The diocese of Sodor between Niðaróss and Avignon – Rome, 1266-1472

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THE organisation and administration of the diocese of Sodor has been discussed by a number of scholars, either jointly with Argyll or in relation to Norway.[1] In 1266 the diocese of Sodor or *Suðreyjar* encompassed the Hebrides and the Isle of Man, but by the end of the fourteenth century, it was divided between the Scottish Hebrides and English Man. The diocese's origins lay in the Norse kingdom of the Isles and Man and its inclusion in the province of Niðaróss can be traced back to the actions of Olaf Godredsson in the 1150s.[2] After the Treaty of Perth of 2 July 1266, Sodor remained within the Niðaróss church province whilst secular sovereignty and patronage of the see had been transferred to the King of Scots.[3] However, wider developments in the Christian world and the transfer of allegiance of Hebridean secular rulers from Norway to Scotland after 1266 would loosen Sodor's ties to Niðaróss. This article examines the diocese of Sodor's relationship with its metropolitan and the rather neglected area of its developing links with the papacy. It argues that the growing

1 A.I. Dunlop, 'Notes on the Church in the Dioceses of Sodor and Argyll', *Records of the Scottish Church History Society* 16 (1968) [henceforth *RSCHS*]; I.B. Cowan, 'The Medieval Church in Argyll and the Isles', *RSCHS* 20 (1978-80); A.D.M. Barrell, 'The church in the West Highlands in the late middle ages', *Innes Review* 54 (2003); A. Woolf, 'The Diocese of the Sudreyar' in *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis 1153-1537, Søkelys på Nidaroskirkens og Nidarosprovinsens historie*, ed. by S. Imsen (Trondheim: 2003); R.G. Cant, 'Norse Influences in the Organisation of the medieval Church in the Western Isles', *Northern Studies* 21 (1984).

2 I. Beuermann, *Masters of the Narrow Sea, Forgotten Challenges to Norwegian Rule in Man and the Isles, 1079-1266* Ph.D. thesis (University of Oslo: 2007) 42-53; Woolf, 'Diocese of Sudreyar', 171.

3 *Diplomatarium Norvegicum*, 21 vols., (Christiania/Oslo: 1849-1976) [henceforth DN] 8 no.9

centralisation of the late mediaeval Church and the growth of the papal administration was a key factor in the separation of Sodor from Niðaróss.

In the period between 1266 and 1331, there was some contact between Sodor and Niðaróss; typically involving the consecration of Sodor bishops by the archbishop of Niðaróss, although in one apparently exceptional case the archdeacon of Sodor acted as an investigative officer for the archbishop. The rights of the archbishopric over Sodor had been confirmed by Pope Innocent IV in February 1253 and subsequently there is some evidence of Sodor bishops travelling to Norway for consecration.[4] According to the Icelandic Annals, Bishop Mark was consecrated in Tønsberg in eastern Norway in 1275.[5] He is only one of the four bishops in this period for whom we know the location of consecration. According to the *Registrum Sacrum Anglicanum*, his successors, Alan and Gilbert, were consecrated by the archbishop of Niðaróss, but no sources are given by the editors of the *Registrum*.[6] The payment of expenses to Bishop Bernard for his election may be evidence of a journey to Norway, although it may equally refer to the expenses incurred travelling to the Isle of Man.[7]

We have already noted that patronage of the see was transferred to the King of Scots in the Treaty of Perth. Traditionally, the monks of Furness abbey in Lancashire had held the right to elect the bishop of Sodor, but even prior to 1266 this right seems to have been being eroded.[8] In 1275 the abbot of Furness asserted the rights of the monks of Furness to elect the bishop to the King of Scots.[9] However, their electoral rights seem to have already been in abeyance since in the same year, the clergy and people of Man elected the abbot of Rushen on Man as bishop.[10] Ironically, the abbot's election was

4 DN 3 no 3.

5 *Islandsker Annaler indtil 1578*, ed. by G. Storm (Christiania: 1888), 336 ['Markus var vigdr til biskups j Tunsbergi til Sudur eya'– my translation].

6 *Registrum sacrum Anglicanum: an attempt to exhibit the course of episcopal succession in England from the records and chronicles of the church*, ed. by W. Stubbs, (Oxford: 1897) [Henceforth *RSA*], 212 [The *RSA* is a nineteenth century list of English bishops compiled by William Stubbs. The bishops of Sodor are included because the Sodor diocese in the early twelfth century was under the metropolitan authority of the archbishopric of York and after the split between Man and the Hebrides, Man reverted to York again.].

7 *Liber S. Thome de Aberbrothoc*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: 1848-56) i, no.358 [henceforth *Arbroath Liber*]; *The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland*, ed. J. Stuart et al, 23 vols (Edinburgh: 1878-1908) i, 59.

8 The monks' electoral rights were confirmed by the Pope in 1194/5, but were not mentioned in the Treaty of Perth [*The Coucher Book of Furness Abbey*, 2 vols (Manchester: 1915-1919) ii, 642-3].

9 *Early Sources of Scottish History 500 to 1286*, ed. A.O. Anderson (Edinburgh: 1922) [henceforth *SAEC*], 381.

