

France spurred Edward to make new efforts to reach a settlement with Scotland. Events during 1356 also blunted the bellicosity of Scottish magnates. It was ironic that the capture of King John opened the way for the release of King David. Talks dragged on during the winter and through 1357 and terms were finally agreed at Berwick on 3 October 1357. The Scots would pay a ransom of £66,666 over ten years for the liberty of their king, surrendering nobles as sureties for the payment of this sum. Linked to the agreement was a ten-year truce and the possibility of a future final peace. Beyond this, however, the Scots delivered no hostages to fortune. Issues of lordship and homage, of the succession or of the claims of the Disinherited were not included. In contrast to the 1328 treaty, such omissions were not forced on a weak and partisan minority regime but were willingly accepted by Edward III. His readiness, for nearly a decade, to seek a settlement contrasted with the English crown's attitude during most of the preceding half-century. It would be this desire to secure stability and peace in the north, rather than fight for greater lordship in Scotland, that would characterise subsequent approaches to the northern kingdom. Issues of English lordship would remain and Anglo-Scottish warfare was not over. Full recognition of David's kingship was missing from the terms and Edward III continued to hold Scottish lands in his allegiance. However, the treaty of Berwick marked an end to the sustained wars over the status and survival of Scottish crown and kingdom which had been waged over the previous sixty years.³¹

³¹ *Scotichronicon*, vii, 304–5; Penman, 'The kingship of David II', 259–63.

Lord of the Isles

THE WAR IN THE ISLES 1286–1318

The years of crisis and war which engulfed the Scottish realm between 1286 and 1356 altered political relationships and power structures across the north and west of the British Isles. Nowhere were these changes of greater significance than in the isles and coastlands to the west of Scotland. The experience of this maritime region would be bound up with the course of events on the mainland, but needs to be understood as different in critical ways. Though the Hebrides and Man had been brought under the lordship of the Scottish king, the Isles retained their own traditions and identities. Through the coming decades politics in the Isles would be dominated by competing magnates, especially the lines descended from Somerled, the MacDougalls of Lorn, the MacDonalds of Islay and the MacRuairis of Garmoran, who still regarded themselves as heirs to his kingship over *Inse Gall*. As before the 1260s, lords of these dynasties would move between the lordship of greater kings, seeking protection and grants of authority as they had shifted between Scottish and Norwegian allegiance, without ever being absorbed wholly into one allegiance. The wars in the Isles had a strategic importance in the efforts of first the Plantagenets and then the Bruces to extend their lordship, but it would be the ambitions of the Islesmen themselves that would prove of greatest significance in reshaping structures of power in the far west.

As in Scotland, it was the death of Alexander III that began the process of change. With the removal of active kingship, the unity of purpose and resources that had allowed the old king to establish his lordship over the Isles was also removed. The roots of this lordship remained shallow. To neighbours and to exiles, the royal settlement of the 1260s was not necessarily the final word on the status and political structure of the Isles. However, it was not just the king's authority which had defined and

contained the activities of the lords and communities of the Isles in the years since 1266. Hebridean magnates had been drawn into closer contacts with lords from western Scotland. From 1286 these links assumed a new importance. In September 1286 at Turnberry Castle, Angus Mor of Islay, head of Clan Donald, entered into a bond with a group of magnates, led by his neighbours James Stewart, Walter Balloch, earl of Menteith and Robert Bruce, earl of Carrick. These lords agreed to give mutual aid to two English magnates in Ireland: Richard de Burgh, earl of Ulster and Thomas de Clare. Those who broke this promise would be subject to attack by the others. Of those agreeing to the bond, Angus had the strongest connections in Ireland; these connections were, moreover, with members of the Ó Neill and Ó Domhnaill dynasties who were hostile to the earl of Ulster. The bond's purpose was to curtail Hebridean support for these Irish lords through an alliance of Scottish and Anglo-Irish nobles. Easy alignments between royal and aristocratic interests on both sides of the North Channel had been crucial in previous decades in putting pressure on Gaelic communities in Ireland and the Isles, but the years of such co-operation between different Anglicised communities was coming to an end.¹

The Turnberry band indicates that, despite links to the Stewarts and Bruces, Angus Mor was regarded with suspicion by his neighbours. This was less the case with Alexander of Argyll and Clan Dougall. His interests on the mainland and his marriage to the sister of John Comyn of Badenoch had made the MacDougalls better-known and better-trusted in Scotland and secured Alexander's appointment as the king's agent in the Isles. However, during the later 1280s there was a shift in the character of such alliances. Instead of acting as the means by which leading Hebrideans could be bound into the king's allegiance, they assumed a more partisan significance. Alexander of Argyll's connections with the Comyns now made him a leading figure in their faction. Between 1289 and 1292 he was active in the kingdom's politics, emerging as a supporter of the Balliol claim. The value of winning allies in the Isles was not lost on rival magnates. The Stewarts and Bruces may well have begun cultivating their contacts with Angus of Islay. The marriage between Duncan, son of Earl Donald of Mar, and Christina, daughter and heiress of Alan MacRuairi of Garmoran, certainly provided Earl Donald, a northern rival of the Comyns, with a bond of kinship to the Hebridean line whose lands bordered Badenoch to the west. During the growing instability of the 1290s, the concern of Scotland's rulers would shift from the maintenance of

peace and stability in the west to the search for allies whose galleys and military retinues were a source of strength in troubled times.²

