

THE MACLEODS OF LEWIS . . . AND OF ASSYNT, COIGACH AND GAIRLOCH

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In this paper I wish to examine in some detail the interdependence of the MacLeod families on both sides of the Great Minch [Fig. 9.1]. It is important to bear in mind that the sea, certainly during the centuries we shall be considering, was not a barrier, but an essential means of communication. The Outer Isles and the north-west mainland are linked geologically, geographically, archaeologically, socially and politically. They were part of the great Norse empire for some 500 years.

The MacLeods play only a part, albeit an important part, in the history of the region. I shall look first at the origins of the Lewis MacLeods and try to trace the course of their expansion until the extinction of the chiefly line in the early 17th century. Then I shall consider the subsequent fortunes of some of the cadet branches on the mainland. Finally I wish to offer some comment on Lewis MacLeods today.

MACLEODS OF LEWIS AND MACLEODS OF HARRIS

The first point concerns the relationship between the MacLeods of Lewis and the MacLeods of Harris and Dunvegan. The earliest genealogy we have was compiled by Sir George MacKenzie, first earl of Cromartie, in the second half of the 17th century. He was the grandson of Sir Roderick MacKenzie, the tutor of Kintail, who married Margaret, daughter of Torquil Cononach, reputed son of Old Ruari MacLeod, last legal baron of Lewis. This genealogy, preserved in Fraser's *Earls of Cromartie* (Fraser 1876. II. 510-11) is obviously defective. It asserts the seniority of the Siol Torcaill over the Siol Tormoid, a claim always made by the MacLeods of Raasay, descended from Malcolm IX Chief of Lewis, and by the Cromartie family itself. In his letter to Dr Johnson of 10 April 1775, John MacLeod of Raasay says that his ancestors 'disputed the pre-eminence for a long tract of time' (Johnson & Boswell 1924. 438-9). The Rev. John MacLeod, the Church of Scotland minister of the parish of Harris, writes (1791-92. XX. 69):

Among the first of the Danish invaders came that tribe, or clan, of which one branch has for several centuries held the property of Harris. The chief of this branch, who has variously been designed MacLeod of MacLeod, MacLeod of that ilk, and MacLeod of Harris, derives his pedigree from Magnus King of Norway, and latterly from the petty kings of Man. Two brothers Lodius, or Leod, and Turkill, or Torkill, the progenitors of two branches, who, to this

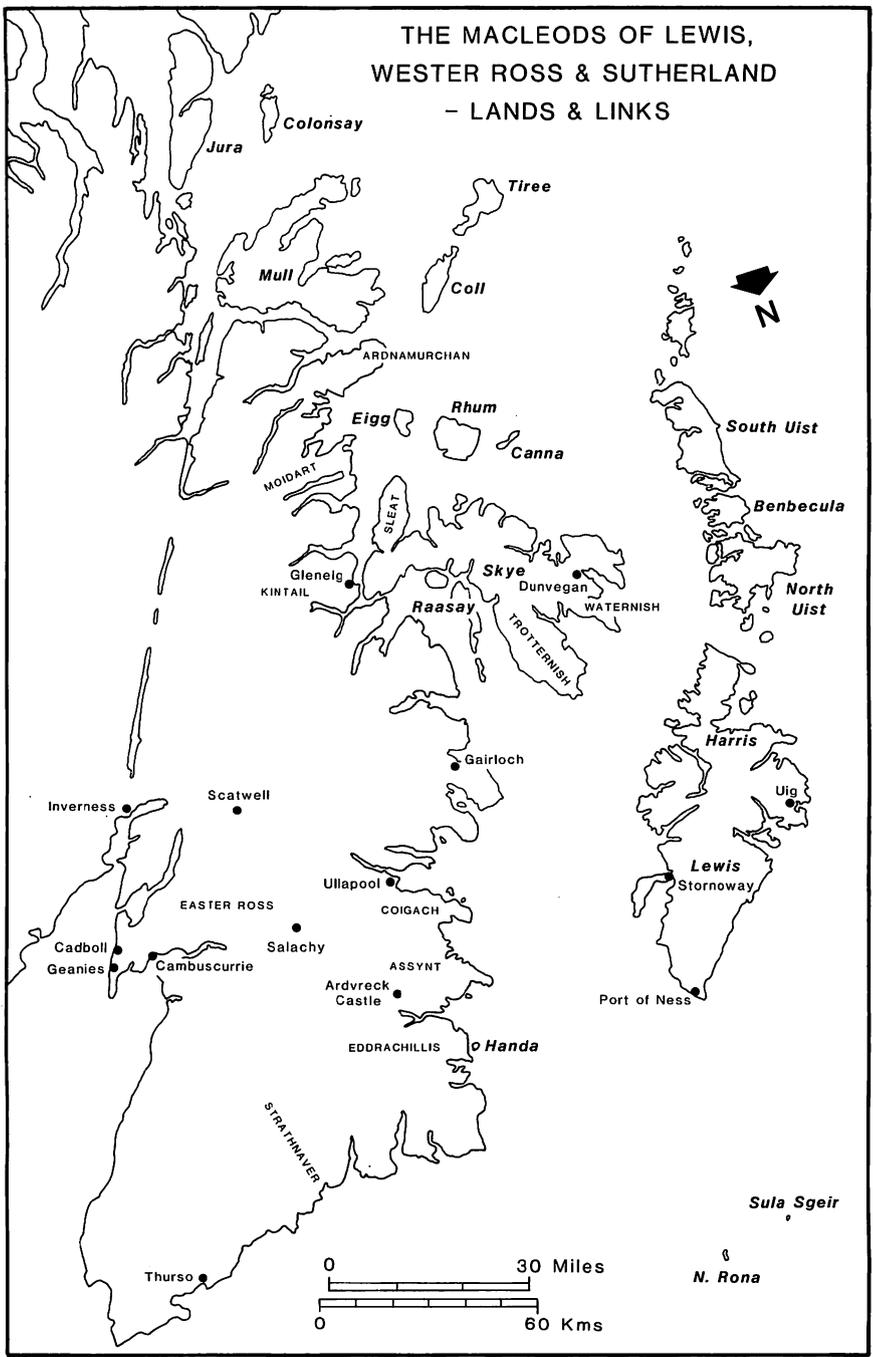


Fig. 9.1 The north-west seaboard and the Hebrides showing lands north from central Skye and Harris associated with the MacLeods. In a world where travel, trade and political power were dominated by the sea there was a natural interdependence between lands and families fringing the North Minch. The Lewis MacLeods took over this role for Assynt-Coigach/Lewis from the Nicolsons; and were later supplanted by the MacKenzies. The seaways between northern Skye and Harris were secured by the Skye/Harris MacLeods.

day, idly contend for the nominal honour of the chieftainship, seized upon the island of Lewis, or, as it was originally written, and as it should still be written according to the orthography of the Gaelic language, Leodhus, so denominated as the habitation of Leod.

The chiefly line of Lewis had died out nearly two centuries before he wrote; it is interesting that the question of seniority was still alive in his day. Some forty years later Gregory ([1881] 1975. 72) writes:

Although descended, according to tradition, from one common progenitor Leod (whence their collective appellation of ClanLeod), the Siol Torquil and Siol Tormod were, in fact, two powerful clans, perfectly distinct and independent of each other. We commence with the Siol Torquil, as having been connected with the Lords of the Isles for a greater length of time than the other branch of the ClanLeod.

For what it is worth, Gregory also points out that the armorial bearings of the two clans are different. Even today some people in Lewis would claim that the MacLeods never had anything to do with the Harris folk.

