

Steinar Imsen (ed.)

'Ecclesia Nidrosiensis' and 'Noregs veldi'

The role of the Church in the making
of Norwegian domination in the Norse World

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and Classical Studies, NTNU

g Fjordane (c.1450) portrays
g's dragon. Photo Bergen

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Acknowledgements

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Trondheim October 2012

Steinar Imsen

Chapter 5: The diocese of Sodor and its connection to Nidaros and the Curia after 1266¹

Sarah Thomas

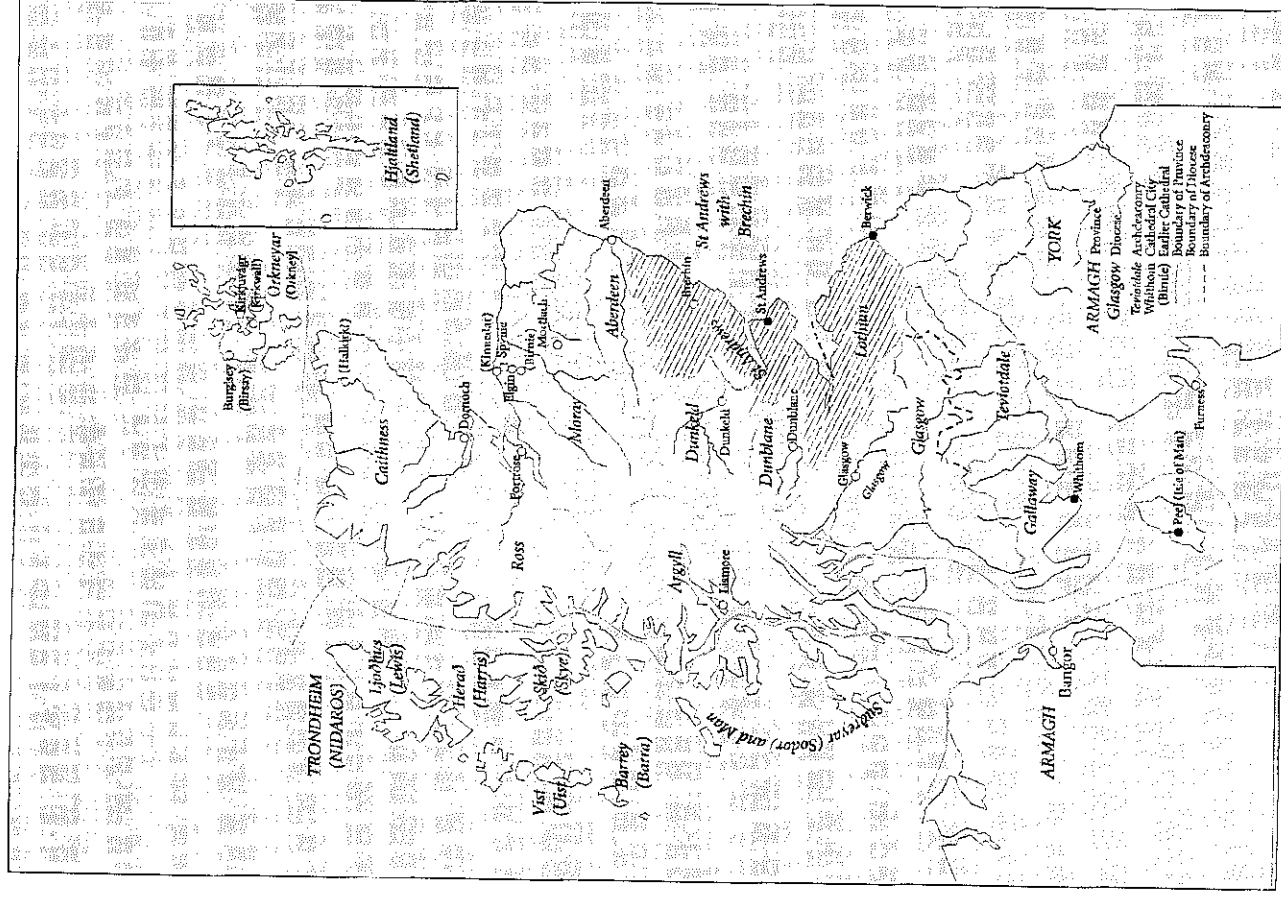
From 1266 to 1472, the diocese of Sodor was awkwardly positioned between its archiepiscopal see of Nidaros, the papal Curia and the kingdoms of Scotland and England. *The Treaty of Perth* of 2 July 1266 left the diocese in the Nidaros Church province but transferred patronage of the see in addition to the secular sovereignty of the diocese to the King of Scots.² These bald facts belie the profound implications and indeed complications that this division of secular and ecclesiastical sovereignty brought about. This chapter will examine the kinds of contact that occurred between Sodor and its metropolitan and the changing nature of those connections. A key turning point for the diocese, as elsewhere in western Christendom, was the centralisation of papal power and, in particular, papal claims to the right to provide bishops. A further factor in the diocese's reorientation away from Nidaros was the influence of the Scottish Church and king. This can be seen during the Great Schism at which point the diocese split between the English-controlled Isle of Man, supporting the Roman Popes, and the Scottish-controlled Hebrides, Arran and Bute, which in line with the Scottish dioceses backed the Avignonese popes. It will be argued that for the connection with Nidaros, the Great Schism was the final straw; after this point, Nidaros was metropolitan of the diocese of Sodor in name only.

