

John of Fordun's Description of the Western Isles

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Chapter 10 of Book II of John of Fordun's *Chronica Gentis Scottorum* is a description of the islands off the west coast of Scotland (Skene 1871:43-4). It is the earliest such description in Scottish historical sources, and so has been (and still is) an indispensable foundation for writings about the area. W. F. Skene, in his 1871 edition of Fordun, seems to have been the first modern scholar to try to discover the origins of the chapter. His conclusion was that Fordun had written it after visiting the Isles, perhaps after a journey to Iona. In reaching this view, Skene was undoubtedly influenced by a pen-picture, in the prologue to one of the manuscripts of the chronicle, of a scholar travelling on foot through Britain and Ireland 'per civitates et oppida, per universitates et collegia, per ecclesias et coenobia, inter historicos conversans et inter chronographos perendinans' (Skene 1871:xxxiii-iv; 1872:386). But it must be doubted whether such a journey was made. The tradition appears in only two manuscripts which, if Skene's own arguments are correct, must come at a late stage in the copying of the text (Skene 1871:xviii; xxix). Skene also adduced circumstantial arguments—what Fordun might have seen by taking a certain route—but otherwise could not point to firmer evidence for the journey (Skene 1872:386-8). In the circumstances the idea that Fordun wrote the chapter after a kind of medieval National Trust cruise to and from Iona cannot be readily accepted.

A more recent explanation, by Mr Basil Megaw, is that the chapter might be based on a list of islands forming the diocese of Man, and ultimately derived from an alleged papal bull of 1231. The bull itself is probably a forgery 'drawn up in the generation after 1360'. Fordun, it was suggested, could have received a copy of the bull, and additional information, through a chain of correspondents which included the abbot of Iona and the bishop of Man, possibly bishop John Duncan (Megaw 1976:29-34). This new proposal has interesting implications for the study of Fordun's sources, for he does not often quote papal material, either genuine or forged. Nor has it been suggested elsewhere that Man might be a source of information for his work. The new proposal might therefore add fresh dimensions to the present knowledge of how Fordun's chronicle was put together. The case for it seems to rest on three main lines of argument.

Mr Megaw set out a comparative table of contents of the bull—list A—and of the island names—list B—in Fordun's chapter. The evidence which, in Mr Megaw's words, 'establishes the connection between the lists is the antiquarian opening phrase "the island called Eubonia, now Man"'. The phrase is common to both the bull and

Fordun. Mr Megaw suggested that the phrase came into use via Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*, and would readily have struck a chord with the bishop of Man. From there it would go to Fordun because, although Fordun uses Higden as a source, 'this morsel would hardly have the same appeal for him as for a Manxman'. But the relationship between Fordun and Higden may suggest another explanation. Fordun was emulating Higden (as Skene noted) and his borrowings, from Higden and from other writers, are those of an author actively and indiscriminately looking for information to explain the history of the Scots (Skene 1871:xxxiv; 1872:380-2). Higden uses the name Eubonia three times. Two of these references come comparatively near the start of the work, where he is giving a description of islands near the coast of Britain. He notes that the Isle of Wight is part of England; that Anglesey is part of Wales; and that Eubonia 'which is called Menevia, or Man, falls to Scotland'. (Babington and Lumby 1865-86 ii:36; 40). To a reader alert for material about Scotland this reference would surely leap to the eye and stick in the mind, no less than if the reader were a bishop of Man suddenly struck by the antiquarian flavour of the name.

The impact of the name is then reinforced by its use a few lines later in Higden. That the name *did* strike Fordun with some force is shown by his use of it in another passage which is probably one of his own fictitious interpolations (Skene 1871:114; Anderson 1922:i. 90). And before he read the *Polychronicon* his mind may have been partly prepared for the name because Higden is not the only writer who uses it. The variant form 'Eufonia' turns up in Simeon of Durham and, via this work, as 'Eufania' in Roger of Howden (Arnold 1882 i:50; Stubbs 1868-71 i:13). Both authors are sources for Fordun's chronicle. Since they use variants they are unlikely to have been the direct source of Fordun's use of the name. But they show that knowledge of other names for Man was not confined to readers of Higden. In short, Fordun would not have needed to use the bull to learn the name Eubonia, or to be impressed by it. He could have taken it directly from Higden, and probably did so.

