

For David, the settlement of the Moray question represented one of the key achievements of his reign, despite the residual problems which it presented to his successors into the thirteenth century. As a seat of challenge to his lineage's possession of the throne of Scots, it was a threat which had to be faced and overcome, but the struggle for mastery in the north was neither as quick nor as easy as our traditional accounts have implied. The threat from Moray should not be underestimated, for David was subjected to sustained challenge down into the middle of the 1130s, a decade into his reign, and for part of that time may have been confined to a core territory south of the Tay, and possibly even south of the Forth. Victory in 1130, although presented as a glorious triumph followed by a quick and easy conquest of the northern territories, appears instead to have been followed by a hard-fought war of attrition which was only won through David's possession of superior resources in his southern redoubt and through his ability to call on the loyalty of the Gaelic magnates of the core of his ancestral kingdom. While the great Gaelic lords may have been deeply suspicious of the man who would be king, whom they barely knew and who may have regarded them with deep suspicion, David represented continuity of a line which had come to almost monopolise power, which had established most of these native lines in their positions, and which offered security of possession of what they already held and the prospect of further gain. While David may have found it difficult to identify with the culture and society of his Gaelic lords, he was pragmatic enough to recognise that they, rather than his Anglo-Norman friends, represented the key to power in Scotland. David's alliance with his native magnates gave him victory in the north, which in turn provided him with the security to about face and consider a policy of aggressive expansion into northern England, free from threat in the traditional heartland of his kingdom. From being the conflict which almost overthrew his kingship at the outset, the conquest of Moray and the domination of the north proved to be David's first steps on the road to the making of the medieval kingdom of Scotland.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# Lord of the West

While the northern part of the kingdom presented a grave challenge to David's power between 1124 and 1134, the west had posed similar problems to him from his first acquisition of power in the Southern Uplands in 1113. The 'west' falls into two distinct blocks: the south-west, an ill-defined zone west of the valleys of the rivers Nith and Clyde; and the west Highland zone, extending from Lennox and Argyll in the south northwards to Argyll of Moray and Argyll of Ross in the north. Beyond them lay a further zone of challenge and threat in the kingdom of Mann and the Isles, a territory over which the Norwegian crown had exercised an active and interventionist overlordship as recently as 1103.<sup>1</sup> The difficulties he encountered and the successes achieved in all of these areas were closely interlinked.

The south-western district appears under the nebulous label of 'Galloway' in the early twelfth century. The name had a more precise political and territorial focus in the kingdom or lordship of Galloway which extended along the northern shore of the Solway Firth from roughly the estuary of the Urr to the North Channel,<sup>2</sup> and which lay outwith the orbit of either the kings of Strathclyde or their Scottish successors. In geographical terms, the country along the northern flank of the Solway is physically isolated from the rest of the Southern Uplands by the hill barrier which extends from Nithsdale westwards to the coast between Wigtownshire and Carrick. As a consequence, it looks naturally to the south and west, to northern England, Man, and to Ireland, and it was with those regions that it

had forged its chief cultural, spiritual and political bonds by the beginning of the twelfth century. Lying, moreover, at the pinch point of the North Channel which separates the Irish Sea from the outer Firth of Clyde and the Sea of the Hebrides, it had a strategic importance to rulers in mainland Britain, the Isles and Ireland who wished to control the sea lanes of the maritime west. Relations with the rulers of this highly strategic land would be of critical importance for David in his drive to fix his grip on both his Cumbrian principality and, after 1124, on his throne in Scotland.

