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‘Kingis rabellis’ to ‘Cuidich ’n Rìgh’? Clann Choinnich: the emergence of a kindred, c.1475–c.1514

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Clann Choinnich (the Mackenzies) had, according to John Bannerman come to be earls of Ross ‘in all but name’ by the 1620s.¹ This territorial and social pre-eminence was the culmination of a long period of expansion that had its roots in the forfeiture of Ross from Eoin Ile, Triath nan Eilean, Iarla Rois (John of Islay, lord of the Isles, earl of Ross) by James III in 1475.² The accepted account of the early history of Clann Choinnich and its emergence from the umbrella of the Clann Dòmhnail earldom rests mainly on confused and contradictory late seventeenth-century sources. The earliest safely dateable members of Clann Choinnich, according to William Matheson, appeared in contemporary sources c.1480.³ Matheson had to rely on internally produced ‘tradition’ in his attempt to reconstruct their ‘history’ prior to this date. According to Warrand, however, no trust can be placed in traditional histories prior to 1475.⁴ As a result of this, he had little to say about

1 J. Bannerman, ‘The lordship of the Isles’, in J. Brown (ed.), *Scottish society in the fifteenth century* (London, 1977), 209–40, at 212–13. A contemporary note written on the back of a folded charter of Confirmation by James VI to Colin (Mackenzie) earl of Seaforth, dated 4 February 1623, illustrates the extent of their holdings in Ross. On this it is stated that Colin has all the church lands in Ross excepting only those of Fearn abbey (cf. *NAS*, GD46/20/Box3). 2 Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, lxx, nos. 109a and 109b. The Book of Clanranald refers to Eoin as ‘coin a hile Iarlla Rois’ (John of Isla, earl of Ross) and his father as having had ‘tigernas In[n]si Gall’ (or lordship of the Isles). Eoin’s grandfather Dòmhnall was ‘Iarlla Rois 7 mac Domnaill 7 ard fhilath In[n]sigall’ (earl of Ross and MacDonald and high prince/chief of the Isles): A. Cameron and others (eds), *Reliquae Celticae: texts, papers and studies in Gaelic literature and philology* (Inverness, 1892–4). Alternative designations were ‘Johne of the Yle erle of Ross and lord of the Ilis’ and ‘Johannes de Yle comes Rossie et dominus insularum.’ (cf. Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, nos. 51, 53, 59, 69, 70, 73, 104, 112 and 117). 3 W. Matheson, ‘Traditions of the Mackenzies’, in *TGSI*, 39/40 (1949), 193. 4 D. Warrand, *Some Mackenzie pedigrees* (Inverness, 1965), 1–6. The Gàidhlig versions of the names of chiefs of Clann Choinnich have been adopted intermittently for this paper. Alasdair Ionraic, ‘Inrick’ (Alexander Mackenzie of Kintail, c.1472x9?); ‘Kenneth Pvlair’ (Coinneach a’ Bhlaìr) 1492; ‘Kenneth Oig/Kenneth Aick’ (Coinneach Og) 1492x79?; ‘Kenneth ni curk’ (Coinneach na

Alasdair Ionraic (Alexander of Kintail) and his son Coinneach a' Bhlàir (Kenneth). Warrand was of the opinion that there was no such person as Coinneach Og (Coinneach a' Bhlàir's son) and that, if there was, he was illegitimate and of little importance. These two writers and their differing approaches, the reliance on, or the rejection of, 'tradition,' neatly define the problems involved in attempting to approach the history of the kindred in this period. The paucity of contemporaneous sources is undoubtedly why the history of the clan, and indeed Ross-shire, in this period has attracted so little attention from historians, and why Matheson in his reconstruction was forced to rely on these later accounts.⁵ However, the period after the forfeiture of Ross does offer some, albeit slim, contemporary documentation. This paper, although casting a glance at the nature of the later source material, will concentrate on the evidence for the development of the kindred during the period 1475–1514.

Historiography

The manuscript histories of Clann Choinnich were written (in their surviving form) sometime around the mid seventeenth century. The best known and most accessible of these are those attributed to George Mackenzie, first earl of Cromarty [1714] and Iain Molach (John Mackenzie of Applecross c.1684/5) which have been printed.⁶ Other manuscripts, produced by mem-

Cuirc 1568), or 'Kenneth of Brahan' before his father's death. 'Colin Caume' (Cailean Cam) Colin 1594 (cf. Fraser, *Cromartie*, 472, 483 and at 497); Mackenzie of Applecross, *Genealogy of the Mackenzies*, 1843, 6, 7, 9, hereafter: *Genealogy* (1843). 'Coinneach' (Kenneth, first Lord Kintail, 1611) in C. Ó Baoill (ed.), & M. Bateman (trans.), *Gàir nan Clàrsach, The Harps' Cry* (Edinburgh, 1994), 80; 'Cailean Ruadh' (Colin, first Earl Seaforth, 1633); cf. A. Mackenzie, *History and genealogy of the Mackenzies* (2nd ed. Inverness, 1894), 167; 'Cailean Dearg,' (cf. W. Matheson, 'Further Gleanings from the Dornie manuscripts', in *TGSI*, 45 (1967–8), 155–6); 'Seorus don[n]' (George, second earl Seaforth, 1651) (cf. *The Book of Clanranald*, in A. Macbain et al. (eds), *Reliquae Celticae*, ii (Inverness, 1894), 176). The Gàidhlig designation of 'John of Killin' (John Mackenzie of Kintail, 1561) has not been traced. John, however, could well be a straight translation of 'Eoin'. The form 'Eachann Ruadh' is found in contemporary documents as 'Auchinvoy', 'Auchin Rede Makkenich' (cf. *ADC*, iii, 31–2 and at 62–3).
 5 A recent exception to this is Norman Macdougall's recent article offering an account of the career of John, last lord of the Isles, 'Achilles' heel? The earldom of Ross, the lordship of the Isles and the Stewart kings, 1449–1507', in E.J. Cowan and R.A. Macdonald (eds), *Alba: Celtic Scotland in the medieval era* (East Linton, 2000), 248–75. A broader focus is given there on wider lordship affairs than in this paper, which concentrates on Ross post forfeiture.
 6 Iain Molach, John Mackenzie of Applecross died around Easter 1684–5 (cf. Ó Baoill and Bateman, *Gàir nan Clàrsach* 172). Iain Molach, to whom authorship of a history is attributed, was retoured as heir to his grandfather Alasdair a' Chùil (Alexander Mackenzie of Coul, 1650) in 1662, Iain's father Ruairidh having predeceased him in 1646 (cf. *Retours*, ii, 117; Mackenzie,

bers of the clan in the seventeenth century, such as the Letterfearn, Ardentoul and Allangrange manuscripts, are unpublished. Jean Munro has argued that these may ultimately derive from a single original manuscript. This is now lost, but it seems to have been the work of William Macqueen, parson of Assynt in 1576.⁷ These manuscript ‘histories’ are the mainstay of the history of the Mackenzies prior to the seventeenth century and the most voluminous source for the period c.1475–c.1508. The reliance on this material was (and is) born of necessity due to the scarcity of other source material.

While the early origins, genealogy and history of Clann Choinnich prior to c.1475 are outwith the scope of the present paper, it is worth noting that the earlier parts of their manuscript histories are notoriously unreliable. The earliest elements of Clann Choinnich manuscript histories became subject to critical scrutiny during the nineteenth century following the publication of a Gàidhlig manuscript dated to 1467, which displayed a genealogy that diverged markedly from that accepted and promoted in the seventeenth-century clan histories.⁸ In these in-house productions it was claimed that the Mackenzie ‘clan’ was founded by Colin Fitzgerald, a fugitive from Ireland, who fought for the king (presumably Alexander III) at Largs and further gained the king’s favour by saving him from a rogue stag while hunting. The grateful king then gave Kintail to Colin.⁹ The earlier Gàidhlig ‘1467’ manuscript, however, included neither Colin nor Fitzgerald among its list of early members of ‘Clann C[h]ainnig[h].’ This, together with the absence of documents such as the alleged charter granted by Alexander III to Colin Fitzgerald, led to questions being raised as to the veracity of the origin tale, and to an attempted defence of the histories by various nineteenth-century clansmen.¹⁰ The Fitzgerald theory was, however, recognised as untenable by

Mackenzies (1894), 598–9). Sir George Mackenzie of Tarbat was served heir to his father’s estate in 1655. He was created ‘Viscount Tarbat, Lord Macleod and Castlehaven’ in 1685, and given the title of ‘earl of Cromartie’ in 1703 (cf. *Retours*, ii, 108; *Retours*, i, 78; Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 551–3). 7 Jean Munro has located these manuscript histories (cf. J. Munro, ‘Mackenzie manuscript histories’, in *West Highland Notes and Queries*, Ser. 2, no. 19 (1999), 12–17); W. Matheson, ‘Traditions’, 226, n. 51. 8 This is the ‘1467 manuscript’ (cf. NLS, Adv.MS.72.1.1, f.1r). It has been printed (cf. *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis* (Edinburgh, 1847), 53–4; W.F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1880), iii, 485). Martin Macgregor has argued that the Mackenzie component of this genealogy was composed 1390x1410: M. Macgregor, ‘Genealogies of the clans: contributions to the study of manuscript 1467’, in *IR*, 51, no. 2. (2000), 131–46 and at 145–6. See also C Ó Baoill, ‘Scotticisms in a manuscript of 1467’, in *SGS*, 15 (1988), 123–5. 9 Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 462–4. There is no trace of the stag motif in Iain Molach’s briefer account (cf. *Highland Papers*, ii, 5–7). 10 The defenders of the Fitzgerald origin included Sir William Fraser (whose patron was the countess of Sutherland, *née* Mackenzie) and Major James D. Mackenzie of Findon (cf. Fraser, *Cromartie*, i, pp xi–xix). Mackenzie of Findon poured scorn on those who placed ‘effusive credence upon the scanty syllables of this shaky parchment’ (cf. Major James D. Mackenzie of

Alexander Mackenzie in his *History and Genealogies of the Mackenzies*.¹¹ Nevertheless, while recognising the improbability of the earliest part of the in-house manuscript histories, Mackenzie implicitly accepted much of the rest of what they had to say.¹² Mackenzie's agenda seems to have been to put the early history of the Mackenzies on a secure footing after the damage done to it following the emergence of the 1467 manuscript. He also set out the genealogy of the clan and its various cadets in order of precedence *vis-à-vis* the succession to the chiefship following the extinction of the main Seaforth line.¹³