However, it is wrong to see the Isles in a purely Scottish context. As the Turnberry band revealed, the region continued to be a crossroads of interests and concerns for all the surrounding lands, in Ulster, Dublin, England and Norway as well as Scotland. The treaty of Perth only twenty years earlier did not shut off links which had lasted for centuries, nor did it rule out new shifts in the status of the Isles. The increased involvement of Eric II of Norway in Scottish politics may have raised the prospect of renewed Norwegian claims in their lost dominions but it would be Edward I of England who would prove the real threat to the status quo. To Edward, Scottish lordship over the Isles and, especially, in Man had been achieved during the English political crisis of the 1260s. In Wales Edward had reversed the gains made by Llywelyn of Gwynedd during that period of Plantagenet weakness and in 1290, as he negotiated the terms of his son's marriage to Lady Margaret, the king showed an interest in imposing his authority on the Isles. This concern had an immediate cause. By 1290 the Turnberry band had failed, and Clan Donald had resumed its activities in Ulster. With the Stewarts and Bruces preoccupied with Scottish politics and keen to retain Hebridean allies, their ability to restrain Angus Mor of Islay and his son, Alexander, was much reduced. During the year these Islesmen helped Domhnaill Ó Neill and other Gaelic lords to recover the leadership of their kindreds in opposition to the interests of Richard de Burgh, 'red earl' of Ulster. It may have been as part of an escalating conflict with the Islesmen that Earl Richard occupied Man. His actions drew in King Edward to aid his chief Irish vassal. In June 1290 the king sent an official to take custody of Man and despatched Anthony Bek to impose his peace on the Isles which were suffering 'war and discord'. Like his father in the 1250s, Edward was drawn into the region to safeguard the stability of Ireland. Significantly, however, his treatment of Man was not unwelcome to the inhabitants. The Manxmen petitioned Edward, complaining of recent desolation, misery and lack of protection, perhaps referring to the rule of Alexander III but more likely to the experience of attacks since 1286. Typically, Edward extracted a promise of good behaviour from the Manx, toying with establishing formal protection over the strategically-vital island.³

² *R.R.S.*, vi, 648; McDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 141-2; Sellar, 'Hebridean sea kings', 208-10; Duncan and Brown, 'Argyll and the western Isles', 220, no. 5.

³ *Ann. Connacht*, 182-5; Stevenson, *Documents*, i, nos 103, 107; *Foedera*, ii, 739; Duffy, 'The Bruce brothers', 74. Domhnaill Ó Neill was son of the Brian Ó Neill who had claimed the high kingship of Ireland in the late 1250s. Domhnaill was again expelled by Earl Richard in 1291.

¹ Stevenson, *Documents*, i, no. 12; *Ann. Connacht*, 178-9, 182-5; Duffy, 'The Bruce brothers', 73-4; Simms, 'Relations with the Irish', 66-86, 79-1.

Conflict was not limited to Ulster and Man. The 'war and discord' in the Isles referred to in 1290 included rivalries within the Hebrides which would escalate during the coming decade. At the centre of these would be competition between the descendants of Somerled. By 1291 an immediate cause for friction was a land dispute between Clan Donald and the MacDougalls. This overlay older antagonisms and ambitions for wider lordship in the Isles which re-emerged in the new political atmosphere. In July 1292 Alexander of Argyll and Alexander of Islay appeared at Berwick before Edward I, then acting as lord of Scotland. The two magnates were bound to keep the peace in the Isles and the 'foreign lands in those parts' and to bring the case to parliament in September. Edward sensibly delegated the issue to the guardians, John Comyn and James Stewart, using their influence with the two parties to contain conflict.⁴

In late 1292 John Balliol was made king of Scots, receiving back Man from Edward I early in 1293. The new king would not, or could not, copy Edward's even-handed approach. In February 1293, at his first parliament, John created three new sheriffdoms designed to bring Argyll and the Hebrides under formal royal administration 'for the peace and stability of the realm'. Though James Stewart was given authority over Kintyre, Bute and Arran, areas under his lordship, the other sheriffs were partisan creations. William, earl of Ross was made sheriff of Skye with powers over the northern Hebrides. Alexander of Argyll was appointed sheriff of Lorn to run much of Argyll and the isles of Mull, Jura and Islay. Two staunch adherents of King John were given power over their regional enemies. If John thought 'peace and stability' would result, he was wrong. A decade later the earl of Ross recalled that the Isles and their 'cheventeyns' had opposed King John, who ordered Ross to wage a costly war against them. The conflict was in reality an escalation of the feud between Ross and the MacRuairis for lordship over Kintail, Skye and the Uists. Though Ross won a temporary victory, the war was far from over. In the same way, the appointment of Alexander of Argyll turned his private dispute with the lords of Islay into a clash between the crown and Islesmen. Angus Mor and Alexander of Islay refused to do homage to the new king, and John sent his sheriff to force Clan Donald to enter his peace, without obvious success.⁵

By backing his own adherents, John merely escalated existing rivalries

⁴ *Foedera*, ii, 761; *Rot. Scot.*, i, 21. The dispute was over the lands assigned to Alexander, son of Angus of Islay, through his marriage to Juliana, sister of Alexander of Argyll. Alexander of Argyll was required by Edward to bring the MacRuairis under the king's authority.

⁵ *A.P.S.*, i, 91; Duncan and Brown, 'Argyll and the western Isles', 220, no. 6; *C.D.S.*, ii, no. 1,631.

into open war against his rule. Moreover, his enemies were not without political weapons of their own. By 1295 Alexander of Islay had appealed to Edward I for justice. Edward's overlordship was also the means for a wider challenge to the king of Scots' position in the Isles. A lady from the old Manx dynasty raised a claim to Man, while Malcolm MacQuillin, the head of a kindred in the earl of Ulster's service, sought to recover lands in Kintyre. As well as John's own actions, the legitimacy of the settlement of the 1260s was under scrutiny. When Edward initiated war against John in spring 1296, he would find allies in the Isles. In particular, to counter Alexander of Argyll, Edward appointed Alexander of Islay as his agent and, with King John's sheriffs caught up in the disastrous events of the summer, MacDonald was able to occupy Kintyre.⁶ However, unlike most of the Scottish realm, Argyll and the Hebrides did not pass under Edward's lordship. Instead, events revealed the very different character of island politics. The submission of Stewart and the captivity of Ross and MacDougall did not end conflict even temporarily. Instead, warfare in the far west intensified. Alexander of Argyll's sons, John of Lorn and Duncan, maintained a forceful defence of their kindred. Further north, Lachlan and Ruairi MacRuairi, the half-brothers of Christina of Garmoran, launched savage attacks on the tenants of the crown in Skye and Lewis. Though enemies of King John's sheriff, these leaders saw Edward's victory solely in terms of Ross's removal and the chance to extend their lordship and to plunder. The imprisonment of Ross, the Comyns and Alexander of Argyll weakened the chances for stable lordship in the region. Edward recognised the need for a powerful lieutenant. In September 1296, seeking to control the MacDougalls, Edward sought to employ the Stewart connection which had considerable influence in Argyll and had recently come into his peace. James Stewart, the Campbells and the men of Argyll and Ross were ordered to support Alexander Stewart, earl of Menteith against John of Lorn. Hopes that the earl would impose Edward's authority were dashed even before the general collapse of that authority in the summer of 1297. Menteith's ally Colin Mor Campbell was killed by John of Lorn, and by April the king had transferred powers in Argyll and Ross to Alexander of Islay and released Alexander MacDougall from custody.⁷