Galloway was not just of importance to David and David was not Henry I's only protégé in the north. Some time around 1120, the English king gave another of his brood of bastard daughters to a rising star in the Gaelic world of the maritime west, Fergus, 'King' of Galloway.<sup>3</sup> The date of this marriage and the links which it forged are both highly significant, for in the late 1110s and early 1120s, Henry was seeking to extend his sphere of influence within the Irish Sea zone and into Ireland itself. It is widely recognised that Henry used his numerous illegitimate children to strengthen his influence, either establishing in positions of power his sons, such as Robert, to whom he gave the earldom of Gloucester in 1122, and Reginald, created Earl of Cornwall by the Empress in 1141, or marrying his daughters to important members of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy whose loyalty he wished to bind to the royal house. Although the growing influence of canon law in inheritance practice was placing a great stigma on bastardy, in the early twelfth century any such stigma was more than outweighed by their royal blood. Henry's daughters were married primarily to members of the Norman and French aristocracy, with ties being forged with the ducal house of Brittany, the counts of Perche, and the lords of Beaumont, Breteuil, Montmirail and Montmorenci, all men of strategic importance on the exposed southern and western flanks of the duchy of Normandy. There can be no doubt that Henry had a similar purpose in mind with the marriage of Sibylla to King Alexander I, and far from being a slur on Alexander's worth in the eyes of the English king it is, in fact, a sign of his importance to Henry in that he was deemed worthy of cultivation in this manner. The marriage of another daughter to Fergus of Galloway is a further example of this policy and, for Henry, of equal importance. Through it, Henry forged an alliance with a ruler whose territories occupied a strategic position on the north-western flank of England, and whose naval and military strength made him a key figure in the highly unstable world of the Irish Sea and the Norse-Gaelic west. It was to be the basis of an alliance between the Galwegian and the Norman and Angevin dynasties which endured for over a century.<sup>4</sup>

It is unknown how David viewed Fergus, but Fergus certainly at first saw himself as the equal if not superior of the 'Prince of the Cumbrian Region'. Fergus, in Gaelic tradition, styled himself as *rí* (a king) and clearly considered himself to be free from any subjection to the King of Scots. Men from Galloway had served in Máel Coluim mac Donnchada's armies in the late eleventh century but on what basis is unknown. Given Fergus's own aggressive expansion of his kingdom at the expense of his neighbours to east and west, it is unlikely that any overlordship exercised by David's father over Galloway had survived the upheavals of the decade after 1093. For David, therefore, 'King' Fergus was an unknown quantity who needed to be either won over or neutralised. This uncertainty with regard to Fergus may have been one of several factors which prompted David to strengthen his position around the head of the Solway in the early 1120s. While the establishment of Robert de Bruce in Annandale is generally assigned to 1124 on the basis of the charter in which David, as King of Scots, infefted him with the lordship of that strategic valley,<sup>5</sup> it is now recognised that the original award to Robert may have occurred very soon after Ranulf le Meschin had yielded up Carlisle and Cumberland to Henry I. The grant of Annandale has been presented as part of a wider scheme of co-operation between David and Henry which saw the establishment of Anglo-Norman barons in the three major valleys feeding into the Solway on the 'Scottish' side of the border – Annandale, Eskdale and Liddesdale – possibly before 1120,<sup>6</sup> but all that can be said with certainty is that Robert de Bruce was probably established between 1120 and 1124. While his infeftment in Annandale may have been a response to the removal of Ranulf le Meschin from Carlisle, it is equally possible that it represented either part of a more general building up of David's power in the region at the time of the brief Anglo-Scottish crisis of 1122, or a response to the growing power of Fergus in Galloway.

Fergus, however, quickly proved to be the least of David's worries in the west. His longer term plans for the development of his own power as prince in Cumbria were overtaken rapidly by events in 1124 when his brother died and he succeeded to the throne. As already discussed, David's succession was not universally welcomed by his Scottish subjects and from the outset he had an uphill battle to win acceptance from the Gaelic magnates upon whom the Scottish kings depended for control of the heartland of the kingdom beyond the Forth. His illegitimate nephew, Máel Coluim mac Alasdair, was able to tap into the suspicions of some of the Gaelic lords and mount a serious challenge to David in 1124–25. There is no evidence that

Fergus exploited this situation to his own advantage, possibly because his attentions were already focussed elsewhere but also probably because of the influence exerted over him by Henry I. Other Gaelic powers in the west, however, were not so hesitant and saw in Máel Coluim a heaven-sent opportunity to extend their own personal empires at the expense of the King of Scots. Chief among these men was Gillebrigte, or his son, Somairle mac Gillebrigta, *ri* of Argyll, who emerged soon after 1124 as the principal supporter of Máel Coluim's bid for the throne.

Gillebrigte or his son, Somairle, was a formidable ally for Máel Coluim mac Alasdair and it is unfortunate that we have no indication of the circumstances which brought them together or exactly when they forged their alliance. David's presence at Irvine twice, once certainly in the period 1124–28, could indicate that it was a connection made very early in the course of Máel Coluim's rising. The alliance between Argyll and Máel Coluim was founded on the pretender's marriage to a sister of Somairle, the date of which is also unknown. Given, however, that Máel Coluim had at least two sons by this marriage before his capture in 1134, who were to join their uncle in an attack on Malcolm IV immediately after David's death in 1153,<sup>7</sup> then the marriage had occurred most probably by 1130 at the latest, and the king's presence at Irvine no later than 1128 points to a date before then.

