PEDIGREES, POWER AND CLANSHIP: THE GENEALOGICAL WORK OF DAVID SELLAR

by Hector L. MacQueen[1]

ABSTRACT

This article presents an overview and critique of the genealogical writings of the late David Sellar (1941-2019), Lord Lyon King of Arms in Scotland 2008-2014. Sellar focussed on the medieval genealogies of the chiefs of the West Highlands and Islands, especially Somerled and his descendants, the MacDonalds, and the MacDougalls. He was also interested in the Gaelic-Norse descent of the MacLeods and the Nicolsons as well as the possibly British Campbells, while he posited an Irish-Gaelic settlement of the lands of Cowal and Knapdale. While some of his findings have been overturned by more recent scholarship and the findings of DNA research, Sellar was a pioneer in his field who established a genealogical methodology of enduring value and use in the broader context of research, not just in Scotland, but also in other parts of the British Isles and in continental Europe.

Foundations (2023) ***JN16-04***

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Introduction

The collection of writings by the late David Sellar (1941-2019), edited by the present writer and published under the title *Pedigrees, Power and Clanship* in November 2023,[2] brought together his research on the genealogies of the major clans of medieval Scotland's West Highlands and Islands. He demonstrated how to approach these genealogies as sources of great potential for understanding the society, politics and culture within which they were produced. In particular, the pedigrees should be seen as the product of an originally oral tradition preserved by the sennachies (bards) of the chiefs and only later written down. More frequently than had been previously thought, the surviving pedigrees provide an accurate account of family descents; they also show how chiefly families wished to be perceived from time to time. Pedigrees might accordingly be faked but it was nevertheless possible to go behind the fakery and detect some underlying truths about the descents they asserted.

My editorial introduction, from which this article is extracted, gives an overview of Sellar's published work from 1966 until not long before his death.[3] The article starts by discussing Sellar's first published work about Somerled, the twelfth-century lord of Argyll, and shows how he developed a methodology in the context of that research. This leads to an introductory discussion of pedigrees' origins in oral tradition and how and why pedigrees might be faked, enhanced or glamourised, especially with regard to the politically and socially prominent figures of chiefs. The discussion then turns to Sellar's analysis of the MacDougall and other descendants of Somerled in the thirteenth century. That analysis showed that the MacDougalls were pre-eminent in the West Highlands and Islands until they chose the wrong side in the Wars of Independence in which Robert Bruce triumphed; the MacDonalds, also descendants of Somerled, then assumed supremacy as the Lords of the Isles until 1493. A question which Sellar explored in these papers was the Gaelic-Norse elements in the pedigrees before and after Somerled. This was taken much further in studies of the MacLeods and the Nicolsons (MacNicols), and also informed Sellar's research on various families in Cowal and Knapdale. A different perspective was provided by Sellar's work on the Campbells and connected families, introducing a possible British origin into the Scottish mix and touching on the importance of heraldry in confirming connections between different families. This article concludes by considering how far Sellar's conclusions have survived the test of time, particularly in light of recent DNA studies which are particularly useful in distinguishing descents with different geographical origins (including Celtic, Scandinavian, Gaelic-Irish), and by a full analysis of "MS 1467", the crucial source for many of the genealogies studied by Sellar.

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1 C.B.E., F.B.A., F.R.S.E., LL.B. (Hons), Ph.D., Emeritus Professor of Private Law, University of Edinburgh.

2 Sellar, W.D.R,, *Pedigrees, Power and Clanship: Essays on Medieval Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2023), ("Sellar, *Pedigrees*").

3 The article is also based on my presentation at the Medieval Genealogy Study Day sponsored by the Foundation for Medieval Genealogy, held by the Society of Genealogists on 18 October 2023.

Somerled

The first article of the October 1966 issue of the *Scottish Historical Review* was entitled 'The Origins and Ancestry of Somerled' and was written by one W.D.H. Sellar who, the reader was informed, was "a graduate of Oxford and Edinburgh universities, and has just completed a legal apprenticeship in Edinburgh".[4] It was thus evident that the author was a young man who was not a professional academic historian; in fact, it was his first published article. The debut was nevertheless something of a *tour de force*, and it was to command its field for the next 40 years. The subject-matter was the genealogies or pedigrees of the twelfth-century "founder of a new dynasty of Hebridean sea-kings and ancestor of the MacDonalds"[5] who was killed in battle at Renfrew in 1164 while leading a rising against the king of Scots. The pedigrees were found mainly in various late medieval and early modern Irish sources but also in a Scottish manuscript known from its probable date as 'MS 1467' (discussed in detail at the end of this article). Somerled's fame rested further on his recovery in the 1150s of his ancestral territories in Argyll and the Western Isles from the sovereignty of the Norse kings of Man and the Isles. These lands included Kintyre, Lorn, Moidart and Garmoran on the mainland and the Islay and Mull groups of islands as well as (probably) the Uists and Barra.[6] Contemporary sources spoke of Somerled not only as *regulus* of Argyll and Kintyre but also as king of *Innsegall*, i.e. the isles of the foreigners (meaning those western isles in which there had been substantial Scandinavian settlement over the preceding 200-300 years with subsequent social integration and, perhaps, acculturation of the settlers into Gaelic speakers: the Gall-Ghàidhil 'the foreign Gaels').[7]

The pedigrees seemed to show that Somerled was descended from Colla Uais, legendary high king of Ireland in the fourth century A.D., and a subsequent line of princes, mostly with Gaelic names. Somerled's father and grandfather certainly had Gaelic names, Gilla Brigte and Gilla-Adomnain, as did all his other claimed ancestors back to Gofraidh mac Fergusa in the ninth century. Gofraidh (Godfrey) had a Norse name but a Gaelic patronymic: "[A] son with a Norse name and a father with a Gaelic … suggests intermarriage" between the two linguistic groups in Argyll and the Isles.[8] The line above Godfrey back to Colla Uais was however undilutedly Gaelic, albeit manifestly too short in terms of generations to be historically correct. While Somerled's own name was derived from the Norse *Sumarliði*, 'summer voyager', suggestive of Scandinavian rather than Gaelic origins, this might be, as with Godfrey son of Fergus, a result of his father's marriage with a Scandinavian woman.[9]

While Sellar's article mainly focussed on the later medieval pedigrees, he also made use of "Clan Donald tradition as narrated in the books of Clanranald and by the Sleat sennachie Hugh MacDonald (both in the seventeenth century) and by later writers".[10] Their historical value as well as that of the pedigrees had previously been doubted, for example by A.A.M. Duncan and A.L. Brown in a justly celebrated article on Argyll and the Isles in the earlier middle ages published in 1957.[11] But Sellar countered this view of these later sources with the observation that "Their account of the origins of Somerled is verifiable …".[12] He went on to conclude that "a close study of the original pedigree will show a strong probability in favour of its authenticity … in detail back to the beginning of the ninth century, and in outline to a time before the fifth-century Dalriadic colonisation of Scotland."[13] The alternative theory that Somerled had Scandinavian origins was based more on negative views of the pedigrees than on any positive evidence.[14] Sellar finished as follows:

