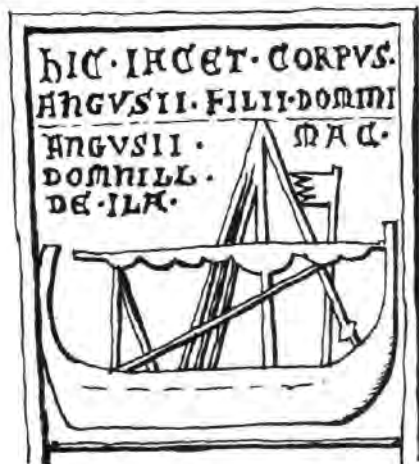


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Tombstone (undated) at St. Oran's, Iona, of Angus, son of Sir Angus mac Donald of Islay.

Σ91

(Inverness, 1981).

THE LORDSHIP OF THE ISLES

JEAN MUNRO

The Lordship of the Isles held a prominent position in the history of the Highlands in the medieval period, both in the Hebrides and in much of the mainland. In working on the record of the MacDonalDs as Earls of Ross as well as Lords of the Isles, it is hard to put together a straight narrative from the various sources available, and so I thought that the most useful thing that I could do would be to try to unravel the thread of events for you.

Dr John Bannerman has made a study of social conditions under the Lordship in the 15th century, which I would recommend to those who want to know more on that topic.¹ This is only one of the fields in which recent work has helped towards an understanding of the lordship and its origins.

In Gaelic tradition the title king or lord of the Isles goes back to Somerled who lived in the 12th century but David Sellar has shown that Godfrey, son of Fergus, who died about 853 is an authentic ancestor of Somerled.² At his death Godfrey was described as a lord or lord of the Hebrides.³ But after his time Norse overlordship and settlement of the west fill the gap of some 300 years until the emergence of a separate Norse dynasty in Man and the Isles under Godfrey Crovan in c.1079. His predecessors had already been called in Gaelic *Ri Innse Gall* — King (or ruler) of the Hebrides. Somerled, who married the grand-daughter of Godfrey Crovan, was first recorded as ruler in Argyll but extended his power into the islands. This brought conflict with his brother-in-law solved by a territorial division which left Somerled in possession of the Islay and Mull groups but not of Man, Lewis or Skye. This division remained until the death of the last king of Man in 1265. Somerled's descendants formed three branches called after his son and grandsons — the clan Dougal later associated with Mull and Lorn, the clan Donald with Islay, Kintyre and Morvern and the clan Ruari with the Uists and Garmoran (Moidart, Arisaig, Morar and Knoydart). Dr Bannerman suggests that until the 14th century the family was led by representatives of one or other group in succession following the Irish pattern. At first they kept considerable independence both from Scotland and Norway, although they owed allegiance to the former for their mainland and the latter for their island territories. In 1266 Norway ceded the Hebrides to Scotland and the island rulers became much more directly involved in Scottish affairs — for example representatives of all three of the branches attended the council at Scone which recognised the Maid of Norway as heir to the throne in 1284.⁴ The wars of independence soon emphasised this involvement and upset the balance between the three groups of Somerled's descendants. The clan Dougal backed Balliol and although their leaders later recovered a good deal of their land they never again dominated the scene. The clans Donald and Ruari backed Bruce, and the close association of Angus Og the leader of the clan Donald with Bruce gave that branch a pre-eminence which was enhanced by the fact that the male line of clan Ruari came to an end when Roderick was murdered at Elcho in 1346 and that the heiress, his sister Amie, was already married to Angus Og's son and heir John who thus inherited the Uists and Garmoran.⁵

It is with John, son of Angus Og, that I propose to begin a more detailed study, as this is the period on which our study of the charters of the Lords of the Isles for the Scottish History Society is being based, extending from about 1350 to 1493. This period includes four lords John, Donald his son, Alexander his son, and finally again a son, John.

John Macdonald of Islay succeeded Angus shortly after the death of King Robert Bruce in the family lands in Islay and also in Mull and other possessions granted to his father by Bruce. Unlike his father, John was not a dedicated Bruce man and indeed he is found attached to the English interest when Edward Balliol gave him a charter in 1335⁶. But after the defeat of Balliol and his supporters, David II pardoned John and his Macruari brother-in-law. To John, he gave the islands of Islay, Jura, Colonsay, Mull, Coll, Tiree and Lewis, and the mainland districts of Morvern, Lochaber, Duror and Glencoe.⁷ On the mainland the Macdougalls had only the lands between Appin and the south boundary of Lorn. This charter and John's succession to Uist and Garmoran established what was to be the lordship of the Isles and very soon afterwards John himself uses the designation not just of John of Isla but also *Dominus insularum* or lord of the isles. One of the first recorded instances of this style occurs in an indenture or treaty with John Macdougall of Lorn dated in 1354.⁸ This sorts out the rights of each party to island properties in Argyll — Macdougall accepting Macdonald's right to Mull, Tiree and part of Jura, while Macdonald apparently relinquished Coll and parts of Tiree.

In 1350 while King David was still a prisoner in England, John of the Isles married Margaret, daughter of the Steward of Scotland, later Robert II⁹ — John's earlier marriage was put aside on some pretext but he kept the Macruari lands. The long argument over the payment of the King's ransom found John, as one of the leading magnates of Argyll, absenting himself from Parliament and allying himself with his father-in-law in opposition to the King's policy. David had a bargaining factor in an act of revocation passed in 1367¹⁰ which would have borne heavily on John but which was not consistently put into effect. It was probably this that brought him to agree to a second reconciliation and at Inverness in 1369 John made 'the most complete and unqualified submission' offering his father-in-law as security and handing over as hostages his son Donald and a grandson called Angus. He also undertook to obey royal officials and to pay contributions.¹¹ This was of course made easier when King David died early in February 1371 and was succeeded by John's father-in-law Robert II.