These actions were an admission of failure. Instead of using mainland magnates, Edward was reduced to dependence on the Islesmen, a course

⁶ *Rot. Scot.*, i, 18, 21-3; Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 58, 530. For the identity of Malcolm MacQuillin (referred to here as '*le fils Engleys*'), see Simms, 'Gaelic warfare in the Middle Ages', 99-115, 109-10.

⁷ Stevenson, *Documents*, ii, no. 444; *Rot. Scot.*, i, 31-2; McDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 165; Sellar, 'Hebridean sea kings', 212.

that, once again, resulted in increased warfare. Acting in Edward's name, Alexander of Islay pursued the MacRuairis and occupied Stewart's lands in Cowal following his rebellion, but the other kindreds regarded his efforts as a regional challenge. Lachlan MacRuairi joined the MacDougalls and the tenants of the Comyns in Lochaber in attacks on Clan Donald and other Islesmen which Alexander of Argyll encouraged after his release. With the defeat of Edward's government in Scotland, the war in the Isles was almost wholly a struggle between these kindreds for dominance, accompanied by Lachlan MacRuairi's continued attacks on the leaderless men of Ross. Without Edward I's active backing, the lord of Islay was vulnerable to the greater strength of Clan Dougall. In 1299 'Alexander MacDomhnaill . . . was killed with countless numbers of his people . . . by Alexander MacDubgail'. Though private conflicts were part of the war in Scotland, in the Isles such feuds were the dominant issue, greater than allegiances to rival royal lordships.⁸

From 1296 onwards neither Edward I nor the guardians exercised effective lordship in the Hebrides. This did not mean, however, that the whole region was a backwater in the wider war. The English king in particular saw the western seas as a valuable route into the Scottish realm. In 1296 his adherents seized Man once more, and during his campaigns in Scotland in 1296, 1298, 1300 and 1301 the resources of his Irish lordship were employed on a large scale. Ireland was not simply used as a source of men and victuals. The contacts between Ulster and the Scottish realm were exploited to apply political leverage with exiles like Malcolm MacQuillin, John MacSween and Hugh Bisset returning in search of land. These exiles sought to renew claims arising from the disputes of the mid-thirteenth century and most had connections with Richard, earl of Ulster. The earl's importance in royal plans was demonstrated by the marriage of his sister to James Stewart in late 1296 in a move designed to bind the Scottish lord into Edward's allegiance. Though this attempt failed, by autumn 1301 Edward was ready for the direct extension of his lordship in the region. In conjunction with an ambitious land campaign in the south-west, a fleet was sent under Hugh Bisset and the gallowglass John MacSween into the Isles, joining up with Angus Og of Islay, one of the new leaders of Clan Donald. Its aim was to extract the submission of Alexander of Argyll and the MacRuairis, either by diplomacy or by war. Fighting occurred in Knapdale between MacSween and John Menteith, the latter backed by John of Lorn. This marked the renewal of a feud from the 1260s when Menteith's father, Walter Balloch, had driven MacSween from the lordship. However, the campaign of 1301 clearly had

an effect. Though the Stewarts and their cousins the Menteiths did not submit, perhaps fearing the claims of the exiles, western lords like Robert Bruce, earl of Carrick, the earl of Lennox and the Campbells did come to Edward's peace. Bruce's new stance was accompanied by marriage to the earl of Ulster's daughter, Elizabeth de Burgh, a match designed to link him to the king's principal regional supporter. The MacDougalls and MacRuairis probably made terms soon afterwards.⁹

Having secured these submissions, Edward did little to alter the region's political balance. Rather than reward his adherents, he allowed the MacDougalls access to his favour and released the earl of Ross, appointing him lieutenant in the north. While it was unlikely that this return to the status quo would have brought lasting peace, as in the rest of the Scottish realm it would be the actions of Robert Bruce that would initiate fresh disruption. The Islesmen would play a central role in Bruce's coup and its aftermath. The response of the MacDougalls to these events was dictated by their strong ties to the house of Comyn. In July 1306 John of Lorn defeated Bruce's escort at Dail Righ, coming close to ending the war by taking or slaying the fugitive king. In the weeks which followed, however, it would be the actions of Clan Donald and the MacRuairis in aiding Robert which would prove of greater significance in both Scotland and the Isles. Despite Bruce's connections with these kindreds, there was no political alliance to match that between the MacDougalls and Comyns. The readiness of the Hebrideans to support Robert related to short-term circumstances. For the MacRuairis, the restoration of Earl William of Ross had been unwelcome. In 1304 the earl was already seeking to recover ground, asking for money to bring the Isles to the king's justice. Though Ross may have come to a temporary arrangement with Lachlan MacRuairi, for the whole kindred, and Christina of Garmoran its head, the signs were ominous. The leaders of Clan Donald may also have felt vulnerable. Like Bruce, Angus Og had supported Edward I without major reward. Edward's favour to the MacDougalls and his friendship with the Earl of Ulster suggested the future would be bleak for Clan Donald, whose strong links to the Gaels of Ireland made them suspect to the English crown and the Anglo-Irish.¹⁰

The alliance between Robert and Clan Donald was essentially a

⁹ Stevenson, *Documents*, ii, nos 401, 610, 614-16; *C.D.S.*, ii, nos 1,238, 1,253-5, 1,275; Lydon, 'Irish levies in the Scottish Wars, 1296-1302', 207-17. Bisset was descended from the family exiled from Scotland by Alexander II and given lands in Ulster by Henry III. MacSween was probably son of Murchad Mac Súibhne who was driven from his lands in Knapdale by Walter Balloch (Stewart) in c. 1262.