For the ruler of Argyll, David's extension of his power into the northern and western parts of his Cumbrian principality may have been decidedly unwelcome. Although he was probably regarded as an under-king by the King of Scots (and Edgar's 1098 treaty with Magnus Bareleg of Norway demonstrated the even in the late eleventh century east-coast based kings were still considered to be overlord of their ancestral homeland in Argyll), Somairle was very much a self-made power who had constructed a personal empire at the expense of Manx, Norwegian and Scottish power in the region. To the Scots, the King of Argyll was a vassal lord who, as we shall see, owed tribute to them, but Somairle certainly regarded himself later in his career as effectively a sovereign power free from 'foreign' overlordship. Some historians have presented the conflicts between Argyll and the kings of Scots from the 1120s to the 1160s in terms of Gaelic traditionalists' hostility to the innovative 'feudalising' tendencies of the Scottish crown,<sup>8</sup> but that view entirely misses the point that Somairle or his father were active against David from the mid-1120s, long before his 'feudalising' policies had made any significant impact on Gaelic Scotland. Somairle's probable hostility towards David was driven by no high-minded principles but sprang exclusively from naked ambition and was a collision of two expansionist powers

rather than a conflict of cultures. It must be remembered that in the Lennox, David had a territory that marched with Gillebrigte's and Somairle's powerbase in Argyll, while the Clyde estuary represented a zone over which the ruler of Argyll saw himself as the naturally dominant power. The sudden emergence of a new authority on the eastern shores of the firth was something which any ruler of Argyll must have viewed with increasing concern as he established his own lordship in the 1120s. Furthermore, David, Fergus of Galloway, and Óláfr of Man were all firmly within the orbit of Henry I of England, and Somairle may have regarded this extension of English power into regions which he considered his own sphere of influence something which had to be resisted at all costs. On a number of planes, therefore, the King of Argyll and Máel Coluim were natural allies.

No detail survives at all of the fighting which led eventually to the betrayal and surrender of Máel Coluim to his uncle. We can only conjecture from the few brief statements made by Ailred of Rievaulx several decades later that it was protracted and heavy, and involved naval and land expeditions against the centres of power in mainland Argyll and the adjacent islands. It was not, however, a war of conquest. David apparently did not dispossess the King of Argyll once he had secured his objective – the defeat and capture of Máel Coluim – nor did he attempt to intrude his own dependents into Argyll itself. Such colonial expansion in the west was probably far beyond his resources at that point in any case. His aim was submission and acceptance of his overlordship and authority as King of Scots by the ruler of Argyll, and it is clear that he had achieved that design by the middle of the 1130s. Somairle may have remained a reluctant vassal for the remainder of David's reign, but he recognised that David had achieved real lordship in the west.

David's operations against Máel Coluim mac Alasdair and his western allies in the period 1124–34 inevitably led to an extension and tightening of royal authority in the northern part of greater Galloway. The inquest which he had instructed to be carried out into the lands associated with the old Cumbrian church of Glasgow in around 1120–21, while almost certainly not offering anything like a complete picture, reveals an absence of properties in the region later occupied by Ayrshire and Renfrewshire.<sup>9</sup> In the north, this exclusion of Glasgow influence presumably reflects the sphere of influence of the church of Govan, which may have been an older Cumbrian episcopal, or at least monastic, centre. Further south, the position is even hazier, but saint dedications in Carrick, for example, point to religious connections with the Isles rather than with mainland Scottish

