422 it was specifically stated that it was "in Vigill of our Lady St Mary" (Broderick 2003, 64-65, 68, 86). Brink (2003, 69) has argued that in Scandinavia the church gradually and deliberately assimilated elements of assembly affairs, and it seems probable that the church would conduct a similar strategy elsewhere, if only throughout the Norse world.

In 1996 Parker Pearson suggested that the origin of South Uist's township system lay in the Iron Age, it is an idea he has subsequently developed (Parker Pearson & Sharpes 1999, 363-64; Parker Pearson forthcoming a). His reasoning is partly based on the fact that nearly all the proto-townships (those that are unlikely to be medieval or later splitting from the original pattern) have settlement mounds that have produced evidence for Iron Age through to Viking Age, and Norse period occupation (Parker Pearson forthcoming a). However, continuity from the Iron Age through the Viking Age is a contentious issue, and although it cannot be proved with any certainty, it is equally possible that Viking Age settlers chose to occupy abandoned Iron Age sites (see Section 5.2). In addition to the settlement evidence, there appears to be some correspondence of boundaries and brochs: of seventeen, eight are very closely related to the 1805 township boundaries. Seven others are located upon the edges of *gearraidh* townships, created in the Norse period (Parker Pearson & Sharpes 1999b, 363). Within Parker Pearson's theory about prehistoric origins the latter seven are clearly differentiated from those located on prehistoric proto-township boundaries in that they are central to their proto-townships. Ó Riain (1972) has illustrated the importance of boundaries in the siting and function of Iron Age and early historic assembly sites and fortifications. If this is taken into consideration there is no definitive reason to assume that the relationship between brochs and boundaries is not a Norse period imposition, especially if there was a newly established correspondence of assembly and duns sometime during Norse period in South Uist. This may also account for the boundary association of duns on the *gearriadh* township boundaries, signifying that the duns were deliberately utilised to demarcate boundaries between farms/*tír unga* in the Norse period. This suggestion can only be a tentative alternative to Parker Pearson's model until the transition from the 'Pictish' period to the Viking Age can be better understood. Evidence from the shores of Loch Awe may support Parker Pearson, as the evidence comes from an area where there does not appear to have been a huge realignment of the settlement pattern over the medieval period. Here, crannog location parallels those of South Uist in that most occur upon township boundaries, and at least one was associated with a baron court (Morrison 1985, 79).

Evidence from Bald's map may also note a further assembly site upon the southern boundary of the Baile Garbhaidh *tír unga*. At the north end of Loch BÍ, the southernmost of a group of small islands was named 'Cheasamul' (Fig. 86). This resembles the name of Kisimul Castle in Barra, the meaning of which has been the subject of much speculation, one suggestion was that it derived from *cíos a mul* – tax mound (MacNeil 1923, 183-4). Although this has been rejected regarding the castle (Anke-Beate Stahl pers. comm.) it is possible that this proposed derivation may be relatively accurate for the South Uist example. *Cíos* may be related to tax or tribute, however, it usually forms a prefix to a phrase, such as *cíos-chain* - tribute, or *cíos mhor* – exacting tribute. On the other hand whilst *mul* can mean a conical mound, it can also refer to a bank of sand, which seems likely given its location at the edge of the machair (Dwelly 1994, 197, 680). If this place-name connection to taxation, and therefore assembly, is accepted, it is interesting that Bald marked a 'duine' nearby, although there is no present sign of any dun in the vicinity.

Two occurrences of place-names incorporating the Old Norse term for assembly, *thingr*, have been recovered, one in Lewis and the other in Skye. That in Lewis, Tiongalairidh, may mean 'milking place of the assembly site', but apart from a 'Cnoc an Tiongalairidh' (Cox 2002, 67, 220, 252) there are no physical features which can be associated with assembly practice. Nor are there any churches or duns that can be related to it, which may suggest that this may be an exception to the pattern suggested above. The example from Skye suggests that an early cartographic representation of Hinnisdale named it as Tinwhill. Despite some problems in interpreting the two place-names as a single entity, Gordon (1963, 88-91) suggested that they were the same term, deriving from Old Norse *thingvellir*, meaning assembly ground. However, it may be that the two terms result from two distinct geographical origins. Just over 1.5km from where the Hinnisdale River enters the sea is Ard nan Eireachd, literally Gaelic for Point of the Assembly. This name may then indicate where the Tinwhill was located. Although no church site has so far been recovered in the vicinity, there is a potential island assembly mound and an island dun that was occupied in the medieval period. A large cairn, 15m in diameter and 0.9m high, is sited upon a tidal island just off the coast of this point (Miket *et al.* 1990, 25). Not far away is Dun Maraig, also on a



tidal island, which has two later rectilinear buildings inserted into it (RCAHMS 1928, 201). These island sites and the associated ‘thing’ place-name may suggest that these formed a central administrative position within this area of Skye in the Norse period. The later erection of Caisteal Uisdean nearby may have been a later attempt to claim some authority from these two sites (see Section 10.5).

### 7.15 Assembly Places

The direct link of chiefs with some duns/crannogs becomes evident in later documentation. In Lochaber in the fifteenth century Alan Cameron, known as Ailean nan Creach, ‘Alan of the Forays’, was said to have lived in a hut in middle of the Corpach Moss and on Tree Island in Loch Eil (MacCulloch 1939, 114). Tree Island appears to be a marine crannog and in 1335 it was included in a grant to John of Ochtery, bailie of Lochaber to the Lords of the Isles (ibid., 159-60), suggesting not only an earlier date of occupation, but also that it was regarded as being of enough significance to be worthy of specific mention. The link of the island to the post of bailie is, however, revealing. A similar association of an island (in this case natural) with a recognised ‘judicial’ post, *seneschal*, or steward, was noted in a 1225 charter regarding Clairinch in Loch Lomond. The charter was issued upon the island, perhaps signifying the process of assembly in action. It is also worth noting that nearby are the associated remains of the other associated elements of this monument collective: Inchallioch monastery and an Early Christian site near the Cashel Point Dun (Frend 1983).

Wallace recorded a dun near Dornie, in Lochaber, and some traditions associated with it, confirming the link of duns with assembly sites:

*At the back of Dr Mathieson’s garden there is a rising ground called the Dunan, on which can still be seen the site and some of the foundation stones of the wall. In the year 1800 part of the walls stood 10 or 12 feet high.*

*Many relics have been found in this ruin; among others, there were two stone ladles, a stone image, a black seal ... Captain Matheson says that in some old records it is stated that a Parliament was held here. In all probability these were 'local parliaments,' or baron's courts, held here, as elsewhere (1895, 115).*

In Gairloch (Fig. 68), Eilean Gruidh, the crannog seat for the MacBeaths and MacLeods in Loch Maree (noted above) is found in the same loch as Isle Maree, a natural island with an early church site upon it, and which remained the focus for religious devotion into the seventeenth century. Near to Dun na Gairloch is another medieval church site (Reeves 1860, 259-88; Dixon 1886, 5, 10, 61, 69-71), as well as a site named the 'Island of Justice', or 'Council Island'. A fanciful tradition placed a ring of trees upon it, where the chief and four of his clansmen, serving as a jury, sat to administer justice. Away from the loch, within half a mile from the island was located Cnoc a Croiche, 'gallows hill', (Dixon 1886, 116), introducing two further elements into the tripartite collective of island, church and assembly sites. The place of the administration of justice, which is probably one and the same as the assembly site, and of the ultimate conclusion of that justice. Although no gallows have been recovered upon islands in Scotland it may be worthy of note that an interpretation of gallows has been made of an otherwise unidentifiable structure on one of the best known images of crannogs from Bartlett's maps of Tudor period Ulster (Hayes-McCoy 1964, 8-10: Fig. 87). In 1883 the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club recorded the memories of old men who suggested that until 1845 there had been a gallows upon a crannog adjacent to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century island dwelling of the MacIntoshes/Clann an Tòiseach in Loch Moy, Inverness-shire (1883, 109). The fact that this had been missed by two accounts of the island at the end of the 1700s, may suggest that this was a later fantasy. Both these writers, who paraphrase each other almost verbatim, do, however, record that there was a perceived connection of this island with the administration of justice: the accused was forced to stand upon the island prior to the delivery of a verdict, which was delivered within twenty-four hours. This tradition notes that at low water the criminal would have had to stand with his feet covered in water, but when the water was high they would have been submerged up

to their waist. These writers would almost certainly have noted the presence of a gallows here if it had been present, one even mentions a gallows at the south end of the loch (Grant & Leslie 1798, 208-08; Mackintosh 1892, 8-10: the latter was published a century after it was written). Nevertheless, the correlation of a gallows, administration of justice and islands does appear to have been recognised. A similar association of crannog, assembly mound and execution site was noted in Morvern, near to Ardtornish castle, by Blundell (1913, 290).

Although no judicial sites have been identified in South Uist several mounds associated with justice are known from North Uist, such as the Hill of Appeals, Cnoc an Uma, in Griminis, and the Council Hillocks, Cnoc an Comhairle, at Airigh Mhic Ruairidh, Claddach Iolaraigh, Cairinis and Boreray (Ferguson & Macdonald 1984, 9, 216-19). A further example may have been located at the church at Cille Pheadair, as a tradition regarding a boundary dispute between the Clann Ruairidh and the Siol Ghoraidh states that it was settled by the priest there. The fact that this incident was remembered as the 'Shouting Court' reveals the official nature of the proceedings (ibid., 9). The sites at Griminis and Airigh Mhic Ruairidh have not been located, but it is tempting to place them in the vicinity of the duns in both areas, and those at Cairinis and Boreray near the churches there. A mound named Cnoc na Croise is situated adjacent to Cairinis. Whereas it seems likely that it could be associated with a now missing, Early Medieval Christian cross (Beveridge 1911, 288; Macdonald 1972, 18), the term *croich* was also used to describe both crosses and the form of gallows used in the Middle Ages in Argyll (Campbell 1995, 3) and there may be some confusion. Campbell noted thirty-one judicial and execution sites in Argyll, nearly all close to a church, castle or dun apparently under the proprietorship of local minor kindreds (ibid.). Further research may reveal the precise nature of the physical relationship between these elements. There are also numerous appearances of hills, or islands 'of evil council' in clan tales, the name is usually associated with an act of advice that leads to treachery or death. The common occurrence of this story suggests it is might be a motif, being used by later tradition bearers to explain place-names actually related to assembly places. One well known example relates to an Eilean na Mi-Chomhairle connected by a causeway to Dun an Sticir, in North Uist (Beveridge 1911, 139). Amongst the names recorded for the Eadarloch crannog was Eilean



na Comhairle (Ritchie 1942, 18), a place-name that is indicative of assembly practices (Barrow 1981).

A more direct connection of these forms of site is visible in Hutchison's work around the Lake of Menteith, which contained islands bearing a church, a hall, occupied since at least the mid-1400s, and 'dog island' (1899, 58). Locations on the land around the loch served as a stable, a mill and a gallows hill, and a house for the chief's piper, all "in full view of Inchtalla" (ibid., 45). Also nearby was Tom a'Mhoid, moot hill, not far from the south end of the loch (ibid., 58). The fact that these features may not have the same genesis in time, with the buildings being constructed from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, reveals a process of adoption and incorporation of landownership and judicial rights into various power structures throughout the Middle Ages. Firstly, an open form of communal mediation, possibly mediated over by secular powers, was appropriated by the church, then at a later date many of the processes were brought back into the secular fold being formalised and enclosed within buildings upon or near to the assembly sites (to be discussed in Section 10.5).

There are some exceptions to this association of assembly/judicial sites with churches and duns in the Western Isles, however. In the centre of Barra, at the top of the central hill is a large notch, known amongst other things as the Pass of the Mouth. In the centre of this notch is a large flat stone with a hollow cup in the centre (Fig. 88), said by the twentieth-century storyteller, Nan MacKinnon, to have been formed when the Devil first fell to the earth (cited Sharkey 1986, 21). An alternative tradition names it as the Stone of Judgement. It is described as being "wide enough to hold a man and a pony without either touching the common earth, it was here that MacNeil of Barra heard the complaints of his clanfolk once a year and dispensed justice" (Archie MacDonald, cited ibid., 21). Horseracing, usually associated with the Irish Meeting Sites, is also held to have taken place nearby, in the Borge Valley (Brannigan pers. comm.). The idea of the "court stane" was not uncommon in Lowland Scotland, where justice was exercised outside, but within the vicinity of tower-houses (Samson 1998, 141), however, the Barra example was far from any of the

fortifications in the island. There are certainly other examples of ‘stones of judgement’ in Beàrnaraigh and elsewhere in the Hebrides, although these are often associated with cruel ways of executing wrong-doers rather than judicial hearings.

In Beàrnaraigh there is a boulder of undressed gneiss, which resembles a chair (Fig. 89), although a highly uncomfortable one, and it is said to have been where the MacLeod sat to commune with his subjects (Sharkey 1986, 124). This is sited in the centre of a machair plain, on a low knoll, but not upon its summit. There are no surviving church sites adjacent to it, although one mentioned by Martin Martin (1994, 122), can no longer be identified. Bald’s map of Harris (1804: Fig. 90) shows that the west coast was heavily covered in wind blown sand, but also that the area of settlement was much closer to the machair prior to the shift to the east coast. Two, now destroyed, duns and another on a stack at the south end of the island (RCAHMS 1928, 39, 41) would have been visible from it. The chair is close to a souterrain (ibid., 45), which are often associated with duns and wheelhouses, possibly indicating another lost dun in the immediate vicinity. Alternatively the souterrain may suggest an otherworldly legitimising power behind the seat, as prehistoric settlement mounds are often associated with the fairy-folk and/or entrances to the otherworld. The seat was noted by Wedderspoon (1912, 102-03), who did not record the MacLeod tradition, although he did suggest it was connected to the sacrifice of the king. He also tied it into an “air line” between a stone circle and monolith (ibid., 94), perhaps revealing its incorporation into a prehistoric ritual landscape that was tapped into in the Middle Ages to provide further legitimisation to the MacLeod’s judgement. Given the stone’s natural origin and its sloping seat, it is perhaps an unlikely candidate for a lordly chair, nevertheless, the temptation to ascribe this as a parallel site to the stone chairs of Ireland is hard to resist (see Fitzpatrick 2001; 2003). It has to be asked whether a local with knowledge of Gaelic Ireland could also resist such temptation, especially if Beàrnaraigh was his home. One possible Bernerach was Norman MacLeod, who created himself a bastion of Gaelic culture there at the end of the seventeenth century. An alternative (or additional) assembly site may have been located at St Anslem’s chapel, on the other side of the Beàrnaraigh hills from the chair. The chapel was ploughed out by the mid-nineteenth century, but there were numerous bones evident in

the plough soil indicating a burial ground. Also there was an early Christian carved stone, which tradition said had been a pilgrimage site, the numerous offerings including coins, pointing to a medieval date (Carmichael 1870, 281; Fisher 2001, 112-13). "Close by the side of the obelisk there stood one of those old circular duns so common in the Hebrides" (Carmichael 1870, 282), tradition recorded inter-mural galleries indicating that this was probably not the chapel (*ibid.*), but the last part of the collective of sites around medieval assembly sites.

Another tradition regarding a seat was associated with a mound in Colonsay (Fig. 91), named Cnoc an Ardrigh, directly beside a dun and a *cille* site, Dun Eibhinn and Cille Bhrighe (Grieve 1923: 1, 194; 2, 294). The inclusion of the term 'Ardrigh', 'high king', reveals either a direct link with inauguration or judicial dispensation of the local chiefs, or a widespread knowledge of the Irish tradition in the Hebrides in later periods. The medieval lords of Colonsay, the MacDuffies, were directly linked to the dun, but as record keepers and justiciaries to the Lords of the Isles (*ibid.*: 1, 285), tradition also noted that they held court at Cnoc-an-Eadraiginn. The place-name was translated by Grieve as 'knoll of the place for interposing to separate combatants', although he did associate it with a Cnoc-na-eiric, beside Duntulm, in Skye, which was named after the fines or compensation levied at the courts held there (*ibid.*: 2, 294-95; also named Cnoc a' Mhoid: RCAHMS 1928, 168). Cnoc-an-Eadraiginn, surmounted by a standing stone and structures was located beside Dun Colla, which oral history linked to the Irish ancestor of the Clann Domhnaill of the Isles (Grieve 1923: 2, 249-50).

These seats are clearly reminiscent of inauguration rituals in Early Medieval Ireland, which also took place on mounds. Some of these continued to have an importance into the later Middle Ages, although the connections may have been re-invented (see Fitzpatrick 2001, 2003). Similar sites were almost certainly an element of Scottish landscapes, and in addition to this were footprint stones, one example of which was supposedly located at Finlaggan, but excavation has failed to find any evidence for it (Caldwell 2003, 65-67). Although no surviving evidence has been uncovered for connections between inauguration and any



specific mounds or seats in the Late Medieval Hebrides Martin Martin implied they were fairly widely incorporated into the rituals he described:

*A heap of stones was erected in form of a pyramid, on the top of which the young chieftain was placed, his friends and followers standing in a circle round about him, his elevation signifying his authority over them, and their standing below their subjection to him. One of his principal friends delivered into his hands the sword worn by his father, and there was a white rod delivered to him likewise at the same time.*

*Immediately after, the chief Druid (or orator) stood close to the pyramid, and pronounced a rhetorical panegyric, setting forth the ancient pedigree, valour and liberality of the family as incentives to the young chieftain, and fit for his imitation (1994, 166).*

There are stronger references to associations with inauguration and churches and duns. Roghadal, in Harris, perhaps best illustrates this tripartite association: it is the location for St Clement's church, the finest piece of church architecture in the Western Isles, and a dun recorded to be the abode of the chief of the Clann Leoid when in Harris (Grant 1959, 189). The *Banatyne MS* states Roghadal was not only the assembly place of the clan, together with a gallows, but also the inauguration place of the chiefs, where the ceremony involved the handing on of a sword and the relaying of a panegyric (nd., 36). Roghadal's dedication may also place it at the heart of an administrative district, revealed in the place-name Harris, deriving from the Norse name for such a division: *herad* (Crawford 1999, 117). The *Red Book of Clanranald* records one inauguration of the Lord of the Isles:

*Ranald ... was High Steward over the Isles at the time of his father's death ... On the death of his father he called a meeting of the nobles of the Isles and of his brethren at one place, and he gave the sceptre to his brother at*

*Cill Donan in Eigg, and he was nominated Macdonald and Donald of Isla, contrary to the opinion of the men of the Isles (RBC, 161).*

In light of the evidence presented above the location at a church is important, but so is the location in Eigg, which is suggested in Section 4.3 to have been an administrative unit along with the Uists, and this incident perhaps places Eigg at its centre.

A further Hebridean link of churches and inauguration is noted in the transference of the chiefship of the MacDuffies in Colonsay and Oronsay through the symbol of a willow rod or staff kept in their burial chapel at Oronsay Priory (Grieve 1923: 1, 286-87; also Martin 1994, 278).

Around Loch Tay numerous antiquarians noted assembly places, which they termed mote, moat, or moot-hills. At the end of a valley near the junction of the rivers Tay and Lyon Dewar noted “three apparently artificial mounds of earth, of a flatish conical shape, situated within a short distance of one another” (1845, 767). These were presumably amongst those recorded by Stewart (1928, 235-37) who stated that “motehills and their adjoining hanging knolls were to be seen quite near one another all over the country” (ibid., 235). One was within half a mile from the church of Fortingall, in the hamlet of Tom-na-croich, which he interpreted as the hanging knoll of the MacNaughton ‘Toisich’. Another was noted at Carnban, a fairy knoll behind a medieval fort, which was used by MacNaughtons and MacNabs in fifteenth century. At Ballindoch there were two artificial knolls, one a gallows, the other a ‘motehill’. Other sites included natural sites like the Craigianie Rock, or like ‘Roro Toiseachd’ at Belmeanach, were thought of as fairy knolls where un-baptised children were also buried, perhaps signifying that there were outside everyday use. In addition to the relation of meeting sites and gallows, Stewart noted their proximity to medieval strongholds. He boasted that Tom na Cuairteig, situated above a fort, was “according to the best authorities ... far more imposing than the famous Tynvald in the Isle of Man” (ibid, 236). It is claimed it was used by John of Lorn for both judicial purposes and a location for the gathering of his armies (ibid.). At Killin, near the church were Tom nan Aingeil and Tom na

Croiche, “where, from time to time, Courts of Bailiary ... were held on delinquents of this end of Loch Tay” (Christie 1892, 62). Gillies (1938, 260) claimed the first of these was artificial and that soil from it was thought to have magical properties, being used for witchcraft. Another Tom na croiche, with a pit and gallows was located near the later Campbell castle at Finlarig (Christie 1892, 6), although it had been the site of a church and MacNab stronghold for a long time previously. The place-name of Am Baillidh, ‘the bailie’, of a field with a mound in it at Ardtalnaog, Glendochart (Christie 1892, 83), perhaps suggests the link to assembly sites is more than just later antiquarian wishful thinking.

### 7.16 The Functions of Assemblies

Although specific evidence relating to South Uist is sparse, it is highly evident that the geographic link of duns, churches and assemblies, including execution sites, was replicated across the Scottish *gàidhealtacht*, and that some form of supernatural or genealogical legitimisation was exploited to verify the authority of the decisions made there.

The nineteenth century oral traditions of North Uist, which were transcribed by Fergusson and Macdonald (1984, 216-19) regarding assemblies taking place at ‘council’ sites in North Uist reveal that they could be used to address a wide range of issues. Everything from the paying of rents, the local management of agricultural practice, settlement of boundary disputes to the recognition of new landlords. Other processes such as execution, gift giving, feasting and the redistribution of goods may be incorporated into this list. When Hugh MacDonald acquired North Uist in the fifteenth century, a progression was made around the island and assemblies were convened at each site so the populace could acknowledge the new lord (*ibid.*, 215-17). If the oral tradition can be accepted as evidence of past practice at these sites, it reveals that the sites in North Uist can be seen as fitting into the phenomenon of assembly sites throughout Europe. They functioned at different levels at different times, perhaps even being used by different groups of society when differing issues were addressed (Reuter 2001; Barnwell 2003). As well as the influence of the church there is another common theme visible through the traditions associated with these activities, that of the



dominance of the social hierarchy. The figure of the chief, bailie, *breitheamh*, administrator appears in the majority of these incidents, a feature that remained common into the nineteenth century.

Often the bailie appears in charters to be a secular figure, closely related to the chief, but the proximity of these sites to churches suggest that the church controlled or were at least heavily involved in the judicial processes, however, this secular/ecclesiastical distinction may often have been blurred. By the early sixteenth century the Clann Biocair demonstrated their proprietorship over North Uist through occupation of duns (see Section 7.9), but a fuller understanding of the routes of their power reveals a greater degree of complexity than previously acknowledged. As their name implies, genealogically the Clann Biocair/MacVicars were believed to be descended from a priest who came from the collegiate church and foremost Caimbeul burial place, of Kilmun, in Cowal, to serve at the church at Cairinis (Macdonald 1972, 6). However, in later days they are said to have become the ‘stearan’, vice administrator, for Kings of the Isles, at Creag Asduinn, with further rights over church dues (Ferguson & Macdonald 1984, 136). Both these instances of oral tradition may be circumspect, but if the connection with Kilmun is correct then they must have come to Uist after its foundation in 1441 (Cowan & Easson 1976, 181), although other traditions link them with Inchaffray, founded in 1200 (Fergusson & Macdonald 1984, 215), which could suggest an earlier date to their arrival. Whilst no direct link of these traditions with the duns can be made, they do reveal the possibility that as churchmen the family had managed to gain control over the modes of judicial administration, as well as secular landholding.

Carmichael (1916, 43-44) noted the community decision-making processes utilised within townships in the late nineteenth century. Meetings were often instigated and supervised by the *Maor gruinn*d, ‘ground officer’. However, more often than not this position was filled by the factor’s appointment, as was the constable, who appears to have been more involved in these meetings. Occasionally, though, the constable was elected by the township, at a *mòd* supervised by the *Maor*. These community decision meetings were called *nabachd*, or

‘neighbourliness’, and held at the *Cnoc na Comhairle*, Council hill. Examples of these in St Kilda were much publicised, and ridiculed by the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century press which coined the term ‘St Kilda Parliament’. Women’s ‘parliaments’, *luadh*, are also recorded, where the women of an area gathered together to discuss public issues (Campbell & Collinson 1969-81: II, 233). This reveals that the process of community decision making was not always entirely enforced from the landowner downwards. In fact, by the twentieth century, such positions outwith the community, and elected ‘grazings officers’, provided a figurehead for dealing with external bodies, but internal decisions were made in a relatively egalitarian setting, consensus being gained by the deliberate avoidance of leadership (Parman 1990, 94-5). However, these examples emanate from a time when the larger decisions were made far away from the farming communities, and other processes such as justice, social bonding and reciprocity, had died out or become negotiated through other media. It seems probable that some of these topics had been appropriated in the later medieval period by the lords, who took them out of the open into their halls. This not only asserted the dominance of the lords in the decision making process but also controls access to the reciprocal social gatherings that bound the clan together. Additionally, the local meetings of nineteenth-century crofters reveals the continuation of some antiquated forms of assembly. It is not impossible that there could have been a hierarchy of meeting places. The big decisions, such as those relating to political, judicial, boundary and non-local issues, being made within the boundary of the *tír unga*, at those sites near duns and churches, and more local issues being dealt with at sites within the township. Spenser’s 1596 descriptions of assembly Irish practices (which he compared to English assemblies at bawns, moot-hills and hillforts) convey the nature of what might have been discussed at some assemblies:

*There is a great use amongst the Irish to make great Assemblies together upon a rath or hill, there to parley ... about matters and wrongs between township and township or one private person and another ... to them do commonly resort all the scum of the people, where they may meet and confer of what they list, which else they could not do without suspicion or*

*knowledge of others ... the Irish never come to those raths but armed* (1890, 116-17).

The topics for discussion were slightly elaborated upon by Campion in his 1571 *Historie of Ireland*:

*These consider of wrongs offered and received among their neighbours, be it murder, or felony, or trespasse, all is redeemed by composition (except the Grudge of parties seeke revenge) ... The Breighoon (so they call this kind of Lawyer) sitteth down on a banke, the Lords and Gentlemen at variance round about him, and then they proceed* (1809, 26).

For evidence that a process where the first list was severed from the latter one might compare the self-effacing, if not egalitarian, decision making process at nineteenth-century crofters' meetings described by Parman (1990, 94-5) and Duncan (1995, 26) with the smaller scale disputes (relative to kings, wars and taxes) dealt with at the Althing in the Icelandic sagas, where powerful chiefs and lawyers are portrayed as bullying, machiavellian manipulators of the legal process to achieve their desired end in everything from compensation for murder, through divorce to horse-dealing (e.g.: *Hrafnkel's Saga* and *Laxdaela Saga*: Palsson 1971, 43-59; Magnusson & Palsson 1969, 126, 132).

## **7.17 Summary**

There is a weight of evidence that brochs and duns were an integral part of medieval landscapes and lordship across Scotland's western seaboard, and South Uist was almost certainly no exception. Unfortunately, the data set for these conclusions is based on a very limited corpus of excavated sites, only future field-work, specifically targeted at investigating medieval occupation layers in duns, hillforts and brochs, as well as early chapel and assembly sites can confirm or deny the interpretations presented below. What little evidence there is, suggests that over the twelfth and thirteenth centuries abandoned duns,



crannogs and hillforts were being reoccupied. This can be interpreted as part of the Gaelic Renaissance, the increasingly Gaelicised Norse elite attempting to establish their native credentials and legitimise their position and lordship over the land itself by occupying the symbols of the old, indigenous political landscape. In this view duns are synonymous with ownership over land and the re-use of these seats of power by incoming kin-groups revealing a desire to supplant earlier claimants to a lordship. Many sites developed to become the seat and power base of the chiefs, whereas others may have been used seasonally, as hunting/fishing/shieling seats while lords toured their estates uplifting dues and demonstrating their power. Although progressions had been part of royal practice throughout Britain for centuries (Alcock 2003, 49-50), it is possible that in the western seaboard the chiefly-circuit may have been a later development. Earlier the demesne of a dun may have been similar to that of a chiefdom, made up of the land surrounding a dun, occupation of a dun being linked directly to domination of the surrounding area. However, as lordships became larger and more widespread, they came to incorporate numerous disparate territories, each with a dun at their heart. As lords then had to tour these territories to partake in the display of lordship and the reciprocity that that incorporated, it became necessary to occupy each dun on an occasional basis, when they were in the region. Yet, occupation was a continuation of the older tradition of inhabiting the symbolic centre of that area. Duns tied to the heads of local kin-groups and their overlords may have lain alongside one another in the landscape, or the locals may have served as temporary guardians of the dun in the absence of the chiefs.

In the Norse period several forms of dun reoccupation are evident. Some broch/duns became the focus for structurally independent buildings within the corpus of their walls, others for single roomed buildings that fill the entirety of the central area. Several duns comprising an outer wall containing an area with small huts may also be medieval. One extremely large example of this type, Dun Mhuirchaidh, in Benbecula, appears to have served as the centre of a Uist-based lordship in the twelfth century. In the Uists, no castles or castellated structures appear to date from the Norse period, probably being later developments.

In the Norse period the duns did not incorporate places for social bonding, dispute and intercourse. Instead, they formed a component of a closely related collective of sites: dun, church and assembly site. As a combined entity these sites had a physical relationship with islands and with the boundaries of *tírean unga*. The siting then suggests that they were designed to be both separated from the mundane world and accessible to wide sections of the island's community, bringing them together for their pastoral care and the administration of judicial and political affairs. The placing of duns and churches together may suggest that secular authorities desired supernatural sanction and legitimation for their position.

However, there may have been a tension between ecclesiastical and secular groups vying to control and influence the decision making process that took place at assembly sites. Both possibilities would have resulted in the patronage of church buildings near duns, with both groups attempting to illustrate their importance by constructing monuments that physically dominated assembly sites and may have been directly involved in the rituals surrounding assemblies.

Earlier in the Norse period, when the *tírean unga* were first established over the pattern of independent farmsteads, some influence would have been exerted over smaller farms through the manipulation of social and economic debt. Political, judicial and other decision making processes may have been undertaken collectively at assembly sites. However, the building of duns from the twelfth century onwards at assembly sites reveals a departure from the earlier Norse period system. It suggests that sections of society were beginning to manipulate and consolidate their hold over the rest of the populace. It is likely that this social influence was replicated in increasing economic dominance. These centralising trends were set to escalate in the later Middle Ages as some kingroups managed to further their position and mould feudal lordships from their holdings. As they did so, these processes impacted upon the economy and settlement pattern of South Uist.

## **SECTION 2                    THE LATER MIDDLE AGES: c. 1266 – c. 1600**

### **CHAPTER 8                    INTRODUCTION TO THE LATE MEDIEVAL PERIOD**

#### **8.1            Introduction**

The Treaty of Perth in 1266 did not mark any significant change in Hebridean culture and economy, initially social and economic trends continued to develop along European feudalised norms. Instead, a division in the archaeological record occurs sometime between around 1400 and around 1550 when there is a hiatus in the identifiable material culture. What emerges at the end of the sixteenth century conforms to the settlement patterns seen to exist immediately prior to the Improvement and the Clearances from the late eighteenth century onwards. It is an understanding of the developments and changes between 1400 and 1800 that informs us about Hebridean culture and politics over the Middle Ages.

After the cessation of the Hebrides from Norway to Scotland through to the end of the fourteenth century Hebridean culture continued to maintain a form of hybridised Gaelic culture. Whilst developments in Gaelic Ireland continued to impact upon and influence the Hebrides, there was gradual shift from a focus on Norway and the North Atlantic world, to the Scottish court and more traditional European forms of lordship (see Section 2.12): this can be seen throughout the archaeological record. Alex Woolf (pers. comm.) has suggested that the decline in Norwegian political influence over the fourteenth century may have been furthered by the civil wars that caused the dissolving of the royal court there, and the kingdom's eventual take over by Denmark. This is also perhaps evidenced in the switch of the Manx and Hebridean bishoprics away from the see of Nidaros and the attempted establishment of one centred in the Hebrides. Willson (1903, 243) claims that the last bishop to visit Norway went to the royal inauguration of 1280, but there appears to be no verification of this and the bishops name, Maccus, also appears to be false. However, from mid 1300s the bishops began to be consecrated in Avignon, after which there appears to have been several attempts to establish a separate Hebridean diocese, centred in Skye, Lismore



and/or Iona (see MacQuarrie 1987, 369-70; Barrell 2003, 23-28; Woolf forthcoming). Economic trends set in place over the Norse period continued: core farming settlements continued to expand, cultivation and fishing intensified, and power was increasingly centralised in the hands of a few individual members of the dominant kindreds (see Section 4.3 and Chapters 5 and 7). However, it is in this period when new, large, architectural monuments patronised by the lords and reflecting European ideas about lordship appeared throughout Hebridean landscapes. Churches continued to be built following the latest trends for the spiritual benefit of lord and peasant alike (see Sections 6.7 and 8.3). However, chiefs began constructing castles, the ultimate symbol of medieval lordship, to embellish their social position (Chapter 9). The fourteenth-century landscape in South Uist, in essence, was one that was recognisable throughout north west Europe.

At the end of the fourteenth-century physical evidence for settlement and society in the Hebrides largely cannot be discerned in the archaeological record. When settlement evidence begins to re-emerge, from the mid-sixteenth century onwards, a different pattern is evident. Houses and ceramic styles changed, and economic patterns had decentralised. A number of structural developments appear to have taken place: the form of landholding had shifted from odal, extended farmsteads in enclosed fields, to runrig 'communities' set within an open-field landscape (Chapters 11 and 12). It seems likely that these changes indicate developments in the nature of Hebridean lordship.

Given the paucity of the evidence it is hard to offer a conclusive explanation for these changes: however, it is possible to offer two alternative narratives. The first suggests that the latter model was the natural result of the growth and development of agricultural communities within a firmly established and highly structured settlement pattern (Section 11.10). The other indicates that break in the settlement pattern reflects an increase in the importance of pastoralism (Section 11.9). At the same time, the continuing emphasis on island duns instead of castles additionally served to contrast landscapes of this period with earlier ones that conformed to traditional European models (Chapter 10). Whereas castles

were restricted and monumental, duns were less exclusive and their siting reveals different more local communal and economic (including pastoral) concerns (Section 10.8).

## **8.2 The Gaelic Revival**

Prior to 1400 Hebridean lords had adopted European 'feudal' norms as they tried to fit into Scottish society (evidenced in charters, the use of primogeniture, etc.: see Section 2.12, as well as the patronisation of castles, etc.). After 1400, however, a new social model was adopted as Hebrideans increasingly focussed on Early Irish society. A Gaelic Revival took place in Ireland from the fourteenth century as Gaelic lords re-established political power over areas that had fallen to the Anglo-Normans and rediscovered their Gaelic past (Simms 1987a, 8-12). Over the 1400s and 1500s Hebridean lords had begun to feel segregated from a Scottish court that was denying its own Gaelic past and was deliberately obstructing many Hebridean lords from obtaining charters to their lands in an effort to bring them under control. It is possible that as a result, Hebrideans, with an already hybridised Gaelic culture, were attracted to developments in Ireland. Given the level of integration between Hebridean and Irish society such a process may have been seen as entirely natural. Manifestations of a late adoption of some Early Irish practices may be hinted at in changing social practices, such as an increased use of tanistry from the later fifteenth century onwards (see Section 2.12), the establishment of a militarised aristocracy supported by an unfree peasantry (see Section 8.3) and a possible shift towards pastoralism (Section 10.8). If this pattern of development is to be accepted, it suggests that the open-field landscape of the pre-Clearance Hebrides can only have been adopted at a fairly late date.

## **8.3 Lords and Clansmen at the End of the Middle Ages**

The tomb of Alasdair Crotach in Roghadal (Fig. 92) is perhaps the fullest expression by a Late Medieval Hebridean lord of how much they had adopted European ideology. The tomb recess is carved with depictions of elite activities of fighting and hunting, and displays their association with castles and ties to the church (Steer & Banenrman 1977, 186-87). However,

despite the abundance of evidence for the adoption of the European ‘language’ of feudal forms of landholding amongst the Hebridean elite (also see Geddes 1955, 136; Campbell & Collinson 1969-81: I, 113, 180; III, 47; Aikman 1827, 40-42; Thomson 1830, 93) there is little evidence to indicate whether similar forms of vassalage filtered down to characterise the relationship between lords and their followers. A generalised model of lordship has been adopted by some historians, whereby the medieval lords/chiefs lived in their castles, surrounded by the *fine*: the *aos-dána*, learned classes, and the secular elite. Macinnes (1996, 57) suggests that the main body of the *fine* were split between two distinct groups: the gentry, *duine uaisle*, and the warrior household, *buannachan*, supported by the clan estates as a whole. The estates were managed and farmed by a stratum of society that has received little attention historically and is scarcely visible archaeologically, but was composed of a number of levels of free tenants and tied peasants with varying degrees of wealth and influence. Over the seventeenth century the *duine uaisle* and the *aos-dána* began to gain written confirmation, tacks, for their holdings. However, it is unclear whether the tacksmen of the eighteenth century were a continuation of medieval forms of landholding or were a creation of the changing social and economic developments of the sixteenth century onwards: influenced by commercialised landlordism and the de-militarisation of Highland society (see Cregeen 1969; Gray 1957, 11-31, Dodgshon 1998, 233-37; Macinnes 1996; 1998, 183-85). Macinnes (1994, 372-74; 1996, 57-59; *contra* Stewart 1982, 234-37) has suggested that the structure of society along the western seaboard was much more similar to Gaelic Irish society circa 1600 than elsewhere in the Highlands. This resulted from an overt gearing towards the provision of military endeavours in Ireland as well as cultural connections that carried with it ideas about the way society should be organised. Together, this created a rigidly segregated society with unfree peasants supporting the martial classes and the chiefs who travelled around their estates uplifting food render and hospitality/*cuid oidche* from the ground *in situ*: as evidenced in an late-sixteenth-century description of Uist:

*The Ile of Wist ... the Clan Ranald on thair pairt thair of will raise 300 men  
... Ilk merk land in this Ile payis 20 bolls victuall, by all uther customes,  
maills, and oist silver, quhairof thair is na certane rentall. The customes of*



*this Ile are splendit, and payit at the Landslordis cumming to the Ile to his  
Cudicht* (Skene 1890, 430).

However, this model does not allow for the existence of a social infrastructure to support the *fine*, particularly the *duine uaisle* and the *buannachan*. The large military retinue kept by the lords appear to have been primarily geared for action in Ireland (Hayes-McCoy 1937, 356-57) or on the mainland (see Boardman 1996, 83-88, 104-05). Hayes-McCoy used figures derived from the anonymous account (quoted above) and other documents, which state that the number of men raised accorded to the number of merklands a chief had, to calculate that in 1593 up to one sixth of the population of the Isles could be mustered. Unfortunately, his figures are not quantifiable in terms of accuracy and/or whether women and children were included. In South Uist the number of men raised may have been relevant to the *tírean unga*, rather than the merkland. If the correlation between *tírean unga* and population made in Section 3.13 is in anyway correct the population of South Uist and Benebecula, the Clann Raghnaill half of Uist, was somewhere between 2,400 and 4,800, and, if the number of 300, mentioned in the anonymous account quoted above, were correlated according to the number of *tírean unga* and not connected to actual demographics, then between 6.25% and 12.5% of the population could be expected to fight for the chief. This correspondence of administrative districts and troops may be broken down further. Each *tír unga* would have provided twenty-five men and each quarterland would have contributed to the provision of six and a quarter men, with each pennyland contributing to one and a quarter men. Yet, even accounting for the fact that the number suggested in the hosting would have covered the number of 'sons' possible in an extended family, the numbers do not support a state of affairs whereby such a large percentage of the population was maintained by the remainder. This suggests that these fighting men were probably directly supported by the various parts of the estates rather than existing as a separate, unrelated entity. Furthermore, such numbers indicate the involvement of a wider spectrum of the elite, such as the minor gentry and the younger sons of families from all spectrums of the *fine*, but leaving a large enough percentage to administer estates personally. It additionally suggests the administrative and martial spheres of genteel activity were rather more integrated than previously envisaged.

Dodgshon (1988a; 1998, 7-15) has outlined the extent of the reciprocation between the late medieval chief and clan. In return for labour and food dues, paid in the forms of rent and hospitality, the chief provided a safety net, not only providing security from military sources, but also from environmentally derived hardship. The weather and landscape of the western seaboard combined to provide a fairly high chance of crop failure. The surplus rent accrued by the chief could then be redistributed to the clan in such instances. The reciprocation of food and security went beyond food in times of hardship, however, providing what MacInnes, perhaps dubiously, refers to as a “rough and rudimentary welfare system” (1972, 349). The provision of dues and the reciprocal benefits received may have been borne out of a system of reciprocation, but were balanced to weigh social debt in the favour of the chief.

It would be easy to reject the political and theological polemic of Improvement writers, such as Walker (1808; McKay 1980), and be misled by the dubiousness of accounts of amoral characters like Buchanan (1997), and cast off an objective interpretation of the information and observations they presented about clanship. As early as the 1720s Burt postulated that the “chief ... entertains a ... tyrannical and detestable maxim – that to render them [the commonality of the clan] poor, will double the tie of their obedience” (1998: 27). The idea that peasants are “imprisoned within [the] everyday tasks and preoccupations” of subsistence agriculture (Braudel 1982: 254) has been common throughout scholarly thinking and was not lost on eighteenth-century observers of Hebridean farmers, such as Walker: “Their Subjection also to the Farmer on whose Ground they live, leaves them no more Time than what is barely sufficient for supporting themselves and Families” (McKay 1980, 160). This is a statement, which receives some support from skeletal-evidence (Derevenski 2000).

It would seem, from the literary evidence that the commons either co-operated with or conceded to the will of the nobility. The ideas of clanship that developed in the eighteenth century have removed most traces from the collective memory of resistance of the commons of the clan to the chief. Paradoxically, the image of a unified clan developed contemporaneously with the perception of a society in decline, it is almost as if the clan

became a golden age to be looked back upon at the moment it was disappearing (also see Hunter 1976, 90). But the contemporary Hebridean records are derived from the writings of the upper strata and resistance to their plans may have escaped their immediate notice. Expressions of resistance often take the form of surreptitious hidden actions rather than overt ones, such as violence or collective action. Back-handed comments, gossip and slack, shoddy and slow working practices can be fairly effective forms of resistance, and can form the mainstay of individual action (Scott 1990). It may be that denial of the clan concept of co-operation stems from ideas similar to those of Frazer: “morally, the argument for resistance is far stronger” (1997, 1). Certainly it is easy to gloss over the point that there is evidence from medieval England that many peasants were eager to support their lord (Dyer 1985, 27). Co-operation, or the appearance of it, was the most likely way of acquiring the favour and patronage of the gentry, allowing the peasant to escape his situation.

In eighteenth century in some areas on the western seaboard land transactions continued to be negotiated by the symbolic giving of cattle by the chief to the tenant (Neilson 1755), similar to continuing forms of clientship in Late Medieval Ireland (Nicholls 1976, 3-5, 10-14; O’Dowd 1986, 128-29). A more symbolic exchange was recorded in the Western Isles, by Martin Martin (1994, 184), but included the exchange of straw rather than livestock.

A general model of medieval Hebridean society can be constructed. Largely it was the product of relics of a social ideal. The reality was undoubtedly more complex: however, the idealised construct almost certainly reveals a shadow of the symbols that bound, divided and demarcated members of the clan throughout the Middle Ages. In the sixteenth century the clans of the Western Seaboard went through a significant development that paved the way for later changes. Throughout most of the Middle Ages the clan had been limited to a small group of individuals directly related to the lords and the *fine* had been largely defined by their ability to take part in military activity and extract dues from an agriculturally tied populace (HP: I, 56; Skene 1890, 439-40; Butler 1925, 301; Bergin 1970, 267; Stewart 1982, 98-99; MacInnes 1989, 95-96; Ó Baoill & Bateman 1994: 205; Macinnes 1996, 56-87, 122-58). The restriction from taking part in martial endeavours equally defined the latter group.



Over the sixteenth century downward mobility expanded the number of the populace that could claim to be related to the chief (see Grant 1930, 506; Munro 1981, 120-21; Macinnes 1994), and the notion of inclusiveness and a common goal percolated throughout the newly enlarged clan (see Watson 1937, 79, 93). Although the golden age of equality during the time of the clans is likely to have been a later invention, the idea of kinship and a common social goal came to frame the majority of social interactions. Alongside this, the participation and restriction of warlike business served to highlight the conceptual social bond that tied the lord to the labourer, the provision of food and social subjugation in return for protection in times of war and famine (see Grant 1930, 507; Bloch 1965, 145-51; Simms 1987a, 105, 112). Throughout the year, however, the social hierarchy was constantly referred to in the dues and rights that had to be rendered to the chiefs and gentry (Martin MacGregor pers. comm.). In addition to lesser kindreds and the *duine uaisle* there may have been a group of freeholders (HP: I, 40), who were considered to have enough status to be acceptable within retinues and lived throughout the clans territories, taking a role in estate management. Through time it seems likely that this class of middlemen came to be incorporated into the *clann* and eventually came to hold tacks for their land. This would oppose the concept that the *fine* existed almost independently of their estates, except to live off them without even the most basic social superstructure.

#### 8.4 The Later Medieval Church

The evidence for the development of the parish structure of South Uist has been outlined in Section 3.6, by the end of the fourteenth century the island had been divided into two parishes, Sgìre Hògh and Cille Pheadair (Fig. 20). The latter had incorporated Barra earlier in the century, but this had become separated with the development of the new MacNeil lordship there. Within each parish there was a main ecclesiastic centre, Hòghmor and Cille Pheadair, possibly served by one priest, who also attended to a number of smaller chapels distributed throughout the parish upon earlier church sites. However, it is difficult to ascertain the devotional practices of the main body of the populace. Barrell (2003) has recently drawn together the documentary evidence for the administration of pastoral care,

and MacGregor (1998) has outlined the way in which the church was integrated into the learned and landed classes of Gaelic society, but quite how the church operated as an institution or set of religious beliefs has yet to be tackled. As MacGregor correctly points out, what discussion there has been has largely been over-shadowed by Carmichael's collection of poetry and charms and a belief that these traditions derived directly from the Early Medieval period (*ibid.*, 6, e.g. see MacLean 1952, 7).

Martin Martin (1994, 150-51) paints a vivid picture of Hebridean religiosity at the end of the seventeenth century, some images of nuns with loose morals who buried the mortal evidence of their promiscuity, and fat fishing friars may reflect his own religious leanings, but popular small devotional acts, such as St Michael's cakes and custards, cavalcades to Neolithic cairns high in the hills, libations to brownies and the processional bowing in front of a stone on the way to Hoghmor (*ibid.*, 137, 152, 155) may all record be accurate indications of communal and individual rituals. Given the strength of this singular source some have claimed that "it can readily be argued that in the Highlands, much of that late-medieval world endured reasonably intact" (MacGregor 1998, 1). However, it is obvious from seventeenth-century Irish missionary records that the vast majority of Hebrideans had not had any formal religious instruction since the Reformation, if not earlier in the century (MacLean 1952, 6). Their claims of 'conversion' may have been no more than a re-introduction to Catholic doctrine (Campbell 1982, 6-7), but in the intervening period it is highly possible that there had been a surge in 'folk' religion, based on half remembered religious practice combined with collective beliefs about the way of the world (possibly the vestiges of pre-Christian religion, or merely the memory of other-world paranoia: see Gurevich 1998). Whilst it is possible that much of this had remained unchallenged by the church, maybe even incorporated into Hebridean ecclesiastical practice (see MacGregor 1998, 7), it is possible that this is to underestimate the influence of conservative doctrine emanating from Rome. Throughout the rest of Britain, the religious and moral uncertainty caused by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation caused widespread (re-?)adoption of folk belief and ritual practice, and this is reflected archaeologically by the sudden occurrence of ritual offerings around houses, etc. This may be seen in South Uist in the Late Medieval ritual

offering of a horse skull, splayed cat and a pot, possibly containing milk, laid at Dun Vulcan (Parker Pearson & Sharples 1999b, 348). Whilst the deposition of sharp objects in the floors of Viking Age and Norse period houses from Greenland and Cille Pheadair to protect sleeping children from evil spirits (Parker Pearson pers. comm.; Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004b, 243, 248) may show that the practice continued after the conversion, the occurrence of similar deposits in Post-Medieval Highland dwellings (see Gazin-Schwartz 2001, 270-73) does not necessarily have to indicate a continuity of tradition. Instead, the practice may have died out but the memory continued in folk-tradition, only to be resurrected in the moral vacuum of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

The visible vestiges of medieval popular religion are scant, and are possibly only really seen in veneration of things like wells: a practice that survived into the eighteenth century in South Uist with the association of Bishop Hugh with a well near Sgiopoint (*OS Name Book 11*, 97), and saints cults (Clancy 1999, 3). More formal religious leanings are visible in elite patronage of church buildings and donations of land to monasteries. The genealogies of the Lords of the Isles, the Clann Ruairidh and Clann Ragnaill are laden with lists of churches being built or enlarged. This practice may have had reached its zenith in the fourteenth century. In the early decades of the century Christina MacRuari donated Cairinis (Fig. 93), Kirkibost and Iolaraigh to Inchaffrey Abbey, which was confirmed near the end of the century by Godfrey (Iona Club 1847, 51; Munro & Munro 1986: 13-14, 28-29). The church building itself was later credited to Ami MacRuari, who was most influential a couple of decades later. She was also believed to have been the patron behind the erection of churches at Teampull Challuim Chille, in Benbecula, and Teampall Naomh Mhìcheil, in Griomasaigh (Fig. 94), “all at the expense of John of the Isles, who mortified eight merk lands in North Uist to the church, [and] two farms in Benbicula” (HP: I, 26). This list of Ami’s and John’s gifts could include Christina’s donations, plus Heisgeir and Unganab, adjacent to Cairinis, although there is some confusion in equalising the figures mentioned in the charters (Beveridge 1911, 44-45, 72-73), as well as the incorporation of Baile a’ Mhanaich and Baile nan Cailleach, in Benbecula. Amongst these may also be the “Unciata of land in Uist” the eponymous Ranald bestowed “on the monastery of Iona for ever, in honour of God and



Columba” (RBC, 161). By 1540 this was the extent of lands in the Uists pertaining to the Abbot of Iona, with the exception of Baile nan Cailleach (CdRA, 2), which may have been contested by the Earl of Argyll (RPC S: I, 449).

At the end of the fourteenth century and over the fifteenth century there appears to have been a problem filling the ecclesiastical posts in the Uists (Barrell 2003, 33). Additionally, after the fourteenth century no mention is made of any churches being patronised in the Uists until Iain Moidartach “erected a church at Kilmarie in Arasaig, and a church at Kildonan in Eig; and he left funds to erect a chapel at Howmore in Uist, where his body was buried in the year of the age of Christ 1574” (RBC, 171). This situation appears to be confirmed by evidence for architectural developments at Hoghmor and Cille Donnain, in Eig: the latter having a burial aisle that appears to parallel what remains at Hoghmor (MacPherson 1878, 582-83: Fig. 95). If the documentary evidence is any indication of a lack of church building in the fifteenth and early sixteenth century it may indicate that the expendable resources necessary for patronising church building programs could no longer be mustered. This may confirm claims that the political and economic unity of the Uist lords in the previous century was also under threat in this period (see Sections 2.5 to 2.8). Political disharmony could also account for the inability to find, or collect the tithes to pay for, incumbents for churches during this period.

Like the churches of Cille Pheadair any structures at Kirkibost and Iolaraigh have been lost to the sea or consumed by sand (see Section 6.3), but the physical structure of the churches at Cairinis, and Teampull Mhoire, at Hoghmor, show new developments in architectural design. Teampull Mhoire was a departure in style from the smaller Romanesque church: Teampull Challuim Chille. This was an entirely new building, higher and longer than its predecessor, with a pair of up-to-date Gothic lancet windows at the eastern end (Fig. 96). Similar buildings can be found at Kilmory, in Knapdale (MacGibbon & Ross 1897, 86) and Kildalton, in Islay (RCAHMS 1984, 203-06: Fig. 97): Eye Church in Aignis, Lewis, also has a similar layout, size and proportions, but lacks the lancet windows (RCAHMS 1928, 12-13: Fig. 98). Lancet windows have been used to date Kildalton to the late twelfth and thirteenth

centuries (RCAHMS 1984, 206), although Eye church has been interpreted as late fourteenth century at the earliest (Addyman 2000b), perhaps suggesting the longevity of this design. The more upstanding of these churches allow a rough reconstruction of how Teampull Mhoire may have appeared, with a rounded portal in the south wall, and a number of smaller windows in the remaining walls. These tend to be concentrated at the eastern end, suggesting that the interior of chancels from this period were intended to be lighter than their predecessors and the rest of the church. Geophysical survey at Teampull Mhoire has suggested that partitions divided the church into three (Reynolds, Hamilton & Raven 2004), the eastern most probably serving as a chancel. Similar partitions, thought to be of timber have been suggested at Kildalton (RCAHMS 1984, 203) and Cille Bharr (Lowe *et al.* 2002, 9, 16).

It was widely believed that Hoghmor superseded Cairinis as a place of learning (Macdonald 1972, 5), but if this was the case it is curious that Fordun neglected both churches in his list of Hebridean highlights: instead reserving mention for the “chapel of the Holy Trinity” in Barra (Skene 1872: II, 40). This perhaps suggests that Cille Bharr was more revered as a place of pilgrimage, although the lack of similar architectural developments in the later Middle Ages at Cille Bharr may suggest otherwise. The size of the new style church at Hoghmor reveals the size of the congregations expected at the church, and this is accentuated by the additional floor-space provided by its predecessor, the co-axially aligned Teampull Challuim Chille, which was probably in use at the same time.

Geophysical survey around Hoghmor (Reynolds, Hamilton & Raven 2004) has highlighted only one possible outbuilding, so it may be that the school operated within the church itself, although where the priest, or attending students were housed remains an unanswered question. The footings of two large turf built sub-oval buildings sit to the west end of Teampull Challuim Chille, in Benbecula (Fig. 99), may be related to this purpose. Campion, writing in 1571 noted similar buildings associated with schools in Ireland:

*Without either precepts or observation of congruity they speake Latine like a vulgar language, learned in their common Schooles of Leach-craft and Law, whereat they begin Children, and hold on sixteene or twentie yeares conning by roate the Aphorismes of Hypocrates, and the Civill Institutions, and a few other parings of these two faculties. I have seene them where they kept Schoole, ten in some one Chamber, groveling on couches of straw, their Bookes at their noses, themselves lying flatte prostrate, and so to chaunte out their lessons by peecemeale, being the most part lustie fellowes of twenty five yeares and upwards (Campion 1809, 25-26).*

Nineteenth-century North Uist traditions surrounding the Cille Pheadair there, raises the possibility that the ecclesiastical influence of the church extended beyond the buildings themselves. It was believed that it had a *uirlinn*, lawn attended by the poor, dependant on charity, and also that *pupail-urandahs* were built around the church to shelter the poor and travellers (Fergusson & MacDonald 1984, 23).