¹⁰ *C.D.S.*, ii, no. 1,632; iv, 400; Sellar, 'Hebridean sea kings', 213; Duncan, 'War of the Scots', 138; Barbour, *The Bruce*, 104-20; McDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 170-4.

⁸ Stevenson, *Documents*, ii, nos 444-5; *Ann. Connacht*, 108-9.

marriage of convenience for both parties. Though contact was probably made in March 1306, when Bruce's followers were active in Kintyre, it was Robert's expulsion from Scotland in the late summer which brought him together with Angus Og and his kin. Lack of effective authority in the Hebrides was now Edward's problem. He ordered Hugh Bisset from Ireland and John Menteith from Dumbarron to lead fleets into the Isles, but Robert was clearly able to move freely through the Hebrides, receiving the support of Christina of Garmoran, raising men and ships from Clan Donald and exploiting that kindred's connections with Gaelic Ulster to recruit Irish support. Kintyre was the base for the king's renewed campaign and, during the next eighteen months, his victories over his Scottish enemies were greatly aided by the efforts of Clan Donald and the MacRuairis. The Islesmen contributed directly to Bruce's forces. 'Men of the outer isles' under Angus Og's cousin, Donald of Islay, aided Edward Bruce's campaign in Galloway in 1308. Moreover, while Robert campaigned on the mainland, his Hebridean allies harried their mutual enemies in the Isles. Lachlan MacRuairi's challenge to Ross's authority in the west undermined the earl's ability to resist Robert in the east and encouraged his submission to the king. When the decisive campaign in the region was launched against the MacDougalls in August 1308, Alexander of Argyll reported that he was vastly outnumbered and attacked from land and sea. His neighbours to the south, the barons of Argyll, led by the Campbells, were against him, and the same was true of Clan Donald to the west. King Robert moved from the east, forcing the Pass of Brander and moving on to take the surrender of Dunstaffnage Castle in Lorn. Meanwhile, it is likely that the island lordships of Alexander were attacked by his Hebridean rivals. Faced by such concerted pressure, Alexander of Argyll sought peace, while his son, John of Lorn, probably fled to Edward II.¹¹

The surrender of Alexander and of Earl William were victories not just for Bruce, but also for the king's allies and adherents, the enemies of these magnates. The results of the victory may not have been immediately clear. King Robert accepted both Ross and MacDougall into his allegiance. Ross was allowed to retain his lands and it seems likely that Alexander was hopeful of similar terms. Both attended the king's parliament at St Andrews in March 1309 but, by the end of the year, Alexander had fled Scotland and joined his son in English allegiance. His decision may have

been prompted by continuing difficulties at the hands of his neighbours, keen to exploit his weakness. Donald of Islay and the barons of Argyll had also been at parliament, perhaps pressing the king to reward their support, while in the west MacDougall may have found his lands occupied by local enemies. In the aftermath of Alexander's flight, members of the Campbell kindred obtained lands held by the MacDougalls in Lorn and Benderloch, but Clan Donald gained most. Angus of Islay received a royal charter granting him Morvern and Ardnamurchan, while his nephew, Alexander Og, was granted Mull and Tiree. By comparison Clan Ruairi made few gains, perhaps because of internal shifts within the kindred. Robert confirmed changes which saw Lady Christina replaced in control of Garmoran by her half-brother, Ruairi. Though Ruairi recognised the rights of Christina's line and sought royal recognition, promising to provide galleys for the king's fleet, it is likely that the replacement of Robert's ally and kinswoman by a leader with a violent and chequered record was the result of family politics, not of royal policy. In other, more ominous ways, the king had to recognise limits to his rule in the far west. Lochaber was a key region, linking the Western Isles and coasts to Strathspey and the Great Glen. Its attachment to Badenoch in the thirteenth century had been a vital means of policing these routes and Robert continued the connection by including Lochaber in Thomas Randolph's earldom of Moray in 1312. However, the king seems also to have recognised the rights of Angus Og in the lordship. Allowing a Hebridean magnate control over Lochaber would not have served the interests of the crown in the north-west. Robert's grant, limiting Randolph's lordship, may have been wrung from him by Angus, and it may have recognised that, after the fall of the Comyns, Clan Donald had effectively occupied Lochaber. It would be an approach to the extension of power pursued across the west by the kindred in coming decades.¹²

The king's readiness to placate the Islesmen was born out of a knowledge of western politics. The MacDougalls remained a threat, joining the exiles in Ireland. Though Alexander of Argyll died in 1310, the Isles were still a weak flank for Robert, hard to police and easy to penetrate from Ireland. Edward II also grasped this and, like his father, sought to use these exiles to recover lordship. In 1310 John MacSween, 'stout of spear', led a fleet to attack his ancestral hold of Castle Sween from John Menteith, who was now in Bruce's allegiance. John of Lorn was also employed. In 1311 and 1314 he was named Edward's admiral in the west

¹¹ *Chron. Fordun*, ii, 335; *C.D.S.*, iii, no. 80; iv, 400; Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 179-81; McDonald, *Kingdom of the Isles*, 174-80. McDonald suggests 1309 as an alternative date for the war in Argyll. Though there are problems with the evidence, all near contemporary indications suggest the fighting took place in 1308.