John called 'good John of Isla' by a later cleric¹² appears to have been liberal in his support of the church, as his ancestors had been — the poet did them less than justice when he called them 'a race that made no war on the church.'¹³ The MacVurichs say that John made donations to Iona, roofed over chapels on Eilean Finlaggan and two other islands and equipped them with 'all their appropriate instruments for order and mass and the service of God':¹⁴ the Macdonald shennachie adds that 'he mortified much land to the church in his time' and mentions the parish church in Benbecula and 'the little oratory in Grimsay' as having been built at his expense.¹⁵ There is good evidence that the 5 major religious foundations in the west and the isles were founded by descendants of Somerled and in the case of Saddell abbey¹⁶ perhaps by Somerled himself or his son Reginald, who is also credited with the transformation of Iona into a Benedictine abbey¹⁷ and with founding the Nunnery there whose first prioress was a daughter of Somerled.¹⁸ Ardchattan priory was founded by Reginald's nephew Duncan son of Dougall about 1230¹⁹, while Oronsay priory was founded or perhaps transferred to Augustinians by good John himself, before 1353.²⁰

The diocese of Argyll was mostly mainland and came directly under the Pope from

about 1250.²¹ The church of the isles was officially part of the diocese of Trondheim from 1153 although a cathedral for the southern part of the diocese called Sodor was being built at Peel in the isle of Man from about 1230. But the patronage of the Scottish part of the see was transferred to Alexander III in 1266.²² In 1349 the Pope was sending copies of a letter about the bishop-elect of Sodor not only to John Stewart of Bute and John Macdonald of Islay but also to the people of the city and diocese of Trondheim — however the letter said that the bishop-elect need not visit Trondheim personally.²³ During the lifetime of John Lord of the Isles the separation of the Isles even from Man was coming about. In about 1330 a group of canons and local clergy of Skye elected a bishop at Snizort but it was not until 50 years later (in 1387) that the great schism in the papacy, during which Scotland supported the opposite side from England and Man, brought about a complete separation; and from that date the diocese of the Isles was established with Snizort as its not very convenient cathedral.²⁴ The relations between the Church and the Lordship require further study, but the problems are obvious — language, remoteness and claims of general barbarity. In 1433 Angus bishop of the Isles, who was a son of Donald, lord of the Isles, was asking for Papal licence to move his cathedral from Skye to some 'honest place' within his diocese — nothing seems to have been done.²⁵ In 1462 Bishop Lauder of Argyll after a rough reception in Lismore told the Pope that 'on account of strife raging between temporal lords and other magnates of his diocese he was unable to reside safely and befittingly in Lismore and to exercise jurisdiction, and his subjects as well clerics as seculars cannot convene to him in one place within his diocese without danger of their lives'. He asked for permission to live in Glasgow or some other suitable place within two days journey of the bounds of his diocese.²⁶ But only ten years later Angus bishop of the Isles and natural son of the former bishop Angus was requesting that he could have a house on the mainland where he could maintain episcopal state when called away from the Isles and suggesting Kilberry in Knapdale as he already had a life canonry of the church there before he went to the Isles.²⁷

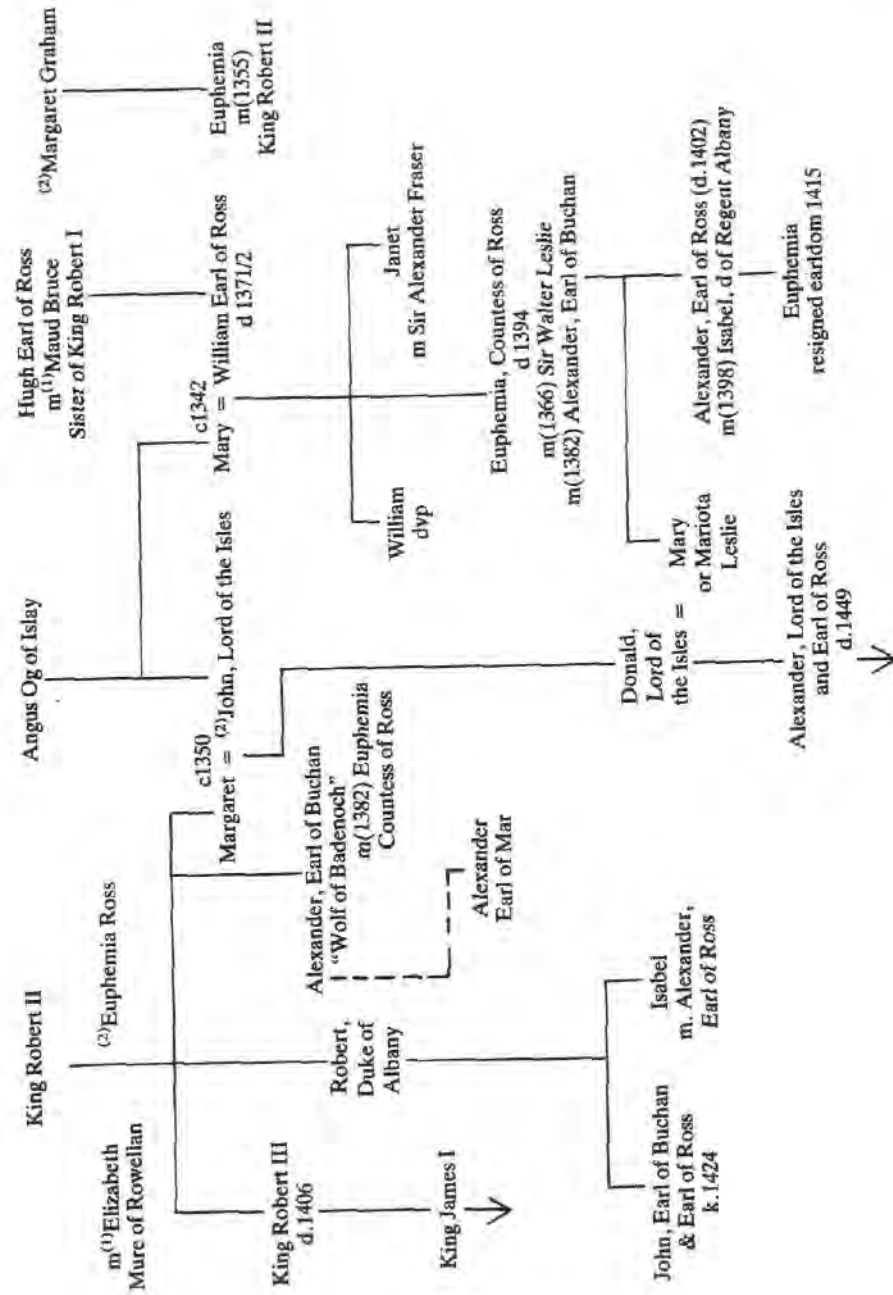
We return to John lord of the Isles to record his death about 1386 — he was taken ill at Ardgorr and 'while yet alive' carried to his castle of Ardtornish where he died three days later surrounded by monks and priests — he was buried, as his ancestors had been, at Iona.²⁸

He was succeeded by Donald the eldest son, not by his first Macruari marriage by which he had three sons, but by his second marriage to Margaret Stewart by which he had another four sons. It is evident from events, and endorsed in the chronicles, that this arrangement was supported or at least not actively opposed by Donald's half brothers — the eldest was already dead leaving a son; the second, Godfrey at one time held Uist,²⁹ and the third Ranald had a charter including Moidart, Arisaig and Morar with Castle Tioram³⁰ which became the country of his descendants the Clanranald.