Harris tradition has always conferred a measure of exclusiveness on the clan names Leod, Tormod and Torquil. This is hardly justified. The Old Norse name *Ljótr* (ugly) appears in early Hebridean records and became Gaelicised as Leod. The famous Viking Sveinn Asleifsson in the spring of 1136 ‘. . . went first to Thurso in Caithness, and with him a man of rank called Ljótolftr’ (Taylor 1938. 225). In 1151 Sveinn sent his brother, Gunní Olafsson, ‘south to Lewis to his friend Ljótolftr, with whom Sveinn had been in days gone by’ (ibid. 306). This Ljótolftr sounds like the Norse *vice-comes* in Lewis who appears in Hákon’s saga. The Lewis antiquarian, Dr Donald MacDonald of Gisla, doubtless had this official in mind when he spoke of ‘Ljotulfi, a chief of Lewis in the mid-twelfth century’, as the progenitor of the Lewis MacLeods (1967. 7).

From Hákon’s saga in the year 1230 (Mundt 1977. 166-167) we learn that:

Páll Báiki, Paul’s young son, and Ottar Snaekollur then travelled south to Skye and there fought with Thorkel Thormodzson. He and his two sons fell there. But his son Thormod escaped from that meeting by jumping into a cask which was floating alongside the ship and it drifted to Scotland, to Gairloch. They travelled then north to Lewis. And Thormodur Thorkelsson was there before [them]. They pursued him from there and slew some men. They seized his wife and cattle.

Further examples could be quoted, but these suffice to show that the Norse names Thorkel/Torquil and Thormod/Tormod/Norman were in current use long before the MacLeods entered history. The Rev. William Matheson says that Tormod and Torquil were family names among the Nicolsons who owned Lewis and Assynt before the MacLeods arrived, and suggests that the persons mentioned in the above exploits were Nicolsons of Lewis (Matheson 1981. LI. 320-1).

According to Harris tradition, Leod, son of Olaf the Black of Man, was born ca. 1200 and died ca. 1280, leaving Harris, North Uist, Skye and Glenelg to his elder son Tormod, and Lewis to the younger, Torquil. Despite the adverse criticism of Lewis by Olaf the Black when as a young man he was *vice-comes* there (*Chronicle of Man*: Munch 1874; Young 1981. 112), the archaeological and geographic evidence suggests that Lewis was a more desirable portion than Harris, if not as good as Man. The official representatives of the Norse rulers, whether from Norway, Orkney or Man, had their residence there. The Lewis MacLeods argue, therefore, that it would be unnatural to leave such valuable holdings to a younger son.

A study of the charters and other acts of the Lords of the Isles (Munro & Munro 1986) reveals that both Harris and Lewis were often witnesses, sometimes to the same document. It ought to be possible to deduce from such evidence who had precedence, but there is no pattern. Sometimes the one, sometimes the other, makes his mark first in seemingly haphazard manner. It probably depended on who was thought to be more important at any given time.

In these circumstances, we should perhaps accept the tradition that all the MacLeods came originally from the same stock, whoever the eponymus — a tough, enterprising group which in the troubled political conditions of the mid 13th century saw the opportunity to seize land and power and took it boldly. As Matheson remarks, the name Leod is not common; only the MacLeods use it and they never again. It is unlikely that two independent clans emerging at about the same time in the same region should exhibit identical elitism. In short, a forceful young man from an increasingly successful family known as the MacLeods in the central Hebrides, appeared on the scene in Lewis in the latter part of the 13th century and there made his fortune.

THE MACLEODS OF LEWIS

Genealogies

Matheson has provided us with a new and realistic genealogy of the Lewis MacLeods (op. cit. 320-337). Using one of the tools of the genealogist — the recurrence of first or given names within a family group — he argues that the first use of the name Torquil and its regular re-appearance among the Lewis MacLeods, but never in the Harris family, indicate a marriage alliance with a family group other than the MacLeods. He therefore dismisses the accepted tradition of Leod's extensive land holdings, because at that time Lewis had been occupied, probably for several generations, by quite other Norse groups — the MacAulays around Uig; the Morrisons, the hereditary brieves, around Port of Ness; the Nicolsons on both sides of the Minch along the east side of Lewis, as well as Gairloch, Coigach and Assynt on the mainland opposite.

The three genealogies of Cromartie, Gordon and MacKenzie all agree that a Torquil MacLeod of Lewis was granted a charter in 1498 (*Register of*

the Great Seal. 11. no 224), but before that the generations, starting with Leod, do not agree. Cromartie lists eight with a blank, Gordon five and MacKenzie seven. Confusion arises from the identification of a MacLeod of Lewis who witnessed a charter of lands in North Uist granted to Hugh MacDonald of Sleat, the date of which is variously given as 1409, 1449 and 1469. The Torquil of the 1498 charter married Catherine, daughter of Colin, first earl of Argyll — they are both mentioned in the charter and are celebrated in a poem in the *Book of the Dean of Lismore*. Matheson interprets this material as a list of three chiefs — Torquil son of Roderick son of Torquil — and dates them from 1498 back to 1432. Cromartie adds a great-grandfather, Roderick, and takes us back to 1405.

Further datings, by no means secure, are provided by the fight at Tuiteam Tarbhach close to Langwell in upper Strath Oykell, on the borders of Sutherland and Ross, which Matheson dates to 1406 (op. cit. 323). The Rev. J. Fraser (*Chronicles of the Frasers*: MacKay 1905. 87) says that the lady involved in the affair was called 'Shivag McKleud, Torkiloig of the Lewis his daughter' — Sidheag nighean Torcaill Oig — and Matheson reckons that the datings make her a sister of Roderick MacLeod who is on record in papal correspondence in 1405 and whose father was the chief known as Torcall Og.

Matheson recognises the difficulty of tracing the MacLeods further back than this, but cites a Gaelic genealogy in the archives of the Royal Irish Academy which sheds some light. It reads 'Ruaidhri McTurcaill McMurchada McTormoit McLeoid McOlbuir McRaoige McOlbuir snaige McAonghusa'. This can only be the Lewis line, and Ruaidhri can be identified as the Roderick MacLeod on record in 1405. The pedigree supports Matheson's argument that the founder of Siol Torcaill was not the younger brother of Tormod/Norman, son of Leod, but Leod's grandson, Murdo. He it was who married a Nicolson daughter and she named his son Torquil after her own father, thus bringing the name into the MacLeod family. Local oral traditions about this marriage vary in detail, but all suggest that the event was unexpected and radical in its consequences.

The following genealogy can now be constructed [Fig. 9.2]. Leod was succeeded by Tormod/Norman whose younger son Murdo married a Nicolson. He was succeeded by Torquil after whom the Siol Torcaill is named. Torquil was followed by his son Roderick *Ruaidhri Mor*, Roderick by his son Torquil, he by his son Roderick and he by his son *en secondes nocés* Torquil. This Torquil was succeeded by his brother Malcolm. On the latter's death, Torquil's son John illegally took possession of the estate, but was succeeded by Malcolm's son Roderick — Old Ruari — whose four legitimate and five bastard sons ruined the estate between them. The family became extinct early in the 17th century.