¹² *A.P.S.*, i, 280-459-60; *R.M.S.*, i, app. 1, no. 9; app. 2, nos 56-8, 351-3, 363, 653; *R.R.S.*, v, nos 239, 366. For Professor Duncan's alternative view of Christina's resignation, see *R.R.S.*, v, 67-8.

and given ships and men to recover his lands in the Isles and Argyll. Irish resources were assigned to these efforts. Richard de Burgh, earl of Ulster was once more the central figure, leading a list of over fifty English and Gaelic leaders summoned to serve in the expedition led by Edward II in 1314. The results of these campaigns were limited to sporadic fighting. The tide continued to be with the Bruces. In 1313 Edward Bruce secured Galloway, opening the way for the expedition which captured the Isle of Man in May. However, such gains were not secure. In February 1315, leading a fleet of Hebrideans, John of Lorn retook Man from Robert's garrison. A month later John was seeking submissions from Donald of Islay and other Islesmen.¹³

It was against this uncertain background that Edward Bruce landed on the Antrim coast at the head of an army in May 1315. The expedition was a reverse of those planned by the English in 1311 and 1314 and formed part of the Bruces' escalation of their war after Bannockburn. However, behind these strategic goals and the hopes of a realm based on kinship between Scottish and Irish Gaels, Edward's war was also part of established regional patterns that connected Ireland, Scotland and the Isles. As lord of Carrick and Galloway, Edward himself was part of such patterns, and south-west Scotland provided large contingents in his armies. But the ambitions of Hebridean magnates, and above all Clan Donald, also shaped the character and course of the war. It was amongst Angus Og's Gaelic kin and allies in Ulster that Edward found his strongest Irish adherents, led by Domhnaill Ó Neill. Ó Neill, a long-standing ally of Clan Donald, reportedly invited Edward's aid and made over his claim to the high-kingship to Bruce. It was also from the men of the Isles that Edward recruited his best soldiers. In 1315, 1317 and 1318 the Bruce forces in Ireland contained a strong Hebridean element, including both MacDonalDs and MacRuairis and drawing on the experience of such gallowglass kindreds in Irish warfare. The influence of the Islesmen was also apparent in the goals of Edward's warfare. Bruce's initial efforts were directed against Domhnaill's enemy, Richard de Burgh, earl of Ulster. The earl had been central to English interventions in the Isles since the 1290, but he was also rumoured to be in talks with his old allies, the Bruces. While the defeat of de Burgh in 1315 made sense as a means of securing Edward a power-base, it served the interests of Ó Neill and Angus Og much more directly. They were free to challenge their Gaelic enemies, chief among them Aed Ó Domhnaill, who was supported by his

own gallowglass led by the exile John MacSween. In Ulster and much of Ireland, the effect of Bruce's arrival was to intensify such local conflicts, supporting the interests of his allies and their gallowglass.¹⁴

Edward's links with the Islesmen and their Ulster allies committed him to war with de Burgh and the Anglo-Irish, made him dependent on Gaelic allies and bogged him down in the dynastic competitions which made up Irish politics. While it is unlikely that Bruce could have won support from the colonists, however disaffected they were with Edward II, his prospects were limited by the interests of his chief supporters. The end of his brief kingship at the battle of Fochart in 1318 certainly involved these supporters. Amongst the dead at Fochart were 'Mac Ruairi *ri Inse Gall* and Mac Domhnaill *ri Oirear Goidel* (Argyll)', perhaps Ruairi of Garmoran and Angus of Islay. In the aftermath, Domhnaill Ó Neill's son was killed at Derry with another MacDonald leader, conceivably Alexander Og, at the hands of Aed Ó Domhnaill. The fate of Edward's Irish ambitions and of Clan Donald's hopes of increased influence in Ulster were bound together in defeat. Since 1315 warfare had been waged with an intensity and on a scale not seen in the region for decades but, though this escalation was driven by direct competition between royal governments, the ambitions of Bruce and Plantagenet in the west still worked in conjunction with the interests of under-kings, magnates and even exiles like John MacSween. The Isles remained a world of many competing lords.¹⁵

CLAN DONALD AND THE KINGDOM OF SCOTS (1318–57)

The defeat of Edward Bruce at Fochart brought an end to one phase of conflict in the west. Despite the destruction, in terms of royal lordship little appeared to have changed. The English crown's hold on its Irish lordship was preserved, and in 1317 Thomas Randolph retook Man for the Bruces. However, amongst leading lords of the region there had been fundamental shifts. Though the deaths of Edward Bruce and his Hebridean allies left their marks, it was the fate of his enemies which had the greatest impact. In Ulster the earl had been driven into exile. Although he returned in 1318, he never recovered his old dominance. In

¹³ *Rot. Scot.*, i, 118–24, 143–4; McNamee, *Wars of the Bruces*, 48–9, 52, 58, 60–1, 160. Gaelic verses were composed to record MacSween's efforts in 1310 (Clancy, *Triumph Tree*, 302–5).

¹⁴ Duffy, 'The Bruce brothers', *passim* and 70–6; Barbour, *The Bruce*, 666–75; *Ann. Connacht*, 248–51. Angus Og was married to Aine Ó Cathain, the sister of one of Ó Neill's vassals, Diarmait Ó Cathain, another Ulster adherent of Bruce. The MacRuairis were also active in local Irish conflicts (*Ann. Connacht*, 250–1).

¹⁵ *Ann. Connacht*, 250–3.

the Isles and Scotland change was even more significant. In 1317 John of Lorn died a broken exile. His end confirmed the removal of Clan Dougal from a leading role in Argyll and the Isles. Alongside the fall of his kinsmen, the Comyns of Badenoch and Lochaber, this meant that the wars since 1306 had removed the two dynasties at the heart of western politics since the 1260s. It remained to be seen how their leadership in the region would be replaced.¹⁶