In a second line of argument linguistic evidence, in the form of the names of the islands, was taken to show that Fordun's text derived from the bull, rather than the other way about. The author of this note is not competent to consider the merits of this evidence, and will not do so. But the nature of the texts from which the names are drawn, and on which the linguistic arguments are based, requires some comment.

The text of the bull depends on a transcript of *c.* 1600. Mr Megaw has shown that the bull cannot be as early as its alleged date of 1231 since two properties named in it were not granted until after 1248. Another student of the bull, Mrs Gelling, has shown that some of the place names in it could not be earlier than *c.* 1300. If Higden is the source for the name Eubonia the bull is unlikely to be earlier than *c.* 1320, since that is when the earliest version of the *Polychronicon* was probably compiled, and it may be no earlier than *c.* 1340, when the work was rapidly growing in popularity. It does not follow, however, that it must have been a bishop soon after 1340 who picked

up the name. Higden's work was widely read and copied over the next 150 years and any late medieval bishop of Man could have been familiar with it (Taylor 1966:90; 98; 149; 151-8). Mr Megaw's arguments for the bull's date of *c.* 1380 have their attractions, but their acceptance is more a matter of belief than of proof, and other evidence mentioned below suggests that a date of no earlier than *c.* 1390 is more likely. A further material point is that there seems to be a relationship between the bull and an episcopal confirmation of 1505. Mrs Gelling has pointed out that the list of place names in Man in both documents is 'almost identical' and that, as regards their form, 'in the majority of cases 1505 is the appropriate date for them' (Gelling 1970-1:135-6). In effect there is still a burden of proof on those who seek to show that the bull is earlier than Fordun, and the text of the bull cannot on the evidence adduced so far be dated more exactly than *c.* 1340 × 1505. Fordun's text, on the other hand, can be pinned down more precisely. Internal evidence given in more detail below shows that the matter of the text is from the late fourteenth century, and is datable to 1371 × 1387. A comparison of the texts cannot therefore proceed on the basis that they are nearly contemporary, or that one is necessarily later or earlier than the other since the dates for one still lie within a very wide range.

The reliability of the text of the bull must also be considered. The editor of the bull in 1911 pointed out that place names are commonly mis-transcribed by papal clerks, and that there have been two possible opportunities for mistranscription in the text (Poole 1911:258). A forged bull presumably never went near the papal chancery, and so one opportunity for mistakes has not occurred. The document may have been copied only once, when the present surviving version was taken from an 'original'. But however many times the text has been transcribed, it is clear from the 1911 edition that it has a very large number of slips and gaps. These are most easily seen in the 'common form' sections—that is, the parts which employ the conventional phrases of the papal chancery—where the transcript can be compared with the formulae which would have been used in a regular bull. The same test cannot be applied to the place names, which are unique to the document, but the very garbled form of some of them, particularly towards the end of the Hebridean section, and the slips which the editor has picked out in the Manx section, suggest that considerable corruption has taken place. A particular feature of the bull is that 'ch' is used for 'c' in a number of words. This would be an unusual trait in a medieval transcriber or forger and so may well be a peculiarity of the latest scribe. It leads one to wonder, for example, whether the 'Ch' at the beginning of 'Chorye' (= Tyree) was originally a 'c', itself a very common substitute in medieval scripts for 't'. With this sort of possibility to contend with, the place names in the bull cannot be guaranteed to be exact or even approximate copies of fourteenth century forms, and to compare them with Fordun's versions may not be comparing like with like. Any linguistic arguments that one text is derived from the other, and not the reverse, cannot in these circumstances be other than very tentative, if not inconclusive.