Links with the Mainland

Putting dates to these generations is another matter. The first date in the history of the MacLeods is perhaps the most important of all. In the middle

THE MACLEODS OF LEWIS — SIOL TORCAILL

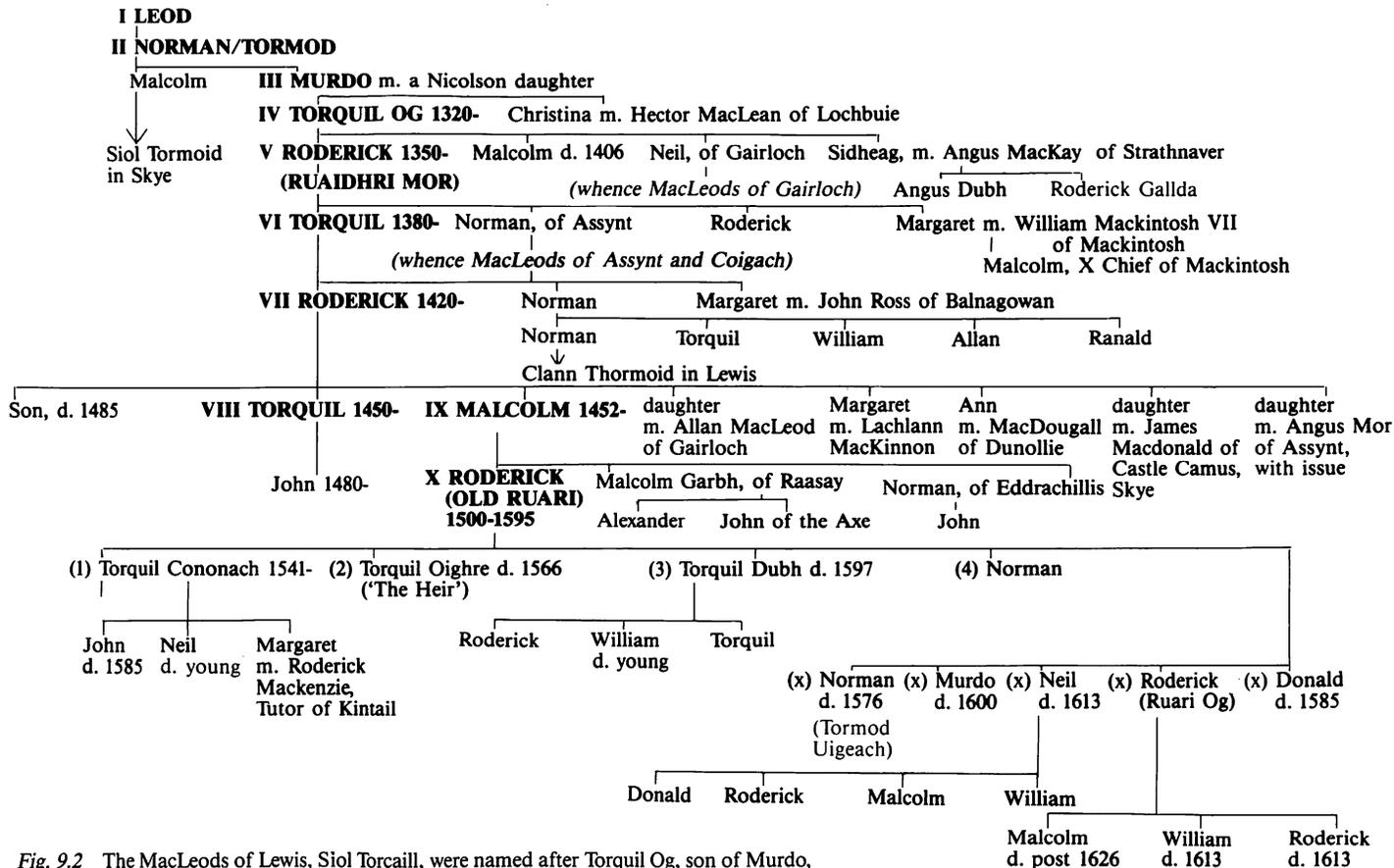


Fig. 9.2 The MacLeods of Lewis, Siol Torcaill, were named after Torquil Og, son of Murdo, son of Norman, son of Leod. The name Torquil would seem to be a Nicolson name brought into the MacLeods following Murdo's marriage to the daughter of a Lewis Nicolson. Earlier the MacLeods appear to have been based in Skye, which remained (together with Harris) the territory of the Siol Tormoid. (Genealogy based on Rev. W. Matheson 1979; dates of birth are conjectural).

1340s, between exile and the disaster of Neville's Cross, King David II turned his mind to the problems of the Highlands and Islands. About 1343 he granted two charters: the first to 'Malcolm filio Turmode MacIode' of two thirds of the holdings (*tenementum*) of Glenelg; the second to a Torquil MacLeod of three davochs of land and the castle of Assynt in Sutherland. Malcolm and Tormod may be identified as the third and second chiefs of Harris respectively, although they are not so styled in the charter and would not call themselves 'of Harris and Dunvegan' for nearly two hundred years more (MacLeod 1938. I. 275).

The existence of the second charter is known only from Robertson's *Index to Missing Scottish Charters* (100). Torquil MacLeod was, however, lord of Lewis at the time and it may be assumed that the charter was granted to him. These were both crown charters and make no reference to other holdings — in Skye the MacLeods held from the earl of Ross, and in Lewis the MacLeods held from the Lords of the Isles.

The motivation for these grants becomes clear in the context of a passage in Dr Barbara Crawford's *Scandinavian Scotland* (1987. 25):

The reason for King Magnus' journey across the Mull of Kintyre in 1097 was that the king of Scotland had agreed to 'let him have all the islands off the west coast which were separated by water navigable by a ship with rudder set'. The impracticalities of this arrangement which tried to distinguish the Scottish mainland from offshore islands must have been realized many times in a part of Scotland where it is sometimes difficult to tell whether land is mainland or island; the saga tale of King Magnus' attempt to include Kintyre in his lot no doubt reflects a realization that to separate Kintyre from islands to which it is linked by water made no sense in politico-geographical terms. This must have been the case in many other parts of the western seaboard which were linked by water with the offshore islands but separated from the interior of the country by difficult and sometimes impassable terrain. The agreement of 1098 was a political settlement made according to the growing principle of 'terrestrial empire' which attempted to cut the maritime links created by the Norse in the west since the ninth century. The immediate political results were negligible except for the boundary of the diocese of the Isles: the spheres of control established by the sons of Somerled in the next century were over island groups and the nearest section of mainland coast. One brief reference to a lost charter of resignation to the Scottish king tells us that Glenelg (opposite the Isle of Skye) had at one time belonged to the king of Man; probably much more of the western littoral belonged to other powerful Celto-Scandinavian chieftains of the Isles.

If you are a maritime people, the security of the sea lanes is probably more important to you than those on land. What had been true for the Norse in earlier times was no doubt equally true for Scottish rulers now. The Glenelg/Skye/Harris and the Coigach/Lewis crossings have always been and still are vital for the safe navigation of the Minches. If he was to succeed in bringing law and order to the region as a whole, King David needed to have his own lieges in control on both sides of the water. Part of the duties of protecting the sea lanes was the maintenance of fire beacons at

strategic points to assist shipping. Fraser (1876. vol 2. 510-11) says:

Harold [ob. c.1250], sone of Godred Dound . . . was obliged to pey 100 merks yeirly for releive of the Scots King to the King of Norway, and at a certain time of the yeir to keip tuo fired beacons, on in Lewis, ane other in the Ile of Skye, for directing the Norwegian shippes in their navigationes of the coasts.

The armorial bearings of the MacLeods of Lewis are ‘a burning mountain proper’ and the motto ‘luceo non uro’ — suitable for lighthouse keepers!