> "The strength of the argument lies not in any one fact or line of approach that places the matter beyond doubt, but in the collation of many scattered pieces of information which, taken together, combine to form a remarkably composite and credible picture."[15]

That Archie Duncan, one of the two editors of the *Scottish Historical Review* in 1966, was persuaded by the arguments in Sellar's article despite its rejection of his own previous doubts, was confirmed nearly ten years later. In Duncan's magisterial *Scotland: The Making of the Kingdom*, published in 1975, he cited the Sellar article in commenting that Somerled's family "could trace its roots in early Irish history", while "the genealogies

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4 Sellar, 'Origins Somerled', 45 (1966), 123-42 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 3). The legal apprenticeship was with the Edinburgh firm of Shepherd & Wedderburn. For Sellar's subsequent career and a bibliography see MacQueen, 'William David Hamilton Sellar' (2021), 187-200.

5 Sellar, 'Origins Somerled', 123 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 61).

6 See the map produced by Sellar for McNeill and MacQueen (1996), 441, reproduced in Sellar, *Pedigrees*, xvi.

7 *ES*, vol. II, 137 (from *Chronica Regum Manniae et Insularum* (1874), vol. I, 60), 254 (from 'The Annals of Tigernach', vol. 18 (1897), 195 – king of the *Innsegall* (translated as 'Hebrides') and of Kintyre; *The Chronicle of Melrose* (1936), 79 (*regulus* of Argyle).

8 Sellar, 'Origins Somerled', 135 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 74).

9 Sellar did not advert to this possibility in his 1966 article, but see Marsden, *Somerled* (2000; 2005), 23-6.

10 Sellar, 'Origins Somerled', 124 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 62).

11 Duncan and Brown, 'Argyll' (1956-7), 192-220, 195. Earlier, A.O. Anderson described the 'traditional account' of Somerled as 'not trustworthy' (*ES*, vol. II, 255).

12 Sellar, 'Origins Somerled', 124 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 62).

13 Sellar, 'Origins Somerled', 125, 141 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 63, 81).

14 For this theory Sellar referred in particular to MacNeill, 'Chapters of Hebridean History' (1916), 254-76.

15 Sellar, 'Origins Somerled', 141 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 81).

of leading medieval families on the western seaboard showing the continued use of Scandinavian personal names is not evidence of lingering Scandinavian speech [but rather of] a Gaelic island aristocracy whose onomastic usages included Norse names".[16] John Bannerman accepted in 1977 that the Somerled genealogy was "almost certainly authentic".[17] Geoffrey Barrow's *Kingship and Unity: Scotland 1000-1306* a few years on (1981), struck a slightly more cautious note: "Somerled belonged to a family that *claimed* descent from an ancient royal lineage of northern Ireland."[18] In another publication in 2006, Barrow observed that Sellar had made "a strong case for the reliability of Somerled's pedigree over eight generations back to Godfrey son of Fergus [but that] Godfrey's name points to intermarriage between Norse and Gaelic elements occurring remarkably early."[19] In 1994, however, Benjamin T. Hudson had challenged the historicity of Gofraidh mac Fergusa but without exploring what this might imply for Sellar's argument about the descent of Somerled.[20] Otherwise historians writing about the subject after 1966 mostly simply referred to and summarised the Sellar article and did not interrogate its findings any further.[21]

Sellar's methodology

Although, as we will consider in more depth below, Sellar's 1966 article was finally subjected to thorough and searching criticism published in 2005 and has also been challenged by the findings of DNA analysis on the 'Somerled Y-chromosome',[22] I have chosen to summarise the 1966 article and its earlier impact in the field in some detail because it still marks the starting point for the decades of Sellar's subsequent research while also illustrating the methods Sellar employed in their pursuit. The main focus of Sellar's later research was the clans of medieval Argyll and the Western Isles, especially but not limited to the descendants of Somerled. Pedigrees of many of these families, included in MS 1467 and in the Irish genealogies, were subjected to comparative analysis, showing their agreements and disagreements and their relationships with each other. Further, Sellar tested the historicity of the persons named and the Gaelic or Norse quality of their recorded names. He also brought into play contemporary or near-contemporary literary material alongside the later recorded traditions already mentioned: thus the Somerled article referred to the Norse sagas and an Irish Gaelic poem.[23] An important generalisation, which Sellar repeated elsewhere, was that "long averages" between generations of nearer 40 than the 30 years typically referred to by genealogists, were "not unusual in a Gaelic genealogy".[24]

The link between the later sources such as the Clanranald and Sleat histories with the earlier pedigrees lay in the authorship role played over many centuries by the *seanchaidh* (sennachie, bard) whose "work was to hand down to posterity the valorous actions, conquests, battles, skirmishes, marriages and relations of the predecessors by repeating and singing the same at births, baptisms, marriages, feasts and funerals."[25] The pedigrees thus offered crucial insights into the nature of the society from which they sprung:

> "The quality of a family's pedigree — and very often that meant its length — reflected, supported and sometimes even explained its position in society. … In Gaelic society, a pedigree was a political statement, and not infrequently an exercise in political propaganda."[26]

Because they were so central to the socio-political structure, pedigrees, however, were never to be trusted uncritically; in part propaganda, they were susceptible to what Sellar called 'faking' or 'fabrication'. Critical analysis could expose this process in action and perhaps even explain why it took the form it did.

Sellar's approach to the sources, both the surviving later medieval pedigrees and the traditional clan histories, is perhaps not wholly consistent with that of very recent scholarship, epitomised thus by Gilbert Márkus:

> "Scholars are less inclined to trust later medieval sources as evidence for earlier periods. … We cannot appeal to the idea, once popular, that information was accurately preserved for generations in oral traditions to be faithfully written down by later scribes."[27]

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16 Duncan (1975), 86. Cf ibid., 166 ("Somerled, Lord of Argyll, was certainly of a Norse-Celtic family from the western isles.").