The land around a church was widely believed to have provided a sanctuary from secular powers, as Richard Stanihurst summarised regarding Ireland in 1584:

*If a belligerent party seeks refuge in a church in his exhaustion during a war, he is safer from harm there than if he were in a fortified castle. The peasantry and other common folk flee to inviolate sanctuaries with their families during times of devastation lest the predator cut off their migration route (Lennon 1981, 158).*

The numerous accusations of churches full of people burnt during the clan feuds reveals the ubiquity of this belief in Gaelic Scotland, as it provided evidence for extreme amoral behaviour for propagandists to maximise the shock of the atrocities committed in this period. One of the ways in which the sanctuary was demarcated is illustrated in a North Uist story surrounding the death of the sixteenth-century Paul of the Thong. In revenge for being an



accomplice in a murder he was pursued towards Cille Mhoire. Before reaching the boundary he was shot by an arrow which caused him to fall with his legs in the river that demarcated the sanctuary, so as not to violate the sanctuary he had to be finished off by a blind man (MacKenzie 1881, 257).

Despite the opposition of the presbytery and government, the Irish missionaries managed to successfully reintroduce Catholicism to the Isles over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although some buildings may have been dedicated to worship it was only in the eighteenth century that churches, or rather prayer houses, were successfully reintroduced (see Anson 1970, 261-62). Although initially resisted, and the overt opposition of some of the early to mid-seventeenth-century Clann Ragnail chiefs, protestant churches were established in South Uist at the end of the century, although congregations remained small (RPCS: XIII, 21; IV: 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 7, 389; Mactavish 1943, 174; Stewart 1982, 339-492).

## **8.5 Bards and Bailies**

Although not ecclesiastic in the true sense, MacGregor has noted the quasi-religious significance of the chief's poet within Hebridean lordships. Over the Middle Ages throughout Gaelic Scotland and Ireland the church had mounted a campaign to curtail the influence of the poets, who had an almost magical status that impeded on what the church might have perceived as their non-secular domain. The poet had considerable influence over a chief, they chose his successor, controlled him through satire (a form of "secular excommunication"), and bestowed immortality upon him through elegy and eulogy (1998, 12). Between the twelfth and mid-fourteenth century the church openly attempted to usurp the central role poets had within inaugurations and replace them with an ecclesiastical presence (ibid., 13; Simms 1987a, 24-32). Physical evidence for this can be seen in the placing of churches on inauguration sites and the surviving medieval image of the coronation of Alexander III at Scone denotes the presence of the poet at the side of the king, but dominated by a cross (see Bannerman 1989, 120-31). The imposition of the church over forms of assembly may have eventually back-fired, as from the fourteenth century the

evidence for chapels built on assembly sites becomes increasingly overshadowed by secular halls, indicating their symbolism was brought into the lordly fold (see Section 10.5).

By the seventeenth century South Uist was home to perhaps the most iconic poet lineage, the Clann Mhuirich. Thomson (1963) has outlined their history. They had their origins as bards to kings in Ireland but after a period serving the Earls of Lennox, came to be patronised by the Clann Domnhaill of Islay sometime in the mid thirteenth century, and held the title of *Ollamh* when the MacDonalds became Lords of the Isles in the following centuries. In return for their services branches of the family held lands scattered across Kintyre, Knapdale and the southern Inner Hebrides. Those in Kintyre (neighbouring those of the Lords' harpers) appear to have been heritable lands. They held these lands at least until the 1540s when they were displaced by the expanding influence of the house of Argyll. Following this, the main line enters a documentary wilderness, to re-appear in the latter decades of the sixteenth century under the patronage of the Clann Ragnail. It was only in the early seventeenth century when they can be directly connected to South Uist, where they are associated with the townships of Stadhlaignearraidh and Dreumasadal. Although this varied over time Stadhlaignearraidh seems to have been their main farm. They received these lands in return for their services "as bard seanachie to the family of Clanranald" (GD201/2/4), which recognised their additional role as clan historian and genealogist. They remained as hereditary tenants of the Clann Ragnail there until the early nineteenth century, although by this time they had lost the privilege of holding their lands for free. This had been on the wane since at least 1707 when they had received their lands in return for a low rent (ibid.). Separate branches may have lived in Benbecula in the fifteenth century, serving the Lords of Ghairbhtreine, although perhaps only as a scribe, penning MS1467 (Ó Baoill 1988, 123; MacGregor 2000a, 133), and in the seventeenth century serving the house of Benbecula (Stewart 1982, 286-92).

The townships of Stadhlaignearraidh and Dreumasadal are important as the latter surrounds the Clann Ragnail chief's home of Eilean Bheagram, and the other is adjacent to it (Fig. 64). This close geographic relationship of poet and patron is an unusual arrangement in light of

earlier evidence (Bannerman 1996), but may reflect later concerns. Together with Eilean Bheagram and Hoghmor, the location of the poet's residence indicates that the Clann Ragnaill had created a *caput* for himself, with the church on one side of him, his poet upon the other. The importance of this latter relationship may have been accentuated by the fact that the poet was directly responsible for the land upon which the chief lived. It is possible that the MacMhuirich originally resided on the island alongside his lord (perhaps accounting for the imprisonment of an illegitimate MacMuirich son at a different dun on the island: MacDonald & MacDonald 1911, lviii, 342-43). Excavations carried out around the building held by local tradition to be their home revealed that settlement there did not predate the mid-eighteenth century (Raven 2003, 135), although an alternative residence may be Dun Buidhe, in Loch Druidibeg, which has largely been demolished. This geographic proximity to the lord may reveal the formalisation of another function of the poet. In Early Medieval Ireland one of the main roles of the poet was to accompany his lord on the circuit around his estates and possess an intimate knowledge of the taxes owed by the numerous vassals (Swift 2004, 189-94). The settling of the MacMhuirich's alongside their lord's *caput* and near what may have been the main assembly site at Hoghmor (see Section 714), may also reflect the (?continued) relevance of this practice.

If the decline of the significance of the poet within later Gaelic society had diminished the MacMhuirich's status by the time of their arrival in South Uist, there is little evidence for it within local tradition. Oral history associated them (particularly Cathal MacMhuirich), not so much with their poetry (which in Cathal's case one recent scholar has titled "*Genius*": Black 1979), but with fantastical tales related to outwitting chiefs, monsters, the wind and the devil, as well as with magical books (Carmichael 1928-71: V, 306-19; Gillies 2000; Hillers 2003). Whilst the latter theme may refer to contemporary recognition of the genealogical power of the *Red Book of Clanranald*, like the others it is more probably reflective of the continuation of motif imagery about the super-natural feats of poets and books. Interestingly, similar tales about the outwitting of sea-serpents and magical red books are associated with the Clann Mhuirich's old employers, the Earls of Lennox (Newton 1999, 73-75). Motif or not, the survival of the tales would seem to indicate that within the



collective South Uist memory the Clann Mhuirich were considered outside the rest of society and somewhat at odds to it.

In contrast to the free land for services granted to the poet, the bailie does not appear to have been held in the same esteem. The 1672 grant of heritable bailie's powers, in addition to the right to uplift the Island's dues and a portion of the fines levied, came in return for a payment of rent (GD201/5/916; RD2(Dal)/32/330). This is, however, a late document and there is no reason to correlate the position of the mid-seventeenth-century bailie with the learned *breitheamh* of the medieval period. They were no longer picked from an exclusive lineage and some of their higher functions may have disappeared. By the beginning of the eighteenth century their main function was dealing in disputes between tenants and local transgressions (Sellar 1981b). However, although the powers of the Bornais bailies' seem fairly wide in 1672 (he was to "pursue all sundry persons guiltie of any crimes small or great in person" with power "if need bees to fence and hold courts", but there is no mention of powers of execution: RD2(Dal)/32/330), there are no similar documents which outline the duties of a *breitheamh* with which to compare them (although they may have existed with considerable powers within a structured legal system: Sellar 1985, 3-5). Hugh MacDonald recorded that the Lords of the Isles had established one *breitheamh* in every island and that there was a system of appeal to Finlaggan (HP: I, 24). However, Hugh may have been transposing contemporary events back into the past, as in the seventeenth century there tended to be one bailie per island. The choice of Gaelic term, *breitheamh*, instead of the Scots bailie, may also reveal the signatories of the 1672 tack realised a cultural inference that may have reflected differences in practice. Despite this, the location of Bornais as a residence for the bailie may be revealing. Unlike the poet, who is given a central position in the landscape, at the very hand of the lord, Bornais is territorially marginal, on the cusp between the island's two parishes. The choice of this location is perhaps a conscious reference to earlier concepts of places of judgement, sited on township or *tír unga* boundaries (see Section 7.13). Furthermore, it seems likely that an earlier assembly site may have been located on the junction between the two parishes, and that the connection of the bailie to Bornais reveals a continuity of the legal function of assembly in this particular

vague location, although courts were unlikely to have continued to be fenced in the open (e.g. GD201/1/270). Alternatively, a more functional explanation may be that the location in the middle of the island provided equal access to and from the whole island. Contemporary bailies were being established elsewhere on the Clann Ragnail estates, and nearly all were of the chief's direct lineage. The exception is in Benbecula, where members of the Clann Mhuirich were installed, but there is only the slightest hint at where they resided (Stewart 1982, 213).

Both bailies and poets existed as part of a wider social spectrum that included and integrated the *fine*, lesser gentry and agricultural workers. Each is represented in the archaeological record in the monuments forms of the castle (see Chapter 9), dun (see Chapter 10), low status settlement (see Chapter 11) and economic activities (see Chapter 12). It is only by considering each constituent element that they can then be brought together to create a holistic picture of Hebridean societies.

### 9.1 Introduction

Castles are by far the most familiar symbol of the Hebrides in the Middle Ages, yet they are also the least understood. Throughout Europe they are the ultimate iconic symbol of lordship within the medieval landscape, occupying a position at the top of the settlement hierarchy, but it is only over the last few decades that there has been any consideration of their function and role within medieval society (e.g. Johnson 2002; Coulson 2003). Earlier work has almost solely concentrated on their preconceived military capabilities, and work on Hebridean castles has been no exception. Instead of relying on these traditional perspectives this chapter will attempt to investigate the castles of the western seaboard and understand them as Hebridean, or Gaelic, responses and interpretations of wider European architectural and socio-cultural models, reflecting local ideas about lordship and the structure of society. Hebridean castles came to be a physical embodiment of the chief, and developed out of earlier sites with genealogical ties to the past, thus legitimising the position of the lord in both form and location. As lordships grew in size this integrity came to be negotiated through a number of complex media, however, the tie of the castle to lordship remained solid. Additionally, they existed at the nexus of several social worlds, Gaelic and European, local and foreign, high and low status and provided an architectural forum for the negotiation between these groups, mediating a number of messages to all of these groups. Their functions and roles can be interpreted through investigation of how they were conceived in their original form, and then conceptualised, perceived, encountered and lived in once built. A wide spectrum of material can aid a study of these topics, including, poetry, estate and governmental sources, architectural and archaeological analysis and landscape setting and view-sheds.



## 9.2 Problems in Hebridean Castle Studies

There has only been a limited amount of serious academic study of Scottish castles (MacGibbon & Ross 1887-92; MacKenzie 1927; Cruden 1960 and Tabraham 1997 remain the main authorities, although recent work by Tabraham 1988 and Rutherford 1998, amongst others quoted below, have begun to tackle more in-depth issues, and the survey work of the RCAHMS, Simpson and Dunbar, whose works are too numerous to list here, is invaluable), and despite the interest that Irish scholars have paid Scottish affairs, work in Ireland, looking at both Anglo-Norman and Gaelic castles, has come to far out-class the Scottish material (e.g. Sweetman 1999; McNeill 1997; O’Keeffe 1998; 2000b; 2001; Loeber 2001). This may be due to the fact that the corpus of excavated material and documentation in Ireland outstrips that readily available for Scotland, and this is especially true for those in the western seaboard (Fig. 100). Recent work at Kisimul in Barra (Fig. 101) has been limited, but has provided valuable dating evidence for the upstanding structures (Morrison 2000, 16-17), whilst preliminary survey at Eilean Tioram (Fig. 102) has provided significant architectural information, but so far has not included excavation (Evans & Rutherford 1999), so accurate dating remains impossible.

Eilean Tioram (Fig. 103) is particularly relevant for this study, as it served as the symbolic beating heart of the Clann Ruairidh and Clann Ragnail lordships (see Chapter 2).

Seventeenth-century clan histories and oral tradition associate the building of the castle with Ami MacRuairi in the middle of the fourteenth century (HP: I, 26; MacDonald 1997, 20). A reference to the island, with no inference of any castellated structure is mentioned in a charter of around 1318-20 (a transcription and translation of this charter has kindly been provided by Andrew McDonald), its inclusion may tentatively suggest a castle there at this date. It was certainly built before 1371, along with Caisteal Bhuirgh in Benbecula, when it was included in a charter to the new head of the Clann Ruairidh territories, but dating cannot be secured with any certainty before this. The first phase of Tioram (the curtain wall) has been dated to the thirteenth century upon comparison with Mingarry (Fig. 104), which can be tentatively dated by the presence of lancet windows (however, Tioram lacks some of the

other features of earlier castles along the western seaboard: Evans & Rutherford 1999, 76-83). Its second phase included a crude tower-house which although structurally similar to the fabric of the curtain wall bears more similarity to fifteenth-century tower-houses elsewhere in Argyll and the Hebrides and may belong to a similar date, leaving a gap of around two centuries where little work was done to the castle (*ibid.*, 85-88). Both the tower and curtain wall were heightened through time, and the internal structures, which had probably been relatively simple timber-framed buildings, were replaced by masonry structures (*ibid.*). Buirgh lacks any architectural features that would aid accurate dating by comparison. It appears that the structure has been adapted at least three times (Millar & Kirkhope 1965), the windows/arrow-loops (roughly splayed and lintelled, and angled downwards and outwards) could be of any date but the overall hall-house form and 'porch' may point to a late twelfth or early thirteenth-century date (see Section 7.11).

All castles emanate from an architectural model that was central to European concepts of lordship (e.g. Bartlett 1993, 65-70). However, O'Keeffe's (2001, 83) realisation that Irish castles were a local interpretation of both the function of lordship and castles themselves, holds true for Hebridean castles. Curtain-wall castles, such as Tioram, had features that would be recognised on the continent, such as a high bonded masonry walls, crenelations and a tower (a small round tower integral to the curtain wall has been postulated at Tioram: Evans & Rutherford 1999, 77). However, they were set apart from European castles, and those elsewhere in Scotland, in style and form (e.g. the lack of a central tower or monumentalised gateway). Although also emanating from changing ideas about lordship and architectural ideas about castles (see below), later modifications, such as the tower-house, the raising of the wall level and the box machicolation over the doorway may have been later attempts to address these deficiencies. In addition to their differences from other masonry castles in Europe, they are both essentially very different monuments. Whilst both Clann Ruairidh/Clann Ragnaill castles have parallels with thirteenth-century castle forms elsewhere in Scotland and Ireland (respectively, curtain-wall castles and hall-houses) they follow the body of Hebridean castles in lacking the architectural details which allow dating upon architectural comparisons. Unfortunately, this lack of dating means that questions as to

whether and/or why the same architect or patron(?ess) may have built or commissioned two such different monuments cannot be broached. Nor can questions be raised regarding why the late fourteenth century, a time of apparent stability under the Lords of the Isles, caused a proliferation of castle-building programs along the western seaboard (Dunbar 1978a, 40). The late fourteenth century has frequently been seen as the period of origin for the tower-house in Scotland, but the date of few can be pinpointed in the Hebrides, and fieldwork increasingly suggests Hebridean examples (e.g. Kisimul and Breachacha) are fifteenth century in origin (Dunbar 1981, 53-55; Tabraham 1997, 67-69; Evans & Rutherford 1999, 87-88; Morrison 2000). The question of chronology is all the more intriguing because few castles appear to have been built in Ireland in the later fourteenth century, with the possible exception of the Clann Domhnaill castle at Dunluce, Co. Antrim (Sweetman 1999, 133-34, but see McNeill 1997, 174). In the absence of information that would allow the picking apart of such questions it is instead worth concentrating on equally important issues relating to how castles functioned and were used, exploited, lived in and encountered during the annual, seasonal, daily and occasional activities of all the different groups that engaged with them, and how they manipulated, created and formed impressions of lordship within the Hebrides throughout the Middle Ages. Similar issues have recently come to the fore in English-centred castle studies, to great effect (e.g. Coulson 1979, 1994; Dixon 1988; 1996; Johnson 2002; Creighton 2002).

Although the term castle may seem far too grand for many of the structures built in South Uist and Benbecula during the Middle Ages, many do pay an architectural reference to castellation and castellated features. More importantly, however, as castles (in the Hebrides as much as elsewhere) occupied the highest rung of the architectural hierarchy and were integrally associated with the highest social stratum, although largely absent from the actual landscape, they formed part of the medieval mental geography of both its inhabitants and visitors. The repeated occurrence of castles in Hebridean poetry reveals that they inhabited a conceptual place within the Hebridean mind-set, at the top of a perceived hierarchical settlement ladder symbolically reflective of the social order. Thus it is necessary to devote a significant part of this study to investigating the role of castles within the Hebridean



medieval world. It is also evident that Hebridean and Highland lords exploited other forms of monument (crannogs, duns, stacks, island dwellings, etc.) to communicate similar and contrasting messages about status and power, and these will be discussed in Chapter 10. Once a generalised model of how castles and other forms of monument functioned has been presented, its ramifications for understanding fortifications within the Clann Ragnair island territories will be investigated.

### 9.3 The Hebridean Castle

*It was late in the evening when K arrived. The village was deep in snow. The castle hill was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness, nor was there even a glimmer of light to show that a castle was there. On the wooden bridge leading from the main road to the village K stood for a long time gazing into the illusory emptiness above him.*

When faced with the idea of a castle, most people will, like K in Kafka's novel *The Castle* (1930, 11), struggle through an illusory mist and darkness to picture a stereotypical mass of walls, towers and turrets, a romanticised vision of medieval military might. When faced with the castles on Scotland's western seaboard, academics have rarely left this image behind, and have been obsessed by the question of castles' defensive and military capabilities. Although there has been some attempt to look at landscape setting, this too was mainly interested in military strategy. MacGibbon and Ross's late nineteenth-century description of Mingarry Castle, Ardnamurchan, typifies this approach:

*Occupying, with its irregular outline, the whole of the top of an isolated rock from 20 to 30 feet high, this fortress guards the entrance from the open sea, both to the Sound of Mull and to Loch Sunart, while it is so placed as to command a view down the greater part of the sound ... Mingarry thus possessed the gateway to the southern division of the islands (cited McDonald 1997, 237-8).*

Although, incorporating a valuable insight into the role of castles in an essentially maritime landscape, little attempt has been made to fully investigate and realise this potential. Academic studies of Scottish castles tend to remain linked to a perspective derived from English scholarship centred upon English examples, and rarely take into account the local (whether Scottish, Gaelic, Hebridean, island, etc.) cultural and socio-political contexts of their construction and use. The medieval lordships of Scotland's western seaboard covered huge geographical expanses, scattered and dispersed across islands, straths, and glens well beyond the immediate view-shed of the castle itself, and the intervening seaways conveyed traffic other than hostile fleets. To understand how these monuments were encountered and perceived from a myriad of social and landscape contexts is the key to substantially altering the simplistic militaristic view of castles, the departure from this mode of thought opens up a picture of castles that is far more complex. By considering an approach incorporating a wider spectrum of factors, their social and economic roles come to the fore, and it becomes evident that castles were not only situated to survey a seascape of potentialities. Stell stated that "the castle at its simplest definition was the strongpoint for the securing and exercise of feudal lordship" (1985, 195). In such dispersed lordships, traditionally held to be glued together through kinship rather than socio-economic coercion, the castle, as much as a stronghold as a symbol, must surely have some implications on understanding social relations within the clans. They were there to be surveyed on a number of different levels by a variety of groups. Through the building of castles, clan chiefs wanted to impress their might and right upon military opponents, passing shipping, contemporary peers and social underlings.

By adopting a methodological approach, that looks at why castles where placed were they were, and how they could be viewed, both physically and ideologically, it may be possible to shed light, not only about the immediate function of castles, but, conversely, on how castles and their occupants imposed themselves on medieval Hebridean social structures.

The possibilities of Norse influence for castles in the Isles has been summarised in Section 7.11, but throughout Scotland locating the origins of castles has been exacerbated by the concentration on traditional views of castles' links with feudal ideas and their architectural development from motte and baileys to stone constructions. Within a Scottish or European context, Tabraham's statement about stone-built curtain wall castles are understandable:

*That such formidable fortresses were built on the fringe of a rapidly developing country by men of Celtic origin, at a time when their Norman neighbours to the east were seemingly content, by and large, with castles of timber and clay, is not readily understood (1986, 43).*

However, if we look at the subject from a localised Norse or Gaelic perspective and incorporate other classes of fortification the picture begins to change. Especially if we consider that:

*The influences for secular stone building of a defensive form in northern Scotland did not come from Norway for it was not until the very end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century that we find King Sverre ordering the construction of stone buildings at the Royal palace at Bergen (Talbot 1974, 43).*

Although King Valdemar had been building stone and lime castles in Denmark earlier in the century (Watson 1998: also see Ekroll 1996).

Of the ten castles in Skye and Lochalsh, Miket and Roberts (1990, 7-8) have noted that seven have place-names that directly associate them with prehistoric sites, often Iron Age in date. With the exception of *Brochel*, this is noticeable in the survival of the *dún* prefix. Whilst no confusion should be made between the Gaelic word *dún* and 'dun' as it has been used by archaeologists in their attempts to create definitive typologies of Mid Iron Age monuments, *dún* was used in the Early Middle Ages by Gaels to describe fortifications. However, *dún* continued to be used by Irish and Scottish Gaels throughout the Middle Ages



to denote duns that they perceived to be old and denote the antiquity of the castellated seats of their chiefs. Nevertheless, in the cases from Skye, the use of the word *dún* appears to betray an early, pre-Norse, origin of their fortifications. The three without the *dún* prefix are known to have been built later in the Middle Ages, often due to relocation from a fortification with an early origin, and are instead named with the prefix *caisteal*. Only two of those prefixed by *dún* show physical evidence of their Iron Age origins: at Eilean Donnain a vitrified fort was visible until the 1920s reconstruction, and Dun Ringill (Fig. 66) is itself a broch that was mortared in the Middle Ages. The pattern of medieval castles on Iron Age sites is replicated again and again across the western seaboard, yet a brief look at studies of brochs/duns and their later re-uses (see Chapter 7) can be revealing in regards to their replacement by castles.

Not all of re-occupied duns became castles. Settlement at some of these sites appears to have been short lived. Many of the internal buildings were ephemeral or appear only to have been occupied for one phase: not being re-built or modified in manner that would indicate longevity of use (e.g. Kildonan, Kintyre: Fairhurst 1939, 207-10: Fig. 62B). Additionally, in a few cases, such as Dun Lagaidh, datable material culture only exists from the late twelfth to mid-thirteenth century (Morrison 1974, 68), perhaps suggesting a short window of re-occupation. More commonly, however, use seems to have come to an end in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (e.g. Dun Bheag, Skye, MacEwen's Castle, Cowal: Callander 1921, 126; Marshall 1983, also see Morrison 1974; Talbot 1974). There may be some tentative correlation with this phase of abandonment with the rise of the importance of the castle, both in form and in essence, which we would recognise today. The datable phases of curtain walled castles easily trespasses on this main period of dun re-occupation and use, but the rise in popularity of later castle forms, from the fifteenth century onwards, including possible early tower-houses, would seem to have begun around the same time that duns lost their importance. Like duns, these new castles had a relationship with expanding specific kin-groups (a relevancy that is not often considered by modern archaeologists), perhaps suggesting that this phase of castle building reflected a newly envisaged architectural manifestation of a similar set of ideas about lordship, replacing that of duns.

Of the seven castles with *dùn* place-names in Skye and Lochalsh, mentioned above (Miket and Roberts 1990), five have Norse associations, often appearing as a suffix to the aforementioned *dún* element. Dunakin (*Dún Haakon*) was named after King Hakon himself and Dunvegan's name has been linked to the twelfth-century Norse sheriff Pal Balkeson. Its name probably does not derive from a simple interpretation from *Dún Bhegan* (i.e. the dun of someone named Bhegan), instead the Bhegan element appears to be a corruption of Balke, the connection is backed up through other, nearby place-names, referring to the name Pol. Both Dunsgaith and Dunvegan are held by tradition to have been held, respectively, by the Clann 'ic Asgail/MacAskills and Clann Eraild/MacRailds directly from the Norse. Both were to be replaced in the new order by up and coming kin-groups, who were in control when the surviving architectural features appear to have been built. Although the dispute concerning the origin of the MacNeils of Barra is rooted in their wish to be seen as pre-Norse and incorporated a desire for Kisimul to be of an early date (Macneil 1964; Dunbar 1978a), it seems likely that the Skye cases were historically accurate.

It is worth noting that when the Clann 'ic Fhionghain/MacKinnon's moved their seat from the little transformed broch of Dun Ringill to the more 'modern' construction at Caisteal Maol, Kyleakin, in the late fourteenth or early fifteenth centuries, documents continued to be issued at the old site (Miket & Roberts 1990, 33, 46). This indicates that Dun Ringill retained a symbolic importance as a place, which probably emanated from its ties with the lineage's origins. The change in building style and the choice of new location are highly significant, as will be seen below.

By the time architecture and documents begin to coincide, increasingly after the later fourteenth century, there is a noticeable differentiation in attitudes to reoccupied duns and the notion of a 'castle'. The castle as an embodiment of ideas had come to the fore and this was reflected architecturally in the development of the recognisable genre of the castle. As has been noted, masonry castles had been constructed in the Hebrides from the mid-thirteenth century at the latest. However, these examples are local expressions of a medieval

European phenomenon, despite variances in architectural style and localised contexts, the castle was central to an understanding of social constructs and manifestations of lordship at the heart of the medieval psyche (e.g. see Bartlett 1993, 65-70). Therefore Hebridean castles must be seen as a localised interpretation of a European cultural model. It is the form and evocative location that has rendered Hebridean and western seaboard castles their particular flavour. John of Fordun's description of the Western Isles, perhaps the most well known and important contemporary list of castles in the western seaboard, written sometime between 1371 and 1392 (Scott 1979, 6), although some of the list may have come down from an earlier source, only mentions eleven castles in nine islands (Steve Boardman and Dauvit Broun pers. comm.). Given the probability of some of the other sites for castles were occupied in this period, it seems likely that not only were his sources vague or inaccurate (see *ibid.*) but they determined what was, and what was not, considered to be a castle probably following Lowland prejudices. As a result, many castles may have been excluded on classification grounds. Absence from Fordun's list may not indicate a castle's non-existence in this period but that only those that conformed to the idea of a castle were recorded. An anonymous document dated around the early seventeenth century titled *Houses in the Isles* (RPCS: X, 821) reveals similar biases in thought. It refers to several "stane houses" in Skye and the Long Isle, by which it means castles such as Duntulm, Dunvegan, Dunskaith and Steornabhaigh; only Kisimul is called "ane castell". Of "Strenthis" in the Inner Hebrides it calls Duniveg, Islay, a house, although more classic, later and perhaps more impressive castles, such as Duart, Moy (Lochbuie) and Aros, are allowed the appellation "castell". A hierarchy of classification is evident which discerned between what was and what was not the phenomenon of the castle.

#### **9.4 The Body of the Chief**

By the fourteenth century the idea of the lord and his castle were becoming one, or at least very closely associated, the castle lending its authority and the power of its idea to the chief, legitimising and naturalising his position. The acts of law and charters of the Lords of the Isles and the clan chiefs usually stated the name of the castle where they were enacted. In



the dispute over Troternish between the Clann Domhnaill and Clann Leoid the holding of Duntulm was central to the display of domination of the estate (Miket & Roberts 1990, 6-7, 56-59). The importance of the castle's function as the embodiment of the seat of power, rather than merely a convenient location is demonstrated in the Clann Fhionghain retention of Dun Ringill as their seat, symbolically and *de facto*, for some time after they had moved to their modern construction at Kyleakin (ibid., 33, 46).

In the sixteenth century there are three examples of castles used as symbols surviving amongst the examples of West Highland monumental sculpture (Steer & Bannerman 1977, 184: Fig. 105). Alastair Crotach MacLeod's famous tomb at Roghadal, Harris, shows a fairly large castle. At Lochaline a tower appears on a grave probably associated with the MacLeans of Kingairloch. The third appears on a shield on an unidentified grave at Iona. All three are heraldic devises, accentuating the association of the castle with lordship and furthering their use as a symbol of power within the Hebridean mind set. The castle at Roghadal appears amongst other symbols of Gaelic lordship: such as a hunting scene, incorporating dogs, deer and armed men and a galley (Fig. 92). The galley, a far more common feature of the West Highland sepulchral monuments that is highly symbolic of power in this maritime locality, appears alongside the castles at both Roghadal and Lochaline. These two images of castles are stylised; they both show Irish architectural details such as the stepped merlons which do not occur in Scotland, and it may be important that only a tower appears at Lochaline (see below). However, at Roghadal, a direct reference to the seat of the MacLeod's at Dunvegan seems highly probable. Although the two towers may indicate the carving post-dated the building of the 'fairy tower', commissioned by the same chief, the stylised form is by no means a realistic representation of the castle as it appeared in the sixteenth century (Simpson 1962; Miket & Roberts 1990, 7, 65-73; MacLeod 1993, 35-36: Fig. 106). Amongst the architectural details the appearance of a chapel window may be a reference to the castle's, and thus the chief's, spiritual aspects. The inter-dependant relationship of castle and chief, is in some ways an extension of the link of the chief with the land, which is a common theme throughout traditional Gaelic poetry. For example *An Elegy for Ruaidhri Mór*, written shortly after 1626: "I challenge anyone to

go to the castle and refrain from tears” (MacDonald 1955, 31). This occurs again in two poems of Iain Luim.: *An Elegy to Sir James MacDonald* states: “It is your journey from Duntulum that has caused a rain of tears from my eyes; that and looking at your tower with no smoke from it” (MacKenzie 1964, 137); and in *A Song to the Laird of Glengarry* he refers to “Donald of the Turrets” (ibid., 133).

If the tie of chief to dun (whether to re-used Iron Age sites or newly built castles) and thus to land was established in the Hebrides in the twelfth century, it may explain why Gaelic Scotland was so quick to grasp onto the ideology of the castle. The few legal, tax and naval-levy systems thought to pre-date and survive the Norse incursions may further indicate an approach to land ownership/tenure where individuals were responsible for and thus attached to bounded areas of land. Outside the English Pale and other areas of direct English control, the Gaelic Irish were not keen to build castles until the fourteenth century or later. McNeill (1997, 168) has interpreted the root cause of this in the fact that the link of the lord to land, through the medium of the castle contravenes the Gaelic ideological concept that a lord was a lord of men not acres. This may lie partly in the problem of estate/castle inheritance in the tanistry/gavelkind inheritance system (ibid.), a problem possibly circumvented in Scotland where some degree of primo-geniture seems to have co-existed with tanistry from an uncertain, but medieval date (see Section 2.12). The nature of the Gaelic Renaissance in Argyll and the Western Isles, thought to follow the rise of Somerled in the twelfth century, has not been fully investigated on a cultural level. Many academics have not parted from the traditional view that Somerled, although part Norse, was part of the rise of Gaelic power in the west. This is a myth, if not originated, but propagated in the Middle Ages by the chiefs and clans in seeking to create the impression of and consolidate links with what was seen as their country of origin. In many ways Ireland, or pan-Gaelic cultural ideas could have been a counterpoint to the incursions of the Scottish state, with an increasingly Lowland focus. However, within Gaelic Ireland, once a castle had been constructed tanistry and ‘gavelkind’-inheritance does not seem to have been impeded, castles could be split room-by-room between heads of the lineage or other more complex arrangements could be agreed upon by the various claimants. However, the connection of the castle to the chief and his immediate

kin-group appears to have been paramount (Loeber 2001, 275-76). An illustration is revealed over the disputes over Ballycapple castle in 1584: the castle and little bawn went to the 'worthiest of the sept', whilst the greater bawn was shared between the new head of the lineage and the other claimants. The 'worthiest' was also granted rents from anybody building within the bawn, and the choice of nearby pasture land (Nicholls 1985, 94-5). That similar processes may have been taking place within the Hebrides is perhaps indicated by the naming of the 'Tanist's House' in Kisimul (Fig. 101). The present building of that name overlies an earlier one with the same appellation, but no tradition or record of how it acquired that name appears to have survived (Macneil 1964, 71, 174; Dunbar 1978a, 28), this practice of division possibly provides an explanation.

As kindreds expanded their influence they began to envelop areas with other in which there were castles indelibly attached to other lineages. Some lordships ended up with estates encompassing a number of castles, and they were faced with the problem of how to care for and exploit them in the absence of the chief. Largely this was done through the appointing of constables/chamberlains. In most cases these figures were not merely servants, they were the heads of the subjugated lineages who had originally held the lands and/or castles, or they were heads of lesser kindreds who were given the positions in recognition of their local influence. The Clann 'ic Asgail claimed to have been wardens of Dunsgaith since time of Kings of Man, but historical confirmation places them there only from 1395, when the Clann Leoid began to extend their control over Skye (Nicolson 1930, 30, 361). What is evident from their claims is their presence as land and castle holders there prior to the Clann Leoid expansion and that they acknowledged the new order by accepting the MacLeods as owners of the castle, but retained their local influence by remaining wardens there.

The fullest evidence available for the role of constables in the Highlands and Islands can be found in the 1550 tack of the castle of Glenorchy (Kilchurn) to John MacGregor. The Clann Griogair had had ownership of the lands until the Clann Caimbeul had campaigned to expand their influence there from the earlier fifteenth century (Thomson 1983a, 173-74). The castle had been built by 1449 by the Clann Caimbeul (RCAHMS 1975, 232) which



indicates that they were stamping their mark on the lands, for MacGregor to become constable, surely reveals that he was acknowledged in his connections to the land, but also his subjugation to the Clann Caimbeul. In repayment for keeping the castle and several farms John was to employ a warden, provide a varying amount food for the laird and his family and servants, allow them use of the hall, chamber (with fodder for the beds), kitchen and bake-house, and keep the tower head clean (Innes 1855, 405-8). John failed to live up to this latter requirement, as in 1570 Campbell of Glenorchy complained that:

*in safar as we fand in our passage throw the cuntre the place of  
Glenurqhay haldin as ane fortres nocht preparit as we wald have belevit  
to honour passand with strangearis quhome we wald have thocht the  
place of Glenurquhay honestilie preparit for ws mair kyndlie nor  
MacGregors* (Dawson 1997, 147).

A similar but considerably earlier situation appears to have existed in regard to Alexander III's charter of Eilean Fraoch Castle to the Clann Naughtan/MacNaughtons, in 1267 it stated they were to be given:

*custody of our castle and island of Frechelan, so that they should cause  
the said castle to be built at our expense and repaired as often as  
necessary, and should keep it safely for our use* (RCAHMS 1975, 217).

Such formal arrangements were not always the case in the western seaboard. A late seventeenth-century history of the Clann 'ic Rath/MacRaes claimed they were hereditary constables of Eilean Donnain in the sixteenth century when it was attacked by Donald Gorm MacDonald (HP: I, 215). However, it is clear from the history of the castle from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century that many groups had served as the castle's constables: Clann Amhliadh/MacAulays, Mathesons and Murchisons (Miket & Roberts 1990, 76-79). If a 1704 traditional history of Clann Coinnich is to be believed, at the time of Donald Gorm's raid Eilean Donnain was only defended by a governor, a watchman and one other gentleman

(MacKenzie 1881, 166), which would suggest that this castle operated at a fairly low level in the chief's absence, in a manner similar to that at Lowland tower-houses (Samson 1998, 138).

With the exception of Eilean Donnain the scenario for Dunsgaith and the Castle of Glenorchy reveals that the link of the body of the chief and the castle was maintained, although this was not as straightforward as that highlighted for situations such as the MacLeods and Dunvegan. The original land-holder retained his link to monument and lands, but acknowledged his vassalage by accepting his superior's claims to both physical and symbolic possession of the seat of his estates. Additionally, as the superior land-owner travelled in circuit around his estates, by occupying the castle, the symbolic central seat of a region, he not only demonstrated his lordship over that particular area, but also over the local kindred who were forced to make way for him and provide for his comfort and food. The circuit also provided an opportunity for the demonstration of lordship on a local scale for the larger populace, such as the uplifting of dues and ruling on local disputes.

## **9.5 Maritime View-sheds: the Keys to Power?**

In the late eighteenth century the so-called 'wit' of Georgian England, Samuel Johnson remarked:

*The castles of the Hebrides, many of which are standing, and many ruined, were always built upon points of land on the margin of the sea. For the choice of this situation there must have been some general reason, which the change of manners has left in obscurity* (Chapman 1924, 139).

He followed this statement with a defamation of the defensive and lookout capabilities of these fortifications. Since then, most scholars have been keen to demonstrate the castles' dominance of the seaways, illustrating this by emphasising what could be seen from within their walls. Much of this may be a legacy from MacGibbon & Ross: of Aros Castle they

were keen to show it ‘is near the centre of the Sound [of Mull] where it bends, so that the fortress commands a clear view both up and down the channel’ (cited McDonald 1997, 240). This idea was developed to show that many groups of castles were built to form unified complexes of defence or observation. Duart and Dunstaffnage controlled the “confluence” of the Sound of Mull and Firth of Lorn and the entrances to Loch Etive and Loch Linnhe (ibid. 249). The inter-visibility of Mingarry, Aros, Ardtornish and Duart was used to suggest they formed a cohesive unit, that Grant called “beacon castles” (1935, 218, 226), suggesting a role designed to observe and warn of threat, presumably military or political. Grant’s interpretation of Achanduin Castle, Lismore, is highly revealing. The castle gave its proprietor, the Bishop of Argyll, “a considerable check upon the activities of the Lords of the Isles, for it looks out over Loch Linnhe, up which so many formidable armaments sailed, and across to the menacing hills of Morvern” (ibid., 313). The possibility of a relationship of duns with beacons has been discussed for the Norse period in Section 7.10, and the practice is recorded to have taken place up to the seventeenth century, although there is no recorded mention of them near, or upon castles (HP: III, 286; Maclean-Bristol 1999, 80).

It certainly seems to be the case that most castles provided wide observation over the areas of movement between and through the islands and coastline. An example is Brochel Castle in Raasay:

*Brochel is on the normal route from the Kyle of Lochalsh to Lewis, and control of the Inner Sound would have been highly desirable to the MacLeods who appear to have been empire building in these areas. All north-south traffic would use the inner sound rather than the Minch* (Sharpe 1982, 35).

Within the maritime landscapes of the western seaboard any threat viewed could be given a military response by the galley. The galley was the symbol of military might and mobility in the Isles. In many ways, across an area so inter-cut by seaways, the galley replaced the mounted knight as the symbol of nobility and military power (McDonald 1997, 144-46). In



a functional sense, this was the way forces manoeuvred and were transported from one area to another, and could be manipulated to provide highly mobile lightning strikes. It may be that the large number of tales of fleets being destroyed, driven away or swept to victory reveals that maritime sea-power possessed an element of chance that could be interpreted as divine intervention particularly if it shifted battle in favour of smaller forces. The galley was symbolically potent because it formed part of the dues provided by the vassal to his superior and the galley was the mechanism by which the chief could impose his superiority. Nearly all Hebridean castles are provided with landing areas for galleys alongside and sea-gates, revealing the importance of ease of access to the sea. As far back as 1824 MacCulloch grasped that:

*In the maritime Highlands, as might be expected, the castles are generally situated near the margin of the water; and often, apparently, rather for the convenience of embarkation than from notions of defence*  
(MacCulloch 1824: II, 159-60).

The implicit threat is traditionally seen to have been the crown (either Norwegian or Scottish), which remained so into the eighteenth century, or opposing clans. However, the threat from Norway can only have been short-lived and that of the Scottish state intermittent at best until the later sixteenth century. There also seems to have been a state of relative stability across the western seaboard whilst the Lords of the Isles held sway, which remained after its initial demise until the period of the clan feuds escalated, around the end of the fifteenth century. Although the castles provided refuge from these threats there seems to have been some other reason for their dominance of the seaways.

Breen (2001, 420-31) has revealed that in Ireland during the late medieval period there is a direct correlation of coastal castles and a program of exploitation of foreign fishing and merchant vessels within their waters. Families engaged in fierce 'protection' of their fishing rights in the bays and seas off their coasts, granting access to their waters in return for payment and protecting those who paid. For example O'Sullivan Beare is recorded to have

executed an English Captain for harassing Spanish fishermen in Bantry Bay. Breen (*ibid.*) has argued that this system was so entrenched and successful that it may have provided the financial impetus behind the Gaelic Revival of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The evidence for a similar situation in Scotland is generally late, emanating from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but hints that a similar situation may well have existed there.

The waters around the western seaboard were famous in later periods for their fish. The Norwegians had been exploiting the North Atlantic for cod since at least the fourteenth century and from the fifteenth century Dutch, German and English fishermen increasingly utilised them. These grounds as well as those around Ireland were also used by French and Spanish fishermen (O'Neill 1987, 34, 135), it seems unlikely that the West Highland coasts were not also used by these groups of fishermen. The use of fishing grounds off Iceland and possibly Newfoundland and the invention of new ways of preserving herring for export provided the stimulus for a huge increase in fishing traffic (*ibid.*, also see Section 12.15). By 1596 Bishop Lesley recorded that "Lochbroune, Rosse", was exploited by Scots, French, Flemish and English fishermen (Dalrymple *et al.* 1888-95: I, 40).

In the Norse period the Hebrides and western coast were situated on the main trading routes between Ireland, western mainland Britain, Man, Orkney, Iceland and the rest of Scandinavia. By the later part of this period, and probably earlier, French and Mediterranean merchant shipping used western waters to traverse round Britain, presumably on route to northern and eastern Europe, avoiding the English Channel. Their presence in the late sixteenth century in or near the Hebrides is evident in the prolific amount of complaints registered to the Privy Council by merchants who had lost ships and cargoes there. Perhaps the most quoted incident is the case of Abel Dynneis, a Bordeaux wine merchant, who had his ship boarded and plundered by MacNeil of Barra, a renowned pirate, in 1612 (RPCS: IX, 318). Amongst other similar incidents, is an incident in 1512 where the Clann Ragnaill, "Dowgall Ranaldsone", was pursued by the courts for "spulzee of the Spanzartis schip broke in thair" Isles (ALHT: IV, 297, 341), possibly the Uists.

The reputation of the Islesmen for piracy in the late sixteenth century and early seventeenth century almost certainly originated in practices, which seen through the prejudiced eyes of the Lowland or European merchant and governmental classes could easily be misconstrued or misrepresented as a 'protection racket' or extortion. The islands of Rona, Fladday and Eilean Tigh were regarded as the habitation of "thieves, ruggers and reivairs" on Skye's inner sound as early as the fourteenth and/or fifteenth centuries (Miket & Roberts 1990, 18). Although they may have been pirates in the more traditional sense, the implication probably suggests that the local chiefs were indulging in this more economically orientated and socially sanctioned behaviour at an earlier date. The earliest suggestion of these activities may be tentatively found in traditional tales and the Norse sagas. Dunakin, or Caisteal Maol, Skye is said to have been built by a Norwegian princess, Saucy Mary, on income derived from a levy imposed on ships sailing through Kyle. Norwegian ships were exempt. A massive chain crossed the sound to impede movement without payment (ibid., 33). Even if the Norse element is discounted as dubious, the notion of the action indicates that the practice was not thought unusual or improbable. More substantial evidence may be found in an incident in one of the sagas. In 1202 it was recorded that an Icelandic bishop was washed up in a storm upon the shores of one of the Bishop's Isles and became subject to a dispute with the king over the extent of payments for the right to land (CWP362).

By the late sixteenth century the Scottish crown was becoming aware of the money to be purloined by their own taxes upon the fishing industry and the benefits to be gained from the profits to burgh economies (see for instance RCPS: IV, 121-22, which also outlines the gains the industry would make in the fight against 'idle-men'). From 1574 onwards government records are full of the complaints made by fishermen throughout the western seaboard (RPCS: II, 382-83; III, 125; IV, 121-22; XIII, 66-68, 740-41, 742, 742-43; VI 2<sup>nd</sup> ser, 5-6, 8-9, 93, 212-13, 283-84; CSPA: V, 668-9) and efforts to restrain Western Islesmen in particular (RPCS: II, 534; IV, 303; VI, 169-70; XIII, 37; VI 2<sup>nd</sup> ser, 96-97, 300-1). The extent of the impact of Islanders' actions is summarised in a letter of 1579 where it was claimed "our



Soverane Lordis trew liegis, sic as merchandis, schipmen, and fischearis, dar not resort to the saidis ylis for feir of thair lyvis and spuielying of thair guidis” (RPCS: III, 125).

In reaction the chiefs of MacDonald of Sleat, MacLeod of Harris, Clanrannald and MacNeil of Barra stated in their defence:

*That it wes the ancient custome befor the dait of the Contract  
afterspecifeit (quhilk they think to be about fourteene yeeres since or  
thereby) to everie ane of thame in whose boundis the herring fishing fell  
oute, to exact of everie bark and ship resorting thereto, - for ankorage or  
ground leave ane barrell of aill or meill in the owner's optioun; and for  
ilk ankor layed on shoare sax shillings aucht pennies: and oute of every  
last of herring slaine there, thrie pundis money: Togedder with the  
benefite of everie saturdays fisching ...*

*... Being demandit by what warrand they uplift the saids exactions and  
dewties foresaids, they answer that they ar heretours of the ground and so  
many lawfully take up satisfacioun for ground leave and ankerage; it  
being ane ancient custome and in use to be done past memarie of man  
(report by Lord Lorn and the Bishop of the Isles, 1634: in CdRA, 108-10).*

MacLean of Morvern, MacLean of Lochbuie, MacLean of Coll and MacKinnon all stated that there was no fishing in their waters, but if there were they would employ the same tactics as the other chiefs. This may indicate that the above demands could be the result of opportunism on behalf of these chiefs, however, the report may reveal the institutional nature of the exaction of tribute from passing shipping. Additionally, it suggests that each chief regarded certain waters as being under their direct jurisdiction. If the idea that such exactions were seen as institutional, it may mean that the charges of piracy were somewhat unfairly levelled. However, it appears that such ‘protection rackets’ were not always simply exchanges of cash and goods for services. In 1586 fishermen complained that despite the costs of ‘ground leave’ they still had to build houses of their own out of timber and covered

with sails against the rain. Additionally, the likelihood of their nets being stolen by the locals in small boats still remained (RPCS: IV, 121-22). Despite all the government initiatives the Captain of Clann Ragnaill continued to indulge in the practices. In 1622 Fife based fishermen around Lewis alleged that he, accompanied by three hundred men, “cuttis thair nettis, interruptis thair fisheing, spoylles thame of thair victuallis, reiffis, and awaytakis thair fisheis and persewis thameselffis of thair lyves” (RPCS: XIII, 740-41). He also attacked a ship in Loch Sgiopiort and two barks in Loch Aineort from loch side, despite the crews ‘having payit the haill land deuties according to the Capitane of Clanrannald his desyre’ (RPCS: XIII, 742-43). His uncle ‘Ranald McAllan VicEan of Castleborow’ was following suit, again with three hundred followers in 1636 (RPCS: VI 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 212-13, 283-4). It is easy to envisage why such breaches of the conditions of ground leave were interpreted as ‘piracy’ by non-Gaels.

Although maps suggest that nearly all castles were placed on major route-ways with wide view-sheds, some castles only have limited vision over seaways. Steornabhaigh, Dunvegan, Eilean Donnain and Kisimul are all placed in sea-lochs with limited views over sea-ways. They are, however, all in places which later became associated with fishing industries and good harbours, a factor, which in light of the evidence presented above, seems highly pertinent. However, the case of Tioram reveals another aspect. Although, it is located near good fishing waters and by the late sixteenth or seventeenth century it was said “shipps doeth come to the castle” (MacFarlane 1907, 167), it has limited views over the Minch: the viewshed extends westwards out to the Small Isles, but the hills on either side of the bay obscure northern and southern approaches. It does however dominate access to the Rough Bounds and some of the best woodlands on the western coast. Wood was a rare and cherished resource, indispensable for roof, boat and other less grandiose constructions. These woodlands provided much of the wealth for the Clanranald who owned and maintained the land (see Cheape 1993). The antiquity and importance of this area’s attachment to this resource is illustrated in the *Life of St. Columba*, where there is a tale of him calming a storm whilst exporting wood around a nearby peninsula (Sharpe 1995, 200-3). The site has also produced evidence of high-status seventh to eighth-century settlement

(Kilbride-Jones 1937, 206-7). This illustrates that some castles were positioned to dominate access to more widespread economic resources.

To see the placing of castles as resulting from deliberate medieval strategy however is to negate and forget most castles Iron Age legacy. It is only the later castles, built away from earlier seats, that can be seen to result from deliberate initiative. The Clann 'ic Fhionghain move from Dun Ringill to Dunakin, although taking use of an earlier site, shows a change in strategic need. Dun Ringill looks over a fairly limited seaward area, bounded to the north, east and west by the coast and peninsulas of Skye, whereas Dunakin overlooks the main sea-route from the northern Hebrides and Highland mainland to the south. In other cases the dominance over land and sea must have been seen as satisfactory, or the hold of the tradition of the seat must have predominated. It perhaps reveals more about the nature of Iron Age relationships with the maritime environment than medieval ones.

## 9.6 Defending the Observable

*Those who see Dunstaffnage Castle by approaching it from land, will find nothing picturesque or interesting in its appearance: it is a heavy square mass, on a bare and ugly shore. But it is far otherwise from the sea ... On the land side, its aspect is mean; and, as a defence, it appears feeble, but, towards the sea, it carries with it that air of rude strength and romance which leads us back to the ages of Highland feudal independence*  
(MacCulloch, cited in McDonald 1997, 250).

Although MacCulloch, writing in the 1820s within the brand of Romantic Aestheticism that began embracing spiritual ideals of nature and wilderness that was arising in the nineteenth century, dismissed the castle's power upon landward viewers, he struck upon the importance of the castle's monumentality within a maritime environment. Within a maritime world the western seaboard castles were primed to impress their message upon the range of sea traffic discussed above. The earliest 'proper' castles in this area were the



‘curtain wall castles’ of the thirteenth century. They had continuous polygonal walls with rounded edges, which in most cases entirely encircled and encased rocky outcrops in or near the sea. Perhaps the most impressive of which is Kisimul, in Barra, which at high tide appears to rise straight from the sea. In all cases “they present to the field a series of unbroken flat walls whose defence was conducted solely from a wall head hoarding” (Cruden 1960, 48).

Yet, when looking at the defences of these castles, from the earliest re-occupied and modified brochs to fourteenth- to seventeenth-century tower-houses one thing seems to predominate: they are all poorly defended. Castle Tioram is a prime example. MacCulloch (1824: II, 160) again noted this, from its landscape setting he realised that it could only have provided a short passive defence, as it did not command any ground and was overlooked by hills which would have greatly reduced the ability of defenders within the castle to act. This notion is further reflected in analysis of the defences themselves. Although the architectural evidence dates mainly from the sixteenth and seventeenth century adaptations, it is possible to state that Tioram was rendered virtually undefendable. It has insufficient shot-holes, the outer walls are thin and weak, and the battlements are above 2m on the wall-walks (Driscoll, pers. comm.). A similar pattern can be found throughout Scotland and Ireland (Dunbar 1978b; 1981; McNeill 1997; Samson 1998). In Ireland the defensibility was often compromised by stairways, domestic features, such as latrines, and light giving features (McNeill 1997, 217-21). The inter-mural passageways and stairways so prevalent in the fourteenth and fifteenth-century tower-houses of Skye (a feature possibly inherited from brochs: Miket & Roberts 1990, 9) must have produced similar results. Access to the sea would have allowed counter attacks to be mounted from the castle (and provided an easy escape route), but this form of defence surely negates the defensive focus of the castle.

The need to increase the monumentality of these sites is illustrated in the case of the towers, they are often higher than needed. The resulting thick walls are needed for structural support, not defence (Stell 1985, 201). That tower-houses in the Anglo-Scottish borders were not designed for pro-active defence is illustrated in a tale whereby a Scottish laird heard

of a force heading to raid and destroy his abode. He responded, not in hiding behind his walls, but by abandoning it, and spearheading a retaliation attack on the other lord's estate (Samson 1998, 135). In the Highlands and Islands, in the large number of traditions surrounding warfare and sieges of the clan era, few battles are held at castles themselves. Where castles do fall, they are often defended by a handful of retainers or single 'chamberlain', who are often bribed or tricked to hand over the keys or open the gates. One example being the castle in Loch Dochart which fell to the Royalist army during the Civil Wars by the pretence of friendship by the local Clann an Aba/MacNabs (Gordon cited Stewart 1982, 109). Although in the main this may in part arise from a series of motifs and themes in the Gaelic literature glorifying cunning over brawn, it must in some way illustrate the fact that castles were not designed to respond to large scale forces. The numbers involved in clan feuds were likely to have been small, large forces probably only occurring when brought together by an outside centralising influence, such as the Norwegian crown, the Lords of the Isles or the heads of the larger clans when heading for Ireland or mainland Scotland.

Documentation reveals that a few sieges did take place throughout the western seaboard in the sixteenth century (e.g. Pitcairn 1833: I, 234; HP: I, 265). Many of these took place after the advent of gunpowder, but the sieges often involved little more than the firing of cannons against the walls and gates, with little to no success. After Lauchlan MacLean's engagement of a fully armed vessel cast adrift after the Armada, he besieged Mingarry castle, but only achieved the death of some of those sheltering inside (Pitcairn 1883: I, 228). Despite claims that at the counter-siege of Duniveg Castle in 1614 "all this tyme the cannon and culwring played in the Castell ... and angus not abill to withstand the seage any longer" (HP: III, 184), the castle only fell when Angus fled by a back gate (ibid, 141). One besieger stated that Duniveg was the "strongest house that evir he saw, and that it wes victualled for ane yeir and that thair was a Spanish pype fullof poulder in it" (ibid., 234). It is revealing that it had only fallen to Clann Domhnaill in the first place after some night time raids and the venturing out of the main defenders, numbering twelve men (ibid., 193-94, 265, 267). The taking of castles by cunning rather than outright force is also evident in 1614 when 'M'Rannald of

Gargavach ... surprisit and tane the castle and fortalice of Ardnamurchine and fortifeit the same with men and victuall” (RPCS: X, 736-37).

The purpose of many of these appears to have been more geared towards gaining control of adjacent land than strategic dominance. In 1579 Hector MacLean of Coll complained that Lauchlan MacLean of Duart had:

*be force and violence, and masterfullie ... tuik the same castell and  
 fortalice ... and mannit and stuffit the said castell in weirlyke maner ...  
 immediateley thaireftir ... intromettit with and disponit upoun the said  
 Hectouris haill leving and heretage to quhom he pleasit ... he hes utterlie  
 baneist him, his native men and tennentis, out of thair awin rowmes,  
 houssis, and boundis* (RPCS: III, 132-3).