The veracity of the Mackenzie manuscript histories, and that produced by the first earl of Cromartie in particular have been called into question.¹⁴ Cromartie is perhaps unfairly singled out for criticism. His history differs from others in its more systematic approach and with the use of 'evidence' rather than any great difference in content. Due to this it is easier to spot inaccuracies (although it served its purpose of providing the 'clan' with a 'history' for two centuries). He was judicious in his selection of information and padded out the earlier periods of history with references to earlier, but fictitious, writs.¹⁵ While Cromartie claimed to have these writs in his 'char-tor cist,' there is actually no trace of them in an inventory of Seaforth writs that had been made for Cromartie's father, in 1627. This list was compiled from the charters of Cailean Ruadh (Colin, first Earl of Seaforth, c.1597–

Findon, *Genealogical tables of the Clan Mackenzie* (Edinburgh, 1879), 12). 11 A. Mackenzie, *The reputed Fitzgerald origins of the Mackenzies* (Inverness, 1892); Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 1–24. 12 William Matheson commented that Mackenzie had rejected the Fitzgerald tale, '[...] but otherwise he gives us what is in effect a conflation of those traditions, slightly modified from the genealogical point of view so as to accord with the manuscript of 1467. The resulting account of Clan history fails to carry conviction [...]' (cf. Matheson, 'Traditions', 193). 13 Mackenzie substituted the Ó Beólan earls of Ross for Fitzgeralds giving a 'native' and 'Celtic' origin for Clann Choinnich. 'It is now most interesting to know who the ancient earls of Ross, from whom the Mackenzies are really descended, were' (cf. Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 24 and at 348–62). 14 According to MacPhail: 'In his longer history, Lord Cromartie it is true, professes to refer to and even to quote from charters and other writs, which no other person is known to have seen – and which many people believe to have been deliberately invented by the noble author for the glorification of his race.' And, in a note: 'He has also been accused of repeatedly falsifying the minutes of parliament' (cf. *Highland Papers*, ii, 3; Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 552–3). 15 These included the alleged Fitzgerald charter, a Crown charter to Murdo Mackenzie in 1362, and perhaps a commission to Murdo McCannich to pursue rebels in 1432 (cf. Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 464 and at 469). Cromartie claimed a mysterious 'fragment' of a MS from Icolmkill as his authority for 'Fitzgerald,' which nobody other than Cromartie himself had seemingly seen. This has been regarded with scepticism by everybody from Skene on (Sir W. Fraser excepted). However, the Revd John Maclean (Mull) writing to Robert Wodrow in 1702, referred to the 'black roll of I colmkill their subject is various, they are mostly historical [...]' (cf. *NLS*, Wod.Lett.Qu. ii, f.13r; J. Maidment (ed.), *Analectica Scotica* (Edinburgh, 1837), i, 121–5).

1633), the head of the family. Had any thirteenth and fourteenth century charters still been extant at that stage it is likely that they would have taken pride of place in Seaforth's own charter chest. However, the list is headed not with a Crown charter from the thirteenth century but with:

In the ffirst Ane chairtor gevin be Johne of Ila Earle of Ros and [Lord] of the Yllis To his cusing Alex[ande]r Mckenze of Kintail Off the fyve merk lands of Ki[l]lin the fyve merk lands of Garve the tua m[er]k land of Corriewulzie the thrie m[er]k land of Kenlochluichart, the tua merk land of garbat The tua m[er]k land of dalnatwa The four merk land of auchlask The four m[er]k land of Taag lyand within the Earldom of Ros and She[rri]ffdome of Innernes haldin of the earles of Ros be s[e]rvice of ward & relief and is daitit at Dingwall the sevint day of Ja[nua]r 1463 Gevin under the gevaris seill w[itho]ut ony sub[scripti]on.¹⁶

Clann Choinnich manuscript histories

William Matheson noted that the clan histories tended to stress their loyalty to the crown, and their readiness to uphold the crown's cause against rebels (and Dòmhnallaich in particular).¹⁷ It could be that these traditional manuscript histories (which may have been based on one original source, such as that of Macqueen) represent an 'official' cleaned up history with awkward associations and episodes conveniently dropped. The emphasis, instead, was placed on a more politically acceptable 'history' to suit the purposes of the kindred in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. To this end a picture was drawn of Dòmhnallaich as being rebellious and overweeningly ambi-

¹⁶ My attention was first drawn to this document from a footnote in an article by Malcolm Bangor-Jones: M. Bangor-Jones, 'MacKenzie families of the barony of Lochbroom', in J.R. Baldwin (ed.), *Peoples and settlement in north west Ross* (Aberdeen, 1994), 111, n. 14. The original can be found in *NAS*, GD305/1/166/7. The charter to which this entry refers is (as far as I know) now lost. The inventory runs to 17 densely written 'A3' size pages in a bound volume. It was seemingly compiled in the time of Cailean Ruadh, and has no entries later than 1627. See also Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, 129–30, referring to the same charter. Place-names included in this are: Cillfhinn/Killin, NH 398607; Garbh /Garve, NH 394615; Coir' a' Mhuillidh/Corriewulzie NH 360698; Ceann Loch Luicheart /Kenlochluichart, NH 335665; An Garbh bad/Garbat NH 413678; Na Tathagan/Taag NH 014639. 'Dalnatua' and 'Auchlask' are as yet unidentified. O.S Landranger, nos.19, 20 and 26. ¹⁷ Matheson, 'Traditions', 214. For a detailed treatment of the seventeenth century Clan/Kindred manuscript history phenomenon in the Gaidhealtachd, see: Martin MacGregor, 'The genealogical histories of Gaelic Scotland', in Adam Fox and Daniel Woolf (eds), *The spoken word: oral culture in Britain 1500–1850* (Manchester, 2002), 196–239.

tious, and conversely of Clann Choinnich as steadfast guardians of the crown's interests in the north, throughout the fifteenth century.

Coinneach was created lord of Kintail in 1610, and his son Cailean was made an earl in 1623.¹⁸ The two men were probably conscious that their family's background, while by no means undistinguished, was not marked by the early acquisition of high aristocratic rank. Moreover, many of their predecessors had been associated with families that were regarded as habitual rebels in a seventeenth century context. At least some of their neighbours were also alert to this, including Sir Robert Gordon. In many of his references to Clann Choinnich he referred to their status as baillies of the earls of Sutherland in the sixteenth century, the inference being that it was his family that had boosted their fortunes.¹⁹ It is also curious that there is little or no mention, prior to 1475, of Clann Choinnich in the 'histories' of their neighbours.²⁰ Although some Mackenzie manuscript histories have Clann Mhic Rath (Macraes) as companions of Colin Fitzgerald, this caused difficulties for a Macrath historian, around the start of the eighteenth century, who could find no evidence to support this. Instead he suggested Clann Mhic Rath were satellites of the thirteenth-century Bisset lords of the Aird. The Reverend Iain Macrath (1704) was also dubious regarding the dating of the Fitzgerald episodes in relation to early members of Clann Mhic Rath as the purported dates of Colin Fitzgerald created obvious chronological problems.²¹

In fact, the sole reference to Mackenzies (outwith their own histories) prior to 1475 is in a Macdonald history. This offers a very different account of the battle of Harlaw and the role of Clann Choinnich to that provided by the earl of Cromartie. An allusion is also made to a fourteenth-century marriage by a chief of the Mackenzies, Coinneach 'Achiench', to a daughter of John of the Isles.²² Although usually ascribed to Hugh of Sleat, seanchaidh, writing in the

¹⁸ Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 192 and at 242. Coinneach was raised to the peerage on 17 November 1609, and his son Cailean made an earl on 3 December 1623. G.W. White (ed.), *The complete peerage or A History of the House of Lords and all its members from the earliest times*, ix (London, 1949), 582; *RPCS*. 8, 380 (note) and at 470. ¹⁹ Sir Robert Gordon, *A genealogical history of the earldom of Sutherland from its origin to the year 1630* (Edinburgh 1813), 77–78, 112, 134–35 and at 146, [hereafter: Gordon, *Sutherland*]. ²⁰ *Chron. Frasers*; W.R. Baillie (ed.) *Ane Breve Cronicle of the Earlis of Ross* (Edinburgh, 1850); John, first Marquis Tweeddale, *The feuds and conflicts of the Clans in the northern parts of Scotland, from the year 1031 to 1519* (Aberdeen, 1842); *Cal. Fearn*; R.W. Munro (ed.), *The Munro tree: a genealogy and chronology of the Munros of Foulis and other families of the clan: a manuscript compiled in 1734* (Edinburgh, 1978). ²¹ *Highland Papers*, i, 196 and at 204. ²² In the seventeenth-century history attributed to Hugh Macdonald of Sleat, a reference is made to a fourteenth-century marriage between a Coinneach 'Achiench' Mackenzie and a daughter of Eoin Ile, Lord of the Isles. There is also a reference made to Mackenzies supporting Clann Dòmhnail at the battle of Harlaw (1411) (cf. *Highland Papers*, i; *History of the Macdonalds*, 27 and at 30; Fraser,

latter half of the seventeenth century, the Macdonald history may well have been compiled by a member of the Beaton family.²³ If so, and if this family also served Clann Choinnich, it might explain the rather muted criticism in the analysis given in the Macdonald history of the actions of Clann Choinnich following the forfeiture of Ross and their opposition to Aonghas Og (c.1490):

he [Aonghas Og] came to Inverness. Mackenzie was like to be killed, or at least banished, by Macdonald, because he was always against him, contriving all the mischiefs he could, at least upon recovering his own, he would deprive Mackenzie of the lands he held of the king.²⁴

Similarly the resistance to Alasdair of Lochalsh (1494) by Clann Choinnich and other former vassals of the Macdonald earls of Ross leading to the Macdonald defeat at Blàr na Pàirce, c.1491, is explained in terms of the fear factor:

young Mackenzie gathered together a number of Ross people, and that of the north, particularly such as held Macdonald's lands, at that time of the king; he had commission to oppose Alexander, in case he aimed to regain Macdonald's lands, and fearing for himself to have those whom he formerly offended as his neighbours, he got all those who then held of the king to join him [...] Mackenzie knowing that if Alexander obtained any kind of superiority or advantage over him, that he would be reduced to a very low condition [...]²⁵

This surprisingly generous assessment of the motives of those who had been enemies of Clann Dòmhnail is perhaps given more weight because it was compiled from a corpus of material that might have been expected to be antipathetic to the Mackenzies. According to John Bannerman, the Macdonald manuscript histories are relatively trustworthy, in contrast to those produced by the Mackenzies, and when compared with contemporaneous sources 'it is surprising how often they are accurate.'²⁶

Cromartie, ii, 469). ²³ The authorship of this history has traditionally been ascribed to 'Hugh Macdonald, a Skye seannachie (cf. *Highland Papers*, i, 1). For discussion of the identity of the author of *The history of the Macdonalds* and the *Books of Clanranald*, cf. J. Bannerman, *The Beatons, a medical kindred in the classical tradition* (Edinburgh, 1986), 16–18 and at 43–44. Bannerman has commented that the North Uist Beatons, possibly authors of these seventeenth-century histories, may have served as physicians to Mackenzie of Seaforth in addition to Macdonald of Sleat. The Book of Clanranald skims over this period, concentrating more on the seventeenth century. A. Cameron et al. (eds), *Reliquae Celticae*, ii, 163–5. ²⁴ *Highland Papers*, i, 51. ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 55. ²⁶ Bannerman, 'Lordship', 210; W.D.H. Sellar, 'The origins and ancestry of Somerled', *SHR*, 45 (1966), 124.