17 Bannerman (2016), 330 (also Steer and Bannerman (1977), app 2, 201).

18 Barrow (981), 108-9 (repeated in the book's second edition (Edinburgh, 2003), 133; emphasis supplied).

19 Barrow, 'Skye from Somerled' (2006), 140-54, 143 n. 20.

20 Hudson (1994), 40-2.

21 See e.g. McDonald (1997), 42-5; Marsden (2000, 2005), 26-9; McDonald (2003), 86.

22 See below, text accompanying nn. 79-95.

23 Sellar, 'Origins Somerled', 132, 140 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 68, 78).

24 Sellar, 'Origins Somerled', 137 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 77). See also Sellar 'Family Origins' (1971), 21-37, 26 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 9, 217).

25 Campbell 'Manuscript History of Craignish' (1926), 190, as modernised by Sellar 'Highland Family Origins' (1981), 103-116, 103 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 2, 41).

26 Sellar 'Highland Family Origins', 103 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 41).

27 Márkus (2017), viii. Márkus is of course writing about sources for periods earlier than those about which Sellar usually wrote.

Sellar's answer to this point, at least with regard to Clan Donald tradition as narrated in the books of Clanranald[28] and by the Sleat sennachie Hugh MacDonald[29] (both of the seventeenth century), was already given in his Somerled article:

> "These sources are not reliable, but they cannot be ignored. In later stages of Clan Donald history where facts can be cross-checked with contemporary evidence, the Clanranald historian and Hugh MacDonald are frequently wrong in matters of detail, yet in their narration of the general trend of events they are usually correct. They represent the oral tradition of the seventeenth century, a tradition passed on in the case of MacVurich, the Clanranald historian, through generations of hereditary sennachies for upwards of over four hundred years."[30]

This was equally true of the later medieval pedigrees such as those in MS 1467 and the Irish genealogies.

The foundations for this approach to the sources are most fully expounded, not in any of Sellar's published articles, but in an affidavit which he submitted in June 2002 to the Court of the Lord Lyon in support of a petition by Ranald Alasdair MacDonald of Keppoch to be recognised as Chief of the Name and Arms of MacDonald of Keppoch and of the Honourable Clanranald of Keppoch.[31] Part of the evidence in support of the petitioner's case was a pedigree (*sloinneadh*) of the MacDonalds of Keppoch, transmitted orally, perhaps from as early as the late seventeenth century, until finally recorded in writing in the mid-twentieth. The pedigree omitted a couple of generations in the later seventeenth century, and in 1994 the then Lord Lyon held that this gap coupled with an absence of evidence that the *sloinneadh* had been "kept in correct form without emendation" meant that the petition should be refused.[32] Sellar's affidavit, rendered in his capacity as Bute Pursuivant, one of the Lyon Court's heralds, was part of the petitioner's renewed assault on that earlier decision. He was, however, again unsuccessful in the Lyon Court in December 2002. Although this time Lyon accepted arguments that a *sloinneadh* might be depended upon despite gaps in its upper reaches, he reaffirmed the need to show that it had been "kept in correct form without emendation", which was not established in the petitioner's case.[33] An appeal against this decision to the First Division of the Inner House of Court of Session was, however, successful in January 2004, the court holding that Lyon had mistakenly "elevated to the status of an absolute requirement something which is truly no more than a cross-check on the reliability of the *sloinneadh*."[34]

Interesting though all this is, especially given Sellar's own later elevation to become Lord Lyon King of Arms, the significance of his affidavit in the present context is rather different, lying in the evidence he cites showing that "even today it is common in Gaelic speaking areas to refer to someone by patronymic rather than by surname", with examples stretching across many generations and not only between parent and child to be found, not only in township or croft histories, but also in the unofficial telephone directories circulating in some island communities: "the whole system of nomenclature, in fact, encourages oral memory of a more extended *sloinneadh*."[35] Sellar further refers to personal experience of this phenomenon, which may have begun with the time he spent in the Highlands and Islands between 1967 and 1969 as a legal assistant in the Scottish Land Court. Further such references to oral traditions gathered by him can be found in some of his other writings.[36]

The affidavit also refers to the influence upon Sellar's use of traditions alongside the written record provided by an Edinburgh University colleague, the Rev William Matheson (1910-1995), as well as that of Sorley Maclean (1911-1996; also famed as the greatest Gaelic poet of the twentieth century).[37] Matheson's work is a particularly notable stimulus in Sellar's account of the ancestry of the MacLeods, while MacLean, whose grandfather was a Nicolson named Sorley, was an important informant in the history of the Nicolsons of Scorrybreac.[38] Both Matheson and Maclean were exponents of the Gaelic oral tradition of the Western Isles from which each came (North Uist in the case of Matheson, Raasay and Skye for MacLean). For them, family pedigrees were an integral part of that oral tradition, alongside poetry, song, stories and other material transmitted down the generations. All thus fall to be considered together, as is the case in Sellar's own work.

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28 *Reliquiae Celticae*, vol. II, 148–309.

29 *Highland Papers*, vol. I, 5–72.

30 Sellar, 'Origins Somerled', 124 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 62).

31 Now published as ch. 1 of Sellar, *Pedigrees*.

32 An earlier adverse decision of Lyon on a different point is *MacDonald of Keppoch, Petitioner (No 1)* 1989 S.L.T. (Lyon Ct.) 2. For Scottish legal citations see MacQueen, *Studying Scots Law* (2022), 151-4.

33 *MacDonald of Keppoch, Petitioner* (No 2) 1994 S.L.T. (Lyon Ct.) 2.

34 *MacDonald of Keppoch, Petitioner (No 2)* 2004 S.C. 483; 2004 S.L.T. 283, para 18.

35 Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 35.

36 See in particular Sellar, W.D.R. (2022), 82, 104-5, 106.

37 Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 33. On Matheson, see *Tobar an Dualchais* website https://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/person/482?l=en and "MacLean, Sorley [Somhairle MacGill-Eain]", *ODNB*.

38 Sellar 'The Ancestry of the MacLeods Reconsidered' (2000), 233-58 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 6); Sellar, 'Part I: History of the Clan' (1999), 3-41 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 7).