The third main line of argument was a comparison of the sets of island names in lists A and B. Examination of the lists certainly shows some resemblances. They amount to saying that the names in list A which can be firmly identified turn up, with one exception, in list B. But in a textual study the discrepancies may be just as revealing. List A is noticeably shorter than list B, and it is an immediate inference that, if A is the basis for B, Fordun must have had access to more than as many island names again than he could obtain from the bull. This evident difficulty was countered by a proposal that other correspondents topped up the text of the bull. This point will be considered in more detail later. Meanwhile, other differences between the lists are to be noted. First, the island names are set out in a different order. Though the geographical sequence is generally the same, five of the nineteen names in A (that is, about one quarter) are in other places in B. Second, A includes Eigg, which B leaves out. Normally such a range of differences between the alleged source and the final result makes the link between the two texts rather problematical. In addition, there is serious corruption in the names towards the end of A, and some charitable interpretation is needed to identify them. Even so, some are still unidentified. Taken together, the corruption and the other textual differences make the likelihood of B deriving from A anything but obvious.

A comparison of the full text of Fordun's chapter with the bull makes the likelihood of derivation even smaller. The bull contains no more than a list of names of islands. Fordun's chapter is a very much larger compendium. Over and above the extra island names it has notes on ecclesiastical sites and castles; characteristics of some islands; distances; and observations on crops, animals, and wonders of nature. The text of the bull has been well and truly topped up—if that is what really happened. Assuming that it did, and that an ecclesiastic was responsible, is the assumption confirmed by an examination of the ecclesiastical information in the text? On Iona, for example, Fordun says that there are two religious houses, one for monks and one for nuns. Their existence is independently attested. Fordun also correctly places the seat of the bishop of Argyll on Lismore. But recent research has been unable to confirm the existence of the alleged monks' cell on Texa. The supposed cell on Inchmarnock appears to have been (in 1390) a parish church, and the alleged cell of the Holy Trinity on Barra is another doubtful entry. Modern studies have equally failed to establish Fordun's statement that there was a house of regular canons on Colonsay, although they show that such a house existed on neighbouring Oronsay—a name which appears in neither A nor B (Cowan and Easson 1976:59; 99; 111:151; 235–6). But Oronsay is named as the seat of the house in papal letters to its prior, and to the bishop of Argyll, and treasurer and official of Glasgow (Burns 1976:79; 85). If the chapter really does depend on extra information from an ecclesiastical correspondent in the Isles it is curious that he seems to go astray in setting down information about religious sites in his own or in a neighbouring diocese.

The case so far for the proposal that Fordun used a supplemented bull is anything

but conclusive. It is therefore legitimate to ask whether the information in the chapter could have come from somewhere else. Mainland Scotland, and laymen, are two more possible sources. Fortunately, they can both be tested.

In 1166 it was clearly recognised that Man and 31 other islands owed tribute to the king of Norway. This is revealed in a reference to a meeting which records the presence of the king of Scots, and which also implies the presence of advisers. Unfortunately the names of the isles are not set out, but this tradition shows a knowledge of the numbers of the isles which is much nearer the size of Fordun's list than of the list in the bull (Lawrie 1910: 114–15). A century later the treaty of Perth explicitly refers to Man and 'the other Sudreys (*ceteris insulis Sodorensis*) and all the other islands to the south and west of the Great Sea'. That there was a distinction between the possessions of Man at that period and other islands on the west of Scotland is clearly understood. The same distinction was made when the treaty was renewed in 1312 (APS i:78; 101). There could hardly have been any doubt in the minds of the men involved in the negotiations that the possessions of Man gave nothing like a complete list of the islands in the west. Since the treaty involved a down payment of 4000 merks over four years, and a further annual payment of 100 merks in return for the cession of the isles, the Scots of the time presumably had some idea of what they were paying for.