According to George Mackenzie the first earl of Cromartie (1714), 'It is advantageous to be discerned of good and great predecessors'.²⁷ This phrase coming at the outset of his 'history', possibly reveals one of the factors that might have prompted Cromartie to write. He may have been attempting to do for the Mackenzies what Sir Robert Gordon had done for the earl of Sutherland, a work designed to be 'Ane ornament to yow and your famelie'.²⁸ Although Cromartie's history and his embellishment of it has attracted a lot of criticism, he seems to have based his material on genuine tradition, and possibly an earlier 'history' (Macqueen's) from the end of the sixteenth century.²⁹ This agrees with much of what is found in other manuscripts histories such as that of Applecross.³⁰ Cromartie not only attempted to bolster his case by introducing 'charters', but further padded this out by attempting to link the earlier sections of clan history to a historical framework with references from Boece, Holinshed and Buchanan.³¹

While Clann Choinnich were using the stag's head emblem (supposedly representing Fitzgerald's rescue of King Alexander) on their coat of arms at least as early as 1574 and probably earlier, the 'real' origins of the kindred remain uncertain.³² Naming patterns might, however, provide an indication of the emergence of the Fitzgerald origin legend more precisely.³³ These can be traced back tentatively to the time of Coinneach (1611), and Cailean Cam (1594) his father for whom Parson Macqueen is said to have written a history of the family, c.1570x1600.³⁴ Cailean Cam was the first (historically attested) chief to bear the name 'Colin' (Cailean), although it should be noted that he attained the chieftainship only because of the early death of his elder brother Murchadh.³⁵ Cailean Ruadh (born c.1597) who became the first earl of Seaforth in 1623 was the first-born son to the previous chief. Had the origin tale featuring Fitzgerald (in the form given by Cromartie) been current prior to this, it is likely that it would have been given to chiefs' sons at an earlier date.³⁶ If Cromartie sought to support a pre-existing tale

27 This appears in the preamble to his history. The editor inserted '[descended]' after the word 'discerned' (cf. Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 462). 28 For discussion see, D. Allan, 'Ane ornament to yow and your famelie': Sir Robert Gordon and the genealogical history of the earldom of Sutherland', in *SHR*, 80 (2001), 22-44, at 35-7 and at 41. 29 See fn. 14. 30 See fn. 9. 31 Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 464 and at 471. 32 An image of Cailean Cam's (Colin Mackenzie of Kintail) Seal, 1574, has been reproduced (cf. Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 514). Coinneach a' Bhlàir's tomb, bearing the date 8 February 1491/2, still intact at Beaulieu Priory, is surmounted by a stag's head. 33 See fn. 9. 34 J. Munro *Mackenzie manuscript Histories*; W. Matheson, 'Traditions', 226, n. 51. 35 Mackenzie suggests that Cailean was named after Cailean the Earl of Argyll his great uncle (cf. Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 20). 36 Cromartie's explanation of the failure of the kindred to use the name 'Kenneth' is that: 'He [Kenneth, son of Colin Fitzgerald] had Kenneth who succeeded him, and wes named according to the custome of the antient Scots, McKenneth after his father, rather then from Coline, the grandfather, from ther respect to Kenneth McMahon [Colin Fitzgerald's father in law] ther antient mais-

rather than an invention, it might explain some of the inconsistencies given in his account, and his need to support it with manufactured ‘evidence’. Although nomenclature may be indicative of a sixteenth-century provenance for ‘Colin Fitzgerald’, this tale could also, perhaps, have been embraced in the early seventeenth century, as the leadership of the kindred aspired to comital status.

Clann Choinnich were by no means the only group to tweak their origin tales for political expediency in this period. Others included the Campbells (who also claimed Norman antecedence) and the Macgregors who boasted Cinaed mac Ailpín, a ninth-century king of Pictland, as their progenitor.³⁷ Nor was this phenomenon confined to Scotland. In Ireland many Anglo-Norman families including such as the Fitzgerald earls of Desmond and Kildare were not averse to massaging their ancestry and having it re-spun in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.³⁸ While it is not clear how thoughts of Irish Fitzgeralds may have insinuated themselves into the minds of Clann Choinnich in northern Scotland, an intriguing link is suggested in the person of Richard Preston. Preston, from Lothian, served King James VI initially as a page, and by 1599 was captain of the king’s household. His standing was further raised when he purchased the lordship of Dingwall in 1609. Preston, Lord Dingwall, married Elizabeth sole daughter of Thomas tenth earl Ormond and Ossory, widow of Theobald, Viscount Butler of Tulleophilm in 1614. He was created earl of Desmond (with support of the duke of Buckingham) in 1619.³⁹ Cailean Ruadh, first earl of Seaforth (after 1623) held lands in the Lordship of Dingwall directly from him in 1622.⁴⁰

ter, so that all that come from this Kenneth retained the patronimick McKenneth [...]’ (cf. Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 464–5). 37 D. Sellar, ‘Highland family origins – pedigree making and pedigree faking’, in L. Maclean (ed.), *The middle ages in the Highlands* (Inverness, 1981), 108–10; A. Campbell of Airds, *A history of Clan Campbell*, i (Edinburgh, 2000), 18–19. 38 According to Katharine Simms: ‘By the mid-seventeenth century many Anglo-Irish families had gone one step further, and procured for themselves ludicrous pedigrees which traced their ancestry in the male line from some Gaelic king [...]’ (cf. K. Simms, ‘Bards and barons: the native Irish aristocracy and the native culture’, in R. Bartlett and A. Mackay (eds), *Medieval frontier societies* (Oxford, 1989), 191–4. 39 *SP*, iii, 121–2. The old Fitz Thomas (Fitzgerald) family had been forfeited due to their involvement in the rebellion of 1601. Thomas (Fitzgerald) the fifteenth Earl Desmond was captured and died in captivity in England in 1607. Both his brother and then his nephew designated themselves ‘earl of Desmond,’ but both died as rebels and exiles, and: ‘any continuous usage of the title appears to have been abandoned’: V. Gibbs (ed.), *The complete peerage of England, Scotland, Ireland Great Britain and the United Kingdom*, iv (London, 1916), 256–7. 40 Cailean Ruadh, Lord Kintail (later first Earl Seaforth) held salmon fishing rights in the River Connon from Lord Dingwall in 1622 (formerly held by his father from Andrew Keith of Delny); cf. *NAS*, GD305/1/166/7. In a sasine granted to Cailean of the lands of Kinnahaird, Davochmaluak, and ‘Glackis, Ochterneid, Inchevandie, Blaikie, Drumglusk, Wester Fairburne, Comrie, Arkou, Auchnaclerach, fishing of Connane,’ in Ross in 1622, it was stipulated that Richard, earl of Desmond (and Lord Dingwall), was

Unfortunately other than demonstrating that these people clearly knew each other, which may have facilitated a conduit for transmission of ideas, this in itself proves nothing. Although the adoption of the name Colin may have been an accident in the sixteenth century, due to the death of the elder son, the origin tale, which could have been created anytime from the mid sixteenth to mid seventeenth centuries, could have proved advantageous to Cailean Ruadh at court in London post 1623.

If the circumstances surrounding the adoption of the Fitzgerald myth are unclear, another puzzle is provided by traditional tales of marriage alliances, particularly with Clann Dubhghaill (Macdougalls) in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.⁴¹ The result of emphasising Clann Dhubhghaill links was the masking of Clann Choinnich involvement and marriage ties with Clann Dòmhnail. It could be that members of Clann Choinnich recalled the splintering of clan solidarity in the 1490s, when some members of the clan seem to have supported Coinneach Og and Clann Dòmhnail, and others supported the crown. Clann Dòmhnail were, for most of the time between the forfeiture of the earldom of Ross in 1475 and the mid seventeenth century, viewed with intermittent suspicion and hostility by the crown. Clann Dòmhnail's extensive possessions had in part been acquired initially at the expense of Clann Dubhghaill, following the alignment of Aonghas Og with Robert Bruce.⁴² By identifying themselves with Clann Dubhghaill, Clann Choinnich perhaps hoped to portray themselves as legitimate successors (in the north) to the 'usurping' Clann Dòmhnail. Clann Choinnich were said to have suffered as a result of their support for dispossessed and rightful owners of much of Clann Dòmhnail's 'empire,' and had consistently supported the crown (although paradoxically the usurping Robert Bruce rather

his superior for the lands lying in the lordship of Dingwall (cf. *NAS*, GD46/20/Box7/bundle 7/5). 41 Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 465, 466 and at 473; *Genealogy* (1843), 6; *Highland Papers*, ii, 8 and at 20; Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 46–7 and at 82–3. 42 Through these alleged marriages by various members of Clann Choinnich, ancestral links were claimed through Clann Dhubhghaill to the Comyn/Balliol family, who were defeated and largely disinherited during the first phase of the Wars of Independence. Despite these awkward family connections, it was also asserted that Clann Choinnich were staunch supporters of Robert Bruce, successful usurper of the Scots crown. For Clann Dòmhnail and Clann Dubhghaill in the fourteenth century, see N. Murray, 'A house divided against itself: a brief synopsis of the history of Clann Alexandair and the early career of 'Good John of Islay' c.1290–1370', in C. Ó Baoill and N.R. McGuire (eds), *Rannachadh na Gàidhlig 2000* (Obar Dheathain, 2002), 221–30; G.W.S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the community of the realm of Scotland* (3rd ed. Edinburgh, 1988), 57–8, 163 and at 290–1; C. McNamee, *The wars of the Bruces, Scotland, England and Ireland, 1306–1328* (East Linton, 1997), 31–2, 36–7 and at 169–70; R.A. Macdonald, *The kingdom of the Isles: Scotland's western seaboard, c.1000–c.1336* (East Linton, 1997), 180 and at 184. For an overview of Clann Dòmhnail and 'the lordship of the Isles', cf. K.A. Steer, and J.W.M. Bannerman, *Late medieval sculpture in the west Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1977), 201–13.

than Balliol, as their purported marriage ties would suggest). The themes of crown loyalty and consistent opposition to the rebellious machinations of Clann Dòmhnail are, perhaps, used to justify Clann Choinnich's later expansion as the recovery of their inheritance.