centres,<sup>15</sup> and a similar picture appears to be the case in Cunninghame. The possible religious affiliations of these western districts do not appear to have reflected the political structures of the later eleventh and earlier twelfth centuries, for clearly the Cumbria bequeathed to David would otherwise not have embraced the whole of what later became the bishopric of Glasgow. That David exercised at least a nominal authority over the lands extending down the eastern shore of the outer Clyde estuary is emphasised by his grant to Selkirk Abbey, recorded in his great foundation charter to the monks of around 1120–24, of the teind of his *cáin* of cheese from 'Galloway'.<sup>16</sup> In his grandson's 1159 charter of confirmation to the monks of Kelso, to where David had moved the Selkirk community in 1128, the detail of the award and its subject matter was greatly expanded to the teind of *cáin* of cattle, pigs and cheese 'from the four *kadrez* of that (part of) Galloway' which had been held by David during the reign of Alexander I.<sup>17</sup> The 1159 charter gives no further information as to where or what these *kadrez* were, but in an earlier charter of around 1136 in which David granted the church of Glasgow the teind of his *cáin* of cattle and pigs 'excepting the years when I come there and consume my *cáin*', four districts – Strathgryfe, Cunninghame, Kyle and Carrick – are named.<sup>18</sup> Evidence that these units represented the four *kadrez* of the 1159 charter is purely circumstantial, but the fact that they were included within the See of Glasgow as it emerged in the mid-twelfth century offers strong corroboration.<sup>19</sup> The implication is that David considered those districts to have formed a portion of his Cumbrian inheritance, or that they, like lower Tweeddale, formed an additional territory over which he succeeded in claiming authority.

David's charter to the church of Glasgow reveals that he considered it possible that he would visit his western territories and, as a result, would require his rights to resources there to sustain his household. There is, however, evidence to suggest that David only ever entered the country west of Clydesdale on two occasions in his reign, both probably in the crisis years between 1124 and 1134 when he was fighting to extend his authority out from his political powerbase in the south-east of the country. The first occasion is dated 1124–28, when David issued a command to the vassals of the monks of Dunfermline to perform the services which they owed to the monastery and to assist in the building work there which had probably started soon after 1124. The king's *brieve* was issued at 'Strathirewin in Galwegia', i.e. Irvine in Cunninghame,<sup>20</sup> which would be developed as a burgh later in the twelfth century under its Morville lords. The second occasion is recorded in a charter, also in favour of Dunfermline but after its

elevation to the status of abbey in 1128 and before about 1136, when Earl Gille Michel of Fife, one of the witnesses, died. It, too, was issued at 'Strathyrewen in Galwegia'.<sup>21</sup> The issuing of two royal acts on two quite separate occasions from the same place is not in itself unusual, but given that these two documents are the only ones to survive that were issued by David anywhere west of Cadzow and Glasgow implies that Irvine was, at least in the period before 1136, of particular significance to him.

In the early 1220s, when David's great-grandson Alexander II was undertaking a series of naval and military campaigns in the outer Clyde estuary and southern Argyll region, Irvine apparently served as the key base from which sea-borne operations were launched.<sup>22</sup> It seems highly likely, given the support for Máel Coluim mac Alasdair offered by Somairle mac Gille Brigta, ruler of Argyll, against whose descendants the 1221–22 campaigns of Alexander II were launched, that Irvine served in the 1220s and early 1130s as the springboard for David's offensive against his nephew's allies in the west. Such activities fit neatly into the speech attributed by Ailred of Rievaulx to Robert de Bruce of Annandale on the eve of the Battle of the Standard in 1138, in which reference is made to naval operations from west-coast bases against Máel Coluim and his associates.<sup>23</sup> Further support for the possibility that David was based at Irvine in connection with military actions lies in the subject matter of his second act in favour of Dunfermline, which freed in perpetuity the abbey's vassals from performance of the labour service owed to the crown of building fortresses, bridges and other royal works.<sup>24</sup> In the military crises of this early phase of his reign, David may have been forced to ignore exemptions from such service dues which he and his predecessors had granted to the Church, and the need for labour to build castles returns us neatly to Robert de Bruce's speech, where he refers to the defences constructed in the course of their operations against Máel Coluim.

An Argyll alliance with Máel Coluim required David to consolidate his hold on the western portion of his Cumbrian principality and extend his direct power all the way to the Clyde estuary proper. Although we have no surviving charter evidence to support this possibility, it is likely to have been as a consequence of the threat posed by Somairle's sea-power that David began to introduce some of his most dependable vassals into this western district. The most significant awards were to Hugh de Morville, who gained all of Cunninghame with its caput at Irvine, David's western base for the campaigns against Argyll, and Walter fitz Alan, who received the three districts of Renfrew, Mearns and Strathgryfe and possibly also northern Kyle

by around 1136.<sup>20</sup> It is often forgotten that the Clyde estuary formed one of the most contested internal frontiers of the kingdom in the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries, but David's arrangements for the security of its eastern shores shows acute awareness of the dangerous exposure of this long coastline to sea-borne assault by Máel Coluim's allies in Argyll and the Isles. Although that direct threat had been neutralised by Máel Coluim's capture and imprisonment in 1134, David remained deeply aware of the threat from the west and chose to extend his authority into that zone whenever the opportunity presented itself.