Some sources say that Donald was a minor at the time of his father's death but I find this hard to believe as he had apparently been a hostage for his father in 1369,³¹ and in any case we know that his parents were married about 1350. Another story is that he was educated at Oxford — Balliol being the college usually mentioned. This arises from a safe conduct granted in 1378 to Donald described as 'clerico' son of 'Johannis de Insulis'.³² This is certainly another Donald and almost certainly another John — de Insulis is the style used by other members of the lord's family but very seldom by the Lord of the Isles himself except occasionally by English and other foreigners.

There are two important items to consider during Donald's period of rule in the Isles. The first is the famous and unique Gaelic charter by which on 6 May 1408 he granted to Brian Vicar Mackay several parcels of land in Islay in recognition of his services to Donald and his father and in return for the gift of 'four cows fit for killing for my house every year'.³³ There are learned arguments over whether or not this charter has a feudal basis but two things certainly cause it to stand out — one is that it is *signed* by two people, Donald himself and Fergus Macbeth and that the names of three witnesses with their marks are spread below the text in a way more usual in later documents. It is not the literacy that is unusual but the shape and the layout of the charter. The other thing is that the grant is made 'for ever and ever' 'to the end of the world' which has no feudal parallel that I know — the more usual form being to mention a specific period or to remain silent on the duration. There are texts of quite ordinary Latin charters which Donald granted to Maclean of Duart (just as Gaelic a family as Mackay in Islay) in 1390 and 1409³⁴ and the confirmation charter he gave to the abbey of Inchaffray in 1410 has survived in the original.³⁵ So the Gaelic charter doesn't represent just a stage in the development of Donald's secretariat — and the question must be, if one why not more? As far as we know there is no similar example in Ireland either. One theory is that island charters, more likely to be in Gaelic, suffered more than their mainland counterparts and there are many references to charters being destroyed — Maclean of Coll rather grandly informed the authorities in 1528 '*registrum combustum est*' when he applied for a confirmation of a previous royal charter³⁶ — and certainly the lordship 'register' if there ever was one, has long since disappeared. Another theory is that a more traditional verbal type of grant was common. The formula, very likely in Gaelic, is said to have gone something like this 'I Macdonald, sitting upon Dundonald, Give you a right to your farm from this day till tomorrow and every day thereafter, So long as you have food for the great Macdonald of the Isles.'³⁷ In 1772 Professor John Walker wrote to Lady Kaimes 'I beg, Madam, you'll ask My Lord, if among the many Charters he has ransacked he ever found one of this tenor.' Well, among those that have been 'ransacked' on our behalf in the S.R.O. and elsewhere we have found nothing of the sort.

Donald's other claim to fame is, of course, the battle he fought at Harlaw near Inverurie in 1411. The origins of this are quite as controversial as the Gaelic charter. There are two extremes of interpretation of Donald's motives in undertaking this invasion of the east of Scotland — one is that he was aiming to take over the earldom of Ross and the other is that he was aiming to take over the crown of Scotland. Donald's claim to the earldom of Ross was in right of his wife Mary or Mariota Leslie. This was fairly straightforward, as in the normal way she was the successor to her niece Euphemia who was still very young — certainly under 13 — in 1411. The succession had already gone through the female line when Euphemia's grandmother succeeded *her* father in 1371/2.³⁸ On the death of Alexander Leslie Earl of Ross in 1402, Donald might have expected the official wardship of the infant heiress. But Alexander had married a Stewart and by 1405 Albany had taken over his granddaughter and was calling himself 'Lord of the ward of Ross'.³⁹ The power of the Albanys was getting very strong in the Highlands. Recently Mar had been acquired by one of them in very dubious circumstances and Donald may well have had good reason to suspect that Ross would be similarly swallowed up. There may have been more than that, for after the mysterious death of David Duke of Rothesay in 1402 and the death of Robert III in 1406 at the time of the capture by England of his son James, the Regent Albany looked to be swallowing up not just Ross but all Scotland. Donald was probably one of the few magnates and certainly the only one in the Highlands capable of withstanding the Albanys. In 1407 his nephew Hector Maclean



of Duart got a safe conduct to visit King James in England⁴⁰ and in the following year English envoys visited the lord of the Isles.⁴¹ Was he perhaps setting up assistance for James against Albany with English support? It has recently been said that, through his mother, Donald had as good a claim to the throne as Robert II had had in 1371,⁴² but this does not seem to be so, as an entail made in 1372 restricted the succession to the male line.⁴³

Whatever Donald's exact motive or objective may have been is hard to determine because the result of the battle was indecisive. Donald had seized Inverness and marched east towards Buchan. In July he was caught by an Albany army under Mar and fought at Harlaw. Both sides claimed to have won but Donald withdrew to the Isles. Later in the summer Albany had an army in Dingwall and garrisoned the castle. In 1412 he raised more men but Donald submitted, handed over hostages and took an oath to keep the peace.⁴⁴

Three years later Albany persuaded Euphemia, still under 17, to resign the earldom to his son John, Earl of Buchan, whom failing to his other sons and finally to Albany himself.⁴⁵ Even so, Donald referred to himself in petitions to the Pope as Lord of the Isles and of the earldom of Ross⁴⁶ and in 1420 in a document written in Scots, his wife or perhaps widow, appears as lady of the Isles and of Ross.⁴⁷

The date of Donald's death is uncertain — the document I have just quoted suggests about 1420 but some accounts say 1423.⁴⁸ His son Alexander called himself Lord of the Isles and master of the earldom of Ross in 1426 and also in 1427.⁴⁹ By this time Buchan was dead — killed at Verneuil in 1424 — and the Albany family all dead or disgraced by the newly released King James but Alexander's mother was still alive. Alexander was eventually recognised as Earl of Ross but much water had flowed under the bridge before that.