10 *SAEC* 382.

annulled in favour of King Alexander III's own candidate, Mark of Galloway.[11] The struggle for control of the Isle of Man in the early fourteenth-century between England and Scotland is apparent in the appointment of Mark's successor, Alan, who was imposed on Sodor by Anthony Bek, bishop of Durham and holder of the English Lordship of Man.[12] Whereas by the time of Alan's demise, Man was probably back under Scots control and his successor, Gilbert, appeared on seven occasions as a witness to charters of Robert I between 1324 and 1326.[13] Neither Furness nor the clergy and people of Man may have had much influence over the choice of bishop in 1328: Robert I's chancellor and abbot of Arbroath, Bernard.[14] Bernard may not have been unfamiliar with Norway since he had been involved in the negotiation of the renewal of the Treaty of Perth, agreed in Inverness in October 1312.[15]

Contact between Sodor and Niðaróss was thus limited to episcopal consecration, the bishops do not appear to have attended provincial synods or participated in the administration of church province. Concurrently, communication with the papacy seems to have been fairly minimal. We are able to identify the attendance of one bishop at a general council of the Church; Bishop Richard died at Copeland in Cumbria in 1274 on his return journey from a general council, likely to have been the second council of Lyons held in the summer of 1274.[16] We have no record of any of the other bishops attending Church councils or visiting either Rome or Avignon.

However, with Bernard's death in 1331, the ties to Niðaróss decreased even further. The next bishop, Thomas de Rossy, was consecrated at the Curia in Avignon by Pope John XXII.[17] He seems to have had no prior connection to Sodor; he was a papal chaplain, a canon of Dunkeld and had

11 *SAEC* 382

12 *Monumenta de Insula Manniae*, ed. J.R. Oliver, 3 vols (Douglas: 1860-2) [henceforth *Mons. Ins. Man.*] ii 104; *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae Medii Aevi ad annum 1638*, ed. by D.E.R. Watt and A.L. Murray (Edinburgh: 2003) [henceforth Watt, *Fasti*] 201.

13 *Regesta Regum Scotorum – Robert I, 1306-1329* ed. by A.A.M. Duncan, (Edinburgh: 1988) [henceforth *RRS Robert I*], 523, 525, 531, 537, 548, 551 & 562.

14 *The Heads of Religious Houses in Scotland from the Twelfth to Sixteenth Centuries*, ed. by D.E.R. Watt and N.F. Shead (Edinburgh: 2001) [henceforth Watt & Shead, *Religious Houses*], 5. This Bernard has often been identified as Bernard de Linton; however, according to A.A.M. Duncan, this is "without foundation" and based on Crawfurd's assertion of 1726 [*RRS Robert I* 201-203].

15 *RRS Robert I* 646; DN 19 no.482.

16 *Cronica Regum Mannie et Insularum*: the Chronicle of the Kings of Man and the Isles, trans. G. Broderick (Douglas: 1996) [henceforth *CM (B)*], *f.51r*.

17 *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland: Papal Letters,* ed. W.H. Bliss et al, 20 vols (London: 1893-) [henceforth *CPL*] *ii* 341.

held the church of Idvies in the deanery of Angus in the diocese of St Andrews.[18] He may have continued to hold the church of Idvies for some time after he was consecrated bishop since another cleric was only provided to it in April 1346.[19] It also gives a clue to his origins: a family of this name from Angus in eastern Scotland held lands immediately to the south of the Montrose basin. In circa 1245, Thomas de Rossi, son of Robert de Rossi received the lands of Rossi in a charter from Hugo Malherb.[20] Henry Rossie had a charter of the lands of Inrony/Ionyoney or Anany from Robert I, Anany seems to have been lands close to Rossi.[21]

It is uncertain whether Thomas attained the bishopric with royal consent. Robert I died in 1329, leaving his five-year old son, David, as king.[22] Initially, after Robert's death, the kingdom seems to have been quite stable, probably because the royal government from 1329 until 1332 remained very similar, in terms of personnel and structure, to that of Robert I. However, it does appear that there was trouble brewing, particularly in the north and west and especially from 1330 onwards. The hanging of fifty wrong-doers off the walls of Eilean Donan castle in Wester Ross points to serious trouble in the north-west which Thomas Randolph, the guardian, was trying to suppress.[23] Thomas de Rossy could have been a royal candidate, but there is no evidence for any connection between him and Randolph.

Instead, his consecration as bishop should be seen as evidence of the growing centralisation of the mediaeval Church. During the period of the Avignon papacy (1305-1403), the mediaeval Church's administration and organisation was centralised under papal authority. As a result the popes could nominate or provide a candidate for a bishopric by mandate.[24] Pope Clement IV's bull *Licet Ecclesiarum* 'formulated the principle which made such nominations systematic and regular'.[25]

The procedure, which was used increasingly by the Avignon popes, was nomination or provision by mandate which meant that the Pope named the candidate for a particular benefice. Renouard argues that 'by the second half of the century [fourteenth], then, appointments to all major benefices belonged entirely to the pope'.[26] The election of bishops did continue, but