- 1 I would like to thank Steinar Innes for inviting me to present a paper at the Reykholt workshop in August 2011. Barbara Crawford and Ian Beuermann both offered useful advice and suggestions about my ideas regarding the reasons for Sodor remaining in the Norwegian Church province. I am grateful to Nicholas Evans for his assistance, patience and proof-reading skills. All mistakes and errors are of course my own.
- 2 *DØV VIII* no. 9. For analysis and discussion of the Treaty of Perth, see Richard I. Austin, 1979

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Barrell 1995a: 184. Barrell it was actually issued by



The church organization in Scotland and neighbouring areas c.1300

He died on 12 January 1265 and there were problems over the appointment of a successor.¹⁷ William Langton had been elected archbishop in March 1265, but his election was quashed in November of the same year apparently because Pope Clement IV's preferred candidate was St. Bonaventure who seems to have refused the offer.¹⁸ The hiatus was not resolved until late in 1266 when Bishop Walter Giffard was translated from the diocese of Bath and Wells to the archbishopric of York.¹⁹ It is therefore arguable that at the time of the negotiations between Norway and Scotland, York was comparatively weak and therefore not able to push the case for Man at least to be placed under its metropolitan authority. We should also note that York's ecclesiastical weaknesses were mirrored in the secular sphere where the English king, Henry III, could be described as distracted, given the baronial rebellion and subsequent war from 1264-67, and not in a position to dispute the Scottish takeover of the Isle of Man.²⁰

We can therefore see that there were strong reasons for York not to be involved, but contemporaneously had York been more able to make a play for Sodor, they might well have been successful. While it cannot be proven that York was a consideration, it is extremely plausible that York was a concern and that therefore by leaving Sodor in Nidaros they avoided a confrontation with York over metropolitan authority. However, we need to acknowledge that there are a number of other possible contributory factors. It could be argued that given that Norway was losing secular control of the Hebrides and Man, leaving the Nidaros Church province intact may have been a face-saving measure. The King of Scots was awarded patronage, which would provide its own controversies, but Nidaros still theoretically had the final say. We could also argue that the Sodor bishops may have believed that there were distinct advantages in remaining part of Nidaros. As we shall see, the bishops were infrequent visitors to Norway and rarely attended provincial Church councils. No records survive of them having been summoned to visit the archbishop, apart from for consecration and professing obedience. We might therefore argue that the distance from the archbishop meant there was much less likelihood of the archbishop and his officials interfering in the affairs of the Sodor diocese. However, we have to acknowledge that there is no surviving evidence that the bishop of Sodor,

17 *Ibid.*

18 R. Barrie Dobson 1991: 53

19 Dobson 1991: 53

20 J. C. Hendrickson, 2010, 229; Beuermann 2007, 366; Lustig, 1979, 38

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to Norway for consecration.²⁶ It is more likely that Bishop Bernard, elected circa 1327 or 1328, travelled to Norway for consecration, though there is no specific evidence for his journey. Previously abbot of the Tronensian abbey of Arbrough in eastern Scotland prior to his promotion to bishop of Sodor, Bernard may already have been in Norway. A. A. M. Duncan suggested that Bernard was one of the Scottish negotiators for the renewal of the *Treaty of Perth* agreed in Inverness in 1312.²⁷ Bernard was granted some income from the abbey in April 1328; this grant seems to have been intended to cover some of the expenses he had incurred.²⁸ It may be that this included a journey to Norway for consecration.²⁹ However, if this was the case, Bernard was to be the last bishop who made the journey to Norway for consecration. Bernard's reign as bishop was short-lived, only approximately two years, and on his death, the archbishop was asked to confirm and consecrate a candidate for bishop, but it did not take place.