The Macdonald shennachies pronounced Alexander to be 'a man born to much trouble all his lifetime.'⁵⁰ I think it is only fair to point out that he brought a good deal of it on himself and on other people as well. After his father's death he had been proclaimed Lord of the Isles after the accustomed manner, probably at Finlaggan in Islay and it was from there that he granted his first surviving charter in 1427 — to Macneill of Barra.⁵¹ The following year with a number of other chiefs he was invited by James to Inverness where they were all taken prisoner. Some were executed but James brought Alexander to court in the hope of keeping him under his eye. Alexander absconded, burnt Inverness and then faced a royal army under James in person in June 1429 in Lochaber. Clan Chattan and Clan Cameron are said to have refused to fight against the King and to have deserted and no battle took place. Two months later on 27th August Alexander gave himself up at a stage-managed appearance in the chapel at Holyrood — the occasion when he was described as wearing his shirt and drawers — and was sent as a prisoner to Tantallon.⁵² Military action in the west went on without him and on 6 March 1430 Parliament called for a host to report for the king's service by May 1431.⁵³ Mar led this army against the galleys of Donald Balloch (Alexander's cousin) and the archers of Alasdair Carrach (his uncle or cousin) who together defeated the royal army at Inverlochy. The king decided to come to terms with the Lord of the Isles and released him from Tantallon at the end of 1431.⁵⁴

The experiment seems to have been a success. Alexander thereafter appears to have kept on the right side of the law and for a time he was the law in the north for he was justiciar of Scotland beyond the Forth at least from 1439 to 1443 during which time he held justice ayres in Inverness with people coming from as far as Tain and Thurso to attend his courts.⁵⁵ He was Earl of Ross from 1436 or early in 1437.⁵⁶

Perhaps this is the place to consider the implications of Alexander's mainland commitments and see what effect they had on his position as Lord of the Isles. Apart from one charter now lost but mentioned in some detail in the 17th century by the first Earl of Cromartie as having been dated at Finlaggan on 7 January 1432/3 and granted to Macleod of Lewis,⁵⁷ his charters are dated in Inverness and Dingwall or around and are concerned with the earldom and Lochaber. It should be pointed out that the Leslies had never had a presence in Ross, so that there was probably a good deal to sort out since the last earl of Ross had died in 1372, and indeed Alexander was probably not in total control of his earldom for some time — he would therefore be anxious to bring in the local families of Urquhart, Innes, Rose, Calder and Mackintosh to whom he was granting charters. But there is still plenty of unrecorded time and no reason to imagine that he abandoned his hold on the lordship.

There are some problems concerning Alexander's marriage or marriages and some non-marriages also. In the Vatican papers there is an indult dated 1433 addressed to Alexander and his wife apparently called Jacobella.⁵⁸ But in 1445/6 his wife Elizabeth procured a Papal mandate to admonish him and his concubine. Elizabeth is thought to have been a Seton, but it seems possible that she was a Haliburton.⁵⁹ He had two illegitimate sons Celestine and Hugh whom we shall meet again — the former was almost certainly older than his one legitimate son John who seems to have been born about 1434. In 1445 three other sons Hugh, Alexander and Donald were legitimised but nothing further is heard of them.⁶⁰ Alexander had some advantage in church matters as his brother Angus was bishop of the Isles from 1426 at least until 1438 and probably until 1441.⁶¹

In view of his own conduct Alexander seems to have taken rather an unfairly high line when he protested to the Pope against the scandalous behaviour of a monk of Iona who is described in January 1443/4 as having been notorious for a long time and 'hateful to the patron of the said monastery (Alexander) and to the temporal lords of those parts on account of his dishonest life and conversation'. He not only kept a concubine but was leader of a group who violently carried off goods belonging to the monastery. Alexander threatened that he would remove the bones and relics of his ancestors buried there and the precious things which they had given to Iona unless something was done.⁶² Probably things in Iona improved, as the work of rebuilding the monastery from its ruinous condition may well have been begun quite soon after this by Donald O'Brolchan — money for such work was being collected as early as 1403 and a considerable drive was made in the 1420s, but the 'goings on' suggest that not much would have been achieved before 1444.⁶³ In view of all this it is perhaps fitting that Alexander, who died at Dingwall in May 1449, was buried not in Iona with his ancestors but at the Chanonry of Ross.⁶⁴ He seems to have died as he had lived as Earl of Ross rather than as Lord of the Isles.

His son John was much more involved with the Isles. He has been described by a clansman as a 'meek, modest man . . . more fit to be a churchman than to command so many irregular tribes of people'.⁶⁵ Yet John managed to quarrel with his wife, his son and his king and to lose both his earldom and his lordship. The chronology of the first few years of his rule is very difficult but important enough to look at quite closely. The sources for both national and local history are poor at this time, the chronicles confused and undated, and the main source, the *Exchequer Rolls*, were drawn up for accounting purposes and not designed to be helpful to historians in search of exact dates.

John is said to have succeeded his father in May 1449 at the age of about 15⁶⁶ — this in itself presents problems as he appears to have had no tutor or guardian, while the

King at 19 was still officially a minor. National history in the summer of 1449 is involved with the fall of the Livingstons who, until that time had held all the top jobs. John was concerned in this because he married Elizabeth daughter of James, later Lord Livingston, chamberlain of Scotland.⁶⁷ The exact timing of events would be of great interest as the marriage came either just before or just after the fall of the family — it was not a success. One theory is that the king arranged the marriage as a favour but against the inclination of the parties themselves — another is that the marriage alliance was a factor in turning the king against the Livingstons, and a third is that the bride's father hoped to gain a powerful ally against the king after his fall. James Livingston escaped execution and joined his son-in-law in the west. In support John seized the royal castles of Inverness, Urquhart and Ruthven. The rebellion must have been fairly short lived as James Livingston seems to have been keeper of Inverness castle on behalf of the king by July 1452 and by 1454 he was even back as chamberlain.⁶⁸