In the decade from 1318 that leadership was in the hands of King Robert. The change had begun earlier. In May 1315, as Edward Bruce gathered his allies and galleys at Ayr, Robert set sail with his own ships to Tarbert on Loch Fyne. There he had his galleys dragged in full sail across Kintyre, consciously fulfilling a prophecy that any who performed the feat 'should win the Isles'. Whilst he dwelt at the old castle at Tarbert, the king cemented his loose superiority in the Hebrides, confirming support for the Irish venture. This quest for effective rule in the far west was, ironically, aided by the bloodbath at Fochart. The deaths amongst the leaders and men of Clan Donald and Clan Ruairi would weaken and fragment these kindreds for over a decade. Robert was not a man to miss the opportunity to tighten his lordship. The king knew the west and its political traditions. His perspective on the region was that of his forebears as earls of Carrick and their kin and allies, the Stewarts, who regarded Argyll and the Isles as a frontier zone of threat and opportunity. As king, Robert recognised the importance of these western magnate houses. His son-in-law, Walter Stewart, accompanied him to Tarbert in 1315, perhaps receiving confirmation as lord of Kintyre. The Stewarts' kin and adherents, the Menteiths and Campbells, similarly played key roles in Knapdale and Argyll. Further north Robert sought to restore the structure of lordship so important for the thirteenth-century kings, and in 1324 Randolph's authority over Lochaber was confirmed, probably at the expense of Clan Donald. The proof of the king's approach was in his dealings with the earls of Ross. Earl William was Robert's personal foe, but the lordship he exercised was vital for the order and stability of the north-west. From William's submission in 1308 onwards, the family was treated with generosity designed to preserve this role. New lands were added to their holdings in the east, while their western lands were confirmed by royal grant. The marriage of William's heir, Hugh, to the king's sister, Maud, cemented an alliance which had guarded the crown's interests in the far north for a century.¹⁷

Robert was not content to bolster the power of western magnates. More than any of his royal predecessors, he maintained a personal presence in the Isles and coastlands. This was especially true in and around the Firth of Clyde. Following his visit there in 1315, the king identified Tarbert as a key point in the region, and in 1325 work was begun to strengthen the old castle as a royal base. He raised the money and supplies for construction from Argyll, Arran, Islay and Kintyre. These sums were levied by royal officials, Dugald Campbell as sheriff of Argyll and John MacDonald as bailie of Islay. John was probably the son of Angus Og and in the coming decades would rise to dominate the region. In 1326, however, he acted as a royal agent on his family's home island. The Hebridean kindreds lacked established leaders and were faced by a king capable of dealing with unrest within the Isles. When Robert visited his castle at Tarbert in 1326 and again in 1328, he was entering a region that sat firmly under his authority.¹⁸

This authority was not limited to the Hebrides. From 1326 Robert's interest was drawn, once again, across the narrow seas. The death of his father-in-law, Richard de Burgh, left his earldom weak and vulnerable with a youth, Richard's grandson, William, as absentee heir. By the end of the year, the fall of Edward II in England meant the Dublin government was uncertain and isolated. Robert received messages from this government and at Easter 1327 he landed in Ulster, acting as the kinsman of the young earl and protector of his tenants. The king remained in Ireland until August, negotiating with the English. Though he left after the colonists formally recognised Edward III, he returned the next year. After the treaty with the minority regime, Bruce now came 'in peace'. In his train was his nephew, William de Burgh, earl of Ulster. Robert established the earl in his province, his actions contrasting totally with the events of a decade before. In the late 1320s Bruce was seeking to restore the situation of the previous century when English and Scottish crowns and magnates acted together to maintain their interests against the Gaels of Ireland and their gallowglass allies. The attack on de Burgh in 1315 had been a product of the Bruces' position and served the goals of their supporters in the Isles. It did not offer a basis for secure Scottish kingship in the region. Influence in Ulster as the sponsor of the young earl linked to effective rule in the Isles was more effective. This was no peripheral concern to Robert. The ailing king spent much of his last two years on

¹⁶ Sellar, 'Hebridean sea kings', 217; McNamee, *Wars of the Bruces*, 184.

¹⁷ Barbour, *The Bruce*, 564-5; *R.M.S.*, i, app. 2, nos 17, 49-50, 55, 61, 63-5; *R.R.S.*, v, 635; Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 271-4.

¹⁸ *E.R.*, i, 52-7; *R.R.S.*, v, 136-7, 156-7. In 1325 'Roderick de Ile', an unidentified Hebridean lord, was forfeited in parliament, an indication of both tensions in the Isles and the king's determination to stamp his authority on the region (*R.M.S.*, i, app. 2, no. 699).

ship and shore seeking to cement his dynasty's hold in the region. The peace and stability of much of his realm was bound up with the management of the isles and coasts to the west.¹⁹

However, the security of Robert's lordship in the Isles depended on the peace between the English and Scottish realms and on the continuity of effective royal government in the region. The renewal of war between the kingdoms in 1333 shattered the brief era of cohabitation, confirming a very different political environment in Ulster and the Isles. Ireland was, once again, used as a source of men and supplies for the Scottish wars, and questions of internal politics were neglected by the English crown. In this atmosphere the problems of the Anglo-Irish intensified, especially in Ulster. In 1333 Earl William de Burgh was murdered by his own kinsmen, ending the male line of earls and leaving his English tenants under absentee lords and vulnerable to their Gaelic neighbours. The role of the earls of Ulster as figures with influence across northern Ireland and into the Isles was over. Robert's support of his nephew in 1328 had not repaired the damage done to the earldom in the Bruce name a decade before.²⁰

The renewal of war brought a parallel change to the west of Scotland. Here too, the great magnate adherents of the crown experienced a crisis. Earl Hugh of Ross was killed, his son and John Randolph left the kingdom, and young Robert Stewart was chased from his lands by the Balliol forces. Conflict for lordship was brought directly into the region by David Strathbogie. David occupied Stewart's lands on the Firth of Clyde in 1333 and two years later carried his war against Randolph into Lochaber, which Strathbogie claimed as heir of the Comyns. Though Stewart drew heavily and successfully on his tenants in Bute and Cowal, the attacks of Balliol and Strathbogie prevented the leading Bruce adherents in the west from exerting influence in the Isles. In their absence, Robert's political settlement unravelled. Man was lost in 1333 and in the Hebrides new leaders emerged: Ranald, son of Ruairi of Garmoran, and John, son of Angus Og of Islay. John's rise was possibly at the expense of his cousins, the sons of Alexander, who took the exiles' route, becoming Ulster galloglass. By 1334, John was lord of Islay and the leading figure in the southern Hebrides. In the warfare between Bruce and Balliol partisans, his support was valuable. John's aims in this conflict represented the change in regional circumstances. His position was no longer shaped