18 *ASV, Collectorie 282* f.193r.
19 *ASV, Collectorie 282* f.193r.
20 *Arbroath Liber* i no. 337.
21 *RRS Robert I* 574.
22 M. Penman, *David II 1329-71* (East Linton: 2004), 36.
23 Penman, *David II* 40.
24 Y. Renouard, *The Avignon Papacy, 1305-1403,* trans. D. Bethnell (London: 1970) 98.
25 Renouard, *Avignon Papacy* 98.
26 Renouard, *Avignon Papacy* 99.

election was much less important than previously. Barrell suggests that election served to indicate to the Pope who might be appointed and even so the chosen cleric might find himself superseded by a candidate who was in the favour of the pope.[27] Additionally, the bishops were now obliged to swear an oath of loyalty to the pope and to visit him.[28] Papal provisions to bishoprics sometimes did prove controversial because there might be a local candidate who had been elected in the traditional manner.[29]

Concurrently, it must be recognised that the initiative for papal provisions did not originate with the popes, but rather from the petitioners themselves.[30] Renouard argues that centralisation of appointments did not encounter much opposition because the clergy became indebted to the papacy for favours.[31] Those most likely to complain were the chapters of cathedrals and monasteries who perhaps felt their rights to elect their bishop were undermined by the centralisation which saw the direct provision of bishops by the Pope. Barrell maintains that the system of provision was generally accepted and therefore clergy desiring advancement had to work within the 'well-defined framework of the system'.[32] The location of Avignon also helped the centralisation; Avignon was much easier for northern European clergy to reach than Rome. Renouard postulates that Avignon's centrality allowed the Pope to extend his authority much more easily and quickly.[33] For clergy from northern European, it meant they could avoid the hazardous journey across the Alps.

Thomas de Rossy's provision to the Sodor bishopric in June 1331, therefore, seems to have brought that bishopric under the auspices of the papacy and papal provision. However, whilst we can now understand the mechanisms which brought about his provision, we need to examine further the potential reasons why this man in particular was provided to the bishopric. As has already been said, he does not seem to be a candidate for royal patronage. The most telling fact about him seems to be the description of him as a papal chaplain. The letter of provision to Thomas described him as 'canon of Dunkeld, papal chaplain'.[34] Moreover, his name, *Thomas de*

27 A.D.M. Barrell, *The Papacy, Scotland and northern England, 1342-1378* (Cambridge: 1995), 191.
28 Renouard, *Avignon Papacy* 105.
29 Barrell, *Papacy, Scotland and northern England* 193.
30 G. Barraclough, *Papal Provisions* (Oxford: 1935), 153.
31 Renouard, *Avignon Papacy* 100.
32 Barrell, *Papacy, Scotland and northern England* 191.
33 Renouard, *Avignon Papacy* 101.
34 *CPL ii 341*.

Rossi, appears in a list of honorary papal chaplains of Pope John XXII contained within *Instrumenta Miscellanea 5827*.[35]

There were two distinct groups of papal chaplains: those who served the Pope at the Curia and those who normally lived outside the Curia and had no specific role to perform at the Curia.[36] Before the reign of Clement VI, 1342 to 1352, the title assigned does not distinguish between these two groups of papal chaplains.[37] However, during Clement VI's reign, this latter group were titled 'honorary' to differentiate them from the resident chaplains.[38] These honorary chaplains did not receive any financial rewards; instead they had privileges such as exemption from the jurisdiction of their ordinary. In contrast, the resident chaplains received a salary of between 100 and 200 florins depending on whether they were *capellani intrinseci* or *capellani commensales*.[39]

The disparities between the two groups are clear when the appointments of Pope John XXII are examined. He appointed 431 chaplains, but he only paid 28 of them during the eighteen years of his reign.[40] His successor, Benedict XII, recruited only 113, but out of that there were only 36 personal chaplains and 16 commensal chaplains.[41] If Thomas de Rossy had been an honorary papal chaplain resident at the Curia at Avignon, it could explain his selection as bishop of Sodor. He was perhaps in the right place at the right time and known in the Curia. We could speculate that when news arrived in Avignon of the death of Bernard, bishop of Sodor, Thomas de Rossy was well placed in order to lobby the pope to grant him the provision to the bishopric.

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35 *Instrumenta Miscellanea 5827 f.04r;* The *Instrumenta Miscellanea 5827* is a list of the honorary chaplains at the papal court from the pontificate of John XXII to that of Clement VII. The list of chaplains is arranged alphabetically and according to pope. Burns suggests on the basis of the neat flowing script that it may have been compiled through dictation which might explain various misspellings and mistakes. See C. Burns, 'Vatican Sources and the Honorary Papal Chaplains of the Fourteenth Century' in *Römische Kurie. Kirchliche Finanzen. Vatikanisches Archiv. Studien zu Ehren von Hermann Hoberg*, ed. by E. Gatz (Rome: 1979) 65-95, at 66.

36 Burns, 'Vatican Sources and the Honorary Papal Chaplains of the Fourteenth Century' 65.

37 B. Guillemain, 'Les Chapelains d'honneur des Papes d'Avignon' *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Historie* LXIV (1952), 217-238, at 218.

38 P. Jugie, 'Papal Chaplain, Middle Ages' in *The Papacy, an encyclopedia vol.1* ed. by P. Levillain (London: 2002) 300.