The Livingstons on the whole were allies of the Douglasses and the ups and downs of that family had considerable influence on John Lord of the Isles in ways which would last to the end of his life. The Douglas story is not primarily the concern of a highland historian but you will remember that king James clashed with them throughout 1451, and in February 1452 he personally murdered Earl William at Stirling. Chroniclers have stated that the outstanding issue between James and the earl was a bond which Douglas had made with the earls of Crawford and Ross and which the king demanded that he should break.⁶⁹ No copy of such a bond exists and no firm date has been attached to it (except by Sir James Balfour who gives 7 March 1445 which is unlikely⁷⁰) and it may not have been formally written. Crawford certainly did rise in 1452 to help Douglas and was defeated by Huntly at Brechin in May. A passage in the Auchinleck chronicle provides a most tantalising clue. Dated 12 May, but without a year, it states that 'James the brother of eril William of Douglas that was slane in the castell of Strivling, come to Knapdale and spak thar with the eril of Ross and lord of the Ilis and maid thaim all richt gret rewardis of wyne clathis silver and silk and ynglis clath and thar gaf thaim mantillis agane and quhat was thar amangis thaim wes counsall . . .'. The May meeting of Douglas and John was evidently followed by a raid on Inverkip, Bute and Arran undertaken in July by Donald Balloch, cousin of John, with a fleet of galleys.⁷¹ The only clue to the year is that it was the same year as the siege of Blackness. There are authorities who claim that these things took place in each of the three years 1452-54 inclusive, and they all base their views upon items in the Exchequer Rolls.⁷² I am afraid I am not prepared to pronounce judgment.

On 1 May 1455 Douglas was defeated at Arkinholm and earl James fled to England. The king appears to have dealt lightly with John lord of the Isles, as in 1454 or 55 he was granted Urquhart and Glenmoriston with the Castle of Urquhart for life.⁷³

The Douglas manoeuvres, of course, were linked with the wars of the Roses in England, especially after the death of James II in 1460. James had favoured Lancaster while Douglas and John of the Isles backed York. In March 1461 following his victory at Towton, Edward of York became king of England and Henry of Lancaster fled to Scotland. On 22 June 1461 Edward appointed James earl of Douglas and 4 Englishmen to visit John earl of Ross and lord of 'Owteryles' and his cousin Donald Balloch and on 17 July Douglas received money for the journey.⁷⁴ On 27 June John was in Bute with the Bishops of St Andrews and Glasgow who were probably trying to gain his support for the policies of the Regency.⁷⁵ The English party found the Lord of the Isles at Ardtornish in October and on 19th of the month

John gave a commission to Ronald of the Isles and Duncan archdeacon of the Isles to act as his ambassadors to Edward — using words nearly identical with those used by Edward which would have been available as a 'crib'.⁷⁶ Douglas was duly paid for safely escorting them from Morvern to the king's presence at Westminster.⁷⁷ There on 13 February 1461/2 a treaty was completed. Its terms⁷⁸ were startling and far reaching enough to satisfy the territorial ambitions of the Lord of the Isles and his militant cousin: for John himself, Donald Balloch and Donald's son John, bound themselves with their subjects and followers to become vassals of England, pledged to co-operate with Douglas and the armies of Edward in subduing and dismembering their native land — the part of which lying north of the Forth was to be shared between the three Macdonalds as vassals of the crown of England.

The ambassadors duly returned north with gifts of money and promises of more. John went to work quickly and took over Inverness and acted as king of the north. Although the treaty was still secret, he was summoned before the Scots parliament in the spring of 1462 but the Regent was not strong enough to make him come.⁷⁹ In March 1463 King Edward empowered the bishop of Down (Ireland) to take oaths and homages from John, Donald Balloch and his son,⁸⁰ but I know of no record that these were in fact given. Meanwhile the Scottish regency was abandoning Lancaster and turning to York and a 15 year truce was signed in June 1464. This presumably left the Lord of the Isles free to make his peace with the Scottish government. Mackenzie of Kintail is said to have got a charter from John at about this time of the lands of Strathgarve to defray his expenses in making peace between the king and the earl of Ross.⁸¹ At any rate John admitted to seizing the burgh customs of Inverness worth £74 (but not of course to the treaty with Edward) and was accepted and forgiven when bishop Kennedy and others visited Inverness and Elgin in August 1464.⁸² He did not himself attend parliament in Edinburgh that October but he was officially represented, as he was in 1467 and 1471.⁸³

So there was a period of comparative peace and this seems an appropriate moment to consider the internal affairs of the Isles and Ross. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this is the council which we know advised John on a fair number of occasions. The first reference to the council occurs in 1443/4, when Alexander with the advice of his council granted lands in Lochaber to Mackintosh.⁸⁴ In John's time there were a number of similar examples — the most interesting being the first as it is the only record of a sitting. On 28th May 1450 in the earl's chamber within the enclosure of the castle of Dingwall, John Ross of Balnagowan and three others appeared before John earl of Ross and Lord of the Isles and his council for consideration of a dispute over some lands granted by the old earls of Ross. The witnesses to this purely domestic Ross affair were John Stewart of Lorn, Lauchlan Maclean of Duart, John Maclean of Coll, Ranald MacAlister and William thane of Cawdor.⁸⁵ It has been suggested that there might be separate councils for Ross and the Isles but on that evidence and on the whole it does not look like it. After this 1450 example we know of another nine charters granted by John with consent of his council,⁸⁶ some concerning island and others concerning Ross lands but all have a substantial number of island personalities as witnesses — also his son Angus made a grant in 1485 with the consent of his father and the council. There are various traditions covering the composition of the council in the isles, said to have met on the council isle in Loch Finlaggan in Islay, but quite evidently in session in Dingwall and elsewhere. These and the household or court which centred on the lords of the isles have been dealt with by Dr Bannerman in his essay in *Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century*.

John was in trouble with his marriage at least as early as 1463/4 — we have only

Elizabeth's side of the story, but she had petitioned the Pope to admonish John for ejecting her from his lands and adhering to a certain adulteress.⁸⁷ Twelve years later she says that the bishop of the Isles (Angus, son of the previous bishop and first cousin of John) was ordering her back to her husband and 'she fears lest the said bishop ensnare her with sentences and censures'.⁸⁸ Elizabeth had fled to the Scottish court and later got favours from James III for her devoted service to Queen Margaret.⁸⁹ Eventually in 1478 the Pope did grant her a separation. It has been assumed that there were no surviving children of the marriage though Elizabeth stated that she had borne children to John, but in 1506/7 'Elizabeth Ylis dochter to umquhile John Lord of the Isles' got a grant of lands in Islay for one year. Her mother was already dead.⁹⁰ I cannot help wondering if she was a legitimate daughter and if so what happened to her later. John's heir (officially recognised in 1476) was his illegitimate son Angus, born apparently before his father's marriage as he was old enough to go with Donald Balloch to take Inverness in 1462 — there was another illegitimate son John who apparently died before his father, but was junior to Angus.