Ulster in the Fourteenth Century

The de Burgh earls of Ulster had played a central role in the politics of the Isles and north and north-west Ireland since the 1260s but they were the major regional casualty of the wars. Robert I's restoration of his nephew, William, earl of Ulster in 1328 proved to be in vain. The earl's attempts to renew his grandfather's authority over a wide region ended when he was murdered near modern Belfast by his own steward and retainers in June 1333. This precipitated a period of conflict and raised fears of a fresh Scottish descent on Ulster. Though the English king's officials restored order to the heart of the earldom in eastern Ulster where English urban and rural communities survived, beyond the river Bann the lordship of the earls over Irish kindreds disappeared for good. Political activity amongst these dynasties remained characterised by conflict between rival claimants, like that between Aed and Enri Ó Neill which lasted into the 1340s, but the balance of power had altered. By the 1350s inroads were being made into English Ulster by the Ó Neill and the Ó Cathain kindreds and by families from Scotland and the Isles. As gallowglass and as lords in their own rights, Hebridean kindreds like the MacQuillins in north Antrim and the MacSweenys in Fanad established themselves in this unstable environment.²¹

by rivalry with the MacDougalls. John of Lorn's son, Ewen, did return with the Disinherited, but his activities did not amount to a challenge to Clan Donald's hold on the Isles.²²

By 1335 both the Bruce guardians and Balliol recognised John of Islay as a lord to be courted. John Randolph travelled to Tarbert, not like Robert to display his authority but to seek the support of John of the Isles. Randolph's move was in response to offers made by both Balliol and the English who wanted John to aid an attack on south-west Scotland from Ireland. Whether or not John actively participated in the campaign, the attractions of allegiance to Balliol and England clearly proved stronger. By recognising Balliol, John secured a free hand in the Hebrides. In September 1336 he entered into an indenture with that king which gave him fresh title to Clan Donald's heartlands on Islay and to the lands granted to the family by Bruce, but which added new lordships. John was given rights to hold Knapdale on the mainland, the isles of Skye and Lewis, and a new claim to Lochaber, though only as guardian for

¹⁹ McNamce, *Wars of the Bruces*, 242-5, 253; Frame, *English Lordship*, 139-42.

²⁰ Frame, *English Lordship*, 144-6, 196-227; Nicholson, *Edward III and the Scots*, 196-7. Edward III abandoned a planned expedition to Ireland in favour of the Scottish campaign of 1333.

²¹ Frame, *Colonial Ireland*, 118-19; Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland*, 128-35; A. J. Otway-Ruthven, *A History of Medieval Ireland* (London, 1968), 248-53.

²² Simms, *From Kings to Warlords*, 130; Sellar, 'Hebridean sea kings', 217.

Strathbogie's young son. This arrangement was confirmed by Edward III and during 1337 and 1338 John remained his adherent, receiving praise from the English king for having 'repeatedly curbed our many wicked enemies'. The 1336 indenture gave John claims on the lands of Stewart, Randolph and Ross, and the Islesman probably pursued these rights through war with three of the leaders of King David's party. The only magnate not challenged by John's new claims was Ranald of Garmoran. Instead, MacRuairi was drawn into an alliance with his kinsman, a relationship secured through a marriage between John and Ranald's sister, Amy, in 1337. By then, John clearly regarded himself as the leading Hebridean magnate and adopted the style *Dominus Insularum*, Lord of the Isles. This was a Latin rendering of the Gaelic *Ri Imse Gall* claimed by Somerled and several of his descendants. From the 1330s it would symbolise the lasting predominance of John of Islay and his kin over the Hebrides and much of the surrounding coastlands.²³

In the late 1330s John represented a growing power, from Ulster to Lewis, outside the allegiance of the Bruce king. While they led an increasingly effective war against Balliol and his backers, Stewart and Ross were apparently unsuccessful in forcing John of the Isles into submission. After David II's return in 1341, the king attempted to undermine John by recognising the latter's cousin, Angus, as lord of Islay, but this too made little impression. John's resistance to the Bruce cause was not due to fixed loyalties to its enemies. Instead, it sprang from a determination to retain his recent gains, areas in which he had made inroads since 1336. In this John was assisted by the divisions between the king and his magnates. His poor relations with David II probably encouraged Earl William of Ross to seek friendly relations with John and Ranald of Garmoran in 1342. Evidence of the Hebrideans reaching a similar peace with King David only came in June the next year in a meeting at Ayr. John was recognised as lord over many of the isles and lands granted him by Balliol, including Lewis and Lochaber. Though Stewart's position in Kintyre and Knapdale and Ross's rights in Skye were also acknowledged, the grants confirmed the gains made in war by John of Islay at the expense of the Bruce party.²⁴

David issued his charters for 'the good and peace of the realm and community'. Though the Islesmen clearly accepted David's distant

authority, in reality the grant of mainland lordships to John of the Isles and Ruairi of Garmoran guaranteed not peace, but continued disruption. William of Ross clearly continued to find the MacRuairies and other kindreds difficult neighbours and vassals in the west. His response to the problem was to seize the chance presented by the mustering of the king's host at Perth to surprise and kill Ranald MacRuairi at Elcho Priory in early October 1346. The slaying of a dangerous enemy by treachery was a tactic used by numerous English lords against Irish rivals. Its value depended on the ability of the killer to exploit the disruption created by the deed, but Ross would continue to experience opposition from local kindreds. Instead, the death of Ranald allowed John of the Isles to extend his lordship further. Ranald was the last male leader of the MacRuairi kindred. As both his brother-in-law and the most powerful figure in the west, John of the Isles moved quickly to secure Ranald's lordships. Uist and Garmoran were added to the orbit of the lord of the Isles.²⁵

Between the 1330s and the 1360s the power of this Hebridean magnate developed as a loose but effective hegemony. In islands and in mainland districts John acted as overlord of lesser kindreds, like the MacLeans on Jura and Mull, the MacLeods on Lewis and the MacKintoshes in Lochaber. These families, and later junior branches of John's own house, were formed into a political hierarchy. John exacted limited services from these adherents, most importantly military support. The MacLeans in particular would be identified as the leader of John's standing forces, soldiers paid in land and rents in the manner of gallowglass septs who combined professional service in war to a lord with permanent landholdings. The wars in the Isles which had absorbed the energies of such warbands were now replaced by relative peace. The use of these troops would now be focused beyond the Hebrides.²⁶