On 6 July 1331, two envoys arrived in Bergen seeking the confirmation of Cormac, archdeacon of Sodor, as bishop.³⁰ Cormac claimed to have been elected bishop by the canons of Snizort and the clergy of Skye – an unconventional electoral body.³¹ Another irregularity in the letter is the statement that the bishopric was vacant after the death of Bishop Gilbert. There are two possibilities: the first that Gilbert should read Bernard and this was a mistake on the part of the Norwegian scribe and the second, as Alex Woolf suggested, that the Hebridean clergy resented the imposition of a Scottish bishop, closely connected to the crown, and therefore refused to recognise Bishop Bernard.³² Cormac does not seem to have gained the support of the archbishop; even without the letter from Avignon, dated 13 June 1331, the archbishop may have been unwilling to confirm a candidate who did not have the support of the King of Scots or the guardians.³³ Yet, we have to acknowledge that Cormac in seeking confirmation as bishop had taken what we might call the traditional route with a clear recognition of the authority of the archbishop of Nidaros. However, as we shall examine in the second half of this chapter, it was unfortunate for Cormac that from June 1331, the diocese of Sodor became subject

26 Sarah E. Thomas 2009/10: 23

27 *RGS Robert I*: 200

28 *Arbrough Liber*, i, no. 358

29 Thomas 2009/10: 23; For discussion of Bernard's appointment to the diocese of Sodor, see Thomas, 2009: 153f

30 *DN* XVIII no.10

31 *DN* XVIII no.10

32 Thomas 2009: 154; Woolf 2003: 179

33 *DN* 17 no.34

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were not as regular as they were supposed to be.⁴¹ Indeed, a letter of archbishop Eilif from 19 November 1326 noted that Church law required archbishops to hold annual provincial councils and acknowledged that this had not happened in the last years.⁴²

Thus, from the inclusion of the diocese of Sodor into the new Norwegian Church province of Nidaros in 1152/53, the bishop of Sodor might have been expected to attend provincial synods in Norway. However, there is no evidence of any Sodor bishops prior to 1266 attending such councils in Norway. Post 1266, there is only evidence for one hishop having been present at a provincial Church council: Bishop Mark was, according to *Árna Saga Biskups*, present at the coronation of Erik Magnusson and a subsequent provincial council in Bergen in 1280.⁴³ However, he was not listed in the statute text, which P. A. Muuch suggested indicated that, after the ceremony, he had returned to his diocese.⁴⁴ At none of the subsequent provincial Church councils of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were the bishops of Sodor present. We should note that the bishops of Sodor were not the only bishops in the Nidaros Church province with a poor attendance record. The bishop of Hólar was only present at the provincial synod of 1280; subsequent bishops of Hólar are not listed as present between 1290 and 1351.⁴⁵ The other Icelandic bishop, from Skálholt, only attended in 1280 and 1290 with no subsequent appearances. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the regular attendees were those bishops from mainland Norway; the bishops of Hamar had a 100% attendance record. Thus, while the bishops of Sodor clearly failed to attend provincial synods, they were not alone in doing so. It is possible that they sent deputies or representatives; there are records of some of the Norwegian bishops sending representatives on occasions when they were unable to attend themselves. For example, in 1309, Bishop Arne of Bergen sent Peter Hakonsson, canon of Bergen, as his representative to the provincial council in Nidaros.⁴⁶

The surviving sources present an impression that contact was minimal at best. However, there is a case of one cleric who may present evidence of more contact and communication. The attempt by Cormac, archdeacon of Sodor, to secure confirmation as bishop in 1331 has already been mentioned. He is notable not just for this, but also for his appearance in Bergen on another two occasions. Indeed, the

41 *RN II* no. 645

42 *DN VII* no. 116

43 *Árna Saga Biskups*: 80

44 Muuch 1859: 12

45 *Ngl.* III: 229

46 *DN VIII* no. 28

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it was most commonly the neighbouring bishop of Argyll and his officials or officials of the dioceses of Glasgow, Dunkeld and Dunblane who were instructed to investigate claims or to confirm a specific cleric's possession of a particular church.⁵²