39 G. Mollat, *The Popes at Avignon 1305-1378* (Edinburgh: 1963) 282.

40 Guillemain, 'Les Chapelains d'honneur' 219.

41 Guillemain, 'Les Chapelains d'honneur' 219.

We have dwelt at length on this particular bishop because his promotion marked a very important departure from tradition. From 1331 onwards, the bishops of Sodor would not be consecrated and confirmed by the archbishop of Niðaróss. Instead, they would be obliged to make the long journey to Avignon or indeed in the fifteenth century to Rome. In the case of Sodor, the authority of its metropolitan, Niðaróss, had been substantially undermined and it would never regain its status.

The provision of Thomas de Rossy to the bishopric was also marked by the concurrent election of a local candidate to the bishopric. In June 1331, two proctors arrived in Bergen claiming that Cormac, archdeacon of Sodor, had been elected bishop by the clergy of Skye and canons of Snizort and requesting confirmation and consecration from the archbishop of Niðaróss.[42] Cormac's election does not seem to have been in opposition to Thomas and it is likely that news of the provision took at least four to six weeks to reach the diocese. Cormac's election seems to have been unconventional, at least in terms of the electoral body. Whether the canons of Snizort and the clergy of Skye constituted a valid electoral body is doubtful and the archbishop of Niðaróss may have shared those doubts.[43]

Cormac's election may already have been strictly speaking invalid because the right to elect the bishop seems to have been held by the clergy of Man and previously by the monks of Furness. A more significant obstacle may have been the failure to seek the approval of the Scottish Crown; the archbishop might have balked at confirming a candidate who did not have the support of the king of Scots or guardians, although he was not obliged to confirm the royal candidate.[44] Cormac sought the traditional consecration and confirmation from the archbishop of Niðaróss, but was perhaps unlucky that Thomas de Rossy had already been provided to the bishopric.[45]

42 DN 18 no.10.

43 The presence of canons at a church, which, as far as we know, was not the seat of the bishops until after 1387, is unusual. It seems that we have therefore to ask whether the canons of Snizort had an administrative function prior to 1387? Do these canons of 1331 represent a proto-chapter? The diocese of Sodor, prior to its split, was vast and perhaps unwieldy. It stretched from the Butt of Lewis in the north to the Isle of Man in the south. From the mid-twelfth century, the bishops of Sodor had established their seat on the Isle of Man. The act of establishing an archdeacon on Skye might have been designed to counteract the problems of this large and far-flung diocese.

44 However, this is not to state that the archbishop was obliged to confirm the candidate presented by the Scottish Crown.

45 For an in-depth study of Cormac's election and claim see S.E. Thomas, 'Rival bishops, rival cathedrals: the election of Cormac, archdeacon of Sodor, as bishop in 1331' *The Innes Review* 60:2 (2009) 145-163.

Thus, Thomas de Rossy's provision ushered in the age of papal provision to the Sodor bishopric. Thomas's successor, William Russell, travelled to the Curia in 1349 and obtained provision to the bishopric on 27 April 1349 and he seems to have been consecrated by 6 May 1349.[46] The Chronicle of Man recorded that he was 'chosen by the clergy of the Isle of Man in the cathedral church of St German on Holm in Man to be pastor of the Church of Sodor' and that he was 'the first bishop-elect of the Church of Sodor to be consecrated and confirmed by the Apostolic See, for all his predecessors were accustomed to be confirmed and consecrated by the Archbishop of Niðaróss'.[47] Russell was the first of two successive bishops who were native Manxmen; he had been abbot of Rushen before his election.[48] He seems to have had no connections to Scotland. This may be indicative of the political situation; David II of Scotland had been captured by the English at Neville's Cross in 1346 and the election of a Manxman may have been the result of English influence.

In April 1349, the archbishop of Niðaróss was informed by letter of William's consecration and confirmation as bishop.[49] At this juncture we can see that the ties to Niðaróss had become even weaker. In June of 1349, William was dispensed by the pope from having to travel to Niðaróss to profess his obedience because he did not 'dare to face the dangers of the long sea voyage'.[50] This suggests, in a roundabout way, that the majority of his predecessors had, in fact, made the journey to Norway. However, this dispensation does not represent an attempt to change the metropolitan authority of the diocese because William acknowledged that he was 'subject to the archbishop of Trondheim' at the beginning of his letter.[51] The papal dispensation allowed that 'for this time he may pay his obedience by a proctor'.[52] This implies that typically the bishop was expected to travel to Norway to profess obedience in person to the archbishop of Niðaróss.