Several documents reveal the extent to which the Scottish Royalty and the Lords of the Isles sought to control the castles of the western seaboard. Steve Boardman (pers. comm.) has suggested that several of the charters of the Lords of the Isles show concern for control of castles. One example is John I of the Isles charter to John of Lorn in 1354, which along with limiting the latter’s rights to build galleys and building a dwelling (“*domesticaturam seu habitaculum*” – possibly a castle) in Tiree, discussed terms in the handing over of Cairnburgh and Dun Chonnuill. One condition was that Cairnburgh was not to be put into the custody of the Clann ‘ic Fhionghain (Munro & Munro 1986, 5-8). The exclusion of Cairnburgh from the territories of John of Lorn is significant as it is one of the few castles that can be said to have a purely strategic function, as it is situated far from inhabited lands and clan heartlands, at the centre of numerous seaways (RCAHMS 1980, 184-90). Also relevant is a letter sent from Edward I to Earl of Menteith after the death of the Maid of Norway in 1284, instructing him “to seize into his hands and undertake the guardianship of the Castles, fortalices and islands, and all the lands belonging to Alexander de Ergadia” (Simpson 1991, 71). However, despite similar concerns in 1608 regarding the pacification of Angus of Duniveag and Hector of Duart (Munro 1882, 19), the last clause is perhaps more



revealing of Edward's desired aims: that he was interested more in the appropriation of the symbols of land-holding the Isles than removing military fortifications.

An incident in Barra 1613 reveals the taking of the Island's castle was a central part of demonstrating the instating of new landlords from competing lines of the lineage:

*Rorie M'Neill of Barray, and Gillevaun Oig M'Neill, his lauchfull some  
lauchfullie procreat betwixt him and Moir Nine Allan, his lauchfull spous,  
and sister ro Donald M'Allan, his Yllantyrum, Capitane of Clanrannald ...  
thay being within thair awne house and castell of Kismule in the Yle of  
Barray, thair doing thair lauchfull effairis in sober and quiet maner,  
lippyning for nor violence, injurie, nor oppressioun to have bene done to  
thame be ony persone, it is of treuth that Neill Oig M'Neill and Gillevaun  
M'Neill, sones naturall to the said Rorie, unlauchfullie procreat betwixt  
him and \_\_\_\_\_, mother to Sir Dougall Campell of Auchinbrek, accomapeid  
with Rorie M'Conneill in \_\_\_\_\_, and Johnn M'Allan, pyper, with  
convocatioun of ... twenty personis, all bodin in feir of weir ... enterit  
violentlie thairintill and put violent handis in the saidis complenaris ...  
layied thame fast in the yrnis, mannit the said house, maid thame selffis  
maisteris and commanderis thairof ... keipis and haldis the said house as  
ane house of weare (RPCS: X, 6).*

After the imposition of the Statues of Iona Lord Ochiltree, who was charged with destroying the Highland galleys, showed great concern for the inhabitants of the western mainland, who, once robbed of their vessels would be unable to respond to sea-borne raids from the Western Isles (RPCS: VIII, 523-5. His comments reveal that boats, and not necessarily castles, were the primary form of defence along the western seaboard, and that the sea gates meant that foreign attacks and fishing vessels could be intercepted quickly. The need for sea gates had another role than allowing quick access to boats for attack, in 1611 the crown complained that whenever official letters could not be sent to:

*Donnald McAllane ... his duelling place of the castle of Tyreine, quhair his wyff, bairnis, servandis and familie hes thair residence ... becaus at all suche tymes as ony messinger repairis to his boundus ... he then convoyis and transportis him selff to ane litle yle in the sey xxx miles of land quhair na man can haif access to his personall presence (RPCS: VIII 2<sup>nd</sup> ser., 306-7).*

O'Connor (1998, 94-101) has shown that castles were in many ways at odds with the rhythms the Gaelic pastoral world, that refuge and protection could be and was provided by the landscape. Within a landscape with scattered pockets of arable and settlement and where the whole population would have been dispersed throughout the hills during the summer months with their cattle, the protective role of castles may have been partially redundant and impractical. Herds would have been almost impossible to round up into a bawn, so they, along with the majority of the local populace, would have fled to the hills, rather than facing oncoming forces. Scottish evidence for this practice will be presented in Section 10.4, but there is some evidence that bawns may have provided some respite from short term raiding. Breachacha Castle, in Coll (Fig. 107) was home to one branch of the Clann Gill'eoin, it has already been mentioned above when it was besieged and taken by force by another branch of the Clann Gill'eoin, but at the end of the sixteenth century it was described as:

*ane great strenth be reason of the situation thairof verie neir to the sea, quhilk defendis the half thairof, and hes three walls about the rest of the castell and thairof biggit with lyme and stane, with sundrie gude devises for defending of the tower. Ane uther wall about that, within the quhilk the haill gudes of the cuntrie are keipit in tyme of troublis or weiris (Skene 1890, 435-436).*

Similar descriptions were made of Gaelic Irish bawns in the later sixteenth century by both Camden in 1588 (Loeber 2001, 275) and Richard Stanihurst in 1584:

*The princes also have courtyards surrounded by great ramparts and ditches, and hedged around with thorn-bushes and shrubbery. They thrust their cattle into these confined and protected compounds when the need arises to guard them from the attacks and stratagems of robbers (Lennon 1981, 147).*

A further example from the western seaboard comes from complaint made by ‘John McDugall of Dunnollich’ in 1623 that servants of Donald Campbell of ‘Barbrek’ had burnt the cattle byres in Dun Ollie (Simpson 1991, 80).

Thus it seems that although castles in the western seaboard may have met the occasional force, it seems that, like their Lowland and Irish counterparts, they were intended to overawe by their apparent impregnability and inaccessibility, bypassing the need of actually having to defend it (Stell 1985, 199).

*The coast that I saw from the Maria, in the light of morning, was dominated by the castle. It was ten times as big as the keep of Sir Andrew de Ross in Scotland. It was set massively into the side of a hill above the sea. All behind it the countryside surged with cultivated fields and blacker forest than I had ever seen. The wheat lay heavy and green to the sun (George MacKay Brown 1976, 204).*

Although not referring to the western seaboard, this highlights the fact that maritime castles must have often been viewed against a backdrop of hills, possibly detracting from their monumentality at a distance. This may mean that the castles’ impressiveness were reserved for relatively close observation. However, Campbell records that Brochel Castle was a well-known landmark to later mariners (cited Sharpe 1982, 46).



The ubiquity of sea-gates, in many cases the sole entry to the castle, may have provided some restriction of access, but surely must have served to enhance the importance and separateness of the castle. Through the crossing of boundaries, wet and dry, on foot and boat, increasing the difficulty of the process of travel, the castle must have been imposed on the mind of the traveller and the monumentality of the architecture enhanced. In addition the concept of the restricted, removed and sacred nature of what lay within the castle was impressed on all those who wanted to gain access therein. This was the chief and/or his servants, representatives and council, and the processes over which they claimed rights and utilised in exercising their power: namely the media that expressed social inclusion and exclusion. Including feasting, protection, justice, imprisonment etc., and expressed through the access and denial of access to these processes (see Dodgshon 1988a). Although Tioram is not directly mentioned the association of the castle to the chief and administration of justice is surely implied by an old saying: "To whom can I go with my complaint, when there is no Clanrannald in Moidart?" (Stewart 1982, 233).

## **9.7 Public Access: Beyond the Walls**

Once in the castle further layers of boundaries and areas of access were encountered. Drawing on Johnson and Boswell, Miket and Roberts (1990, 19-20) describe the entry-route into Brochel Castle. The traveller went first by sea, then up a stair into and through the darkness of a passage covered by a guard alcove and only then into the light of a central courtyard surrounded by high-walled buildings. Once past the outer boundaries the traveller would be faced by a further set of boundaries that would have defined, and been demarcated by, their own position and status. In a more basic tower-house the public arena was normally the hall, positioned on the upper floors of the tower, necessitating the passage through a number of walkways, stairways and open spaces. In many ways this passage must have been a physical metaphor for entry into the heart of the castle (see Dixon 1988; 1996). Passing through boundaries signifying the exit from the profane outside world, subject to injustice and numerous, diverse powers and entering into the realm of the chief and the

power and justice which he personified. This passage must have served to legitimate, naturalise and impose the nature of the chief's position.

In some cases, such as Kisimul and Castle Tioram, outer complexes of buildings were built as part of later phases of the castle. Some of these structures have been interpreted as halls (Dunbar 1978a; Evans & Rutherford 1999: Figs. 101 and 103). Although the evidence for this may be scant, the buildings in question possibly serving as additional domestic or household quarters. These predate the eventual domestication of halls and castles in general, and the phase of castle abandonment in preference for mansion houses, that took place across the western seaboard in the latter seventeenth century (Macinnes 1998, 169-70). Halls were a main part of castle architecture from the fourteenth through to the seventeenth century throughout Scotland (Stell 1985 202-04, Zeune 1992, 125-26), so it seems likely that halls were an integral part of Hebridean castles and highly important in understanding the function of castles in Island society.

As will be demonstrated in Section 10.5, halls were being constructed throughout the Hebrides in the later medieval period, their construction could possibly indicate that social stratification was becoming prevalent regarding access to the jurisdictional and other powers of the chief. Certain issues were being removed from the public arena of the outdoor assemblies and being incorporated into the chief's private domain (see Sections 7.13 and 10.5: also O'Keeffe 1997, 8-11, for an analysis of the formal space of halls in Irish castles). Both the latter phases of Tioram (Evans & Rutherford 1999, 90-94) and Kisimul (Dunbar 1978a) reveal a further stratification in access to halls in that they have two, one encompassed within the tower at the heart of the castle, the other within the curtain wall. Perhaps more important clan members and visitors from outside their immediate 'realm' were greeted by the chief at the inner hall, in the tower. The possible relative privacy of the inner hall may have provided the environment for discussion of topics such as leases as well the more politically important subjects as alliances, etc. Issues, such as justice and rent-exaction, which were more public, or related to the lower orders of the clan, may have been reserved for the outer hall.

Within the castle walls were housed the chief, his domestic family and his domestic, administrative and military households. The size of the military household is uncertain and it certainly varied over time and between lords. Additionally, the keeping of a military force, mainly for campaign in Lowland Scotland and Ireland, was kicked off during the Wars of Independence, and seems to have rapidly increased over the course of the sixteenth century (Hayes-McCoy 1937). In 1596 Spenser (1890, 115) described late sixteenth-century gentlemen's houses as full of kern. It is the limiting of this retinue in the Statutes of Iona that Macinnes (1998, 166) links to the ultimate demise of the castle, as the negation of housing this group, coupled with an increasing Anglification of the Highland gentry, enabled more domesticated housing to develop.

Felim MacDugall in his poem *It is not good to travel on Sunday*, probably composed in the early sixteenth century, stated: "Not good is a lime-built castle lacking a hall" (Watson 1937, 241), summing up the contemporary realisation of the important role played by the hall. "The main hall is seen as ringing with the talk, laughter, and belching of the household at dinner time, and with the snoring and farting of the same at night" (Samson 1998, 138). As Samson points out this image is probably unreasonable as it is dependent on an uncouth and barbaric preconception of pre-Reformation and in this case Highland nobility (ibid.).

In the poem *I'm Not Free from Thoughts that Harass*, there is a stock description which shows a much more domestic scene within the hall of either a castle or mansion of the seventeenth century:

*Thou my darling art my heart's one,  
Son of him from gabled castle,  
Well I know the style you're heir to –  
Large wide mansions, floor swept barely,  
Mighty fire, of ashes sparing.  
Apple rolls from end to end of,*



*Right good wife in further chamber,  
 And beyond more rooms a-fastened,  
 Rooms where daoín'-uaisle's gather,  
 Drinking cups and bowls a-quaffing,  
 Girls a-hemming fair and happy,  
 Brown silk thread all deftly platting.*  
 (Campbell & Collinson 1969-81: I, 57-58).

Throughout the traditional Gaelic poetry references to castles and their halls are filled images of sewing and embroidering maidens and the drinking, dancing and general festivities surrounding feasts and marriages: ramifying the importance of these rituals in tying together society (Dodgshon 1988a; 1998, 8-9, 84-7) and the arena in which they were played.

A large number of poems rehearse the importance of the hall as the theatre in which poetry and the music of the harp (and later the pipe) was played out, often these performances were central to the festivities, genealogies and historical events being recorded. Perhaps the most succinct and eloquent example is found in a late fourteenth-century Irish poem *To a Harp*: "O'Conor of Conn's city! Grandson of O'Melaghlin, happy men envy thy house, thy castle is a weir of harps" (in Bergin 1970, 242). This is perhaps inevitable, given poets are authors of the poems, and that they reflect their own perception of themselves and their own role in society and their reason for being. However, there must be some revelation here to yet another mechanism essential to social cohesiveness of the gentry, and the clan as a whole, taking place within the hall. The references to substantiate this link of the poet to the castle, and in some ways to the chief, are numerous. One illustrative example may be found in the Blind Harper's attack or lament upon absenteeism, written after 1619, *A Song for the MacLeod of Dunvegan*:

*The wheel has gone round,  
 the warmth has abruptly turned cold:  
 but here I have seen*

*a fort flourishing with cups now dry,  
a fort filled with songs,  
bountiful without caution or stint:  
but that day has passed,  
and the buildings are deserted and cold.*

*Echo deserted the Dùn  
at the time we were parted from our chief;  
I met with him  
wandering hill and moor;  
it was he who spoke first:  
If I'm not mistaken, it was you  
I saw entertained  
over a year ago in the Dùn of the poet bands.*

*O Echo of the forts.*

*(Ó Baoill & Bateman 1994, 199-201)*

Whatever the interpretation, whether domicile abode, public arena or haunt of civilised poets or retinue (either handsome and heroic or barbarously uncouth), it was through this environment that one had to travel to get to the most private parts of the tower-house; the domestic abode of the chief, himself, and his family (ibid.). This boundary is also acknowledged in the poetry:

*I know your ancestral custom,  
A great open house, with swept flooring,  
A good hostess there presiding,  
With bright maidens there at sewing,  
With closed rooms there above them.*

(*Who Would Sound the Silver Whistle* in Campbell &  
Collinson 1969-81: III, 227)

Also see *I'm Not Free from Thoughts that Harass*, above.

## 9.8 Halls, Kitchens and Outhouses

Many castles may not have presented a single, unified, defence to the outside world. Some appear to have incorporated into, or been the focus for, clusters of outbuildings. The best contemporary account is Richard Stanihurst's, writing in 1584 regarding the castles of Gaelic Ireland:

*Adjoining them are reasonably big and spacious palaces made of white clay and mud. They are not roofed with quarried slabs or states, but with thatch. In the palace they have their banquets but they prefer to sleep in the castle rather than in the palaces because their enemies can easily apply torches to the roof* (Lennon 1981, 146).

The most visible outbuildings are located within bawns or curtain walls (e.g. see RCAHMS 1975, 169, 200, 214, 218; 1984, 263, 270), but may be scattered about the immediate vicinity of the castle, rather than being enclosed within a demarcated wall. Of the few castles surveyed and/or excavated across Scotland's western seaboard nearly all have produced evidence for medieval outbuildings. At Dun Ringill (Fig. 66), where there are two houses inside, one house is definitively medieval in date, and the other may be too. There are a further four longhouses nearby, of unsure date, suggesting that if they are not contemporary with the dun, the area remained the focus for settlement (Miket & Roberts 1990, 47-8). Morrison (1974) has noted that outlying settlements and non-monumental houses within the castle walls or enclosures are also present at a number of other prehistoric sites: Dun Lagaidh, MacEwen's Castle in Cowal, Kildonan in Kintyre and Dun Beag in Skye (also see Sections 7.4 and 7.8). Sitting on an un-enclosed promontory Ardtornish (Fig. 108)



is surrounded by at least fourteen buildings of varying size (RCAHMS 1980, 171). At Dun Ara (Fig. 109) a bailey encloses four buildings, but beyond the dyke, upon the peninsula are at least six further structures (ibid., 199, 201), but perhaps the most revealing example is at Aros (Fig. 110), where an outer wall encircles a hall-house and a further building of much the same proportions, but outwith the enclosure are at least another four visible building footings (ibid., 174). All these castles are located on promontories, but where islands have been fortified by outer walls, such as Cairnburgh (ibid., 185) and Dun Chonnuill (RCAHMS 1984, 266) the buildings are relatively small, unimpressive structures.

A Scottish description mirroring Stanihurst, albeit emanating from the Eastern Highlands at the beginning of the eighteenth century, can be found in Burt's visit to a local chief somewhere near Inverness:

*Being prepossessed with the notion of a castle, and seeing only a house hardly fit for one of our farmers of fifty pounds a year; and in the courtyard a parcel of low outhouses, all built with turf, like other highland huts* (1998: 84)

Although un-enclosed these areas may have served a purpose similar to bawns and the barmkins of the Lowland tower-houses. These were low walls, enclosing, but more importantly demarcating the function of the tower-house. Justice was delivered and domestic activities usually took place within (Samson 1998, 141-2). Although few physical boundaries are present a similar idea may be evident. The need for a constructed delineation would often be negated by a natural boundary, such as island shore. Societal differences and ideas about landholding and status between the Highlands and the Lowlands may, however, also be a factor.

Although Stanihurst's statement cannot be thought to be definitive for all outer buildings, he does emphasise the fact that many were accessible to the wider populace, not just reserved for the gentry. He noted that "a great number flock daily" to those lords with "fixed

dwelling places” (cited in Loeber 2001, 275). His comments about timber and turf thatched halls adjoining castles were either echoed or paraphrased by both Camden (1588 cited *ibid.*) and Moryson (in 1603) who also added that within the halls “they eate with their Family. Neither are many of these gentle mens houses void of filth, and slovenlinesse” (1907: III, 498).

This may suggest that the outer halls, and complexes mentioned above at Kisimul and Tioram have been correctly interpreted, only in these cases they were brought within the castle walls. Although this may result from practical or defensive reasons, or some wish to state the inclusiveness of these settings within the remit of the castle, in neither of these cases are there expansive backlands upon which settlement could have taken place. Eilean Tioram, upon which the castle stands is however large enough to accommodate several small outhouses and one larger stone structure (Fig. 111), which have not been dated or excavated, but may be contemporary accommodation (Speller & Tompsett 1999, 14). The latter building may have served a form of gatehouse as it overlooks the causeway (*ibid.*, 11).

At Burt’s castle he hints, but does not specify, that the outbuildings served as accommodation and storehouses. At another laird’s house he describes an outside hovel that served as a kitchen (1998, 238). The need for kitchens, barns, storehouses, stables, etc. must mean that interpretation of these outhouses should include the possibility of these functions. Illustrations of other domestic activities associated with castles of the seventeenth century can be found in the traditional poetry, although they take a more grandiose approach than Burt’s derisory comments:

*I knew the custom of your household,*

*A cow being flayed, a pig divided,*

*Gentry seated at round white tables,*

*Slender greyhounds with golden leashes ...*

*(Who Would Sound the Silver Whistle in Campbell &  
Collinson 1969-81: III, 227).*

And of Clanranald's house;

*I knew the custom of your household,  
Boiling beef and flaying cattle,  
A baker baking the bread,  
Brewers brewing beer,  
Maidens sewing linen,  
And putting silk on their limbs,  
On their shoulders, and on their feet  
(Sorrowful am I in a Strange Country in Campbell &  
Collinson 1969-81: III, 331).*

## 9.9 Demesne and Domination

The following document, dated 1616, was intended to follow up, expand upon, and revitalise the articles of the Statutes of Iona, 1609. In addition to drawing attention to the demilitarisation of castles and the fact that castles were not full-time residences, it highlights the subject of mains, or demesnes. More importantly it leads to speculation about the nature of castles and their domination over land and people, taken as being one of the most important roles played by castles across 'feudal' medieval Europe, perhaps being one of their most important and realised manifestations after their military conception.

*The saidis personis principallis and everyone sall mak thair residence and  
duelling at the particular placeis underwritin now designit be thame for  
thair duellings: - viz. the said Sir Rory McCleade at Dunveggane, the said  
Capitane of Clanrannald at Ylantyrin, the said Sir Lauchlane McKynnoun  
at Killimoyne, the said Laird of Coill at Brecache, and the said Laird of  
Loichbuy at Moye; and that suche of the saidis personis as wantis duelling  
housis ansuerable to thair rankis in the placeis foirsaidis sall with all*



*convenient diligence prepair materiallis and builde civile and comelie housis for thair duellingis; and, wher thair housis ar decayit, that they sall repair and mend the same, and that they sall mak policie and planting about thair housis, and that they sall tak maynes about thair housis in thair awne handis, and labour the same with thair awne goodis, to the effect thay may be thairby exercised and eshew idilnes; and, wheiras the Capitane of Clanrannald hes not maynes about his house, that thairfoir he sall labour with his awne goodis the maynes callit Hobeg in Ust now designit be him for his maynes, and that he sall tak the same in his awne handis (RPCS: X, 774-775).*

Of the five castles mentioned in the above document, four have demesne lands within their immediate vicinity. Little evidence survives about the nature of mains holding in medieval Gaelic Scotland. The document may have provided the stimulus for its creation or ramified a process either in development or already well established. The concept of the demesne certainly does not sit well with traditional ideas of clanship and associated patterns of landholding, but the idea has not been investigated and clan studies are notoriously under-developed and shackled by academics' and modern-day clans' preconceptions.

Most early charters mention castles alongside the islands or regions to which they are attached, such as Ranald's 1371 charter linking Eilean Tioram and Moidart and Caisteal Bhuirgh with the Uists (RMS: I, 520; Munro & Munro 1986, 10-11). At this time Bhuirgh is named 'Vynwayle' deriving its name from the island of Benbecula, rather than the township is was located in. Around 1600 Steornabhaigh castle was linked to twenty merklands of Lewis (RMS: VI, 465), which may tie it to part of one of the parishes of Lewis rather than the whole island, but this is perhaps too late a document to shed light on the earlier arrangements of demesne lands. It is possible though that these castles had no set demesne as such and lived off the estates as a whole, Loeber (2001, 305) has pointed out that in Ireland MacCarthy Mór's largest castle sat within a demesne that composed half of his overall lands. However, it is equally possible that in Scotland such large charters obscured

micro-management policies surrounding castles. In the fourteenth century four *dabhaichean* of Assynt appeared alongside the “forcelata insule ciusdem” (Webster 1982, 507), which may be an example of one castle with an associated smaller demesne, if not still a fairly large one. More evidence becomes available over the seventeenth century: one presented four merklands of the Mains of Saddell with the “castle and custody thereof”, another the three “merk land of Dunolly mor and castle ... and office of bailiary of Lorne” (Campbell 1933: 2, 269, 294). Also, in 1672 MacLean paid the duties for “the lands of Dowart, the castle, tower, and fortalice thereof, and milne of the same; the lands of Barbrgane of the [castle]” (HP: I, 251). Unfortunately, these examples post-date the Statutes of Iona and came under the jurisdiction of improving landlords, so may not be typical. Nevertheless they raise the possibility that in the earlier period some castles were provided for by small mains farms, rather than extensive estates.

In Gaelic Ireland the evidence is again piecemeal, although the idea of demesne lands did seem to exist, if small scale in nature. Nicholls (1972, 37-9) suggested a link of demesne lands to stations of office, although separate from the larger overall estate. Their presence was also piecemeal; some large chieftaincies had them, others did not. Where they existed they were reserved only for the lord and the *tánaiste*. An example of their presence is found relating to O’Connor of Sligo: he had a small castle and landholding in each sub-land. O’Dowd (1986, 125) suggests that each castle formed a nucleus for settlement with the agricultural workers living in vicinity. Unfortunately, these examples may differ from Scotland as patterns of landholding and lordship had different origins and were differently affected by English and Lowland Scottish incursions. They may however suggest that the idea was not as foreign (Lowland or English) to them as may have been expected, and that the adoption by Gaelic lords in Ireland may have made it acceptable in the western seaboard, if a similar, possibly indigenous, system was not already in existence.

According to the Statutes of Iona, quoted above, Castle Tioram was not provided with a demesne: the backdrop to this castle is mostly steep hillside with very little land with arable potential in the near vicinity. Thus the Clann Ragnaill chiefs were instructed to make a farm

of the township of Tobha Beag in South Uist. The length of a lordly connection with Tobha Beag is uncertain. The Uists had been associated with them since their inception, but their direct attachment to this particular township is not documented before or after the Statutes of Iona. Although there had been a connection to Driomor, a few miles to the north of Tobha Beag, around 1500, and later they became tied to Ormacleit to the south. Of other castles in the Outer Hebrides few have good arable land within view:

- Kisimul presently looks out over the modern 'town' of Castlebay, although the land is flatish, its agricultural qualities are little better than rough moorland, beyond is rocky and boggy hillside.
- Dun Ringill looks out over moorland, cultivation may have been possible in the past given the Post-Medieval occupation there, and pasturage use may stem from the eighteenth enclosure the dyke to which it lent its name (GD 221/5078/5), but in the main it is poor quality soil.
- Dunsgaith is probably alone amongst the Sleat peninsula castles in not looking over good arable land. The eastern side is cited in most guidebooks as the 'Garden of Skye', and appears lush and green to any amateur environmentalist. The western side, where Dunsgaith is, is rough grazing. Although the bay nearby may have provided some limited arable, the castle itself is based on a rocky skerry near cliffs, surrounded by bog.
- Dun Tulum, follows the same pattern of cliff use and the ground overlooked may have provided a thin slice of ploughable land, the rest is hill and moorland.
- It is hard to assess Dunvegan in its original setting because it is now a Victorian designed landscape, but the clause in the Statutes of Iona suggests enough agricultural land nearby to provide a good income.
- Steornabhaigh Castle may have also dominated a strip of flat manageable crop-land, although this has to be substantiated. Nearly all the surrounding land would have been rough grazing.

In many of these cases, the castles were situated upon Iron Age sites, overlooking land that was once prime agricultural land, to judge from the concentration of duns and brochs nearby.



Environmental degradation and the growth of peat is a gradual process which is hard to date, but most of the evidence suggest that this began with a fairly rapid phase of peat growth in the mid-to-late Iron Age, leaving some of the sites stranded in a sea of bog. Some were abandoned, others not. As suggested before the antiquity and associated power of certain sites exerted a substantial pull in the reasoning to stay at a site.

On a functional level it may be possible to surmise that in a semi-transhumant society the notion of dominance over the movement of people, livestock and economic goods was rendered redundant. There may have been no need to marry the dominance over people if dominance over the maritime environment was the primary influence on siting. This idea would perhaps be enhanced by the fact that throughout the period under study there was a dispersed settlement pattern throughout most of the Isles. However, it is clear that when there was a desire to control Hebridean landscapes by siting buildings with wide viewsheds over the landscape it was possible, such as the nineteenth-century estate houses in Uist (Badcock & Symonds 2000). This leads to two further lines of debate: perhaps the reason for the marginal placement of Hebridean castles lay within a socio-cultural idea where separateness was given cause to be enhanced, accentuated and desired; and within the nature of Gaelic power and the clan, there was little need to make a statement of control (these are discussed further in Sections 10.8 and 10.9). The inclusion of halls in castles and the appropriation of the mechanisms once covered in public assemblies reveals, however, that this latter element was eroding, and reveals why later mansion houses are often sited near good arable ground.

## **9.10 Summary**

The above debate has attempted to demonstrate that to understand the phenomenon of castles it is necessary to look beyond the site-based, architectural and military remits of earlier studies, and investigate several diverse strands regarding siting and location. What emerges is a picture that does not emphasise a purely High-Medieval phenomenon, nor their defensive capacity, either as a structure or within large-scale state politics. Instead, castles

were intended to be regarded as monuments to the idea of defence, impressing the power of the resident on clan gentry, ambassador, passing shipping and probably local peasant alike. By their siting within the landscape and seascape, the architect sought to highlight this monumentality and the associated powers' by emphasising boundaries and the separateness of the castle from other buildings and residences. The natural power of the chief, who was one with the castle, was further legitimised by its location upon sites of antiquity, the lordly residences of earlier rulers. Thus the secular power of the lord was entwined with sacred sanction.

Physically, castles were viewed within a conceptual architectural hierarchy, but the arguments levied above can be used to illustrate our understanding of what contemporary legal documents would have encapsulated in the cover all appellations of "castell, tour, and fortalice" (RPCS cited MacKenzie 1903, 217). Although often stemming from similar routes, founded on, or in, Iron Age ruins, some sites developed into the castle proper, others did not. However, they often retained their hierarchical associations, becoming the residences of the clan gentry.

It would seem that the evidence enhances Crouch's argument that "there was an overt intention by the designer [of castles] to impress contemporaries with their wealth and importance, as much as to build a fortress" (cited McDonald 1997, 250). Yet the castles proper function was additionally:

*as a centre of administration and the economic network over which it should have presided ... They could only function effectively as fully integrated administrative centres, wherein both lord and man enacted their reciprocal rights and responsibilities, the very essence of medieval society and maintained order and stability in their society (Watson 1998, 75).*

With this statement in mind it is essential that we open up this discussion to include other Hebridean forums for the mediation of similar activities, such as duns and

halls, and consider how they functioned with specific reference for the display of lordship in South Uist.



### 10.1 Introduction

Whilst the architectural phenomenon of the castle was the most monumental expression of medieval lordship in the Hebrides, the *fine* continued to inhabit and build less monumental duns, exploiting them in diverse ways, and using them to mediate different messages about Hebridean lordship than with castles. They are often sited on crannogs or natural islands, but also occur on peninsulas and stacks. Although medieval duns exist across the western seaboard, they have never really been studied as a cohesive group. This is largely because they do not fit into the normal remit of rural settlement studies and are overshadowed by their bigger brother, the ‘true’ castle. This is perhaps unsurprising given the difficulties medieval lawyers had in describing in legal terms the forms of monument important to Hebridean lords: castles, towers, fortalices and even ‘crannokis’ (e.g. see RPCS: X, 821, Morrison 1985, 23), and they were often grouped together to create a catch-all of all sites that might be relevant to the control of power. Yet, what O’Keeffe has pointed out regarding Ireland is just as pertinent in regards to the medieval western seaboard:

*If we concede that feudalism is a meaningful construct, that the private fortress of feudal societies should be called castles, and that Ireland was feudal for two or three centuries prior to 1169, then every private fortress of the era might be considered a castle, regardless of the contemporary terminology used, and indeed regardless of physical form (1998, 188).*

These forms of sites are often no more than a few buildings built in evocative high or island locations, often within the remains of prehistoric fortifications, and are remembered in folk-history primarily as refuges and/or prisons. However, when we look in more detail at how these sites were used, it becomes apparent that they functioned in the same ways as castles in more traditional European settings. They appear as the central to the role and display of elite status, places of inhabitation, prisons, fortifications, dower houses, safe-houses, nodal points

within estate and trade networks, dominating important resources, etc. The differences between duns and castles (the absence of the curtain wall or other castellated features and difference in location) allows us to envisage that they had a specific role in medieval Highlands and Islands politics and society.

## 10.2 Chiefs and Their Household

It has been demonstrated in Section 7.5 that by the end of the Late Norse period the reoccupation of prehistoric duns had come to symbolise the naturalisation of certain kindreds in their occupation and/or domination of localised regions. It has also been shown in Chapter 9 that castles across the western seaboard were frequently built upon reoccupied duns, continuing to demonstrate similar ideas about the social order whilst drawing in new European medieval concepts of lordship. Finlaggan (Fig. 80) may have been occupied since the twelfth century, but its use as a *caput* for the Clann Domhnaill Lords of the Isles continued into the sixteenth century, when it fell into the hands of the Clann Caimbeul and was turned into a farming settlement. In its many phases a castle may have been built upon the crannog and a wooden palisade may have surrounded the natural island, but these fortified features were both short lived. Buildings at the site also included a chapel and a series of halls (Caldwell and Ewart 1993). Given that the most influential kindred felt able to use a dun to highlight its ancestral links to the past and legitimise its lordship, and that castles were used to reinforce the duns' message, it is not hard to understand that some other undeveloped, or un-castellated duns maintained the conceptual link of the lord to the land (Fig. 112). Unfortunately, the surviving corpus of medieval Gaelic Scottish and Irish poetry contains little mention of duns, and by the time more material is available the dun had largely fallen out of use, thus, in order to demonstrate the continuation of such ties we are dependant on oral history and inferences drawn in from other sources and a small number of excavation reports. Yet, perhaps the most suggestive evidence comes from naming practices. At least two documents survive where, Ranald, son of the chief of Clann Ragnail with a considerable power-base of his own (see Section 2.8), is named "of Ylanebigorn" (RSS: I, 246) and "of Elanbegeryn" (RSS: I, 250-51), this has to be Eilean Bheagram, the

‘fortified’ islet in South Uist (Figs. 113 & 114). The precise political context for this naming will be discussed in Section 10.8, but the adoption of this title surely is an attempt to state his personal connection to a *caput* at the centre of his lordship, and that Eilean Bheagram was an embodiment of his position. Another example comes from a grave-slab in Iona:

*Here lies Iohannes MacIlan, lord of Ardnamurchan; and Mariota MacIlan,  
his sister, wife of Malcolmus MacDuffie, lord of Dunevin in Colonsay,  
bought this stone for her brother (Steer & Bannerman 1977, 112).*

The naming of ‘Malcolmus MacDuffie’ as “domini de dunevin in colvu(n)say” (ibid.), differs from Ranald MacAllan’s in that the ‘domini’ separates the personal-name from the place, which may be significant, but the tie of the lord to the dun, rather than the lordship or the territory is again explicit. Like Eilean Bheagram, Dun Eibhinn (Fig. 62) is another undeveloped, un-castellated dun, although not sited upon an island (RCAHMS 1984, 89-90). The dating of the slab to the first decade of the 1500s (Steer & Bannerman 1977, 114), ties it to the same period as Ranald’s attempts to establish himself through similar titular ambitions, and may signify the ways these chieftains were attempting to forge a new identity for themselves and their dominions in the wake of the fall of the Lords of the Isles.

The central and symbolic role of many duns to their respective lordships is perhaps easier to demonstrate, there are several instances of the repeated use of specific significant duns for the issuing of important documents after chiefs’ had built more up-to-date dwellings in more strategically important areas. The Clann ‘ic Fhionghain/MacKinnons continued to use Dun Ringill long after their move to the newly built castle, Dunakin (Miket & Roberts 1990, 46): a situation mirrored by the Camerons of Locheil, who refortified a newly acquired castle in 1530, but continued to use ‘Tree Island’, in Loch Eil, for the issuing of documents until 1607 (MacCulloch 1939, 160, 230; Salter 1995, 134). The connection of the Isle of Loch Rannoch to rights to the surrounding land is expressed in a complaint made in 1564 by James Menzies against Colin Campbell of Glenorchy and ‘Rannald M’Rannald M’Conilglas of Keppach’ who had forcibly occupied it:



*the Ile with the Loch of Rannoch, pertening heretabillie to the said James, and fortificatioun thair of ... [commands Rannald] to remove himself ... and utheris his servandis and partakaris, furth of the said Ile in the said Lochrannoch, and to deliver the samyn to the said James, to be usit be him at his plesour, thaireftir as his heretage (RPCS: I, 292).*

Four years earlier Colin Campbell's grant to 'Rannald McRannald McCouliglas of Cappycht' claimed to have come by it in the forfeiture of the lands of the Clann Griogoir, and covered their back by claiming "als hauand of the laird of Weyme in lifrent the tuelf merkland of Rannocht ... set in assedatioun to the said Rannald". "The twenty pound land of Rannocht auld extent with thair pertinentis with the loch Ile and fischingis of the samyn for all the day" (Innes 1855, 206-08) reveals that the crannog was directly linked to a substantial area of ground, in addition to rights over the produce of the loch. In the light of this it must have been all the more galling for James Menzies to witness Colin and Rannald's demonstration of their new domination, not only by "inhabitand all fortificatioun of the said Ile, and placeing of brokin men of far Hielandis and clannis theirin", but also by the supreme statement of control: "the wrngus fortificatioun and bigging of the said Ile" (RPCS: I, 290). However, the connection is not always so clear, as there was a year between Andrew Mercer's grant "pro custodia manerii de Louchern" (in 1445) and "pro custodie insule locus de Erne" (Porteous 1912, 28). Additionally, a charter of 1655 accords Eilean Ran with only a half merkland (Gillies 1938, 103), although the late date may suggest that the site had lost its significance, and thus the land attached was of little importance. Further evidence for the role of crannogs in the control of resources can be found in 1576, when Donald 'M' Angus' of Glengarry was impeded by Lord Lovat "to bring and cary wod and tymmer down in boittis to the burgh and Innernes throw the watter of Lochnes" (RPCS: II, 500). The most likely place for the impeding to take place is at the southern end of Loch Ness, where there is a crannog, Eilean Murchaidh/Cherry Island, that features frequently in the Frazer clan history (e.g. Fraser 1905, 129, 184), perhaps due to such a key role and its nodal positioning.

The *Banatyne MS* raises many possibilities about the way in which duns could be used in the display and exercise of lordship over land, although the language used perhaps reflects more about the nineteenth-century context of its composition than medieval terminology. The MacLeods of Harris, were centred at Dunvegan in Skye, but they held a dun in the island of Pabaigh in the Sound of Harris. The name, Seana Chaisteal, 'Old Castle', betrays the site's perceived importance in the later periods, but there are no identifiable remains later than the outer shell of the prehistoric dun (B. Ballin-Smith pers. comm.). The manuscript history states that before the Clann Leoid expansion it had belonged to the chief of the "Clan igaa" of Ness (*Banatyne MS*, 12), which may account for its later relevance to the Clann Leoid. Over the fifteenth century the history claims it was enlarged and strengthened by John MacLeod (who died in 1442), and in the 1500s it was a hiding place of Alasdair Crotach upon the approach of James V (*ibid.*, 39, 49). It remained an importance residence of the MacLeod chiefs into the early 1600s when Rory Mor moved to Beàrnaraigh (Grant 1959, 247). What the *Banatyne MS* reveals is not only that the dun retained an importance for the chiefs themselves, but how that power may have been transferred in a similar way to castles and chamberlains/constables/wardens (see Section 9.4). It states that in a dispute over the inheritance over the chiefship of the MacLeods in the mid-sixteenth century, there was a possibility that the lordship could fall into the hands of the Clann Caimbeul. In order to preserve the lineage, the wardship of the dun was put into the custody of another member of the kindred, Kenneth Campbell (*Banatyne MS*, 54). Presumably the post of warden of the dun signified their position in the clan, provided them with a territorial hold in the Isles and aided in their desire to express that they were in line to become chief. Unfortunately, the *MS* account cannot be taken on face value; the genealogical account of the *MS* differs considerably from the more likely one laid out by Grant (1959, 123-26), which must cloud the historicity of this particular description of events. The discrepancy possibly resulted from a need by the *MS* author to expiate tanistry from the MacLeod succession (MacGregor 2002, 218).

The centrality of islands to the administration of clan politics, and the role of the constable is also hinted at in the Frazer clan history:

*In 1589 in Stratharick and Abertarfe the Frazers were numerous, and few or no strangers among them; there kept courts, giving every gentleman his own particular post to maintain marches, liberties, and properties ... To Alexander M'ktaus he gives the custody of Ellanwirrich as constable (Fraser 1905, 184).*

The greatest corpus of data regarding the administration of a Gaelic lordship comes from the Campbells of Glenorchy, and was compiled and published in Innes's *Black Book of Taymouth* (1855). By comparing the dates and location of the issuing of bonds of manrent prior to 1587 (after this date there is a considerable change in location), it is possible to gain a limited insight into the temporal activities of crannog use (Fig. 115). It is apparent that after the building of the castle of Balloch, at the east end of Loch Tay (Fig. 116), documents were composed at any time of year, and it is possible to suggest, although the weight of data is less strong, that this followed a pattern also revealed at the Castle of Glenorchy beforehand. Issuings at sites of an unidentified type also appear to be randomly distributed throughout the year. In contrast to this all year round focus on castles, the issuing of documents on crannogs is centred on the period between May and August, although there are occasional outliers in the winter months and the data is biased towards Priory Island and Eilean Ran, in the middle and west end of Loch Tay respectively.

The location of Eilean Ran is not entirely agreed upon. Christie (1892, 58), followed by Gillies (1938, 397-98) suggested that it was sited on a mound set in an area of what was marshy ground lying near the junction of Loch Tay and the river Dochart, and there is a general belief that it was a castle or fortification that was destroyed in the Civil War (Gillies 1938, 102; Christie 1892, 58-59, 69). There appears to be no directly supporting evidence, but in his letters south Monk claimed his progress was a "campaign of the torch, not the sword ... destroying the country ... where the enemy used to shelter themselves in winter" (Gardiner 1903, 102), and for the opposing side Middleton was burning houses under Clann Caimbeul jurisdiction (Birch 1742, 465). It is marked in this vicinity by Pont (n.d.b: Fig.



117) and the shape of the island mirrors the shape of the mound, which has been reveted on one side and, unlike the surrounding area, is covered with large stones, perhaps the remains of standing structures, Christie (1892, 58) also recorded the footings of buildings there and a moat. There is not enough rubble, however, to suggest the remains of a castle, so it may be that the site was only a minor fortification.

Whilst the concentration of documents issued on crannogs in the summer months may reveal little more than the fact that this would have been the easiest time of year for lairds to travel around their estates and deal with their affairs, it indicates that many crannogs were central to the administration of chiefship, also that they may have only become the focus for lordly activity on a seasonal basis (an argument made in Section 7.9 regarding Norse period duns).

Given the ever-expanding jurisdiction of some of main Hebridean kindreds over increasingly geographically dispersed lordships, the temporary occupation of some duns, at least by the chief himself, must have been normal, and many may have been utilised in a manner similar to the one described in the *Banatyne MS* and perhaps hinted at in the concept of the circuit, whereby a chief and his household travelled around his estates uplifting his rents and dues in person (Alcock 2003, 49-50). The sheer number of duns and island dwellings recorded by Pont and Blaeu means that they cannot all have functioned as the primary residence of a chief, which leads to some further possibilities regarding their use. Blaeu's published map of the Uists and Barra records thirteen island dwellings (Fig. 2), but Pont's surviving sketch map of Baghasdal (Fig. 4) shows a landscape far more abundant in duns, and there are numerous others elsewhere in the atlas.

A number of tales and histories relating to sixteenth-century feuds in North Uist among the Siol Uisdean involve the use of duns and they enable us to build up a picture of life in the duns. For example, the athletic games that were taking place at Dun Scolpaig, North Uist, which were central to the murder of Donald Herrach (MacKenzie 1881, 253). Although the events described take place in the context of a feud, it is evident that it was not only the chiefs and/or their representatives that were living in duns. Other members of the clan elite,

with more localised power-bases, also occupied duns. It is repeatedly stated that they were being used as refuges, implying casual use. However, given the scale of the medieval building inserted into Dun an Sticir (Beveridge 1911, 139-43: Fig. 118), and the dun's inclusion in Blaeu's map, it seems more likely that some were permanent residences. This dun is noted as being occupied by the son of the captain of the clan, who served as "balliuo de Oyst" (ibid., 304). Other elite members are noted in connection to specific duns (e.g. Dun Scolpaig occupied by the head of the clan, and Dun Aonais, named after his son: ibid., 194-94, 224). However, this is not the case for all the individuals with links to duns recorded in the tales, which were written down shortly after they took place and thus may be historically accurate (HP: I, 66). Mostly these characters appear as accomplices in the trail of murderers who are rewarded with land and duns, such as 'Paul of the Thong', who was given Dun Steingearraidh and lands at Baile Mòr for his actions (Beveridge 1911, 187). They were not part of the *fine*, but middle-men, or tacksmen. However, the connection of a dun to an area of land appears to have remained intact.

Evidence regarding women at duns shows that they were at the heart of a domestic arena (Innes 1855, 19; Wilde 1866, 388; Fraser 1892, 128; Byrne 1903, 7; Greive 1923: I, 268; Dawson 1997, 222). However, the role of women at some duns reveals the complex functions duns had to the complex geography of lordship. The *Wardlaw MS* records that in the early sixteenth century Katherine Grant, wife of Hugh, Lord Lovat, "turn'd hectick" and died at "Ellanwirrich" (Fraser 1905, 129), presumably Cherry Island/Eilean Mhurchaidh at the south end of Loch Ness (Blundell 1909). Additionally, in 1694 the divorced wife of the Earl of Mentieth was placed in Inchtalla in the Lake of Menteith (Hutchison 1899, 314). This perhaps suggest little more than that crannogs could act as suitable dower houses. However, women within Gaelic society were relatively independent and retained control of resources that they brought to a marriage in the case of a divorce (Stiùbhart 1999, 237). Thus the connection of these women to crannogs may have been imbued with some significance regarding proprietorship over associated lands and related resources.

### 10.3 Defence

It is a reoccurring motif in the oral tradition of the Highlands and Islands to name duns as temporary refuges for heroic characters in times of trouble. A number of examples are set in context against the hostile take over of Lewis by the Clann Coinnich. The last MacLeod to offer resistance was said to be Ruaridh Dubh, the younger son of the more notorious Neil, the story recounts that he took refuge at a dun in Loch Arnol. From there he killed anyone who approached in the wrong manner, including four monks: an inclusion which Grant (1959, 153) suggests may reveal that it has been borrowed from an earlier, pre-Reformation story. Similarly, Donald Chaim and his accomplice were forced to take refuge in a dun in Loch Barrabhat, Crowlista (Macdonald 1967, 24-25; Macdonald 1975, 15). Although lacking the colour of these stories government records substantiate the idea of duns acting as refuges. In the wake of the troubles surrounding the planting of the Fife Adventurers in Steornabhagh, they gained a license from the King's Justices to pursue fugitives (i.e. the Clann Leiod) and use all "warlyke ingyne" to destroy their refuges (MacKenzie 1903, 217). Other near contemporary accounts of the brief respite duns could provide are contained in the Earl of Gordon's genealogy. One episode records that after a skirmish:

*John Macky himselff wes so hotlie pursued, that he wes glaid for saiftie of his lyff to flie into ane island hard by Lairg, called Ellan-Minrie, haveing gottin in thither by suiming; wher he lay quietlie all the rest of the day. The nixt night he left the iland, least he should be discovered (1813, 97).*

Another incident, dated to 1526, suggests that in the Clan Chattan feud the MacKintosh chief was killed by James 'Malcolmesone':

*After which, fearing greater truble to ensue towards him, he flieth to the yle of the loch of Rothiemurcose, as a sanctuarie or defence for him. Bot the rest of the Clan chattan did pursue him with such eager myndes, that by force*



*taking him in the yle, they killed him and many of his confederats (ibid., 99-100).*

The first site is the largely unfortified crannog, Eilean Ma Ruibhe (Blundell 1913, 281-82), whilst the second is a natural island bearing the substantial remains of Loch an Eilean Castle (Simpson 1937: Fig. 119). It should not be surprising that pursuing governmental forces (whether Lowland troops or hired locals) saw duns as obstacles in their path to capturing unco-operative individuals, and came into contact with them when fugitives did take refuge within them. There was no need to record the cultural context of the dun in the brief despatches describing events. Neither they, nor Gordon, nor later tradition bearers stopped to note whether the dun was used as a dwelling in the times when they were not being used as handy hideaways. In contrast Loch an Eilean Castle was an upstanding monument with recognisably defensible features and is likely to have been occupied in this period (ibid.). The mere fact that they are such a common resort of hotly pursued renegades surely suggests that they were not just stumbled upon by chance, but well known and part of the mental geography of the clan. It is common to these approaches that there appears to be some perception that duns could provide protection to their occupants. However, a tale set in the early 1400s in Sutherland perhaps betrays that this perception may not have been held too strongly. Two MacKays, Angus and Paul 'Mackneill' stole their neighbours' cattle, they then hid in the:

*Ile of Dolay in Breachat [probably Loch Dola: RCAHMS 1911, 160]. In the end, being hotlie pursued, and not thinking themselues saiff aneugh within the yland, retired, vnder silence of the night, vnto ane hill hard by ... to lie saifly ther from the pursute of their enemies (Gordon 1813, 66).*

Records of sieges of islands in Scotland mirror those of Hebridean castles by the sea, in that their success varies greatly, and they fall due to the cunning of their attackers, or betrayal of their defenders. For example, Archibald MacGillespuig Clerich is thought to have been killed after the alarm had been raised by his mother whilst he swam from Dun an Sticir, in

North Uist (Beveridge 1911, 143). Gordon's (1813, 181, 263, 534) accounts of sieges of the castle of the Isle of Assynt, however, show that fortunes could vary widely depending on the situation. Additionally, the fullest record of a siege of a dun, Loch Gorme, in Islay, in 1614, shows that despite being newly repaired (HP: III, 273-74) in the latest artillery style (RCAHMS 1984, 282-83), it quickly submitted when faced by cannon (HP: III, 287). The style of fortification here was replicated during the same campaign at Loch an Sgoltaire, Colonsay (Fig. 120), and may reflect the Spanish help, in lieu of an armada that never materialised, that English and Lowland sources were concerned would springboard out of the rising (RPCS: II, 500; CSPA: V, 602, 618). However, crannogs and duns were continuing to be fortified and held against forces through until the Civil War, such as that the New Model Army "tooke [in] the Isle of Loughtannor in Aboyne, which Huntly had fortified" (Gordon 1817, 537), if not later (e.g. MacGregor 1901, 126-27, 179).

Given that most crannogs in South Uist are over-shadowed by hills and within easy arrowshot from the landward side it is unclear whether the duns' defences were effective. Fynes Moryson, who accompanied the English army records that this was certainly a problem for the Irish in 'Loughrorcan' when faced with a determined English force in 1601. They rained shot and arrows down upon the island till the houses caught fire and the defending force of thirty men were forced to swim away (1907: II, 372-3). Although Captain De Cuellar (1988, 34-35) managed to hold out a castellated crannog against a large English force with a very small number of Spanish defenders, this would seem to be an unusual situation. English Tudor accounts of crannogs in Ireland give us some clue, Thomas Pettiplace's record of O'Neil in 1567 said that:

*that fortification that he only dependeth upon is in sartin ffreshwater loghes, which from the sea there come neither ship nor boat to approach them; it is thought that there in ye said fortified islands lyeth all his plate ... money, prisoners, and gages, wch islands hath in wars before been attempted, and now of late again ... wch, for want of means of safe conduct upon ye water, it hath not prevailed* (Wood-Martin 1886, 146-47)

This reveals the main defence of these sites was the water that surrounded them. Holley's study of crannogs in the Inner Hebrides revealed that sixty percent of crannogs there were in water deeper than a man could wade through, seventeen percent were reachable by wading and thirty-eight percent only had access by boat. Causeways tended to be in water 1.5m – 2m deep (2000, 60-62), the silted nature of many of the lochs in South Uist may have meant that while access could have been gained by swimming, walking could have been impeded. In 1611 when the Clann Griogoir "amassit thameselffis togidder in the yle of the loiche of Loch Kitterine, whilk thay haif fortifeit with men, victuall, poulder, bullett and uther weirlyke furnitour, intending to keepe the same as ane place of weare and defence", it was necessary for all the boats and birlinns in Loch Lomond to be transported in order to root out the "woulffis and thevis" (RPCS: IX, 125-26). A number of tales regarding attacks on island sites reiterate the need to bring boats from elsewhere to gain access to it: Allan MacRuairidh's attack on Island Moy is noted by its inclusion of the currachs brought to the loch (anon. 1819, 83); and 'Smooth' John MacNab had to bring his own boat to retake his island seat, as the only boat had been taken into custody (Porteous 1912, 30-1). The concealment of a boat by dragging it for a distance inland is a feature of the tales surrounding Donald Cam's existence at Loch Barabhat (Macdonald 1975, 15). In the 1490s feud between the Drummonds and the Murrays over a crannog at one end of Loch Earn, the control of boats around duns was seen as central to pacifying the situation. Drummond promised James IV that he would "within XV. dais fra this day furth to ger cast down the hous of the est Ile of loch ern and distroy all the strenthis of the samyn and tak waay the bate and put hir to the west ile", another crannog at the other end of the loch (ibid., 33). Such concerns are also visible in control over 'ports' in lochs. In the late 1400s Colin Campbell obtained heritable title to the lands of the Port of Loch Tay, which is directly related in the charter to Priory Island, in Loch Tay (Gillies 1938, 116): control of the port is thus evidently linked to control of the crannog.

The vulnerability of a dun once an enemy had obtained boats is obvious from the available documentation. The Isle of Loch Tay (Priory Island) was besieged during the Civil War by



General Monk, and a series of letters survive revealing the sequence of events. At first the Royalist commander was obstinate and obviously felt safe, however, the threat of boats weakened his resolve (Akerman 1856, 73; Firth 1899, 133, 136-37). The ease of the Royalist capitulation is summed up in Monk's report:

*I sent summons for the rendition of itt, to which the Governour att first return'd a resolute answer; wheruppon I gave order for the fetching uppe of some boates severall miles from the place, the Enemy having seiz'd uppon all the boates in the Lough. Two were gott uppe (against the streame) into the Lough, and floates were appointed for the carrying over our men; but the Enemy pervieving some preparation were willing to submitt to termes (Firth 1899, 137-38).*

Similar events were recorded in Ireland half a century previously (see Moryson 1907: II, 356). The vulnerability of island duns is also evident in the concerns of Colin Campbell, in 1570 he pleaded to his wife:

*I pray yow to gyf gud attendance to your awin body and pass nocht to the west end of the lach sa raklessle as ye do and remanis thair with sa few ane nummer as ye do divers tymes (Dawson 1997, 95).*

Whilst at the west end of Loch Tay she would have stayed at Eilean Ran (the number of documents issued there clearly mark it out as a place of some importance within the exercise of their lordship: see *ibid.*, 63-64, 185, 187, 189-94, 198, 200-01, 211; Innes 1855, 205-08, 211, 223, 226, 227, 231-39), it is clear that Colin felt that it would not provide the protection that he thought his wife needed, or deserved.

It is clear from the Irish material that castles and crannogs were not the main form of defence for the Gaelic forces, instead the landscape acted as defence, people and cattle could disappear into the hills, forests and bogs, and this cover could also be a platform from which

to mount guerrilla-style raids (O'Connor 1998, 94-101). There are hints that the Scottish landscape was used in a similar way: during the Civil War Cromwellian troops complained that the men of Lochaber used the hills to evade confrontation (Akerman 1856, 78-80), and Monk's memoirs say that only one man and two women were seen in three days (Guizot 1838, 78). In Islay in 1615 James MacDonald of Dunyveg was pursued with forty of his men "to ane iland callit Inchdaholl. The rest of his companeis wer forced to tak the hillis in the night" (RPCS: X, 764), presumably because they were too numerous to fit onto the island. An account of the troubles of the Cameron of Loch Eil in the late sixteenth century contains a further example:

*No sooner had he returned to the Isle of Locheil where he then lived, than he was informed of the arrivall of another body of enemys from the West ... He drew up his men ... att a place called Achinlourbeg, opposite to the isleand, and being informed that the Macintoshes were gone, he retired to a place where he was covered on all sides, called Inchdorisher surrounded by woods and hills (Cameron 1842, 42-43).*

The link of duns and hills and refuges is reiterated in a seventeenth-century description of Eigg, regarding a remote crannog with no evidence for late settlement upon it (RCAHMS 2003):

*there is ane high mountaine on the southwest syde of this Country. And it is ane verie good strength against enemies, that wold doe anie harme or skaith to the Countrey for it wold keep themselves that are Inhabitants of the Iland saiff, and their wyffs and children with all their moveable goods or geir which they could bring or carie with them to the tope of that hill, or mountaine, In this mountaine there is a Mure, and Mosses and in the midst of the tope of that mountaine there is a fresh water Logh. And in the midst of that Logh there is ane Illand which wold hold a certaine number of men and women with their bairnes (MacFarlane 1907, 176).*

In 1688 a similar comment was made of Lochan Eilean in Strathspey: “useful to the country in times of trouble or wars, for the people put their goods and children here, and it is easily defended” (Wood-Martin 1886, 15 )

In the anti-Catholic context of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries crannogs in the Uists appear to have had a resurgence of use. Small crannogs, named Eilean na t-Sagairt, occur both in Loch Dun Mhuirchaidh, in Benbecula (MacGuaire 1933, 497, OS Name Book 10, 19), and Loch Phuirt Ruaidh, in South Uist (named as Priest’s Loch on Bald, 1829a) and are thought to be associated with the Irish missionaries. The latter was thought to have been used by Father Forester for the hiding of his altar and vestments (William MacDonald pers. comm.), Father Forester is on record as being active in South Uist in the mid-eighteenth century (Stewart 1982, 470). Other place-names with a ‘na t-Sagairt’ suffix occur throughout the Uists, associated with a valley in South Uist and a series of natural features and a boulder with an incised cross upon it in North Uist, but any association with Irish missionaries is not explicit (Beveridge 1911, 278-79).