The importance of the Lewis/Coigach link is nowhere more sharply illustrated than in the struggle between Torquil Cononach MacLeod and his half-brothers during the last decades of the 16th century. On the death of Torquil the Heir by drowning in 1566, Torquil Cononach made a bid for the inheritance. He had the support of the MacKenzies, the Morrisons of Ness and his half-brothers Tormod Uigeach and Murdo. He seized Stornoway Castle and there imprisoned Old Ruari the Chief for the next two years (MacPhail 1916. vol 2. 262-288). In 1572 Old Ruari was conveyed to Edinburgh and resigned his lands to Torquil Cononach as his recognised heir, himself enjoying only the liferent. But on his return to Lewis, Old Ruari repudiated this resignation on 2 June 1572 on the grounds of coercion (MacLeod 1938. vol 1. 34-6). In 1576 the Regent Morton succeeded in reconciling Old Ruari and Torquil Cononach, and Torquil was again recognised as heir with immediate possession of the holdings on the mainland. These accommodations were, however, not to the liking of his bastard half-brothers. Moreover, Old Ruari now had two more legitimate offspring, Torquil Dubh and Norman. Tormod Uigeach, of the Morrison faction, was killed by his half-brother, Donald, who was in turn captured by Torquil Cononach (with Murdo’s help) and carried off to Coigach, but soon escaped back to Lewis. Old Ruari then incited Donald to seize Murdo and hold him in Stornoway Castle. In reply, Torquil Cononach again invaded Lewis from Coigach, captured the Castle and shut up Old Ruari for the second time. At this date he took away all the MacLeod writs and charters and consigned them to the MacKenzies for safe keeping. He left his son John in charge in Lewis, but in 1585 the unfortunate young man was ambushed and murdered by his uncle Ruari Og who set Old Ruari free and restored to him his estate ‘which . . . he did possess during the rest of his troublesome days’ (Gregory op. cit. 220).

Torquil Dubh, Old Ruari’s son by his third marriage, prosecuted the feud with Torquil Cononach with ruthless MacLeod intensity. In 1596 both of them declared their submission to the king, doubtless hoping thereby to profit at the other’s expense. They were both withdrawn from the list of rebels who had been active while the king was occupied with the Catholic earls (*Balcarres Papers* VI. no 70). If anybody, the king favoured Torquil Cononach (*Register of the Privy Seal* LXVIII. 298), who nevertheless made little progress in his invasion of the Long Island. On the other hand, Torquil Dubh successfully took the war into Coigach itself (*Record of the Privy Council* 11 February 1596/7) and was consequently summoned to compar

before the Council, of which Kintail was an influential member. Torquil Dubh was understandably reluctant to appear in such company, he was declared rebellious and soon afterwards was treacherously seized by the Morrison brieve and surrendered to MacKenzie. He was summarily beheaded in July 1597.

These events show how the internecine warfare of the chiefly family led to the disintegration of a significant social and economic unit. The collapse of the chiefly line gave rise to the depressing episode of the Five Adventurers and, in the end, the MacKenzies' acquisition of Lewis. Some idea of the breakdown of society during this period may be gained from the journals of Bishop Robert Forbes who writes of the Rev. Farquhar M'Cra that he had served in Lewis in the 1610s:

where he preached the gospel to the inhabitants, who were great strangers to it for many years before, as is evident from his having to baptize all under the age of forty years, which he did, and married a vast number who lived together as man and wife thereby to legitimize their children, and to abolish the barbarous custom that prevailed of putting away the wives on the least discord (Craven 1886. 110).

The Reformed Church of Scotland did not, of course, operate in the Islands until after the Synod of Glenelg was set up in 1724.

Standing and Status

The history of the chiefly line of the Lewis MacLeods has to be put together from the corpus of mediaeval material which has been at the disposal of historians for centuries — mainly public documents, since the family's muniments disappeared a long time ago. Such material can be interpreted in many ways. Some of the earlier chroniclers had few scruples about interpreting it to suit their own ends, even inventing new 'traditions' or rewriting defective passages. Through the permanent haze of speculation, however, we have a fairly consistent picture of the rise and heyday of a family which, if not of the highest rank and power, yet played a not insignificant part in the shaping of Highland history in the late Middle Ages.

The MacLeods were loyal supporters of the Lords of the Isles and their fortunes rose and fell with those of their overlords. In the Islands, the Lewis MacLeods were often at odds with their cousins of Harris and Dunvegan — thanks to the intractable dispute over lands and offices in Trotternish in Skye which the King of Scots artfully granted to both at the same time. On the mainland the Lewis MacLeods were usually at feud with their neighbours in Sutherland, the MacKays, but increasingly now with the rising clan of MacKenzie, a family whose influence spread throughout Easter and Wester Ross during the 16th century.

The MacLeods of both branches belong to that group of clans which began to come to notice in the 14th century — Campbells, MacLeans,

Camerons, MacNeills. Undoubtedly Norse in origin — *pace* Skene — they foreshadow a new society based on the clan, popularly a paternalistic society cocooned in legend and tartan (see Munro 1981. 117-129).

Morrison (1981. LI. 432-3) argues that the clan system in the Highlands differed in some subtle, unique way from the unjust feudal society which the kings of Scotland, latecomers to Norman ways, foisted on their reluctant subjects. The clan system, however it is defined, derives from a long and painful fusion of Old Norse democracy, Irish tribalism and Norman feudalism, the elements of which were inevitably modified by pre-existing social and racial structures.

That different layers of society existed in the 14th and 15th centuries is only to be expected. At the top, the *ancien régime* naturally discouraged innovation; at lower levels new ideas fermented and gained strength. The wry anecdote of Hugh MacDonald, the Sleat seannachie, aptly illustrates this uneasy relationship. John of the Isles (1449-1497), earl of Ross, once gave a great banquet at which he asked MacDonald of Moidart to be the master of ceremonies. MacDonald seated the leading guests in strict order of precedence and then sat down himself. Turning to the standing MacLeods, MacLeans and MacNeills, he exclaimed 'As for those fellows who have raised up their heads of late and are upstarts, whose pedigrees we know not, nor even they themselves, let them sit as they please' (Gregory op. cit. 54). The Scottish earldoms of Sutherland, Atholl, Crawford and Angus were created in the late 11th and the 12th centuries; Ross in 1226. Although the Lordship of the Isles is first used as a title only in 1336 (Munro & Munro 1986. XX. 3.), the MacDonalds trace their origins back much further, as the old style *Ri Innse Gall* implies.

The MacLeods certainly do not belong to this class of overlords. They never attracted the favour of the king of Scots. Royal recognition is conventionally based on usefulness or power, less on merit or gratitude. The history of the Lewis MacLeods shows only too clearly that they enjoyed none of these qualifications. Even their kinsmen in Skye — who survived when they failed — never came within touch of a peerage. Perhaps this lack of royal recognition lay behind the claim made by John MacLeod of Dunvegan in the early 1600s that his family was descended in the direct male line from the Norse kings of Man. He was probably influenced, as Matheson suggests (op. cit. LI.71), by Camden's *Britannia* published in 1586, but it is also worth noting that the earldom of Seaforth was created in 1625. The MacLeods looked down on the MacKenzies as the MacDonalds had looked down on them; if the MacKenzies could be ennobled, perhaps the MacLeods had to be royal!

The MacLeods of Lewis were a luckless lot. Unlike their cousins in Skye, they were not clever at picking winners and even less clever at disentangling themselves from losers. Their unquestioning loyalty to the Lords of the Isles — splendid in Torquil's defiance in 1501 — degenerates into the hopeless succour which Malcolm, son of the illegitimate Ruari Og, brought to Sir James MacDonald during his rebellion in 1615.