At William's death in approximately 1374, he was succeeded by John Donkan or Duncan, another Manxman, but one who until his provision to the Sodor bishopric had been archdeacon of Down in Ireland. The *Chronicle's List of Bishops* claims that John was 'elected by the clergy of Man in the

46 *CPL iii 279; CPL iii 285.*
47 *CM(B)* f.51v.
48 *CM(B)* f.51v.
49 DN 7 no.219.
50 *Calendar of Entries in the Papal Registers relating to Great Britain and Ireland – Petitions to the Pope 1342-1419*, ed. W.H. Bliss (London: 1896) [henceforth *CPP*] 168.
51 *CPP* 168 [for Trondheim read Niðaróss].
52 *CPP* 168.

cathedral church'.[53] Like his predecessor, he too travelled to Avignon for consecration and confirmation by the Pope. In November 1374, Pope Gregory XI wrote to the archbishop of Niðaróss, Robert II of Scotland and William, Lord of Man to announce the consecration and confirmation of John Donkan as bishop of Sodor.[54]

John Donkan's travails on his perilous overland journey to Avignon indicate that his predecessor's claims about the dangers of a long sea voyage were perhaps a little disingenuous. The Chronicle of Man recorded that 'he had been taken prisoner while returning from Avignon and bound in close prison and iron fetters at Boulogne in Picardy. Afterwards he was freed on payment of five hundred marks'.[55]

His rule over the united, if perhaps splintering, diocese came to an end with the Great Schism. The Great Schism lasted from 1378 until 1417 and was only resolved when the Council of Constance deposed all of the rival popes.[56] In 1378 a new pope was elected in Rome by the cardinals under pressure from the Roman populace to elect a Roman, or at least not a Frenchman.[57] However, the actions of Urban VI infuriated the French cardinals and they withdrew to Anagni where they eventually elected a new pope, Clement VII.[58] There were then two popes and two colleges of cardinals. Thomson argues that 'the fundamental reason for the persistence of the schism which was generally regarded as a scandal was the same as the cause of its outbreak, the absence of any superior authority which had the right to correct a pope'.[59]

When the Great Schism occurred, Bishop John Donkan recognised Urban VI as Pope in line with the policy of the English crown. Urban VI's Avignon rival Clement VII was recognised by the Scottish Church and Crown. Thus, Clement VII ordered that John be replaced and subsequently Bishop Michael, bishop from August 1387, was transferred from the Cashel archbishopric in Ireland to the diocese of Sodor *in Scotia*.[60] There is no indication that Robert II had any involvement in the choice of candidate for

53 *CM(B)* f.51v.

54 DN 7 no.291; 'William, lord of Man' was probably William de Montacute who was granted the island by Edward III in 1333 [T. Thornton, 'Scotland and the Isle of Man, c.1400-1625: Noble Power and Royal Presumption in the Northern Irish sea Province' *SHR 77* (1998) 1-30, at 5].

55 *CM(B)* f.51v-f.52v.

56 A. Grant, *Independence and Nationhood, Scotland 1306-1469* (Edinburgh: 1984) 91.

57 J.A.F. Thomson, *The Western Church in the Middle Ages* (London: 1998) 178.

58 Thomson, *Western Church* 180.

59 Thomson, *Western Church* 181.

60 Watt, *Fasti* 202; DN 17 no.167.

bishop. However, there might well have been Scots input on the selection of the bishop given that the Bishop of Glasgow, Walter Wardlaw, was a cardinal and legate in Scotland and Ireland for the Avignon papacy.[61]

The diocese of Sodor's position in the schism is instructive: it along with the other Scottish bishoprics recognised the Avignon popes. Yet, this was directly against the policy of the metropolitan: the Norwegian archbishopric supported the Roman pope.[62] It illustrates the gulf between the diocese of Sodor and its metropolitan and demonstrates that by this time its inclusion in the archbishopric of Niðaróss was an anachronism which few were prepared to do any more than tacitly acknowledge. To all intents and purposes, the diocese of Sodor was part of the Scottish church. The Norwegian archbishop may have accepted that the diocese had no choice but to support the pope which the patron of the diocese, the king of Scots, had chosen to support. In contrast, during the Great Schism, the bishops of Orkney were provided by the Roman popes.[63] The diocese of Orkney was more integrated into the archdiocese of Niðaróss; this was in part due to the fact the islands of Orkney and Shetland had remained possessions of the Norwegian kingdom.

The most significant and lasting effect of the Great Schism upon the diocese of Sodor was the separation of Man from the rest of the diocese and the creation of two sets of bishops. The separation of Man from the Isles is not surprising if considered in the context of the earlier attempt by the clergy and canons of Skye to elect a bishop. The intact diocese of Sodor was unwieldy and only really functioned when the secular kingdom of Man and the Isles was united.

Thus from 1387 onwards, a separate line of bishops on Man adhered to Rome while the bishops of Sodor followed the Scottish Church. This emphasises the impact of a split in secular sovereignty; the Hebrides were a part of the Scottish kingdom, but Man was controlled by vassals of the English king. In the early fifteenth century, Sir John Stanley was granted the island by Henry IV and the Stanley family appear to have held Man more or less securely throughout the fifteenth century.[64] The bishops of Man became subject again to York and their support of the Roman popes was in line with

61 R. Nicholson, *Scotland, the Later Middle Ages* (Edinburgh: 1974) 192.

62 L. Hamre, 'Church and Clergy' in *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia Vol.1 Prehistory to 1520*, ed. by K. Helle (Cambridge: 2003), 653-675, at 663.