Overall the evidence points to the fact that island sites and duns were not especially defensible. However, they did provide temporary refuges but could not repulse a prolonged attack. Their indefensibility is perhaps unsurprising given the nature of Gaelic medieval warfare, more given to opportunism and small-scale un-sustained cattle raiding and house burning, than the organised prolonged tactics of large scale armies. However, Moryson’s accounts of English campaigns in Ireland show that the Tudor commanders believed crannogs to be central to the Irish cause: he notes nine destroyed in one year’s campaign (1907: II, 196, 232, 352, 355, 356, 372, 407), whilst in the following year eight are mentioned specifically, and more are summarised and not described in full (1907: III, 167, 178, 182, 207, 283, 285). Undoubtedly, the focus on these sites partially came from their strategic value, as Irish lords mounted raids from them and hid their treasure and supplies there, but it seems as likely that they were seen as conceptually important to Irish morale and the functioning of Gaelic lordship.



O'Sullivan (2001b) has cohesively argued that for the Tudor English the crannog became a symbol of the otherness of the Gaelic Irish, and although his argument holds less well for the role of crannogs in Irish perceptions of their own identity, as the evidence is almost entirely Anglo-centric, it is clear that English writers certainly perceived this as the case. In 1571 Campion noted that O'Neill "fortified a strong Iland in Tyrone, which he named spitefully, Foogh-ni-Gall, that is, the hate of English men, whom he detested, that he hanged a Souldiour for eating English bisket" (1809, 188-89). The Gaelic associations of crannogs do not appear to have crossed into Scottish writings, perhaps due the widespread survival of crannogs and island dwellings throughout most of Scotland outside the South East.

However, the crannog remained central to the exercise of lordship. The Tudor strategy in Ireland perhaps reveals that they believed that without crannogs Irish lords would be hindered in uplifting their rents, participating in social rituals and administering justice, and it is the case that crannogs and duns were just as important within Scottish Gaelic lordships.

#### 10.4 Prisons

A perceived connection between duns and prisons has been noted since the conception of crannog studies, being mentioned by Munro in reference to Prison Island, 'Loch Canmore', Kinord, Aberdeenshire (Munro 1882, 22). It is a perception with some antiquity, being noted in the *New Statistical Account* for Dry Isle, or Castle Cluggy, in Loch Monivard: "an artificial island ... which tradition represents to have been a sort of prison attached to the castle" (Ferguson 1845, 740-1). It is an association commonly associated with crannogs in Irish annals from the early through to the later Middle Ages, incorporating political prisoners, hostages and high-status slaves (Connon 2004). The use of chiefly seats and residences as prisons is revealed by a strategy within the Scottish crown's policy of subjugating the Isles, where seats were to be surrendered to the Commissioners for the Isles in order to facilitate their dispensation of justice. However, in a 1610 letter to the King they called for "all the castellis, housis and strenthis within the boundis of his commissioun for

resett of him and his companie, for halding of his courtis and keeping of his prisonaris thairin”, but they also noted that “In wche point thair is mony of zar Maiesteis subiectis who will pretend verie iust caus of greif and discontentment yf thay salbe disposest of thair housis and the same convertit to Jayllis and prisionis” (HP: III, 120). The placing of prisons in duns may simply stem from the idea that they were seen as more securely situated, escape or the likelihood of being sprung from the dun being hindered by their placing on islands or rocky outcrops. However, perhaps merely being confined within a dun, redolent in symbols of lordship, provided some degree of sanction to the captivity, showing that its owner had the right to exercise imprisonment.

The widespread association of duns and crannogs to prisons led to the prison becoming an often interpreted feature at dun sites. One example is on Eilean Gruaidh, Loch Maree, that Dixon notes as a natural rocky bank, heightened and cemented with clay and containing a number of buildings, “one with a deep hole said to be a dungeon” (1886, 98). This particular example may be no more than romantic thinking, but a more ready association may be found in a South Uist site, Am Priosan – the prison (Fig. 121). This is a fairly unusual monument, sitting on a outcrop of bedrock in a tidal inlet at the mouth of Loch Baghasdal. Unlike prehistoric brochs and duns, the wall, composed of two outer skins of very large boulders filled by smaller stones, and encloses a relatively small sub-ovoid area. There is relatively little tumble around the monument, suggesting the walls did not stand much above the present level: around 0.4m on the inside. Further height may have been provided by turf, and it would have been relatively simple to roof. This difference in construction technique perhaps hints at a later, post-medieval, origin, but this cannot be confirmed. If the place-name is taken as a true indicator of use there is little to indicate how a prisoner could be maintained or confined there. However, whilst, here, the name appears to be an appropriate indicator of its use, there are other Am Priosan sites along the western seaboard where the name appears to be the result of fanciful thinking. One in Bhatarsaigh is composed of a few stones in a tidal inlet, and it is said to be where a ruthless landlord stranded useless workers, to be lost to the tide (Gillies n.d.).

The *Banatyne MS* records that shortly after the beginning of the feud between the Clann Domhnaill and the Clann Leoid:

*the MacDonalds ... seized a Berbis belonging to Allister Crottach with a natural son of the Cheif called Donald Glass and thirty-six men on board. They were taken to Arivullin, in South Uist, where Donald Glass was put in irons having a heavy weight attached to a chain placed around his neck which disabled him for ever after; he was detained for six years. The whole of his crew were starved to death in a dungeon where it is said they actually ate each other casting lots whilst more than one remained alive (Banatyne MS 46).*

The grim conditions of prisons in castles is well summarised by the Presbyterian prisoners at Mingarry Castle during the Civil War:

*having nothing to drink but the rain-water that fell from Heaven on the bartizans of the castle, which they were forced, because of the thick mud, to seethe through teeth, they winking all the while, for they could not look upon the green glut that was with it; and their meat was for the most part unground rye, which they were sometimes forced to grind betwixt two slate stones for their extreme hunger (Reid 1837, 51; also see Stevenson 1980, 139-40).*

The tale in the *Banatyne MS* is informative in that it records the use of ‘irons’ to restrain captives. However, its location is perplexing, as Airigh Mhuilinn, is a normal shieling site, composed of the remains of a number of small cells (Raven forthcoming), not a ‘dungeon’ in any sense of the word, unless some conception of remoteness was perceived to make it secure. This was certainly done in areas where larger wildernesses were present: in 1572 ‘Rory M’Leod of Lewis’ complained that ‘Torquil M’Leod’ had captured him in his castle and that he had been held “in maist miserable captivite in mountanis and cavernis of craigis



far distant from the societe of men almaist pereised wt cauld and famine” (HP: II, 281-83). The author of the *Banatyne MS* use of the place-name, Airigh Mhuilinn, betrays a late annotation, as the *muilinn* suffix has to postdate the construction of the mill in the mid-eighteenth century (see Section 12.12). The location had also become highly popularised by its association with Flora MacDonald and Bonnie Prince Charlie, so it is unclear how much its inclusion here can be taken for granted. It is tempting, however, to speculate that the author was describing the larger area, rather than the site. In the area is a dun, Dun Cnoc a’ Bhuidhe, composed of a large broch with later buildings inserted into the top, which may have housed the prisoners. Alternatively, Alex Woolf (pers. comm.) has suggested that this may be a derivation of Ardvulan, but as Banatyne was a native Gaelic speaker this is, perhaps, a little less likely, and no sixteenth century occupation was recovered at the dun, although it may have been obliterated by later settlement.

In contrast to the heavy chains and starvation in the Hebridean prisons of the *Banatyne MS* is the prison described by Cameron of Loch Eil during the Civil War. Loch Eil’s captives appear to have enjoyed an almost idyllic setting, but his *Memoirs* neglect to mention how the prisoners were restrained from leaving, or whether they were able to enjoy the opportunities the location offered:

*The place where these gentlemen were confined was ane Isle in a fresh-water Loch of twelve miles in length, and covered with woods on both sides. It is called Locharkike ... It never freezes, and its water is admirably light and delicat, being well stored with salmond and other fishes. Att the head of it is a large forrest of red deer, where there is besides great abundance of other game (Cameron 1842, 143).*

As late as 1708 Rob Roy MacGregor was recorded as still using a crannog to imprison his detractors (MacGregor 1901, 179). From what evidence there is available is that many duns could and did serve as prisons, but it seems unlikely that in most cases this was not their

primary purpose, and that this function acted in conjunction with their more domestic and lordly ones.

## 10.5 Halls and the Appropriation of Assembly

It has been argued in Section 7.13 that by the end of the Norse period there was a close correlation between islands, duns and assembly places, and that the church had begun to consolidate its power by appropriating assembly sites, through the building of churches on or adjacent to them, and mediating in, possibly even controlling, the issues addressed at the assemblies themselves. Whilst this process continued into the fourteenth century, it appears that a parallel process was taking place, whereby secular powers were attempting to (re-)establish some control or hold over the public administration of the activities carried out under the auspices of assembly: the re-distributive and debt inducing social bonds such as choosing leaders, decision making, justice, feasting, rent paying etc.

Whilst it is common in the clan histories and genealogies to note, or at least attribute, feats of architectural patronage to great individuals (e.g. Ami MacRuairidh's links to Caisteal Tioram, Caisteal Bhuirgh, Teampull na Trionaid, in North Uist, Teampull Challuim Chille, in Benbecula, and Teampull Naomb Mhìcheil, in Griomasaigh: HP: I, 26), Ami's husband John I of the Isles architectural epitaph is revealing. Amongst other buildings:

*it is he also that covered the Isle Eorsag and the Capel of Isle Finlagan, and the Chapel of Isle Suibhne (island in Loch Sween), with all their appropriate instruments for order and mass and the service of God (RBC, 159-61).*

It is virtually impossible to interpret the precise motives for his actions, or whether he was replacing old churches with newly built structures, which is probably the case for St Columba's church in the "Isle Eorsag" (Orasaigh, in Islay: RCAHMS 1984, 254-56) and the Island in Loch Sween (if it is Cill Mhic-Channaig in Eilean Mór: MacGibbon & Ross 1896: I, 89-91; RCAHMS 1992, 66-74; Fisher 2001, 144-45). However, these examples are

notable in that he was building chapels in locations on islands with possible assembly associations. The site of Finlaggan is well documented as the *caput* of the Lords of the Isles in the later medieval period, serving as the main assembly site for the Council of the Isles and inauguration place for the Lords themselves, and it is likely to have been the centre of Island politics since at least the twelfth century, if not long before (Caldwell 2003). All the dating evidence provided by the limited excavation of the chapel that has taken place points to the later fourteenth century as the first phase of construction, but the church was predated by the burial ground (Caldwell 1990; 1993; 1998), which perhaps indicates an earlier church nearby. Why it was felt necessary to introduce an ecclesiastical sanction to activity there at this particular time is unclear, rather than a century earlier, when the Lords of the Isles began to adopt other symbols of European lordship. However, it certainly would have added *gravitas* to decisions made there, and been an addition to the prestige of the site, providing its lord with a chapel in a manner similar to that provided to most contemporary lords in the private chapels within castles. At Orasaigh the church was substantially remodelled in this period, although there are Early Medieval remains: it was the burial ground for the MacKay family who served as 'lieutenants' for the Lords of the Isles in that part of Islay (Muir 1855, 57-8; Steer & Bannerman 1977, 125, 156; RCAHMS 1984, 255-56; Fisher 2001, 140), perhaps suggesting some connection of the church, island and the administration of justice. If Cill Mhic-Channaig is correctly interpreted as the Isle Suibhne, then its position beyond the mouth of the loch means that it is unlikely to have served as a local assembly site for day-to-day affairs, but it is perfectly located for important meetings by lords borne in boats, centred between Jura, Islay, Knapdale and Kintyre, as well as the more distant coast of Ireland and the heartland of Argyll.

A further example of a church being built in this period upon an island assembly site may be found at Loch Glashan (Fig. 122). Similarly to Finlaggan, here a high status Early Medieval crannog was positioned in a long loch along a major route-way through Argyll. It was sited alongside a natural island and near a prehistoric dun. Excavation of structures upon the natural island revealed over sixty sherds of thirteenth to fourteenth-century pottery and fourteenth-century coins, as well as querns and pipe stem (perhaps suggesting use into later



periods) although the floor layers were not fully excavated. One building was tentatively interpreted as a church built in the fourteenth century. The evidence came from a roughly built fragment of chancel-arch and some wrought stone. It is possible that this worked stone was brought in from elsewhere, so the interpretation of a church is not definitive (Fairhurst 1969, 49-59; RCAHMS 1988, 189-90), but it seems highly probable that this indicates a church being built upon an assembly site in the fourteenth century.

However, from the thirteenth century it seems clear that secular lords increasingly sought to establish their direct control over some assembly processes. It is in this period when halls began becoming an essential part of castle architecture (Figs. 123 and 124). Dunbar (1978a, 40-3) suggests that large oblong towers along the western seaboard (at sites such as Eilean Donnain and Caisteal Bhuirgh) are datable to the late fourteenth century on parallels to David's tower in Edinburgh Castle. Smaller ones with less massive construction he interprets as later (e.g. Caisteal Maol, Caisteal Uisdean, Caisteal na Grugagaich, Kilchurn, Kinlochaline, Ardmaddy, Island Muller, Craignish, Dunolly and Moy: Fig. 125); this would be in keeping with a national preoccupation with halls in castles that lasted into the seventeenth century (Zeune 1992, 125-26). However, at Aros (Fig. 110), a particularly early castle, possibly thirteenth century in date (RCAHMS 1980, 173-77), the hall is by far the predominant and central feature. The fact that this is one of the largest examples of a hall, reveals the importance of the events taking place within halls to lordly life (although see O'Keefe 1997, 8-11). From the documents issued at castles, it is evident that the hall hosted some of the events and reciprocal social rituals, once performed at assembly sites: feasting is perhaps most conspicuous in the poetry that survives, but land grants, trials, councils, rent and due paying, etc. all began to take place within the halls in castles (see Sections 9.7 and 9.8). The moving of the location of these events to within the castle, the walls of which symbolised the very body of the chief, can only have been a deliberate act which physically removed them from the public domain and embraced them to the lord, whose symbolic control reflected a new secular power over social events.

Large halls also began being constructed on other island assembly sites. In the Highlands Inchtalla, in the Lake of Menteith (Hutchison 1899, 95-6), and Clairinch, in Loch Lomond (Frend 1983, 127) both bear the remains of large buildings (the latter measuring 14.5m x 5.7m) that stand out from the smaller outbuildings that surround them, and it seems likely that it was here that the numerous documents issued at them were penned, dating, respectively, to the thirteenth century (ibid., 125), and to between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries (Hutchison 1899, 92). During Glencairn's Rebellion of 1653 meetings of Royalist troops were held at the crannog in Loch Rannoch, in a building described as a "Hall" (MacGregor 1901, 126, 127). In the Uists Dun Ban (Fig. 126) is perhaps the most studied medieval dun, it consists of a large mortared hall and a large enclosed courtyard (RCAHMS 1928, 69-70). Halls were also being built upon non-island assembly sites elsewhere in northern and western Scotland (Christison 1891, 214; Simpson 1949, 16). It is also evident that in the sixteenth century the Clann Domhnaill carried the pattern of assembly appropriation with them to Ulster, as they constructed a castellated structure at Duninenny, in Antrim: the place-name translates to 'fort of the assembly' (McNeill 2004, 191). All these sites conform to the building of halls at around the same proportions to those being built in castles, and many contain enough out-buildings to claim a similar amount of floor-space to smaller castles, providing places for accommodation and services. Elsewhere, where archaeological evidence is less evident, it is evident that assembly activities were taking place within buildings (halls?) on island sites. At Loch Eadarloch, the *Howlet's Sang*, a poem set in the fifteenth century directly associates the crannog there with feasting (Ritchie 1942, 15-16), while tradition stated that "there Mac Mhic Raghnaill used to hold any special meeting with the nobles of the district. Beside the Fearsaid Riabhach is seen the site of Tigh na Fuine (the Bakehouse)" (ibid., 16-17). At Tree Island, in Loch Eil, oral history states that there were timber houses where the chief was brought up in the sixteenth century. After 1564 numerous surviving documents were issued there (MacCulloch 1939, 230). The importance of some of the proceedings undertaken upon crannogs is revealed in James IV's 1506 visit to one in Loch Kinord, Aberdeenshire (Wood-Martin 1886, 15). Excavation of similar island halls, elsewhere in Scotland, though particularly in Galloway, reveal that they were frequently constructed on top of earlier ecclesiastical structures. At Loch Mochrum, in

Galloway, the hall was re-modelled from a church in the fifteenth century (Radford 1950, 44-47; Zeune 1992, 120-22). Such acts of construction must surely have been a way of diffusing the church's dominance over assembly and appropriate it into the realm of secular lordship.

This is not to say that there were no secular structures built at assembly sites prior to this date. Small, temporary structures, such as tents, booths and huts are a common feature of Viking Age Scandinavian assembly, often on fields of heather adjacent to the assembly sites (Brink 2003, 70). Later sources reveal that in Early Medieval Irish practices had been adopted in parts of the wider *Gàidhealtachd* and that they continued to be used into the later medieval period. In the Isle of Man there are references to the Tinwald being associated with 'white pavillions', which Broderick (2003, 87) has linked to houses made of 'woven white peeled rods' where Early Irish kings' received acknowledgement of their superiority from their vassals; a practice that continued until at least 1172 for Henry II's visit to Dublin, and may have lain behind the wattle town that was thrown up by Ó Ceallaigh in 1351 for a 'convention' of the learned classes of Scotland and Ireland (MacGregor 2000b, 81-82). That this setting for assembly may have been adopted into Gaelic Scottish practice is perhaps hinted at in a Clann Caimbeul history which explains the behaviour of the chief in the late fourteenth century:

*his sudden burnings of his houses when some nobleman of the O'Neils and others out of Ireland were coming to visit him because they were not magnificent enough for entertaining them, that he might have occasion to feast them in tents (HP: II, 92).*

It is possible that the footings of small buildings on some islands, like those on Eilean Mor at Cille Donnain (Fig. 79), in South Uist could reflect the remains of similar types of ephemeral structures, although the fact that features remain perhaps suggests the more substantial constructions seen in later periods. It is not impossible, however, that the later halls grew out of this tradition.



It seems likely that the process whereby assembly was appropriated by secular authorities could also fit into a European decline in the nature of assembly, changes in the nature of lordship and the extension of the institutionalisation of courts and rental payments meant that judicial affairs were becoming less localised and increasingly expressed in less personal terms (Reuter 2001, 443-44). The incorporation of these processes in large buildings, especially castles, reveals a departure from publicly sanctioned politics to one dominated by the chiefs, and that was often mediated through local officials, bailies. or even the dun constables. It further indicates that as castles were an architectural expression of up-to-date European lordly identities for those already with the knowledge to interpret that message, they were also instrumental in mediating new ideas about the structure of power within the clan.

## **10.6     Stacks and Moated-Enclosures**

The traditional histories and place-names of Lewis record that in the sixteenth century some notorious renegades also took up residence in some of the stacks that surround the island. They are to become the focus of a new program of research by Bannerman (2004), so only a few points will be raised about them here. The occupation of Stac' Dhomhnaill Chaim, and Bearasaigh all are recorded by oral history to belong to the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, during the take over of the Fife Adventurers and Clann Coinnich, and Neil MacLeod's fortification of the latter is documented in governmental records (see Gordon 1817, 275; Thomas 1890, 389-91, 395-95; Macdonald 1967, 8-13, 24; 1978, 31; HP: II, 277-79; RPCS: X, 3-4). MacPhail's descriptions of his visit to the two sites reveals their situation and ease of access:

*It was at sunset, on an autumn evening that I \_\_\_\_ this island fortress \_\_\_\_ but the sea was up, it was already nearly dark, and my vessel was several miles away; so after a good look at its craggy sides I reluctantly bore away for Loch Carloway. It seemed a dreadful place to live on, for in winter there*

*must be weeks and even months in which by season of the raging sea, no boat could land upon it; yet it was here, a brave, treacherous and bad man held out against the superior fraud and violence of the Tutor of Kintail.*

*Berisay, is a craggy islet, one tenth of a mile long and half as broad, surrounded by mural cliffs, about 100 feet high, with an 'acarsaid' or landing place on the south west side, and the ruins of the huts on the terre plein; the highest part of the rock is 175 feet above the sea. Berisay is exposed to the whole force of the Atlantic Ocean, for it receives no protection from the small island of Sean Bheinn ... on the other hand it is the ... ideal of a pirates nest, commanding a view of half the horizon, impregnable, and near a frequented harbour (MacPhaill n.d., 42)*

*Stac Dhomnuill Chaim, Mangursta, Uig, Lewis ... or Stac na Bherighe. It is about 100 feet high, and on the top is not more than 20 yards long; a deep ravine cuts it off from the shore, with which however it remains connected by a rocky isthmus. The rock is otherwise surrounded by the sea, and is quite inaccessible except on the land side, where a narrow path leads up to the brae. A wall, from 4 to 5 feet thick, defends it on the land side, in which at the south end, there is a gap or gateway 2 ft wide. The gate would be extremely dangerous to force, as the cliff is close in front of it. There are the ruins of a cottage, 8 1/2 x 10 ft interiorly, and the walls 4 1/2 ft thick – on the terre plein of the rock; as also a sheep pen attached to the wall. Only in very fine weather can boats land at Mol Garbh, or Rough Beach of the isthmus (MacPhaill n.d., 52)*

Given the inaccessibility of such sites it seems obvious why tradition bearers would associate their occupation to such a tumultuous event in the island's history, however, it is possible that some of these sites were inhabited under different auspices in earlier historical and cultural contexts. Similar stacks were occupied in the Norse period in the Northern Isles, the-

most well studied examples being the Brough of Birsay and the Brough of Deerness in Orkney. The first of which had Pictish occupation, but both of them, through the Viking period, into the Late Norse period, became the focus of important high status settlement, including halls and churches (see Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998, 11-14, 164-67, 153-56, 188-90). It is possible, that the Lewis stacks fit into a similar pattern of use in the Norse period, although Dun Othail has later settlement connotations, an early chapel site has been interpreted upon it (Thomas 1890, 370-72; MacGibbon & Ross 1897: I, 81; Macdonald 1967, 241; 1978, 27; Bannerman 2004, 133), and Caisteal Mhorair (Fig. 127), place-name, Mormaer's Castle may link it to an Early Medieval title related to a regional magnate. In Ireland, however, the position became associated with tax collectors who were frequently berated for their lack of noble prestige (and the killing of tax collectors appears to have become a feature of folktales from the progenitor of the MacMhuirichs to seventeenth-century Uist tradition). Tradition suggests a connection to the Earls of Ross, rather than the Clann Leoid (CWP 342; Campbell 1997a, 81; MacDonald 1984a, 156; RCAHMS 1928, 15; Smyth 1984, 219-20; Simms 1987a, 83-84). This particular stack is overshadowed by its neighbouring cliff-face, calling into question its defensiveness. The link to this local administrative title is perhaps paralleled in the connection of the Morrsion *breitheamh*'s ties to Dun Eistean, where recent excavation has revealed Late Medieval pottery, verifying local tradition that it was occupied from the late fifteenth century (Thomas 1878, 510, 516; 1890, 365-69; Matheson 1978; Stiùbhart 2002; M. MacLeod pers. comm.).

It may also be worthy of note that stacks elsewhere along the western seaboard were being reoccupied in the medieval period, such as Ugadale fort, in Kintyre, which has produced evidence for thirteenth- or fourteenth-century habitation (Fairhurst 1956, 20-21), perhaps suggesting that stacks had important connotations for the medieval Gael.

In addition to stacks another type of site with chiefly connotations that occurs in the Highlands is the moated site. The moated site is a phenomenon in areas of Anglo-Norman expansion, in England, Ireland and Scotland, where they appear to have generally been the abodes of high status peasants in newly colonised areas, being built mostly prior to the



middle of the fourteenth century (Turner 1997, 3; O'Connor 2000, 93-94, O'Keeffe 2000a, 95-97). Whereas at least seventy have been identified south of the Highland line, Turner (1997, 3) located only five north of it: David's Fort, in Ross and Cromarty, Inchadamph, in Sutherland, two in Gairloch, Wester Ross and Ath na h-Eilde, in Sunart. Tradition places the building of the latter three well after the end of the 1300s, and their patrons to be of the lordly class: Inchadamph has no date associated with it, but it is linked by tradition to the MacLeods (RCAHMS 1911, 6). Ath na h-Eilde was held to have been constructed by the chief of MacIains 1590s, although it has not been identified with any remains, and one of the Gairloch sites, Tigh Dige nam Gorm Leac, is believed to have been re-built as late as 1738 (ibid., 4). Its previous incarnation is thought to have been much earlier, being erected around 1430 by Neil MacLeod (Dixon 1886, 24). Although the evidence is far from secure, the late dating of these sites and the status of their inhabitants raises the possibility that their construction fits into a pattern of moated sites being built by the Gaelic elite in Ireland from thirteenth to the fourteenth century (O'Connor 2000, 100-01). O'Connor has interpreted this, not as a Gaelic lordly adoption of an Anglo-Norman monumental style but as the continuation of Gaelic lords building dwellings that require little economic or social resource input. Whilst he ignores the potential cultural significance of these less monumental styles of house, instead seeing it in more economic terms, he does link the bounded, un-castellated type of site, seen in the moated site, directly to that of crannogs, which he sees in the same terms (ibid.). Evidence that these two types of monument functioned in a similar manner comes from the oral history of Gairloch regarding Tigh Dige. The MacKenzies of Gairloch appear to have shifted back and forward between there, Eilean Ruaridh and Eilean Subhainn (Dixon 1886, 30, 49, 53-54: Fig. 68), it also appears to have been connected to the administration of justice as the island assembly site of the area is located nearby (ibid., 97). Again, like crannogs, their defensive capabilities can only have been minimal, the ditch and turf bank is unlikely to have been able to withstand any sustained military aggression.

Both site-types conform to the model of duns, in that they were isolated from the mainland and provided the accommodation for the highest echelons of the clan. In the case of the

moated site the moat was an artificial boundary, but in the case of David's Fort, it is apparent that this was enhanced by the use of water (Beaton 1883, 416-20).

## **10.7 The Function of Islands**

If the interpretation presented above, that questions the perceived defensibility of island sites, is correct, then the question has to be asked: why were the Gaelic nobility choosing island locations to live on and exploit for the administration of their lordship? One method of answering this question may be to look at islands themselves. Fredengren (2002, 107-10) has attempted to begin to study the nature of human interaction with, and perception of, islands, and see islands from a spatial perspective within the landscape. She has noted that there is an experiential tension that exists in people's minds between the mainland and islands, where the island as a piece of bounded land with its own identity also has a presence on a loch that is at one time both a part of, and yet separate from the landscape surrounding it. From the mainland the island can seem removed from the land, but it is visible: once upon the island the island is clearly demarcated and enclosed, but the landscape of the mainland is still part of experiencing the island. The water surrounding an island is a conceptual barrier separating the island from the land. This is the case whether the loch is shallow or deep, or access provided by a causeway: simply moving through and between the water is a change from travelling across land. Boats can provide a connection between the two zones, but the need to control access to boats proves that that connection remained limited, and again the need to change and utilise different modes of transport creates the notion of the passing through a barrier. The limited space upon an island, bounded by water, also creates a notion of separateness from the rest of the landscape. In a medieval context this is perhaps best illustrated by the practice of fencing courts and market places, and the holding of both on islands surely reflects this. The separateness from the landscape is also, then, likely to be part of the reason why islands were chosen as residences. The decision to live away from the rest of the community is likely to have demarcated an island's inhabitants as in someway removed from other members of society, this is especially important if the majority of the population lives in clustered, tight-knit communities, such as the ones

developing in South Uist in the later Middle Ages (see Chapter 11). Living on an island may have then accentuated the prestige of the Gaelic nobility that occupied dun sites. Islands also retained an importance for Gaelic ecclesiastical practice throughout the Middle Ages and into the 1700s. A hermit is recorded on Eilean Mór in Knapdale in early to mid 1400s (Steer & Bannerman 1977, 148-50), while numerous Hebridean island churches continued to be used for burial, such as Eilean Finnan where numerous of the Clann Ragnail were interred (Cameron 1957) and Eilean Ban, in Loch Morar, became a centre for Clann Ragnail priests into the eighteenth century (Stewart 1994, 33).

Unfortunately, the only source that could be hoped to shed light on Gaelic perceptions of islands, the poetry, is quiet on the matter. The only hints are in a few curiously vapid and un-informing lines in *On the Recapture of Enniskillen*, which refers to a siege of the island castle there in 1595, although it was probably written sometime after 1600: “dry and bright, yet moist”; “O fresh fortress, pleasantly dry and warm”; and “And yet, O bright-carpeted fortress with watery banks” (Bergin 1970, 271-2). However, although not necessarily referring to occupied islands a passage in *The Maid of the Yellow Ringlets* indicates that many Gaels recognised the separateness of island locations. Possibly composed around 1611 it reveals the wishes of a poet regarding an unrequited love, who had rejected him for a priest:

*A house has been given her on an island  
where she could see no man to entice her,  
where she could hear no cock crowing,  
where no thrush whistles.*  
(Ó Baoill & Bateman 1994, 65).

The crannog, dun or island-dwelling is a form of lordly monument in contrast to the castle. The castle was an architecturally impressive, European expression of lordship, built at the nodal points between the Gaelic clan and the maritime sea-borne world. In total contrast to this are the island dwellings, of non-monumental construction, but incorporating the similar



elements such as halls, kitchens, etc., occupying inland locations where the chiefs interacted with other members of their clan in a Gaelic cultural medium. In part, O'Connor (1998, 97) sees the lack of castles in Gaelic Ireland as a response to Gaelic modes of land-holding and redistribution, which negated the incentive to invest in large scale monuments. This does not appear to have been a problem in Gaelic Scotland given the number of castles built dotting the western seaboard. O'Connor (*ibid.*, 101) also suggests pastoralism rendered the need to build castles redundant, as it would have been particularly hard to impress a population that had transitory occupation of the landscape, and impossible to protect a resource, like cattle, that was regularly dispersed. The location of both castles and island-dwellings next to and near pastures, however, should not be seen to detract from the importance of the sites, but, conversely, this situation should be seen to enhance the prominence of cattle and pastoral resources within a Gaelic context. People moving through the landscape on a seasonal, and occasionally daily basis, whilst they followed the grazing patterns of their herds, would have seen and referenced them, and people living on duns would have been able to keep an eye on those patterns of movement, perhaps regulating them, protecting them on the occasion of invasion, or providing a context for interaction between the different levels of the clan.

## **10.8 Castles and Duns in Late Medieval South Uist**

In 1596 Bishop Lesley stated: "I will nocht make mekle talkeng of les Iles, albeit thay haue decore, and ar outsett in touris and litle tounes" (Dalrymple *et al.* 1888-95: I, 56), but both Pont and Martin noted the Uists and particularly South Uist, as exceptional in the proliferation of island dwellings there: stating respectively "in thir Ile [Uist] ar many small towers buildt in freshe water lochis, ar strenthis in trowblesum tymes" (n.d.b., 90) and in South Uist "several lakes have old forts built upon the small islands in the middle of them" (Martin 1994, 151). Blaeu's published work (Fig. 2) shows five that were likely to have been occupied contemporaneously in South Uist, but there are a number of others that are likely to have co-existed alongside them. One, Dun Raouill, is marked as a red rectangle (Fig. 128), not as an occupied dun, though there is documentary and traditional evidence it was in use around the same time of its compilation, and a further three are marked on one of

Pont's sketch maps of Baghasdal (Fig. 4). It is not known why these did not make it onto Pont's finished design, drawn on the same parchment, but the sketch is slightly erroneous in its overall shape and the drawing is crowded with lochs and place-names, so it is possible that Pont simplified his design to render it more decipherable. All the island dwellings on Pont's maps are identifiable, as are a few which are not. Before going on to study how they related to each other and the landscape around them, it may be worth giving a brief overview of those islands that still have identifiable remains upon them. To this list is added others not on Pont and some other castellated features.

Little remains of the duns that survived Blaeu's publication process, with the exception of Eilean Bheagram, although the crannogs still survive in the main. More recent buildings obscure any evidence for earlier structures at Loch an Duin, Smeircleit, and Dun nan Gallan, Staoinebrig (Fig. 129). Bald's 1805 map shows buildings and an enclosure upon the latter site, which had disappeared by the first edition OS map (1881), although some walling was discovered here in 1965 (CANMORE). It probably would have sat in a branch of West Loch Olaidh prior to drainage, although this may not have been a crannog, possibly sitting on a natural knoll in the loch. Nothing other than the crannog with associated boat noosts survive at another of Blaeu's sites in West Loch Olaidh. On Loch na Duchasaich (Fig. 130) there is another crannog possibly noted by Blaeu, the buildings on the island appear, however, to be sub-circular, rather than the sub-rectilinear buildings that might be expected of a medieval site. Although building shape is uncertain chronological indicator, it raises the possibility that Pont was attempting to demarcate the importance of Ormacleit, prior to the building of the present castle. This may tentatively verify tradition that the foundations of the castle were laid by Iain Moidartach, but the project was abandoned upon his death in 1593 (MacDonald 1930-31: I, 56). The place-name, Loch na Duchasaich, may derive from a Gaelic expression of the native hereditary right of lordship over territory, *dùchas*. Anderson (2003) has noted the term 'duoghasa' being used in early seventeenth-century rentals in Ireland regarding heritable portions of land, raising a possible association of the site with expressions of ownership. However, a more sober interpretation may be *dubhchasach*,

which is South Uist Gaelic for a type of fern (McDonald & Campbell 1958, 107), and ferns do grow upon the island.

A small crannog at Loch an Eilean, in Baghasdal (Fig. 131), is marked on Pont's abandoned sketch map, but not on Blaeu. Upon it are the remains two buildings, one consisting of well-laid courses of rectangular blocks of gneiss, a feature seen on the outbuildings at Eilean Bheagram, possibly indicating an early seventeenth-century date (see below) as it is virtually unknown from other sites of any period. Other island sites not included on Pont's maps with probable medieval settlement on have been noted in Sections 7.4 and 7.8, in reference to the Norse period. Three other re-used prehistoric duns with later medieval settlement on have also been identified: Cnoc a' Bhuidhe, Mingearraidh (Fig. 67), which is a high broch, with a later rectangular building inserted into it, and two at Loch an Duin Mhoir, Geirinis (Figs. 82 and 83). The western-most of these duns, consists of a large crannog with a number of buildings clustered together in one corner: two large adjacent rectangular structures and another, separate, sub-rectangular one nearby. The other is another crannog surmounted by a large broch which appears to have a large rectangular hall inserted into it, similar to Dun an Sticir, in North Uist (Fig. 118), although this interpretation is highly tentative given its denuded nature, and the fact that the centre is highly obscured by rubble fallen from the outer broch wall. Surrounding the broch, filling the whole of the visible surface of the rest of the crannog is a collection of seven sub-rectangular buildings, and possibly a kiln. No tradition or archaeological evidence survives to date any of these sites, but, whilst rectangular buildings around brochs have occasionally turned out to be Iron Age (see Armit 1996, 131-32; Harding & Dixon 2000, 17-20), the closest parallels to the buildings surrounding the broch in Geirinis are Late Medieval (see Section 11.8), raising the possibility that this collection of buildings belongs to this period. A natural island in the same loch supports another building of the same type.

There are a number of buildings in South Uist that bear a strong similarity to one another in that in their surviving state they all appear to be medieval, none of them providing any evidence for prehistoric predecessors: Caisteal Calabhaigh, Caisteal a' Bhreabhair, Eilean



Bheagram and Dun Raouiull, to this list may be added Caisteal Bhuirgh in Benbecula (the possibility of an earlier foundation has been discussed in Section 7.11).

The first two are singled out from the main group as they are vaguely associated with Clann Neill and have a different type of location, on stacks situated hard by the sea. Calabhaigh (Figs. 73 and 74) is composed of an irregular curtain wall, 21m x 15.15m, containing a number of buildings, including what appears to be a hall, a latrine and a tower (with external dimensions of 3.7m x 3.6m, with an internal space of 1.5m x 1.5m, and composed of two stories). It has been interpreted in the past to be all of one phase (RCAHMS 1928, 107). Macneil (1964, 91), who was over keen to stress the antiquity and longevity of use of all the sites once under Clann Neill control, states that the stone work of Caisteal Calabhaigh is so similar to Kisimul's, and that it must have been built shortly after by the same master mason. On more recent interpretation this would place it in the fifteenth century (Dunbar 1978; Morrison 2000). However, the small tower is clearly of an earlier phase, as the curtain wall abuts its sides and is not integral to it, unlike the other buildings. The small tower may help to date the origin of this site, but this will be returned to below. There is a general opinion that the site was associated with the MacNeils of Barra, but this is not documented anywhere. Macneil (1964, 91) states that it remained a stronghold of theirs till 1601, but, as with all his comments, he does not reveal his sources. Nevertheless, its occupation around this time is perhaps indicated by the place-name 'borg' on Mercator's 1595 map of Scotland in roughly the right situation (Fig. 72).

It sits on a rock commanding the access to Loch Baghasdal, which allows further comparison to the other Outer Hebridean castles, of Kisimul and Steornabhaigh, with viewsheds over the Minch, which would have placed it in a perfect position to connect with passing maritime traffic and charge vessels for the use of the protection of the bay (see Section 9.5), perhaps leading some credence to oral tradition that it was occupied by a pirate (MacIain n.d.). Its conspicuousness is revealed by MacCulloch's comments that "except a small half-ruined tower at the entrance of Loch Boisdale, I saw no antiquities in this island" (1824: 3, 24). There is a small bay adjacent to the castle that may have served to protect the occupant's

galley when not in use, and provide ease of access when needed. At the end of the nineteenth century it was said a smack might anchor to its south, but it was necessary to avoid “sword rock” (Otter 1874, 165).

Caisteal a' Bhreabhair (Figs. 132 and 133) is sited on an isolated stack to the south of Eriskay, with no easy landing upon it. The flattest rocky area is located in its northern half, so access to the part of the island with the tower upon it is provided by the crossing of a high and narrow spit of land bridging the two halves of the island, and then ascending a steep cliff-hugging path, protected by a length of mortared walling. The summit is crowned by a small tower, 6.5m x 6m, standing in the midst of a sea of rubble that may obscure some outbuildings. Further accommodation was provided by two denuded structures only meters away (Fig. 134), on a lower shelf of the stack-summit. They are in a position where it is unlikely to have been robbed out, so it seems accurate to presume they were largely turf built. Traditions link its construction and use with sixteenth-century pirates (MacPherson 1975, 81-3), possibly the MacNeil's themselves (Mould 1953, 89) who are said to have launched attacks from there. It is also believed that they lured vessels to crash onto the rocks by using warning lights, sited in the windows of the tower (Domhnaill Neill pers. comm.). In its high and prominent location the castle both dominates and impresses its monumentality on the passage up the Minch, much more so than Kisimul could ever have done (MacNeil 1978). Although no immediate bay is at hand it also presides over Sound of Barra where distressed shipping would have probably taken temporary shelter (Macneil 1964, 91). Its position is perhaps best described by Otter:

*the ruins ... making it an object easily recognised by a stranger. The northern approach is not so easily distinguished until the sound is brought to bear about S.E., when Weaver's castle will be easily made out in the distance, but it is a place beset with dangers for a large ship, and requires great caution when approaching it (1874, 89).*

Such conspicuousness may have rendered it an unlikely haven for a mere pirate, unless he was made safe by both its location and his social status. Both this tower and the curtain wall at Caisteal Calabhaigh are constructed using a similar method, whereby the outer facing is lined with large thin stones, with the largest face set to the outside, the inner core is composed of smaller stones and rubble brought together with mortar. The outer facing cannot have been structurally integral to the wall, as is demonstrated in the facing of walls at both sites having tumbled down, leaving the core standing, it is possible then that the outer skins were bonded onto a more crudely built inner wall. This is a feature which does not appear to occur at the other sites (facing walls have collapsed, but not in the same manner), perhaps lending something to the possibility that they shared a similar architect or design, with relation to the MacNeils, and that they share a similar genesis in time.

These two sites are in contrast to Eilean Bheagram (Figs. 113 and 114), which does consist of a denuded tower of similar proportions, 6.4m x 5.3m, but which is eroding in a different way: only corner stones have fallen from the rest of the wall, and there are stretches where large chunks have gone, but overall the walls retain much of their integrity. The surviving mortared and harled walls are also provided with small gun loops, although these may merely be to let in some light (David Caldwell pers. comm.). The tower sits on the highest eminence on the island, on a high steeply banked escarpment facing the northern bank, perhaps suggesting that this was either felt to be its most vulnerable side, or that it was here that the most impressive face was to be witnessed. Around the rest of the island, surrounding the tower are a number of rectilinear dry-stone buildings, which appear to overlie more denuded structures. Hawley (1970) suggested that the tower was the most recent of the buildings, but there seems to be no reason to support this argument on structural grounds. Whilst it seems plausible that most of the visible structures may all belong to the latest phase of this monument's use, it is worthy of note that if all the buildings are taken into consideration it would provide the island with a similar amount of floor-space to some of the smaller castles. If it is assumed that some of these structures would have been designated as accommodation, a hall, a kitchen, etc., then there is little real difference between Eilean



Bheagram and Kisimul castle, for example (compare Figs. 101 and 113). The main exceptions are the absence of a chapel, although Hoghmor is nearby (Fig. 84), and the fact that Kisimul is architecturally and experientially, a castle. Although there has been some attempt to provide some castellation by the inclusion of the small tower, it is this lack of an oppressive exclusive barrier, the curtain wall, which may reveal that the choice not to build one at Bheagram was the result of the desire to express a different message to a different group of people, and this will be explored below.

The circumference of Eilean Bheagram is demarcated by a ring of boulders that has thought to have been a denuded wall (RCAHMS 1928, 108), but may be part of the make-up of the island. However, a similar feature has been discovered at Cro Inis, an Irish royal site dating to between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, though with a later tower-house built upon it. Here, the feature has been interpreted as simple defensive boundary, as the ring of boulders is very slippery and hard to cross (Kelly 2004). It is possible that this ring reflects a similar idea.

Bheagram is first mentioned in a series of charters around the end of the 1400s in connection with the son of the chief of the Clann Ragnail, Ranald Ban. At this time he was attempting to establish an officially sanctioned lordship amongst the chaos of the forfeiture of the Lords of the Isles. These lands may have been a consolidated sub-lordship within the clan territories (see Section 2.8). He is on record three times in connection with the castle: “Ronaldo Alansoun de Ylandbigrim” (RMS: II, 610), “Ranald Alansoun of Ylanebigorn” (RSS: I, 246) and “Ranald Alansoun of Elanbegeryn” (RSS: I, 250-51). This need to express a tie with a site in South Uist is important for our understanding of events within the clan in this period, and will be discussed below, but it is not a title which lasted, as his son, who took over the chiefship after the death of both Ranald and Allan, and styled himself “Dugall Mcrynald of Ellantyrin” (Innes 1869, 135). However, its connection to the Clann Ragnail chiefs does not appear to have ended as a discharge is issued by the chief, dated from the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 1639, at “Wyellandvegroume” (GD201/1/52), although by December the 19<sup>th</sup> he had returned to the main seat at, Tioram (GD201/1/53). Another discharge, this time for

the *tocher* of the Clann Ragnail chief's bride, was issued there on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, 1655, although this document is now lost (MacDonald 1930-31, 55). Two poems exist which suggest the continuation of chiefly activity at the site into the early years of the eighteenth century: one, *I am Mindred to Rise*, associates it with the Allan that died at Sherriffmuir in 1715:

*There are many lovely maidens  
Who well become the arisaid  
All the way from Balivanich  
To Barra Sound who love you,*

*With some in Eilean Bheagram,  
And some in France and Italy,  
And there's no day of preaching  
Without some in Kilpheder*

*When those womenfolk gather,  
Wearing tight pulpit-shaped kertches,  
They'll have sweat upon their brows  
Dancing on a deal floor.*

(Black 2001, 49).

It is hard to conceive of a deal floor at Bheagram, however. The second, *I am alone on the Misty Mountain*, shows an affinity with the same period, as it refers to Ormacleit as a residence of the chief, which was only occupied during this chief's lifetime.

*My own true love indeed is Donald  
To thee become arms in order  
Sword and shield, bow and quiver,  
Narrow dirk whose side is gilded.*

*My love, is my love, not little*  
*beloved of women from Eilean Bheagram*  
*To the white pass of Cille Pheadair*  
*To Cill'Amhliadh of women wanton,*  
*To Snaoieabhal where is the quagmire,*  
*To Staonaibrig of female gossips,*  
*To Ormaclait of chaste women,*  
*Where the cows are at time of milking*  
*Where wine is poured late and early*  
*Where fiddle plays and pipe is struck up.*  
 (Campbell & Collinson 1969-81: I, 125-27).

The *Uibhisteach* historian Domhnaill Iain MacDomhnaill stated that there was no accurate account to be found of the site in local tradition (DJMMS MS63/588576/11/56), but both Michael MacIntyre (SA1964/65/B2) and Archie Munro agreed that it was “supposed to be a prison rather than a place of habitation” (SA1963/11/A5). Whilst it may have functioned as a prison, it is curious that it is this role of the site that survived into posterity.

This motif is also one associated with Dun Raouill, although it is recorded in a seventeenth-century song said to be composed by Brian MacMhuirich, a illegitimate son of one of the poet lineage, whilst incarcerated within its walls for cattle rustling from the Clann Ragnail (MacDonald & MacDonald 1911, lviii, 342-43). Whilst its place-name, including a *dún* prefix (see Section 9.3), reveals that it is likely to have been in use throughout the medieval period it only appears as a red rectangle on Blaeu's map (Fig. 128). Although he named it 'Ylen Loch Truriburg' - the island of Loch Druidibeg, which is a common way of naming important island settlements in this period. The fact that it is coloured in red on the map may also be of significance, as Blaeu appears to have used this colour to demarcate sites deemed to be significant. That it was probably in occupation around the time of Pont's survey is noted in tradition and documentation. The first source tells that the hero of the Battle of Carinis, Donald MacIain MhicSheamus, was besieged there by Uisdean MacGilliespuig



Chleirich (another notorious character in North Uist tradition) at the end of the 1500s (MacDonald 1930-31, 59). The latter source is a dispensation of marriage for Ranald MacDonald of Benbecula and Anna MacDonald, daughter to Clann Ragnaill, written “at Ellan Raald on the 8 of June 1653. Dominicus Duigin, Priest of the Mission” (Anon. 1819: Appendix, 32-33). Whilst this raises the likelihood that the dun was still in use in this period the regularity of that use may be questionable given the persons involved. The document concerns the family of Benbecula, who were establishing themselves as a highly independent branch of the Clann Ragnaill in this period, and they may have chosen this location, with its connotations to earlier members of the clan, possibly even its progenitor, to state that independent status. Alternatively, or possibly in addition to this, is the figure of Father Dugain, a Vincentian missionary under threat of capture from governmental and presbytery authorities. Such a remote location may have been used to elude capture, whilst also adding some authority to the proceedings.

The dun itself (Figs. 76, 77 and 78), a rectangular building with dry-stone walls, differs considerably from the small square-ish mortared towers described above. Although interpreted as one phase by the RCAHMS (1928, 110-11), modified by shooting butts, it seems likely that there are at least three, if not four phases. The first being the outer skin, forming one single high enclosure wall. The second was the addition of a smaller inner-building, rendering the original higher wall to appear like a battlement where it abuts the newer phase and creating an aisle along the southern edge where the ‘battlement’ is not present. This building was then modified into two rooms that may have been consolidated in a fourth phase, creating slightly rounded corners to the rooms. The floor-space would have been highly limited in comparison to Eilean Bheagram, to which it was contemporary in their later incarnations. However, to its east is another natural island part of which is enclosed by one or two walls, although the outer ring’s denuded state may indicate that it served as a water break in high water. Into and against the inner wall are four other buildings (with internal measurements of 4m x 2m, 1.5m x 2m, 8m x 5.5m, and 10m x 5m, the walls of the larger buildings being 1m – 1.5m wide and up to 0.5m high). Bald (1829a) names this ‘Island na Taigh’ - house island, but does not record any buildings upon it,

suggesting that these dwellings pre-dated his survey, and that only the remnants of the knowledge that someone had lived there had survived. It seems likely that the two islands, in such close proximity to one another, served as a coherent unit, with Eilean na Tigh serving as kitchen and outhouses to the fort/dwelling/hall/prison of Dun Raouill.

If we can take Dun Raouill's dry-stone construction as evidence of its earlier construction, it is tempting to ask if the small mortared towers belong to one later phase of building. Whilst this question cannot be answered with any accuracy upon the available information, without the presence of hard dating, there is a pattern of association which might shed some light on the matter. There are some constructional similarities between Caisteal Calabhaigh and Caisteal a' Bhreabhair, which differ from Eilean Bheagram, but the one thing that may link them together is a possible attribution to the late 1400s and 1500s, which is reflected in the documentary debut of the Bhreagram and traditions surrounding Calabhaigh and Bhreabhair. This date also conforms with evidence from similar towers elsewhere. Perhaps the most relevant of which is located in Barra (Fig. 135): it constitutes a square tower, 6m x 6m, taking up the whole surface of a small island in the centre of island in the inland, fresh-water loch, Loch Tangusdale. It survives to show three storeys with mortared walls and two windows, but no fireplace. It is known as either Sinclair Castle or MacLeod's Castle, although these names emanate from fairly recent origins: firstly from a Victorian novel, *Sinclair of the Isles*, and latterly from an old tenant's name. Oral history suggests that it was built, or lived in by MacIain Garbh in the mid-1400s, (Macneil 1964, 100-03), yet, in 1824 the tower was thought of as "an ancient seat of the MacNeils" (MacCulloch 1824: III, 12). Unfortunately, no archaeological evidence can substantiate this dating, nor has enough study been done to allow a comparison of this 'MacNeil' tower with those suggested at Calabhaigh and Eriskay. Elsewhere on Barra, what appear to have been the footings of a mortared tower, built into Dun Cuier (Fig. 136), were excavated away in order to study the prehistoric dun. The published record is short and brief and the illustrated finds from this phase limited (Young 1956, 294-96), but the pottery examples include one example that would easily feel at home in a fifteenth- or sixteenth-century assemblage, although there is another that maybe seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century, as well as mid-1700s knife handle (the dating of

this knife has been confirmed by Caldwell, pers. comm.). The spread of dates reveals the extent of occupation of this site, although the site was not accurately recorded enough to allow a direct link with the tower. Preliminary results of an excavation of another tower discovered at Dun Eistean, in Lewis, point to a similar date (M. MacLeod pers. comm.), but it has yet to be seen whether this will be borne through in analysis. It is unfortunate that the evidence is so insubstantial, but it may be possible to loosely associate these small mortared towers to the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Pont's and Blaeu's map gives a picture of contemporary Late Medieval dun use, which provides an opportunity for the investigation of how the duns related to each other in the landscape. Such an approach is limited for other periods when it is impossible upon the available dating evidence to be sure if they were occupied in the same period. In addition to this the study of duns within the medieval landscape is hindered by the fact that many duns are placed upon prehistoric crannogs, the need to build on a prehistoric site may have been more important than the need to create an impact on, or keep a look-out upon the surrounding landscape. Thus to understand the concerns of a medieval occupant it is necessary to turn to two island-dwellings that do not appear to have been built on a prehistoric predecessor and that have a clear relationship to one another: Eilean Bheagram and Dun Raouill.

These two sites were not built on a prehistoric site, which marks them out from their predecessors. Munro stated that "the social or military exigencies that led people to construct artificial islands would also lead them to take advantage of such natural ones as would be found most suitable" (1882, 243). However, it is clear that the crannog builders often chose to build on sites adjacent to natural islands, suggesting that there was something special about artificial islands that natural islands could not or did not provide (this could be functional or symbolic, but is outwith the discussion here). The later medieval duns mark a distinct departure in siting strategy from their late Norse period ancestors, although whether this was because prehistoric antecedents were no longer as important to their inhabitants, or new factors were now more important cannot readily be ascertained until excavation can



prove or disprove that these sites were virginal territory. Of all the small towers only one appears to have been built upon an earlier site: Sinclair's Castle, in Barra (Branigan & Foster 1995, 48; Branigan 1995a, 203-04).

Eilean Bheagram sits on the cusp between the arable plain of the coast and the beginnings of the cnoc-and-lochan, some of which may have been outfield-arable, but mostly served as pasture (see Sections 1.9.1, 1.9.2 and 12.2). Its view-shed shows (Fig. 137) a considerable amount of the machair lay was visible, but at this point the machair rises in a steeply sided ridge, so the machair track and western coast would have been obscured. Immediately to the north and south the banks of the loch are also high and sharp, limiting the available view-shed, however, this is less so to the northeast round to the southeast and the southwest; it would have been possible to see some distance in any of these directions. To the east another ridge blocks views into Loch Druidibeg, but the mountains beyond it are exposed. The settlement mounds on the machair in this township have not been dated (Parker Pearson forthcoming a), and it is possible that medieval settlement here could be obscured by the nineteenth-century township at the loch edge to the northwest marked on Bald (1829a: Fig. 114). Contemporary low-status settlement at either site would have been in daily reference to the dun, and if it were under the later settlement Bheagram would have dominated it.

In contrast Dun Raouill sits out on Loch Druidibeg surrounded by rough pasture land. It does, however, command a view-shed over the sides of the loch (Fig. 84), which must have been one of the main route-ways from the lowland area up into the hills and to Loch Sgiopoint, one of the main access points to the Minch, and thus the mainland. Transhumant populations and inter-island travel could have been monitored from there, if that's not too strong a term. Additionally, the hills of this area may have been the lords' pastures and/or hunting grounds (see Sections 12.8 and 12.9), so this location could have provided ease of access for lordly participation in both. The relationship of these two sites within the same township may suggest that the chiefs may have moved between them on a seasonal basis. Although hardly a hard corpus of data the available documents issued at either site may tentatively corroborate this, the two issued at Eilean Bheagram being issued in the winter

months, the one at Dun Raouill during the summer. At the very least people from the surrounding area moving up and down to the hills on a seasonal or daily basis would have passed by and referenced one, if not both of the duns. Access between the duns is provided by a long ridge of land that leads to the western end of Loch Druidibeg, this route-way is extended by a series of substantial causeways linking the mainland to two smaller islands, leading straight in the direction of the dun. An alternative route is perhaps shown on Bald's map (1829a: Fig. 138), where the river leading from Loch Druidibeg led into a now drained 'Loch Rigary', one arm of which was only narrowly separated from Loch an Eilean, where Eilean Bheagram is situated, the other to the estuary at Tobha Mor. Today the river route between the two lochs is canallated, but it is possible that a shallow boat could have provided water-borne transport both between the duns, as well as from Dun Raouill to the Atlantic coast. Bheagram's tower and escarpment appear most prominent if seen from this route-way, perhaps suggesting that it was designed to be viewed from this approach, either from Dun Raouill, or Loch Sgiopoint. The two duns are also situated between the church lands of Hoghmor and the MacMhuirich poets lands of Driomor and Stadhlaigearaidh, revealing that in the later Middle Ages this part of the island was very much a conceptual centre of the clan.