Plots such as those hatched by John in 1462 could not remain secret for ever, and the treaty of Ardtornish came to light after Edward of England made peace with James III in 1474. In September 1475 John was ordered to appear before Parliament in Edinburgh in December. In spite of summonses by Unicorn Pursuivant at Dingwall castle and at the market cross of Inverness on 16th October John did not appear, and his life and lands were forfeited on 1 December. Four days later commissions against him were issued to Lennox, Huntly, Atholl and Argyll. Dingwall castle must have been taken by 28th March as James III wrote to Huntly on that day to thank him for his 'grete labour and charge in recovering the king's castle of Dingwall'. In parliament in Edinburgh on 1 July 1476 John, still styled '*excellētissimus et illustrissimus princeps*' and apparently at the request of Queen Margaret, was once more received by the king and the estates.⁹¹ John renounced the earldom of Ross, the offices of sheriff of Inverness and Nairn and the lands of Knapdale and Kintyre — sealing the document with a seal now showing only the galley of the isles with no quartering of Ross lions⁹² — but he was reinstated in his other lands and created a lord of parliament (surely somewhat of a come-down from the early family title of King?).

The exact progress of events after this is confused, as usual. Angus his son apparently did not support his father's submission — the family MS history says that Angus 'followed his former courses came to Inverness and demolished the castle'. He also made raids against Arran and in Knapdale and it was probably Angus rather than his father, who got the blame, who was in Castle Sween 'art and part of the treasonable stuffing of the said castle with men victuals and armes of weire' and holding it against the king. Once again John was summoned to parliament,⁹³ once again he submitted and got a renewed charter of his lands on 16 December 1478 when he was certainly present in Edinburgh as he granted a charter there himself six days later to Leslie of Wardis.⁹⁴ Among the long list of witnesses to this charter was Colin earl of Argyll and at some period after this Angus was married to Argyll's daughter.

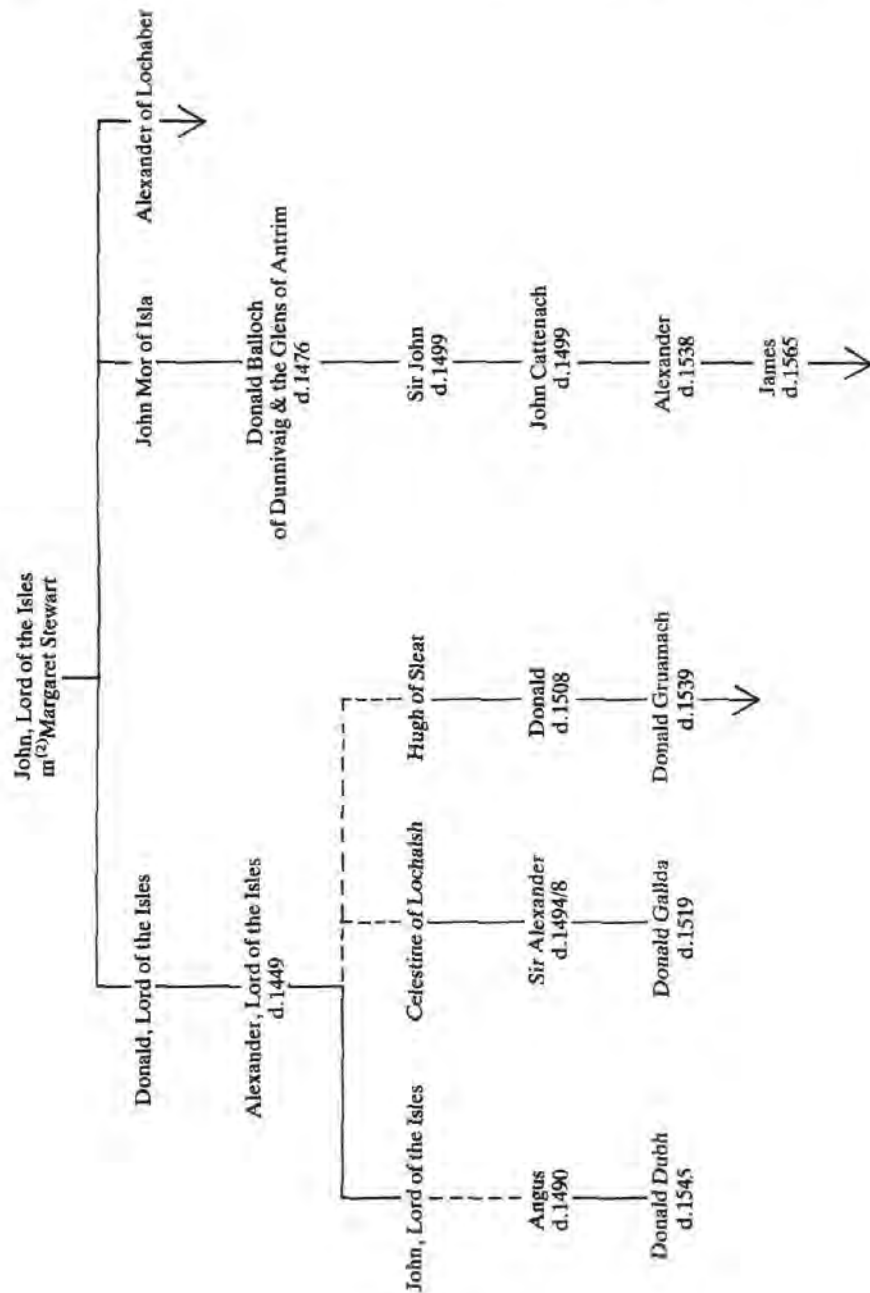
In 1481 John was further humiliated in the eyes of his more hot-headed followers. He was given a charter by James III 'for his faithful service' of parts of his old lands in Kintyre and Knapdale, but for his lifetime only with no succession to Angus, and they are described as lying within the newly created sheriffdom of Tarbert — in other words fully integrated into the kingdom of Scotland. Quite a sizeable chunk of Knapdale including castle Sween had six months earlier been given to the earl of Argyll. John had also been present when the king raised an army intended to fight the English — perhaps this was his faithful service.⁹⁵ This attitude may have been the

ultimate cause of the great sea battle fought at Bloody Bay north of Tobermory between John, supported by Macleods, Macneills and Macleans, and Angus with good assistance from the clan Donald. Angus emerged the winner and apparently dominated the northern scene until his murder by his harper in Inverness in 1490⁹⁶ — certainly when, as master of the Isles, he granted a charter to the abbey of Iona in November 1485 he had as witnesses the *judex* and the *archipoeta*, presumably members of the official household.⁹⁷