Even before 1266 areas of the west had come under Scottish control. Alexander II had campaigned in the Clyde and in Argyll in the early 1220s. He died, while on another expedition, on the isle of Kerrera. Throughout the thirteenth century lowland and mainland families can be traced extending their territorial interests westwards (Barrow 1973: 373–6; Duncan 1975: 580–3). After 1266 the west appears to have been under a firm grip, which reached its fullest extent with the establishment in the 1290s of sheriffdoms carrying with them authority for the sheriff to collect royal dues in the area (Duncan 1976: nos. 46; 66–7). The surviving fragments of the Scottish exchequer records show clearly that sheriffs knew the lands from which they were to take dues, and there can be no reasonable doubt that by no later than, say 1295, the Scottish government had a good working knowledge of the western seaboard.

In the fourteenth century there is more evidence pointing in the same direction. For a number of reasons, Robert I had a particularly close knowledge of the west (Barrow 1965: 231–3; 242; 258; 279; 409–10). During the troubles in the early part of the reign of David II an agreement between Edward Balliol and John of Islay drawn up at Perth in September 1336 refers to the islands of Islay, Gigha, Jura, Colonsay, Mull, Skye and Lewis, as well as several areas of the western mainland (Rot. Scot. i:463–4). Nearly seven years later, in June 1343 at Ayr, David II made a similar grant to John, omitting Skye but adding Tyree and Coll, and handing over custody of the royal castles of Cairnburgh, 'Iselborgh' and Dunchonnel. At the same time and place he granted to Reginald son of Roderick of the Isles the islands of Uist, Barra, Eigg and

Rum (APS xii:6–7). The accession of Robert II did not change the pattern. The new king, previously the Steward, was lord of Bute and Arran. His daughter Margaret was married to John of Islay and this, with another alliance through his own second marriage, made the Steward the leading member of what has been called a 'Highland Party' in the later part of the reign of David II (Nicholson 1974:155–6). When Steward and king, he and his advisers could not have been ignorant of the west. In the early part of his reign royal charters convey and confirm lands in the isles and the western mainland. This evidence shows that the Scottish administration was informed about western names and places, including those mentioned earlier in this paragraph, plus the castles of 'Elantyrin' (Tioram) and of 'Vynwawle' (on Uist; evidently Benbecula). (Thomson 1912:nos. 412; 520; 567–9). The general tenor of this evidence is that island place names and lands and properties in the west were known to royal clerks working on mainland Scotland. Nor were they alone. Another contemporary, John Barbour, the poet and a mainland Scot, had a working knowledge of the geography of Argyll, Lennox, the Clyde, Kintyre and thereabouts (Barrow 1973:372; Mackenzie 1909:50–4). It cannot accordingly be ruled out that Fordun's source could have been a document or information which came from the mainland, or from a lay source, or from a combination of both.

Indeed, taking the text of the chapter as a whole, and not just the names in list B, this seems a more likely explanation. The chapter is more than a bare list, as in the bull and B, or as in chapter 11 of Book II, where Fordun sets out the names, and no more, of the isles in the Orkneys. Chapter 10 is a much longer and fuller description, and with a distinct secular flavour. Man is noted as the seat of the bishops of Man, but Fordun also observes that the ruler of Man owes a service of ten war galleys to the king of Scots. Arran comes next, out of order from list A, and noted as having two royal castles at Brodick and Lochranza. After Helant Inlaysche (Lamlash or Holy Isle), Fordun puts Bute, which has a 'fine and impregnable royal castle'. (Bute and Brodick were in the Steward's hands in the mid-fourteenth century, and so the reference to them as 'royal' castles shows that the text of the chapter as it stands now is no earlier than 1371). In all, Fordun notes against nine of the islands that they have eleven castles or towers. On Islay he notes Duniveg; near the Garvellachs, Dunchonnel; and, on Mull the castles of Duart and Aros. Cairnaburgh is the next to appear, followed by an unnamed tower (turrus) on Tyree; the castle of 'Benwewyl' (= 'Vynwawle') on Uist and, finally Thurso, which he calls an island, with a 'very strong tower'. (Although he refers to 'Insula Tyreym' he does not note it as a castle *i.e.* Tioram.)