63 Watt, *Fasti* 251-2.

64 Thornton, 'Scotland and the Isle of Man' 14.

the policy of the English Crown and Church.[65] In the fifteenth century, the bishops of Man were associated with English dioceses and most were probably English such as John Green, bishop from circa 1449 until circa 1455, who had a benefice in Warwickshire.[66]

The new nomenclature used for the two new dioceses indicates the divisions along the new natural lines of sovereignty; the Scottish diocese of Sodor was usually described as 'episcopus Sodorensis in Scotia' or 'Sodorensis siue Insularum'.[67] The Man bishops, who adhered to the Roman Popes, seem to have used the title 'episcopus Sodorensis'.[68] They do not appear to have adopted the title 'bishop of Man'. Instead, the Roman Popes and bishops of Man seem to have ignored the reality of the situation and continued to use Sodor as the name of their diocese.

The letter of provision to bishop Michael of Sodor in Scotia is dated 13 July 1387 and a month later, on 12 August 1387, he promised to pay the main tax and five smaller taxes to the papal Camera and college of Cardinals.[69] The letter of 12 August 1387 was written in Avignon, which would suggest that Michael was present in the Curia. His identity is not clear; he may have been a Franciscan.[70] He appears on one further occasion as a witness to a charter of Donald, Lord of the Isles, in November 1409. On that witness list he is called bishop of Sodor and doctor of theology.[71] Whether he was an Irishman or not is not clear. Michael died at some point prior to 20 April 1422.[72]

It is not stated, however, where Michael's cathedral seat was; he could have been based at Snizort on Skye. It appears that Snizort became the seat of the bishops of the Isles fifty-six years after Cormac's abortive election as bishop. In 1433 Bishop Angus attempted to transfer his seat from Snizort to an unnamed location.[73] Snizort may have been the natural, if not unanimous, choice for the bishops with an already established proto-chapter as implied by the 1331 letter.

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65 D. Ditchburn, *Scotland and Europe, the Medieval Kingdom and its Contacts with Christendom, 1214-1560* (Phantassie: 2001) 234.

66 *RSA* 212.

67 DN 17 no.35; DN 7 no.475.

68 DN 17 no.953.

69 *Calendar of Papal Letters to Scotland of Clement VII of Avignon, 1378-1394*, ed. by C. Burns (Edinburgh: 1976) 130; DN 17 no.167.

70 Watt, *Fasti* 202.

71 *Acts of the Lords of the Isles, 1336-1493*, ed. by J. Munro and R.W. Munro, (Edinburgh: 1986) [henceforth *ALI*] 28.

72 Watt, *Fasti* 203.

73 *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome* 1433-1447, ed. by A.I. Dunlop and D. MacLauchlan (Glasgow: 1983) [henceforth *CSSR*] iv 25.

Bishop Michael clearly travelled around his diocese since he was a witness to a charter by Donald, Lord of the Isles, given at Ardtornish in Morvern in 1409.[74] However, Michael seems to have tried to avoid too many dangerous voyages since in 1397 the Pope issued an indulgence for Bishop Michael permitting him to send a priest to deal with problems in the remote islands.[75] Michael's appearance as a charter witness in 1409 is the first instance where we encounter a bishop of Sodor apparently in the retinue of the Lords of the Isles. The MacDonald, Lords of the Isles, were the most significant power in the Hebrides and the bishops would have had to work with them.

It is not entirely clear who succeeded Michael. Richard Pawlie or Payl was confirmed as bishop by Pope John XXIII in 1410, but the schism had not ended and it seems highly unlikely that Richard was initially recognised in the Hebrides.[76] Pope John XXIII was the choice of the Council of Pisa of 1409, after the death of their first choice Pope Alexander V, which deposed both the Roman and Avignon popes. It is not clear which countries and bishops recognised the Pisan popes. It may be that there was a hiatus until the end of the schism. Michael must have died sometime between 1409 and 1421 when Richard Pawlie/Payl appears to have been recognised as bishop in the Hebrides.

He had 'a vicar-general in spirituals who was rector of Kilchoman on Islay' in December 1421.[77] He confirmed, by ordinary authority, *Dominicus Kenychi* as abbot of Iona in 1421.[78] That the new abbot sought the pope's ratification may indicate that he doubted whether Richard's authority would be recognised. Indeed, Richard's authority to confirm the abbot of Iona in his post is doubtful because Iona appears to have been independent of the bishop's jurisdiction and under the direct authority of Rome.[79] Vestiges of the distrust from the Great Schism perhaps also remained and Richard probably had limited influence in the Hebrides.

Richard Pawlie was, in all probability, dead by the spring of 1422 when Pope Martin V confirmed Michael Anchus as bishop of Sodor in April 1422.[80]

74 *ALI* 28.

75 *Calendar of Papal Letters to Scotland to Benedict XIII of Avignon, 1394-1419*, ed. by F. McGurk (Edinburgh: 1976) 78.

76 DN 17 no.355.

77 Watt, *Fasti* 203.

78 *CSSR* i 264.

79 K.A. Steer and J.W.M. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Edinburgh: 1977) 208.

80 DN 17 no.418.

He was the Scottish bishop of Sodor because the papal bull described the diocese as 'ecclesie Sodorensis in Scotia'.[81] However, Michael was not bishop for any length of time because in 1425 the Pope Martin V named John 'Burgheclh' or Burghersh as bishop of Sodor.[82] Similarly, John 'Burgheclh' was replaced within a year by Angus de Insulis.