After the death of Angus the leader of the hawks, or eagles, was Alexander of Lochalsh, son of John's natural brother Celestine.⁹⁸ In August 1492 he granted a charter along with John, though he was given no official position.⁹⁹ The Annals of Ulster refer to him as deputy of Macdonald, but the entry is one that records his death in battle.¹⁰⁰ Before that Alexander, with or without John's approval, but along with Farquhar son of the Mackintosh chief, invaded Ross but was defeated at the battle of Blair na Parc probably in 1491. John's last known charter was dated at Aros in Mull on 6 December 1492 and granted the patronage of the church at Kilberry to the bishop of Lismore.¹⁰¹ After that there is a mysterious silence during which John was quite evidently forfeited yet again, and lost all the lands of the lordship. No mention is made of this in the Acts of Parliament and Sheriff Macphail even went so far as to suggest that it didn't happen — but in late August 1493 the king granted a charter of lands which it was specifically stated were in the king's hands owing to the forfeiture of John, formerly lord of the Isles.¹⁰² The internal discord among the island families probably gave James IV the chance to strike 'sua that the kingis lyegis may lif in quiete and peax'¹⁰³ (or something nearer to quiet and peace anyway) which James III had not been strong enough to take against a united front in 1476. John fades from the scene and even the date of his death has been constantly mistaken. In fact he survived for nearly ten years as a pensioner at the court of James IV. Astonishing as it may seem — and an indication of how innocuous he had become — he was even allowed to revisit his former lands, as the Treasurer's Accounts show that in 1502 he got material for a new doublet 'agane his passing to the llis' and 28s. 'to his expense to pas to Lochabir'. The following January the king was at Dundee and John of the Isles was reported ill on 10 January and by 5 February he was dead, for money was remitted for his burial.¹⁰⁴

James IV was at Dunstaffnage and maybe elsewhere in late summer 1493. Alexander of Lochalsh surprisingly appears to have submitted early — he and John Macdonald of Dunnivaig and the Glens, son of Donald Balloch, were knighted and Alexander evidently received some promise from the king for security of tenure for freeholders within the lordship¹⁰⁵ — certainly during the next few years a number of royal charters were granted to John's former vassals on terms similar to those by which they had held before, and these provide valuable evidence on landholding within the lordship in cases where no earlier charter is available. Sir Alexander was killed certainly before August 1498 and according to the Annals of Ulster as early as 1494 by John Cattenach son of Sir John of Dunnivaig, and John MacIain of Ardnamurchan.

The king visited the west regularly during the next few years, based mainly on the royal castle at Tarbert, in April and July 1494, in May 1495 and in March, May and August of 1498. But the lordship was not yet quiet. There were at least seven major risings during the next 50 years¹⁰⁶ — more than the Jacobites staged for the Stuarts in fact. Sir John of Dunnivaig and the Glens and his son John Cattenach were eliminated first; after the rebellion at Dunaverty castle in Kintyre in 1494 they were captured with the help of MacIain of Ardnamurchan and eventually hanged in



Edinburgh in 1499.

Donald, son of Alexander of Lochalish rose twice between Flodden in 1513 and his own death in 1519 — the later rising probably aimed mainly at MacIain of Ardnamurchan. He had been joined by Alexander, son of John Cattenach who tried again himself in 1529. Donald Gruamach grandson of Hugh of Sleat, also had a go at the royal forces in 1539 when he was killed by an arrow at Eilean Donan. But all these were small efforts in terms of men and influence.

All this time there remained one real threat to the throne and he insured that the forfeiture of the lordship was not accepted as final for more than 50 years. Angus, master of the Isles, left a son Donald Dubh, by Argyll's daughter whom the government rightly or wrongly claimed to be illegitimate. Donald was an infant or probably not yet born when his father died and he grew up a prisoner in the castle of Inch Connel in Loch Awe. He escaped in 1501 and was not recaptured for six years and three government campaigns, for he was supported by virtually all the former lordship vassals. The campaign of 1504 was directed by Huntly against the castles of Eilean Donan and Strome regarded as 'rycht necessar for the daunting of the Ilis'.¹⁰⁷ But Donald was retaken and he remained a prisoner until, at the time of the Rough Wooing in 1545, he was once more at liberty — Gregory says 'in what manner Donald Dubh effected his second escape is doubtful; but it is certain that he owed his liberty to the grace of God and not to the goodwill of the government'.¹⁰⁸ Again all the former vassals rose — a council was held on Eilean Carne apparently off the south of Jura on 28 July at which successors of the old councillors appointed two commissioners to treat with the English¹⁰⁹ — shades of Ardtornish in similar circumstances some 85 years before. In August the islesmen crossed the narrow channel to Ireland with a fleet of about 180 galleys. What followed was anti-climax. As Donald waited for the earl of Lennox who was also supporting the English his followers began to quarrel over the distribution of the English money. Lennox eventually gathered an expedition at Dublin of mixed English, Irish and islesmen to capture Dumbarton castle which he had promised the English he would do and had tried without success in 1544. The fleet did not leave until mid November and returned to Ireland having accomplished nothing. Soon afterwards Donald Dubh died of fever at Drogheda while on his way back to Dublin. The islanders tried to carry on under James of Dunnivaig but got no help from England and soon gave up.

Donald died without issue and with him died the last real hope of re-establishing the lordship of the Isles, which had dominated the west highlands for more than 400 years since the time of Somerled.