There is good confirming evidence for virtually all the sites. Brodick castle was in existence early in the fourteenth century. Bute is much earlier (Mackenzie 1909:67; Cruden 1960:34). Cairnaburgh, Dunchonnel and 'Vynwawle' have already been noted as occurring in fourteenth century documents. Duniveg on Islay may originally have been a Norse castle, as Thurso presumably was (Cruden 1960:19–21; Talbot 1971 and 1974). Apart from Fordun, the earliest written evidence for Duart seems to

be in 1390, but architecturally it is older (Paul 1882: no. 2264; McGibbon and Ross 1887-92: iii. 46-7; Cruden 1960: 39; 46). Aros is known from other written records from 1409 and 1410, but is also thought on architectural grounds to be much older (Paul 1882: no. 2286; Lindsay *et al.* 1908: 137; McGibbon and Ross 1887-92 iii. 125). Fordun and other sources are more consistent with each other in this field of the evidence than in ecclesiastical information.

In the rest of the chapter Fordun records that Greater Cumbrae is 'rich and large'—just the thing to say when a Stewart is on the throne. Little Cumbrae and Jura are good for hunting. On Islay the lord of the Isles has two dwellings (*mansiones*). Uist is noted for seals and other marine life. Rum is wooded, mountainous and good for hunting, and next to St Kilda (Hirth) there is an island where, it is said, there are wild sheep which are rarely captured. In the bygoing the Corrievreckan (*gurgis oceani . . . fortissima*) is noted. Some sizes of islands and distances are also recorded. Fordun's text has ecclesiastical notes against eleven islands. This is more than the nine to which he attaches information about castles and towers. But if one adds in the other pieces of secular interest, like good places for hunting and the seats of the lords of the isles, the whole balance of the chapter is anything but ecclesiastical, as might be expected if it were based on a bull with additions from a bishop and an abbot. The balance lies the other way. Any contribution from the bull can be no more than the names of twenty islands, including Man, out of more than twice as many noted by Fordun. Many of the names then have added to them a series of notes which depart even further from the supposed source. A bull supplemented by a local churchman cannot be seriously maintained as the origin. The weaknesses in the ecclesiastical evidence, the overall weight of information of secular interest, and the generally good quality of the evidence of the castles all tell against the possibility.

Another approach is to look at other examples of Fordun's use of sources to see whether they throw any light on how he might have reacted to the text of the bull, either on its own or supplemented by another hand. It is not yet possible to be dogmatic about how he handled his sources, because the study of them has scarcely begun. But it is already clear that his chronicle shows different standards of scholarship, accuracy and regard for truth, depending on the period he is dealing with, the quality of his sources, and whether or not Anglo-Scottish relations are involved. A careful and exhaustive examination of how Fordun used the early Scottish king lists has concluded broadly that for the earlier periods of the chronicle Fordun can be both unreliable and inventive, and that he was very dependent on the quality and quantity of his sources (Anderson 1973: 215). The present author's view of Fordun's version of the twelfth-fourteenth centuries is that, except where he is writing propaganda or flattery, he can usually be trusted to deal faithfully and fairly with his material. If the bull had been produced in the fourteenth century it would have been a recent text in Fordun's eyes. A brief examination of some examples of his use of sources in the *Gesta Annalia*—that is, the part of the chronicle from 1154

onwards—is probably a reasonable way to show how he handled other recent texts, and in turn how he might have treated the bull.