If this tale was developed towards the end of the sixteenth century, it coincided with the culmination of Clann Choinnich expansion at Clann Dòmhnail's expense in Lochcarron and Lochalsh, allowing Clann Choinnich to remove the last Clann Dòmhnail foothold on the seaboard of Wester Ross.⁴³ By the 1620s Clann Choinnich had defeated Glengarry, Sleat was a brother-in-law of Cailean Ruadh 1st earl of Seaforth, and Clann Raghnaill (Macdonalds of Clanranald) were his vassals.⁴⁴ In addition to this, Siol Torcail (Macleods of Lewis, Coigeach, Gairloch, Raasay, Assynt) who had hitherto supported efforts to resuscitate the lordship of the Isles, were systematically either destroyed or reduced to vassalage.⁴⁵ Siol Tormoid (Macleods of Harris/Dunvegan), while not vassals, seem to have been clients of Cailean Ruadh.⁴⁶ A hint of propaganda, justifying their aggrandizement at Clann Dòmhnail's expense appears in Iain Molach's history, where he relates how the founder had married the heiress of 'Kenneth Matthewson'. 'Colin Fitzgerald' had, seemingly, in right of his wife acquired Kintail. Their offspring, however, had been:

forced to quit it to the Clandonald, but God's providence was not to let it with the Clandonald but to come to the righteous owners – the successors of Sr Collin Gerald qk they wan legallie and honorable from those that held it by usurping.⁴⁷

⁴³ An account (by a member of Clann Choinnich) of the final stages of the conflict has been printed (cf. *Highland Papers*, ii, 37–49; Fraser, *Grant*, iii, 150 and at 405–6; *RPC*, iii, 505–6 and at 533). Strome Castle, controlling Lochcarron, was besieged and demolished by Coinneach in 1602. Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 215–17; D. Gregory, *The history of the Western Highlands and Isles of Scotland* (2nd ed. Glasgow, 1881) 300–3; *NAS*, GD 305/1/166/7. MacCoinnich was given a royal confirmation of Lochcarron and Lochalsh in March 1607: *RMS*, vi, no. 1879. ⁴⁴ *NAS*, GD201/1/, nos. 16, 28 and 36; Warrand, *Pedigrees*, 17. ⁴⁵ Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 260, 550 (Eachann Ruadh had secured part of Gairloch in 1494, but Clann Leòid held onto the remainder until 1610–11), 401–2, 408–15. Clann Choinnich obtained right to Assynt (1588), Còigeach, Waternish and Lewis (1605–11): *NAS*, GD305/1/166/7; and Raasay (1608) *NAS* GD 128/23/3. ⁴⁶ Ruairidh Mòr Macleòid of Dunvegan died at Chanonry, Seaforth's main residence in 1626 (cf. I.F. Grant, *The Macleods, a history of a clan* (Edinburgh, 1981), 232); A. MacCoinnich, 'His Spirit was given only to warre': conflict and identity in the Scottish Gaidhealtachd, c.1580–c.1630', in S. Murdoch and A. Mackillop (eds), *Fighting for identity: Scottish military experience, c.1550–1900* (Leiden, 2002), 133–61 and at 147–9. ⁴⁷ *Highland Papers*, ii, 7. The earl of Cromartie blamed 'MacMahones' for this. Elsewhere he relates how Dòmhnall Ile (Donald of the Isles) had been oppressing Alasdair Ionraic. After plundering a church in Atholl however, Dòmhnall: 'By God's just judgement he became mad[c]' (cf. Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 464 and at 473).

This hints at the ideology (such as it is) of the clan historians and the circumstances in which they worked. It is unlikely that it was a complete invention, rather a subtler twist on existing tales with which the clan at large were familiar. If ordinary clansmen could not be convinced, then the history would have failed at its most basic level. To this end, Cromartie perhaps mixed the familiar tales and episodes (which may have in any case been more important than 'history' to tradition) with which he and his 'clansmen' were acquainted and shoe-horned them into the framework of 'history.' In these circumstances, tales such as that of the heroics performed by Donnchadh mòr 'Mckenzie's great scallack' at the battle of Park (c.1491) were of equal if not more relevance than the political circumstances, from which the conflict emanated, which is explained in terms of a family feud.⁴⁸ The Macdonald histories have been found reasonably accurate when compared against contemporaneous historical source material.⁴⁹ However, it could be that this may have been possible as a result of a tradition of literacy associated with the lordship of the Isles. Why should seanchaidhean associated with the Macdonalds have better memories, with tales less subject to the inevitable distortion of oral transmission, than other kindreds?⁵⁰ Unlike the Mackenzies, whose star was in the ascendant by the early seventeenth century, the Macdonalds looked backwards to past glories in contrast to a more miserable present. In the case of the Mackenzies, their manuscript histories, too, can be broadly representative of a truth, post-1508, perhaps helped by an increase of writs in their charter chest as an aide memoire. The tendency to distort events dates and episodes prior to c.1500, is frustrating, as these undoubtedly contain some element of truth, however skewed.

⁴⁸ Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 479 and at 480. 'Mckenzie's great scallaig'; see also: Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 91-7; *Highland Papers*, ii, 23 n. 23 for discussion of the word 'Scalag'. Sgalag, in modern Gàidhlig is defined as 'servant' (Middle Irish: 'Scolóc'); A. Macbain, *An etymological dictionary of the Gaelic language* (Gairm, Glasgow, 1982); see also: *RIA*, Dictionary of the Irish language, 'S 101. 71'. ⁴⁹ S. Cameron, 'Contumaciously absent'? *The lords of the Isles and the Scottish crown*. I am grateful to Dr Cameron for letting me see a draft of her, as yet, unpublished paper; Bannerman 'Lordship', 209-11. ⁵⁰ Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, lxxix-lxxx, commented that the Lordship of the Isles was an 'orally based culture.' However the Lordship was so wide ranging (and as the surviving charters bear witness) it would have been difficult to administer without recourse to writing, whether in Gaelic, Latin or Scots. According to the 'History of the Macdonalds', Macduffie or MacPhie of Colonsay kept the records of the Isles: cf. *Highland Papers*, i, 25; D.S. Thomson, 'Gaelic learned orders and literati in medieval Scotland', in *Scot. Stud.*, 12 (1968), 68-9. Clann Choinnich do not seem to have had (in 1627) written records pre-dating 1463 in any language, and when evidence of their literacy in Gaelic does emerge in the latter half of the seventeenth century in the odd line and in personal names in their manuscript histories, and as seen in the Fernaig manuscript, it is rendered in Scots orthography.

Alasdair Ionraic

Alasdair Ionraic, or Alexander Mackenzie of Kintail, is the first chief identifiable in contemporaneous record. References to him, however, are sparse and at times contradict Mackenzie manuscript histories. In those, Alasdair is depicted as a loyal crown man consistently opposed to the treasonable activities of Clann Dòmhnail, and Eoin earl of Ross.⁵¹ It is also stated that Alasdair married twice, to Anna Macdougall, and then to Mairead, daughter of McCoull of Morir (possibly MacDubhghaill of Morar, a sept of Clann Raghnaill).⁵² Although it is possible that Clann Choinnich were in opposition to the Macdonalds in Ross prior to 1475, the impression gained from surviving documentary evidence and Macdonald histories seems to contradict this.

There seems, perhaps unsurprisingly, to have been a blood relationship between Alasdair and Eoin Ile, earl of Ross. In the charter of 1463/4, Alasdair, already designated ‘of Kintail,’ is described as a cousin of Eoin.⁵³ The nature of this relationship is difficult to determine. However, two marriage supplications made in the fifteenth century, by Alasdair and his son Coinneach, help to shed some light on this.⁵⁴ Alasdair had married Catrìona, daughter of John, son of Ranald, sometime in the 1430s. It is difficult to identify Catrìona’s family from the numerous branches of Clann Dòmhnail on the strength of this patronymic.⁵⁵ However, if her grandfather were Ranald, eponym of Clann Raghnaill, and if Alasdair’s great grandmother were a sister of Ranald, it would perhaps, account for them being within the third and fourth degrees of consanguinity.⁵⁶ This would lend support to the

51 ‘Whilst John of Ila oprest Alexander’ (cf. Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 472–4). 52 *Genealogy* (1843), 6–7. Another recension of the Applecross genealogy identifies Alasdair’s wives as a daughter of Macdougall and a daughter of ‘McRonalld’ as the second wife. (cf. *Highland Papers*, ii, 20); ‘Alexander had to his first wyfe, Ann, daughter to McCoull of Lorne, by whom he had Kenneth and Duncan; and after her death he married Margrat, daughter to McCoull of Morir, by whom he had Hector’ (cf. Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 473); A. Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 83. For identification of ‘MacDubhghaill as a sept of Clann Raghnaill, cf. Gregory, *Western Highlands*, 158, n. 1. 53 Note of a charter in an inventory made of Colin earl of Seaforth’s charters, c.1627 (cf. *NAS*, GD305/1/166/7). 54 ‘It is supplicated for the part of Alexander Mackenzie [Mackennyeh], layman, and Catherine, daughter of John, son of Ranald [Ranaldi], laywoman, that formerly, knowing that they were related in the second and third and double third and double fourth degrees of affinity and also third and fourth degrees of consanguinity, they contracted matrimony publicly and “de facto de verba de presenti” and consummated the same, and have remained therein for about thirty years and have offspring. But they are not able to remain in matrimony without apostolic dispensation. It is therefore supplicated that the Pope absolve them and dispense them to remain in the matrimony in which they have so long lived together, decreeing legitimate the offspring born or to be born. “Fiat.” Rome’ (cf. *CSSR*, v, no. 1167). 55 An ‘Iain Dall’ or blind John appears as son to Ranald, the eponym of Clanranald, in a family tree (cf. Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, 288 and at 291, n. 24). 56 They were also within the prescribed degrees of affinity, which could cover a range of issues of relationship from previous