FOOTNOTES

1. *Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Jennifer M. Brown (London 1977), 209-40.
2. *Scottish Historical Review* (1966), xlv 125-42.
3. K. A. Steer & J. W. M. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (RCAHMS 1977), 201-2.
4. Ranald Nicholson, *Scotland: The Later Middle Ages* (Edinburgh 1974), 25. Readers are frequently referred in these notes to this work, in which Highland events are fully discussed and chronicle sources (as well as records) extensively used and cited.
5. Steer & Bannerman, 203-4.
6. Nicholson, 143.
7. *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, xii 6.
8. *Highland Papers*, ed. Macphail (SHS 1914), i 76-78.
9. *Calendar of Papal Letters*, iii 381.
10. *APS*, i 499-501.
11. *APS*, xii 16-17.
12. D. Monro, *Western Isles*, ed. R. W. Munro (1961), 94.
13. Steer & Bannerman, 208.

14. Book of Clanranald, in A. Cameron, *Reliquiae Celticae*, ii 161.
15. *HP*, i 26.
16. I.B. Cowan & D.E. Easson, *Medieval Religious Houses — Scotland*, 77.
17. *Ibid.* 59.
18. *Ibid.* 151.
19. *Ibid.* 93.
20. *Ibid.* 94.
21. D.E.R. Watt, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae Medii Aevi* (SRS 1969), 28.
22. *Ibid.* 197.
23. *CPL*, iii 279.
24. Watt, *Fasti*, 207.
25. Register of Supplications (Vatican Archives), 289 fo. 253.
26. *Ibid.* 550 fo. 212.
27. *Ibid.* 683 fos. 173-4.
28. *HP* i 27; *Rel. Celt.*, ii 161.
29. *Inchaffray Charters* (SHS 1908), 136 no 142.
30. *Reg. Mag. Sig.*, 1 Jan 1372/3.
31. *APS*, xii 16.
32. *Rotuli Scotiae*, ii 11.
33. *Facsimiles of the National MSS of Scotland*, pt. ii, p 46 & plate lix.
34. *RMS* 13 July 1495.
35. *Inchaffray Charters*, 137 no 143.
36. *RMS* 1 Dec. 1528.
37. *New Statistical Account of Scotland* (Argyle), 384.
38. *APS*, i 537-8.
39. *Book of the Thanes of Cawdor* (Spalding Club 1859), 5.
40. *Calendar of Patent Rolls* (1405-8), 363.
41. *Rymer's Foedera*, iv (1) 131.
42. Dr Bannerman in *Scottish Society* (1977), 214.
43. *APS* j 549.
44. Nicholson, 235.
45. Scottish Record Office, Reg. Ho. charter no 243.
46. *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome* (SHS 1934), i 268-9 &c.
47. *Register of Moray* (Bannatyne Club 1837), 475-6.
48. E.g. *Scots Peerage*, ed. Sir J. Balfour Paul, v 42.
49. *CSSR* (SHS 1956), ii 189; *RMS* 14 Nov 1495.
50. *HP* i 34.
51. *RMS* 14 Nov 1495.
52. Nicholson, 315-16.
53. *APS* ii 19.
54. Nicholson, 316-17.
55. *Familie of Innes* (Spalding Club 1864), 73; *RMS* 4 Aug 1476; C.F. Mackintosh, *Antiquarian Notes*, i 184-5.
56. Charter to Alexander McCulloch, 6 Jan 1436/7, transcript in National Library of Scotland, MS 35.4.12a; *Exchequer Rolls*, v 33-34.
57. W. Fraser, *Earls of Cromartie* (1876), ii 511.
58. *Reg. Supp.*, 289 fo. 253.
59. *HP* i 94-5; *Scryngeour Inventory* (SRS 1912), no 145.
60. *HP* i 92-3.
61. Watt, *Fasti*, 203.
62. *HP* i 90.
63. Steer & Bannerman, 106-8.
64. *Ane Breve Chronicle of the Earlis of Ross* (1850 edn.), 10.
65. *HP* i 47.
66. *Exch. Rolls*, v preface xcii.
67. *Asloan Manuscript*, ed. Craigie (STS 1923), 235.
68. Nicholson, 362.
69. *Ibid.* 358.
70. *Annales of Scotland* (1824 edn.), i 173.
71. *Asloan MS.*, 221.
72. E.g. Nicholson 362, Bannerman in *Scottish Society* 217, A.I. Dunlop, *Life and Times of Bishop James Kennedy* (1950), 151.
73. *Exch. Rolls*, vi 68, 217.
74. *Foedera*, xi 474; *Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland*, ed. Bain, iv 1317.
75. *RMS* 11 April 1475; Dunlop, *Bishop Kennedy*, 223.
76. *Rot. Scot.*, ii 407.
77. *Cal. Docs. Scot.*, iv 1326.
78. *Rot. Scot.*, ii 405-7.
79. Nicholson, 402.
80. *Foedera*, xi 499.

81. Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii 473.
82. *Exch. Rolls*, vii 296-7; *RMS* 16 & 21 Aug. 1464.
83. *APS* ii 84, 87, 98.
84. *Nat. Lib. Scot.*, MS 2123 fos. 69-70.
85. SRO ref. GD 297/191.
86. Montro, *Western Isles*, 140-3.
87. *CPL* v 671.
88. *CPL* viii 66-7.
89. *RMS* 14 Dec 1476, 15 Oct 1477.
90. *Reg. Sec. Sig.*, 1 Jan 1506/7; *RMS* 1 Jan 1505/6.
91. *APS* ii 108ff.
92. SRO, ref. RH 6/457.
93. *APS* ii 155.
94. *RMS* 16 Dec 1478, 4 Feb 1478/9.
95. *RMS* 11 Aug 1481; C.M. Macdonald, *History of Argyll*, 254.
96. *Rel. Celt.*, ii 163; *HP* i 52.
97. SRO, ref. RH 6/517.
98. Nicholson, 542-9.
99. SRO, ref. RH 2/1.
100. Steer & Bannerman, 207.
101. *RMS* 26 Dec 1507.
102. *RMS* 29 Aug 1493.
103. *APS* ii 228.
104. *Treasurer Accounts*, ii 301, 344, 354, 357.
105. *RMS* 5 Aug 1498.
106. For a good summary see Steer & Bannerman, 209-13.
107. *APS* ii 240.
108. D. Gregory, *History of the Western Highlands and Isles* (1836), 155.
109. *Cal. State Papers* (Thorpe), i 53; Montro, *Western Isles*, 121-2.