Other duns reveal a similar proximity with pastoral resources, being sited away from the main areas of settlement and arable farming focussed on the machair, and some, such as Dun Cnoc a' Bhuidhe (Fig. 9), are located on other routes into the hills. This particular route is still used as a roadway and is also marked by a Neolithic chambered tomb, showing its antiquity. The number of duns around Geirinis (Fig. 82) is also interesting in that if all occupied at the same time, including the one in Loch Cille Bhannain, to which it was joined prior to drainage (Bald 1805), it reveals a loch borne community of some standing. Such a large community would contradict arguments that duns reflect separated high status settlement. Unfortunately, more data needs to be obtained before this can readily be addressed.

## 10.9 Caisteal Bhuirgh in the Later Middle Ages

As might be expected Caisteal Bhuirgh raises different questions about the nature of medieval Hebridean lordship. The vague origins of this castle have been discussed in Section 7.11, but it was certainly in existence by in the mid-fourteenth century (HP: I, 26; Skene 1872, I, 43; II, 40; Scott 1979, 6; RMS: I, 520; Munro & Munro 1986, 10-11). At this point in time it was evidently considered to be integral to lordship over Uist and it was named after the island of Benbecula, not after its location (see Skene 1872: I, 43; II, 40; RMS: I, 520; MacKenzie 1932, 321-22). After 1400, however, Caisteal Bhuirgh appears to fall from grace, as no mention of it was made throughout all the legal wrangles or island descriptions of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Pont (n.d.b., 90) was the first to re-highlight it, and implied that it belonged to the Captain of the Clann Ragnaill. However, it had not recovered its prestige, it remained absent from a governmental list of strengths in the Isles in 1613, which included ruins, small castles and modified duns (RPCS: X, 821). It was only shortly after this that the castle became commonplace in charters, in reference to the family of Benbecula. By 1633 Ranald regularly styled himself “of Castle Worfee” (GD201/1/36), by which time it appears to have lost its association with the Uists, and gained its link to the township, Buirgh. After the chiefship had moved into the Benbeculan line the eighteenth-century poet MacMhaighstir Alasdair directly linked Caisteal Bhuirgh and the family of Benbecula with the old Tioram-based line:

*The Craigorm reared my early days,  
In Castle Borge of the poet's lays:  
A land aye full of all things good,  
Milk, honey, wine in ample flood.*

*Sprung from Tirrim's feathered race,  
And groves that Finnan's island grace.*

*(The Mavis of Clan Ranald, MacDonald & MacDonald 1924, 181).*



However, the symbolic link between the two castles may have only recently been re-forged, and the poem may reflect this new reality rather than one with any pedigree, it could also possibly be a direct reference to it.

So what can account for Caisteal Bhuirgh's rise and fall? The answer may come from its location. When first built it may have been situated upon the arm of a sea loch, hard against the Atlantic (Burnett 1997, 78; SA1964/65/B2), and this is reflected by the nearby place-name 'Rubha Sgeir na Biorlinn' (*OS Name Book 10*, 76). This loch may be visible on Blaeu's map (Fig. 139), but it is clear that by Bald's survey in 1805 there was nothing there but wind-blown sand (Fig. 140). Quite when the loch filled up is unclear as traditions conflict about the time-scale involved (CWP 362a; MacCulloch 1824: 1, 102), but it may have been a slow process, starting off shortly after the castle was built. This sea loch provided the only harbour on the whole east coast of the Uists (see Otter 1874, 88-9). The alternatives in the Outer Hebrides were on the west coast (*ibid.*, 135, 156, 158) and most were protected by castles (see Sections 9.5 and 9.6). It seems all the more likely then that Bhuirgh's position may betray another anchorage, which would have given huge view-sheds over the Atlantic (Fig. 137) where passing traffic could have been taxed and fishing fleets exploiting the main fishing ground off the Atlantic shelf (Boyd & Boyd 1996a, 61, 64) protected. This last element may be all the more prominent as the Clann Ruairidh appear to have been developing the fishing capacity of the Uists. At Bornais the whole township seems to have become geared towards maintaining and processing herring fishing. Huge kilns have been excavated full of seaweed cramp, but little else (Sharples 2003, 13-14), which was one method Martin Martin (1994, 129, 159, 200) referred to being used to preserve fish. This archaeological evidence for the intensification of the fishing industry may also be supported in some of the traditions recorded by Carmichael about Ami MacRuairi:

*It is said that this philanthropic Lady sent men around the coasts to excavate in the rocks wherein the people might pound shell-fish for fishing bait. These poll-sollaidh “bait-pits” as they are called are only found at good and suitable fishing rocks (CWP 429: 1).*

At its inception then Caisteal Bhuirgh had dominance over a unique west coast harbour with huge vistas over the Atlantic, as well as the adjacent arable land and local rural settlement. In this way it could be interpreted as a castle in a very European sense, dominating both people and resources. This is in total contrast to the later castle, Kisimul (Fig. 141), which has limited maritime views down the Minch, and the land visible from it is either the hunting ground of Maol Dòmhnach (CWP 381g), or rough pastures of Castlebay and Bhatarsaigh. Its main view-shed is of the water of the bay itself, and it can only really be this resource that Kisimul was concerned with.

After the loch at Buirgh had filled in with sand blow, the castle lost its strategic significance. It was no longer possible to dominate the waterways on the Atlantic coast of the Uists. Additionally, the Clann Raghnaill lost control over the routes between the Atlantic and the Minch, through the Sounds of Barra and Harris, which were granted to other lineages. There was then no easy route from the castle to the Minch and the mainland. The alternative route was very complex (Fig. 142): perhaps by small boat across the mouth of the south ford into Loch Bi, then up through Beinn Tairbeirt (the *tairbeirt* place-name perhaps confirms this theory as it indicates a passable isthmus) and dropping to the Minch at Loch Sgiopoint.

The castle may have also lost its significance as it was no longer held directly by the Clann ‘ic Ailean in the period between the 1370s and the early 1600s. It was outlined in Section 2.7 that the Clann Ruairidh estates may have been contested by Ranald and his brother Godfrey, the Siol Gioraidh perhaps gaining an upper hand in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. Whatever the case, the lands that were left in Ranald’s patrimony were split between his sons upon his demise. His son Angus Riabhach inherited what appears to be a titled territory when he became “Lord of Garbhthrian” (RBC, 167), a sub-territory that included Benbecula and portions of Eigg, Morar and other mainland estates (Fig. 16): a large

fraction of the old Clann Ruairidh territories (see Section 2.9). In the 1540s a number of new landholders appeared throughout Benbecula and South Uist. Gairbhtrean passed to Alane and Lauchlane McCoule McRannauld (RPCS: II, 378), John of Moidart's nephews or cousins, while South Uist passed to a half-uncle, "Ferquhar McAlester of Sceirhow" (RPCS: I, 241-42; II, 441). All three were attempting to establish themselves in new Uist territories. If we compare these names to the names of duns in Benbecula (Fig. 143), each is featured. For each of these duns to be attributed a different name at a later date would have taken some forethought and coherent working through. Instead, it seems much more likely that the personal-names attached to these dun place-names reflect something of these individuals' desire to establish their claims over lands in Uist. Unfortunately, these duns have all been robbed of their stones, and medieval re-use cannot be confirmed. However Dun Ruaidh and Dun Aonais in Loch Olabhat, and Dun Iain do survive. The first (Fig. 61) is a modified natural island with a large rectangular building built upon it, and the latter is a prehistoric dun (Fig. 144). At Dun Aonais it is clear that a medieval structure has been inserted into the broch, with windows. The RCAHMS (1928, 101-02) survey of Dun Iain identified several small sub-rectangular buildings in an around the prehistoric dun. There are several Iain's and Angus's associated with Benbeculan affairs from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century, but it seems likely there were associated with some of them. Despite such tentative links, the distribution of the other sixteenth-century duns is revealing. They are spread in a semi-circle around Caisteal Bhuirgh, and all are concentrated within one single *tír unga*, rather than being dispersed throughout the island. It is tempting to state that in the sixteenth century the distribution of the duns noted acknowledgement of the superiority of the inhabitants of castle in the landscape.

However, if Caisteal Bhuirgh formed part of the *tigherna Ghairbhtreíne*, and was lived in by the Sliocht Aonghais Riabhaigh, it means that this highly important symbol of lordship was lost by the main Clann Ragnaill lineage. Alternatively, the head of Clann mhic Ailean may have maintained superiority over the castle in a way that would explain the distribution of duns around it in the sixteenth century. There are three alternative mechanisms for how we might perceive this. Firstly, Angus Riabhach, and/or his son, may have lived in one of the



duns and not in the castle, or secondly, he may have held the castle as chamberlain/constable for the Clann Ragnaill in his absence: both positions would be dependant on an acknowledgement of their subjugation. Thirdly, if Angus Riabhach received his title through tanistry his position may have followed Irish practice and he would have had a third of the castle in his own right (see Section 2.12), in the same way he had a third of his father's lands. However, it is surely significant that Ranald Ban, the Clann Ragnaill contemporary to Angus Riabhach's son, styled himself after a separate island dwelling in South Uist: Eilean Bheagram. It is difficult to conceive of him doing this unless he had lost access to the more monumental and symbolically significant Caisteal Bhuirgh. Even after a century of anonymity when the newly established and highly influential Ranald of Benbecula, brother to the chief, started to state his connection to the castle, the Clann Ragnaill chief continued to reside at Eilean Bheagram, and did not attempt to establish his own interests over Buirgh.

The first phase of the basic tower-house at Tioram has been roughly dated to the early or mid-fifteenth century (Evans & Rutherford 1999, 85-88). This appears to have been a period of weak control by the Clann mhic Ailean (see Sections 2.7 to 2.9), it is possible that the construction of the tower-house corresponds to attempts to (re-)establish the link of one line to the castle. The refurbishment and embellishment of the tower-house, roughly dated to the late 1400s (Evans & Rutherford 1999, 90-91), would easily sit with the flourishing of the clan under Alan MacRuari from that period onwards. The expansion of the castle would then parallel the building of Eilean Bheagram by Alan's son, revealing that the clan was leaving its architectural mark throughout its patrimony, yet demarcating sub-lordships within it.

## **10.10 The Decline of the Castle and the Island Dwelling**

Over the seventeenth century the Gaelic elite gradually began to stop living in castles and crannogs, and started to build themselves mansions and grandiose houses. The shift away from the castle has been seen as a result of the Statutes of Iona. The chiefs were robbed of their households, and no longer needed anywhere to entertain them, and their sons began to

be educated in the Lowlands and England and began to adopt more ‘genteel’ ways, influenced by fashionable urban life (Macinnes 1998, 166, 169-70). Whether spurred on by the Statutes, or part of a more general process of change (Goodare 1998), together, these influences encouraged the elite to abandon life in the halls and seek a more refined and demarcated existence, away from the hustle and bustle of clan life. They began to modify their homes or build new ones that incorporated houses with numerous rooms in the latest styles.

Whereas some other Hebridean chiefs were building large stately homes, such as Armadale, in Skye, the Clann Ragnair returned from exile after the 1688 revolution to build Ormacleith Castle (Fig. 145). Uist tradition records that he was prompted to do this by his new MacKenzie wife, who had been educated in France. Reportedly, she took one look at her new marital home, the chief’s previous accommodation, and stated “my father has a better stable” (MacDonald 1930-31, 56), or “hen-house” (Campbell 1997a, 89-91). What he built, using French architects, was a fairly modest house, in comparison to his contemporaries, but it still must have stood out against the other dwellings in South Uist. The nineteenth-century Uist tradition bearer, Farquar Beaton, stated “It is called a castle by the natives because they could not imagine their chief building a house and calling it by any other” (MacDonald 1930-31, 56). On first impressions the building seems fairly unremarkable, but there may be some parallels and architectural references between its T-shape and Reenadisart, in Co. Cork, the home of the ultra-Catholic/Gaelic O’Sullivan Bears, although this site is much more monumental and castellated in appearance (Breen 2003, 191-95). Such a *homage* may not have been lost to some of the castle’s visitors. It was said of Clann Ragnair and his wife that:

*so completely did their tempers accord with each other, that their uniform hospitality, polite attention, and affable manners drew company from all parts of the kingdom, and a little Court, well befitting that of a chief, was actually formed (cited MacKenzie 1881, 421-22).*

Amongst those in attendance were numerous Irish Catholic missionaries and priests. Oliver Plunkett wrote a letter describing the state of the church in the Isles:

*There were once many monuments of the saints and churches in them, but all were destroyed by the non-Catholics. The ministers now preach in private houses and carry out their other functions in them* (Hanly 1979, 210).

Ormacleit was no exception: Calum MacFie was chaplain there to Clann Ragnail in 1704 (Macdonald 1995, 30), and it was stated in a list of priests active in the Isles that “There is a fifth Mr. McO’Ure he stayes for the most part at Ormcleit in Southuist where he attends upon the Captain of Clanranald to his chaplain this is a lustie bodied black haired young man” (cited Stewart 1982, 353). In 1707 it was a fitting enough place to accommodate Bishop Gordon, the rest of his visit was largely spent in “miserable huts” (ibid., 349-50). In Benbecula the family based at Caisteal Bhuirgh also protected and housed priests (ibid.), as did the MacNeil of Barra, where, in the eighteenth century it was said by one priest:

*His condescension is sometimes so great, that we are allowed to perform some of our functions within the precincts of his palace, for, to be serious, he has built such a genteel house as I never expected to see in the Long Island* (cited Dawson 1890, 233).

Thus it appears that the Clann Ragnail family were fully immersed in seventeenth-century Gaelic Catholicism, and felt that it was a necessary important component of life in their homes.

The notion of a castle began to be eroded from the collective concept of the chief. Although in 1674 part of the Clann Ragnail chief’s dues to Argyll was to aid in building of fortalice (Stewart 1982, 158), by the end of the century the tie of the castle to the chief had largely disappeared from Gaelic poetry. The elegy and eulogy composed by John MacCodrum for



James MacDonald of Sleat make no mention of castles (Matheson 1938, 102-15, 150-59), nor does his *John of Moidart's Lullaby* or *A Song to Clanranald* mention Tioram, apart from perhaps a passing reference in the line “*N a cheann tàmh ri tàrmunn puirt*”, where he is called “head of the household” (ibid., 116-123, 164-71). The *Song to the Goodman of Grinish* talks of houses and dwellings, *tighean* (Matheson 1938, 134-5), but this absence of castle terminology is not universal. At the end of the 1600s he composed a poem to praise the building of Cille Bhrighde House (Fig. 146), in South Uist, by the local independent old-style tacksman, cousin to the chief:

*God bless the famous tower [tùr] of famous  
prospect. 'tis Colin's tower, a tower that is namely  
throughout every land, a tower at the landing-place  
of Barra's sound.*

*The tower of the poet-bands is the hospitable tower,  
the tower where one is satisfied without stinting, the  
melodious tower wherein is splendour, wine and  
beer unbought on tables.*

*Tower of fortune, famed and munificent, where  
poor-men leave their blessing, tower of joy wherein  
is honour, whoever should praise it as deserved.*

*(The Goodman of Boisdale's House Blessing,  
Matheson 1938, 182-3).*

Despite Mary MacLeod's poem praising Norman MacLeod's 'hall', in Berneray, in similar terms (*MacLeod's Wanted Hall*: Carmichael Watson 1934, 20-25, 113-14), the irony of the situation does not appear to have been lost on contemporary ears. Upon the founding of another of Norman MacLeod's houses in Harris, the MacMhuirich praised it, calling it a *túr*, tower, this prompted the ridicule of a local wit:

*Tower, calling a house a tower  
When it has only couples and end beams,  
Within there is an old man  
Who is known as Sir Norman.*  
(Grant 1959, 343-44).

It is possible that castles had had gardens nearby earlier in the Middle Ages but that this was not recorded. A mansion at Geata MhicLeoid, in North Lewis had an orchard and garden possibly in the late 1500s (Grant 1959, 153), but it would be expected that such gardens would leave more widespread archaeological traces. A poem composed in 1635 to the MacLean, who was not amongst the most progressive landlords, told of:

*Those of the learned poets who have  
passed that way were to be found  
about your (castle's) lawn.*  
(Iorram to Sir Lachlann, Ó Baoill 1979, 6).

Which may also hint at a garden associated with castles in their earlier incarnation. If gardens are to be seen as a late development then the 1686 contract for gardener at Dunvegan would seem a more reasonable herald to the practice's arrival (Grant 1958, 362). A walled-garden is all that remains of Baghasdal House, and it was significant enough of a feature to be marked on Bald (1805b), filled with trees.

In Loch Moy, in Inverness-shire, late eighteenth century tradition held that the chief of the MacIntosh/Clann an Tòiseach lived in an island-dwelling during the summer months, recording that it was inaccessible during the winter, when they were believed to live at Connadge, ten miles away (Grant & Leslie 1798, 207-08; Mackintosh 1892, 8). Clann Raghnaill oral history would indicate its occupation in the late fifteenth century (anon. 1819, 83), but the documentation available for the chiefs' activities show that they composed most

of their charters at nearby ecclesiastical sites, Inverness, and the royal centres in the south. This includes those regarding the 'Barony of Moy'. However, in between 1593 and 1664 there was a floret of tacks, marriage contracts, and other papers issued upon the island, mostly ranging in date from the end of April to the middle of October, although one was dated to February (Paton 1903, 46, 49, 103-05, 114). There is no mention of Connadge, which may mean that the oral history was mistaken and that the chiefs did not reside there, but this may also suggest that little business was conducted in the winter months. The individuals named in these documents name themselves as the Clann an Tòiseach of Dunachtin or Torcastle. Whilst these are fortifications other than Loch Moy, both reflect the relationship of the clan's chiefs with symbolic castle-seats and their expansionist policies. Dunachton's place-name suggests an early dun at the site, which may have been its predecessor as the central seat of the region. Its location on the banks of Loch Insh, would also suggest an occupied island or crannog nearby, although this may refer to the location of a medieval chapel on a mound which is made an island when the nearby river is in spate. A 'court hill', beacon site and burial mounds are also located nearby, which together as a group of associated sites possibly betray an early origin. Rival clans had held both castles until the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, respectively, and it is likely that the adoption of this title was a continuation of the process of adopting territorial seats into naming practices to demonstrate proprietorship (Fraser-Mackintosh 1866; Macbain 1890, 151, 174, 189; MacCulloch 1939, 123-27). This seems very possible as other documents from the 1650s and 1660s show that the Clann an Tòiseach chiefs of Dunachton and Torcastle were caught up in the primary political machinations of the *Gàidhealtachd*. This may indicate that the later phases of occupation of the island in Loch Moy was a deliberate attempt to insinuate an antiquated Gaelic authority to their lordship. The remains recorded upon the island in the 1790s would, however, suggest a considerable period of settlement upon the island. The earliest remains were composed of a 'street' with numerous house foundations on either side. Later, a laird's house and garden were built upon them, and occupation can be dated by an inscription upon a gate to 1665 when the chief married a dowager bride (Grant & Leslie 1798, 207-08). By the end of the century the successors of these lairds moved their abode to the side of the loch where it was demolished after its role in the '45 (Mackintosh 1892, 12).



The Island of Loch Moy may then be held as an example of how a Gaelic lord's use of an island-dwelling changed through time. It transformed from a territorial centre during the later Middle Ages to an expression of Gaelic independence, which was at the same time traditional in its location but also, given its architecture, a piece of up-to-date noble luxury.

By 1705 Roghadal House, in Harris, had an adjoining ginal, brewhouse and brewer (Grant 1959, 352), sounding the death knell for the castle, confirming that, whether by design of the Statutes of Iona or not, its inhabitants were no longer separated from the machinations of estate affairs.

### 10.11 Summary

When first built Bhuirgh was a departure from the duns in two important ways. Firstly, it was an entirely different European form of architectural medium through which to express European ideas about the exclusivity of lordship, and secondly its siting in the landscape, shows a different range of similarly European concerns, over people, arable and maritime resources. These developments, plus the inclusion of a hall that appropriated public assembly, reveals a centralisation of the mechanisms of power and the consolidation of the hold of the Clann Ruairidh over the islands. Conversely, its placing in Benbecula, within what became a recognisable sub-lordship, allows us to see that it was considered as a separate entity within the Clann Ruairidh structure, raising possibilities that allow us to challenge previously held misconceptions about the unity of this Hebridean clan-based lordship. In contrast, Eilean Bheagram, whilst maintaining the hall and aspects of castellated architecture was an entirely different form of monument. It was an open, less oppressive and domineering lordly site, whilst separated from the rest of the social order, it was not walled against it, and would have perhaps not conflicted with Gaelic ideas about society and hierarchy being constructed through genealogy and reciprocal inclusiveness. Its placing in the landscape, together with its relationship with Dun Raouill, again indicate a preoccupation with 'traditionally' Gaelic resources, hunting and pastoralism.

### 11.1 Introduction

The excavated Norse period settlements at Cille Pheadair, Bornais and An Udail reveal continuity and development into the fourteenth century, but around 1400 there was a significant change. The Norse period pattern of dispersed hall-centred farmsteads sited upon the machair continued to be occupied, but they became the focus for small communities, which inhabited groups of smaller houses clustered around the hall. Around the middle of the fourteenth century An Udail went through a period of abandonment and Cille Pheadair was abandoned for good, as was Bornais around the beginning of the next century. There followed a period, lasting over a century, when evidence for low-status settlement in South Uist remains absent. When a clearer picture of settlement again becomes evident, it is evident that there had been a substantial change in the nature and pattern of settlement. In a number of townships the settlements had moved away from the machair, to occupy sites along the cnoc-and-lochan, where they were organised into clustered dwellings in an open-field agricultural landscape. There are several possible explanations for this change: intensification of farming; population growth; developments in the form of land tenure at a local level (from the odal farmer to smaller tenancies); which was tied to the extension of the powers of lordship. There is an alternative model of Late Medieval settlement development, which would offer a significantly more complex explanation of how the eighteenth-century settlement pattern evolved. The gap in identifiable settlement may signify an increased importance of pastoralism, perhaps with an intermittent shift to a more transhumant lifestyle. All of these possible localised social and economic processes may be inter-linked, but they are all also integrally linked to wider political and cultural developments in Hebridean society. These will be discussed through an analysis of the buildings and settlement patterns, and how they may be understood and interpreted (Fig. 147).

## 11.2 Fourteenth-century Settlement

Norse period settlement was originally focussed on the machair, although there had been some expansion into the *gearraidh* land (see Section 3.8). The three excavated settlements from the Uists, Bornais, Cille Pheadair and An Udail (Fig. 25) represent machair-based farmsteads, although all show a slightly different pattern of development. None are yet fully published, but as a result of the longevity of work at An Udail it is perhaps worth looking at this first. Unfortunately, however, the published information is quite limited, being largely devoid of details and plans. What nevertheless emerges, is a picture of continuity from the Norse period. The main focus of the settlement appears to have been a large hall (Fig. 30), but by around 1300, it additionally consisted of up to five smaller longhouses with associated outbuildings. Evidence exists for arable exploitation and for industrialised iron working (Crawford & Switsur 1977, 127). The “massive main longhouse” filled up a decade either side of 1350, marking a period of abandonment that may have lasted for over a decade (Crawford 1988, 24-25). After a short period “the resumption is in all material terms exactly as before except for new house stances being laid out” (ibid., 25). A large central building was retained and the number of related buildings continued to extend through into the mid-1400s, and included two narrow post-built barns (Crawford & Switsur 1977, 132). However, it is unclear if Crawford’s descriptions cover the full extent of remains, or whether, once published a clearer picture would emerge, as in an early interim report Crawford (1971, 2) noted further medieval and Viking remains on the north mound, but stated that he was reluctant to record it.

Settlement at Bornais appears to have followed a similar pattern of continuous development from the Norse period (Fig. 28). Whilst one large hall was retained at the settlement’s centre, smaller houses were built so that the settlement expanded to cover all three mounds: agriculture and herring exploitation also appears to have intensified (Sharples 2005a). The last phase of one of the outlying buildings is much smaller than the hall, measuring 7.2m x 4m internally (Sharples 2005b). The use of its internal space reveals new developments towards the end of the fourteenth century. Rather than having a large long central hearth,



with activity centred at the point of the building furthest from the entrance, this building has a small square hearth, and activity was focussed just inside the doorway (Sharples 2005a; 2005c). By this period there was another fundamental change from the earlier structures: foundations which were previously sunk into the machair were instead constructed above the ground (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a, 149-51)

Whereas settlement at the other two sites expanded, Cille Pheadair (Fig. 29) appears to have retained its form as a singular house (although it is possible that a larger settlement has subsequently been washed out to sea: Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004b, 241). Whether the lack of expansion was due to its poor economic status is unclear. The final house was apparently abandoned before the change in hearth location became popular (Sharples 2005c), but the building is a slightly irregular rectangle on a small scale similar to that at Bornais, measuring 6.9m x 3.1m internally (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a, 148-49).

### **11.3 Settlement in the Sixteenth Century and After**

Pont's maps, and those published by Blaeu, show a stylised view of the settlement landscape of South Uist around the end of the sixteenth century. Despite the small scale of the maps, Pont's uses of symbols are clearly intended to show settlement location and type. Both townships and individual high status residences are depicted, and despite the technical inaccuracies of the early maps their siting (Fig. 148) corresponds well with settlement locations recorded on Bald's map two centuries later. While fine detail of these settlements cannot be portrayed at this scale, the fact that Pont felt he could identify a core site in which to place his symbols, suggests that each township had a central and nucleated focus. When compared with Bald's map, it is apparent that such foci had remained a feature of settlement throughout the intervening period (from around 1600 to 1805), and that their central loci had barely changed. This strongly suggests a period of settlement continuity; thus it is possible that the details on Bald's map contain features characteristic of the sixteenth-century settlement. Given the different temporal and social contexts of these maps such comparisons require critical evaluation.

There are four main observation to make about the distribution of buildings on Bald's map (which are of interest even although Bald did not differentiate between houses, outbuildings, inns, and so on: Fig. 149).

- i. The majority of buildings are clustered together haphazardly. In some case these are large conglomerations (eight buildings on average, but up to twenty-three) focussed upon one area within the boundaries of the township, in others there are a number of foci. This is particularly clear in Frobost (Fig. 23), where there are three clusters, two of which are named North and South Frobost. These almost certainly represent a survival of quarterland farmsteads.
- ii. Within some townships, in addition to the settlement clusters are occasional outlying buildings, probably dwellings, often utilising extensions of the raised areas of land.
- iii. In contrast to the un-arranged distribution of buildings within most townships, settlement at Baghasdal (Fig. 5) was laid out in an organised linear arrangement.
- iv. All the above settlement was placed along the arable of the western coast, although there are a small number of one or two buildings and marked farmsteads situated on the opposite coast, separated from the main western area of settlement by the central range of hills (these will be discussed in Section 12.10).

There are two easily discernible patterns in these observations that can be attributed to their late date. Firstly, Bald's survey was commissioned at the height of a surge in South Uist's population in 1805, when it had doubled in fifty years, this surely accounts for a significant number of buildings. It is possible that, as in North Uist in 1799 (Lawson 2004, 42), a greater number of inhabitants and landless cottars explains the outlying houses, although this will be discussed in Section 12.4. Secondly the planned nature of settlement at Baghasdal is surely explained by the fact that this was run by the tacksmen of Baghasdal, who had been noted since the end of the 1600s for their Improving tendencies.

Putting these problems aside, the predominance of the nucleated form of settlement is evident on Bald's map. Whilst the English word 'township' would, and does in everyday modern parlance, suffice to describe these clustered settlements, to avoid confusion when referring to the larger administrative unit the term *baile* (plural: *bailtean*) will be used to describe the settlement clusters (following Crawford 1983, 363).

Since Dodgshon's seminal articles (1993a, 1993b) the development of *bailtean* has been seen as the key to understanding the development of Post-Medieval social structures across the western seaboard. One of the key aims of subsequent research has been the creation of methodologies for both recovering and understanding *bailtean* remains (see edited volumes by Hingley 1993; Atkinson, Banks & MacGregor 2000; Govan 2003). To a large degree this has been hindered by the difficulty in locating the physical evidence. Unlike the proliferation of un-datable field systems that have been identified (for a summary see Halliday 2003), evidence for settlement that pre-dates the eighteenth century has proved almost impossible to locate. The reason for this difficulty has been put down to the fact that the bulk of most buildings were constructed out of degradable materials, such as turf and wood. In the Isles timber was a scarce resource, and as in other woodland-poor regions, would have been re-used frequently. Additionally, Sinclair noted that in Caithness "once in three years, all the earthly part of these houses is thrown on the dunghill, and new houses built again of the same materials" (1795, 130). Although such buildings would not have required the building of substantial foundations, which would have left an archaeological trace, the complete destruction and removal of buildings appears to have been a common feature of Highland and Hebridean settlement (Dodgshon 1993a, 422-24: although see Lelong for 2003, 11-14). However, research in the Uists has been more fortunate and has produced evidence for later medieval settlement. Excavations have been carried out on a number of sites on the cnoc-and-lochan zone of South Uist: Frobost (Helen Smith pers. comm.), Airigh Mhuilinn (Symonds *et al.* 2000) and Gearraidh Bhailteas (Symonds 1998). At all these sites work was targeted upon the upstanding remains of eighteenth and nineteenth-century settlement, and at each site residual evidence for Late Medieval material



culture was recovered. This indicates that each settlement may have been occupied continuously since the later Middle Ages.

An Udail is unusual in that this settlement has produced good later medieval remains. The Norse settlement form continued into the middle of the fifteenth century, when, in an event Crawford connected to the massacre of the Siol Ghoraidh, the whole settlement was destroyed. After this episode, which may have taken place around 1460 (1988, 9) there was “a brief inter-occupation and then the construction of what must be the fore-runner of a post-Medieval tacksman’s house built on the ‘cottage loaf’ layout” (ibid., 27: Fig. 150). This marked a “striking change in building style” (Crawford & Switsur 1977, 132), but one that continued throughout the twelve rebuilds that took place from the remainder of the fifteenth century through to its abandonment around the end of the seventeenth century (Crawford 1969, 7). Only the size of the settlement changed. Around 1500 An Udail had continued to expand: it consisted of one major building, surrounded by four or five other buildings. However, by the end of the 1600s the settlement had shrunk to a singular decrepit building. At its prime Crawford interpreted the medieval phases of An Udail as a big-tacksman’s *baile* (Crawford & Switsur 1977, 132-33). An Udail then presents a model of settlement location continuity through the medieval period and later, but also of expansion in size, with additional developments in material culture. Unfortunately, however, it remains the only example.

It should be noted that in the late eighteenth century this locational pull may have been abandoned in some cases and a new emphasis was placed upon the genealogical connections of the owners of the *baile*. In two incidences work to find the home of significant historical figures in South Uist has targeted remains associated with them by local tradition. Both Symond’s program of research to find the home of Flora MacDonald (1999b, 74-82) and excavations around the homestead of the MacMhuirichs (Raven 2003, 135) have produced evidence for late eighteenth-century occupation. Both are too ephemeral to have had long periods of use, but in the first case the site is too late to have been occupied by Flora, but may have been occupied by her descendants, and in the second it is possible that the site was

occupied by the last of the MacMhuirich lineage to be recorded, who was illiterate and did not follow his ancestral profession. Thus, what seems to have been the important factor in traditions was the genealogical connections of their owners, not the physical location of their homes. Further work by Symonds has suggested that Flora MacDonald probably lived at the nearby *baile* of Gearraich Bhailteas (Fig. 151) that has produced evidence for a considerable period of occupation (pers. comm.). It is likely then that these two sites do not contradict the centrality of ancestral settlements, the genealogical conceptualisation of the occupiers of the site was merely ramified through connection to members of these lineages in later periods, who were more concerned with their families' pasts, rather than their geography.

#### 11.4 A Shift of Settlement Away from the Machair?

Initial survey by SEARCH indicated that the settlement mounds along the machair were occupied through into the Viking Age, and were abandoned *en masse* at the end of the Norse Period, the populace shifting the focus of settlement to the neighbouring cnoc-and-lochan (Parker Pearson 1996; Sharples & Parker Pearson 1999, 46–48). Early results from the excavations at Bornais and Cille Pheadair appeared to confirm the idea of a wholesale abandonment of settlement on the machair in one concentrated period, and point to a date sometime between the mid thirteenth and mid fourteenth century (ibid., 51, 55). Several possibilities for this change were mooted, from environmental disaster to a cultural change after the Norse abandonment of the Isles in 1266. However, subsequent research has required a reinterpretation of these theories: most notably regarding the extent and date of the movement. A general shift may have taken place within most townships towards the end of the fourteenth century, but a number of settlements remained upon the machair until the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The recognition of the longevity of settlement at some sites has rendered arguments for ethnic changes redundant. Instead environmental degradation of the machair, and/or a shift in economic emphasis on pastoral resources, have been suggested as causing the populace to begin to choose to abandon their ancestral homes upon the machair (Parker Pearson *et al.* 2004a, 161–64; Parker Pearson forthcoming a; Sharples 2005c).

An Udail is unusual in that it reveals a pattern of continuity in settlement use. This is not the case for the majority of settlements in South Uist presented by the cartographic evidence. With the exception of the east coast settlement (which will be discussed in Section 12.10), the majority are sited on the high raised bands of cnoc-and-lochan, where dry land would have been at a premium. This is in total contrast to the distribution of Norse period settlement, which was based on the machair (see Section 5.2). Bald revealed that there were some exceptions to this shift from the machair: Baghasdal, Smercleit and Aisgernis all remained on the machair. Pont's maps, dating to around 1600 note that in addition to these machair focussed settlements was Machair Mheadhanach (Fig. 152), which documents suggest was abandoned after a massive sand blow in the following century (GD201/5/1217/24). Cille Donnain may have suffered the same fate, only shortly before Pont's survey: Pont marked the main settlement well inland, upon the cnoc-and-lochan. However, nearer the coast is another settlement, named 'Totenamaekan' (Fig. 153), which may be a rendition of *tobhta na machair*, ruins of the machair. Blaeu has left the symbol for this settlement white, which may indicate its lack of status or inhabitants; in the present day this area is an active sand dune, rather than machair plain, which may indicate that the machair here had been subject to sand inundation shortly prior to Pont's survey. Staoinebrig may also fall into this category; although not named on Blaeu, it seems to be shown away from machair. However, local tradition names a series of mounds upon the machair as the 'old town', and this place-name is supported by surface pottery finds that suggest a period of occupation from the Viking period to the seventeenth century (Parker Pearson forthcoming a).

The significance of the cartographic evidence is twofold. Firstly, that sometime between the end of the Norse period and the sixteenth century there was a large scale, but not entire abandonment of the settlement on the machair, and a relocation to the nearby cnoc-and-lochan. Secondly, this change in focus took place in tandem with the creation of the *bailtean*. The end of settlement at Bornais and Cille Pheadair around the end of the fourteenth century may indicate that the main phase of relocation took place around this date,



a possibility supported by the absence of later medieval finds recovered in Parker Pearson's machair survey (forthcoming a). This may be highly significant given the fact that the machair-based settlement mounds had been the focus for settlement since prehistory, and that this antiquity probably provided a sense of legitimacy to the proprietorship over the associated farm land.

### 11.5 Fieldwork into Medieval *Bailtean* in South Uist

The belief in machair-based medieval settlement in South Uist provides an almost unique opportunity for the study of the development of the *bailtean* in the western seaboard. The qualities of the machair raised the possibility that medieval structures would be preserved under the sand, as would midden material that would provide environmental data and ceramic evidence (for dating). The environment of South Uist thus appeared to present an almost ideal framework for fieldwork to be undertaken to test models for *bailtean* development. The author led over ten weeks of fieldwork, during the summers of 2000, 2001 and 2002, as well as the spring of 2002, with the help of students from the Universities of Sheffield and Bournemouth and other volunteers. Over sixteen sites (at Aisgernis, Baghasdal, Machair Mheadhanach and Staoinebrig, Smercleit, West Cille Bhrighe, Cille Pheadair and Frobost: Fig. 154), 49 sq m of ground were surveyed with geophysics and ninety-eight test pits were excavated, covering 180 sq m in plan. A summary of the aims and results of the fieldwork is presented in the appendix (the full results will be presented in reports deposited in the NMRS).

Whilst occasional sherds of possible medieval pottery were recovered from insecure layers of eight of the sites (Aisgernis Sites 48, 96, 97, Baghasdal Sites 67, 68, 191 and Sites 134 and 137 at Machair Mheadhanach: Fig. 155), only three produced substantial evidence for medieval occupation. Previous finds had suggested Norse period occupation (Parker Pearson forthcoming a) at Site 74, at Smeircleit. Whilst no direct evidence for Late Medieval occupation was uncovered these excavations produced evidence for continuous, unbroken settlement from the Mid Iron Age through to around 1700, followed by re-

occupation during the Victorian period. Substantial evidence for seventeenth-century settlement was provided by the presence of a large midden containing numerous sherds of diagnostic pottery (Alan Lane pers. comm.) and a late seventeenth-century coin (Donal Bateson pers. comm.). In a period when money was little used by Hebrideans, similar coinage may have remained in circulation into the eighteenth century (ibid.), as the pottery may have. Over the eighteenth century locally made ceramic appears to have fallen from use, possibly being directly replaced at the end of the century by imported factory wares, although tradition holds that there may have been an intervening aceramic period (Campbell 2000a, 84).

Geophysical survey of Sites 96 and 97 at Aisgernis revealed anomalies that appear to be a clear, and thus valuable picture of the appearance of Pre-Clearance *bailtean* on the machair, with houses excavated into the mounds and separated by rig-and-furrow (Fig. 156). Whilst it is possible that this settlement could be Post-Medieval in date, excavations by the author and Parker Pearson (forthcoming b) produced Middle Iron Age pottery and a small number of medieval sherds: only a very limited assemblage of later imported ceramics was recovered. If, as argued above, there was an aceramic period then this settlement may have reached its zenith during this period, however, the lack of later wares may indicate a Late Medieval *baile* spread over these two sites. At a neighbouring site, Site 48, a Norse period Cu alloy pin (dated to between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries by David Caldwell and Colleen Batey pers. comm.) was recovered from the footings of a turf wall. This strongly suggests that these three mounds had been occupied in relative continuity from the Middle Iron Age to some point in the Late, or Post Medieval period.

Site 138, at Machair Mheadhanach (Fig. 157), was one of a large cluster of mounds that have produced evidence for occupation from the Beaker period to the seventeenth century (Blaeu 1654; Munro 1961, 76; Parker Pearson forthcoming a), when it may have been overcome with sand blow (GD201/5/1217/24). An upstanding structure upon this mound had been quarried away by the MOD, but Craig Allaker (pers. comm.) had discovered a large nodule of flint (thought to be a Norse period strike-a-light: Parker Pearson pers. comm.), a fragment

of sixteenth-century metalwork and a Mary Stuart coin (Craig Allaker pers. comm.: Fig. 158). Several layers of occupation at different levels were uncovered during the excavations, suggesting constant re-use of the mound through time. A number of trenches across the summit of the mound revealed midden material, which included several diagnostically medieval sherds of pottery and an arrowhead (Fig. 159) that may have been eleventh- to sixteenth-century in date (Jessop 1996, 194, 196; David Caldwell (pers. comm.).

Whilst not conclusive the fieldwork appeared to substantiate cartographic evidence for continuity of settlement locations from the sixteenth century to the beginning of the nineteenth century. It confirmed occupation stayed on the machair at Aisgernis, Baghasdal, Smeircleith and possibly Staoinebrig. Additionally, settlement at Machair Mheadhanach continued on the machair until it was abandoned after a sandblow, probably in the seventeenth century. Where settlement had moved away from the machair, excavations at Frobost may also verify suggestions that the new locations served as core foci for later occupation. Unfortunately, although medieval finds were distributed widely over mounds no stratigraphic relationship was demonstrable and thus it was impossible to interpret either the presence or absence of clustered *bailtean* prior to the eighteenth century.

Overall, the results of the fieldwork hints at, but cannot conclusively demonstrate, a model of continuous development of *bailtean* through the Middle Ages, even where the foci was relocated from the machair to the cnoc-and-lochan. However, a curious and tentative offshoot from the excavations was the lack of recovery of diagnostic finds belonging to the fifteenth or early sixteenth century. It has to be asked whether this might confirm the apparent gap in the settlement record? This question is all the more relevant because certain later medieval houses from the cnoc-and-lochan and their associated pottery assemblages show a change in style and form which can be dated, in all probability, to the later sixteenth century. This may indicate that during the fifteenth century there were substantial developments and changes in the settlement pattern that were at odds to the model of the linear development of the *bailtean*. Instead, in the fifteenth century, settlement may have been dispersed through the landscape, with the process of nucleation resuming at the end of



the 1500s. This alternative proposed settlement pattern may reflect either the continuation of a tradition disposed to dispersed independent farmsteads, or a rise in the importance of pastoral resources. If demonstrable, such developments would have possible ramifications for the understanding of the impact of feudalism throughout the economy and society of South Uist.

The form of development of the Late Medieval *baile* has yet to be evaluated in detail because the evidence has been fragmentary and elusive. Yet, it is crucial to understand the process, and what happened between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and its implications, if we are to understand changes in the social structure of Hebridean societies and how the landscape was utilised to replicate social relations.

#### **11.6 The Fifteenth Century: A Problem of Recognition, Sand, Plague or Pastoralism?**

The abandonment of the established Norse settlement pattern on the machair may possibly be explained by a drop in population or the displacement of the population by environmental degradation. There is some evidence that both have occurred in the Uists but that is not the whole story because in addition, there appears to be gap in the finds record between c. 1400 to c. 1600. This may be no more than a gap in the recognition of material from this period, however. During this period greater cultural and economic changes were taking place throughout the Irish Sea region, and there may have been an increase in the significance and importance of pastoral resources. It is possible that pastoral developments system may explain the shift in settlement.

At An Udail it was notable that sand blows began to increase from around 1300, they continued to escalate until they finally overwhelmed the settlement in the 1690s (Crawford & Switsur 1977, 132; Crawford 1988, 10-11). Around 1600 it was said that in South Uist “the sand doeth flow with the winde and destroyes both the lands and hyds the houssis below the sand” (Pont in MacFarlane 1905, 180), and it has been noted above that Machair

Mheadhanach was abandoned around the same time as An Udail. Whilst sand blows may have been related to the intensification of agriculture (see Dodgshon 1998, 23), or the beginnings of the Little Ice Age (Morrison 1990, 5-7), it is clear that this was affecting settlement from the fourteenth century onwards. Given the prolonged period of machair instability it is unlikely to account on its own for the apparent synchronicity of the relocation at the end of the fourteenth century.

Iain Crawford (1988, 25) offered an alternative explanation for the apparent abandonment of An Udail in the 1350s: the Black Plague. The impact of the plague is well known from deserted medieval village studies throughout England (e.g. Beresford 1963, 157-68), but there is little direct evidence for how the Hebrides were effected. Jones (1986, 102) claimed that in 1348 and 1349 the plague was borne by ship out from England and 'ravaged' the Atlantic world, including the Hebrides: unfortunately although he does not state his sources. Crawford (1988, 25) had looked to Ireland for the source of the Hebridean plague, noting its impact there at the same time. That the plague was sea borne is revealed by its presence in Iceland in 1402, where it killed two thirds of the population (Byock 1988, 98), and it is possible that this wave of plague also hit the Hebrides. It is perhaps worthy of note that 1348/9 and 1402 possibly correspond with the end of occupation at Cille Pheadair and Bornais, but this may be no more than coincidence. More recent evidence for plague induced settlement abandonment comes from the machair settlement of Baghasdal, which was abandoned at the end of the nineteenth century due to 'machair fever' (James MacDonald pers. comm.).

Whereas small and/or low status settlement such as Cille Pheadair could have been vulnerable to one period of exposure to either plague or sand inundation, this explanation is less satisfactory for larger settlements such as Bornais, especially when so many machair-based settlements continued. Nor does it explain the temporary break in occupation observant at some sites.

Before going on to consider alternative possibilities of change in the overall settlement pattern of South Uist, it is first worth looking at whether there are some problems in recognising sites from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The ceramic and house forms from 1400 and 1600 are entirely distinct from one another. It is possible that there was either a gradual merging, or a sharp change of style between 1400 and around 1550. However, this cannot be clearly demonstrated from the available material, as there are too few securely dated assemblages and/or buildings.

### 11.7 The Ceramic Evidence

In order to assess the ceramic evidence access was kindly provided to the pottery assemblages from Finlaggan, by David Caldwell, National Museum of Scotland, Gunna, by Heather James, G.U.A.R.D., Guinersso, by Mike Church, University of Edinburgh, Achnahaird Sands, by Stuart Farrell, Griomasaigh, by Alastair MacKenzie and numerous sites in Northern Ireland, by Cormac Bourke and Richard Warner, Ulster Museum. Access to unpublished pottery reports from Eilean Olabhat and some shieling sites in Barra was also provided by Ewen Campbell.

Campbell (2003, 142-43) recently briefly reviewed the evidence for developments in the locally produced pottery sequence of the Western Isles. He suggested that during the fourteenth century there was a change from plain Norse styles to globular vessels with high necks and stabbed, incised and impressed, or 'slash and stab' decoration around rims and shoulders, often applied by bird bones. A limited number of vessels of this decorated type were noted in the later Norse period layers at An Udail, but Lane (1983, 188-92, 201, 212, 249: Fig. 160) indicated that these became more common throughout the medieval period, so much so that he stated that "decoration must be regarded as a minor trait of the Viking-age pottery" (ibid., 228). Alongside a list of other finds of later pottery (ibid., 295-338) Lane also noted that Lethbridge recorded similar styles alongside imported twelfth and thirteenth-century pottery at Hoghbaigh, in Coll (ibid, 15), perhaps confirming an early presence of these decorated forms. However, Lethbridge's (1950, 96-7; 1954, 193) descriptions are



vague at best, and close correlation of the context of recovery of both types cannot be confirmed. One other Scottish site with early decorated wares is Finlaggan (Fig. 161), where some has been sealed under fourteenth-century deposits alongside imported white gritty ware, here again decoration becomes much more common over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (David Caldwell pers. comm.). One other location that may have decorated medieval pottery occurring beside imported thirteenth-century white gritty ware is associated with the re-use of the Griomasaigh wheelhouse, although the contexts are insecure (Alasdair MacKenzie pers. comm.). As well as possible early examples of 'slash and stab' decorated pottery, both the Finlaggan and An Udail thirteenth- and fourteenth-century assemblages also contain lugs and handles (Crawford & Switsur 1977, 132). These are decorative features which are absent from the few other available Hebridean medieval assemblages. However, they are common from contemporary (late twelfth to early fourteenth century) assemblages elsewhere in the Irish Sea: such as the of everted-rim, or Fictile ware, of Ulster (mostly unpublished finds held within the collection held by Museum of Ulster, but see Wood-Martin 1886, 91-102; Davies 1950, 68-69, 73; Ivens 1988; 2001; Ó Floinn forthcoming: Fig. 162) and granite-tempered ware from the Isle of Man (Barton 1999, 224: Fig. 163). Whereas the Manx material differs from the Hebridean and Irish pottery in terms of inclusions (Davey 2000, 32-36), and the everted rim ware can bear more complex designs, all three bear some strong similarities in form and decorative style until the later fourteenth century. After this point lugs and handles seem to disappear and Irish and Hebridean styles become almost indistinguishable. Sometime after the fourteenth century Irish pottery loses the highly complex designs of the everted rim ware, and becomes solely characterised by the 'slash and stab' decoration around rims and necks that characterise later Hebridean wares (see below). Although future work may prove lugs and handles to be more a more common feature amongst thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Hebridean pottery decoration, it is possible that the decorated and handled material from Finlaggan and An Udail are skeuomorphs of vessels imported from Ireland or Britain.

One reason to question the origin of these types and the early dating of decorated sherds of local Hebridean wares is the absence of decorated material from Bornais. Here over the

fourteenth century a different style of pottery decoration developed: plain undecorated pottery with everted rims and flat-footed bases became more common during the site's use. The absence of decorated pottery from both Bornais and Cille Pheadair has led Lane recently to question Crawford's interpretation of the phasing at An Udail and whether decorative forms do occur during the Norse levels (2005). Throughout the Hebrides most assemblages of medieval decorated wares have not been found with other datable material, and thus cannot be securely dated upon internal evidence. Dating has depended on comparison with other assemblages found in securely datable contexts, or alongside datable imported wares (e.g. Crawford 1997; Campbell 2005a; forthcoming b). Where assemblages of decorated pottery can be dated with any accuracy, they invariably belong to the later sixteenth century. At Breachacha Castle, although it is stated that hand-made pottery was found from all layers of the castle's building, from the middle of the fifteenth century, the illustrated decorated forms come from layers sealed by late sixteenth-century renovations (Turner & Dunbar 1970, 182: Fig. 164). The assemblage of decorated pottery from Gunna can be dated to the sixteenth century as it was recovered alongside imported, datable continental ceramics (Heather James & Bob Wills pers. comm.: Fig. 165). This associational dating is mirrored at Druim nan Dearcag, in North Uist (Campbell 1997b, 911-13: Fig. 166). Excavations of a shieling at Guinnerso, in Lewis, have revealed an extensive pottery-manufacturing site (Burgess *et. al.* 1998, 73-85). A sample from the floor level of this shieling has provided a radiocarbon date calibrated to between 1400 and 1600 (Mike Church pers. comm.). The pottery made at this site (Fig. 167) is perhaps the most developed form from any Hebridean assemblage, with sharp-edged squared rims and slashed rim decorations more closely resembling contemporary Irish styles than other Hebridean ones. Although only seven sherds of handmade pottery were recovered from excavations at Castle Sween, in Kintyre, it is perhaps revealing that all came from a phase dated to between the sixteenth and mid seventeenth century (Caldwell & Stewart 1996, 546, 548; Ewart & Triscott 1996, 527). It would seem then that the small corpus of assemblages that can be dated are all datable to the later sixteenth century or early seventeenth century. This may, tentatively, suggest that the remaining, undated, assemblages of 'slash and stab' ceramics also belong to this period and that this form of pottery is predominantly, but not exclusively, late sixteenth and early

seventeenth century in date. It may be significant that excavations at Barryscourt tower-house, in County Cork, produced little or no pottery from the period between the late fifteenth and late sixteenth century. This was interpreted as resulting from a drop in ceramic use throughout Ireland and Britain in this period (Pollock 1999, 158-59). If this trend spread to the Hebrides it may further account for the lack of assemblages datable to before the late sixteenth century there.

The evidence presented above suggests that although there are some thirteenth, fourteenth and early fifteenth-century examples of decorated Hebridean pottery, possibly containing examples of lugs and handles, the form of pottery without lugs and handles but retaining 'slash and stab' decoration may predominantly belong to the fifteenth century and after. Although less strongly, the evidence also perhaps hints that it only really escalated in popularity towards the end of the sixteenth century, and may have extended into the seventeenth. Only further excavation can serve to confirm or contradict this theory. It is possible that this bias towards the later sixteenth century in recovered contexts results from the greater conspicuousness of later medieval settlement (see below). However, the lower incidences of earlier recovery may indicate its low usage and, furthermore, that there was a break in settlement over the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

The likelihood that decorated Hebridean pottery forms were a later medieval development is perhaps supported by the fact that similar styles were being increasingly produced throughout the Gaelic world. Hebridean Late Norse and Irish everted-rim ware traditions converged to a similar decorative style and vessel form. Richard Warner (pers. comm.) has suggested that crannog ware (smaller vessels with less complex designs and less pronounced everted rims) developed out of the earlier style sometime between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, although this is slightly earlier than suggested by McNeill (1980, 109, 113). It must be more than coincidence that comparative developments were occurring consecutively in the Hebrides. A handmade pottery tradition existed at the Norse period settlement of Freswick, Caithness, with sherds being recovered from eleventh- to fourteenth-century contexts (Fig. 168). Throughout most of the occupation the forms only vaguely resemble



Hebridean styles (Batey 1987, 232-85; Gaimster 1995) but Curle's original publication (1939, 104-06) included some illustrations of decorated rims similar to later Irish and Hebridean examples, and he claimed that they were mostly recovered from later levels. This possibly suggests parallel stylistic developments in Caithness towards the end of the Norse period (however, Curle's phasing has recently been reinterpreted, which means that any comparison has to be tentative: Batey 1987). Although these areas were in close contact during the Middle Ages, it is unclear at present whether this convergence in style may reflect some form of collective Gaelic identity, or desire to express unity.

### 11.8 Vernacular Architectural Evidence

Whereas late fourteenth-century houses at An Udail and Bornais were rectangular, and can be demonstrated to be a continuation of the Norse longhouse tradition, the houses of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries are sub-rectangular, tending towards ovoid in some cases. In the fourteenth century the internal length of the buildings on mound three at Bornais and that of Cille pheadair was around seven metres. In comparison to other contemporary hall-houses this is small, but would be considered large by later standards (see below). Thus alongside a postulated change in ceramic style and the shift in settlement location, it would seem that attitudes to house style altered significantly over the fifteenth and early sixteenth century. Given that only a handful of post-Norse period buildings have been identified and excavated throughout the western seaboard it is perhaps no surprise that only a few examples can be dated with any accuracy. Well-dated Late Medieval buildings are few, but what exists correlates to the late sixteenth century and later. Although this may be a result of a lack of recognition and haphazard recovery, this evidence perhaps provides the strongest indication that the possible gap in the settlement record reflects a significant development in Hebridean society over the fifteenth century. Such a development deflected the occupational focus away from the arable-based *bailtean* and encouraged ephemeral structures dispersed throughout the landscape.

The only site to have been excavated that provides evidence for continuity throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is An Udail (Fig. 150). Sometime in the middle of the 1400s the old rectangular longhouse style was replaced with a new style that was 'ovoid' with "house compartments ... placed side by side, in parallel, forming plans reminiscent of a cottage loaf" (Crawford & Switsur 1977, 132). The largest building, which Crawford dubbed 'Tigh Mór' was built of "well-constructed double walling, packed with sand and possibly turf [that] is 6' across on average but widens to a bastion of 8' thick at the single asymmetrically sited doorway" (Crawford 1965a, 8). Although Crawford's stated dimensions of buildings during the medieval phases vary widely (from 6m x 3.6 to 15m x 9m: 1964, 2; 1983, 360), the largest internal dimensions of one phase appears to have been 10.5m x 4.9m (1967b, 11). He interpreted the adjacent cell as sleeping quarters, but unfortunately quoted no evidence to support his reasoning (Crawford 1983, 361). At An Udail this form continued to be used until the settlement was finally abandoned at the end of the 1600s. Crawford, rightly, was quick to point out that "this destroys for the Uists, at least, the arguments advanced hitherto for the persistence of Norse architecture for dwelling houses" (Crawford & Switsur 1977, 132), although the cultural significance of the development of the blackhouse has yet to be investigated.