Macdonald historian's claim that a Coinneach 'Achiench' Mackenzie (perhaps a great-grandfather of Alasdair Ionraic) had married a daughter of Eoin Ile, lord of the Isles (fl. 1336x87), in the fourteenth century.⁵⁷ Alasdair's son Coinneach also had a marriage connection with Clann Dòmhnail. According to Cromartie, he married a daughter of Eoin, last lord of the Isles, as his first wife.⁵⁸ In a marriage dispensation to him dated 1465, his wife is named as 'Finvola' a daughter of Celestine de Insulis (Gilleasbaig of Lochalsh), thus a niece rather than a daughter of the lord of the Isles.⁵⁹

Although it is difficult to be sure due to lack of firm evidence, what little there is suggests a much stronger connection with Clann Dòmhnail prior to 1475 than the Mackenzie manuscript histories would allow. Not only has a veil been drawn over this connection, but a new, subtly different one has been added. The earl of Cromartie's history reveals this by giving more information than the other histories, and exposing some of the errors. This unfortunately leaves the remaining information with a credibility problem. Cromartie maintains that Alasdair Ionraic had Kinellan (near Strathpeffer) on rental from the earl of Sutherland as a kindly tenant, following the forfeiture of Ross. In addition he also adds that Clann Choinnich were used by Sutherland as a type of militia against Clann 'ic Aoidh (Mackays) in Caithness and Sutherland during the earl of Sutherland's absence at court c.1477.⁶⁰ Unfortunately there is no evidence that the earl of Sutherland took an active role in the earldom of Ross in the aftermath of the forfeiture of Clann Dòmhnail there in 1475, still less that he acted as a baillie. John of Killin (Eoin MacCoinnich), chief c.1500x8–61, Alasdair Ionraic's grandson, did act as baillie for the earl of Sutherland in the later 1540s.⁶¹ It could be that Cromartie wished to obscure this subordinate status and to place the episode with Mackenzies as baillies to the earls of Sutherland further back in time, to the fifteenth rather than the sixteenth century. While the problems associated with Clann Choinnich manuscript histories can be pointed out, not much is known of Alasdair's career prior to 1466 when as we have seen, he was named in a marriage supplication.⁶²

This seems to be the earliest reference to the name MacCoinnich (MacKenny, Mackenzie) in any source.⁶³ Accordingly, the supplication for

betrothal to a sibling to perhaps ties through fosterage. ⁵⁷ *Highland Papers*, i, 27. ⁵⁸ Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 475. ⁵⁹ Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, App.B, B42. ⁶⁰ Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 474–5. 'Kinellan' is an island in a loch a half mile to the west of Strathpeffer (NH 470575). The island was excavated in 1915–16 (cf. H.A. Fraser, 'Investigation of the artificial Island in Loch Kinellan, Strathpeffer', in *PSAS* (1916/17), 51, 48–98). ⁶¹ The earls of Moray had a tack of the earldom of Ross from the king from 1524. They were followed in this by the earls of Sutherland in the 1540s (cf. *ADPC*, 211, 469 and at 615; *RSS*, i, no. 3296; Gordon, *Sutherland*, 112 and at 134–5). John [Mackenzie] of Killin and his son Kenneth of Brahan appear as witnesses to several documents in the Sutherland papers in the mid sixteenth century (cf. Fraser, *Sutherland Book*, iii, 100, 108, 141 and at 147). ⁶² *CSSR*, v, no. 1167. ⁶³ The genealogy in

legitimation of his marriage and issue, applied for in 1466, may be the first surviving instance of the adoption of the name ‘MacKennych’ in a non-Gaelic context. The timing of the supplication and the adoption of the style ‘MacCoinnich’ in documentation may be related to the charter from Eoin Ile in 1463. Alasdair now had formal title to his lands and wished to transfer this to his legitimised heir. This marriage supplication would appear to contradict the traditional manuscript history account of Alasdair’s marital exploits. If Catrìona had indeed been married to Alasdair for thirty years, then the claims that Alasdair was married twice, and that Eachann Ruadh, the progenitor of the Gairloch family, was a son from the second marriage, seem unlikely. If Catrìona was the mother of Alasdair’s heir, Coinneach, and they had been married for over thirty years, the identity of a second wife (if such there was) is puzzling. It could be that a second wife was either unrelated, thus making the seeking of papal legitimation unnecessary, or that Eachann Ruadh was not expected to succeed and that the marriage was irregular, at least in the eyes of the church.⁶⁴ It might be that the dispensation was intended to strengthen the position of the heir who had been married into the Clann Domhnaill the year before. If so, it suggests that there was potential opposition from other sons of Alasdair by a different woman.

While there are problems with the identification of Alasdair’s children and marriages, an even bigger void appears for the thirty years of his career alluded to in his marriage dispensation. One of the witness to the serving of Hugh Fraser of Lovat as heir to his deceased father in 1430 is ‘Alexander Kennethson’.⁶⁵ The same person is identified as ‘Alexander Mackenzie of Kintail’ in an early nineteenth-century Fraser genealogy.⁶⁶ If this is the same person, it is tempting to speculate, although impossible to prove, that the adoption of the prefix ‘mac’, rather than the suffix ‘son’ in 1466, may be an indication of the influence of Clann Dòmhnail, and the style adopted by Macdonald chiefs as ‘MacDòmhnail’.⁶⁷ As if this were not problematic enough, a ‘Ewin Makkenye sone and air to the umquhile Kenyeoch mc Sorle

the ‘1467 manuscript’ is headed by ‘murchadh’ and is thought to date from c.1400 (cf. *NLS*, Adv.MS.72.1.1, f.1r. See also M. Macgregor, as cited in fn. 8). ⁶⁴ According to Alexander Mackenzie (1894), Alasdair Ionraic had three sons: Coinneach a’ Bhlàir, Donnchadh, Eachann Ruadh, and one daughter who married Ailean MacLeòid of Gairloch (Siol Torcail). Alasdair Ionraic may also have had an illegitimate son, Dùbghall, who served as a prior at Beaulieu. Some of these are unattested historically (other than later Mackenzie manuscript histories). For an account of Alasdair’s marriages, cf. Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 81–4; Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 473–5. ⁶⁵ *RMS*, ii, no. 179. G.F. Black also noticed this, and Alexander appears under the heading ‘Kennethson.’ Although Black identifies Alexander Kennethson as a Mackenzie under the heading ‘Kennethson,’ he does not include this instance under the heading ‘Mackenzie’ (cf. Black, *Surnames*, 393 and at 525–6). ⁶⁶ *NAS*, GD128/28/6b. ⁶⁷ Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, no. 16. The chief of Mackenzie is ‘MacCoinnich’ in Gàidhlig: cf. C. Ó Baoill (ed.), *Gair nan Clàrsach*, 76–82.

[...] appears on record in 1496.⁶⁸ This, perhaps, could have been Eoin (John of Killin, 1561) son of Coinneach a' Bhlàir and grandson of Alasdair Ionraic. The timing seems right, and the combination of the father and son's name also fits. The naming of 'Ewin's' father, through the patronymic 'mcSorle' rather than 'mcAlasdair,' causes difficulty. Although many things were possible in a linguistic milieu where Gilleasbaig [Gàidhlig] was given as 'Archibald' in Scots, and 'Celestinus' in Latin, the identification of 'Alasdair' with 'Sorle' is seemingly made nowhere else.⁶⁹ Little else is known of Alasdair Ionraic either from contemporaneous documentation or manuscript histories of other kindreds. He appeared as a witness to a charter in Dingwall by Eoin Ile to Alexander Fraser of Philorth in 1471.⁷⁰ He is also supposed to have been the recipient of a crown charter (to the lands), presumably of Kintail, in 1477 'for help in securing the earldom of Ross for the King'.⁷¹ He may have died by July 1479, however, as his son Coinneach rather than Alasdair was held responsible for rental payments in the king's dukedom of Ross.⁷²

Coinneach a' Bhlàir and Coinneach Og

Coinneach a' Bhlàir (Coinneach of the battle, presumably that of Blàr na Pàirce) initially held his lands at rent of the crown in 1480.⁷³ This may have

68 *Family of Rose*, 169. 69 Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, 303. 70 The original document is apparently now lost (cf. *ibid.*, no. 100). 71 *Ibid.*, 261–2; *SP*, vii, 497. This is based on an inventory of Allangrange papers which I have been unable to trace. This comment is redolent perhaps of Cromartie's 'spin'. It is not included in an early inventory of Seaforth papers c.1627 (cf. *NAS*, GD305/1/166/7), nor in *RMS*. The earl of Cromartie includes it in his account of Alasdair Ionraic (cf. Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 474). 72 Kenneth Mackenzie was responsible for rental payments to John Munro of Foulis, chamberlain of Ross, to the king for the lands of Achinsoul, Moy, Kinnahaird, Ardoval, Drumglust & Arcoyn. He was to pay £20 14s. 8d., livestock and victuals for these lands (cf. *ER*, viii, 597–9). James III granted the lands of the earldom of Ross and lordship of Ardmannach to his second son, a minor, also named James in 1481 (cf. *RMS*, ii, nos. 1457 and 1472). 73 *ER*, viii, 597–99. He resisted Aonghas Og according to the *History of the Macdonalds* but was together with the earl of Atholl, defeated by the Dòmhnallaich at Lag a' Bhrèid (Logiebraid), (cf. *Highland papers*, i, 48–52). This reverse passes unnoticed in Clann Choinnich's accounts. MacCoinnich sent his priest as a messenger to the King in Halloween 1489 and another messenger 10 days later. It is tempting to speculate that this was in regard of action taken against Aonghas Og (cf. *TA*, i, 123–4). Blàr na Pàirce (the battle of Park) also proves difficult to pin down, but it must have happened sometime after the death of Aonghas Og c.1485–90 (cf. Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, 313), and the death of Coinneach a' Bhlàir in February 1491/2 [(cf. *Highland papers*, i, 51 and at 55–6). J. Munro and N. Macdougall place this battle in 1491 (cf. J. Munro, 'The lordship of the Isles', in L. Maclean (ed.), *The middle ages in the Highlands* (Inverness, 1981), 33; Macdougall, 'Achilles heel', 262; N. Macdougall, *James IV* (East Linton, 1997), 100. The Mackenzie versions of this are found in: W. Fraser, *Cromartie*, II, 473–83; *Highland Papers*, ii, 21–5; *Genealogy* (1843), 7; Mackenzie *Mackenzies* (1894), 84–95. Equally difficult to pin down is the battle of Druim a' Chait. Although Gregory places it in 1497, the evidence is not strong (cf. Gregory, *Western Highlands*, 92).