Pedigree-making and pedigree-faking

The affidavit acknowledged that "oral pedigrees, like the written record, could be manipulated or even forged – and sometimes were, with considerable skill."[39] Sellar went on to say, however, that "this is more likely to be true in medieval times, when a chief or a king's pedigree was an important political statement, encompassing the right to rule, than in modern circumstances."[40] It was of course with medieval times that Sellar was primarily concerned. In an article on Highland family origins first published in 1981, he explored the techniques of pedigree-making and pedigree-faking.[41] It offers his fullest examination of the topic in general, and thus forms an excellent introduction to it, with many examples, mostly starting from MS 1467. Pedigrees were indeed political statements on behalf of rulers whose manipulation might be detected in the variation between different versions and their being too short in terms of the number of generations recorded. One should also be alert to the distortions made by writers anxious to glamourise their histories from the sixteenth century on, including such as Hector Boece and George Buchanan, as well as to the errors introduced by W.F. Skene, the great nineteenth-century historian of Celtic Scotland, in his transcriptions of MS 1467. At the same time, however, it was possible to show that clearly manipulated pedigrees contained authentic material to which had been 'tacked on' other content that enhanced the significance of the kindred in question; for example, the claims of the MacKenzies and the Campbells to Norman descent (and, in the case of the Campbells, to descent from King Arthur), or of the MacGregors to be descended from a brother of Kenneth mac Alpin, the ninth-century king who was in the middle ages regarded as the founder of the kingdom of the Scots. But genuine pedigrees could still be worked out through the haze of fiction, and the article demonstrated the significance in particular of Cormac son of Airbertach, who may have been the common ancestor in the twelfth century of a number of clans whose patronymics were derived from sons of Cormac,[42] and of Gilleoin of the Aird, another probably twelfth-century figure whose direct descendants, the del Ard family, were of the "first importance" in the Aird district south of the Beauly Firth and west of Inverness down to the fourteenth century.[43] Gilleoin may also have been the common ancestor of the Mackenzie and Matheson clans.[44]

Sellar's writings on the socio-political context in which he set the pedigrees must be sought in the collection of his legal history writings, published in 2022, notably pieces on 'Celtic law', 'Celtic secular marriage' and the office of Lord Lyon King of Arms as an evolution from the medieval king's *seanchaidh* or king's poet (*ollamh-ri*).[45] But Sellar frequently refers in his genealogical pieces to the socio-political work of others in this field, notably John Bannerman on the later medieval Lordship of the Isles[46] and the 1986 edition of the Lordship charters and other acts by Billy and Jean Munro.[47] While his research was significantly informed by these other works, it is clear that Sellar himself was most interested by the period between the death of Somerled in 1164 and the rise of the MacDonald lordship at the beginning of the fourteenth century. His work traced the descendants of Somerled during this period: in particular Somerled's sons Dugald and Ranald and their sons, grandsons and later offspring.

The MacDougalls

Sellar's most sustained narrative and analysis, starting from but reaching beyond the pedigrees, concerned the pre-eminence of the descendants of Somerled's son Dugald, the MacDougalls of Lorn, in Argyll and the Isles in the thirteenth century (rather than the MacDonalds descending from Ranald and his son Donald). A careful analysis of the MacDougall pedigrees in MS 1467 alongside those of the MacDonalds and the MacRuaris (another line of Somerled's descendants active in the period) was first published in 1986.[48] The pedigrees bore some evidence of manipulation but were still good evidence for the prominence of the family in the thirteenth century; indeed, as Sellar noted, the MacDougalls appeared in MS 1467 as *Clann Shomairle* while the

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39 Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 1, 31.

40 Ibid.

41 For citations see above n. 25.

42 i.e. MacQuarry, MacKinnon, MacMillan and Clan Gille-Adamnain.

43 Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 45-57.

44 Sellar rejected the claim that the Clan Gillanders was also descended from Gilleoin of the Aird. But this view is challenged in Black '1467 MS: The Gillanderses' (Feb. 2019), 3–15, 11. Black also suggests that Gilleoin flourished c.1040 rather than in the next century.

45 Sellar, David, *Continuity*, chs 2 ('Celtic Law and Scots Law: Survival and Integration'), 3 ('Marriage, Divorce and Concubinage in Gaelic Scotland') and 4 ('The Lyon and the *Seanchaidh*'). Note also ch. 12 ('Juridical Acts Made in Contemplation of Death') at 263-4.

46 There are two articles by John Bannerman entitled 'The Lords of the Isles': one in Steer and Bannerman (1977), app. 2, 201-13; the other in Brown (1977) 209-40. Both are reprinted in Bannerman, *Kinship (2016),* section 3, chs 6 and 7.

47 *ALI* (1986).

48 Sellar, 'MacDonald and MacRuari Pedigrees in MS 1467' (1986), 3-15; Sellar 'MacDougall Pedigrees in MS 1467' (1986), 3-18 (amalgamated in Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 4).

MacDonalds and the MacRuaris were given under the names of their eponyms amongst the sons of Somerled.[49] This makes it more likely that the MacDougalls were indeed the senior line descended from Somerled, as Sellar argued, and that the later manipulations of their pedigrees were made to downplay if not deny this fact, probably in the interests of the MacDonald Lords of the Isles, for whom MS 1467 was compiled.[50]

These articles were followed much later by what has been described (in 2007) as "probably the most scholarly and useful account for the long thirteenth century in the kingdom of the Isles".[51] In it Sellar sketched the relationship of the kings of Man with Somerled and his sons by Ragnhild, daughter of King Olaf the Red of Man and Ingibjorg of Orkney. He noted that after Olaf's death in 1153 at the hands of his nephews, disaffected island chiefs sought through Somerled to make his son Dugald their king in place of Olaf's successor, his brother Godfrey. Somerled's victories over Godfrey in 1155 and 1157 forced what became the division of the former kingdom of Man and the Isles already referred to.[52] However, the main focus of the article is "the four greatest MacDougall chiefs – Duncan, Ewen, Alexander and John – who followed each other in succession in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries."[53] Sellar traced as far as possible how they were each "affected by the competing expansionist ambitions of Scotland and Norway" until the latter kingdom finally ceded sovereignty over the Isles to the king of Scots under the Treaty of Perth in 1266.[54] The family's fall, and the concomitant rise of their fellow-descendants of Somerled, the MacDonalds, resulted from the ultimate triumph of Robert Bruce as king of Scots 1306-1329 with MacDonald support, but in the teeth of MacDougall opposition founded on the clan's loyalty to Bruce's great rivals, the Comyns. Like many other kindreds that chose the wrong side in the Bruce wars of independence, MacDougalls would become in the fourteenth and later centuries among the most prominent mercenary warrior kindreds of Scottish descent (galloglass, *gallóglaigh*, foreign soldiers) in Ireland. Sellar noted in his 1986 article that MS 1467 included five pedigrees which, he suggested, gave the genealogies of five leading captains of MacDougall galloglass in Ireland about 1400.[55]

Gaelic-Norse pedigrees

If Sellar saw Somerled and his descendants as essentially Gaelic with a gradually diluting dash of Norse in the thirteenth century, he also gave close attention to pedigrees where there was no descent from Somerled and the Norse element appeared to be predominant. Traditionally "the MacLeods gloried in a high Scandinavian ancestry";[56] the question was then their relationship if any with the thirteenth-century Norse kings of Man and the Isles. The clan's major territories were in Harris and Skye (the MacLeods of Dunvegan, *Sìol Tormoid*) and in Lewis (the Macleods of Lewis, or the *Sìol Torcuill*), both outside the domains of Somerled and his descendants. All indeed remained part of the kingdoms of Norway and Man until ceded to the king of Scots in the Treaty of Perth in 1266; they came under the sway of the Gaelic lords of Argyll and the Isles only after 1300. Working with the surviving MacLeod pedigrees (none of which were to be found in MS 1467) and drawing attention to a Welsh genealogy of the kings of Man and the Isles, Sellar proposed in 2000 that the MacLeods descended, not from thirteenth-century kings of Man, but from the sister of Godfrey Crovan, king of Man in the late eleventh century.