The events of 1134 probably marked the end for the time being of Somairle's involvement in the challenge of the meic Alasdair for the throne. Certainly, if we can place any faith in the long list of provinces which contributed men to the 1138 campaign in England provided by Ailred of Rievaulx, warriors from Lorn and the Hebrides were present at the Battle of the Standard, fighting alongside the men of Lothian, Galloway, Cumbria, Teviotdale, Scotia proper, and Moray.<sup>21</sup> This list of regional contingents alone provides striking evidence for the extended reach of David's authority by the later 1130s. It is possible that David's imposition of lordship over Somairle and his Argyll domain, evident by the 1140s in his award of components of the royal *cáin* from Argyll and Kintyre to the support of the canons of Holyrood Abbey,<sup>22</sup> resulted in David's encouragement of Somairle to expand his own sphere of authority into the island domain of King Óláfr of Man. Certainly, Óláfr appears around the period 1135–40 to have attempted to ring-fence his own position with a series of marriage alliances between his own family and neighbouring powers, among which was a match of one of his illegitimate daughters with Somairle. The precise date of this union is unknown, but is likely to have occurred before about 1140, given the fact that the eldest son of the couple was deemed old enough to exercise kingship by about 1156–57.<sup>23</sup> It would seem, therefore, that a concerted effort was being made to draw the king of Man into a network of alliances that came together ultimately in David.

Until 1135, Óláfr had, like David, been a protégé of Henry and had enjoyed his protection since soon after 1100. Óláfr, however, also enjoyed strong ties with Stephen, whose lordship of Lancaster made him a near neighbour in the eastern sector of the Irish Sea,<sup>24</sup> and it is possible that he may have aligned with him from the first days of the struggle with Matilda. For David, a weakening of the position of the Manx king may have been a necessary accompaniment to the projection of his own authority into the northern Irish Sea zone. The tying of Óláfr into the Scottish orbit was

achieved largely through his marriage, probably shortly before 1140, to Affrica, daughter of Fergus of Galloway.<sup>25</sup> While this match could be presented as an independent action by Fergus designed to strengthen his own influence in the kingdom of Man and the Isles, its probable date suggests strongly that David's hand lay behind it. Certainly, as David consolidated his grip on the north-west of England and, in the summer of 1141 extended his power south through Copeland, Furness and the Honour of Lancaster, he replaced Stephen as the dominant force in the northern Irish Sea zone. That fact and any pressure that was being brought to bear on him by Somairle would have brought Óláfr into David's orbit.

The effectiveness and extent of David's enhanced authority in the west became evident in 1136. The dedication ceremony of the new cathedral at Glasgow occurred in the summer of that year and charters issued around that time indicate the gathering of a significant number of Gaelic and Anglo-Norman magnates in David's company. At Glasgow, David was attended by Fergus of Galloway and his younger son, Uhtred, who was Henry I's grandson, Radulf, son of Dunegal, lord of lower Nithsdale, his brother Domnall, lord of upper Nithsdale, and a number of other native lords from the Lennox and what is now eastern Stirlingshire.<sup>26</sup> A second charter, issued at the royal estate of Cadzow in Clydesdale a short time after the Glasgow gathering, shows that other lords with west-coast interests had been present. These included Hugh de Morville and Walter fitz Alan, both of who probably already held their lands on the Clyde coast by this time.<sup>27</sup> Here, then, we seem to have an assembly of David's key allies and vassals in the south-west, men who would shortly provide him with significant military aid in his invasion of northern England. By 1136, therefore, David had achieved an unprecedented mastery of mainland Scotland. Direct royal authority had been imposed over the whole of the Southern Uplands except for Fergus' domain in Galloway, while north of the Forth royal power was entrenched firmly from the Moray firthlands to Argyll, Fife to Buchan. Outwith that expanded core, the still notionally independent rulers of Galloway, Orkney, Caithness and the Isles had been brought into his orbit, and David's influence extended from Man to the Northern Isles. The reality of that power would be revealed soon afterwards when David shifted from consolidation within his own kingdom to a policy of aggressive expansion.