The provision of Angus de Insulis to the diocese of Sodor is an important point. Angus appears to be the first Hebridean bishop of Sodor; he was the illegitimate son of Donald, lord of the Isles and half-brother of Alexander, Donald's son and successor.[83] He was provided to the bishopric by Pope Martin V in June 1426.[84] A separate letter giving him the rectory of a church in the diocese of Argyll also noted that the see of Sodor was immediately subject to the pope.[85] This could either have been a clerical error or recognition that the diocese of Sodor was very loosely connected to its metropolitan authority in Norway.

Angus's attainment of the bishopric reflects MacDonald confidence in their power and status, particularly given that his candidature for bishop was probably not supported by the patron of the see, James I.[86] Whilst the MacDonalds seem to have had good relations with James I initially after his return from captivity in England in the spring of 1424, by 1426 tensions between James I and the MacDonalds were growing.[87] Alexander's involvement in feuding in the north-west Highlands combined with their links to James's one surviving Albany Stewart relative meant that James would have been very unlikely to elevate a MacDonald to bishop of Sodor.[88] Following Alexander's surrender in 1429, Angus seems to have been summoned to the March Parliament in 1430 in order to submit to the King of Scots.[89] The recognition by the abbot of Iona of the ordinary authority of the bishop of Dunkeld in 1431 has been interpreted as part of a campaign by James I to control the lord of the Isles.[90]

81 DN 17 no.418 [the church of Sodor in Scotland – own translation].
82 DN 17 no.439.
83 *ALI* 300.
84 DN 17 no.447.
85 *CPL* vii 478.
86 R. Oram, 'The Lordship of the Isles: 1336-1545', in *The Argyll Book*, ed. D. Omand, (Edinburgh: 2006)133.
87 M. Brown, *James I* (East Linton: 1994) 59, 93.
88 Brown, *James I* 93; Oram, 'Lordship of the Isles' 133.
89 *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, K.M. Brown et al eds (St Andrews, 2007-2009), 1430/54. Date accessed: 13 July 2009.
90 Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, edd. D.E.R. Watt *et al* (Aberdeen and Edinburgh: 1987-98) viii 266; Barrell, 'The church in the West Highlands' 26; Oram, 'Lordship of the Isles' 133; Brown, *James I* 103.

However, although Angus used the title bishop in 1427, his letters of appointment were not actually issued until 1428 because of an ongoing lawsuit.[91] He made a series of petitions both concerning himself and other clergy which suggests that he was in Rome during the autumn and winter of 1427-28. On 29 December 1427, Angus sought in one petition to be promoted to holy orders and sought permission for a 'prelate in the Roman Court, having grace and communion of the Apostolic See, to confer deacon's and priest's orders upon him'.[92] In that petition he called himself 'subdeacon' whereas in a petition of 10 January 1428 he gave himself the title 'bishop of Sodor'.[93] Angus was consecrated and confirmed at some point between 29 December 1427 and 10 January 1428.

Predictably, Angus was associated with the Lord of the Isles and was a witness of a charter of Alexander's given at Eilean Mor on Loch Finlaggan on 23 June 1427.[94] A petition of 1433 highlights Angus's personal connections since he claimed to be a 'nephew of the king of Scots and son of the Lord of the Isles'.[95] This petition indicates the continuing issues surrounding the use of Snizort as the seat of the bishop; Angus sought permission to move his cathedral from Snizort to 'some honest place within the diocese'.[96] However, his petition to move the cathedral church seems to have failed. The attempt to move the bishop's seat may represent MacDonald discomfiture with the location of Snizort. Despite increasing MacDonald landholdings in Skye during the fifteenth century, it was still out with what might be considered the heartland of the MacDonalds.

Angus died before 2 October 1441 when his successor, John, son of Hector MacLean, was provided to the bishopric by the pope Eugenius IV.[97] The *Book of Clanranald* claimed that, 'his full noble body was buried, with his crozier and his Episcopal habit, in the transept on the south side of the great choir'.[98] The description sounds like Iona, not Snizort; however, we must acknowledge that there is no surviving or known grave-slab for Bishop Angus. Angus's apparent burial on Iona, rather than at his cathedral church at Snizort, is not surprising given that this was the traditional burial place of

91 Watt, *Fasti* 203.
92 *CSSR* ii 182-183.
93 *CSSR* ii 182 & 184.
94 *ALI* 35.
95 CSSR iv 25.
96 CSSR iv 25.
97 DN 17 no.562.
98 'The Book of Clanranald' in A. Cameron *Reliquiae Celticae,* edd. by A. MacBain and J. Kennedy (Inverness: 1892-4) [henceforth *Clanranald Book*] 211.

the MacDonald Lords of the Isles.[99] For example, the *Book of Clanranald* gave an account of John's, first lord of the Isles, burial on Iona in 1380.[100]