There was also an important connection between the MacLeods and the Clan MacNeacail (MacNicol, Nicolson), who probably held Trotternish in Skye. There is a MacNicol pedigree in MS 1467, showing that the probable eponym of the clan had flourished about 1300. While it was difficult to feel much confidence about the further 20 generations above Nicol in the pedigree, they had a "distinctly Scandinavian flavour". "The Nicolson claim to high Norse descent", Sellar concluded, "is wholly credible."[57] So too was the tradition that the clan had also once held the lands in Lewis later pertaining to that island's branch of the MacLeods, having lost them in the fourteenth century through the marriage of a Nicolson heiress to a MacLeod. From that event on, Clan MacNicol was to be most strongly associated with Trotternish, their caput being at Scorrybreac by what became Portree.

The mixed Gaelic-Norse inheritance was also to be traced in naming practices amongst the ruling dynasties of not only the Western Isles but also the Isle of Man and the Northern Isles of Orkney and Shetland from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries. But here there were some important contrasts. While the Manx dynasty favoured royal Norwegian names to the exclusion of Gaelic ones (despite a Gaelic court culture), the sons of

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49 Sellar, 'MacDougall Pedigrees in MS 1467' (1986), 18 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 93); Sellar 'Hebridean Sea Kings' (2000), 187-218, 199 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 5, 117).

50 See further Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 22-4.

51 Woolf, 'A Dead Man at Ballyshannon' (2007) 77-85, 79. Note now McDonald (2019), chs 5-10.

52 See Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 1.

53 Sellar, 'Hebridean Sea Kings' (2000), 188 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 105). See also the biographies of these MacDougall chiefs contributed to the *ODNB* by Sellar.

54 Sellar, 'Hebridean Sea Kings', (2000) 201-18 (quotation at 203); Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 119-36 (quotation at 121).

55 Sellar, 'MacDougall Pedigrees' (1986), 13-15 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 101-3). On the later medieval Irish galloglass, see Nicholls, 'Scottish Mercenary Kindreds' (2007), 86-105, especially at 102-3 for the MacDougalls; also Marsden (2003), section II, '*Clann Dubhgaill* – The MacDowells'.

56 Sellar, 'Ancestry of the MacLeods Reconsidered' (2000), 233 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 137).

57 Sellar, 'History of the Clan' (1999), 5 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 161).

Earl Harald Maddadsson (d. 1206) were named David, John and Henry, departing from the traditional Scandinavian names previously used by the jarls of Orkney and perhaps illustrating Harald's growing adherence to the kingdom of the Scots.[58] The *Clann Somhairle*, however, featured both Scandinavian and Gaelic names, with the latter showing some Scandinavian affinities (e.g. Dubhgall, 'dark stranger/foreigner', has Norse associations in the Western Isles), while Scandinavian names came to assume Gaelic forms (e.g. Ragnall becomes Raonuil, then Ranald in Scots). In the MacLeod lines, the Manx royal names do not appear; instead the Scandinavian names Thormod and Thorkell (Scotticised as Torquil) were preferred by the Dunvegan and Lewis branches respectively. The Clan MacNicol also used distinctive forenames including one Gaelic (Mael-Conghail) and one Scandinavian (Arnkell/Arnketil, Gaelicised as Armchuil).[59]

Where the stock of forenames was limited, by-names and nicknames became important identifiers of particular individuals, the transmission of which was no doubt by way of the kindred's oral tradition. Here too are found mixed Gaelic and Norse elements. A striking example is the MacLeod ancestor Olvir *Snoice* whose nickname was most likely Scandinavian but in a Gaelicised form and which indicated that its possessor suffered from some kind of nasal deformity.[60] Another interesting example is Dugald 'Screech', younger brother of Duncan (MacDougall) of Argyll and so a grandson of Somerled; his nickname probably derived from Old Norse *skrækja* in contrast to his Gaelic given name.[61] It presumably denoted Dugald's high-pitched voice or, perhaps, war-cry.

Families of Cowal and Knapdale

Not amongst the descendants of Somerled, but claiming Gaelic and ultimately Irish descent, were the families of Cowal and Knapdale studied in an article first published by Sellar in 1973, with a follow-up appearing in 2017.[62] The families were the MacSweens, the Lamonts, the MacLachlans and the MacGilchrists, with short notes also on the Macneils of Barra, the MacNeills of Taynish and Gigha, the MacEwens of Otter, the MacSorleys of Monydrain and the Argyllshire MacLeays (otherwise MacDunsleve or Livingstone). All claimed a prestigious Gaelic descent from the legendary fifth-century Irish king Niall of the Nine Hostages through the Cinél Éoghain (later 'O'Neill') kings of Ailech in the north of Ireland. The migration from Ireland occurred in the eleventh century when Ánrothán the younger son of a historically vouched king of Ailech, Aodh Athlamhan, sailed to Scotland with his troops, seized territory in Cowal and Knapdale and married an unspecified daughter of a king of Scots. Not all of these pedigrees appeared in MS 1467, however: those that did were the MacEwens of Otter, the Lamonts, the MacLachlans (whose pedigree referred specifically to Niall of the Nine Hostages) and the MacSorleys of Monydrain.

There is no historical evidence for Ánrothán or another, later, key figure in the subsequent descent, named in the pedigrees as Dunsleve (Gaelic *Donn Sleibhe*).[63] Sellar thought nonetheless that, given the consistency of the pedigrees, the latter at least must have flourished in the second half of the twelfth century. His name was certainly used in the families concerned in the thirteenth century. Sellar therefore argued that the pedigrees of the families claiming this descent were essentially to be believed and, in the later article, that the contiguity and disposition of their estates and castles (such as Castle Sween, Old Castle Lachlan, Skipness, Toward and Fincharn) in the thirteenth century was "the result of carefully considered family planning and agreement a generation or two before", i.e. in the time of Dunsleve or just after. Like the MacDougalls, the MacSweens chose the wrong side in the Wars of Independence and migration back to Ireland produced "the numerous tribes of MacSweeney Galloglass" that figure largely in the Irish annals from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries.[64] But the other families continued to flourish in their region after 1300; hence, indeed, their appearance in MS 1467.