been due his having succeeded his father without having been served heir, if of course his father had still been infeft of his lands following the forfeiture of Ross.⁷⁴ It could well have been that the new landlord had scant regard for titles formerly granted by the forfeited earl. However, circumstances could well have changed following the murderous coup instigated by James IV against his father in June 1488. The new king was unsure of his support in many places, and Ross in particular presented problems. Aonghas Og may have exploited the dissension in the royal court to try to press his claim for Ross.⁷⁵ This might be the key to the serving of Coinneach as heir to his father in September that year.⁷⁶ Clann Choinnich had consistently flouted the efforts of the previous monarch's regime to make them pay their fermes and rentals for their lands in Ross over the last eight years.⁷⁷ The olive branch of hereditary tenure brought the crown the support of a kindred who had possibly been drifting into the ambit of the lordship over the preceding thirteen years. Clann Choinnich now had a landholding stake (perhaps as vassals of the duke of Ross) in the resistance of Clann Dòmhnail's attempts to regain Ross.⁷⁸

Overall, remarkably little is known of Coinneach a' Bhlàir other than his marriages, his resistance to rental demands from the crown and his purported defeat of the Macdonalds at the battle which supplied his by-name. Although the evidence is not good, consisting mainly of unreliable seventeenth-century Clann Choinnich sources, some hypotheses can be advanced. It could be that Coinneach, in reaction to the circumstances surrounding the forfeiture of the earldom of Ross in 1475, re-aligned himself politically by dispatching his Macdonald bride, and taking on a more politically expedient Fraser partner instead.⁷⁹ The very different political circumstances in which

⁷⁴ Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, nos. 109a, 109b and 126, pp 260–1; *Highland Papers*, ii, 21, n. 3.

⁷⁵ Macdougall, *James IV*, 36–7 and at 46–7. ⁷⁶ The document seems to be lost. A note of it survives in the 1627 Seaforth Inventory (cf. *NAS*, GD305/1/166/7). ⁷⁷ Coinneach was distrained in 1481, and Fraser of Lovat penalised as his cautioner, for non-payment and lifting of cattle on 31 Aug. 1480 (cf. *RMS*, ii, no. 1451; *ER*, ix, 60–1 and at 404–5). In 1487 it was reported that MacCoinnich had deforced the king's officer, John Munro of Foulis when he had tried to extract revenue from Coinneach for lands held of Elizabeth countess of Ross (cf. *ER*, ix, 534; *ER*, x, lviii, 26, 93 and at 95). ⁷⁸ The assessment offered in the seventeenth century '*History of the Macdonalds*' was that Clann Choinnich had much to lose if Clann Dòmhnail regained the earldom (cf. *Highland Papers*, i, 51 and at 55). John, Coinneach a' Bhlàir's (second) son and eventual successor received sasine, according to the 1627 Inventar, in 1500 as a vassal of the duke of Ross. It was not until 1508 that he received a charter of land held directly from the king as tenant in chief (cf. *NAS*, GD305/1/166/7; *RMS*, ii, no. 3313). ⁷⁹ See marriage dispensation for 'Finvla' & Coinneach, 1465 (cf. Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, App.B42). According to the first earl of Cromartie, Coinneach married a daughter of Fraser as his second wife (cf. Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 477; *Highland Papers*, i, 21). Hugh Fraser was surety for Mackenzie's good conduct in 1480 (and penalised as a result), which would

the two marriages were contracted contributed to tensions that surfaced after Coinneach's death in February 1491/2. It seems that Coinneach, his eldest son, was overlooked due to the Macdonald connections of his mother.⁸⁰ The intrusion of a more 'reliable' head of a kindred, if not complete expropriation, seems to have been a feature of James IV's divide and rule policy in the north, to which Clann Dòmhnail; Clann Ghill'Eathainn (Maclean) in 1493/4 and 1496/7; Siol Torcail (Macleods of Lewis) in 1511, the earldom of Sutherland (1494–1514) and the thanage of Cawdor (1502–10) were subject.⁸¹ While the division was certainly effective, the actual ruling proved more problematic. If the crown opposed Coinneach Og as chief, the alternative was his half brother Eoin (John of Killin), son of Coinneach a' Bhlàir's wife by his second marriage to Anna Fraser. Such a cavalier attitude to the norms of primogeniture may have encouraged dissension in the ranks of Clann Choinnich in the 1490s if not notions of tanistry.⁸² The formidable Eachann Ruadh, Eoin's uncle and by tradition guardian, was by far the most suitable candidate in such a scenario. He was a recipient of a grant to the lands of Gairloch (1494) and held the lands of Kintail and Eilean Donnain castle until 1511.⁸³

The employment of George (1501) and Alexander (1513), the second and third earls of Huntly, as the Crown's blunt instrument, wielding power from Strathbogie to Stornoway by 1505, seems to have done little to alleviate, and may have exacerbated tensions in the north and west. Alexander, third earl of Huntly, stated that the taking of Eilean Donnan (& Strorne) castle was 'rycht necessar for the danting of the Ilis' in March 1503, as a prelude to the reduction of the rebels in the north Isles supporting Dòmhnall Dubh.⁸⁴ This surely suggests that Eachann Ruadh, who allegedly

chime with the approximate date of the marriage (cf. *RMS*, ii, no. 1451; *ER*, x, 61). 'Annas fresale the spous of umquhaile kenzeoch makke[n]ze of kyntale,' is on record in 1494, complaining that Ross of Balnagown stole her cattle from Kinellan (cf. *ADC* (1478–95), 327]. ⁸⁰ Aonghas Og and Fionnghal (Finvla, sister to Gillesbaig/Celestine) recipient of a marriage dispensation to Coinneach in 1465, were first cousins, and Alasdair of Lochalsh could accordingly have been Coinneach Og's maternal uncle. ⁸¹ For the forfeiture of the lordship of the Isles, and the promotion of MacIain of Ardnamurchan (cf. Macdougall, *James IV*, 103–5). For Clann Ghill'eain (cf. N. Maclean-Bristol, *Warriors and priests: the history of the Clan Maclean, 1300–1570* (East Linton, 1995), 74 and at 77–9); Gregory, *Western Highlands*, III n. 2. For the Gordon takeover of the earldom of Sutherland, cf. I. Grimble, *The chief of Mackay* (London, 1965), 15–16. For the Campbell takeover of Cawdor, cf. *Highland Papers*, i, 126–7. ⁸² Richard Ó Conchobair wrote in the colophon of a manuscript praising the benefits of tanistry (albeit in the context of a learned family) as a means of selecting the fittest successor as late as 1590 (cf. Bannerman, *Beaton's*, 86). ⁸³ *Gairloch Muniments*, Black Deed box, Bundle 1 (1494); Black Deed box, Unnumbered Bundles-transcripts of Gairloch Writs (1511). I am grateful to John Mackenzie of Gairloch for kindly allowing me to see this and other documents at Canon House. ⁸⁴ Gregory, *Western Highlands*, 98; Macdougall, 'Achilles heel', 273;

held the castle, was at the very least considered untrustworthy, if not sympathetic to Dòmhnall Dubh.⁸⁵ The earldom of Ross had been taken from Eoin Ile in 1475 and annexed as inalienable crown property reserved for the king's first or second son shortly afterwards.⁸⁶ The earl of Huntly had been one of the prime movers in this, taking control of the royal forts in Ross including Dingwall castle.⁸⁷ He seized the Redcastle and the Ardmannoch placing them in the hands of Hugh Rose of Kilravock in 1482.⁸⁸ It may be that Huntly's exercise of power lay behind the reluctance of MacCoinnich to pay his fermes and rentals in the 1480s. 'Kainach Mackenzie of Kintail' (Coinneach a' Bhlàir), however, was one of the witnesses in September 1491 to a charter and a bond issued by the earl and the master of Huntly respectively, which would indicate that he was, by that time at least, in favour with both the Gordons and the crown.⁸⁹ Coinneach a' Bhlàir however, was dead by the following February (1491/2).⁹⁰

According to Duncan Warrand, Coinneach Og (c.1492x9) was not served heir to his father. Not only that, but it is possible that no such person existed, and, if he did he was 'hopelessly illegitimate,' and could not have inherited from his father.⁹¹ There are certainly good grounds for postulating Coinneach Og as having never existed, or at least if he did having predeceased his father. Such a view is supported by the difficulty in identifying him in any contemporary record. There are problems with this interpretation, however. It seems indisputable that Coinneach Og was not served heir, in what may have been a short, disputed and violent period as contestant for the headship of the kindred. Coinneach a' Bhlàir, his father, however, was not himself served heir until 1488, although his father Alasdair Ionraic died (if the Applecross manuscript is correct) in 1472, or sometime between 1476 and 1479.⁹²

Macdougall, *James IV*, 183; *APS*, ii, 240. 85 Eachann Ruadh was stated in 1511 to have held the castle against his nephew's will since at least 1501; cf. *Gairloch Muniments*, Transcripts of Gairloch Writs (1511). 86 Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, lxx–lxxi and at 172–4; *Black acts: the acts and constitution of the realm of Scotland*, Edinburgh 1566 *Mittelalterliche Gesetzbücher Europäischer Länder*, in *Faksimiledrucke*, Band III (Verlag Detlev Auvermann, Glashütten/Taunus, 1971). 87 Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, lxxi. 88 *Family of Rose*, 52. 89 At Loncarde', or 'Lochtcanmor' on 8 September 1491 (cf. *Familie Innes*, 20; *Spalding Misc.*, iv, 189). For the place-name, either at Beaufort in Lovat or about 2 miles north of Turrieff (NJ 716 535), cf. W.J. Watson, *The history of the Celtic place names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1993), 494. 90 The date of Coinneach's death, 8 February 1491/2 is carved and still legible at his tomb in Beaulieu Priory: 'hic iace[ut] kanyaus m[ac]k[en]n[y]ch d[omi]n[u]s de kyntayl q[ui] obit vii die february a[nno] d[omi]ni. m.cccc.lxxxxi.' 91 Warrand, *Pedigrees*, 5. 92 'This Alister Inrick dyed verie aged at Kinellan Anno 1472 and in the beginning of the reign of K[ing] J[ames] the third' (cf. *Highland Papers*, ii, 21). The earliest date at which Coinneach, Alasdair's son, is mentioned in a landholding capacity is 1479, suggesting that his father was dead by

According to Mackenzie histories, Coinneach a' Bhlàir had married 'Margrat', a daughter of Eoin Ile, earl of Ross, as his first wife, and she was mother to Coinneach Og.⁹³ This seems to be a misrepresentation of Coinneach a' Bhlair's very real liaison with 'Finvla' (Fionnghal?), daughter to Gilleasbaig of Lochalsh. This would mean that Coinneach Og if he were the product of this marriage could indeed have been the legitimate heir.⁹⁴ It clearly was not in the interests of the crown after the forfeiture of Ross (1475) to have a potentially hostile tenant in Ross, one who might be sympathetic to or support Aonghas Og and his successors, including Alasdair of Lochalsh.⁹⁵

Clann Choinnich had, by c.1490, redeemed themselves in the eyes of the crown by resolving the issues associated with non payment of rentals, but more importantly by standing against Clann Dòmhnail. The death of Coinneach a' Bhlàir changed all this. Not only was the eldest legitimate heir the son of an estranged (and worse, Clann Dòmhnail) wife, but the favoured candidate, Eoin (John) was a minor who would not attain his majority until 1501.⁹⁶ It is hard to escape the impression that Coinneach Og may have rebelled in support of Clann Dòmhnail kinsmen.