First, he could have copied the island names as they stood in the list. Chapter 48 of the *Gesta* includes a list of the kings of Scots said to have been read out at the inauguration of Alexander III. The list may look Scottish, but it comes from the English chronicler Ralph of Diss, and the only Scottish contribution to it is the addition of the names of Alexander II and III (Skene 1871:294–5; Anderson 1973:237–8). Even although the list comes from a non-Scottish quarter Fordun treats it scrupulously, and the additions to it are both few and accurate. At the end of the list he makes some comments on it, renders some Gaelic into Latin, and explains that two names sound similar although their spelling differs. It looks as though he was prepared to explain points about Gaelic from his own knowledge, and that a Hebridean correspondent was not always needed to guide him in this.

A second technique which can be demonstrated is where Fordun the propagandist takes over, and texts are interpolated. Chapter 15 of the *Gesta* is an outstanding example—a long passage put in the wrong place in the narrative (therefore an obvious insertion) and arguing for the antiquity and independence of the Scottish church (Skene 1871:266–8). Fordun's text (*Gesta* chapter 20) of king Richard I of England's quit-claim of 1189 cancelling the treaty of Falaise probably comes from the English chronicler Roger of Howden, who is a source for several other passages in the *Gesta*. But Howden's text of the treaty has been supplemented by passages emphasising that William I owes homage only for lands in England, and stressing the duties owed by the kings of England towards the kings of Scots (Skene 1871:272–3; Stones 1965:6–8). Chapters 44–5 of the *Gesta* describing relations between Alexander II and Henry III consist largely of episodes picked out of the Melrose chronicle. But they have been touched up with the extra words shown in quotation marks in the next sentence. Melrose's negotiations (of 1237) become 'difficult'; Alexander returned home 'prosperously'; when the kings met again in 1244 Henry III arrived at Newcastle-upon-Tyne with a 'large' army 'to wage war'; and, once more, Alexander returned 'prosperously'. Melrose's neutral narrative has been given a subtle and patriotic twist (Skene 1871:291–2; Stevenson 1835:148; 156). Fordun's additions are not always as biased as this, however. There are passages where he adds short dating notes, such as references to living kings and princes. He also occasionally puts in explanations of words or phrases, sometimes from Anglo-Norman and, as already noted, from Gaelic (Skene 1871:314; 319; 326).

A third technique is that of Fordun the filleter. A large part of chapters 68–9 of the *Gesta*, describing Edward I's activities after the death of the Maid of Norway, can be shown to derive from instructions for the English ambassadors sent to Scotland. But in the *Gesta* the diplomatic verbiage has been cut away, leaving a few facts about the ambassadors and what they tried to do (Skene 1871:310–11; Stevenson 1870:i. 164–5). This technique might have been used to cut out the relevant island names

from the very much longer text of the bull, but it cannot be a complete explanation of how the bull might have been used since the problem is one of additions to a list. But Fordun's use of this method has to be mentioned to show the range of his abilities and also to underline the point that, if he did use it on the bull, he was very discriminating. The bull has a list of places in Man, and indications of the rights which the bishop of Man could exercise over the churches in his diocese (Poole 1911:259). Fordun knew that Man had once been under Scottish control (Skene 1871:300–1). It is difficult to see how he could have resisted some reference to these place names and rights—if the text of the bull were before him—to fill out his meagre information about the island. But he says nothing about them.

A fourth technique is that of Fordun the blender. Chapter 16 of the *Gesta* describes revolts in the north of Scotland. It includes two passages from the Melrose chronicle but ends with a related detail about the beheading of the rebel leader, McWilliam, which is not in Melrose but is in the English chronicler 'Benedict of Peterborough' (Lawrie 1910:269–71). Chapters 30–1 of the *Gesta* are a combination of passages, some from the Melrose chronicle and some still unidentified, about earl David of Huntingdon, his death, and his family and successors. The blending is done skilfully, and without obvious breaks in the narrative. It can be recognised because the identified passages have been taken in almost verbatim from the original source (Skene 1871:281–2; Stevenson 1835:99; 108). A different example occurs in chapter 69. After quoting some of the filleted diplomatic instructions, Fordun records that one of the Scots who went to Norway to bring back the Maid was a Sir Michael Scot. His source for this is not yet known. But the accuracy of the fact is established from English records, because Edward I gave orders for Sir Michael to be recompensed for the journey. To skilful blending there has been added trustworthy blending (Skene 1871:311; *Rot. Scot.*:i. 6a).