The confirmation of the bishops of Sodor by the Pope continued with John, son of Hector, MacLean in 1441.[101] The archbishop of Niðaróss was sent a courtesy letter informing him of the confirmation, but had no role to play in either the selection or confirmation. Officially, the diocese of Sodor still recognised the metropolitan authority of Niðaróss, but in practice the bishops and clergy of the diocese tended to seek the approbation of the Pope. A courtesy letter was also sent to James II, although it is more likely that if there were any Scots influence on the nomination of John MacLean as bishop it would have originated from bishop James Kennedy of St Andrews.[102] Kennedy was a powerful figure within the Scottish Church and a loyal supporter of Pope Eugenius IV.[103] The minority of James II, 1437 to 1449, can be characterised as a period of factional turbulence, particularly for the first four years, with power struggles between the leading magnates.[104]

It is not immediately evident whether John MacLean was consecrated and confirmed by the Pope himself. The provision letter of 2 October 1441 was written in Florence and it may be that John MacLean was present. In late October or early November 1441 he was dispensed for illegitimacy. However, on 18 December 1441, he paid '5 florins by the hands of Andrew de Pacis and Sons as composition for the fruits wrongfully taken up from the archdeaconry of Sodor'.[105] The fact that he did not pay it himself, but used an agent, suggests that he was not in the *Curia.*

John MacLean may have been a member of the MacLeans of Duart; it is conceivable that he was an illegitimate son of Hector MacLean of Duart who died at the battle of Harlaw in 1411.[106] However, if he was a MacLean of

99 Steer and Bannerman, *Sculpture* 209.

100 *Clanranald Book* 161.

101 DN 17 no.562.

102 Nicholson, *Scotland, the Later Middle Ages* 335.

103 Nicholson, *Scotland, the Later Middle Ages* 336.

104 C. McGladdery, *James II* (Edinburgh: 1990) 14.

105 *The Apostolic Camera and Scottish Benefices, 1418-88,* ed. A. I. Cameron (Oxford: 1934) [henceforth *ACSB*] *267.*

106 *ALI lvi* & 263; Bishop John MacLean may be the same man who petitioned for dispensation to be promoted to holy orders in May 1429. The petitioner was *John Macleillane,* acolyte, Sodor diocese, vicar of church of Heglislane [*CSSR iii* 21]. This may be the same man who appears in a petition of 11 September 1432 who was said to have detained the rectory of the church of Kilchrist of Strath for four years [*CSSR* iii 251]. A supplication of 1447 regarding the church of Kilchrist refers to a clerk, *John Hectoris*, who may be the same man mentioned in the petitions of 1429 and 1432 [*CPL* x 286]. If that was the case, Bishop John MacLean seems to have begun his ecclesiastical career with the vicarage and possibly then the rectory of Kilchrist of Strath on Skye.

Duart, it is surprising that he did not mention that he was of noble birth.[107] It is also interesting to note that he never appears as a witness to any charters of either Alexander or John, Lords of the Isles.[108] John's episcopacy seems to have been lengthy; he was still bishop in 1467 when he was one of the recipients of a papal letter concerning the promotion of a clerk to the abbacy of Iona.[109] He may still have been bishop in 1472 when the bishopric of Sodor was transferred to the new archiepiscopal see of St Andrews.[110]

Thus, by the mid-fifteenth century, the archbishop of Niðaróss only merited a courtesy letter informing him of the provision of a candidate to the bishopric. It is unlikely that any of the fifteenth century bishops of Sodor ever went to Norway to profess their obedience to their metropolitan. By 1472 and the creation of the archbishopric of St Andrews, the diocese of Sodor was only part of the archdiocese of Niðaróss in theory; in practice, there was little or no contact with the archbishop. It is arguable that the diocese had always been in an irregular position; legally it was within the archdiocese, but rarely were Hebridean clergy involved in its administration and organisation. Cormac, archdeacon of Sodor, is the only example of a Hebridean cleric who was involved in the administration of the archdiocese. There are no records of any Hebridean bishops attending the Norwegian archdiocese's provincial councils or indeed being invited to attend such a council.[111]

The inclusion of the diocese of Sodor in 1152/3 in the new archbishopric of Niðaróss may well have owed more, as Beuermann has argued, to the political and ecclesiastical situation at that point.[112] By the fifteenth century, circumstances had changed dramatically and its inclusion had become an irrelevance and an inconvenience. However, without the introduction of papal provisions to the bishopric, the consecration and

107 *ALI lvi.*

108 From 1436 until his death in 1449, Alexander, Lord of the Isles and earl of Ross, seems to have spent the majority of the time in Ross. All his surviving, twenty four in all, charters with a recorded location from this period are written in Ross. [*ALI* nos.23-50 37-76] Analysis of the given location for John's charters between 1449 and 1472 reveals that he spent much of his time in Ross. Twenty of the forty-seven charters were written at Dingwall; only twelve were written either in the Hebrides or in Argyll. [*ALI* nos.51-102 77-163] This brief examination suggests that the lordship was principally based in the northern Highlands with infrequent visits to the Isles and Argyll.

109 *CSSR* v 359.

110 DN 7 no.475.

111 DN 7 no.36 (example of a council which most of the other bishops attended).

112 I. Beuermann, 'Metropolitan Ambitions and Politics: Kells-Mellifont and Man & the Isles' *Peritia 16* (2002) 432.

confirmation of the bishops of Sodor might well have continued to be performed by the archbishop of Niðaróss. Ultimately, it was the centralisation of the late mediaeval Church which rendered Sodor's position in the archdiocese anomalous and anachronistic.

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