In their family life the MacLeods were indeed ill-starred. Old Ruari was,

by any standard, an erratic husband, but he was not lucky either. His first marriage was a disaster and it was perhaps not wholly his fault; arrest by an aggressive king was not to be foreseen. What might have happened if Torquil the Heir had not been drowned off Skye in 1566? Would Torquil Cononach, silent until that time, have still claimed the inheritance? Did someone deliberately send the young heir to sea in a leaky boat? Did Torquil Cononach's son John have to have a weakness for shooting swans?

'As far as writings could accomplish this object', says Gregory (op. cit. 270), Torquil Cononach put the future of his clan at risk by conveying the barony of Lewis into the hands of MacKenzie when he consigned all the writs and charters from the MacLeod chest to Roderick, the Tutor of Kintail. From then onwards the story of the MacLeods of Lewis is how the MacKenzies tell it.

As with Caesar's Celts and Germans, all we know about the Lewis MacLeods comes from outside, often unfriendly sources. The abundant muniments of the Harris MacLeods throw little light on their kinsmen across the Minch; recent research has in any case not been concerned with them. Our main sources of information are the histories of the first earl of Cromartie, Sir Robert Douglas and the clan historian, Alexander MacKenzie. It hardly needs remarking that all these gentlemen, honest historians according to their own lights, shared a certain attitude towards Clan Kenneth. The MacKenzies evidently wished to enjoy some of the royal Norse blood — however diluted — which the MacLeods claimed, but they were not always too scrupulous about individual MacLeods. They had access to public records, perhaps to some not now available to us. They also had access to the contents of the MacLeod charter chest, now lost or destroyed. In all fairness, but for the MacKenzies, we should know very little about the Lewis MacLeods at all. What one misses so sorely is the wealth of domestic detail which can be found for instance in the Dunvegan muniments.

Local tradition in Lewis unfortunately adds little to our knowledge. The Morrison MSS in the Stornoway Library were compiled by one Donald Morrison, a cooper by trade, who recorded his 'traditions' in the early decades of the 19th century. Two of the ten volumes are lost. There are a few references to the MacLeod chiefs — always respectfully called the 'proprietors' — but the bulk of the tales, mostly of the 18th century, are about the MacAulays, Morrisons, Mathesons, MacDonalds and, of course, the MacKenzies.

THE MAINLAND MACLEODS

On the mainland of Scotland, MacLeod families held lands in Gairloch, Coigach, Assynt, Eddrachillis and Handa. So long as the chiefly line survived in Lewis, these lands were held in vassalage to Stornoway and formed an important part of the heritage. Sometimes ownership returned direct to Lewis, as in the case of Torquil Cononach.

THE MACLEODS OF GAIRLOCH

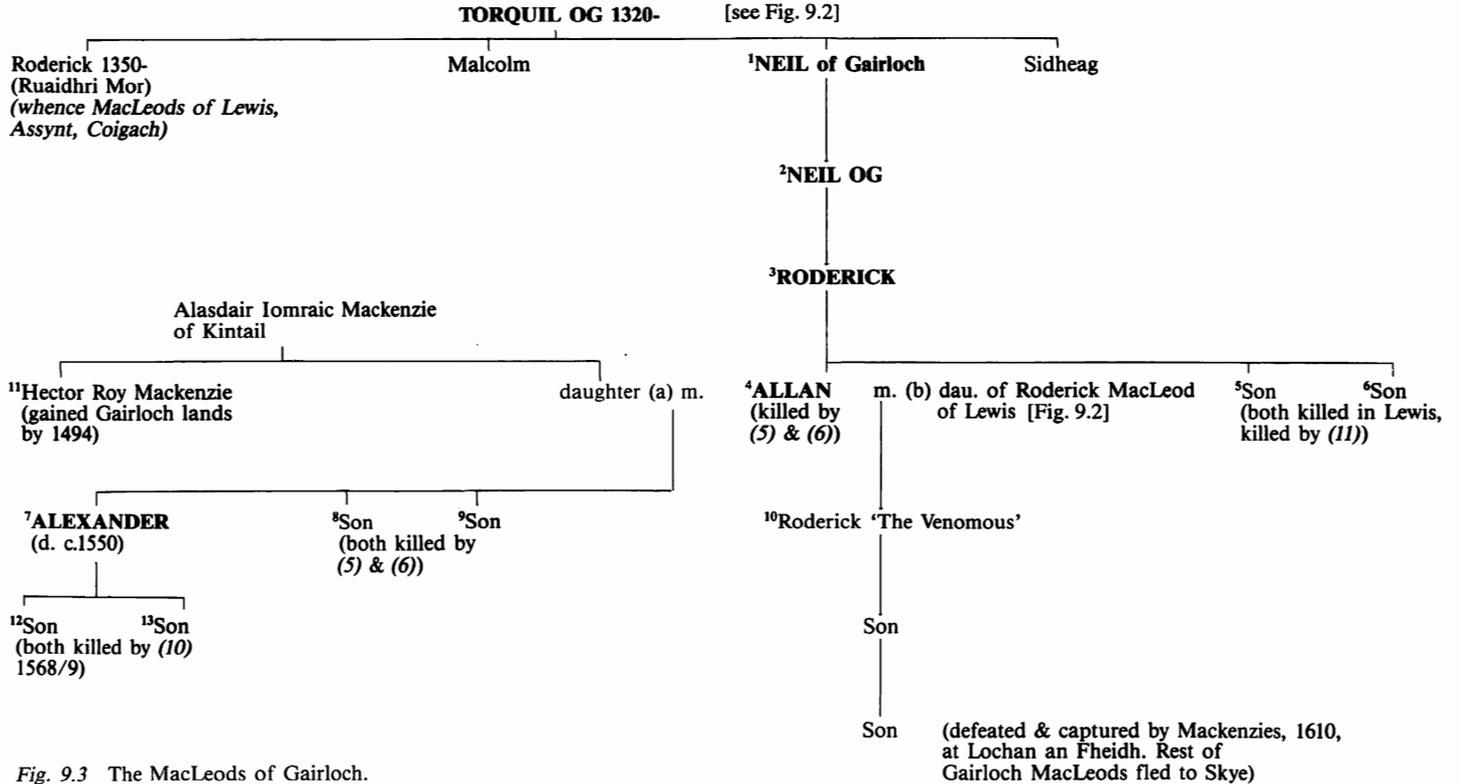


Fig. 9.3 The MacLeods of Gairloch.

MacLeods of Gairloch

The MacLeods of Gairloch are confused by the clan historian, Alexander MacKenzie, with the MacLeods of Raasay, probably because both these families used the same patronymic, MacGillechalum. This hypothesis causes problems. It suggests that Neil, the ancestor of the Gairloch MacLeods, was the son of Malcolm, the younger brother of Ruaidhri Mor of Lewis, who was killed in 1406 at Tuiteam Tarbhach. According to Matheson's genealogy, however, Neil has to be Malcolm's younger brother. This is probably right, but it leaves the business of the patronymic in the air.

Neil was the father of Neil Og who was the first to receive a royal grant of the Gairloch lands in 1430, although they had been in MacLeod hands for long before that date [Fig. 9.3]. Neil Og increased his holdings at the expense of the indigenous MacBeaths. Little is known of his son and successor, Roderick, who fathered Allan. Allan married a daughter of Alasdair Ionraic MacKenzie of Kintail, an alliance which, according to Sir Robert Gordon, was to bring disaster to the MacLeods:

When the sumamed of Clankenzie began first to prosper and ryse, one of them did obtain the third part of Garlogh in mortgage or wedset from the clan — wic — Gillchholm. Thus the Clankenzie getting sitting therein, they shortlie and spedelie purchased a pretended right to the whole by some pretence of law, which the lawful inheritor did neglect.