It may now be possible to envisage with more confidence how Fordun might have treated the text of the bull. First, he could have copied out all the island names exactly as they appeared, and in the same order. But it is already clear that this was not done. Second, he might have added to the text of the bull, or blended it with another source. This is a distinct possibility. The reference in chapter 10 to the galley service owed from Man to the king of Scots could be his addition, for the phrase is used elsewhere (Skene 1871:301). The reference to royal castles in Bute and Arran, and the flattering remarks about Greater Cumbrae and Rothesay castle (which had not been impregnable in the thirteenth century, as Fordun's text recognises elsewhere) (Skene 1871:299), could all be late touches, as may also be the translation of the Gaelic names of some of the isles. Beyond that it would be hard to go. There are as yet no other known instances of Fordun taking such a short list as that in the bull and expanding it several times. In the present state of knowledge of Fordun's sources and the way he used them—especially his usual practice of copying them faithfully—it seems more probable that if he did not write the catalogue himself he

started with something which was much more like the text of chapter 10 as it survives than the text of the bull.

But when was it written? The earliest record evidence for the priory of Oronsay (said to have been founded by John of Islay) shows it in existence in the 1350s (Burns 1976:85; Cowan and Easson 1976:94). Fordun's references to the castles of Cairnaburgh and Dunchonnel, making no claims to royal possession or control, appear to recognise the resignation of the castles recorded in David II's grant of 1343 to John of Islay, and so must be later than that agreement. The reference to the title 'lord of the Isles' suggests a date no earlier than *c.* 1350. John of Islay uses it, for example, in 1354 (Macphail 1914:76). The late 1350s appear to be the earliest likely date at which several of the details of the chapter would make sense together, and there is no reason to suppose that most of it could not have been put together soon afterwards. It might antedate the succession of the Steward to the throne, but as the text now stands there are some touches in it which can be no earlier than 1371. The latest possible date for Fordun's work appears to be 1387. The date of the description of the Isles accordingly lies within the range 1371 × 1387.

The provenance of the information in the chapter must now be considered. Man and Iona, as suggested by Mr Megaw, seem to be highly unlikely, if not impossible. Apart from the weaknesses of the ecclesiastical evidence, the many references to castles suggest a layman's appreciation of political and military power in the Clyde and the southern Isles. The weight of information in the chapter covering these areas is perhaps an important clue. Skene remarked that the chapter becomes hazier and less correct the further north it goes (Skene 1872:388). Some two-thirds of the text (counting by island names) deals with the Clyde and, beyond Kintyre, with the waters and islands to the south and west of Ardnamurchan—that is, the part of the west where the power of the Steward (later Robert II) and his son-in-law John of Islay was at its strongest. Rather than tug and stretch and add to the skimpy text of the bull to turn it into a source it seems preferable to suppose that Fordun obtained his information on the mainland from an informant in or close to royal circles after 1371, and so reflecting a predominantly lay view of the arena.

Finally, why was the chapter written? A quick and evident answer is that Fordun was imitating Higden, who began his chronicle with a long description of the place of Britain in the world, followed by a portrait of the land, its islands, and its peoples. The earliest chapters in Fordun have passages drawn from Higden and other authors to do the same for Scotland. Fordun describes the land and its two peoples in chapters 8 and 9 of Book II, and it comes as no surprise (especially since there is a reference in chapter 9 to 'insulas ulteriores') that he follows with a description of the western isles in chapter 10 and a list of the isles in the Orkneys in chapter 11. But the significance of chapter 10 may go further.