How had a region, long fragmented between rival dynasties and easily brought under Scottish royal authority in the previous century, been formed into a single great lordship? Most obviously, John's rise was a consequence of the crisis experienced by the Scottish kingdom since the 1280s. The Hebrides had never been effectively absorbed into Scottish political society. Loose royal overlordship and aristocratic connections were no substitute for real identification with the Scottish kingdom. Like English lordship in western Ireland, such predominance disappeared quickly in the face of setbacks. War and crisis from the 1280s and after 1332 meant that the means and will to bring a distant and diffuse region

²³ *Scotichronicon*, vii, 110-11; Nicholson, *Edward III and the Scots*, 220-1; *Acts of the Lords of the Isles*, lxxiv-lxxv, nos 1-3; *Rot. Scot.*, i, 516, 534, 535.

²⁴ *R.R.S.*, vi, nos 72, 73, 485; *R.M.S.*, i, app. 1, no. 114; Penman, 'The Kingship of David II', 185. The accommodation between Ross and the Islesmen was sealed by the earl's marriage to John's sister, Mary, and his grant of lands in Kintail (under dispute between the two men) to Ranald (*A.L.L.*, app. B, no. B23).

²⁵ *Scotichronicon*, vii, 253. Garmoran was confirmed to John in the 1370s but was almost certainly in his possession from soon after 1346 (*R.M.S.*, i, no. 412).

²⁶ *A.L.L.*, xlii-xlyiii, no. 4; Simms, *From Kings to Warlords*, 116-28.

like the Isles under effective external authority were lacking. In the wars Hebridean magnates were sought as allies and themselves used the wider war to fulfil their own goals in the region. The decisive passage of the conflict saw the downfall of Comyn lordship in Lochaber and of the MacDougalls in Mull, Mòrvern and Lorn between 1307 and 1309. Achieved by Bruce in alliance with Clan Donald, this would serve the interests of the Islesmen much more than the king. The MacDougalls were the most powerful Hebridean kindred, the dynasty most closely bound into the structures of the kingdom and most susceptible to royal direction. By contrast, Clan Donald and Clan Ruairi remained much less closely linked to the Scottish polity and retained stronger Irish connections. They were never comfortable agents of the Scottish crown. Bruce had destroyed the strongest ties of lordship between the Scottish elite and the Islesmen.

Of equal importance were attitudes within the Isles. For Islesmen the defeat of Alexander of Argyll and his kin was a decisive episode, not in King Robert's war but in the sporadic but bloody conflict between the descendants of Somerled for kingship over *Innse Gall*. This kingship was ill-defined but nevertheless possessed real meaning, corresponding to the different values and perceptions of the Islesmen. These were reflected by the continuing strength of ties – political, military, cultural and social – between the Hebrides and Gaelic Ireland. John of the Isles himself retained links of kinship with those Gaelic kindreds which profited most from the decline of the earls of Ulster. With this background John would hardly see his lordship in a purely Scottish context, and during the coming decades Hebridean kindreds, the MacSweens, the MacRuairi and the MacAlasdair branch of Clan Donald, would continue to establish themselves in Ireland, receiving the praise of bards, the employment of lords and control of new lands. For the men of the Isles, while the Scottish king's lordship was an external intrusion, John's primacy represented the continuation of their customary identities and activities as a Gaelic, sea-borne, militarised and aggressive society. His achievement revived and redefined the islands and coastlands as a distinctive political society within the Scottish realm but outside the effective orbit of the kings.²⁷

Such developments had dangerous implications for the Scottish kingdom. John's primacy ended much of the internal warfare which characterised the Isles, but the Hebrides remained a militarised society. Still economically poor, the Isles exported their surplus military population in

search of lands or money. They added a new and unpredictable element to the political society of the north.²⁸ John also represented a new element in Scottish politics. In 1350 the lieutenant of the kingdom, Robert Stewart, sought a personal alliance with John of the Isles through his marriage to Stewart's daughter, Margaret. During the 1350s John was linked to the leading magnates of northern and western Scotland, Stewart and Ross. However, these connections were of a very different character to those of the previous century. The Comyns and Stewarts forged ties with Hebrideans in the 1260s to aid the crown in bringing the Isles into its orbit. The contacts made in the 1350s were no adjunct to royal authority. Instead they were attempts by magnates to accommodate and manage the place of Clan Donald and its satellites in the politics of the mainland. The trends of the thirteenth century in the west had been reversed. The re-establishment of an effective sub-kingdom in the Isles altered the political balance not just of Scotland, but of the whole maritime world of the west. The relative unity of the Hebrides contrasted with the fragmentation of royal authority in both Scotland and Ireland and with the lasting divisions between lords in English and Scottish allegiance. In an atmosphere of lasting warfare, the ability of Anglo-Irish and Scottish magnates to contain the activities of the Islesmen, through alliances like the Turnberry band, was lost. In Ireland the result was the part played by Hebrideans in the weakening of English lordship in Ulster and Connacht. As a consequence of the Scottish wars, in the fourteenth century it would not be the rule of English and Scottish kings and nobles, but the lordship of John Mór that would hold sway in the Isles and span the narrow seas.²⁹

²⁸ Boardman, 'Lordship in the north-east: The Badenoch Stewarts I, Alexander earl of Buchan, lord of Badenoch', 1–30; *A.L.L.*, xxxviii–xli.

²⁹ *A.L.L.*, app. B, no. B25. The lordship of Kintyre, which Stewart and John both claimed, may have been Margaret's dowry. It was confirmed to the couple by Robert as king in 1376 (*R.M.S.*, i, no. 568).

²⁷ Clancy, *The Triumph Tree*, 309; Nicholls, *Gaelic and Gaelicised Ireland*, 87–9; Duffy, 'The Bruce brothers', 74. John's mother, Ainè, returned to Ireland in c. 1336 and married into a branch of the Ó Neill, an alliance perhaps in her son's interests.