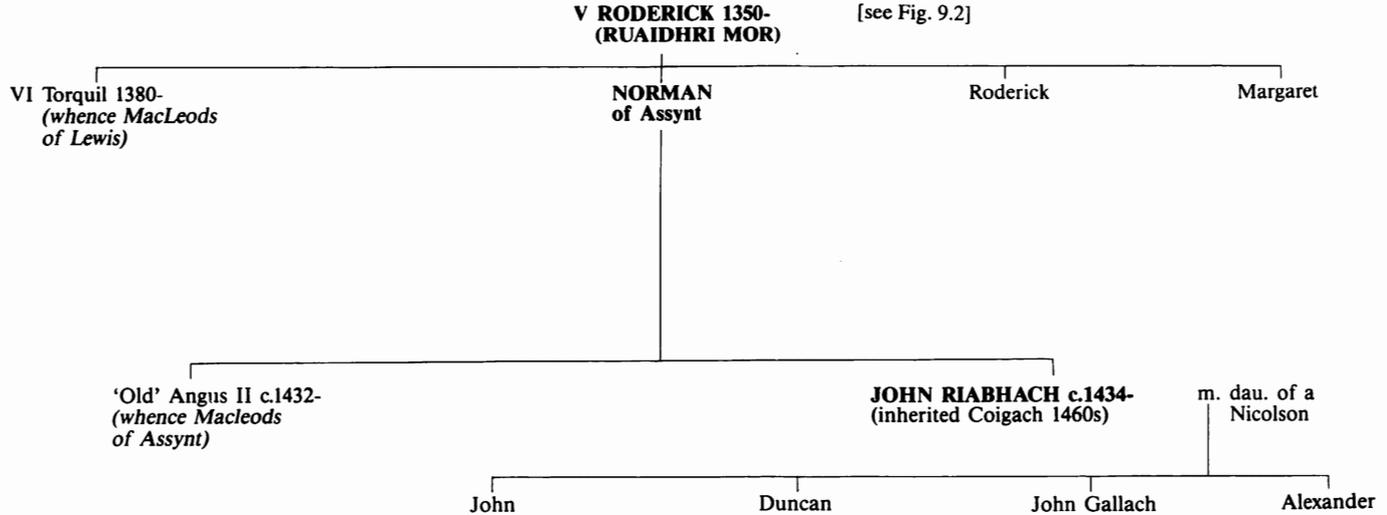
By his MacKenzie wife, Allan had three sons, one of whom, Alexander, succeeded him. His second wife was a daughter of Roderick MacLeod of Lewis and bore him a son, Roderick, whose name, to quote Morrison (1968-76. section V) is synonymous with 'soaring ambition, crooked counsels and bloodthirsty deeds'. Allan's two brothers who lived in Lewis resented the MacKenzie alliance, came to Gairloch and murdered Allan and the two younger boys. Vengeance was exacted by Hector Roy MacKenzie, the boys' uncle, who in due course acquired the Gairloch lands by the sword and received a royal charter in confirmation in 1494.

The MacLeod family struggled to maintain its identity for 70 more years. Alexander succeeded Allan in the leadership and died ca.1550. His two sons were murdered, because of their MacKenzie blood, by Roderick the Venomous, their father's half-brother, at the infamous banquet on Eilean Isay in Loch Dunvegan in 1568 or 1569. This outrage provoked a new MacKenzie campaign of revenge. The final confrontation took place in 1610 at Lochan an Fheidh. The MacLeods were defeated; their leader, a grandson of Roderick the Venomous, was captured and the lucky ones escaped to Skye.

MacLeods of Coigach

The estate of Coigach was given by Norman MacLeod, first of Assynt, to his second son, John Riabhach, in the 1460s, thus founding the line of the Coigach MacLeods [Fig. 9.4]. John married a Nicolson lady and had four

THE MACLEODS OF COIGACH



(descendants survived into 18th century, but family dispersed after forfeiture of Torquil MacLeod VIII of Lewis in 1506. Lands soon restored to Malcolm IX, brother of Torquil.
Coigach (along with Lewis, Assynt, Waternish) granted 1571/2 to Torquil Cononach, then singly 1576 to Torquil Cononach.
Acquired by Mackenzies, 1606, on marriage of Cononach's daughter to Rorie Mackenzie; confirmed by Royal Charter 1608)

Fig. 9.4 The MacLeods of Coigach.

sons, John, Duncan, John Gallach and Alexander. The eldest son, John, was renowned for his martial prowess. He sired a line of descendants which survived into the 18th century.

The family was dispersed after the forfeiture of Torquil MacLeod of Lewis in 1506, when Coigach with Assynt was awarded in liferent to MacKay of Strathnaver. These holdings were, however, restored when Malcolm, Torquil's brother, was reinstated in 1511. By charter dated 14 February 1571/2 Torquil Cononach received Assynt with Lewis, Coigach and Waternish in Skye, as related above. Failing any legal heir of his, the estates were to go to Malcolm MacLeod of Raasay, failing whom, to the nearest legitimate male heirs of Torquil bearing the name and arms of MacLeod. Old Ruari repudiated this charter, but after their second reconciliation in 1576 Torquil Cononach received a direct grant of Coigach and used it as his base throughout the ensuing fratricidal struggle with the Lewis MacLeods (see above).

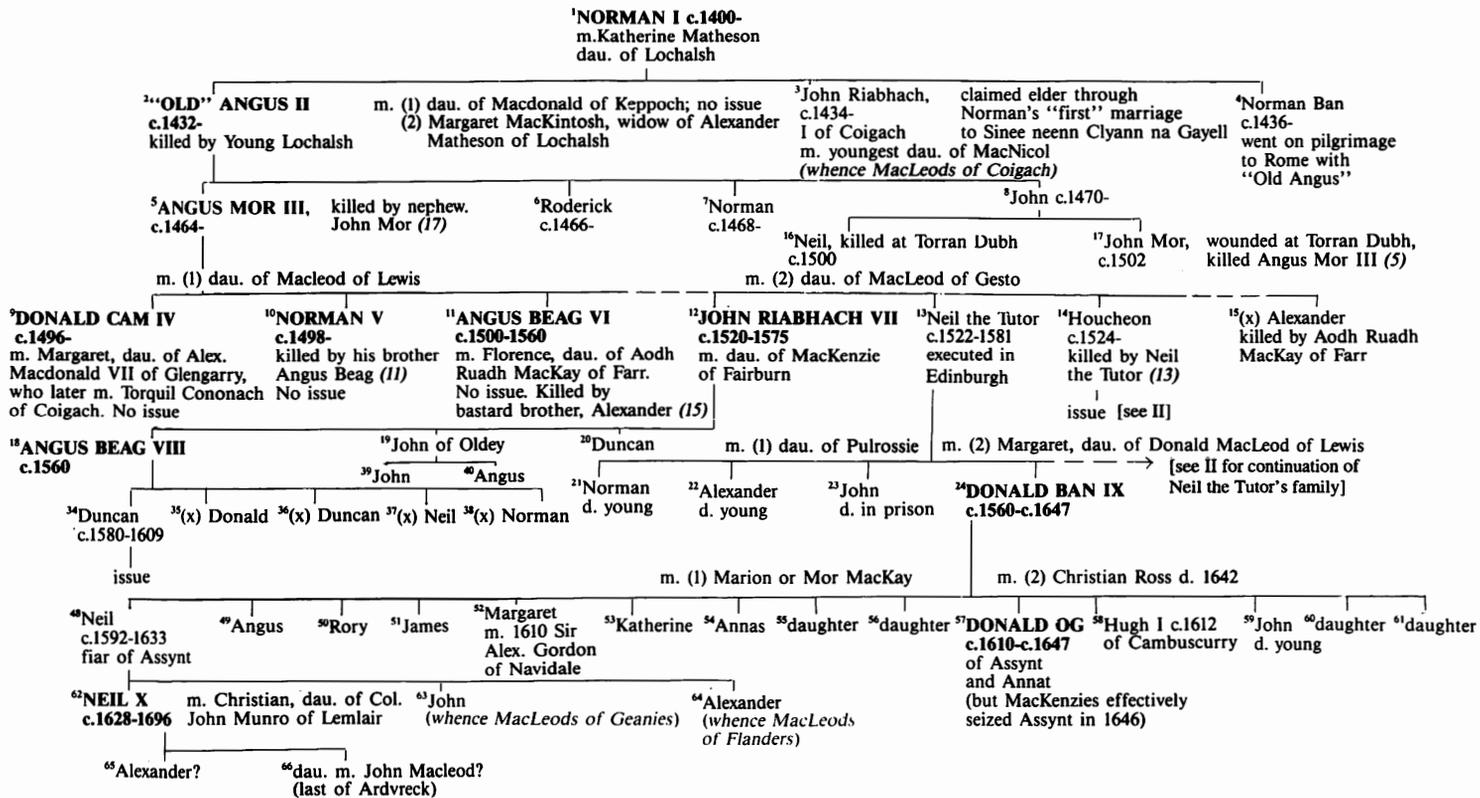
Coigach was still in his hands at the time of his death in 1620. The estate then fell to the MacKenzies.