Fordun says some truthful and therefore unflattering things about the Steward's activities in the reign of David II (Skene 1871:358; 367–8; 382). But he tries

elsewhere to be more agreeable, and for this he produces what are in all likelihood some of his own inventions. Chapter 28 of Book I tells of a certain Euthacius Rothay, the first leader of those who inhabited the island of Albion, who gave his name to the island of 'Rothisay'. The same island also became known as Bute after St Brendan had built a shrine (or booth) there. The most likely explanation and justification for this fairy tale is that it was directed at the lord of Bute. It implies that the Stewarts could take pride and comfort in some very early origins. The same early leader, but this time called Eugenius, turns up in chapter 57 of the *Gesta*, along with Scots who had long inhabited the western isles unmolested. But then Fordun adds a warning—a family feud between the sons of Malcolm Canmore and their uncle Donald allowed the king of Norway to rule the isles (Skene 1871: 24–5; 302). This is more fiction, and also with a purpose. The Crown's grip on the isles may have been weakened by David II's resignation of castles in 1343, but it was still strong enough to enable him to enforce a submission on John of Islay in 1369 (Nicholson 1974: 179). After 1371 the Crown's position in the isles depended on the maintenance of good relations between John of Islay and the new king. If Robert II and his son-in-law were to fall out, the Crown's position would be jeopardised. Fordun, perhaps from a realistic view of the Steward's record, may have foreseen the potential dangers. Chapter 10 describes the prize, its wealth, and the means to hold it. The chapter is certainly a geographical description, but it also looks like a political brief written from the standpoint of a mainland Scot.

In the event, there was no trouble while John of Islay lived. But after his death in 1387 his sons seem to have changed allegiance. In 1389 grievances suffered by Margaret Stewart, his widow, at the hands of her sons and their adherents were laid before the Scots parliament, and her brother, the future duke of Albany, was instructed to see that right and justice was done to her (APS i. 556–7). In July 1388 bishop Duncan of Man had been authorised by the English government to negotiate with John's sons, and from then until after 1400 there is evidence of English friendship and support for them (Macdonald and Macdonald 1896: i. 141). The Great Schism introduced further complications. Benedict XIII, the Avignon pope to whom the Scots adhered, had deprived Duncan of the see of the Isles in 1387 (Watt 1969: 202). But the bishop was still supported by England and in 1388, with his commission from Richard II, he was in a position to make what gains he could in a confused situation in the Isles. An alleged papal bull confirming rights in or over Scottish islands could have been of considerable assistance to him in this. It is in the very last phase of his episcopate (1387 × 1392), or in the time of his successors, that a confirmation of the rights of the bishops of Man in parts of Scotland would have been most compelling and useful, and to which the fabrication of the bull, if it must be given a fourteenth century date, should probably be assigned.

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Editors' Note

Mr Scott's convincing demonstration that the Manx document does not represent one of Fordun's sources, and his wider view of the historical background, are gratefully accepted by Mr Megaw. The broad pattern followed in listing the islands, and the Eubonia reference in both, may however suggest the possibility of a remoter link, presumably in the administrative arrangements of the kingdom of the Isles.

The conclusions advanced in the paper 'Norseman and native in the kingdom of the Isles: a re-assessment of the Manx evidence', in *Scottish Studies* 20 (1976), are in no way affected, the comparison there with Fordun's list being confined to an appendix.

Dr Margaret Gelling has replied to criticism of her views in that paper in *The Vikings: the proceedings of the symposium of the Faculty of Arts of Uppsala University, June 6–9, 1977*, ed. T. Andersson and K. I. Sandred, Uppsala 1978. Considerable support for Mr Megaw's view has appeared in papers by Dr R. L. Thomson and Dr Gillian Fellows Jensen in *British Archaeological Reports, British Series 54 (ii), Man and Environment in the Isle of Man*, ed. Peter Davey, Oxford 1978, where also Dr Gelling's Uppsala paper and Mr Megaw's are both reprinted.