The excavated Late Medieval and early Post Medieval houses from South Uist (Symonds 1998; Symonds *et al.* 2000) have yet to be fully published, yet they can be said to have a small oval/sub-rectangular appearance (Fig. 151). Similar buildings have been identified and excavated throughout the western seaboard. Four have been excavated in North Uist (Fig. 169): Druim nan Dearcag, Airigh Mhic Ruairidh, Bagh an Akara and Eilean Olabhat. The settlement at Druim nan Dearcag was composed of a cluster of two houses and two outbuildings. The excavated house was originally 4m x 2m internally, although it was later lengthened to form two cells, measuring 2.7m x 2.2m and 1.5m x 2.2 on the inside (Armit 1997, 905-07). Armit noted that its irregular 'boat-shaped' outer appearance masked a more regular rectangular inside (*ibid.*, 907). One end of the building at Airigh Mhic Ruairidh had been washed away, but excavation of the remaining structure revealed it was sub-rectangular, measuring 2.1m wide internally with a central hearth (Dunwell 1998, 46-7).

Bagh an Ackara measured 6m x 4m internally, and like Druim nan Dearcag had an internal division inserted at a later date (ibid., 49-51). At Eilean Olabhat the medieval re-use of this prehistoric site constituted an outbuilding and a house, the latter measuring 4.5m x 2.6m internally, again with an internal division (Armit 1996, 203). The latter three sites have, and can, only be vaguely dated to the later medieval period through comparisons of their ceramic assemblages to that recovered at Druim nan Dearcag, datable to the sixteenth century, and the problematic sequence from An Udail (Johnson 1998, 47, 50-51; Campbell forthcoming b). A further comparable medieval site from the Uists is at Griomasaigh (Fig. 170: 6.1m x 2.9m internally), but the phasing of the recovered pottery is insecure (Alasdair MacKenzie pers. comm.).

Better provenanced material comes from a few sites elsewhere in the Hebrides and mainland of Scotland (Fig. 171). At the Isle of Gunna two larger later buildings, possibly belonging to the eighteenth century (though with round-ended rectangular outer walling containing a rectangular inside, measuring 7.6m x 3.6m and 4.1m x 2.4m: James 1998, 16-19, 28) overlay a series of amorphous sub-rectangular structures. Only two were fully uncovered, revealing inner dimensions of 3m x 2m and 5m x 3m, of the remaining structures one had a 3m long interior. Internal divisions were also present (ibid., 22-28). Caldwell *et al.* (2000, 62-63) identified a sixteenth-century *bailte* at Finlaggan (Fig. 172), composed of an oval/sub-rectangular distinctive building style, with internal dimensions ranging from 5m x 3m to 10m x 7m, although most tend to be at the smaller end of this range. They also noted that this form of building was ubiquitous throughout Islay. Excavation of another ovoid building, measuring 8.1m x 3.6m internally has been excavated at Achnahaird Sands, on the western mainland (Stuart Farrell pers. comm.). Although it has produced hand-made pottery similar to Late Medieval Hebridean types, the imported ceramic assemblage is datable to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, it is possible that some of this relates to later re-use associated with the occupation of a considerably larger building nearby, and that the smaller building may have an earlier origin.



Leaving aside the last example, the above list can hardly be said to be extensive, nor can we be more confident that it is representative sample of Late Medieval domestic settlement. However, they do exhibit a number of similarities. Although the largest example from Finlaggan may have internal dimensions of 10m x 7m, most are between four and six metres long, and two and three metres wide. The walls are composed of low stone footings for a turf superstructure, and the buildings are all of a sub-rectangular or ovoid shape. These features are closely comparable with the dimensions available for An Udail. However, unlike An Udail that was occupied continually throughout the Middle Ages, all of the others appear to date from the later sixteenth century.

To this list may also be added the shieling/pottery manufacturing site at Guinnerso, in Lewis, dated to between 1400 and 1600 (Mike Church pers. comm.). The building here was of similar dimensions and was built of roughly coursed boulders (Burgess *et al.* 1998, 78-79). The interpretation of this building as a shieling is supported by environmental studies, which have produced no evidence for cereal consumption or preparation (Mike Church pers. comm.). With the notable exception of Finlaggan, a connection to seasonal pastoral activity has been considered by the excavators of the sites mentioned above (those in North Uist by Armit 1997, 916; Gunna by James 1998, 29-30, Islay by Louise Craig pers. comm.). Although environmental evidence from Druim nan Dearcag shows some connection to arable exploitation (Mike Church pers. comm.) its location on the cnoc-and-lochan is unsuitable for arable farming and there are no known associated field-systems. This led Armit (1997, 916-17) to raise the seemingly unlikely possibility that the site could be predominantly linked to pastoral activity. In addition to being located away from the main arable zones Airigh Mhic Ruairidh, Bagh an Ackara and Griomasaigh are all located on the coast and near to jetties, possibly suggesting that fishing may have been a part of activities conducted at these sites.

In this light it may be no coincidence that the only later medieval structures to be found in Barra have been interpreted as shielings (Branigan & Foster 2002, 112-14: Fig. 173). Although one has been built over a structure tentatively dated to the Norse period (*ibid.*, 105-

07; Campbell 2005a), the two excavated medieval 'shielings' are similar in form to the above examples and are only slightly smaller in size: one is oval, measuring 3m x 2.5 internally, the other is sub-rectangular, 3.2m x 1.4m, with two adjacent smaller cells (Branigan & Foster 2002, 112-13). In contrast, small contemporary (sixteenth- to seventeenth-century) structures elsewhere on Barra, possibly related to transhumance, appear to have been little more than tents (Branigan 1995b, 183-84): why such a disparity in structural technique? Additionally, an excavated shieling mound in Skye revealed structures and pottery associated with later medieval intensification (MacSween & Gailey 1961, 77-81). It is possible that these 'shielings' were not simply seasonal huts away from the arable, but elements of a later medieval pastoral system on an equal scale to other medieval houses.

In summary, there appears to have been a change from larger more substantial buildings in the Norse period, sited near the best arable land, to small amorphous Late Medieval buildings nearer good grazings. Taken together with the poor archaeological visibility for settlement of the 1400s and early 1500s, this shift in location and change in architecture may account for the apparent gap in the settlement record. It would appear that during this period Hebridean society became increasingly disposed to a pastoral economy, and that as a result settlement became increasingly ephemeral as communities became more transitory and followed their herds around the landscape from pasture to pasture. It is this alternative model to that of *bailtean* development that shall be explored below.

## 11.9 A Pastoral Hiatus?

Preliminary assessment of the faunal data from Cille Pheadair and Bornais indicates that during the Norse period animal husbandry was primarily geared for meat consumption (Mulville 2005a). Sheep were present in almost equal numbers to cattle, but unlike cattle were kept away from settlement (Mulville 2005b). Although some use of summer pastures in the hills must have been made for both species, this possibly suggests close management of cattle within yet to be identified enclosures on low lying areas while the hills may have been primarily utilised for sheep grazing. Elsewhere in the Norse Atlantic sheep were

grazed away from the main areas of settlement with relatively little supervision, often one herdsman per flock (Sveinbjarnardóttir 1989, 74).

This Norse-period pattern of exploitation, with some cattle grazing near the settlement throughout most of the year and aimed at meat consumption is different from the pattern of transhumance that was established throughout north and west Scotland by the eighteenth century. Later sheiling practice was integrally linked to dairying, a connection that was mirrored in Scandinavia and Ireland. In the Highlands and Islands its significance is testified by the fact that whole communities moved to the hills for the summer months (see Raven forthcoming). Cattle had had a highly symbolic position within Early Medieval Gaelic Ireland, and were indicators of social status and wealth. Quite when this had been adopted into the Hebridean psyche is unclear, and possibly began as early as the eleventh or twelfth centuries as part of the growth of the Kingdom of the Isles and the Gaelicisation of Hebridean society. However, cattle had certainly come to have a central role within Hebridean cultural mechanisms by the later Middle Ages (Dodgshon 1988a). Alongside the increase in the social significance of cattle, it is evident that there must have been a fundamental shift in pastoral practice, accompanied by a change from red meat to 'white meat' (dairy products) consumption.

Dodgshon (1993c, 680, 694) has pointed out that by the eighteenth century the proliferation of summer grazings available in most Highland and Hebridean topographies meant arable resources were of high strategic importance, and that most communities would have been keen to maximise their return on any land with arable potential. Evidence for this is provided by the fact that when there was a conflict between the two resources arable took precedence and pastures were brought into cultivation when needed. Given the limited amount of land with arable potential this is likely to be invariably true throughout much of the eighteenth-century Highlands, where grain had to be increasingly imported to support a quickly and vastly expanding populace (although see Section 12.12 for evidence that grain was of minimal importance for many late medieval Hebrideans). However, the need to make the most of what crops could be raised need not be translated into a signifier of the secondary



role of pastoralism in the Hebridean mindset (contra Dodgshon *ibid.*): cattle and dairy produce remained the mainstay of both social contracts and rentals. Nor can an important role of arable in the late 1700s be taken for granted throughout the medieval period, where cattle appear to have had a greater social significance.

Katherine Simms's study of 'nomadry' in Ireland suggested a considerable increase in 'creaghts' from the fourteenth century onwards, noting that they were mostly confined to the northern and western districts (1986, 380-81). She linked them directly to the increased landlessness and displacement of some of the gentry as well as the "aggressive pastoralism" of others, who sought to demarcate lordship through the grazing of cattle (*ibid.*, 381-84). However, Simms limited the scope of her study, confining herself to using the more decorative documentation available, perhaps ignoring some of the more mundane everyday agricultural uses of the practice. This is perhaps not surprising as the early literary evidence is skewed: large scale pastoral activities are only mentioned when they were over-used, abused or manipulated by lords.

It is clear from descriptions, such as Moryson's in 1603, that in some cases 'creaghts' were accompanied by large retinues of dependants: "MacCarty submitted himselfe, and draw his creaghts (or cattle, servants and goods) into Lecayle" (1907: II, 400). He additionally noted the size of some of the larger lords' herds, stating that during one campaign the Earl of Tyrone kept behind Armagh "where he and his Creaghts lay, feeding some thousands of Cowes" (*ibid.*, 401). English Tudor and Stuart writers may have confused the more aggressive creaghts with displaced clans and more traditional transhumance, or booleying (Williams & Robinson 1983, 34), but, like Davies in the early 1600s, they were fairly confident in directly linking creaghts to the "wild barbarous rebelliousness of the Irish" (1890a, 288), perhaps over-emphasising claims that this was linked to the Irish not living in settled villages, like the 'civilised', Protestant and capitalist English (e.g. *ibid.*, 192). Living in temporary accommodation and not being tied to one spot would surely have exasperated English attempts to subjugate the Irish, as it was easier to track down fugitives if they were

committed to one area, and punish them by destroying their livelihood. Writing in 1596, Spenser was perhaps amongst the most avid critics of transhumance in Ireland, stating that:

*if there be any outlaws or loose people, as they are never without some, which live upon stealths and spoils, they are evermore succoured and find relief only in these boodies ... the people that thus live in these boodies grow thereby more barbarous and live more licentiously than they could in towns ... for they think themselves half-exempted from law and obedience (1890, 87-88).*

Despite the defences of Stanihurst in 1584: “Accordingly it is wrong to suggest as many do that they are nomads in wooded and marshy lands. They do have fixed habitations and farms” (Lennon 1981, 146), throughout the early 1600s, Davies, amongst others, persisted in stating that “the habitations of this people are so wild and transitory as there is not one fixed village in this country” (1890b, 374). The model of large scale transitory booleying in medieval Ireland was uncritically accepted by the rural-centric, Romanticised, Republican and slightly archaic Evans (e.g. 1957, 34-38). As a result of the evidence having its roots in the biased writings of hostile English commentators and its support in De Valeran politics any belief in medieval Irish large scale transhumance has become deeply unpopular amongst modern Irish scholars and academics (e.g. Colin Breen, Audrey Horning pers. comm.). However, it seems likely that recent scholars underestimate the importance of pastoralism and overestimate the predominance of arable resources, cattle raising also seems entirely suitable to the Ulster topography.

Whilst it is a large jump to juxtapose contentious models of Irish large scale transhumance to Hebridean soils, and acknowledging that in Scottish Gaelic ‘creaght’ came to be directly associated with cattle raiding not transhumance, it is worth noting that Spenser stated that the Gaelic Irish were following:

*Scottish manners ... to keep their cattle and to live the most part of the year in boolies, pasturing upon the mountain and waste wild places, and removing still to fresh land as they have depastured the former ... and feeding only on their milk and white meats (1890, 87).*

Furthermore, it is curious that, as in Highland Scotland, archaeological evidence for rural dwellings of mid-later medieval date is virtually unknown from Gaelic areas in Ireland (O'Connor 1998, 95-96). Horning (2001, 377-81) has recently noted that many houses may have been built almost entirely of wattle and turf (Fig. 174), the wattle part being picked up and carried by transhumant communities as they followed their herds. The flimsy structures and transitory nature of occupation means that archaeological evidence to support this has been limited to one example (ibid., 380-81). It seems entirely possible that similar structures could have been used along Scotland's western seaboard as pastoral resources grew in importance, and that this may in some way account for the lack of recovery of Hebridean settlement datable from the fifteenth to later sixteenth century. Although this can only be a tentative suggestion, it is curious that when Gaelic Irish settlement again becomes visible recorded examples bear many similarities to contemporary Hebridean examples, in size, form (Fig. 175) and ambiguous associations with seasonal activity.

Three buildings have been recorded at Glenmakeeran, in Ulster; all three are sub-rectangular, with an attached cell lying end on from the main structure. One was excavated, revealing inner dimensions of 5.6m x 2.6m, the other two measuring 6.2m x 1.7m and 7.25m x 2m (Williams & Robinson 1983, 31-33). At Goodland, also in Ulster, a massive spread of one hundred and twenty-nine single celled buildings lying adjacent to one another have been surveyed, varying from ovoid to rectangular in plan, excavated examples had inside measurements of 3.5m x 2.3m, 2.4m x 1.5m and 4.5m x 2.1m (ibid., 35). The investigations at both sites produced evidence for late sixteenth-century locally-made pottery and some seventeenth-century imported vessels (ibid., 31-35; also see Sidebottom 1950; Case *et al.*, 1969; Brannan 1984). Both sites were initially interpreted as booley sites, an interpretation apparently supported for Goodland by environmental evidence that shows that arable use



ceased in the sixteenth century (Case *et al.* 1969), however, this interpretation has been called into question by Audrey Horning (pers. comm.). She suggests that the pottery and clay pipes recovered through excavation indicate more permanent occupation, and that the buildings, which do not overlap each other, are possibly contemporary with adjacent field boundaries. Furthermore this complex may correlate with leases granted by the Earl of Antrim to Alexander and Donal Magee, of Islay, which stated that to maintain their holdings they were required to settle them. This later charter and the field enclosures perhaps parallel seventeenth-century developments of shieling grounds in South Uist (see Sections 3.10, 12.7 and 12.10), thus it is possible that earlier interpretations as booley houses may be accurate, for some of the structures at least. Even if some of the later structures may be of a more permanent nature, length of occupation cannot be inferred from a presence or lack of portable material culture: several shieling mounds have been excavated on Ben Lawers, and most have uncovered pottery finds in similar numbers to that at Goodland and Glenmakeeran (Atkinson *et al.* 1997, 63; 1998, 76; 2003, 108; Atkinson 2000, 154-57).

In addition to these Ulster examples Breen (2003, 157-59, 181-82) has discovered two clusters of similar dwellings upon the coasts of Bantry Bay, Co. Cork. Canalough is composed of ten houses averaging 5m x 3m internally, and has produced sixteenth or seventeenth century pottery. The settlement at Ballycallagh is about the half that size, composed of buildings of the same proportions. Their coastal location perhaps suggests some connection to fishing. Although undated the 'booley houses' noted by Piggot (1954) in Achill Island bear a striking similarity to these houses in both plan and location.

Although a limited sample, the corpus of evidence available for Late Medieval buildings from both sides of the Irish Sea reveals some striking similarities. These comparisons have a number of possible ramifications for the understanding of the development of the settlement pattern and social and economic structures in the Hebrides and in Gaelic Ireland. One focus is the possibility for the development of a pan-Gaelic material culture over the later Middle Ages, which is also reflected in ceramic forms, but this is beyond the scope this thesis. Additionally, however, the reappearance of substantial architecture at the end of the

sixteenth century, albeit of a small amorphous form, and located near pastures rather than primary arable land, may reveal a significant shift from a transitory pastoral lifestyle to a more sedentary existence. Although this is highly speculative, and relies heavily upon negative evidence, the possibility of an increase in pastoralism in the fifteenth century should not be ignored.

A pastoral system, together with ephemeral structures does not, however, translate into a lack of conceptual importance of 'place' (see Gray 2003), and especially for settlement foci. Eighteenth-century shieling practice involved the repeated annual building of huts upon the same sites, often by successive generations of the same family, and accompanied by several rituals designed to accentuate their role as enculturated dwellings, rather than simple shelters (see Section 12.7; also see Raven forthcoming). Through time this resulted in the creation of large tell-like shieling mounds that, in many ways, resemble the settlement mounds of the machair. It is possible that during the suggested period of increased pastoralism the continual re-occupation of some machair-based mounds throughout the Middle Ages reflected seasonal periods of re-use alongside exploitation of low lying pastures. Additionally, similar to habitation at early farmsteads and later shielings, occupation was in continual reference to their central and ancestral place within the medieval mental settlement geography.

At present the evidence is not strong enough to confirm or disprove this possible model for fifteenth-century developments, and future work may alter the picture radically.

Furthermore, this model of development contradicts that seen at An Udail, where dairying appears to have been more important than at Bornais (Mulville 2005a). Here also the continuous growth of the *bailtean* can be demonstrated throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Unlike the small clusters of houses at sites such as Druim nan Dearcag (Armit 1997, 905-07) the atypical and newly established *bailtean* at Finlaggan also appears to have consisted of a large number of buildings in its late sixteenth-century form (Caldwell & Ewart 1993, 155-56; Caldwell *et al.* 2000, 62-67). The *bailtean* at both An Udail and Finlaggan possess a similar overall layout, with a number of smaller buildings focussed on one large

building. Crawford's interpretation that the one at An Udail belonged to a big-tacksman (Crawford & Switsur 1977, 133) is perhaps confirmed by Burt's (1998, 204) comments that tacksmen's huts were the same as other huts, only longer. A point echoed for the Outer Hebrides by MacDonald: "the house of the tenants are, generally speaking, wretched hovels, and those of the subtenants, nasty and miserable beyond description" (1810, 86; also see MacLeod 1867, 81-83). These two sites provide stronger evidence that there was a steady uninterrupted growth of the Late Medieval *bailtean*, sited within an open-field landscape, from the older Norse pattern: the pattern in South Uist merely being reoriented away from the machair. Just as the model for the increasing transhumance and pastoralism should be given consideration this should be given equal deliberation, if not more credence.

#### 11.10 Nucleation and the *Bailtean*

Nucleation has generally come to be seen as an almost inevitable conclusion of medieval settlement, although later writers have recognised that there are likely to have been a number of catalysts and causal factors, linked to political, cultural, demographic and economic developments throughout the Middle Ages. The momentum towards nucleation may have stemmed from a need for more systematic farming methods, emanating from the desires of the state and/or local landlords, to extractable taxes and surpluses, and communities to feed expanding populations (Lewis *et al.* 1997, 210, 223). As a result some scholars have been keen to envisage nucleation in purely functional terms, communities coming together to plough in areas where topography dictates and necessitates co-operation (e.g. Williamson 2003). However, the origins of nucleation can also be seen to have resulted from European models of settlement and social-hierarchy. As with the architectural styles of castles and churches, society developed notions of how buildings, settlements and institutions should be constructed. Through this desire to find a model, the concept of a village was imposed upon the medieval mind-set of both peasants and lords (*ibid.*, 251). Some academics have seen this nucleated model as a reflection of the process of feudalisation: the use of space within the village replicating the social order of lord and peasant community (e.g. Dodgshon 1987, 166-192; Saunders 1990).



Austin was perhaps amongst the first to critically evaluate academic approaches to nucleation. He realised that many 'nucleated settlements' had evolved through the negotiation of several different mediums rather than resulted from one revolutionary event or external imposition (1985, 204). With this in mind he challenged the morphological centred perspective of most settlement studies. He noted that established explanations for nucleation: a steady growth based on one place, an agglomeration of dispersed settlement, the collapse of a dispersed settlement pattern into a nucleated one, or external planning, took no account of the social, or other, impacts or ramifications (ibid., 207). "One of the great drawbacks of morphologies constructed from late maps is that the original functions and social structures have almost entirely disappeared even although the skeletal frame remains" (ibid., 206). Building on Austin's work O'Keeffe (1999, 103-05) has questioned what scholars mean by using terms like nucleated and dispersed, arguing that:

*Were we to understand dispersal and nucleation as processes rather than as descriptions of static distribution patterns, and to interpret literally, therefore, the adjectives 'dispersed' and 'nucleated', we could imagine settlements which are so-described to be the actual products of social, political, or economic forces which cause – or persuade – people to move centripedally to a core (to nucleate) or to move centrifugally from a core (to disperse) (O'Keeffe 1999, 104).*

O'Keeffe introduces the concept of agency into medieval settlement studies, allowing communities and individuals to opt in or out of the economic benefits offered by the village. Noting that centrifugal agency and power relations, kin-relations and consciousness of economic imperatives are integrated different parts of a single process, he calls into question the static model of a trajectory from dispersed to nucleated settlement (ibid., 105). The choice to live and farm in communities is perhaps all the more pertinent given the fact the collectively held and co-operatively farmed land could be managed within enclosed fields

and/or dispersed farmsteads, as in Early Medieval Ireland (O’Keeffe 1996, 146-47). The process of nucleation in South Uist should then be viewed with these perspectives in mind.

Dodgshon (1993b, 384-85) has stipulated that throughout the Highlands and Islands the development of the *bailtean* was directly linked to the imposition of a European ‘feudal’ model of society that occurred sometime after Treaty of Perth in 1266, possibly as late as the 1500s. He noted that the township formed a legal superstructure over individual holdings, providing spatial constraints upon population growth, protection against resource scarcity and was a sign of risk aversion. It was within this framework that the development of the runrig system (the farming system integrally linked to the *bailtean*: see Section 12.3) can be interpreted as a sign of the change from the fiscal assessment of social subjugation (renders and dues) to one of taxable land assessment. However, Dodgshon (1993a, 427-28) did not deny the possibility that this could be inter-linked with the practical necessities of the administration of agriculture. The evidence from South Uist does not contradict this model, but perhaps indicates a more complex and drawn-out process than that envisaged by Dodgshon, with several pressures exerting their influence upon the society, economy and environment, that together resulted in the creation of the nucleated *bailtean*.

The largest of the *bailtean* on Bald’s map includes twenty-three buildings; most average around half that number. It is thus hardly surprising that forty years later the resident minister, Maclean, stated that “there are no towns, villages, or hamlets in the parish” (1845, 187). This statement reveals the subjectivity of the descriptive terminology for settlement types, and that it is perhaps misleading to compare the nucleation that resulted in the *bailtean* with that that produced a typical English medieval village. The grouping of twenty-three buildings in an 1805 *baile* may only reflect the extent of the population at the time of the survey. The population had doubled in the previous fifty years from a figure that is consistent with the crude demographics noted in the seventeenth century (McKay 1980, 26-27; Munro 1794, 297-98; Maclean 1845, 526; Coste 1920-1925: V, 116-17; Hayes-McCoy 1937, 356-57). Nevertheless, even if we halve the numbers of buildings on Bald’s map to get back to mid-eighteenth-century levels we would have some *bailtean* of twelve structures.

This marks a significant change from the cluster of up to five buildings of a Norse period farmstead. Additionally, it may indicate that, if the settlement pattern was not substantially altered over the fifteenth century, the farmsteads may have continued to expand and accrue larger communities throughout the Middle Ages.

Dodgshon's (1993a, 428-31) survey of eighteenth-century cartographic evidence for *bailtean* throughout the Western Highlands and Islands revealed that most were composed of small numbers of houses. His work correlates with Geddes's study of Lewis (1948, 55-58), where groups of four to six homesteads were inter-dispersed through the townships: Geddes interpreted the reason for this dispersal in two ways. Partly it derived from the need and practicalities involved in most economic activities such as plough sharing and team sharing for jobs such as peat cutting, ploughing and fishing, but it also derived from the limits that the fragmented nature of arable in Lewis could support in one place. The arable of South Uist is less fragmented, spread evenly in one long lineal strip along the western coast. Thus the landscape may have provided support for larger clusters of dwellings and allowed for greater intensification of arable production. Simply because large undivided tracts of land with arable potential existed there is no simple reason why this should equate to intensification of agriculture or to nucleation, especially when co-operation in South Uist extended beyond the normal five-household grouping by 1805.

External influences on the desire to intensify may have come from a number of sources: a market driven economy that could be tapped into by lord or peasant alike, the desire of lords for an extractable surplus, and an increase in population. The evidence for economic developments within South Uist over the Middle Ages is discussed throughout Sections 12.11 to 12.16: it seems that there were some significant fluctuations between intensification and lack of centralisation throughout the period. From the end of the Norse period through to sometime in the 1400s there was some degree of centralisation over fishing and agricultural produce at larger farms. Herring is likely to have been exported in bulk to urban markets in England and Ireland (Sharples 2005a). Whilst this shows that some or the larger landholders were tapping into a wider economy, this may also be directly tied to the



extending power of the Clann Ruairidh who were protecting their interests through the building of castles, etc. and implementing new taxation systems, seen in the imposition of the merkland (see Section 3.11). By the sixteenth century both the fishing industry and agricultural centralisation had disappeared, only to be reintroduced in the eighteenth century. The patronising of large scale building projects had also declined. This leaves two possible time periods when economic pressure to maximise production may have stimulated nucleation, the twelfth to thirteenth century and the eighteenth century.

Population pressure is difficult to demonstrate archaeologically. More houses were being built at Bornais and An Udail by the fourteenth century, but if a process of nucleation was taking place this does not necessarily require an increase in population. The possible impact of the plague cannot be ascertained (see Section 11.6) but perhaps the best indicator of population pressure can be seen in the intaking of arable from pasturelands (Lewis *et al.* 1997, 236). The expansion of farmsteads onto the *gearraidh* may indicate that this was taking place from the twelfth century (see Section 3.8). Once established there do not appear to have been further waves of substantial intaking in South Uist until east coast farms were established from the seventeenth century onwards (see Section 12.10), although there is tentative evidence to indicate that peaty soils were being cultivated in the fifteenth century (see Section 12.2). Lewis *et al.* (1997, 236) have linked population pressure directly to the creation of open-field systems and the co-operative nature of nucleated settlements: population pressure raises tensions about the control of animals and defining who owned what. If this can be accepted then it could indicate that the population expanded in South Uist between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries, and possibly later, resulting in the creation of the *bailtean* and the runrig farming system. However, from the seventeenth and mid-eighteenth century the population seems to have been fairly low, consisting of 1,580 people (Coste 1920-1925: V, 116-17; McKay 1980, 26-27). By around 1800 it had swollen to 3,450 (Munro 1794, 297-98), so if population growth influenced nucleation, then, again, two phases can be highlighted, the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries.

However, even if population pressure and economic intensification contributed to nucleation, they cannot explain why settlements were not distributed in newly formed, dispersed, small clusters of around five buildings but instead continued to expand upon core nuclei. Although some farms may have shifted away from the machair, in some cases core farms were retained and there was a continuation of the Norse period pattern. One *tír unga* had split into two townships, Frobost and Gearraidh Bhailteas (Fig. 23), each composed of two quarterlands equalling five pennylands. At Frobost, the Norse period farmsteads were centred on settlement mounds upon the machair (Parker Pearson forthcoming b), by 1805 it consisted of three settlements located on the cnoc-and-lochan. The largest two were both named, South and North Frobost, and the third was a spread of buildings between these two cores. It seems probable that, although formed upon new locations, North and South Frobost reflect a direct conceptual continuation of the Norse farmsteads, and that the third spread developed out of the increased population by the time of Bald's survey. Dodgshon (1993a, 424) has rightly raised questions about the direct assumption that farmsteads outwith the *bailtean* were late responses to population pressure, noting that it was possible that such buildings were vestiges of an older 'pre-feudal' dispersed settlement pattern. However, the evidence for Frobost suggests that here at least this was not the case. The proposed development of settlement at Frobost would also raise queries for some of Dodgshon's (1993a, 427-31) examples, most notably at Bragar, in Lewis, where similar sub-divisions were maintained throughout numerous reorganisations, and at Glen Hinnisdal, in Skye, which mirrors Frobost in having five pennyland units each with its own *baile*.

The continuity of core foci within quarterlands, or their equivalent division of a township (see Sections 3.8, 3.9 and 3.12), may reflect the continuing importance of the main farm. However, it seems likely that the function of the ancestral Norse period farm, with its free or odal rights over the whole associated farmland (see Sections 5.3), changed throughout the Middle Ages. By the sixteenth century tenure over land appears to have changed to one where the farm-holder held land directly from the chief. Whether it is possible to equate the social position of the odal farmer with the *duine uaisle* landholder of the later medieval period, or even later tacksmen is debatable. The simplest rendition of each group reveals the

first may have held his land free of tenure, but was subject to certain dues to his king. The second held his from the lord on grounds of kinship in return for military service. Other dues and may also have had a role in mediating between the chief and the clan and administering to the needs of his sub-tenants. The third may initially have been no different from the second, but held his land by paper tack and increasingly had to pay his rents with hard money. However, it is apparent that there was a significant shift in the nature of tenure, from free landholding to that of tenancy. This surely reflects the increasing social and economic control that indicates a European style 'feudal' form of lordship, with the lord possessing the ultimate ownership over land.

In other areas with odal landholding settlement patterns followed a continual cyclical pattern of small growth followed by splitting and relocation within the township, that remained the over-arching administrative unit, demarcated by the boundaries of the original odal farm (Clouston 1920, 37-39; Thomson 1970, 176-77). This process may account for the expansion and contraction of the settlements of Freswick, Caithness, and Jarlshof, Shetland, throughout the Norse period, the latter becoming increasingly characterised by a number of house buildings and outbuildings centred on one single large building (Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998, 156, 180-81, 196-201). At the end of the thirteenth century the Norse period-style longhouses were replaced by two squatter, more rigidly-rectilinear structures, with a larger floor-space, together with associated kilns, that Hamilton (1956, 190-92) differentiated from its Norse predecessors as a "medieval farmstead", a settlement form that lasted through to the seventeenth century. In Shetland, at the Biggins, Papa Stour, the original farmstead began to develop into a village in the fourteenth century, although there was internal splitting within the township. It was only in the seventeenth century when primogeniture was introduced that the odal class were reduced to tenants (Crawford & Ballin Smith 1999, 22, 239, 242). This pattern of township development in the Northern Isles retained small groupings of buildings: it marks a clear departure with the development of odal settlements in South Uist. Instead, after the thirteenth century there appears to have been little new farm establishment and the main farms continued to expand in size. The lack of new farms may indicate that the change in the form of tenure fossilised the existing system, settlement and



lands become associated together and allotted and re-allotted continually as one unit.

Alternatively, whether the head landholder was a free odal farmer or *duine uaisle* the core farmstead remained central to the overall settlement pattern, the expansion of buildings perhaps bearing testimony to the development of sub-tenancies. In Iceland the slavery that supported early odal farming ceased to function. Byock (1988, 98-99) has suggested that slavery needed close administration of coercive or persuasive pressure, and that these could not be applied in pastoral farming, as it is dispersed and requires personal initiative. Instead, farming within odal farms was extended through the increasing use of sub-tenancies. This may be a misunderstanding of greater changes in European socio-cultural models of landholding and society that were taking place between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Ecclesiastical doctrine and other socio-economic models about landholding created a situation where slavery, as an institution, was no longer tenable, definable or discernible, and the lowest echelons of society, the agricultural labourers, came to be redefined as a 'free' in terms of status, yet servile, class of tenants and sub-tenants (Karras 1988; Pelteret 1995). If either of these developments was mirrored in South Uist it is possible that these sub-tenants kept close to the main farms in order to continue to manage the arable land as a single unit.

### 11.11 Discussion

Whilst large nucleated *bailtean* were the predominant settlement form in South Uist at the end of the Middle Ages, there is no direct evidence of how they developed. This is due to a lack of archaeological evidence that can be confirmed to date between the early fifteenth and late sixteenth century. There are two possible, but highly conflicting narratives of how *bailtean* developed from the dispersed farmsteads of the Norse period.

The first narrative offers a model of linear development from the Norse period farmsteads. Population pressure and market forces may have increased a need for greater co-operation within communities to maximise arable production. This resulted in the development of runrig system, reflected in the choice of the farmsteads' inhabitants to choose to live together

within expanding communities, living in *bailtean*, and farming an open-field landscape. Within this model the settlement framework of a set number of core foci, originating in the Norse period farmsteads, was retained. Unlike the model for settlement growth in the Norse period, and which continued in the Northern Isles, during the later medieval period, most farms ceased to divide and separate as the number of occupants grew: instead, settlement began to cluster and expand around the established centres. For some reason, perhaps due to environmental degradation of the machair, the foci for the majority of these settlements were relocated to the cnoc-and-lochan, away from their ancestral settlement predecessors. However, throughout this movement, the concept of core farms were retained and re-established within the locational shift. As well as the requirement to feed more mouths, agricultural intensification may have emanated from the desire to access external markets, and may have come from within the *bailtean* communities, but equally it may have been imposed by landlords, who were increasingly keen to extract surpluses and taxes. During the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries Hebridean lords were attempting to mould their estates into a European model that reflected new ideas about lordship, with them as the supreme landholder presiding over a populace who were largely denied a military role within the society (see Section 8.3), and were expected to maximise agricultural production to provide financial resources for their lord. Within their estates this expansion of lordship resulted in a change in tenure, and landholder-to-landlord relations were increasingly similar to that of tenancies rather than land being held independently of the lord. This change in tenure may have also stimulated nucleation. The earlier system of settlement development (a period of minor growth followed by the establishment of a new dispersed farmstead) was designed to create independent farms: within a system where all land was held equally from the lord, this process became redundant. In an environment where arable was concentrated in one zone, such as the machair of South Uist, communities were free to expand, and live and farm together.

If this process was the result of a top-down imposition, it suggests strong lordship. The Clann Ruairidh would be suitable thirteenth and fourteenth century candidates, as alongside adoption of the European 'feudal' trappings of castles, knights (McDonald 1995), churches

and terminology (see Section 2.12) they appear to have been maximising the economic potential of their estates (see Sections 5.6 and 12.12). In contrast, throughout most of the fifteenth century the Clann mhic Ailean do not appear to have been able to exert themselves in the Uists: although the Siol Gioraidh may have been fairly assertive on a local level (see Section 2.7). There is a possible later flourishing of strong lordship associated with Iain Moidartach in the sixteenth century. However, his powerful impact upon the Lowlands and Central Highlands (see Section 2.10) was not necessarily linked to his own possessions in the Isles. Although he did manage to acquire enough surplus to re-start the patronisation of church building programs, they appear to have been relatively minor alterations of pre-existing structures, as at Hoghmore. On a more local level the Clann Ruairidh appear to have established their sole right over land (though their interest in charters possibly signifies they adopted the principle that the king was the ultimate possessor). It is a small step to envisage that through their adoption of 'feudalism', they managed to reduce the odal rights of landholders and reduce them to tenants.

This model may only be viable for the Uists where land with arable potential occurred in large areas, allowing for settlement to expand without topographically imposed limitations. Although work at An Udail suggests a similar lineal pattern of *bailtean* development to that proposed for South Uist, fieldwork elsewhere in North Uist may reveal an entirely different pattern of settlement development existed independently of it. Crawford only managed to locate nine of the fifty-four *bailtean* that he estimated should have been present in North Uist (Crawford 1965b, 41) and a number of these were evident only as they existed immediately prior to the Clearances (ibid., 54-56; 1967c). It is evident from his surveys and cartography that unlike smaller islands, such as Eigg and Canna, where *bailtean* were composed of five or six buildings on average (Campbell 1984, 138-39; Dressler 1998, xiv), by the early nineteenth century *bailtean* in North Uist (Moisley 1961, 91) mirrored those in South Uist in numbers of buildings. However, Armit's work in North Uist has revealed that small sixteenth-century settlements, comprised of one or two houses, dot areas of the cnoc-and-lochan, away from the main arable zone. He described Druim nan Dearcag as "part of a string of dispersed settlements seemingly truncated by the ridge-and-furrow cultivation



which radiated from the cleared township of Foshigarry” (1997, 901). It is possible that these settlements evidence the continuation of dispersed independent farmsteads (following the pattern of farm splitting seen in odal landholding) in North Uist into the 1500s, and that the nucleation process post-dated 1600. The similarity in nineteenth-century settlement in South Uist possibly indicates that this may have taken place throughout the Uists as a whole.

The second proposed model, does not contradict the possibilities for a fourteenth-century period of nucleation, however, it suggests that throughout much of the Hebrides the process was interrupted during the fifteenth century, to resume at the end of the sixteenth century. Instead, there was a significant shift away from, but not a total abandonment of, arable resources and an intensification of pastoralism: cattle and dairy products became predominant, both socially and economically, and transhumant practices were increasingly adopted. The building of large longhouses ceases around 1400 and small, ephemeral, amorphous huts were built in their place. Additionally, they were built at sites distributed throughout the landscape, rather than concentrated near the arable machair. In some cases there remained an acknowledgement of the machair-based Norse period farmsteads, and the settlement mounds were re-occupied seasonally, when nearby machair grazings were exploited; in others settlement was relocated to the cnoc-and-lochan, to a position more central to low lying pastures. However, the core-foci of the earlier farmsteads was replicated, and acknowledged in both locations, suggesting that the occupation and tenancy over these farmsteads had some meaning related to access to pasture grounds. Additionally, it may reveal that the holder of these farms held a position legitimated through a connection to these foci. This relationship may additionally have been negotiated through the gifting and lending of cattle to his sub-tenants and servants, such a relationship may have echoed Early Medieval Irish practice and may be witnessed in eighteenth-century practices (see Section 12.4). An increase in the importance of pastoralism may have resulted from a fourteenth century Hebridean invention of a ‘Gaelic’ past, a process that was taking place in contemporary Gaelic Ireland and routed in interpretations of Early Medieval Irish practice (Simms 1987a, 6-8). The escalation in the social and economic importance of cattle in the fifteenth century is also reflected in contemporary elite dwellings in South Uist (i.e. Eilean

Bheagram; see Section 10.8), which additionally suggest the development of a different concept of social hierarchy. Instead of the exclusive feudal monument expressed in the castle, the new elite dwellings reveal a society more expressive of inclusiveness and clanship. Within this model it seems likely that settlement became more sedentary from the sixteenth century onwards, and that nucleation re-started at sometime between then and the eighteenth century.

Although more complex than the model of development laid out by Dodgshon (1993a, 1993b) it seems he was accurate in describing the process of nucleation as reflecting the adoption of the feudal package. However, it is likely that the beginnings of nucleation can be found much earlier than 1266, and also that the process may have been going on considerably longer than he had envisaged. The two models outlined above present considerably conflicting discourses about the development of *bailtean*. Neither model may have been static or exclusive: settlement patterns are fluid and subject to complex cultural, political and environmental pressures that vary according to time and place. It is then possible that both processes were taking place alongside one another, with nucleation being a continuing impetus in some places where arable resources, land tenure and the population was not threatened, and neighbouring farms adopting a more pastoral lifestyle. Neither of these groups would have entirely abandoned use of both pastoral and arable farming, but emphasis may have been given to one or the other. Given that settlement patterns reflect the social structures that created them, these models also offer very different pictures for social developments within South Uist, regarding the rise and fall of both 'feudalism' and 'clanship'. Until further research is conducted it will be impossible to confirm either model. However, by examining the evidence for the social and economic context of the *bailtean* it is possible to reveal other changes that had taken place between the better evidenced Norse period and the end of the Middle Ages, and it is to that that we now turn.

## CHAPTER 12 THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF THE *BAILTEAN*

### 12.1 Introduction

The clustered settlement pattern of the eighteenth century was the result of continual development from that established in the later medieval period. The evidence for this pre-Clearance landscape is considerably more plentiful than that available for earlier periods, yet it is evident that there had been considerable changes since the High Middle Ages in how settlements were occupied, the landscape exploited and how society and the economy was organised and controlled. It shows that there were exceptions to the later settlement pattern, and that the landscape could be manipulated to express social status and identities. By the end of the medieval period the *bailtean* were surrounded by open-field rig-and-furrow arable and various low lying and hill pastures. Their exploitation necessitated a degree of co-operative interaction and organisation, and this is reflected in the runrig system. The runrig community was one in which ploughs, teams of plough horses, fishing boats and other items requiring substantial capital investment were owned by a number of members of the *bailtean*, and related activities were engaged in by the community at large. Because of this co-operative behaviour runrig communities are often portrayed as egalitarian social units, yet there is evidence that this co-operation was created by practical needs and requirements, rather than any inherent communal spirit. In contrast to this communal life focussed on the lowland *bailtean*, was the exploitation of the hills. Shielings allowed communities that were congested and living on top of each other throughout the winter to escape the socially regulated and emotionally charged atmosphere of the township. The hills and wilder east coast also allowed disenfranchised members of the community to opt out of the runrig system and, to a limited degree, live beyond regulation by the elite. At the same time the hills provided hunting grounds for the chiefs, their guests and their retinue. Access to hunting activities and the resulting foodstuffs created a structural dichotomy between wild – domestic, which symbolised elite - low status. Furthermore, it is evident that in tandem with the growth of the communally emphasising *bailtean* the elite no longer attempted to



centralise industrial activity and overt economic control dissipated. Instead, status came to be mediated in more subtle terms (Figs. 176 and 177).

## 12.2 Open-Fields

The original un-lithographed copy of Bald's map (1805a: Fig. 5) reveals that the hamlets of each township sat amongst the arable land, which was farmed in un-enclosed groups of strips, rig-and-furrow. Bald's maps (1805a, 1805b) show a relatively neat layout to groups of rigs, which is unlike Pennant's description of them in Rum as "diminutive patches" (1774, 277). Unlike Rum where land with arable potential is distributed throughout the island the arable of South Uist is largely confined to the wide strip, running almost along the length of the island in-between the machair and the cnoc-and-lochan, where the acidic peat intermingles with the alkaline machair sands. Thus in South Uist the rigs were concentrated on this fertile soil.

To the east of the main ploughable arable land small patches of the lower lying peaty soils may have been cultivated in lazybeds. Dodgshon (1998, 213-15) raised awareness of a possibility that the technique and the tools associated with it may have been a reaction to later population pressure or environmental degradation, although he did highlight some sixteenth-century examples of the cultivation of peatier soils. There are numerous tales related to the fourteenth century and later which mention spade agriculture (e.g. Fergusson & MacDonald 1984, 9), which are verified by evidence for the introduction of oats and barley, which are best suited to heavy, peatier soils, rather than the machair, during the later occupation at Bornais, throughout the fourteenth century (Colledge & Smith 2005; Smith 2005). By Martin Martin's time 'digging' seems to be fairly well established in North Uist and Harris (1994, 127), although the fact that he felt he needed to describe the practice may suggest that he did feel that the technique was not widely known and needed explaining (ibid., 119). The peaty soils may have provided intermittent arable-use, but the possibility does not equate with actual use. They would almost certainly have been used as grazings, before the animals were removed to the higher hills in mid-summer. Much of this zone

would have been frequently and persistently waterlogged, which would have limited ubiquitous use.

On Bald's map there are a group of small townships south of Tobhta Mor: Tobhta Beag, 'Totahur', Sniseabhal and Peighinn nan Aoireann. This area is mostly composed of cnoc-and-lochan and small hills, it has a limited amount of machair. Farmers there would have been almost fully dependent on small patches of arable distributed in the low-lying hills. The prefix of the place-name, Peighinn nan Aoireann, reveals a vestige of the importance of the penny/ *peighinn* as a unit of land demarcation, however, in 1786, the land was worth two pennylands (GD201/2/56). Thus, instead of the name showing the land's worth, the fossilisation of the *peighinn* into the place-name surely reveals the topographically bounded nature of the arable land organised into a single unit.

Flax appears to have also been grown during the occupation of Bornais, suggesting that agricultural practice was more diverse in South Uist than most Norse areas (Colledge 2000). Nineteenth-century North Uist tradition held that the flax industry lasted until 1711, when taxes rendered it unprofitable: the 'Loch of the Mill' at Paibeil is thought to have been a flax dressing mill (Fergusson & Macdonald 1984, 250). The latter explanations may fit into a pattern of belief in the strength of the indigenous Hebridean economy before southern meddling, but there may be some truth behind the use of flax in this period. Tradition also states that in the latter sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was experimentation in growing pulses (ibid., 216), this is also supported by archaeological evidence (Helen Smith, pers. comm.).

Bald depicted his rigs in a neatly distributed linear pattern, an artistic representation which probably covered up a less tidy appearance in reality. Walker (1808: I, 185) described the variety in the sizes of the ridges, in remote parts they were fifteen to twenty-five feet wide, although they were mostly twelve. Also:

*The crooked direction of ridges, which was universal over all Scotland, seems not to have arisen from design, but merely from the path of the cattle, which when left to themselves, naturally proceed in a curved line. The curvature of the ridges, is incommodious in ploughing the ground, and also in sowing and reaping the crop (ibid. I, 184).*

The above material has concentrated entirely upon arable resources, but it must not be forgotten that the majority of the townships were composed of pasture and hill land, and that it is possible that pastoral resources were the backbone of both the Hebridean economy and social relations (see Section 11.9).

### 12.3 The Runrig Community

The physical pattern of ridges is often confused with runrig, the social system by which they were exploited. An examination of this system reveals something of the nature of the communities that lived in the *bailtean*. It is clear from studies of runrig townships in the Northern Isles, where the related documentation is prolific, that the specifics of the system could be extremely complex (see Fenton 1978, 40-57; Thomson 1970; 1998). Unfortunately, given the paucity of evidence surviving for the Western Isles it is only possible to get a generalised picture of how runrig *bailtean* functioned. One description is as follows:

*A number of tenants on the same farm, have a common pasture for their cattle; and the arable land is divided among them, by ridge and ridge alternately, which each cultivates for his own behoof. This gives them all a common interest in the crop, and, where there was no inclosure, might be of some advantage, in guarding each person's lot of corn-field, against the encroachments of his neighbour's cattle (Walker 1808: I, 64).*

The process of allocation took place at Samhain when an appointed individual marked out the rigs, the rigs were then distributed amongst the members of the township by the drawing



of lots (Carmichael 1916, 256, 358). It is often noted that this system additionally distributed the better and less-fertile areas equally amongst the tenancy. By Carmichael's time (1916, 256) the machair arable in South Uist was split into rigs in a separate allotment to rigs elsewhere. Although he implies this was a fairly recent development, it seems unlikely that arable exploitation upon the machair was not always open to rig farming when farmed by larger communities. When combined with evidence for the common tenure of pastures, and the shared activities of ploughing, fishing, peat cutting, etc. this has attracted interpretation by many scholars of an egalitarian, communal and sharing community.

In contrast to this Dodgshon has taken Carmichael's comment that no cultivation was undertaken until the rigs were allotted to mean that:

*runrig refers to the holding of land in the form of intermixed strips, not to the communal working of land ... compared to the communal working and exploitation of arable, runrig seems perversely concerned with upholding the private interests of each tenant, identifying his or her share on the ground* (1998, 143).

This seems to over-simplify the complexity of the situation and ignore the nature of social discourse within agriculturally tied communities. Within historical peasant groups the primary dream is to gain possession of land without dues, added to this is the notion of 'limited good', which is that if somebody else gains something it has to be at another's loss. This creates an underlying atmosphere of mistrust and disputes become regulated by gossip and petty damage (Foster 1967a; 1967b). There is a great deal of anecdotal evidence to support the presence of such attitudes in eighteenth-century Hebridean society. The Improvement literature, driven by a desire for the incentives behind the idea of private property, picked up on anti-communal feeling within runrig communities. Writing of Lismore in the Old Statistical Account, Robson stated that "Runn Rigg ... while continued, prevents industry in the tenants, and this system occasions many disputes" (1794, 19-20). In Caithness, Sinclair, elaborated:

*Were there twenty tenants, and as many fields, each tenant would think himself unjustly treated, unless he had a proportionate share in each. This causes treble labour, and as they are perpetually crossing each other, they must be in a state of constant quarrelling and bad neighbourhood. In order to prevent any of the soil being carried to the adjoining ridge, each individual makes his own ridge as high as possible, which renders the furrow quite bare, so that it produces no crop, while the accumulated soil in the middle of the ridge is never stirred deeper than the plough (cited in Morrisson 1996, 99).*

It seems that even the grass between the rigs was allotted (SAS 2(f)). The particularly disruptive neighbouring tenant was a figure that was berated in the Gaelic proverb “*Is meiraig am bitheadh ruinn-feannaig riut* - Pity the man who would have to divide the rig with you” (ibid.). This also highlights the benefit the community had in responsibility for the collective crop, a neighbour neglectful of weeds or drainage could ruin the surrounding ground (Moisley 1962, 27). Walker’s comments, in contrast suggest that such disputes were well glossed over:

*As in this situation their separate interests must frequently interfere, the harmony in which they live, and the good will they bear to one another, is truly surprising (1808: I, 56).*

Economic activities certainly created a need for social interaction, but the inter-relatedness of these communities and the need to organise the landscape and activities around them must have provided a considerable incentive for co-operation. The family relationships and rate of inter-marriage between members of townships are hard to prove, the rentals available do not cover a wide enough section of the population to reveal a detailed picture. They contain a mixture of surnames and patronymics: the surnames cannot in themselves be used to demonstrate genealogical links (e.g. see the number of routes various surnames came to be

used in South Uist: MacLean 1984), and the extent of the patronymics too limited in range to be useful. Some of the tenants listed in 1738 reveal that townships were held by family groups, such as Cille Donnain, rented by 'Rory Morison', 'Donald his Broyd' and 'John oag his Broyd' (GD201/1/351/3). By the 1822 rental, which is relatively full, clusters of tenants with the same surname are apparent. Cille Donnain had twenty-six tenants, including four Campbells, two Ross's, two Bethunes, and two sets of father and son relationships are designated amongst those listed as MacDonalds. This situation is reflected at Dalabrog where there were twenty-nine, incorporating one Campbell, seven Steels and five Walkers and three junior/senior relationships: one area being rented between 'Malcolm and Archibald MacIsaac ... Plus additional set of Angus Morrison Senior ... Angus MacKinnon Junior ... Donald MacMillan ... Grass of Lot No. 6 lately held by A. McKinnon the same being vacant' (GD201/351/1/20). More commonly there are regional spreads of names, rather than obvious connections to townships. Despite these examples, the rentals are not clear enough to state with certainty the likelihood that the inhabitants of *bailtean* were closely related to one another. However, these rentals do reveal wide variations in the land allotted amongst tenants of shared townships, highlighting the fact that wealth was also unequally distributed amongst the community.

Carmichael noted the community decision making processes utilised within townships in the late nineteenth century. Meetings were often instigated and supervised by the *Maor gruinn*d, or ground officer. However, more often than not this position was filled by the factor's appointment, as was the constable, who appears to have been more involved in these meetings. Occasionally, though, the constable was elected by the township, at a *mòd* supervised by the *Maor*. Nevertheless there seems to have been some process of community decision making which was not entirely enforced by the laird (see Section 7.16).

Despite this there seems to have been some belief in the system:

*The term run-rig seems a modification of the Gaelic, 'roinn ruith' – division run. In this case the word 'run' is used in the sense of common. In Gaelic*



*the system of run-rig is usually spoken of as 'mor earann' – great division  
... Occasionally, however, an old person calls the system of 'roinn ruith'.  
This seems the correct designation (Carmichael 1916, 42).*

This is echoed in the belief in North Uist in the 1800s that: “but save these boundaries and enclosures [those of the church and between townships], the whole land was an outrun, as from the beginning of the world and not one sod was owned by a man beyond another man as his private property” (Fergusson & Macdonald 1984, 37). Such statements reveal the need of communities to preserve their interests in the land. Additionally, there may be some element of conservatism in the face of the imposition of crofting at play here. New areas were being brought into runrig as late as 1921 in Baile Raghnaill in North Uist (Moisley 1962, 30).

It seems probable that neither all out egalitarianism, nor private interest is likely to have been the driving force behind social relationships and that both provided some degree of motive for co-operative activity within the township.

#### **12.4 Social Forms of Landholding**

There is documentary evidence for several different ways townships were rented, occupied and lived in. By the eighteenth century some were probably the core of a tacksman's 'household' or extended farmstead, with servants or subtenants, while others were sub-let to those that actually worked the land: others still were rented directly by joint tenants. The fullest examinations of the social and economic role of tacksmen have been made by Cregeen (1969) and Dodgshon (1998, 43-44, 94-95), and Stewart (1982, 499-512) has made a particular study of their role within the Clann Raghnaill estates. Their studies reveal that prior to developments over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries tacksmen had been part of the chief's immediate kin-group, and had held large blocks of land at low rent in return for their localised services, administering agricultural activity, consuming surpluses and collecting rents. Their pivotal kin-based position between the chief and the agriculturally

tied populace was essential in facilitating clan cohesiveness. They were the local face for the paternal care of the clan over the needy (allowing rents to go unpaid in years of famine and food to be distributed to the poor and ill) and provided an opportunity for dues to be rendered to an internal, and traditionally recognisable personage; thus minimising causes for disputes to arise.

Under the tacksman and his family, Pennant described, “according to the custom of the isles, the farm employs a number of servants, viz. a chief labourer ... a principal herdsman ... a cowherd ... and one under him ... Besides these there are two other men ... who have the charge of cultivating a certain portion of the land; and also overseeing the cattle it supports ... The maidservants are a housekeeper ... a principal dairy maid ... and five other women” (1774, 229). Similar townships presumably also supported the servants’ families similar to the picture drawn by Walker (1808: I, 58) a quarter of a century later. He stated that the average farm contained the tacksman, his wife and children, 8 men servants, 6 women and 2 boys, 10 subtenants and their families amounting to seventy-one people.

The tacksmen often sub-letted their land, this could take a number of forms, such as straight renting to sub-tenants, but also by ‘steelbow’ and ‘half-footing’. Steelbow tenure was described by Walker as “when a tacksman subsets his farm, with his whole stock of cattle upon it”, the stock being valued at two to four times their actual worth, which was to be paid back at end of the lease (ibid., 58). Walker also summarised ‘half-footing’: “in Skye and the neighbouring countries the possessor of the farm affords the land and the seed-corn, and another person executes the tilling, sowing, and harrowing. After which they divide the crop between them, in such a proportion as they agreed upon” (ibid., 59).

On the Clann Ragnail Moidart and other mainland estates, after their forfeiture in 1746, much of the populace are portrayed as little more than agricultural servants to the chiefs and gentry:

*Some of the Cottars are allowed a little Cottage with Grassing for two or three Cows. They are obliged to manure the Arable Ground of the Farm on their own Charge, being further allowed the fourth part of the Corn produced. Others of them are allowed a small piece of Ground (which they labour on their own account) and the Grassing of two or three Cows, for which are obliged to labour the Landlords arable Ground on their proper Charge, but when otherwise employed in his Service, he is obliged to maintain them (Neilson 1755).*

It may be that the clan operated in similar ways across their territories, and similar practice may have been employed in South Uist. However, taking into consideration the fact that different regions with differing cultural and political histories developed divergent landholding systems (see Sections 3.2 to 3.4), given the available data any correlation between the two areas will have to remain speculative. Elsewhere, studies have often emphasised the likelihood of large numbers of cottars on Highland estates in the eighteenth century, however, this has been refuted by Leneman (1986, 61), whose work has reassessed the data in Atholl and suggested that this class of sub-tenant was small in number.