Sellar also took the opportunity in 2017 to reply briefly to criticism of the 1973 article by Donald McWhannell, who was unpersuaded by the argument for the historicity of Ánrothán and the O'Neill link. Instead McWhannell, basing his argument primarily on the difference in naming practices between the known descendants of the Uí Néill and those of Dunsleve, suggested that the latter may have been a Gall-Ghàidheil who had "acquired his distinctive name through an ancestral marriage between a high status Scandinavian male and a noble woman from Argyll or Ulster."[65] Sellar's response was to the effect that "the fine-tuning that has clearly gone into the

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58 See Crawford (2013), 259.

59 Sellar, 'The Significance of Names: Scandinavian Personal Names' (2005), 199-208 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 8).

60 Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 154-5.

61 Ibid., 120.

62 Sellar, 'Family Origins in Cowal and Knapdale' (1971), 21-37 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 9); Sellar 'Clans, Castles and DNA' (2017), , 34-43 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 10).

63 Giving rise to the modern Irish surname Donleavy.

64 Sellar, 'Family Origins in Cowal and Knapdale' (1971), 21 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 210). See further Nicholls 'Scottish Mercenary Kindreds' (2007), 91-7; also Simms, 'Images of the Galloglass' (2007), 106-23; Marsden (2003), section II, '*Clann Suibhne* – The MacSweeneys'.

65 McWhannell, 'Ua Néill Pedigrees' (2014), 3-14, 13; also McWhannell, 'Family of Donnsléibhe' (2014), 3-11 (where nomenclature and naming practices are considered, arguing that there is "a set of distinctly MacShuibhne/Mhic Dhuinnshléibhe given names such as Suibhne, Maol Mhuire, Murchadh, Donnsléibhe and Eoin which were not generally used by the Uí Néill" (ibid., 8)). McWhannell also discusses the

division of the territory of the Dunsleve kindred also suggests existence as a kindred before his time", while the extent of the families' lands in Cowal and Knapdale pointed to their being amongst the "first rank of Gaelic aristocracy" in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[66] This was at the least not inconsistent with the stories of Ánrothán and Dunsleve.

The Campbells

Sellar's research was not limited to the Gaelic-Norse families of Argyll and the Western Isles. As we have already noted, the article on pedigree-making and pedigree-faking took him as far as Inverness-shire and Easter Ross. Perhaps stimulated initially by the Clan Campbell's rise to domination of Argyll and beyond in the later middle ages as well as the appearance of a pedigree in MS 1467, Sellar also became fascinated by the mix in the Lennox area around Loch Lomond. It was there, he argued in a study first published in 1971, that the British (rather than Gaelic or Norman) origins of the Campbells were to be found. The territory of the medieval earldom of Lennox had once been part of the British kingdom of Strathclyde and the Campbell claim to British (as distinct from Gaelic or even Norman) descent was accordingly to be taken seriously. Other claims were prime examples of pedigree enhancement or fakery. Of particular significance to the argument for a British origin was the extent to which the record evidence for the Campbells before 1300 disclosed Lennox connections and the Campbell fondness for the forename Arthur, otherwise uncommon in medieval Scotland and harking back to the legendary king of the Britons in the fifth and early sixth centuries. The Campbell study also raised the still unanswered question of how to understand the early medieval transition, north of the Clyde, from Briton to Gael, from the kingdom of Strathclyde to the earldom of Lennox in the kingdom of the Scots. It further canvassed the possibility that, even before 1300, the Campbells were already significant landowners, albeit that their subsequent service to Robert Bruce would become the foundation of their greatness in the later medieval (and indeed early modern) kingdom of the Scots.[67] Finally, the article was the place where Sellar first published (in typically tentative style) another of his important generalisations: "I doubt if it can be shown that the eponym of any Highland family is a fictitious character."[68]

Others have since built upon the insights and questions set up by Sellar's work on the Campbells. Steve Boardman highlights the Campbells' earliest recorded appearances being, not in Lennox, but (as Sellar had noted) in connection with Clackmannanshire and Stirling (also an area "rich in Arthurian/British associations"[69]). Amongst several other points, Boardman argues for the thirteenth-century association of the Campbells with the lordship of the Stewarts, who could genuinely claim 'British' ancestry as a result of their origins in Brittany, and also draw the Campbells into the Stewarts' rapidly expanding landed interests both around the Firth of Clyde and in the earldom of Menteith. Boardman further challenges the view that the Campbells were always centred on their later medieval caput of Loch Awe and traces in detail the ever-rising fortunes of the family through to 1513. Ronald Black notes that MS 1467 gives the Campbells a "grudging precedence" amongst the Argyll and Lennox kindreds whose pedigrees form a middle section in the manuscript, with that precedence being perhaps due, not so much to their historical position in the region, as to the fact that by 1467 its then head of kin, Colin Campbell, had been made earl of Argyll and held high offices in royal government.[70] In a subsequent work Black argues that the Campbells "spring from all three of the racial and linguistic groups which dominated central Scotland in the thirteenth century". Citing Boardman's work on the earliest recorded appearances of the Campbells being in the Stirling area, Black suggests that the family was early absorbed into Anglo-Norman life, with marriages across the Gaelic-Scots divide, thereby earning themselves a contemptuous Gaelic nickname (*Caimbeul*, 'twisted mouth') which became their surname in Scots. But their Gaelic patronymic was *Mac Cailein Mòr* (from Colin Mor at the end of the thirteenth century) or, more usually, *Ó Duibhne* ('the Grandson of Duibhne') or the plural *Ua Duibhne*.[71]

Sellar himself followed the 1971 study with another published in 1974, in part a vindication of a later genealogical claim made by the Campbells.[72] The paper examined the evidence about the MacArthurs of Darleith in Bonhill parish, Dumbartonshire. In the Campbells' traditional history, written down in the later seventeenth century with at least the blessing of the then earl of Argyll, they were said to share a common ancestor with the MacArthurs in Paul *an Sparáin* (Paul of the sporran or purse) via respectively a son and a daughter. Sixteenth-century records suggested that the Christian name Arthur was favoured by the Darleith

origins of the MacDhuinnshléibhe (Livingstone) family who are still the hereditary keepers of Bachall Mór of St Moluag in Lismore: see 'Ua Néill', 9-10. On that family, see further Livingstone (2004?).

66 Sellar, 'Clans, Castles and DNA' (2017), 40-1 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 238).

67 Sellar, 'Earliest Campbells' (1973), 109-25 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 11).

68 Sellar, 'Earliest Campbells' (1973), 112 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 284). See also Sellar, 'Clans, Castles and DNA' (2017), 40 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 237): "It is very rare for the eponym of a Gaelic family not to be a real person."