Sodor and the Curia – the changing focus of the late medieval Church

The papal letter of 1380 concerning Ardehatten and Kirkapoll illustrates the wider ecclesiastical changes that occurred during the fourteenth century. It shows us how the archbishop of Nidaros found his authority superseded by the centralisation of the late medieval Church. We therefore see the change from the late-thirteenth century, when the archbishop confirmed episcopal decisions, to the later fourteenth century when the preferred authority for confirming the decisions of the bishop was the pope. The fourteenth century saw the centralisation of the administration and organisation of the Church under the Avignonese popes. This meant that many of the actions previously undertaken by bishops and confirmed by their metropolitans were now to be confirmed by the papacy. Thus, instead of a bishop confirming possession of a benefice, with or without cure of souls, confirmation might be sought from the pope. Of particular interest to this chapter is the papal provision of bishoprics; the basis for this had been set out by Clement IV in his bull of 1265, *Licet Ecclesiarium*, which stated the principle that all bishoprics belonged to the papacy, although in practice it only reserved the provision of bishoprics to those who had fallen vacant when the incumbent died while at the Curia.⁵³ During the fourteenth century, papal provision came to encompass not just these episcopal sees but almost all other bishoprics. This did not necessarily mean that election by chapter or other recognised electoral body was now invalid, but it was less important. Andrew Barrrell suggests that election would serve to indicate to the pope who might be appointed. However, this was not a guarantee that the pope would provide the bishop-elect to the said diocese. Thus, for example, in 1359, the election of Thomas Macdowell to the bishopric of Whithorn was ignored in favour of a curial clerk, Thomas, who was provided to the bishopric by the pope on 31 December 1359.⁵⁴

In the case of the diocese of Sodor, it came under the auspices of the papacy in June 1331. The first bishop to be promoted in this manner was Thomas de Rossy.

⁵² See for example *CPL Clement VII*: 185

⁵³ Geoffrey Barraclough 1935: 9

⁵⁴ Barrrell 1995a: 192–193

the diocese of Sodor.⁶³ Letters announcing the death of King David II, King of Scots, had influenced the ruling elite in Angus in eastern Scotland, which emphasises the importance of Sodor.⁶⁴ However, perhaps had more to do with the death of the temporary papal chaplain, the papal agent in Avignon.⁶⁵ He was the pope for provision

William Russell, was the first bishop-elect, appointed by the pope – that is, the pope's provision and appointment – marked a further low point in the dispensation from the diocese of Nidaros.⁶⁶ His appointment on a sea voyage; however, he was arrested and imprisoned in Curia: surely indicating a serious crisis.⁶⁷ William was not the only bishop in 1397. Bishop Michael in the Hebrides and cometeries on the Isle of Man, and the dangers of such travels –

but he was the only bishop of Sodor to seek to avoid having to travel to Nidaros.⁶⁸ The very fact that William sought dispensation implies that his predecessors had made the journey to Norway to profess obedience. The petition should not be interpreted as a denial of the authority of the archbishopric over the diocese since William's letter began by acknowledging that he was 'subject to the archbishop of Trondheim'.⁶⁴ The archbishop had been informed by papal letter of William's election and subsequent consecration as bishop, but it is extremely unlikely that he ever met William.⁶⁵

William's successor, John Duncan, was promoted from the archdeaconry of Down in Ireland. John was apparently elected bishop by the clergy of Man prior to his consecration at the Curia in November 1374.⁶⁶ Pope Gregory XI issued a letter announcing John's consecration to the archbishop of Nidaros, but there is no evidence either way of whether John travelled to Norway to profess obedience to the archbishop. *The Chronicle of Man's* List of Bishops stated that he was only installed in his cathedral church 'in the third year after his consecration'.⁶⁷ Its explanation for the delay was John's imprisonment in Boulogne, though it is vague as to the duration of his imprisonment; he was released 'on payment of 500 marks'.⁶⁸ These events might have been additional reasons for John to choose to avoid travelling to Norway.