There were several multiple tenanted townships in South Uist in 1721 (E648/1). In fifteen townships there were seven tacksmen, only two of which had substantial holdings, at eight pennylands each, two held a five and six pennyland tack, while another two had three; the last is not recorded. The remaining eight townships were held by large numbers of tenants, three by fourteen or fifteen people, although their proportions vary widely. A small number held three pennylands, while most held a quarter pennyland or a number or fraction of clitichs. It is likely that the rents of these smaller tenants, tacksmen and sub-tenants reflect their set proportion of townland, providing them with access to most resources.

In certain instances it seems it was possible to demarcate particular areas from the collective township. The tale of the 'Red Weaver', from Lewis, recorded that during a land dispute an individual gained the unusual permission to build a dyke around his ninth of the land



(MacDonald 1975, 14), which must have stated his proprietorship over a specific piece of land.

Although it is worth highlighting the specifics of these eighteenth-century methods of landholding and forms of letting, it is a large jump to project these particular patterns of landholding back two centuries. However, it is possible to deconstruct some of the eighteenth-century developments and create a generalised narrative of medieval landholding. Over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there was a decline in the military and social role of the *duine uaisle* and as a consequence land tenancies increasingly reflected the escalating financial dependence of the chiefs upon their estates (Macinnes 1996, 56-121; Dodgshon 1998, 102-22). In contrast to the mid-1700s when tacks could be very small, and be rented out to individuals or groups of tenants distantly related to the chief, sixteenth-century holdings appear to have been large and in the hands of a few individuals closely related to the chief (Stewart 1982, 234). Although the details regarding lesser level of agricultural organisation are not available for the sixteenth century it would appear that by the 1700s there had been a significant decrease in the status of smaller landholders. Where large tacks existed in the eighteenth century, and were farmed either directly by the tacksmans' servants, or let out to semi-independent communities, it is possible that this reflects a continuation of the old pattern of farm organisation, in which large numbers of bounded runrig communities operated separately under a *duine uaisle*. The Clann Ragnail estates were notable by their late retention of *duine uaisle*, until well after the '45 (Stewart 1982, 499-512). As late as mid-nineteenth century it was said that:

*the Tenants of Uist are among the few remnants of the old Duihne wassel or Tacksman, gentlemen of good blood and descent, well educated and holding good farms* (Maxwell 1865, 7).

By 1827 the factor described the method of rental at Geirinis, Cille Bhannan, Gearraidh Fluich and Driomor:

*All these Farms ... are held nominally by Tacksmen but really by Subtenants.  
The Tacksmen have no Capital therefore subset these lands – the rents are ill  
paid, the lands ill cultivated and the people miserably poor (GD201/1/338).*

This seems to indicate that many communities were semiautonomous under the tacksmen, and that the runrig system functioned without much interference. Multi-tenant farms may reflect the same pattern, but reveal that the middle strata in the relationship had been removed.

## **12.5 *Bailtean* as Mentality**

Unlike the law codes of Norse or Irish societies in the earlier Middle Ages, or the prolific folktales recorded from the Western Highlands and Islands in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there is little direct evidence for the Late Medieval Hebridean world view. However, it is clear from main tenet of folkloric motifs, and the dichotomy between the beneficial role of brownies within the household and the malevolent other world creatures that inhabited the landscape outside the fields, that the emphasis lay on highlighting the centrality of one's kingroup and community to one's wellbeing (e.g. CWP491(c); Martin 1994, 137, 152; Pennant 1774, 272, 312, 313; Swire 1966, 153; see Wylie & Margolin 1981, 46-72; MacInnes 1992b, 4; Salomonsson 1994; Skjelbred 1994; Lysaght 1994; Henderson & Cowan 2001, 39-41, 44). The structural divergence of the agricultural runrig community from the individual's desires was further enforced by its absence in folksong, which, rather than reinforcing the individual's dependence on one's neighbours consistently referred to ways to escape it. This was illustrated by a continual reference to a land's fecundity, which equated it with both food and wealth (Campbell & Collinson 1969-81: I, 151), by marriage into the gentry, or by escaping to a life in the hills (e.g. *ibid*: I, 65, 85, 125, 129; III, 223; Campbell 1999, 90). Such external methods of shrugging off the local ties of dependency are common throughout peasant mentalities, which see them as the only way to better one's position without impinging on the fortunes of other members of the community (Foster 1976b). Campbell and Collinson (1969-81: III, 19) interpreted one folk-song motif as a fond

recollection of a childhood where one was safe amongst one's kin close to home. However, this would appear to be a misidentification, the content of the songs clearly denote a carefree and comfortable childhood amongst the gentry, as is evident in references to wine and white-palmed women (i.e. they were wealthy enough not to go outside and labour).

## **12.6 Alternatives to *Bailtean* Life: Shielings, Hunting Grounds and East Coast Settlement**

The concentration of communal activity in the clustered *bailtean* and its surrounding arable could create a stifling atmosphere, where neighbours, relatives, elders and social superiors closely monitored behaviour. This was counter-balanced by the relative freedom of the hills. For the inhabitants of the *bailtean* this was provided in the opportunity to exploit the summer pastures, when they moved away from the lowland fields following, herding and milking their cattle and living in shieling huts dispersed through the hills. For some the hills may have provided a chance to escape social regulation more permanently, as what appear to have been disenfranchised groups began to cultivate small patches on the east coast. The hills also provided hunting grounds for the elite: an activity that was socially demarcating.

## **12.7 The Shieings**

By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries almost the whole community moved with their herds up into the hills, sometimes as little as a mile, where they lived on the lower slopes of the hills in turf huts (Figs. 178 and 179). Here the cattle fed upon the fresh pasturage and were kept away from eating the crops growing on the lowland open fields. Women milked and made dairy produce, men and children herded, lovers were freed from the claustrophobic regulatory atmosphere of the *bailtean*, and the system was celebrated by poets and society alike (for a fuller discussion see Raven forthcoming). Some form of transhumance had been going on since the Iron Age, although it is probable that the precise relationship between farm and shieling changed during the Norse period (ibid.). Furthermore, it is possible that the larger part of the economy of South Uist had been given over to transhumant pastoralism



throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (see Section 11.9), but this cannot be confirmed until future fieldwork is carried out. Thus, quite when the eighteenth-century form of summer pasture use came into use is uncertain. Walker summarised the system as it was practised in the 1700s:

*The homestead is on the arable land ... Here the farmer, with his cottagers, live in what are called their winter houses.*

*Soon after the middle of June, when the arable land is sown, they emigrate from these dwellings, with their cattle, to a mountainous place belonging to the farm ... Their only occupation is tending the cattle on the heights, and the manufacture of butter and cheese. Their chief sustenance is oat or barley meal, with milk in its different forms. In this way they pass the fine season, in a pastoral and cheerful manner of life, of which the people are extremely fond (1808: I, 318).*

Life at the shielings was lived out of doors, the open conditions provided a stark contrast to winter life, confined to the immediate surroundings of the *bailtean*, with much time spent in the shelter of the house. Throughout the winter life was lived under the constant watch of the rest of society, the summer grazings provided opportunity to court and behave in less socially restrained ways, away from the village elders and gossips (Parman 1990, 44). The emotions inspired by the release from the claustrophobic *bailtean* environment are illustrated in Gaelic terms for going to the shielings: *reiteach a bhaile* and *glanadh a bhaile*, roughly meaning, respectively, ‘disentangling’ and ‘cleansing’ (Fenton 1980, 99).

It is easy to overlook the importance of the shielings as casual seasonal dwellings, placing greater weight onto the more substantial and archaeologically visible winter structures, but there is evidence that shielings formed a highly important role with the annual rhythms of later societies, having a specific function within their world-view. The hearth-fire was a central and symbolic feature of any Hebridean home, bringing luck and well-being to the

household and its human and animal inhabitants (Carmichael 1928-71: I, 231, 234; II, 275, 280, 369; Kissling 1943, 83-86). A burning peat was removed from winter dwellings and taken with the household up to the shielings and placed in the summer home's hearth (Carmichael 1928-71: II, 369, also see SAS 2(f), Kissling 1943, 88 for other rituals surrounding the occupation of the shielings). This ritual linking the hearths of the winter and summer dwellings is highly revealing. It directly indicates the en-cultured safety (or *habitus*: Bordieu 1977), of the home and *bailtean* community was deliberately and symbolically transposed into the wild of the hills, transforming the shieling from the antithesis of society to its very heart.

## 12.8 The Hunting Forest

Of course, the hills were not only home to cattle, herds and dairymaids, Dean Munro's description of the Uists describes 'forrests' (Munro 1961, 76), providing the hunting grounds necessary for the status of the Gaelic gentry. Some chiefs had whole islands given over to their hunting grounds, such as MacNeill of Barra's island of Maoldonaich, also known as Eilean nam Fiadh (CWP362), while others had large parts of the estates given over to this pursuit. It is possible that the Isle of Rum was held in special regard as a hunting island for the gentry. Its Gaelic name Rìoghachd na Forraiste Fiadhaich, can be translated as Kingdom of the Wild Forest full of deer (MacLennan 1979, 160, 270), and it was certainly associated with grandiose hunting in the later medieval period. The hills of South Uist are likely to have served as one of the primary hunting grounds of the Clann Ragnaill, and may also have an early ancestry. Although perhaps not an impartial observer, Alexander MacDonald, a Uisteach who accompanied Bonnie Prince Charlie, claimed:

*The island of South Uist is reckoned the only country best for game in all Scotland, where all species of wild fowl are in great plenty besides deer, etc.*  
(Forbes 1895, 326).

Martin Martin (1994, 154) recorded three hundred deer in 1695. Around seventy years later Walker stated that “The Mountains ... have about 200 head of Red Deer upon them, but they are kept from increasing by the Eagles which haunt the Country and destroy the Fauns” (McKay 1980, 75).

Leneman’s study of eighteenth-century Atholl shows that there shielings occupied the same areas hunting grounds and the two activities were often in conflict. In 1704 shielings were located in the hinds’ calving area, revealing a growth in the importance of cattle as a commercial resource which caused a decline in hunting. By the end of the eighteenth century the economic benefits of cattle were again outweighed by the status provided by hunting (1986, 177). Looking at Early Medieval Irish law there was certainly scope for some lords to have grounds reserved solely for their own hunting, although in some circumstances common grazings occupied the same ground, with allowances for some degree of common hunting. Norse hunting patterns meant that any kill went to the owner of the ground so there were no chiefly or royal hunting grounds (Gilbertson 1979, 6-9). The evidence for the pattern inherited or adopted by the Clann Ragnail in South Uist does not survive, but hunting was almost certainly highly important and prestigious throughout this period.

*Their method of killing deer was as follows: On each side of a glen, formed by two mountains, stone dykes were begun pretty high in the mountains, and carried to the lower part of the valley, always drawing nearer, till within 3 or 4 feet of each other from the narrow pass, a circular space was inclosed by a stone wall, of a height sufficient to confine the deer; to this place they were persued and destroyed (Mclean 1797, 232-3).*

The dykes described above in Rum do not survive in Uist. However, the form of hunting is likely to have been similar, large proportions of the community would have been employed in beating the ground and driving the deer into a hollow or narrow provided by the topography, to be slaughtered at the leisure of the gentry. The deer themselves were thought



to be owned by the chief and not considered wild and free, and thus open to the public for capture and consumption (McKay 1980, 197; also see Martin 1994, 226). This was not true of other hunted animals, such as fowl, although seals appear to have occupied an ambiguous position (see Section 12.13).

The significance of access to hunting resources is revealed in Mary MacLeod's poem *A Satiric Song*:

*In the dwelling of a noble's son,  
where I and thou would not be together ...  
Not alike were our dwellings at sunset ...  
In my father's house were found venison and bones of the deer; ...  
In thy father's house bree and the bones of the fish were for your fare.*  
(Carmichael-Watson 1934, 13).

Further evidence comes from two other poems. One, *Wednesday was the Day*, composed by Eachan Bacach in 1635 to Sir Lachlan MacLean of Duart names him: "Foe to the hind of the glens and the salmon of the streams" (Ó Baoill 1979, 5). The other, *Son of the Earl of White Banners*, is anonymous but probably written in the 1600s:

*Hunter of the deer from the mountain forest.  
Of the grey seal from the shore of the ocean,  
The little roe deer that moves proudly.*  
(Campbell & Collinson 1981, 89).

Though none of these poems directly addresses whether these differences were enforced by economic restriction, the nature of the foodstuffs mentioned suggests that they were socially restricted and that access was distinctive of noble status.

Most early accounts of the Uists note the abundance of fowls and birdlife, some may emanate from the large number of geese that haunted the isle and destroyed the crops, but other species of bird were hunted as well. Much of this was probably by the gentry, but Martin Martin (1994, 159, 210) reveals that seabirds were taken elsewhere and were eaten, preserved in seaweed ashes, or processed to gain oil, their entrails also made good thread (Fergusson & Macdonald 1984, 250). There were also birds of prey: “The eagles in the Highlands, are likewise a formidable enemy to the sheep farmer”, killing lambs, fawns and fowl, ravens were also thought to kill lambs (Walker 1808: II, 361). Dean Munro noted “sundrie halk nestis” (Munro 1961, 77) in the Uists, almost certainly used, if not bred for hunting. In 1682 Sir William Ogilvy begged for a ‘Clanranald Hawk’ (Munro 1984), it seems likely that this could be a hunting bird derived from the Uists.

In 1628 ‘Johne Mcrannald of Ylandtirim’ was amongst a group of Hebridean chiefs that the Scottish crown singled out for contracting into a scheme “For ... preserving and keping the *deir* and *raes* within everie ane of the honorabill pairteis forrestis, iles and boundis alyve” (CdRA, 190). The following line: “for keping gude societie and nighborheid” reveals this early notion for natural heritage conservation was little more than a thinly veiled attempt to stamp out behaviour seen as propagating the undesirable behaviour of Gaelic chiefs. However, the 1721 rental for South Uist reveals the lack of success in this venture: several hereditary falconers, fowlers and foresters were still given land rent-free to maintain these hunting areas (E648/1/4).

## 12.9 The Chief’s Pasture

In South Uist there may be evidence to support the idea that the chiefs reserved part of the island for their own grazings and hunting grounds. It has long been established that the wealth of the chiefs was often embodied in cattle. They served as a store of wealth, and were a physical display of the prestige they brought, and they were a major part of the exchange and gifts given in transactions between different chiefs, as well as between chiefs and vassals (Dodgshon 1988a). What is less clear, however, is how chiefs provided for their

herds. In the 1770s Johnson noted that in Rassay “the laird himself keeps a herd of four hundred [cattle]” (Chapman 1924, 56). It was apparent that a large portion of this herd was directly provisioned for: “one hundred and sixty winter in *Rona*, under the superintendence of a solitary herdsman” (ibid., 53). How the rest of this gigantic herd was cared for, and the precise relationship of the chief to the herdsman is not stated. In some cases it appears that the herders were direct servants of the chief and the cattle remained the property and responsibility of the chief. Robson (1794, 13) stated that ‘MacDonald of Achtrichtan’ rented his cows out to a shepherd, although the grass was his: he also hired a herdsman during the day and a woman for milking. It seems likely that this was common for chiefs, and that whole herds were managed in this way. Others, however, may have rented their cattle out to tenants and sub-tenants, thus off-loading responsibility for the livestock, while retaining the prestige for their ownership, social bonds and relationships could also have been re-enforced. This is a model with direct comparisons to Early Medieval Irish law (Kelly 1998, 423, 428-31, 445-48), which perhaps betrays its origins: although it is possible that it had been borrowed into Hebridean society in the later Middle Ages as the lords increasingly looked to Ireland as a cultural homeland. In contemporary Gaelic Ireland the acceptance of a lord’s cattle remained as a symbolic bond of vassalage, as well as a tie which could be recounted. Freedom was attainable upon repayment of the initial gift of cattle plus a fee of a number of others (Nicholls 1972, 68-71). This seems similar to Steelbow, discussed in Section 12.4, which was described in the eighteenth century when the relationship may have come to be understood in more commercialised terms.

There is no direct evidence which method of herd management was practised by the Clann Ragnaill in South Uist, although upon Bonnie Prince Charlie’s arrival on the east coast moors of Benbecula, Neil MacEachan, a man of local upbringing, wrote:

*They were no sooner landed but they were seen by a herd of Clanranald’s who stayed in the place always to take care of his master’s cattle (Blaikie 1916, 231-32).*



Bald's Estate Map, reveals that by 1805 the hills were nearly all apportioned between the townships. However, two townships were not recorded as having set grazing grounds; Tobha Mor and Dreumasdal (Fig. 17). It is interesting to note that this appears to have been the central core for the Clann Ragnail chiefs in South Uist during the later Middle Ages, and seems to indicate that they reserved the local grazings and hunting grounds for themselves. Near the eastern coast there is a mound named on the modern Ordnance Survey maps (1977) as 'Buail' Ormaclet'. Unlike in Ireland, where *buaile* refers to transhumance, in Scots Gaelic *buaile* can mean a 'fold for cattle' (MacLennan 1979, 57), but Beveridge (1911, 319) suggests that in the Uists this meant a cattle fold representing a shieling on a larger scale. The mound is surmounted by a multitude of cellular structures on and around its summit (Fig. 180), which would certainly fit this description. The connection with Ormacleit is intriguing, it is situated five townships from this area (Fig. 181), but had become the centre for Clann Ragnail by the end of the seventeenth century. The likelihood of the connection of the chief to the grazing ground, as with other families to particular grazings, seems highly probable. The place-name connection, together with the use of the more grandiose *buaile* as opposed to *airigh*, the usual term for shieling, combines to suggest a chiefly connection to the surrounding pastures.

## 12.10 Settlement on the East Coast

Near Buaile Ormacleit, but further up the hillside, is a feature known as 'Uamha nan Tighearean', remembered by tradition as a hunting seat/shelter of the gentry used while hunting on the east coast. The precise location of this site is not clear, it is possibly either an Iron Age wheelhouse and souterrain, or cave, near Maoladh na h-Uamha. Thomas described the area:

*About the place ... I saw among the creeks and hollows of the fallen rocks what appeared to have been the abodes of men; and there were, as elsewhere in the Long Island, some primitive shiellings indeed, consisting of*

*a low wall built up to an overhanging rock; but I have had not time to investigate further (1868, 168).*

These outer buildings may also have been associated with hunting activities. There are a few problems, however, in taking this for granted. This is one of the few areas on the east coast which was inhabited by the beginning of the nineteenth century. The others being Caltanais, which appears on Bald's lithographed map of 1823 as a township in its own right, two other areas slightly further north, Tigh na h-Acairseid and 'Bunamik' in the township of Stadhlaigearraidh, and Mealabhaig, which is depicted on Bald's survey (1805b) of Baghasdal as a farmstead, surrounded by several fields of rigs. Around the coasts of the both Loch Aenoirt and Baghasdal were other patches of arable and single buildings, many of these must have been the plots of fishermen encouraged to settle on the east coast by the tacksmen of Baghasdal over the eighteenth century (MacDonald 1810, 791). However, this area also has evidence for settlement in the more distant past. Around Uisinis there are a series of Neolithic cairns, Iron Age structures, such as wheelhouses and souterrains, and other un-datable hut circles. This could highlight the extent of prehistoric settlement in the east coast prior to the environmental degradation and expansion of peat that occurred over the Iron Age, this focus becoming uninhabitable and abandoned in this period. But does the presence of eighteenth-century settlement reveal a period of re-occupation, or the latter phases of a continuous period of occupation?

Bald's map reveals several areas of settlement around this area, Lamasaign, which along with 'Bunamik' and Glacklee had one building, and Coradail, which like Tigh na h-Acairseid had two, there was also 'Mouladou' that was marked as being 'in ruins'. The surrounding landscape still bears the remains of the surrounding rigs and lazybeds and some were marked as having associated enclosures. However, these are hardly substantial farmsteads, and may be similar to other east coast farms in Harris, which were shielings occupied when the population on the west coast arable had reached extreme limits (Caird 1951, 89). Carmichael's studies led to an encounter with Fearachar Beaton, a shepherd in Coradail in the 1870s. He recounted a poem supposedly composed by a very old lady that

linked movement from Heisgeir (off the south end of North Uist) to a “green grey bothy in Corrodale” in height of summer. The possibly reflected a memory of seasonal transhumance between the two areas: although he told another which stated “I would sow my nine lovely corns rigs of lint, In the little trim glen of Corradale” (1928-71: 2, 282-3). Some of these farms, however, appear to have been settled more permanently by the mid-eighteenth century at least. Life at these farmsteads must have been grim, in addition to the difficulty of cultivating the thin peaty soils, Otter described “terrific squalls” blowing down the valleys south of Usinis (1874, 161).

The well-travelled Bonnie Prince Charlie is thought to have stayed in Coradail in the house of the failed priest turned school master and Jacobite hero, Neil MacEachan MacDonald (who also had connections to Benbecula similar to the one portrayed by Fearachar Beaton: MacKenzie 1903, 452-454). A fellow visitor to Coradail, Alexander MacDonald referred to their accommodation as a ‘Forrest house’ and ‘the house in the forrest’ (Forbes 1895, 326). Although this was later interpreted as a ‘foresters cottage’ (Blaikie 1897, 50), it is not entirely clear from the original sources what this means precisely, although it perhaps confirms a link to hunting in the area. It does not appear to have been a lowly shieling, however, seeming rather grander in comparison to the shielings he had stayed in previously in Benbecula. In his account of their time together in Coradail MacEachan claimed that the Prince “swore [it] look’t like a palace in comparison of the abominable hole they had lately left” (Blaikie 1916, 239). MacEachan described Coradail as “a little pleasant glen ... belonging to Neil MacDonald, where there was two country-houses” (ibid., 238), perhaps revealing it was a permanent house rather than a temporary dwelling. Given, in his own journal, Donald MacLeod described it as “a tenant’s house, only a hut better than ordinary” (Forbes 1895, 174), it could be that MacEachan saw his land through rose tinted glasses. His account is also in contrast to that contained in O’Sullivan’s own memoirs, which said that “there was but one house, & not any within four or five miles of it” (Tayler & Tayler 1938, 185). Although these descriptions differ over the number of buildings, it seems that one was multi-cellular:



*In the forrest-house the Prince ... used to sit on a fail-sunk, i.e. an earthen seat, having some fog and plaids under him, and would step into a by-chamber, which served as a pantry, and ... put the bottle of brandy or whiskie to his head and take his dram without ceremony (Alexander MacDonald's Journal transcribed by Forbes 1895, 326).*

Alexander MacDonald's evidence further suggests that if this was a 'dwelling' rather than a 'hunting house' it was not permanently or recently occupied as it was in need of repairs before it could be lived in (ibid.).

Only slightly later, in the 1760s, John MacCodrum composed a poem about his attendance at 'MacAskill's wedding', said to be held in his 'house' in the wheelhouse itself (Matheson 1938, 304). A century later, Thomas (1868, 165) described of his visit to 'Meall na Uamh', it "lies less than half a mile above the shepherd's house", suggesting the focus for the settlement had moved further down the hill, although this may be post-Clearance.

In the early 1900s Father Allan Macdonald recorded the families that had been cleared from the east coast half a century earlier, and what had happened to their descendants. His list of tenants is interesting in that it includes McLellan's, M'Intyre's McLeod's, Campbell's, MacEachan's and Bowie's (Mac 'Ille bhuidhe), amongst others (n.d./392), who can all be linked to incoming tacksmen of the seventeenth century (Stewart 1982, 223). The MacEachan presence is not surprising, in that they were directly linked to the Clann Ragnail bloodline, true *duine uaisle* in the old sense, and had held the tack for Tobha Bheg (ibid., 241). However, during the early seventeenth century there are hints in the Clann Ragnail correspondence that they and their cousins had fallen from favour, and the lairds were attempting to oust them from their position (see GD201/1/96; GD201/1/213; GD201/1/284; GD201/5/961). The Bowie's too were descended from a disgraced individual well remembered in Uist tradition. Their progenitor had been an 'African secretarie' or servant boy to Clann Ragnail himself (Stewart 1982, 327-8), who had embarrassed the chief in front of his peers and been banished to 'Lagan an t-Sluaidh' above Liathadal (MacLean 1984,

512-13). It may be that the other inhabitants of the east coast were descendants of disgraced tacksmen, or *duine uaisle*, who did not adapt comfortably into their new commercialised role and chose to live outwith the rest of the community. That the move to these east coast settlements were an active choice rather than enforced through population pressure and lack of opportunity in the west is perhaps affirmed by the low demographics suggested for the seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries (McKay 1980, 26-27; Coste 1920-1925: V, 116-17).

The fact that this area was not allotted to west coast townships may be directly linked to the presence of settlement on the eastern coastline. If Parker Pearson (1996, forthcoming a) is correct in seeing the origin of the township layout in the Iron Age then the location of the wheelhouses, etc., may point to a fairly early origin for this area's exclusion, with a western impetus interrupting the strip system focussed on east coast settlement. However, the possible Norse expansion of farms into *gearraidh* land (ibid.) shows a flexibility in the development of townships, with new boundaries created and adapted to new areas of settlement. A survival of more permanent occupation into the eighteenth century may account for the break in regular strip shaped townships over the island. Yet it seems more likely that re-occupation of this area accounts for the apparent lack of substantial formalised farmstead boundaries, such as head dykes (although small field enclosures were marked upon Bald's maps). No tacks survive for east coast settlements, and a late eighteenth-century valuation for South Uist shows that Tobhta Mor was linked with 'Baleloch, Ganicheounich & Limsay' (GD201/5/1217/24). The first of these may be Ballach nam Bran, north west of the Uisinis peninsula, and the latter is probably Lamasaig, one of the east coast farms. In 1827 Dreumasdal was also tied to lands in the east worth a third its total rent (GD201/1/352). The definition of the boundaries of these new farms probably remained unstated: a situation perhaps facilitated by the tenants' descent from west coast tacksmen. The intaking of arable from the grazings could have remained based on informal and personal connections and agreements, and if these were the result of a falling out with the chief, the chief could pretend to ignore their presence.

It was noted in Section 12.5 that folktales were used to propagate contrasting concepts about the en-cultured *bailtean* and the wild otherness of the hills. Whilst a large corpus of recorded tales reveal that this wildness extended to the east coast and summits of Beinn Mhor (Swire 1966, 153). Martin Martin described one revealing belief:

*There is a valley between two mountains on the east side called Glenslyte, which affords good pasturage. The natives who farm it come thither with their cattle in summer time, and are possessed with a firm belief that this valley is haunted by spirits, who by the inhabitants are called the great men; and whatsoever man or woman enters the valley without making first an entire resignation of themselves to the conduct of the great men will infallibly grow mad (1994, 152-3).*

Carmichael recorded a fuller version of this tale (although the size of the supernatural creatures has changed), which also reveals that by being exempt from supernatural retribution the occupiers of this east coast farm legitimated their ownership and place in the landscape:

*Gleann Liadail or Liathadail is a glen in South Uist, adjoining Corodale. No one dared to go into Gleann Liadail without singing the song to propitiate 'daoine beaga a'ghlinne,' the little folk of the glen. The only persons who could go were Clann 'ic Iosaig, the MacIsaacs, better known as Clann 'ic 'ille Riabhaich, the clan of the son of Gille Riabhach, the brindled lad ... Reilig Ni Ruairidh, the burial place of the daughter of Roderick, is in Benmore, near Liadal. It was the custom of the women of Benmore to pour libations of milk on Reilig Ni Ruairidh when milking their cows in their neighbourhood (1928-71: V, 386).*



## 12.11 The Late Medieval Economy

Throughout the fourteenth century there was consolidation and intensification of the economy of the Norse period in South Uist. The Bornais excavations reveal that milling may have continued and that herring fishing intensified, the latter is also evident from traditions surrounding Ami MacRuari and her castle buildings programs (see Sections 9.2 and 10.9). Yet both industries appear to have disappeared over the Late Middle Ages, and were reintroduced in the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Whilst it is hard to build up an explicit case for a fifteenth and/or sixteenth century industrial decline from a general lack of evidence, in many cases, evidence surrounding the reintroduction of these industries reveals that they were built upon new foundations.

## 12.12 Arable Resources

Dr Winster's report to the Sacred Congregation, in Rome in 1669 is one of many contemporary sources to highlight Hebridean economies were primarily subsistence based, producing little for market export, and that arable was of minimal importance:

*The mountainous districts are barren, and during five or six months of the year, scarcely yield to the inhabitants sufficient oaten or barley-bread ... the people live on cheese, milk and butter; the lower classes, however, are often without bread ... the missionaries who visit these districts are obliged ... to bring with them bread and wine for the Holy Sacrifice (Moran 1861: 176).*

The lack of an emphasis upon cereal production is also evident in Oliver Plunkett's reports, written around the same time:

*The common drink in summer-time is milk, and in winter it is boiled water mixed with flour-meal. Even the noble and better off people do not have beer as a rule (Hanly 1979: 210).*

By the eighteenth century South Uist and other larger islands in the Long Isle exported grain when harvests were good, but this contrasts with most other smaller islands and mainland areas which appear to have depended upon importing meal for this foodstuff (see Neilson 1755, McKay 1980, 14, 69). Most grain was probably consumed in the form of porridges and gruel with cakes made for festivals and special occasions: bread though may have been more uncommon. The evidence does not discount the possibility that bread consumption was restricted to the gentry. The following comment by Walker perhaps confirms this, but the reference is to Rum, where arable resources are particularly poor. Additionally, the last sentence suggests that political agendas regarding status in the 1700s may have played some role in creating the mind-set of the subject:

*During all the Summer, they live entirely upon animal Food, and yet are healthy and long lived. The year before I was there, a man had died in the Island aged 103, who was fifty years of Age before he had ever tasted Bread; and during all the Remainder of his long Life, had never eat of it from March to October, nor any other Food, during that part of the year, but Fish and Milk; which is still the Case with all the Inhabitants of the Island. I was even told, that this old man used frequently to remind the younger People, of the simple and hardy Fare of former Times, used to upbraid them with their Indulgence in the Articles of Bread, and judged it unmanly to toil like Slaves with their Spades, for the Production of such an unnecessary Piece of Luxury (ibid., 196).*

The image of bread as an elite foodstuff is contradicted by Iain Luim's poem *A Lament for Alasdair MacCholla*:

*As I lie on my back on the standing knoll, little  
inclination have I to mix with the rabble who would  
think bread sufficient sustenance.*

*You were not, my beloved, gathering limpets on a  
headland, nor would it have been a fitting  
occupation for you – you and your company were a-  
drinking (MacKenzie 1964, 35).*

If this evidence can be accepted it would seem to indicate that Hebridean economies were considerably more geared for a pastoral economy than most historians have so far been willing to admit. If arable production was not central to the economy there was little need for the elite to exercise control over it. A situation illustrated by the abandonment of mills and its associated dues, multure and thirlage.

The kiln at Bornais went out of use sometime between 1320 and 1450 (Sharples 2005d, 57), and although this is only one example, this is the sole evidence available for mill use (as kilns and mills appear to have necessitated each other: see below) in the Outer Hebrides until the sixteenth century. Around the beginning of the seventeenth century Barra was singled out by Pont regarding mills:

*In a toune called Quir ... there is a litle mill in that water and no more  
mills in all the Illand.*

*Bot everie husbandman in the countrey hes ane Instrument in their houses  
called one Kwerne and the two stone doth lye on the house floore, and that  
place is made cleane (MacFarlane 1907, 179).*

Whether Barra was odd for having a mill at all, or only one is not clear, but none are noted for the Uists, or elsewhere in the Islands. However, the hills of South Uist have produced no evidence for the horizontal mills that are so frequent in Lewis and elsewhere (where this may date to the Norse period or eighteenth century and later). Pont's map of Baghasdal contains a loch named Loch 'Veulin', near Smeircleith. This may derive from *muilinn*, possibly



suggesting an earlier mill underneath the eighteenth later one that survives to the north of the loch. Alternatively, the name could be a mis-interpretation of the name which appears on the later OS maps: Loch an Dun, which seems more likely given that a later tack of 1758 for Baghasdal refers to the whole of the ground “with the corn mill lately built on the said lands” (Frazer-MacKintosh 1847, 322). Neither, the presence of mills, nor ties to thirlage or multures occurs in any of the surviving tacks prior to this period, and they tend to be fairly wide in their coverage of legal access to resources. In the disputes that arose between the mills at Tobha Mor and Bornais in the 1780s and 90s, about which areas were tied to which mill, it is apparent that the central area was not tied to any other mill than Baghasdal’s (GD201/1/311). The one at Milton also appears to have built sometime before the middle the century (GD201/2/11). Together with the one in Benbecula, this accounts for all the mills present in South Uist noted in the *New Statistical Account*: “There are four mills in the parish ... supplied with good machinery and copious water falls” (Maclean 1845, 187).

With the construction of the mill at Tobha Mor a program of quern destruction was undertaken to force the tenants to use the mills (GD201/1/351/12). In this case the inhabitants of Bornais had their querns broken, although sometimes they were confiscated (see MacLellan 1997, 6-7), or as:

*When illicit grinding was discovered, the miller was empowered to break the querns, and it is said that about the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century a raid was made upon the querns of South Uist, when a large number were collected by the millers and thrown into the sea – fines were also exacted; but these frequently took the form of a license in favour of the inhabitants of the smaller islands of Uist and Skye, where regular mills did not exist, and private grinding at times was a necessity, owing to dangerous and stormy ferries (MacDonald & MacDonald 1904: 3, 130).*

Bornais cannot be described as one of these marginal areas, so it seems that querns were the main way of grinding corn in South Uist until well into the eighteenth century. It is in this

period when mills seem to be adopted throughout other Western Isles lordships; the first profits from mills make their appearance in the records of MacLeod of Dunvegan in 1732 (MacLeod 1938-39: II, 74). It seems clear from this evidence, and the ties of thirlage and multures within tacks that the tacksmen and chiefs were the prime motivators behind this period of construction, and that there was no hint of the community ownership suggested for the numerous small horizontal mills of later periods in Lewis and the Northern Isles (e.g. Fenton 1977, 109).

· It is curious that it is in this period when kilns reappear throughout the landscape. Walker (1808: II. 368) made direct connections between *graddaning* and the quern, and the kiln and the mill (although see Buchanan 1997, 67). However, Walker was surprisingly sympathetic to graddaning in his following description:

*The making of what is called Graddan bread, from oats or bear, has been an immemorial practice in the Highlands: it was a natural and necessary contrivance for turning the grain immediately into bread, before kilns and water mills were introduced, for the drying and grinding of corn.*

*To make gradan bread, a parcel of corn with the straw is set on fire; after the inflammation is over, the grain being sufficiently dried or parched for grinding, is gathered up, sifted and cleaned; it is then committed to the quern; this is a hand cornmill of stone; and, by this, it is immediately reduced to meal and made ready for use.*

*All the operations in the making of it are performed by the women; and one woman, with the quern, usually grinds and sifts about a firloot or six pecks of meal in a day.*

*It is a practice, however, for which there can be no apology but necessity;  
and, though this was the case in former times, it is by no means at present  
(1808: II, 368-70).*

The latter relationship not only processed and preserved the grain prior to milling, but it also allowed tacksmen to observe and calculate the amount of grain being produced, so that it could be taxed more thoroughly. For ardent Improvers, such as Walker there were other benefits: “nothing can be more preposterous ... where time is the greatest difficulty to support them in winter, than that their produce should be burnt by the inhabitants” (ibid., 370).

Elsewhere on the Clann Ragnaill estates it is only from the 1720s that increasing exploitation of milling took off, alongside fishing, woodlands, mining, charcoal burning (Dye *et al.* 2002). Neilson stated of the Clann Ragnaill chief’s recently forfeited mainland estates “there being no water mill in the Country” (1755) the same was recorded in Canna (Pennant 1774, 279). This may not however be the picture throughout the Outer Hebrides in the mid to latter seventeenth century: John Morrison of Bragar, in Lewis, and the ‘Old Trojan’ Norman MacLeod of Berneray, North Uist, appear to have been early Improvers, despite being both regarded as upholders of Gaelic tradition. Morrison’s lands at Loch Ordais were inundated by the sea at high tide, he is said to have built a channel and sluice to drain the loch and stop the sea. Additionally, he encouraged various other minor industries, it is said he “fell asleep to the trickle of the still on one side and the clatter of the mill on the other” (Matheson 1970, 206-08). In an untitled poem composed by Mary MacLeod in gratitude to Norman MacLeod upon the gift of a snuff-mill, we see a picture of the tacksman’s dues of thirlage:

*Though I go to bed it is not sleep I desire,  
for the flood is so great and my mill is unshod;  
the mill-due is to be paid if this year is not to ruin me,  
and get it I must, though it be that I borrow it.  
(Carmichael-Watson 1934, 83).*



It would seem then that both horizontal and vertical mills were directly connected to the centralisation of control over the modes of production. Alongside the notion that mills had been wholly abandoned over the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, this would seem to contradict Dodgshon's (1998, 116-17) suggestion that mills had not been a part of medieval Hebridean lordship because the landlords reaped the end product in rents and dues, rather than mill duties. In addition to grain paid as part of rents, the extension of ties to mills controlled by a handful of influential tacksmen was surely an imposition designed to monitor what was being grown in order to siphon off additional surpluses in the form of both thirlage and multures. Landlords also directly benefited from the tacksmen's payments for rights to operate mills.

### 12.13 Other Resources

The topography of South Uist provided opportunities, other than pastoral or arable, for sustenance and exploitation. A common feature of the exploitation of these resources, however, was that access to them often augmented the demarcation of social relationships.

As it was elsewhere, the washing-up of a whale may have been a cause for commotion in the community. In the eastern highlands, where whales were possibly less frequent, they were worth noting by local chroniclers, such as Robert Gordon:

*The yeir of God 1600, fourteen great whaills, of huge bignes, wer casten in by the sea, vpon the sands vnder the toun of Dornogh, in Southerland, They came in alyve, and wer slain immediatlíe by the inhabitants, who reaped some commoditie thereby; some of these fishes wer 90 feett in lenth (1813, 239).*

However, it was an occurrence which did not go un-noticed in Lewis. When a whale was washed ashore in Dail Beag the factor took charge of it for the master and a man was hung

for the violation (Macdonald 1975, 24-5). Dean Munro had also highlighted whales in connection with Lewis, he added that a portion was taken by the church: “Ane great tak of quhaillis is oftimes in this cuntrie thair come [26 or] 27 quhaillis young and auld to the tiend anes thair” (Munro 1961, 87).

Other sea mammals were also consumed, such as “otters and seals; the latter are ate by the meaner sort of people, who say they are very nourishing. The natives take them with nets, whose ends are tied by a rope to the strong alga, or sea-ware, growing on the rocks” (Martin 1994, 114). However, as noted in Sections 1.9.6 and 1.9.7 South Uist does not have the topography which encourages sea-mammals, or sea-birds on the scale found elsewhere in the Isles (ibid, 134; MacFarlane 1907, 181; Pennant 1774, 228). The importance of seal meat was not just as simple nourishment: “The seal, though esteemed fit only for the vulgar is also eaten by persons of distinction, though under a different name, to wit, ham ... The Popish vulgar ... eat these seals in Lent instead of fish” (Martin 1994, 136).

Perhaps more significant however is what is revealed by how the larger seal culls were divided. The boat owners were given a portion, but so were the steward, his officer and the minister. The latter being given the “choice of all the young seals, and that which he takes is called by the natives Cullen-Mory, that is, the Virgin Mary’s seal” (Martin 1994, 133). The name of this portion linking it to pre-Reformation activity. This suggests that along with whales these animals were seen as special in some way, outside the normal hunt of wild animals, which were free and not therefore not subject to claims by the gentry. The song *Son of the Earl of White Banners* revealed that in parts of the Hebrides seals were linked to the higher echelons: “Hunter of the deer from the mountain forest, Of the grey seal from the shore of the ocean” (Campbell & Collinson 1969-81: III, 89).

In addition to the occasional whale carcass the beach also provided other resources, the most notable being shellfish:

*As I came from South-Uist, I perceived about sixty horsemen riding along the sands, directing their course for the east sea; and being between me and the sun, they made a great figure on the plain sands. We discovered them to be natives of South-Uist, for they alighted from their horses and went to gather cockles in the sands, which are exceeding plentiful there (Martin 1994, 155).*

Although most available shell-fish were consumed the limpet in particular “was a great support to many poor families ... in the late years of scarcity” also “being parboiled with a very little quantity of water, the broth is drank to increase the milk in nurses, and likewise when the milk proves astringent to the infants” (ibid., 201).

In the mid sixteenth century cockles were so abundant in Barra that they were mentioned by Dean Munro, who noted they were regarded as sacred, in that those in Cille Bharra sands were linked directly to the church itself (Munro 1961, 74). By the end of the nineteenth century the consumption of cockles had become linked to scarcity (MacQueen 1794, 144). The concept of limpets as a symbol of poverty and want remained well into the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Macdonald 1975, 27), as is seen in the poem *Early I Rose One Morn of Glory*:

*To the tower of towers to the tower of Sgabhaidh  
To my father's tower and my mother's  
Where I early got my rearing  
Not on sickly soup of limpets.  
(Campbell & Collinson 1969-81: I, 131).*

The proliferation of shells recovered from middens may indicate a huge dependency on this foodstuff, but might equally be evidence of their widespread use as fishing bait.



By examination of these marginal resources it is apparent that the tacksmen exploited their position to siphon off a surplus of seal and whale meat, but had no claim on shellfish. Additionally, access to their share provided an opportunity for them to exercise their social muscle and demarcate their position as separate and above the main body of the populace.

#### 12.14 Fishing in and on the Coasts of South Uist

Whereas herring fishing was a prominent part of the economies of the Norse period into the fourteenth century, the absence of fishing from Hebridean economies was a constant complaint of subsequent governments, it became noticed by travellers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This appears to apply to both fresh and salt water fishing. Although few later medieval middens have yet to be studied, cursory observation would seem to imply that seventeenth-century middens are distinct from their Norse counterparts, in that there is an absence of fish bones.

Although direct evidence is scant it is likely that some freshwater fishing took place, in the eighteenth century there are tales from South Uist about traditions limiting the days upon which fishing was allowed, they also reveal the use of line fishing (Macdonald nd./22). At the end of the sixteenth-century inland fishing activities in Lewis were described, in “schaule burnis ... salmond and uthir fishes ... are slane with treis and bastonnis, and hes na uthir craft nor ingyne to slay thame” (Skene 1886-90: III, 429). Martin Martin (1994, 111, 200) revealed the additional presence of angling. He also provided a hint about why freshwater fishing was not practised more widely, when describing Bernera, in the Bishops Isles, he stated that “the natives never go a fishing while Macneil or his steward is in the island, lest their plenty of fish, perhaps they might take occasion to raise their rents” (ibid., 159).

Another form of freshwater fishing may have existed on the east coast of the island. A *carraidh*, or tidal fishtrap, in South Uist was described in the Ordnance Survey Name Book as “a little bay where fish are caught by means of a stone fence built across the bay and when the tide recedes the fish are trapped on the low side of the fence” (Book 13, 100). There are

only a handful of these known from across the Scottish western seaboard, including the woodlands around Tioram (Dye *et al.*, 2001). The presence of these cases are only likely to have been recorded as they are largely built of stone. Most fishtraps are composed of a single wall, although in Sunart there is one which is double built, with boulders on the west and more substantial side, and a central gap to allow shallow boats to pass and filled by wicker when required to trap fish (Dye *et al.* 2001: 52).

The *Ordnance Survey Name Books* of the later nineteenth century recorded three occurrences of place –names with this element in South Uist. “Cairidh Mhór – fish wier applied to a creek on north side of Loch Shealive – 1m to east of Strome Calternish” (*Book 11*, 122), “Poll na Cairidh – ?Stoneybay, south side of Loch Skipport” and “Bagh na Cairidh Mòire / Abhain na Cairidh Mòire” (*Book 13*, 100). Only one of these places has any possible evidence for a stone trap. The fishtrap at one is still in use, with a net serving for the trap, which reminds us that the majority of fishtraps were constructed of perishable materials. The problem of the South Uist examples is their dating, their description in the Ordnance Survey Name Book suggests their use in the nineteenth century, but there are some problems in interpreting when they came into use.

At the end of the sixteenth century, despite the anonymous writer’s claims about the unskilled fishing of Skye and Lewis, quoted above (Skene 1886-90: III, 429-30), another description said of Skye, there is an “abundance of all kynd of fish ... and there are litle rivers ... where there are abundance of salmond fish slayne” (MacFarlane 1907, 183). Also stating that in Lewis, in a river running into ‘Loghbervais’ there were “thrie thousand bigg salmond slayne ... in anno 1585” (ibid. 185). Most appear to have been caught in rivers, or river mouths, such as that described at ‘Loghdua’ (ibid., 185). A century later Martin Martin (1994, 156) revealed that a similar method was still in use in Barra, using three lines of nets. In Lewis in the nineteenth century blankets were often used instead of nets (Baldwin 1982, 165). Dean Munro described the dyke built at the mouth of Loch Bee, in South Uist, and said that “thair is gottin amang the roch stanes of the dyke ... flewkis, podlokis, schaytis and little hering stikand fast amang the stanes” (in Munro 1961, 77). Nets were used elsewhere

on the Clann Ragnail estates. By 1764, a tack for the chief's fishings on Loch Shiel allowed the undertaker "to cut small trees for making stovs for a stell fishing of birch or alder at the sight of the Wood Keeper they paying ... such price as they shall please to name or appoint" (GD201/2/40). Neilson suggests that these were small in number and that like in Morvern salmon were only a minor export: "Salmon caught at Kinlochalin there are a few Barrells yearly Cured and Exported with the Fish of the water of Lochie that are Cured at Fort William" (1755).

With the exception of Munro none of these cases refer to Uist, in fact Uist is conspicuous in being not referred to in these earlier descriptions in regard to fishing as an economic activity. The only other exception is Bishop Lesley's account of 1596, which described "Eusta [as bearing] ... plentie of beir and aites, gude garse, and plesand pastoral, it mairatouer abundes in peple, mony lochis it hes, riuieris bot ane, welthie in Salmont" (Dalrymple *et al.* 1888-95: I, 57). The scarcity of remains of stone fishtraps in South Uist need not indicate a lack of inland fishing there. This method may have been supplemented by exploiting natural tidal bowls, nets and wooden wicker traps from at least the sixteenth century, and probably earlier.

As is obvious from the above quotations there was a preoccupation with salmon in inland and coastal fishings, this despite the fact that in principal, all salmon fisheries in Scotland belonged to the crown (Coull 1996, 7-8). Throughout the seventeenth century Argyll Estate documents show a great desire to control rights of access and use of inland fisheries (see sasines in Campbell 1933: I, 64, 75, 154, 155: II, 147, 153, 213, 475, 479).

In contrast to this evidence we know that Hebridean catches were sufficiently numerous to be worth taxing and they became a large proportion of what was paid in dues by Hebridean chiefs to the church. A 1621 Tack of Teinds from the Bishop of Isles to Rory McLeod of Dunvegan reveals the extent they worked within these obligations:



*With all sindrie commodities fredomes liberties and richteous pertinentis  
quhatsumevir perteining and belonging yairto ffriellie, quietlie weill and in  
peax, but only revocation obstacle impediment or agane calling  
quhatsumevir exptand and reservand alwayes forth of yis present tak ye  
teind fisches yat sal happin to be slayne and takin zeirlie and ilk zeir during  
ye spaice foirsaid within ye seas and loches within ye landis and baroneis  
expressed and particularlie (MacLeod 1938-39: I, 63).*

And again in a following tack of the same year which called for “1/3 of sheaves, excepting the teind fish caught in the seas adjacent to his lands” (ibid.: I, 65). The large numbers of salmon these sources suggest were caught indicates some effort, and it does indicate some form of trade or export, in addition to local consumption. Some of the salmon may have been traded directly with the foreign and Lowland Scottish fishermen who frequented the Islands in great numbers. Amongst the complaints made by Lowland Scottish fishermen in 1623 about ‘strangearis’ the Outer Hebrides was “that the cuntrey people sellis thair fisheis unto thame” (RPCS: XIII, 308), the problem presumably being that the trade was thus being denied to them. It may be that these taxes were deliberately targeted at the fishing industry and not the local populace. In fact the Bishop of the Isles was singled out by for his heavy duties in July 1623 in a list of ‘Grievances of Lowland burroughs’:

*The merchantis of this kingdome ar preiudged in the payment of the exsyse  
and teynd fishe exactit be the bischope of the Illis, quhilkis tua burdeynis do  
presse ws so saire as thair is no gayne of oure fisheing (HP: III, 316-7).*

However, the Lowland burghs were evidently more interested in large-scale herring fishing rather than salmon. It would seem then that their fishing techniques differed from that of the Hebrideans, who had little centralised fishing industry of their own and employed the crude traps and techniques, described above. If this was the case then late sixteenth-century descriptions of Hebridean fishermen as ‘unskilled’, may have been accurate.

Salmon do not appear in Fynes Moryson's 1598 list of exports from the "Westerne parts of *Scotland*", unlike the "red and pickled Herrings, Sea coales, and Aquavitæ" which Hebrideans were said to "carry into Ireland and Neighbouring places" (Brown 1891, 87). Even by the latter eighteenth century, after much endeavour to encourage the fishing industry in the western seaboard, most fishermen only caught fish for their own plate, although this was blamed on a lack of market (Anderson 1785, 17). Only cod, ling, tusk and herring were exported. Having only lately learnt to catch basking sharks (ibid.), thousands of poor in Long Isle were said to survive only from dogfish in winter and spring (Knox 1787, 102). Yet, eighteenth-century fishermen did not undertake industrialised marine fishing, but took their catches from small boats and by angling from the shore.

The accounts of Bonnie Prince Charlie's travels provide some information about the use of smaller islands in the fishing of the time. Several accounts record that they landed in the Sound of Harris on "a little desart island where some fishermen who had little houses like swine's huts" (Edward Bourk's account transcribed by Forbes 1895, 192) where they found "a great quantity of Cod & ling in heaps upon the shoar" (O'Sullivan's account in Tayler & Tayler 1938, 183). Many of them account for the smallness of the hut: "we cant get into it, but by breaking down part of it, for it was like a pig-sty" (ibid.). The fish appears to have been intended for salting, for alongside them was "half a barrel of salt and a pot" (Neil MacEachann in Blaikie 1916, 237).

By 1632 there is evidence in the Seaforth Muniments that the creeks of north-west and north-east Lewis were served by small fishing boats, as were those around Skye, and that these vessels were primarily employed in line-fishing (Shaw 1980). Away from the foreign use of Loch nam Madaidh (Martin 1994, 130), or 'Uiskway' in Benbecula, where the occasional herring was said to be taken (ibid. 149), little evidence survives for the coasts off Uist. This perhaps stems from a response to the local topography, Uist presenting less of the creeks and good harbours as compared with Harris (ibid., 111), the majority occurring on the more isolated coastlines, in the east, north and south. The western machair, adjacent to the majority of historic settlement, provides shallow shores, on which it is very difficult to beach

boats safely. Some of the rocky points, such as Rubha Aird a'Mhuile, provide safe anchorages for small boats and may have done so in the past. The changing face of the machair means that there may have been more rocky promontories during the medieval period. For example the beach near the Sithean Biorach Norse site has a rocky outcrop off the present coast, it has been suggested that this would have formed a small harbour when the site was occupied (Parker Pearson pers. comm.). However, it is unlikely that there would have been many such promontories.

Geddes's (1948, 56) work show that in Lewis the community of the Bailtean came together to man, and possibly provide for the boats themselves. Of all fishing boats in Lewis in 1630 Captain Dymes said that "There beinge in the Island not above a dozen boates which doe kill anie fish for sale" (MacKenzie 1903, 593). The majority must have been small vessels employed in catching for the crew and their families. Some for winter provisions:

*The natives preserve and dry their herring without salt, for the space of eight months, provided they are taken after the tenth of September, they use no other art in it but take out their guts, and then tying a rush about their necks, hang them by pairs upon a rope made of heath cross a house (Martin 1994, 200).*

By the eighteenth century most boats were owned by tacksmen, such as William MacDonald of Canna, who in 1742 fished for herring, with four boats of his own, which mingled with fifty other boats in the surrounding waters (Knox 1787, 81). Knox reporting to the Fisheries Board noted that these, like most Highland fishing boats had a sail or four oars, and were crewed by six or seven men, who sang or were accompanied by a bagpipe. Due to their size and being open topped they could not go far from the shore, nor be away for much over seven or ten days. Any hope for export was hampered by a need of salt for preservation (ibid., 90: Anderson 1785, 16). In South Uist Walker noted that MacDonald of Baghasdal was the only proprietor who encouraged fishing in the latter eighteenth century, yet he also



observed that the industry was dependant on lesser members of society, who could not afford to support it:

*Though many of the Poorer sort of the Inhabitants, are very expert in Fishing, perfectly well skilled in curing the Fish, and abundantly sensible of the Profits upon the Fishery: yet their Poverty and distant situation renders the Difficulty of acquiring Boats, Salt and Tackling insurmountable (McKay 1980, 82).*

He suggested handling methods, with four men and a headman, fishing for flounders, cod and conger eel (ibid, 80-82). By this period saithe and other fish could be caught by the use of an enlarged landing net, *tàbhan*, a tool which had parallels elsewhere in Atlantic Scotland from at least the 1500s, although the origins in the Uists appear to have been Norse. Dean Munro noted these being used for catching haddock and whiting in Lewis, also highlighting the unusual inclusion of “Laddes and lasses and women” amongst the fishers (Munro 1961, 87). Beveridge (1911, 323) described flounders being caught by women with spears, who stood in shallow tidal runs, using bare feet to feel in the sand for the fish. In Caithness and the Northern Isles saithe were an essential element in the diet and economy of the poor, providing lamp oil as well as food (Baldwin 1982, 192).

There was a tradition in North Uist in the 1800s that the Siol Ghoraidh had encouraged salt manufacturing in the fourteenth century, located at Lirinis (Fergusson & Macdonald 1984: 23), with enough being produced to sell to Dutch, Swedes and French vessels until it was banned by Edinburgh and the activities of Elizabeth I and James VI (ibid., 25, 40). How much weight should be placed behind these traditions is open to debate, especially regarding the dates, as the eighteenth-century reporters to the Fisheries Board were all too aware that salt taxes were limiting the industry (Anderson 1785, lix). There is some evidence, however, that herrings were preserved for export, either by drying, pickling or, as with sea birds, in seaweed ash (Martin 1994, 159).