69 Boardman (2006), ch. 1, at 13.

70 Black, '1467 MS: The Campbells' (2012), 3–10, 3.

71 Black (2017), vol. I, ch. 1 (quotation at 3). Earlier, Black had criticised one specific argument by Sellar on a reading of MS 1467: see his '1467 MS: The Campbells' (2012), 6-7, and Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 257 n. 57.

72 Sellar, 'Lairds of Ardincaple' (1974), 46-54; Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 12.

family, whence the patronymic surname MacArthur; but earlier material suggested that they were also dubbed 'Ardincaple of Darleith', Ardincaple being another Lennox estate, situated on the east side of the Gare Loch in the parish of Rhu between the modern towns Rhu and Helensburgh. The family of Ardincaple was of considerable significance in the Lennox from the thirteenth century on, holding in chief of the earls of Lennox, but at some point in the fifteenth century the lands of Ardincaple were taken over by means unknown by a family whose patronymic was MacAulay and who were quite unrelated to the MacArthurs. These MacAulays claimed to be a junior branch of the MacGregor stock, a claim Sellar found "not improbable" given that there were MacGregors of Ardinconall in Dumbartonshire, close by Ardincaple.[73] The MacArthurs meantime survived at Darleith until 1670, and Sellar suggested that the Campbells' claim of kinship with them may have had a genuine basis, testified in part by both families' use of 'Arthur' as a Christian name from the thirteenth century on. But further, "It is difficult to conceive of any reason other than ancient and genuine tradition to explain why a seventeenth-century earl of Argyll should have claimed as kin the obscure and impoverished Lennox family of Darleith."[74] In this article, Sellar incidentally also referred to the Galbraiths (the foreign Britons, *Mac a Bhreatnaich*), another Lennox family of probable British origins who shared the MacArthurs' liking for the Christian name Arthur.[75]

Another Campbell connection led to a study of the genealogy and the heraldry of the family of Spens of Lathallan in Angus.[76] Heraldry here provided crucial evidence of genealogy. The Spens arms included a Campbell gyronny quartered, pointing to the marriage of a Spens with a Campbell heiress which could then be corroborated with documentary evidence. As the Spens example well demonstrated, heraldry is also a way of linking names: "one of the most cherished rules of Scottish heraldry [*is*] that all those of the same surname, related or not, should have arms which are recognisably linked."[77] The article also highlighted a figure of particular interest to Sellar, Sir John Spens of Glendouglas (in Lennox) and Bohapple (Menteith), burgess, provost and sheriff of Perth, parliamentary auditor, comptroller and, finally, in the 1430s, steward of the household of the duke of Rothesay (the future James II). Spens had earlier served the Albany Stewarts, Walter Stewart earl of Athol and King James I. In 1428, acting as bailie of the crown lands of Glendochart, Spens presided over an inquest of fifteen which found that Finlay Dewar was the keeper of the *coigreach* of St Fillan, i.e. the relic containing the saint's supposed pastoral staff, by virtue of which any inhabitant of Glendochart who paid Finlay four pence, or a pair of shoes, and provided him with one night's hospitality, could require him to pursue their stolen goods or cattle anywhere in Scotland.[78] After his death, Sir John's inheritance became the subject of protracted litigation in the 1460s and 1470s, the evidence and implications of which Sellar traced with a lawyer's expertise.

Developments: Somerled, Gofraidh mac Fergusa and DNA

We must now consider the developments in relevant scholarship that have occurred since each of the articles just discussed first appeared. As already noted, Sellar's conclusions on the reliability of the MS 1467 and other late medieval pedigrees for the origins and ancestry of Somerled were challenged in 2005, in an article by Alex Woolf.[79] The details of his critique can be traced in the editorial notes to chapter 3 of the *Pedigrees* collection. In general, Woolf argued that the Somerled pedigrees were an exercise in fabrication begun probably late in the thirteenth century as the *Clann Somhairle* shifted away from its previous claim to kingship of Man and the Isles (based on their eponym's marriage with a daughter of that royal house and descent in the female line from Godfrey Crovan, king of Man and the Isles 1079-1095), and instead to emphasise its primacy in Gaelic Argyll and the Western Isles. It may also be, Woolf suggested, "evidence that the [fourteenth-century] Lords of the Isles wished to be seen to have been involved in 'Project Scotland' from its inception."[80] This is an important comment to which we will return later in this article.

The crux of Woolf's attack was the historicity of Gofraidh mac Fergusa which had been previously doubted (as already noted) by Benjamin T. Hudson.[81] The evidence for Godfrey's activity was dated to 836 and 853 in the late seventeenth-century Irish collection, *Annals of the Four Masters*, dates consistent with the pedigrees' placing of him in the eighth generation above Somerled. Woolf demonstrated, however, that these dates were the result of a false synchronicity created by the Four Masters or their sources rather than anything to be found

73 Sellar, 'Lairds of Ardincaple' (1974), 52 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 273).

74 Sellar, 'Lairds of Ardincaple' (1974), 47 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 264).

75 Sellar, 'Lairds of Ardincaple' (1974), 46 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 264). See also 'Earliest Campbells', 119 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 252). Note too the Galloway name MacBratney (*Mac Breatnaigh*, son of the Briton), presumably derived from the early medieval proximity of Galloway and Strathclyde/Cumbria.

76 Sellar, 'Spens of Lathallan' (2005) 10-19 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, ch. 13).

77 Sellar, 'Spens of Lathallan', 10 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 274).

78 Sellar, David, *Continuity*, 24. See further Gillies 'Toschederach' (1996), 128-42; Márkus, 'Dewars' (2009), 95-144, 98-103; Houston (2014) ch 3.

79 Woolf, 'Origins and Ancestry of Somerled' (2005), 199-213.

80 Woolf, 'Origins and Ancestry of Somerled', 213.

81 See Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 3-4.

in the relevant sources themselves. Sellar had acknowledged in his original article that the authenticity of the Godfrey annals might not be irrefutable and that his overall case was not conclusive unless they were accepted.[82] Woolf made clear that Sellar's caution was in this regard well justified.