MacLeods of Assynt

Assynt, as King David's charter of ca. 1343 shows, was one of the early MacLeod holdings. Roderick V of Lewis gave Assynt to his second son Norman (1) in the 1420s, retaining the superiority to himself [Fig. 9.5]. From the start the family had internal disputes about seniority and legitimacy. Norman's son, Old Angus (2), married twice. This involved him with the MacKintoshes who in the end slew him. Angus III's succession (5) was disputed by his brother John (8), but confirmed by MacLeod of Lewis, Angus's father-in-law. The grievance festered, however, and Angus was murdered by his nephew, John Mor (17). Angus married twice, first to his chief's daughter and second to a daughter of MacLeod of Gesto. Three of the four sons of his first marriage were killed by their half-brothers or their sons or by Alexander, an illegitimate son of Angus. Of the first marriage only Donald Cam IV (9) survived, but he had no issue. The second marriage produced John Riabhach VII (12) who succeeded. It also produced Neill (13) who was to be the tutor of Angus Beag VIII (18) and also to murder his own younger brother Hucheon (14) and his son, Donald (29). The respective progenies of these two carried the feud to the point of near extinction of both lines. John Riabhach VII (12) governed the barony for 15 years 'with great commendation' (*Geanies Papers*). He had married a daughter of MacKenzie of Fairburn and left a young family. His brother, Neill (13), became tutor to the minor Angus Beag VIII. Neill managed the estate with competence, but his crimes caught up with him and in the end Torquil Cononach seized him and had him executed in Edinburgh in 1581.

On attaining his majority, Angus Beag VIII (18) was not considered fit for the chiefship and after only one year was ousted by an unlikely alliance of the families of Neill the Tutor and his brother Hucheon, who divided the

THE MACLEODS OF ASSYNT — I



THE MACLEODS OF ASSYNT — II

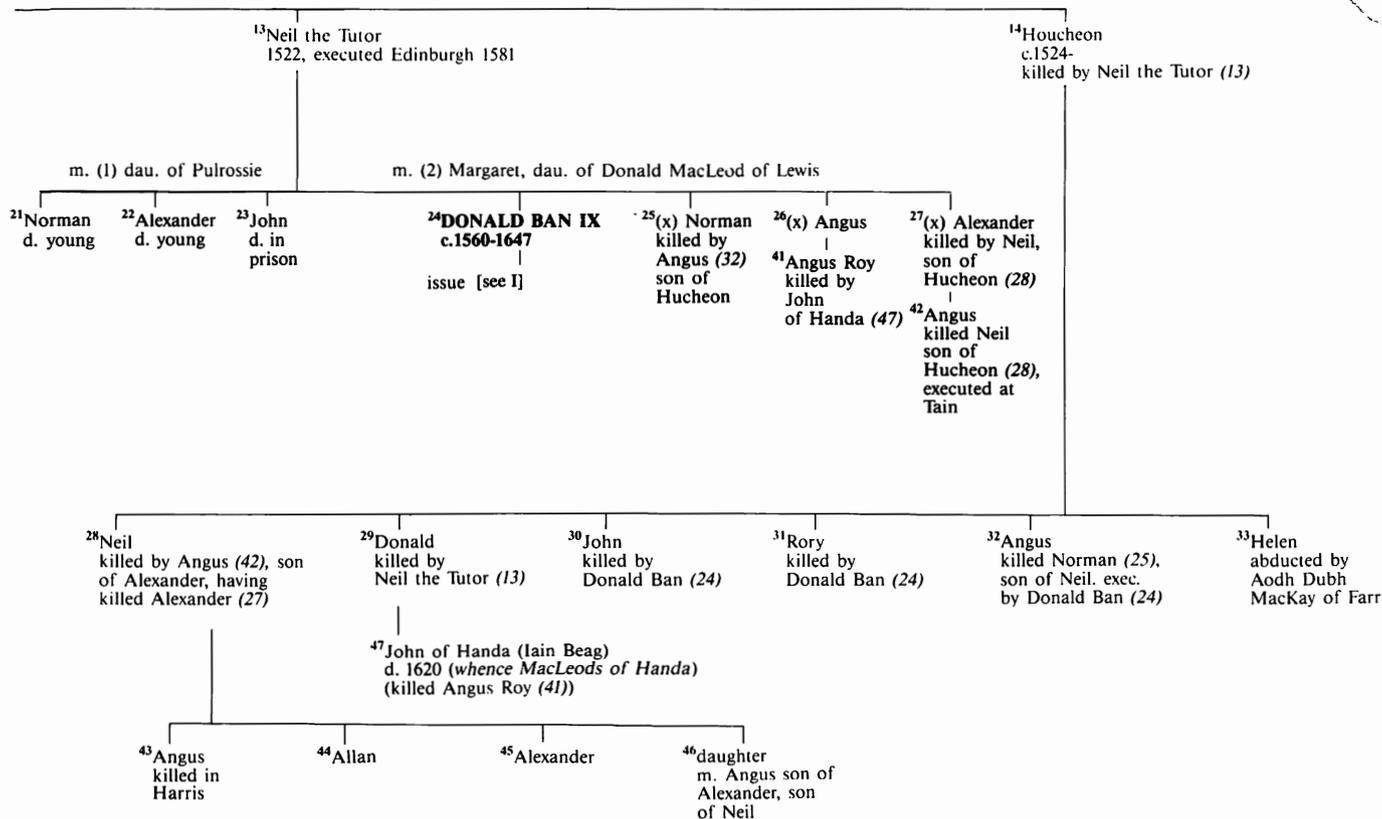


Fig. 9.5 The MacLeods of Assynt.

estate between themselves. A period of anarchy followed and ended only with the emergence as chief of Donald Ban IX (24), another son of Neill the Tutor by his second wife, Margaret, daughter of Donald MacLeod of Lewis. Donald Ban IX had to settle some of the old scores in the old-fashioned way, but he achieved much more through a policy of reconciliation between his fractious relatives.