Seventeenth-century Improvers, such as the Earl's of Sutherland, complained at length about what they saw as the lack of zeal and enthusiasm for fishing, also noting something about the land-bound fishing habits of Highlanders:

*The principall comodities of Strathnaver ar cattle and fishing, not onlie salmond (whereof they have great store), bot also they have such abundance off all other kynds of fishes in the ocean, that they apprehend great numbers of all sorts at ther verie doores; yea, in the winter season, among the rocks, without much trouble, they take and apprehend everie day so much fish onlie as will suffice them for the tyme, and doe care for no greater provision or store. Iff the inhabitants wer industrious they might gane much by these fishes; bot the people of that cuntrey are so farr naturallie given to idleness, that they cannot apply themselves to labour, which they esteem a disparagement and derogation unter their gentilitie (Gordon 1813, 11)*

The parallels between this comment and those made by Tudor and Stuart writers about Gaelic Irish fishing habits (e.g. Moryson 1890, 423) are perhaps too close to allow Gordon's claims to be taken at face value, and possibly reveals more about early improving or Protestant industrialist zeal than Gaelic society. The possibility of small scale sea fishing by Uisteach in boats possibly preceded the eighteenth century, the lack of evidence in the documents stemming from the preoccupation of the writers with commercial exploitation overlooking local usage. It may be a modern misconception of the Uists as an island, rather than a piece of land that leads modern writers to presume that islanders would have automatically been primed to exploit this resource. This may ignore the possibility that islanders could have looked inland to inland resources to define themselves and their economy, which may account for the apparent lack of fishing in the documentary sources. However, Rixson (1998, 36-7) has suggested, on the basis of English records in Ireland, that Scottish galleys were used for fishing there, and that they were thus used for that activity at home. If he is right that such prestigious items were used for such behaviour, then prior to the Statutes of Iona, and the destruction of the galleys, the fishing off the Hebridean coasts

may have been under the control of chiefs. There is some further evidence to indicate the direct role of some of the larger chiefs in fishing, both by boat and net. In 1586 MacKenzie of Kintail was charged to “remove his coble, fischearis, and nettis fra the fischeing of the Watter of Conane ... and desist and ceis thairfra in tyme cuming” (RPCS IV, 65). Smaller, independent, boats may have also been employed, but the destruction of the galleys may account for the decline of the Hebridean fishing industry in the seventeenth century, although, given the evidence this is hard to substantiate.

By the early nineteenth century the tacksman for Baghasdal stated that fishings between Barra and Eriskay would move to the middle of the sound, not as they had done before (in Frazer-MacKintosh 1847, 331), suggesting some change had taken place over the boundaries between fishings. To emphasise their ownership Baghasdal’s tenants began hauling boats onto the sands exposed at ebb tide, to get worms for bait, erecting huts, starting fires and ripping up grass to stop line entanglement (ibid.). As well as showing the intense desire/need to define fishings, this may show an extension of the township and runrig system into the sea, such as that described by Carmichael:

*A curious custom prevails among the people of Barra of apportioning their boats to their fishing banks at sea, much as they apportion their cows to their grazing grounds on land. The names, positions, extent, characteristics, and capabilities of these banks are as well known to them as those of their crofts.*

*The people meet at church on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of February ... the Festival of St Bridget; and having ascertained among themselves the number of boats engaged in the long line fishing, they assign these boats in proportionate numbers among the banks according to the fishing capabilities of each bank. The men then draw lots, each head-man drawing the lot for his crew ... Should a bank prove unproductive, the boats of that bank are invariably*



*allowed to distribute themselves among the other grazing banks, the boats of which are then at liberty to try the deserted bank (1916, 51-52).*

However, MacDonald's report (1810, 792) reveals that this system was unlikely to have had much antiquity. He claimed that it was only in 1794 that MacNeil got the fishermen of Barra to take lots for fishings at an annual general meeting. These were "subdivided by landmarks, well known and familiar to the natives", then counted as property for the year, an admiral was also appointed to solve disputes.

### **12.15 Non-Uisteach Exploitation of Hebridean Waters**

Most of the early descriptions were concerned with herring fishing, and as Martin Martin revealed of Skye fisheries, they were "generally known to strangers" (1994, 199). In 1566 the Kings of Scotland had noted the wealth to be derived from fishing: "it hes plesit God to oppin ane greit commoditie to the common weill of this realme throw the fischeing of Lochbrume and utheris lochis of the north seyis" (RPCS: I, 482). However, Lowland fisheries from the Clyde may have been exploiting herring around the Isles from the thirteenth century when the crown tried to encourage royal control through the burghs. Despite sending naval vessels to protect the fleets, they could not compete with Dutch fleets (Coull 1996, 54-67). From around this mid 1500s the Scottish Court began to endeavour to intensify control and tax of fishing traffic, first they tried to exclude continental fishermen and further encourage fishing vessels from the lowland burghs (RPCS: IV, 123-4; VI, 428). By 1670 large fleets of up to fifty boats frequented the west coast lochs, with unusual large nets, as well as small common ones. Their catch was salted and sold abroad (Fraser 1905, 494). There are many complaints by the Lowland fishermen about competition from French, Spanish and Dutch fishing fleets, although it is likely that these European fishermen had been exploiting these waters for a considerable period. Archaeological evidence for Dutch exploitation of Hebridean fisheries is provided by the late seventeenth-century graves of a Dutch fishing crew, found at Aiginis, Lewis (McCullagh & McCormick 1991).

The Irish coast had been targeted for their catch by English fishermen from the late 1400s (O'Neill 1987, 30-37), although these waters are likely to have attracted foreign fishers from much earlier. Bergen and the Scandinavians had held a relative monopoly over the North Atlantic until the latter half of the fourteenth century, their collapse, along with the abandonment of Greenland, left the North open to expansion from other areas. By 1411 Bristol had established themselves as far north as Iceland, if not out towards Newfoundland (Oleson 1963, 123, 138). It seems likely that if the English were so quick to fill this void they had been spreading north for some period. The European herring industry had concentrated on the Baltic and North Sea from the eleventh century, however, the Baltic shoals disappeared between the 1300 and 1400s. Along with technological advances in the preservation of the catch this caused north Europeans, such as the Dutch, to look further afield (Braudel 1981, 215). If the surrounding waters were being exploited it is more than probable that the Hebridean waters were in use too.

## **12.16 Industry**

Apart from the kilns seen at Bornais, and the herring fishing there is little hard evidence for how the products of the medieval landscape of South Uist were transformed into tradable products to bring profit for the chiefs. Some evidence comes from the oral traditions of North Uist. According to nineteenth-century North Uist oral history, in the fourteenth century the Siol Ghoraidh encouraged salt and tanning industries, mainly at Lirinis, and patronised a craft school at Loch nam Madadh (Fergusson & Macdonald 1984, 23) and Christina, the Countess of Mar, had a school at a nunnery, teaching girls manual crafts (ibid., 120). In the next century, from 1423, the incoming MacVicars/Clann Biochar set up a 'collastrach', or skills schools, at Heisgeir, Cairinis, Cille Pheadair, Sannd, Loch nam madadh and Baile Sear. These were supposedly for both sexes, and taught tanning, weaving, soap-making, pottery work, flax weaving, dyeing, oil extraction, milling, brewing, distilling, salt manufacture, nature study, astronomy and navigation (ibid., 173). From 1539 Donald Gruamach, of Sleat, encouraged further industry at the Rubha Ghriminis Dubh, where they used to cut quern stones for export. He is also remembered for having organised drainage

and store works and building up craft schools (*ibid.*, 220). These traditions may reflect memories of historical reality, but it is possible that stories regarding an industrial Gaelic past, stem from a mix of a need to counteract Gaelic disenfranchisement and the nineteenth-century protestant work ethic of the North Uist story tellers.

Activities such as tanning, weaving, dyeing, brewing, distilling and oil extraction, all undoubtedly took place, but were probably undertaken within the home, rather than being centralised and controlled by the social elite. No remains of clusters of tanning pits, or pre-eighteenth-century stills have yet been discovered, although little concerted effort has been made to identify these types of sites in the archaeological record. Pottery making also appears to have been a home based economy. Although perhaps being rather sycophantic Robert Gordon (1813, 313) noted the Earls of Sutherland building salt works in Sutherland in 1614, as an original act in the north. This date is revealing in that it is around this time that the change in the nature of chiefship appears to have started. It was only in the seventeenth century that Hebridean chiefs began to try and exact control over the produce of the land.

Most households would have preserved the skins of their stock and been skilled in making objects from them, although Hugh Miller (1889, 17) noted an artisan making shoes in Eigg by the latter 1800s. Hides and cheeses were amongst the products traded with the Lowlands in the Middle Ages (Grant 1930), but around the beginning of the seventeenth century cattle began to be driven south for sale in large numbers. The very first drover being said to be the hero of the Battle of Carinis and kinsman to the Clann Ragnaill, Donald MacIain 'ic Seamus (Mackenzie 1881, 257). Throughout the century the markets of England were opened up (Fenton 1977, 133) and the Hebridean chiefs reacted by making Black Cattle the main export from the Isles into the eighteenth century (Dodgshon 1998, 113, 196).

In contrast dominance over milling and other industries was certainly a feature of later medieval Gaelic lordships in the mainland and Central Highlands, and was certainly thought



part of the lords prerogative. In his comic *A Poem About Women* the Lomond Bard revealed the commercial bias in lordships in the southern *Gàidhealtachd*:

*Even if I had twelve townships,  
Even though I were to build five hundred kilns  
And put a mill on every stream,  
I would hear it from the women.*  
(Newton 1999, 103).

Despite the lack of elite dominance over these activities in South Uist after the fourteenth century, it should not be thought that the chiefs would not have siphoned off a percentage of much of the resulting products in the form of rents and dues. It seems likely that they probably took the raw products. Those materials that could be made into higher quality goods would have been removed by the elite to be transformed into prestige items by their own craftsmen. There is little evidence at present, however, to support this.

## 12.17 Summary

Within *bailtean* their communities both lived and worked alongside one another, and whilst this perhaps was a result of social developments from the Norse period onwards (see Sections 11.9 to 11.11), it is possible that the choice to live alongside one another also echoed the economic and practical necessities of farming practice. Just as the dispersed farmsteads of the Norse period, sitting within demarcated enclosed fields reflected the independent status of their farmer-occupiers, by the end of the medieval period the community of the *bailtean* are notable for their co-operative behaviour. Although, whether co-operation was borne out of communal interests or practical necessity remains open to interpretation. Whilst some farmers may have been ‘free holders’ (see HP: I, 40), most held their land from a superior, and the majority of the populace were directly tied to the land by their place in the social hierarchy. They did not possess substantial resources in their own

right and their subjugation was negotiated through access to land and other resources that required capital investment, such as cattle and ploughs.

Whilst, at the end of the Middle Ages *bailtean* communities were indebted to the gentry for land, cattle and the tools of production, they appear to have been free from the economic domination that the gentry had espoused over their fourteenth-century forebears. In the fourteenth century the economy of South Uist, especially arable and fishing, appears to have been controlled, at least partially by the elite. The kilns of Bornais and An Udail show that some farms maintained a hold over arable agricultural production. However, it is likely that the Clann Ruairidh lords siphoned off some dues from this process, either as a direct tax, or in return for the administration of rights to multures and thirlage. Additionally, there appears to have been a local, industrialised fishing industry, centred on large farms and encouraged, controlled and protected, by the lords (see Sections 5.5 and 10.9). It is unclear who financed the purchase of boats and fishing-gear, or whether it was shared like ploughs in later periods. Along with other small-scale industries, which are suggested by local traditions but not verifiable from the archaeological record, local fishing and control of arable production disappeared sometime between 1400 and around 1600. The runrig community then, was not one that was overtly dominated by an elite that controlled economic activity at a daily or seasonal level. Instead, status and access to wealth bringing resources was more subtle, being mediated through socially endorsed mechanisms, such as socio-economic debt (couched in terms of reciprocity) and access to specific resources. It was only in the eighteenth century that direct economic control was re-established.

In contrast to the close integrated communities and social regulation of the *bailtean*, and associated runrig farming, was the freedom and otherness offered in the hills. Within the seasonal agricultural cycle the whole community could make use of the relative freedom provided by the wide undulating landscapes of the eastern coast. Much of this land may have also been the play ground of the elite, providing them with a large pastoral demesne to graze their substantial herds of cattle and hunting grounds. Large herds and access to hunting in themselves defined their social status, yet this may have been enhanced as the

hillside location was spatially distinct from the arable centred low status *bailtean*. This spatial distinctiveness also provided an opportunity for individuals to express social agency and opt out of the communal nature of the *bailtean* by occupying farms on the wild east coast. However, the fact that those found in the east were mostly of the tacksman class, may indicate it was only a viable option to the stratum of society already outwith the main body of the *baile* community. It is possible that given that the east coast farmers were already socially outside runrig society, the physical separation of their farms from the actually served to reinforce communal associations within the *bailtean*. The equation between social stratification and their ability to live without the sanction and support of the community may have served to bring home the dependency of most of the lower echelons upon the rest of the settlement's inhabitants.



### 13.1 Landscape and Lordship in the Norse Period

The late Norse period landscape in South Uist can be characterised by a settlement pattern that includes dispersed farmsteads, as well as the duns, churches and assembly sites, which occur alongside one another in a configuration of lordship. These settlements and monuments are mapped out across an administrative landscape composed of a hierarchy of taxation units. Combined, the settlement pattern and the tax system shed light on the structure of Norse period Hebridean society and changing developments as the Middle Ages unfolded.

Throughout the Norse period the farmstead was the basic building block of the settlement hierarchy (Sections 3.8 and 5.2). Norse cosmology indicates that these were conceptually separate and distinct from one another, and ensured that they were dispersed through the landscape (Section 5.3). It also meant that settlement focussed on arable land that was probably divided into an enclosed field-system (Section 5.4). In the eleventh century some farmsteads were small and poor, others were larger and richer, and centred on impressive halls. In its earlier phase the overall pattern of farmsteads may have descended from that established in the Viking Age, where landholders took up bounded units of farmland which were held by odal right – free from the bonds of vassalage. In the following centuries many halls became central to small clusters of buildings, yet it is likely that this reflects a pattern of settlement growth and splitting that is reflected throughout the Norse world. In this system, as the families of the farm-holders grew, the farms split up to create independent farming units within the wider boundaries of the farm; then the cycle would begin again. This created core farms on the most productive arable land, occasionally signified by the place-name *bost*, and secondary farms on poorer ground, notable by place-names including the word *gearraidh*.

It is clear that the larger farmsteads were also central to social and economic activities. The presence of grain kilns, which are absent from smaller farmsteads, shows that they dominated agricultural surpluses, and other evidence reveals that small scale industrial activity was taking place (Section 5.5). Herring exploitation in particular indicates that some farm owners held considerable political and financial clout and possessed, or could call in social debts, sufficient enough resources to organise, invest in and profit from an industry that tapped into a sea-borne trade network that extended to markets in England and Ireland (Section 5.6).

At some point, possibly in the eleventh century, the dues, taxes and military services (whether land based or in the form of ship service) that may have previously been exacted from the inhabitants of the Isles were regularised; settlement was assessed and pennylands, quarterlands and ouncelands/*tírean unga* were imposed across the landscape. A *tír unga* was composed of twenty pennylands and/or four quarterlands, worth five pennylands each. The *tír unga* appears to have been the most important unit in South Uist during the Norse period (Sections 3.2 to 3.9). Not only was it at this level that food renders and military dues were exacted but they were laid out in east-west strips across the island. This ensured that the inhabitants of each *tír unga* had access to all the resources the environment had to offer (Section 3.8). At one level this seems to have been reflective of an idealised concept of the structure of society that was a blend of structures borrowed from Early Medieval Irish law and the Carolingian multiple estate. Within the resulting system the pennyland became equivalent to the land farmed by one homestead, the quarterland to the minor-noble 'household' (denoted by holding five clients – five pennyland farmholders), and the *tír unga* to a higher level of nobility. The quarterland may, however, also have denoted the number of farms thought necessary to co-operate in the majority of agricultural activities. The fact that the *tírean unga* were laid out on an island basis, with both North and South Uist being assessed at ten *tírean unga*, would appear to confirm that the tax reflected an idealised state of affairs. However, in contrast, although each *tír unga* retained an assessment of twenty pennylands, later medieval townships were assessed at various numbers of pennylands (Sections 3.13). A number of *tírean unga* were also composed of one original farm and one

*gearraidh* farm, suggesting that there may have been some correlation of the *tír unga* with the original boundaries of the odal farmstead, which provided a limit to expansion and taxation (Sections 3.8). These two observations may indicate that there was an attempt to marry the idealised social construct with physical reality. It is hard to reconcile these two spheres effectively. Nevertheless, the importance of the *tír unga* is evident as it was at this level that later parishes (Sections 3.6 and 3.7) were constructed and it was on their boundaries that the monuments of power (duns, churches and assembly places) were distributed (Section 6.6, and 7.13 to 7.15).

It is possible that the *tírean unga* had their origins in the pre-Viking Iron Age, but the evidence for this is inconclusive (Section 3.2). Partly the question of antiquity is blurred by the relationship of the *tír unga* with churches and assembly sites, which occur alongside one another on their boundaries. This is a common locational pattern for such monuments throughout prehistory as well as the early Middle Ages, so it is possible that later political structures were deliberately mapped out to situate these monuments on newly created boundaries (Sections 7.13 to 7.15). This problem could be partially resolved if the pre-Viking ecclesiastical structure could be reconstructed and continuity substantiated, but the evidence is, unfortunately, contradictory (Section 6.2).

Architectural evidence for churches do not survive for most of the *cille* sites. Most have been swamped by the graveyards that grew up around, and eventually over them, although the main parish church at Cille Pheadair may have been washed out to sea. An alternative site for the Cille Pheadair church and Cille Bhanain are obscured by later buildings. Medieval structures only survive at Cille Donnain and Hoghmor (Section 6.3). The complex of structures at Hoghmor reveal a change from an earlier phase of small cells, possibly housing a small monastic community, through several phases of enlargement and the creation of larger churches specifically designed to provide access to the wider community (Section 6.4). This reveals significant developments in the nature of ecclesiastical patronisation. The early community was primarily geared to the personal salvation of the monks themselves and their lordly patrons; however, from the twelfth century there was a



greater attempt to provide pastoral care to the populace and the new structures probably acted as a parish church served by a priest. This may in turn reveal a change to the reformed church, also reflected in the architectural styles employed in building the churches. It is possible that as Hoghmoir (and presumably Cille Pheadair, although the structures do not survive) came to serve the parish it came to overshadow the other *cilles*, a number of which may have become outlying chapels prior to their eventual abandonment later in the medieval period (Section 6.7).

In addition to these churches and chapels, sited on the low-lying grounds of the east coast adjacent to the arable lands, there are a number of other place-names with ecclesiastical associations. These are located in the hills on the western side of the island, usually directly on the coast itself at the mouths of the sea lochs and/or embarkation points. Buildings were only found at two of these sites, although a number have crude *altarach*. It seems likely that most of these sites were designed for open-air communion to provide pastoral care to maritime travellers and the population tending their animals in the hills during the summer months (Section 6.3).

The presence of *cilles* on the *tírean unga* boundaries partly suggests that they were sited to maximise the provision of pastoral care (Section 6.6): however, it is clear that the situation was more complex. These were also the locations for assemblies and duns. The evidence for assembly in South Uist is limited, but it is evident from material elsewhere in the Highlands and Islands that assembly sites were often focussed upon prehistoric monuments: standing stones, burial and settlement mounds. They were public arenas for a number of practices, ranging from the inauguration of kings and heads of kindreds, law making, tax and due collection and payment, judicial administration through to local decision making processes. Assemblies were also accompanied by horse racing and fairs (Sections 7.13 to 7.16).

Throughout the western seaboard the central role of brochs and duns, that had been in decline for most of the Late Iron Age, came to a finalé at the end of the eighth century. It

may be no more than coincidence that this took place around the same time as the first Viking raids are recorded, but they continued unused throughout the Viking Age (Section 7.3). What limited evidence there is suggests that duns began to be reoccupied from the thirteenth century onwards (Section 7.3), and that they remained an important element of the political landscape throughout the rest of the Middle Ages. The environment of South Uist meant that the duns were built on loch based crannogs, but the pattern was reflected throughout less waterlogged regions on hilltop and coastal promontory forts. Although the re-use often incorporated the building of free-standing structures within and around the duns, this marked a change from the farm-based and less monumental halls of the elite in the earlier Norse period. The lack of evidence for an escalation of violence in this period leads to the conclusion that the reoccupation of duns was part of another process: the Gaelicisation of the Norse Hebrideans. The duns were recognised as being part of the indigenous pre-Viking landscape and it is likely that by living in duns the elite were attempting to claim descent from the older inhabitants. Through the mechanism of occupying the old monuments of power they were legitimising their own position in society. Nowhere is this more evident than in the naming of duns after the founders of kindreds, both real and fictitious, which was a deliberate strategy to tie the occupation of the land linked to the dun to the lineage. It also served to integrate the possession of the dun and the land into the genealogy of the kin-group, thus the dun became more than a habitation, it functioned as the monumental seat of the head of the lineage. Use denoted ownership and rights over the land and its other inhabitants (Sections 7.5 to 7.8). Some of crannogs may have only been occupied seasonally, and thus may have been linked to transhumance (Section 7.9). However, this role may have become more important in the later Middle Ages as lordships grew in size and the heads of kin groups exercised power over larger and dispersed territories, necessitating occasional use as lords progressed around their estates and administered the duties that their position required.

Although fundamentally very different forms of monuments, the enclosed secular dun, the ecclesiastic church and the public assembly site, formed a collective that had a close locational relationship with one another. In some cases they were sited directly alongside

one another, in others they were dispersed through the landscape, but connected by route ways. There is also a consistent pattern of association with islands; at least one site was situated upon a natural island or a crannog and another on the mainland: often a natural island without any structural remains upon can also be included in this collective. Execution sites are also usually situated nearby (Sections 7.13 to 7.16).

The phasing of the establishment of each of these spheres of public, lordly and ecclesiastical administration is unclear. Whilst it seems likely that public assembly was part of the political landscape in the earlier Norse period, as it is found throughout the Norse and Gaelic Diasporas, the church and secular authorities may have established their influence over public affairs at different times. It is possible that the church was the latest addition to the trinity, and was a result of a deliberate strategy to establish both Christianity over earlier pagan religious connotations associated with assembly and the authority and influence of the church over society. The elite's patronisation of the building of a church alongside their semi-fortified homesteads is a feature of settlement in the Northern Isles and Scandinavia, so an alternative possible scenario may be envisaged, where the secular elite deliberately patronised church building in order to provide a cosmological sanction to their position. It would have further legitimated and formalised secular control over public assembly. Ecclesiastical power would also have benefited from this latter pattern of development as it would additionally have consolidated the presence and influence of the church in daily and political affairs. Through time these authorities gradually extended their power over society through the appropriation of elements of public assembly (such as important decision making, the reciprocal acceptance of dues and giving of gifts and judicial administration) and brought these discourses inside the enclosed arena of their households. The more mundane and everyday roles of assembly continued outside.

The varying fates and fortunes of South Uist's lords are reflected in its parishes. When first laid out, the parishes of the two Uists were laid out to form regularised blocks of five *tírean unga*, although smaller islands, such as Barra and Benbecula, formed smaller groups of whole *tírean unga*, reflecting their size. The two parishes, Sgìre Hògh and Cille Pheadair,



were rarely incorporated in charters together, perhaps suggesting that they were regarded as belonging to two separate lordships/kindreds throughout most of the Norse period. By the early fourteenth century the parish of Cille Pheadair had expanded to become Ceann a Deas, which additionally incorporated Barra and perhaps the Bishop's Isles. However, these additions were separated from Cille Pheadair by the end of the century. It is likely that the incorporation and ceding of Barra reflect the fortunes of the Clann Ruairidh and Clann Neill lordships (Sections 3.6 and 3.7).

The archaeological and historical evidence attests to several wider-ranging social developments during the Norse period, most notably the change in the forms of landholding and lordship. In the earlier Norse period some odal landholders managed to manipulate social and economic debt to gain support from other landholders and sway the decisions made during public assembly, this eventually created minor local chiefs living in halls and large farmsteads. The landholders were tied to pay dues to greater chiefs and kings and possibly acted as 'clients' to them, yet throughout the Norse period it appears there was an increasing trend towards centralising power in the hands of fewer individuals, who began occupying duns. These monuments serving as symbols of power imbued with mythological links to the past. Either through secular patronage or by deliberate internal strategy ecclesiastical authorities increasingly sanctified the chiefs' influence. These local chiefdoms became subject to wider processes, formalising clientship into a more recognisable system of vassalage directly tied to the emerging lordships of more powerful kindreds in the Late Medieval period.

### **13.2 Landscape and Lordship in the Later Middle Ages**

After 1266 the settlement landscape of South Uist reveals a pattern of continuity and development followed by considerable change around 1400. Although trends set in place during the Norse period were initially uninterrupted they were enveloped and incorporated into increasingly more complex social developments that reflected new concepts about hierarchy and lordship (Section 11.2). The spatial and symbolic semantics that were

expressed in the settlement landscape that developed over the thirteenth and fourteenth century reflected the desire of Hebridean lords to adopt and adapt to European and feudalised styles of lordship. In the centuries that followed 1400, there appears to have been a significant shift away from the centralised and segregated 'feudal' landscape. By 1600 a less bounded landscape, with less economic and hierarchical social segregation reveals a changed society, less concerned with social and economic centralisation in the hands of a limited strata of society. Instead of following European styles of lordship, society seems to have looked to Ireland and common kinship for ideas about how society should be constructed (Section 11.3 and Chapter 12). There is little concrete evidence for settlement between circa 1400 and circa 1550 (Sections 11.5 to 11.8). However, several models exist to explain how the structure of society in South Uist developed through this transition. These explanations have ramifications for understanding changes in Hebridean culture as much as social and economic developments.

The fourteenth-century settlement landscape can be portrayed as pyramidal. At the uppermost pinnacle was the lord's castle in all its monumental splendence (Chapter 9). Below this were duns (Chapter 10), and churches. The latter were built under the lord's patronisation in the latest architectural Romanesque and later Gothic styles to reflect the glory of the lords as much the Lord (Section 8.4). At its base were farmsteads occupied by all levels of society, rich and poor, and these can be divided into larger clusters of buildings with centralised industrial (fish processing and iron working) and agricultural (kilns and possibly milling) activity and single, less well off homesteads (Sections 5.6, 11.2, 12.12 and 12.13). The theme of centralisation is continuous throughout the hierarchy, ecclesiastical organisation became focussed on parish churches (Section 8.4) and certain duns came to over-shadow others (Sections 7.7, 9.3 and 10.2). The most important duns were often then replaced with castles (Section 9.3). Centralisation is further reflected in the accumulation of resources and the investment in the patronisation of these monumental architectural ventures.

The Hebridean castle may lack many of the classic features that were adopted by castle builders throughout much of Europe, but then a large number, including Eilean Tioram, the

seat of the Clann Ruairidh, predated the majority of stone-built castles in mainland Scotland, Gaelic Ireland and Scandinavia. It is possible that the early construction of mortared masonry castles was linked to new practices of primogeniture and formal taxation that gave the lords direct control over the duns and the land. Whatever the case, Hebridean lords bypassed their neighbours and bought straight into European concepts of the role of castles and how they functioned. This reflected their cultural independence, as much as political, or even military. However, in many ways the castles that were built along the western seaboard reflected indigenous interpretations of those European concepts of lordship (Sections 9.2 and 9.3). Like the duns that they replaced, castles continued to be viewed as the embodiment of the lord and his right of lordship over associated lands, whether the lords' estates or demesne. Just as when the lord died the poets lamented the death of the land and the emptiness of the castle, it is clear that the castle additionally became home to the new lord. This connection was also replicated through the share a *táinaiste* could have in the castle and the mechanisms by which a head of one kindred and lordship became a warden/constable for another as the latter gained superiority over the territory (Sections 9.2 to 9.4 and 9.9).

Unlike many castles throughout Europe, Hebridean ones rarely show any relationship with arable resources, often being situated in marginal and coastal locations. The fact that they were not sited to present a daily and monumental reference point upon ploughed land or a farming populace reveals that their lordly patrons were not primarily concerned with expressing their control over arable resources and their influence over its farmers. Instead, castles were developed out of duns in maritime locations, often, but not always, with wide view sheds of the main seaways, and almost always presiding over the few harbours on either side of the Minch. Although some duns without view sheds of the Minch had been reoccupied these did not become embellished into castles, and often fell out of use over the Middle Ages. This reveals that Hebridean lords intended their castles to be seen primarily from harbours, but perhaps the sea in general, and to impose their monumentality upon sea users. Whilst, some military forces would have come by sea this does not explain why castles were concerned with harbours and often lack even basic defensibly wall walks, despite the building of machicolations and crenellations that present a falsely defensive



appearance. It seems more likely that any defensive action was the mounting of a sea-borne counter offensive: however, this is perhaps to miss the point. Hebridean castles were not built upon nodal points within a maritime seascape for martial reasons. View sheds and harbour locations reveal that they *were* situated to monitor and dominate the seaways, but were primarily targeted to enforce the extraction of taxes on merchantile and fishing vessels for travelling through their waters, exploiting their fishing grounds, protecting them from the piracy of others and sheltering in their harbours (Sections 9.5 and 9.6).

Additionally, castles provided an impressive arena for the lords to stage their interactions with their vassals, the rest of the *fine* and clansmen. Over the later Middle Ages this may have come to be increasingly important because as lordships grew in size and some lineages extended their influence over others many people were increasingly distanced from the lord geographically, the lords personal interaction with their subjects became increasingly intermittent. For most expressions of lordship (such as feasting, the uplifting of hospitality and other dues and the administration of justice) came to be limited to the circuit as the lord and his household progressed around his estates (Sections 9.7 to 9.9).

Although there are no castles in South Uist, they retained a prominent and symbolic position within the settlement mentality and were central to Clann Ruairidh expressions of lordship. Caisteal Bhuirgh, in Benbecula, is one of the few Hebridean examples that can be interpreted as showing a concern with local settlement and economic resources as it has wide vistas of the nearby arable land and fishing grounds. When it was first built it was also dominant over the only harbour on the Atlantic side of the Long Isle. Its position by the sea may show that the builders of Caisteal Bhuirgh had the same concerns as their neighbours. However, this instance of a Hebridean castle's positioning within more traditional European siting strategies possibly reveals a local expression of the 'feudal' nature of Clann Ruairidh power, similar to that which they were expressing in their charters (Section 10.9).

Alongside castles, away from the coastal harbours, the *fine* continued to occupy smaller, less monumental dwellings: duns. Through this architectural medium the conceptual link to the

founders of lineages, and thus to the contemporary leaders of that kindred, were maintained, and through this the dun's occupier was directly tied to the land. Over the course of the Middle Ages they were increasingly managed in the same way that castles were: as permanent and seasonal residences for the chief and his family, prisons, refuges from temporary attack etc. As estates grew they were adapted to the new geographies of lordship, being occupied occasionally as a lord progressed around his estates and/or managed by a warden of a vassal kindred in the lords absence (Sections 10.2 to 10.6).

Sometime between 1400 and 1600 there was a considerable change in both the settlement hierarchy and settlement pattern (Sections 1.2 to 11.4). It is only after 1700 that a clear picture of the settlement pattern emerges, from maps and documents. By this time, unlike the extended families that occupied scattered farmsteads in the Norse period, the majority of the population were then living in larger communities occupying semi-nucleated *bailtean* in an open-field landscape (Sections 11.3, 11.10 and Chapter 12). Unfortunately, the existing corpus of archaeological data for the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries is limited. As a result any discussion of the transition between around 1400 and around 1550 has to remain speculative. However, by the later sixteenth century a clearer picture of the result of the change can be proposed. The tradition of building longhouses, of the style popular throughout the Norse period, had been abandoned in favour of small amorphous structures (Section 11.8). Pottery styles had also changed (Section 11.7). The vernacular architectural and ceramic changes follow a trend seen on both sides of the Irish Sea and may be interpreted as a material manifestation of the Gaelic Revival of the latter Middle Ages. In addition to these changes there was a general shift in settlement away from the machair, eastward to the nearby cnoc-and-lochan (Section 11.4). Whilst this may be attributed to environmental degradation of the machair, or to an expansion of arable onto the peatier soils, this marks a significant alteration in attitudes to landholding (11.6). The veneration of a founding figure and farm had been a central principle of the Norse period odal mentality (Gurevich 1969, 1992). However, it is possible that even although they were no longer permanently occupied these settlement mounds retained a significance for Hebridean farmers. They became places associated with rights of ownership over the land, expressed in

occasional re-use and was perhaps preserved in Hebridean folklore. For example compare the similarity of traditions and rituals associated with the Norse founding spirit Hogboy (Brown 1969, 127-34; Firth 1986, 45-54; Marwick 2000, 30-46; Campbell 2005b, 2-5, 23, 82-104) with examples of spirits associated with houses and pastures, often located on abandoned settlements, recorded in the nineteenth-century Hebrides (McNeill 1956, 112-14, 128-30; Ross 1976, 101). Unfortunately, the archaeological evidence from the period between 1400 and 1600 is somewhat contradictory and various possible interpretations for the transition have to be explored.

The first interpretation is one of general continuity, with the larger *bailtean* of the eighteenth century being a simple straightforward development and expansion of the Norse period farmsteads as the population expanded. Within this model the core farm remained a centrifugal influence, whether on its original site on the machair or a new cnoc-and-lochan position, which became the focus for expansion. However, few *bailtean* can be demonstrated to pre-date circa 1600. Moreover, the apparent end in mill use perhaps indicates a decline in arable farming after 1400 (Section 12.12), which implies a significant economic change. This continuity-model contains a significant shift in land-holding practices. The odal pattern of farm splitting and relocation as families grew came to an end. Instead, communities continued to expand in the same place. That this transition may not have been universal and may account for some of the clusters of small buildings being built in low lying peaty soils in North Uist into the late sixteenth century, such as Druim nan Dearcag. These are possibly evidence for the last phase of 'odalised' expansion prior to 1600, when they were abandoned

At some point the people of South Uist began farming their arable land in open-fields and operated them in runrig – a communal way of organising agricultural activity, although probably not egalitarian (Section 12.2). Whilst by the 1700s a number of these 'communities' operated relatively independent of the close involvement of *fine*, others were directly run by the gentry (Section 12.3). The change from enclosed fields belonging to individuals to open-fields belonging to large communities must have been a significant



process. It is possible that as the communities centred on farmsteads grew they made the decision to farm co-operatively. However, it is equally possible that the *fine* encouraged this process in order to increase production and extract surpluses, which would indicate a date for the change in either the fourteenth or eighteenth centuries, these being the two times when there is other evidence for the centralisation and maximisation of the Island's economy. Alternatively, the development of runrig may have been a reaction to changing class and kinship structures and a response to the redundancy of the *buannachan* in Ireland, both as a social activity and as a source of economic benefits for the chiefs. All these processes were parts of an overarching change in landholding: land that had been held in the earlier Middle Ages by free odal right, or had come to belong to a sub-lineage of the gentry through hereditary right, became subject to the ownership of the lords. Land that had been held through clientship without feudal tenure came to be held unilaterally from the chiefs and many *bailtean* communities may have perceived the new order as one which provided each farmer with an equal footing to his neighbour. That many of the gentry felt disenfranchised by this communal impetus may explain why some of them chose to live away from the *bailtean* in independent farmsteads on the east coast, shunning the most productive arable land and the majority of the community.

The second model suggests that there was a massive increase in the importance of pastoral resources, both social and economic. The Revival of Gaelic culture may have precipitated a move to a cattle economy, where the possession of cattle came to symbolise wealth, and cattle became the currency of vassalage, social obligations and debt. Any deterioration of the machair's arable potential may have also accentuated a dependence upon pastoral produce (Sections 11.4 and 11.6). Up until 1400 the economy of Cille Pheadair and Bornais had farmed a limited amount of cattle, for consumption as beef and pastoral resources had been primarily given over to sheep. By 1700, cattle and dairy produce had become paramount to the household and island economy. Transhumance had also become a significant seasonal event for whole communities. Cattle or their derived products do not appear to have been exported prior to the seventeenth century. It is possible that in the intervening period pastoralism had become the predominant economic practice. As well as

accounting for the change in focus away from the arable machair, this may provide an alternative interpretation for the smaller clusters of small buildings seen in North Uist (e.g. Druim nan Dearcag). As people moved around with their cattle there was less need to invest resources in buildings, as they would have only been occupied temporarily. This may also explain the abandonment of longhouses in favour of small huts, reminiscent of later shielings. Throughout the later Middle Ages buildings were often constructed time-and-again in the same place, revealing a continuation of concerns in the symbolic use of place, where use signified right of ownership and connected the occupants to their ancestors (Sections 11.9 and 11.11).

Although in this second model it is unlikely that arable was totally abandoned, its decline may indicate a drop in population, with arable only becoming important again as the population grew from the end of the sixteenth century onwards. A pastoral hiatus would have taken the emphasis away from the enclosed fields of the Norse period, and allowed later strip fields to be laid out over a relatively blank canvas. As with the first model presented above, it is possible that the new found sedentary settlement process took place as a result of population growth, but also the increasing need for lords to extract surpluses from their estates and the redundant *buannachan* to find new employment.

These two models perhaps over emphasise the need for communities to maximise their exploitation of either arable or pastoral resources. However, this may highlight that Hebridean farmers were struggling to equate a Gaelic cultural ideal, which endorsed pastoralism, with more the practical needs of providing sustenance and a taxable surplus, perhaps better provided by a combination of both arable and pastoral produce.

Although the ancient settlement mounds with Norse period farms upon them appear to have maintained some symbolic significance within the settlement pattern it is clear that over their transition into *bailtean*, whatever process took place, there were accompanying alterations in the mechanisms of landholding. This can be seen in the decline in the importance of quarterlands and *tír unga* divisions. The majority of the townships listed in 1498, when

incorporated into tacks in the eighteenth century were valued at varying numbers of pennylands, rather the regularised divisions of the Norse period. It seems likely that the later townships were the product of the land granted to the *duine uaisle* in the later Middle Ages, when there the symbolic link between the quarterland to noble status had lost its specific cultural significance before the 1498. However, *tírean unga* at either end of the island, and quarterlands at Gearraidh Bhailteas, Frobost, around the old chapel sites, and elsewhere in the western seaboard (Chapter 3) retained their the structural coherence. This perhaps suggests that some tacks were formed fossilised as established units, or that some memory of the old symbolism of the tax unit remained, to be employed in specific circumstances. Additionally, some townships may have been the land acquired and/or held by the descendants of the odal landholders – perhaps known as freeholders. The survival of some of the rituals of clientship, such as the gifting and lending of cattle and exchanges of fistfuls of straw, continued into the eighteenth century suggests that the social importance of clientship continued (Section 8.3). However, it is evident from tacks that fragments of townships were becoming the normal size of units rented by the *duine uaisle* and other tenants. The smaller tacks reveal the decline in the influence of many of the *duine uaisle*, perhaps as they were robbed of their role in military ventures and the increase in the status of wider sections of the clan through downward mobility, as well as the creation and formalisation of co-operative agricultural units. Alongside the rise in the runrig *bailtean* the role of the *duine uaisle* was being formalised in tacks which tied them into the economic structure of the clan (Sections 2.11, 3.12 and 12.4).

Over the later medieval period the economic centralisation that characterised the Norse period and fourteenth century was transformed. There is no evidence for the kilns and associated mills (Section 12.12) and fishing for exportation (Sections 12.13 and 12.14) as was seen at larger Norse period farmsteads (Sections 5.5, 5.6 and 11.2) and seen in the position of earlier castles (Section 9.5), until they were reintroduced in the eighteenth century. This is not to suggest that there was no social or economic domination by the *fine*. Instead, the hierarchy was reproduced through socially symbolic exchanges, participation in activities such as hunting and fighting (Sections 8.3 and 12.8 to 12.14), access to certain



resources and the payment of dues at crucial times of the year and rites of passage. Despite these mechanisms that demarcated society, the lack of centralised economic processing may reflect the widening demographic corpus of clanship and an idealised social construct that possessed less emphasis on social and feudal segregation than that professed by fourteenth-century lords (Sections 2.12 and 8.3). Within the later medieval period it is possible that the incorporation of the populace into the *clann* directly contradicted a belief in the right to exploit agriculturally tied communities, both overtly and economically.

The landscape setting of island duns show differing concerns with those found at castles. Castles were concerned with fishing fleets and were sited at nodal points in a maritime landscape where the chiefs interacted with groups outwith their own society (Section 9.5 and 9.6). In contrast the island dwellings are located inland, nearer pastures, hunting grounds and route ways through the island to the pastures and sea ports: although still at nodal points, these were where chiefs interacted with groups within their clan. The Late Medieval island dwellings were then more suited to Gaelic and clan-based social systems, concerned with pastoralism and inclusivity rather than the exclusive and economically dominant European model of lordship expressed by the castle (Sections 7.9, 10.7 to 10.9).

In the later Middle Ages, after the first flourishing of castles in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the Clann Ragnaill blended concepts of castellation and the duns to create new forms of lordly monument that reveal different beliefs in lordship. In South Uist these are represented by the paired monuments of Eilean Bheagram and Dun Raouill. Both were located on islands and pay architectural reference to castles in having rectangular buildings, although only the former was a bonded masonry tower, if a small one, and both have enough outbuildings to equate them with the same spatial dimensions and functions found at other west coast castles. Their island locations may have provided a temporary defence but perhaps more importantly served to denote status by segregating the island dwellers from those around them. This differentiation was not enhanced by the monumental outer walls that embellished the enclosed exclusivity of the true castle, and this may have served to suggest a message that although the *fine* within the island were separate, they were not

divided from it. Together with the church at Hoghmor and the lands of the MacMhuirich bard of Eilean Bheagram and Dun Raouill formed a power centre similar to a castle, but which was diffused through the landscape (Sections 10.8 and 10.9). The spatial distance may have served to suggest the chief was part of the natural structure of society not set apart from it and dominating it (Section 10.7): as suggested by the castle with an internal chapel.

In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, elsewhere in the western seaboard, there were changes in the style of both new castle buildings and secondary adaptations and alterations to already existing structures. The tower-house increasingly became the predominant form for original constructions and were often inserted into earlier castles (e.g. Eilean Tioram and Dunvegan). Tower-houses continued to reflect connections to local kindreds and often replaced the duns and crannogs, which had been central to demonstrating their lordship in earlier periods (Sections 9.3 and 9.7). Although castle-like in the outer appearance their internal spatial arrangements and the inclusion of halls within tower-houses have ramifications for understanding later medieval ideas about lordship. Freestanding halls were also increasingly being inserted into the courtyards of earlier castles (Section 9.8) and often were also being built upon assembly sites, obliterated earlier ecclesiastical structures. The later medieval phase of hall construction demonstrates the extension of lordship over public decision-making processes. Whereas halls built over assembly sites were a straightforward appropriation of the site and the process of assembly (Section 10.5), a more overt attempt to exert their position within assembly was the removal to, and enclosing of the site within, the castle walls. Where halls were placed both within the outer wall or bawn and inside an internal tower-house, it is possible that access to the lord and his lordship was becoming increasingly restricted and bounded: less important and more public affairs restricted to the outer hall and private and important ones conducted within the tower (Sections 9.7 and 9.8).

The building of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century tower-houses elsewhere in the western seaboard creates a paradox to developments within the Clann Ragnail territories. After a period of apparent strength, wealth and unity in the fourteenth century (Sections 2.5 to 2.6), demonstrated in the castle (Sections 7.11, 9.2 and 10.9) and church building programs by the

Clann Ruairidh (Sections 6.4, 6.5 and 8.4), the fifteenth and sixteenth century produced no such grandiose monuments. By comparison Eilean Bheagram is small and developments at Hoghmor appear to have been little more than the adaptation of pre-existing buildings. It could be argued that the Clann Ragnaill chiefs' inability to match the architectural endeavours of their predecessors and neighbours resulted from a lack of political unity and a decline in their economic resource base. Disputes about the inheritance of the Clann Ruairidh patrimony between Ranald, Godfrey and their offspring may have taken their toll (Sections 2.7 to 2.9), and the end in milling (Section 12.12) and fish processing (Section 12.13) in South Uist, plus the infilling of the harbour alongside Caisteal Bhuirgh (Section 10.9) may have had a dramatic impact upon the lords' funds. However, the Clann Ragnaill certainly would have had resources equalling, and probably excelling, those of the MacNeils in Barra, who were patronising the building of Kisimul in the fifteenth century (Morrison 2000). Although it is likely that they embellished Eilean Tioram late in the century (Evans & Rutherford 1998, 94), this was a period when the Clann Ragnaill were re-establishing their significance in western Scottish politics (Section 2.8). The argument for architectural patronisation being dependent on economic or political solvency is, however, counter-balanced by cultural agency. If the increase in pastoralism throughout the Uists was a deliberate choice resulting from the adoption of Early Irish Medieval practices following the Gaelic Revival (Section 11.9) it would suggest that this impacted upon the Clann Ragnaill chiefs' choice not to build new castles in South Uist (Section 10.8). The differences in landscape setting between Eilean Tioram and Eilean Bheagram reveal very differing concerns, which together with the continuing expansion of the buildings at Tioram, indicates that Bheagram was indeed a cultural product, rather than the result of an economic situation.

Caution should perhaps be employed in making simplistic comparisons between the later medieval landscapes of South Uist and contemporary ones in Gaelic Ireland, both in Ulster and Bantry (Breen 2003), and creating blanket interpretations about Gaelic cultural landscapes. The landscapes of all three regions have coastal castles, inland island-dwellings; re-use of prehistoric 'fortifications', similar low status settlements consisting of small clusters of small sub-rectangular buildings and closely resembling taxation systems. All



these lack evidence for centralised industry and agriculture, such as mills. However, they differ considerably from landscape in the central, eastern and southern Highlands in that throughout the Middle Ages there appear to have been centralised lordships, with mills and ginal houses (see Dodgshon 1998, 9, 116-17). Unlike the lords in the western mainland and Hebrides who decorated their burials with West Highland sculpture lords elsewhere in the Highlands enshrined their burials under Gothic canopies and effigies. The ceramic styles that converged in western Scotland and northern Ireland also do not appear to have been adopted in the south and east of Scotland. Whilst it is difficult to make too much of links between material culture (of which 'landscapes' are arguably included as they are the product of social action) and ethnicity or culture (see Jones 1997) it is possible that the similarities between Uist and Ireland, and their differences with the central Highlands, may have a number of ramifications. Firstly it perhaps reveals a converging cultural pull towards an Early Medieval Irish model for society and economics along the western seaboard in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, that was not adopted to the same degree in the central Highlands. Secondly, it is possible that more European 'feudal' ideas about the structure of the society and economy were stronger in areas in the *Gàidhealtachd* with more substantial Anglo-Norman settlement, or were nearer to the Lowlands and central government. Unlike the Hebrides this model was not replaced as a result of interaction with Ireland after the fourteenth-century Revival. This is one area that would greatly benefit from future study.

In summary, during the later medieval period, a number of trends are evident in the landscape in South Uist. Over the latter thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the Clann Ruairidh continued the trend of centralisation and control over agricultural resources and the populace that had begun earlier in the Norse period. This was augmented by the exploitation of an indigenous fishing industry as well as foreign fishermen and maritime traffic. The tradition of building large arable centred farmsteads also continued. The profits provided in this increasingly subdued landscape were reflected not only in the very act of building castles themselves, but also in their siting, at points which monitored and controlled access to fishing grounds and harbours and were visible throughout much of the settled and farmed landscape. Sometime after 1400 South Uist lost its central position to the economy of the

succeeding Clann Ragnair lordship: territories were lost to other lineages and environmental degradation and plague may have affected the ability of the lordships to extract large surpluses, whether arable or marine based. In tandem with these processes, however, it seems likely that there was a shift in internal clan politics, perhaps fuelled by the Gaelic Revival, emphasis shifted from arable to pastoral resources and overt control of agricultural products were decentralised. Although castles continued to be important, South Uist was managed through monuments that were built to demonstrate the elite's position within the social order rather than exclusive to it, and their concern with 'Gaelic' pastoral resources. By 1600 an agricultural landscape emerged that was entirely different from that demonstrable for the Norse period, which had lasted through until around 1400. Larger communities had begun to occupy *bailtean* and co-operate in agricultural management and practice within a shared open-field landscape. By this time land appears to no longer have been held in free tenure, but held directly from the lord. These changes may have been a direct result of the expanding inclusiveness of the clan and the new attempts by the *fine* to negotiate their status that this necessitated.

### 13.3 Main Conclusions

- Sometime before the twelfth century the landscape of South Uist was segregated into a highly structured pattern of land-assessments for the payment of taxes: the *tír unga*, divided into four quarterlands, each divided into five pennylands. Each tax-unit correlated to a farming settlement unit occupied by various social levels, from poor and less influential farmers to richer and more powerful chieftain-farmers. The *tír unga* was also central to the distribution of political monuments, with clusters of an assembly place, a dun and a *cille*, aligned along their boundaries.
- Duns came to be re-occupied from the thirteenth century onwards as part of a move by landholders to mould a new independent, Gaelicised identity, and legitimate their social position through naturalising their position in the landscape. Although the origin of church and assembly sites and the tax system cannot be ascertained, it is clear that when

- they were placed together in the Norse period they were the point where private secular, public and ecclesiastical powers interacted, and reflect the tensions that they caused.
- The Norse period farming-landscape was composed of dispersed farmsteads centred on hall-houses, surrounded by enclosed fields. This pattern continued through to the end of the fourteenth century, although large halls tended to be abandoned in favour of clusters of smaller halls, and centralised control over agricultural production, fishing and other industries increased.
  - This pattern came to be dominated by castles and Romanesque and then Gothic churches. Caisteal Bhuirgh showed a desire to mark its control over arable and marine resources, unlike most other Hebridean castles, which were concerned with protecting harbours. This reflected the feudal form of landholding exercised by the Clann Ruairidh.
  - Substantial evidence for the settlement pattern disappears around 1400 for over a century and a half. When it reappears hall-houses had been replaced by small amorphous dwellings, more akin to shielings and nearer pasture grounds, clustered together in *bailtean* sitting within an open-field landscape, and organised communally. All evidence for centralised economic control had also dissipated.
  - Large castles had ceased to be built to be replaced by smaller fortifications, often concerned with pastoral resources, new church buildings and priests were no longer patronised. This indicates that lordship under the Clann Ragnail was not exercised through overt feudalised control. Instead, it seems likely that their status and position was mediated and justified through social mechanisms, and is perhaps reflective of the growth of clanship throughout the Hebrides. Financial wealth was also appropriated through an escalation in the charging and extraction of dues from mercantile traffic and fishing vessels to pass through their waters and shelter in their harbours.
  - It is also possible that once the Clann Ragnail were no longer supported and feudally sanctioned by the Clann Domhnaill Lords of the Isles or the Scottish Crown, like other lineages, they turned to Early Irish social models, borrowed from contemporary Gaelic Ireland, to negotiate express their lordly identity.



### 13.4 Future Directions

This thesis has highlighted a number of themes about developments in South Uist, the Hebrides and the Gaelic world. However, it has also raised the problems caused by a highly limited corpus of existing data, so the suggested future research topics are a combination of necessary primary fieldwork and research syntheses. Four main areas for future work could address issues concerning ecclesiastical development; high status settlement and economic centralisation throughout the Middle Ages; Late Medieval low status settlement; and the impact of a pan-Gaelic identity upon material culture in Scotland and Ireland after the Gaelic Revival.

The first topic would build up the corpus of understanding about *cille* sites throughout the Uists and Barra. This could primarily be achieved through a program of topographical and geophysical survey. Small scale excavation at selected sites could shed light upon foundation-dates and length of occupation. In particular, this could address the suggestion of an early-Christian site at Pabbaigh. Work at Hoghmor, already being undertaken by the author in conjunction with Andrew Reynolds and Mike Hamilton should reveal substantial information about the development of this site. However, like most other ecclesiastical sites, permission to excavate is unlikely to be granted, due the presence of human graves, and thus foundation dates and an understanding of the full settlement history of this and other sites is not achievable. One exception to this would be to expand upon Fleming and Woolf's (1992) survey and Parker Pearson's (1995) limited excavations at Cille Donnain, and open a small number of small trenches around the church itself, the proposed assembly island and upon Eilean Mor. These would test the validity of interpretations regarding dating and form of occupation/use. Further field-walking may identify the site of Cille Coinnich and GPR survey over Cladh Pheadair may resolve whether this site was a graveyard or the site of the original Cille Pheadair church.

This work has located a number of high status settlements upon crannogs, but little direct information exists for how they were used and lived in. Excavation at the most important

Late Medieval South Uist site, Eilean Bheagram, could reveal the chronology of occupation and activities conducted at the site, as well as raise new issues. This study would perhaps benefit from work at a comparable but less monumental site, such as Loch an Eilean, Baghasdal. This could be brought together into a large-scale survey of the Eilean Bheagram and Hóghmor environs, which would study the zenith of the Late Medieval settlement hierarchy and be coupled with investigation of how they related with the landscape and low status settlement (perhaps identifiable through test pitting programs or chemical analysis: Banks & Atkinson 2000; Lelong 2003). Standing building survey and small-scale excavation would also greatly enhance an understanding of Caisteal Bhuirgh (where geophysical survey and coring could also establish earlier loch levels and contemporary outbuildings), Caisteal Calabhaigh and Caisteal a'Bhreabhair.

At both ecclesiastical and secular high status sites, the problem of excavation to provide dating may be surmounted by the use of Thermo-Luminescence Dating on shells (Jean Luc pers. comm.), or radio-carbon dating from charcoal (S. Driscoll pers. comm.) in the mortar.

In the absence of the publication of the An Udail excavations, although given the differences between the Norse period settlement there and the South Uist sites, full excavation of a late medieval settlement on the machair could be highly beneficial. Here, the state of preservation should provide unique information, and confirming or contradicting theories on developments in settlement form (dispersed or nucleated), house style (large hall or small hut), material culture, economy (pastoral or arable based, fishing exploitation), etc. throughout this otherwise enigmatic period. Possible sites could include Machair Mheadhanach Site 138, which has already produced Late Medieval material culture (see Appendix), or Staoinebrig Sites 33, 34 and 44, which have produced evidence for occupation throughout the Middle Ages (Parker Pearson forthcoming a). Away from the machair, further survey work may identify early mills, or follow up North Uist traditions for medieval industrial activity. On the east coast, especially around Uisinis, survey work would be highly enlightening about the extent of settlement there, especially if excavation of selected

sites could provide dating evidence (it is unlikely that environmental data will survive in the acidic soils here).

A possibility, referred to throughout the later part of this thesis, is that the interaction between the Scottish and Irish *Gàidhealtachd* after the fourteenth-century Gaelic Revival in Ireland directly impacted upon social and political culture, and specifically lordly identity, in the Hebrides. Further work exploring this possibility for a unifying identity, expressed through a converging material culture (settlement pattern, landscape exploitation, architectural forms, pottery style, etc.) could provide an archaeological perspective that would complement that being attempted by historians (e.g. MacGregor 2000b; McLeod 2004; also see O'Keeffe 2004). To achieve a wider understanding of Scottish Gaelic mentalities it would also be profitable to compare and contrast this data with landscapes and material culture from elsewhere in medieval Gaelic Scotland.

### 13.5 End Note

This thesis has brought to light valuable primary historical and archaeological data regarding tax systems in the Western Isles, the monuments of the secular and ecclesiastical elite, as well as the sites occupied, lived in and utilised by lower status echelons of society. Additionally, it has demonstrated that by considering all these elements together, as parts of an integrated whole, it is possible to reconstruct the changing structures of Outer Hebridean society throughout the medieval period. By necessity the results are very much area specific and are a direct product of specific interpretations about social and world structures within specific lordships in one location. A greater and more comprehensive understanding of medieval lordships can only be achieved through the instigation of programs of intensive sustainable research throughout neighbouring islands, and on the mainland.