It is possible that Clann Choinnich had gone on an unrestrained looting spree following their victory over Clann Dòmhnail at Blàr na Pàirce, which is what Mackenzie's *History and genealogies of the Mackenzies* state.⁹⁷ How-

then (cf. *ER*, viii, 597-9). The 1488 date seems to rest on the date in which Coinneach a' Bhlàir was served heir according to a note of a writ in the Seaforth Inventory, c.1627: 'Ane service led at the burghe of Dingwall In p[rese]ns of the sh[eriff] of Innernes thairby be ane inquest of verrie famous p[er]sonis Keinoch mcKenze wes s[er]vit air to the said umqll Alex[ande]r mackenze his father In the landis of Kintail Kenlochew Strabrane Stragarve and Strachonane with their p[er]tinents Qlk service is of the dait the secund day of Sept[em]ber 1488 yeirs. Ane Instrument of Sa(sine) following on ane precept decreit by the Sheriff of Innernes at command of the retour purchest furth of the cancellrie on the said s[er]vice for infetung of the said Kenneth In the landis foirsaides qlk in he wes s[er]vit of the dait the penult day of Januar 1488 yeiris under the sub[scripti]on sir Jon Kinniffeld no[ta]r publik' (cf. *NAS*, GD305/1/166/7). ⁹³ Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 108; *Genealogy* (1843), 7, name her as 'Margaret'. Other recensions do not name her: cf Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 475; *Highland Papers*, ii, 21. ⁹⁴ Munros, *Acts Lords Isles*, 130 and at 244. ⁹⁵ Gregory thought his mother a daughter of the lord of the Isles, rather than a niece (cf. Gregory, *Western Highlands*, 93). ⁹⁶ The dates of Eoin's minority are based on the assumption that his father married Anna Fraser c.1475, around the time of the forfeiture of Ross. He complained to the lords of council in 1511 that Eachann Ruadh had withheld Eilean Donnain castle and the lands of Kintail from him since 1501, presumably the date he attained his majority, making his date of birth c.1480. 'Extract Decreet of the Lordis of Council in the Action between John Mackenzie of Kintail and Hector Roy Mackenzie anent the right of keeping the Castle of Ellandonnan 7th April 1511 (cf. *Acta Dominorum Concilii*, xxii, f.142; transcript in *Gairloch Muniments*, Black Deed box, Transcripts of Gairloch Writs, 1494-1619). Eoin died in 1561 (cf. *Cal. Fearn*, 121). ⁹⁷ Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 100.

ever, it seems perverse to suggest that, having defeated crown rebels (and thus gained favour with the crown), that they would then capriciously place themselves under legal sanction, abandoning any advantage their victory had gained them. If the victory at Blàir na Pàirce was led by Coinneach a' Bhlàir, who died in February 1492, and the 'lawlessness' of the Mackenzies post-dates his death by two to three months, then another scenario, that of Coinneach Og instigating a rebellion, could be postulated.

Coinneach Og had, within three months of his father's death, raised a rebellion and plundered the Ardmannoch and killed Harold Chisholm of Strath Glass. The government response was swift. George earl of Huntly, raised a force of 3000 men (including Grannd [Grant], Mac an Tòisich [Macintosh], Rose of Kilravock and Keir of Rothiemurchus) to attack Coinneach in May 1492.⁹⁸ This expedition was either unsuccessful or the depredation caused by the Mackenzies was extensive, for Kilravock had to ask Huntly for breathing space with regard to the revenues he was supposed to have collected for him in the Ardmannoch.⁹⁹

Mackenzie, who was of the opinion that it was after Blàr na Pàirce that Clann Choinnich went on a looting spree in the Ardmannoch, added that they were bent on retaliation against Rose of Kilravock, who had taken the part of Clann Dòmhnail against them. Kilravock, though, was Huntly's placeman in the Ardmannoch and would surely not have taken the side of Clann Dòmhnail. A late genealogical manuscript in the Gairloch muniments places this episode in the aftermath of Sauchieburn (1488). Here it is stated that Eachann Ruadh had taken the Redcastle on his way home after an attempt to help the beleaguered James III, had been offered a remission by James IV, and had surrendered the castle of his own volition.¹⁰⁰ Both accounts must be wrong on chronological grounds (unless referring to a separate incident), as the Redcastle was taken two to three months after the death of Coinneach a' Bhlàir, in 1491/2, and over three years after the death of James III.¹⁰¹ There is no further reference to Coinneach on contempora-

⁹⁸ Rose and MacCoinnich may have had some dispute prior to the outbreak of violence, as Huntly had promised to 'restore Hucheon [Rose] to his tak and guidis'. It was later (15 December 1499) felt necessary to grant Huntly a remission for the slaying committed by him and his cohorts in the execution of 'justice' in the assault on MacCoinnich in the Ardmannach in 1492 (cf. *Family of Rose*, 52, 154–5 and at 170–1). ⁹⁹ Innes, *Kilravock* 158. ¹⁰⁰ *Gairloch Muniments*, Unpainted deed box, no.41, Papers on the Genealogy of the Mackenzies of Gairloch, A Genealogical Series of the family of Gerloch (1776). In this, it was suggested that James IV was so impressed by Eachann's loyalty to his dead father (James III) that he granted him Gairloch. If Eachann was in the company of the master of Huntly (Eachann's brother Coinneach witnessed a bond of the master of Huntly in 1489, see fn. 89) in his rebellion against James IV, there might be a grain of truth in this (cf. Macdougall, *James IV*, 61–2 and at 72–4). ¹⁰¹ Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 100.

neous record, and his death may have been one of those for whom Huntly and his followers sought remission in 1499, for harrying, burning and killing they had inflicted in 1492 upon: 'Canoth Makcanehe and his kyne and freindis duelland in Ros, for thai war the kingis rabellis at his horne in that tyme.'¹⁰² It seems clear that Eachann Ruadh had joined Coinneach in the depredation in the Ardmannoch, and 'sindri utheris thair complicitis'.¹⁰³

Eoin or John of Killin, Coinneach a' Bhlàir's eventual successor, seems to have been born around 1480 from his father's second marriage to Anna Fraser, following the forfeiture of the earldom of Ross.¹⁰⁴ John of Killin it seems reached his majority in 1501, and had to deal with a series of complaints from which it would seem, as heir to the 'umquhile' Coinneach, he had to redress claims from Dunbar and others for the damage wrought in the 1490s by his half brother (or perhaps, his father) together with Eachann Ruadh.¹⁰⁵ This would suggest that Eachann Ruadh had supported Coinneach in the rebellion of 1492. This does not seem to have hampered Eachann unduly as he was granted sasine of Gairloch in 1494. This may have been born of the crown's need to secure the western flank of Ross, following the forfeiture of the lordship of the Isles in 1493. It also put pressure on Siol Torcail (Macleods of Lewis), who had occupied this territory (and continued to hold part of it until c.1611) and who were to prove consistent supporters of efforts to revive Clann Dòmhnail lordship.

Not much else is noticed of Coinneach Og in contemporary records. Neither did the Mackenzie manuscript histories have much to report of Coinneach Og, disposing of the subject with one page, in contrast to the fuller treatment offered to the other chiefs. They maintained that King James had warded the young heirs of Mac an Tòisich [Mackintosh] and MacCoinnich in Edinburgh. According to the histories both attempted to escape and make their way north, but were intercepted at Torwood, near Falkirk, by the outlawed laird of Buchanan; Mac an Tòisich was captured and Coinneach Og was killed.¹⁰⁶ The same sources are silent in regard of any

¹⁰² Ibid. ¹⁰³ *Acta Concilii* (Stair), 77; *ADC*, iii, 62–3. ¹⁰⁴ (See also fn. 96.) Known as 'John of Killin' in Clann Choinnich manuscript histories. Killin could perhaps the farm where he was raised, or was apportioned as a younger son ('Killin,' NH 397 608). More likely perhaps is that this was where he was raised by a foster family. Thanks to Dr Steve Boardman for this suggestion. ¹⁰⁵ This Coinneach to whom he was served heir was presumably his father, as his shadowy half-brother was never infeft of his estate (cf. *Acta Concilii* (Stair), no. 309, pp 76, 99–100 and at 104–5). ¹⁰⁶ *Highland Papers*, ii, 26–7; Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 483; Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 111–12. Walter Buchanan was declared outlaw in 1503, and forced to find surety for relatives in the Lennox (cf. *ADC*, iii, 333 and at 340–1). The placing of the incident at Torwood suggests that this may be conflated with another tale relating to the defeat and murder of James III at nearby Sauchieburn (cf. R. Nicholson, *Scotland: the later middle ages* (Edinburgh, 1974), 529–30).

rebellion in Ross-shire led by Coinneach, or a crown force levied by Huntly to suppress it. Alexander Mackenzie followed this lead, attributing their warding in Edinburgh to the ‘natural forwardness of youth’.¹⁰⁷

According to Cromartie, this happened in 1498/9, after which *Mac an Tòisich* was again incarcerated in Edinburgh.¹⁰⁸ There could be a grain of truth in this story regarding Coinneach’s death while trying to escape imprisonment. Although there is no mention of Coinneach, there is evidence that *Mac an Tòisich* was a prisoner in 1502. Quentin Focart and William Spicehouse were given 20s. from the king for their re-capture of the fugitive Farquhar Makintosh who had been attempting to return home.¹⁰⁹ James IV certainly seemed relieved at the news of his recapture and told his mistress so.¹¹⁰ It is possible that Coinneach Og’s activities were regarded as incompatible with the pro-crown, anti-rebel (Clann Dòmhnail) image that the traditional histories sought to cultivate. This, in conjunction with the brevity of his career, may explain why the clan historians treated him in such a perfunctory manner.