On 8 November 1596 Donald Ban purchased a charter of Assynt from the first Lord Kintail and settled it on his posterity. In 1635 Colin, earl of Seaforth, granted Donald a new charter of Assynt, but Seaforth's successor, George, had other ideas. On winning a royal charter for Lewis on 13 November 1637, he decided to incorporate Assynt fully into the MacKenzie estate. As a result of much legal manipulation in which Seaforth's brother, MacKenzie of Pluscardine, and Kenneth MacKenzie of Scatwell played dubious roles, Seaforth now believed he could eject Donald Ban from his lands. A thousand MacKenzie troops invaded Assynt in 1640, but Donald Ban succeeded in getting a decree against Seaforth and was awarded compensation in the sum of £44,000 Scots. This was more than enough to discharge the estate's indebtedness and Donald's second wife, Christian Ross, who proved to be a good manageress, did what was required. In 1642 Donald Ban made over the estate to Donald Og (57), his son by Christian. The MacLeods now thought themselves secure, but the wadset due to Pluscardine, although paid off against receipts, continued to change hands amongst the MacKenzies and was still held legally valid as a debt on the estate as late as 1757. The MacKenzies raided Assynt in May 1646 and caused much material damage. They returned in 1672 and carried off the MacLeod charter chest, thereby extinguishing any hope of a MacLeod renaissance in Assynt. Donald Ban was still alive on 21 May 1646 when he left the estate of Annat to Donald Og.

By his first wife, Mor or Marion, daughter of Aodh MacKay of Farr, Donald Ban had four sons and three daughters; by his second wife, Christian, daughter of Nicholas Ross of Pitcalnie, three sons and two daughters. In succeeding decades, they and their children were to be dispersed throughout Scotland and Europe and to produce the cadet lines of MacLeods of Cambuscurrie (58), Cadboll, Sallachy, Geanies (63) and Flanders (64).

Donald Ban's eldest son, Neill (48), known as the 'fiar' or feuar of Assynt, married Florence, the fifth daughter of Torquil Cononach of Coigach. Neill predeceased his father in 1633. Donald Ban left Assynt and Annat to Donald Og (57) and the recently acquired estate of Cambuscurrie to Hugh (58), second son of Christian. Donald Ban and Donald Og both died about 1647. So far as the MacLeods knew, the estate of Assynt was quite unencumbered. Young Neill X (62), the eldest son of Neill the 'fiar', succeeded under the guardianship of his father's half-brother, Hugh of Cambuscurrie. While still a minor, Neill married Christian, daughter of Col. John Munro of Lemlair. He attained his majority on 24 November 1649, and his subsequent history is in the public domain. He died old, ill, embittered and impoverished in Edinburgh in 1702. He probably had issue by

Christian. When the sheriff of Sutherland was trying to eject the occupants of Ardvreck Castle [Fig. 1.11], mention was made of 'bairns and servants' (*Trial Indictment* no. 5). The defence of the castle was, it seems, in the hands of Neill's son-in-law, John MacLeod (66). The Rev Dr Donald MacKinnon asserted that Neill had a son named Alexander (65), but typically omitted to reveal the evidence. Officially the family died out. In 1954 a Mr. J.A.S. McLeod of Cooma, New South Wales, Australia, claimed descent from Neill, but this claim was judged to have no genealogical backing.

MacLeods of Eddrachillis and of Handa

The MacLeods of Eddrachillis trace their descent from Norman, a younger brother of Old Ruari, the last legal baron of Lewis. Their somewhat unedifying history may be deduced from the Geanies Papers. They lived mostly in Assynt. They were unluckily the neighbours of the MacKays of Strathnaver, by whom their rights in Eddrachillis were alienated. The direct line died out in the 18th century.

The small family of MacLeods of Handa sprang from Hucheon/Uisdean/Hugh (14) [Fig. 9.5], the youngest legitimate son of Angus Mor MacLeod of Assynt. The second chieftain, Iain Beag (47), distinguished himself by capturing Torquil Cononach whom he dutifully delivered to Stornoway for execution. To Iain Beag's fury, Tormod MacLeod, Torquil Cononach's half-brother, refused to commit fratricide and let him go free. Iain Beag shortly afterwards attacked, against odds, and killed the Morrison brieve of Lewis and some of his supporters. This is yet another example of the interplay between the mainland and Lewis.

Iain Beag spent most of his life feuding with Neill, the tutor of Assynt, who was his great-uncle and had murdered his father and grandfather. In later life he ran a profitable, independent piracy business out of Handa. Despite all this he died peacefully in his own bed in 1620 (MacPhail 1916. vol 2. 274). There is no certainty about his descendants. According to tradition they were decimated and scattered by the potato famine of 1845-46. A John MacLeod, crofter fisherman of Oldshoremore near Kinlochbervie, who was born in 1775, claimed descent from Iain Beag and there are some of his family still alive today.

MACLEODS IN THE 19th-20th CENTURIES

Despite massacres, murders, banishment and emigration over the centuries, families called MacLeod have survived in surprising numbers in Lewis, Ross and Sutherland, particularly in Lewis. The 1890-1 survey of schools in three parishes of Lewis reveals that the surname MacLeod headed the lists in all three parishes. Roughly 28% of the school population was called MacLeod (MacKenzie (1903) 1974. 64-5). The Annual Report of the

Nicolson Institute in Stornoway of 1925 shows that of the 31 duxes between 1895 and 1925, eleven were MacLeods — the MacKenzies were runners-up with 5! Of 255 children who took their leaving certificates between 1900 and 1924, 46 or 18% were called MacLeod. This does not necessarily mean that the MacLeods were more intelligent or hard-working; only that there were more of them than of other family names. In the current telephone directory of the Highlands and Islands Region there are 19 columns of MacLeod subscribers, making a total of about 2,500. Very roughly, 970 or 40% of these MacLeod subscribers live in Lewis. By contrast, in the MacLeod lands of Harris, North Uist, Skye and Glenelg, 244 MacLeods or only 10% of the subscribers are recorded. The other 50% of MacLeod subscribers are scattered all over the Highlands; most or many of them perhaps will have come from Lewis in the first place.

These random statistics merely show, however, that there are a lot of people called MacLeod! Despite lack of leadership and other misfortunes which have smitten the islands since the 17th century, a surprisingly large number of MacLeods have survived and multiplied in Lewis and the Highlands. Thousands of MacLeods exist also in the Old Commonwealth countries and the U.S.A., in France, the Low Countries and Scandinavia. Many of these will be descended from MacLeods from Lewis who emigrated after the beginning of the 18th century. Sadly, many of these descendants are ambivalent about their origins. The potent publicity which has come out of Dunvegan this century perhaps makes them all prefer to be cousins of the late Dame Flora MacLeod of MacLeod rather than descendants of humble and impoverished tenants of the MacKenzies!

By contrast, the MacLeods who still live in Lewis are notably impervious to the seductions of their Harris cousins. Attempts to enrol them in the world-wide Association of Clan MacLeod Societies have shown that they are not interested in the MacLeods of Harris and Dunvegan or indeed in their own chiefly line. The MacLeods of Lewis were Norse and brutish and feudal and Papist. They lived a long time ago and are best forgotten! The heroic figures of Lewis today are called Matheson or MacAulay or MacKenzie!

Acknowledgement

Grateful acknowledgement is made to James Ford for preparing Fig. 9.1.

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