Sodor and Scotland

John Duncan's episcopacy would see the breakup of the diocese and further emphasis of the separation of both parts of the now divided diocese from Nidaros. The complaint about the English fortifying the cathedral on Man hints wider problems in the diocese, in particular the competing claims for lordship of Man between England and Scotland.⁶⁹ The secular division of the diocese between the part under the secular authority of the English Crown, the Isle of Man, and the rest, the Hebrides, Arran and Bute, under the Scottish Crown, had ecclesiastical consequences with the Great Schism from 1378 onwards. Bishop John Duncan recognised the Roman Pope Urban VI in line with the English Crown's policy. However,

63 *CPL Benedict XIII*: 78–79

64 *CPP*: 168

65 *DN VII* no. 219

66 *DN VII* no. 291

67 *CM(B)*: f.51v–f.52v

68 *CM(B)*: f.51v–f.52v

69 For the struggle for control of the Isle of Man between England and Scotland, see Thornton 1998

ignonese rival, Clement with Michael, previously to the diocese of Sodor; the two bishops of Sodor; Michael, and the other two popes put the diocese at par in line with the other ones.⁷¹ It indicates the deep surviving evidence that is allegiance to Avignon. The Hebrides and islands of Arran are mentioned in the Treaty of Perth, which is only known from a charter of the diocese.⁷²

The provision to the bishopric of Sodor was made by the factor MacLean in 1441. The charters they are recorded as being issued by the Papal Treasury.⁷³ There is evidence that the diocese was to be recognised as the diocese of Sodor by the Treaty of Perth. However, there is little evidence for the diocese of Sodor in the first instance, Angus was the first bishop of Sodor, the power of the MacDonalds was recognised by the Treaty of Perth in 1441. His successor was Angus, who was most likely to have been the first bishop of Sodor. The evidence that either bishop or attended any of the

The Sodor bishops were almost equally as distant to the patrons of the see as to their metropolitan. The early-fourteenth century bishops, Alan, Gilbert and Bernard, seem to have been the bishops with the most connection to the Kings of Scots and were therefore clearly in his retinue since all three were witnesses to royal charters.⁷⁷ After Bernard, their role as witnesses to royal charters seems to have stopped. There is little evidence of the bishops of Sodor attending the Scots parliament, apart from four occasions, in 1290, 1293, 1314 and 1430, respectively. Bishop Mark was listed as one of the bishops confirming the Treaty of Birgham on 14 March 1290 and he was present at the parliament of 9 February 1293 at Stone.⁷⁸ Legislation from the November Parliament of 1314 has the seal of Alan, bishop of Sodor, attached.⁷⁹ In 1430, Bishop Angus seems to have been summoned to parliament to profess obedience to King James I.⁸⁰ Bishop Mark was also chosen as an auditor in the court of Edward I to judge the succession claims to the Scottish crown, known as the Great Cause, which took place between May 1291 and November 1292.⁸¹ The bishops appear almost as infrequently as witnesses to charters of the Lords of the Isles, the secular rulers who from circa 1336 controlled the Hebrides and thence from circa 1436 also held the Scottish earldom of Ross, which stretched from coast to coast, from the north-east to the north-west. Bishop Michael witnessed a charter of Donald, Lord of the Isles, at Ardmorish on the island of Mull in November 1409 while Bishop Angus witnessed one at Finlaggan on Islay in June 1427.⁸² We can probably attribute these infrequent appearances to two factors: first, the probable survival of only a small number of Lordship charters, and second, proportionally more of the charters concerned the earldom of Ross and were given in locations in the north-east rather than in the Hebridean Lordship. We can conclude that the bishops of Sodor might attend the Lord of the Isles when he was in the Hebrides, but they did not travel with him outside of their diocese and therefore did not have the opportunity to witness charters.⁸³

While it is arguable that the Sodor bishops were from circa 1387 effectively part of the Scottish Church province, the evidence suggests that it was a very loose association. The Sodor bishops from the late-fourteenth century might have been called *episcopus Sodorensis in Scotia*, but there is no evidence that they were

77 See *RRS Robert I*: 523, 525, 531, 537, 548, 551 & 562 (Alan and Gilbert), 612 (Bernard)

78 *RPS*, 1290/3/1, date accessed: 6 January 2012; *RPS*, 1293/2/11. Date accessed: 4 January 2012