While much of the history of Clann Choinnich in the 1490s is a matter of conjecture, particularly with regard to Coinneach Og, it seems clear that by the first decade of the sixteenth century there was considerable tension between Eachann Ruadh of Gairloch and his nephew John of Killin. Eachann may have felt that as the most capable, experienced and eldest of his brother’s immediate kin that he was the most suitable candidate for the chiefship, or he may also have felt that he was in terms of primogeniture, the most suitable chief. John had after all been a son from a second marriage, and Eachann had seemingly made the most of his nephew’s long minority to consolidate his position. Not only had he secured the lands of Gairloch (1494), he also held the lands of Kintail and the castle of Eilean Donnan, preventing John from gaining possession until at least 1511, even though John had title to these since 1508/9, and should, he claimed, have had access to them since 1501.¹¹¹ Despite Mackenzie’s observation that ‘he

¹⁰⁷ ‘They were both powerful, the leaders of great clans, and young men of great spirit and reckless habits. They were accordingly apprehended in 1495 and sent to Edinburgh ... having been accused of no other crime than the natural forwardness of youth’ (cf. Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 110 and at 112). ¹⁰⁸ Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 483. ‘Applecross’ places these events in 1488 (cf. *Highland Papers*, ii, 26–7). In contrast, A. Mackenzie thought Coinneach Og died in 1497 (cf. Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 111–12). ¹⁰⁹ Mac an Tòisich (or Mackintosh) escaped in March, and recaptured in April 1502. Someone does appear to have accompanied Mac an Tòisich, but he is not named (cf. *TA*, ii, 141–5). ¹¹⁰ Macdougall, *James IV*, 180. ¹¹¹ *Gairloch Muniments*, ‘anent the right of keeping the Castle of Ellandonnan, 7th April 1511,’ in ‘Transcripts of Gairloch writs by Sir Kenneth Mackenzie bt’; *RMS*, no. 3313. For an account of John and Eachann’s career: Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 113–45 and at 385–92.

[Eachann] and his nephew appear ever after to have lived on the most friendly terms', following the dispute alluded to in 1511, the evidence, even in his own book, seems to contradict this.¹¹² The continuing, if perhaps intermittent, tension between the kindreds was underscored when, in 1551, John and his son Coinneach had to obtain a respite for violence offered to Iain Glasaich, Eachann Ruadh's son and heir. Iain Glasaich later died in mysterious circumstances in Eilean Donnan castle.¹¹³

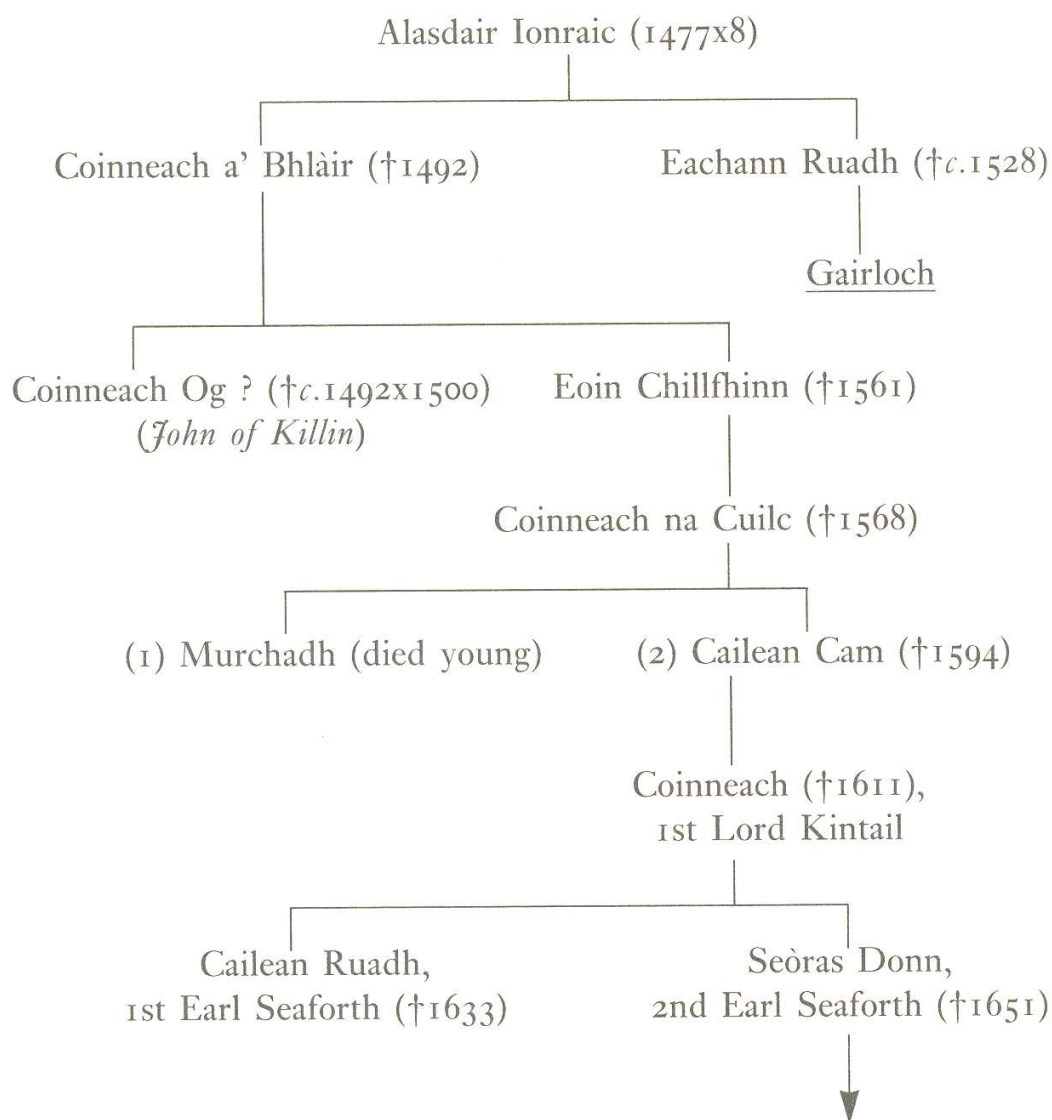
John of Killin had started the process of rehabilitation in 1502/3, addressing debts his predecessors had accrued in the 1490s, as a first step towards redeeming his estate.¹¹⁴ He had, probably due to the strength of the position of Eachann Ruadh, been obliged to secured crown backing for his claims to his estate both in 1508/9 and in 1511.¹¹⁵ The recourse to the crown and law to achieve those ends had, in return, inevitably secured John's support for the latter. According to the manuscript histories John escaped the debacle of Flodden. He also took responsibility with others for keeping the peace in 1514, and joined in action against 'rebels' in the ensuing decades.¹¹⁶ The carefully constructed image by the first earl of Cromartie of a kindred consistently supporting the crown (and the much later, perhaps eighteenth century, slogan of 'Cuidich 'n' Rìgh' adopted by the Seaforth regiment), while perhaps fitting John of Killin, seems ill-suited to his predecessors.

The manuscript histories of Clann Choinnich, dating in the main from the latter half of the seventeenth century, are clearly untrustworthy in relation to events prior to 1500. While they may contain much genuine material, they show evidence of reconstruction and fabrication. In contrast to the image portrayed in these histories, Clann Choinnich were perhaps not the staunch crown supporters depicted by the earl of Cromartie. They seem instead to have been favoured by Clann Dòmhnail (prior to the forfeiture of Ross) and undergone periods as crown rebels, both in the 1480s and more seriously in the 1490s. They had also experienced a serious schism within

112 Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 147–8 and at 401. 113 *Gairloch Muniments*, Black Deed box, Transcripts of Gairloch Writs, 1494–1619, and notes on genealogy of the Gairloch branch of the Mackenzie family by Sir Kenneth Mackenzie, bt.; Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 147–8 and at 401; Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 486–8, 490 and at 495–6; *Highland Papers*, ii, 28–30 and at 33. 114 *Acta Concilii* (Stair), 99–100; *ADC*, iii, 81–2. 115 It is likely that his Fraser kinsmen (also pro-crown) would have also provided close support for Eoin as reported by Cromartie; cf. Fraser, *Cromartie*, 484–8; *ADPC*, 7–8 and at 86–90; *RMS*, iii, no. 1958; *Spalding Misc.*, iv, 208 and at 212–13. See also Friendship contract (1549) where 'Jhone M'Kenze of Kyntaill and Kennocht M'kneze his sone', bound themselves to protect defend and maintain the Frasers of Lovat following their annihilation by Clann Raghnaill at Blàr na Lèine (1544) (cf. Sir K. Mackenzie, 'Old contracts of friendship', in *TGSI*, 11 (1884/85), 209–10 and at 214–15; Gregory, *Western Highlands*, 157–63). 116 Fraser, *Cromartie*, ii, 490; *Highland Papers*, ii, 30; *ADCP*, 8; *RSS*, i, 409–10; *Family of Rose*, 71; Mackenzie, *Mackenzies* (1894), 133.

their own ranks, amplified perhaps by extraneous circumstances. The struggle that Eoin had in claiming his inheritance from Eachann Ruadh was to have repercussions for the kindred throughout the first half of the sixteenth century. However, the first decades of the sixteenth century also saw the rehabilitation of the kindred, who moved to distance themselves from the troubled times of the 1490s, when they were the 'Kingis rabellis'. This would be the first step on what would be a long-lasting and mutually beneficial relationship with the crown.¹¹⁷

CHIEFS OF CLANN CHOINNICH, c.1430–1651



¹¹⁷ I would like to thank Professor Colm Ó Baoill (Celtic) and Professor Allan Macinnes (History) at the University of Aberdeen, and the editors for their helpful comments, while making clear that they are not responsible for any errors.

CHIEFS OF CLANN CHOINNICH, *c.*1430–*c.*1561