79 *RPS*, 1314/1, date accessed: 28 December 2011

80 *RPS*, 1430/5/4, date accessed: 21 December 2011

81 *Edward I*: 240

82 *Actis*: 27, 28 & 34–35

83 Thomas [forthcoming]

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7; *CPL* XI: 85 & 286

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in the early fourteenth century, the dioceses of Oslo, Hamar, Nidaros, Bergen, Stavanger, Orkney and Greenland were listed as having paid Peter's pence to the papacy.⁹² Papal collectors were appointed for the realms of Denmark, Sweden and Norway and while the diocese of Orkney was still part of the Norwegian kingdom, Sodor was not.⁹³ Yet, Sodor was not included in the valuations of Scottish dioceses presented to the Scots parliament on 20th July 1366.⁹⁴ Sodor was probably meant to be included within the sphere of William de Grenlaw's role as papal collector since the bishop of Sodor was listed with other Scottish bishops in a document confirming William de Grenlaw's reappointment as papal collector.⁹⁵ However, de Grenlaw's accounts from circa 1362 do not record any payments from the diocese.⁹⁶ Indeed, the papacy's method of dealing with Sodor's odd position was to appoint a collector purely for the diocese. Thus, shortly after John de Pöblis had been appointed, papal collector for Sodor and Orkney as well as the Scottish dioceses in October 1374, Pope Gregory XI appointed the bishop of Sodor, John Duncan, as papal collector for 'his city and diocese'.⁹⁷ The appointment of a collector solely for Sodor was a practical solution to the problem of a diocese, which sat uncomfortably between the kingdoms of Scotland and Norway.

Conclusion

Sodor's position in relation to papal taxation, appearing to belong neither to the Church province of Nidaros nor to the kingdom of Scotland, seems to be a fitting summary of its overall status between 1266 and 1472. The period was one of diminishing links between diocesan and metropolitan, which were weakened by the centralisation of the medieval Church and then fatally damaged by the Great Schism, which created another divide between bishop and archbishop. Even in the initial 65 years after the *Treaty of Perth*, contact between the diocese and the metropolitan see was sporadic, but once the bishops were provided by the pope, they clearly saw little reason to make a potentially dangerous and long sea-voyage to Norway. We also speculate that the bishops of Sodor perceived some advantage in their position; given their relative freedom from their metropolitan they may have

92 *PA*: 42

93 See for example, the appointment of Marcellus Bishop of Skálholt as papal nuncio and collector in 1448 (*DN* VI no. 522)

94 *RPS*, 1366/7/18, date accessed: 9 January 2012

95 Barrell 1995a: 189

96 *Ibid.*

97 *CPL* iv: 109; Barrell 1995a: 189

- PN = *Pavelige Nuntiers Registrikabs- og Dagböger, førte under tiendeoplysningsen i Norden 1282–1334*, ed. P. A. Munch, Christiania 1864
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- RPS = *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, ed. K. M. Brown et al., St Andrews 2007–2012
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Chapter 6: The Nidaros Church and ‘Norgesveldet’: Shetland to 1470

Brian Smith

There is one feasible way of dealing with Shetland’s ecclesiastical history. We must view it as part of the history of society. R. W. Southern once said:¹ ‘The habit of separating ecclesiastical history from secular history has tended to make everything ecclesiastical appear more rarefied than it really is’. I have erred in that direction myself, in the past: the paper I wrote about the Shetland archdeaconry for *Ecclesia Nidrosiensis*² is not an entirely adequate response to the subject, and I revisit those archdeacons here.

All of us have big problems about sources. Historians of Shetland, like most historians, have no information at all about the spiritual lives of ordinary people in the Middle Ages, or indeed until the eighteenth or even the nineteenth century. We have only a handful of medieval records. Some of them are interesting and suggestive, but they are difficult to use, as I shall suggest at various points. There are not even many vestiges of structures or monuments in the islands from that period. Alexandra Walsham’s thesis in a recent work³ that there is evidence lurking everywhere about the medieval past, despite the Reformation’s best efforts, is not a good guide to what happened in Shetland. We don’t have any decipherable inscription from that era, and we only have one holy well.

So when we look at the church in Shetland in the Middle Ages, we are restricted in what we can investigate. We must concentrate on the careers of bishops and archdeacons and on parish priests when we catch a glimpse of them. But considering the society as a whole, and the part that the churchmen played in it, is a way of making more sense of paltry material.

1 R. W. Southern 1970: 360

2 Brian Smith 2003

3 Alexandra Walsham 2011