We must now also take note of the identification of the so-called 'Somerled Y-chromosome' by the late Bryan Sykes (1947-2020), Professor of Genetics at the University of Oxford 1997 to 2016. The Y chromosome is "that piece of DNA which every father gives to his son" and is "the only piece that men possess and women do not".[83] In 2003, Sykes published the findings of his analysis of the DNA of the MacDonalds, MacDougalls and MacAlisters, i.e. three major lines descending ultimately from Somerled.[84] The conclusion was that a significant number of men of each name, and in particular the current clan chiefs, shared the same Y chromosome: "a clear and consistent Y-chromosome signal from the common ancestor himself",[85] i.e. from Somerled. Further, however, the particular category of Y-chromosome to which this one belonged was "in the wrong class to have come from the long line of Irish kings that is claimed for [Somerled] in the traditional genealogy." The chromosome is also rarely found in Scotland outside the lines of Somerled's sons. "But the one place it is not rare is Norway. … This is a classic Norse Y-chromosome. On this evidence Somerled, the Celtic hero, was directly descended from a Viking."[86]

Sellar was impressed by the DNA evidence thus revealed and, taken in combination with Woolf's article, it does seem now that, as he privately accepted, the argument with which he first made his name has been overturned. Certainly he made no attempt to reinstate his original position or meet Woolf's critique. In a paper published in 2017 he noted that "At a conference of the Scottish Medievalists held in January 2002 [of which Sellar was chairman at the relevant time] Bryan Sykes set the cat among the pigeons by declaring that his researches showed that it appeared that the Y-chromosome of the MacDonalds was distinctively Scandinavian while [Sellar added] the Y-chromosome of the MacLeods was distinctively Celtic."[87] The latter observation was, of course, a tacit recognition that this DNA evidence showed that if the MacLeod tradition glorying in a high Scandinavian ancestry had any truth, it had to have originated in the female line, as Sellar had proposed in his 2000 article on the subject. No published study of MacLeod DNA by Sykes has been traced, but a 2004 study of MacLeod DNA by Julia Abernethy concluded that "there is good evidence for the Clan predominantly sharing the same common ancestor around 1000 years ago". But "it is difficult to identify the geographical origin of this male progenitor by simply looking at the frequencies of the genetic type in other populations. However, the statistical similarity between the MacLeod sample and Shetland, Oban and the Isle of Man is strong evidence for the Clan as a whole having its origins in Scotland or the Isle of Man."[88] Given the Shetland and Isle of Man connections, Scandinavian links have thus not been altogether disproved for the MacLeods.

The DNA evidence has also raised questions in relation to other conclusions drawn by Sellar in his preceding work. He himself brought up the question of what it might show in relation to the families of Cowal and Knapdale whom he maintained to be of Gaelic-Irish descent, perhaps ultimately from the fifth-century Niall of the Nine Hostages. A survey of Macneil of Barra descendants world-wide published in 2015 had however shown that their Y-chromosome was not Celtic but Norse.[89] The Macneils had been among the families discussed in Sellar's original paper; did the DNA finding impact on others of these as well? Ronald Black has, however, independently concluded that the Macneils' genealogy lurks in MS 1467 under the heading 'Mac Gabharáin Earca', previously read as MacLennan, and that the clan was unrelated to other MacNeills in Argyll or to any of the Cowal/Knapdale families studied by Sellar.[90] While DNA data is certainly being gathered by many of the relevant clan associations and other organisations, it has yet to produce definitive results in most cases.[91] What is certainly known is that, while what was thought to be the Y-chromosome of Niall of the Nine Hostages is today widespread not only in the north of Ireland and Scotland but also wherever the Irish diaspora has extended itself, nonetheless that Y-chromosome is not unlikely to have originated some 2,000 years before Niall's time. This would mean that probably only a minority of men today are descended from him.[92] However, it is

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82 Sellar, 'Origins', 133-7; Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 71-7 ("If the Four Masters' annals are accepted, the case is virtually conclusive": 'Origins', 137 n.2; *Pedigrees*, 77 n.95).

83 Sykes (2003; 2004),15, 19.

84 The MacAlisters were descended from either Alexander brother of Angus Mor son of Donald son of Ranald son of Somerled, or (the view Sellar preferred) from Alexander Og son of Angus Mor.

85 Sykes (2003, 2004), 218-24 (quotation at 223).

86 Ibid., 224-5.

87 Sellar, 'Clans, Castles and DNA', 41 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 238).

88 This study is accessible at http://macleodgenealogy.com/Research/Genetics%20Clan%20MacLeod.html.

89 The MacNeil Surname Y-DNA Project is available at https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/mac-neil/about; findings are reported in *The Herald*, 16 January 2015, accessible at https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13197315.macneil-clan-shocked-dna-checks-force-rewrite-history/.

90 Black, '1467 MS: The MacNeils' (Feb. 2018), 3–25. See also McWhannell, 'Family of Donnsléibhe' (2014), 10-11.

91 George Young, former coordinator of DNA research for the Clan Lamont, informs me (email dated 23/6/2022) that, while the Clan's DNA project remains incomplete, "the general results of our members lead us to believe our Lamont ancestry of descent from the O'Neils of Ireland."

92 See Moore and others, 'A Y-Chromosome' (2006) 334–8; Howard and McLaughlin (2011), 34; Jaski (2013) 3-17, 18–31; and Swift (2013).

understood that research has been conducted on the Nicolsons' DNA which so far points to an Irish rather than a Norse origin for the Clan MacNicol.[93]

A man's cultural sense of himself is, of course, not defined by his Y-chromosome.[94] As the example of Niall of the Nine Hostages given above suggests, that chromosome may have originated many millennia ago. The introduction of a Y-chromosome into a bloodline may also be the result of what is sometimes politely called a 'non-paternity event' such as at some point a mother's pregnancy having resulted from her undiscovered extra-marital liaison, or the adoption of a child born other than to the adoptive parents. Putting it more crudely, the boy with a Norse Y-chromosome might be brought up within an entirely Gaelic household milieu and then himself raise sons (and daughters) in the same fashion. We do not know when Somerled's Y-chromosome entered his ancestral line in terms of time and it certainly did not entail his personal cultural affinities in the first half of the twelfth century being necessarily any more Norse than Gaelic. The DNA evidence speaks only to biological and genetic descent and not to other factors that may have been equally (if not more) significant in the formation of an individual. As Sellar concluded in his only extended comment on the subject: "There may still be many surprises in store."[95]

MS 1467

Sellar often lamented the lack of a critical edition of MS 1467; until such was available, conclusions based upon its evidence must be regarded as provisional. While there is still no scholarly edition in print, there is the 1467 Manuscript website created in 2009 and maintained by Ronnie and Máire Black.[96] The site's aim is to present images of the genealogies in the MS so that the reader can see them, know exactly what is in them, and compare them with the editors' transcript. The site also includes copies of several scholarly articles on specific genealogies in the MS written by Ronnie Black and first published in the journal *West Highland Notes & Queries* between 2012 and 2020. Each of these contains a line-by-line discussion of the 1467 text using pen-and-ink sketches based on spectrally-imaged colour photographs which are superior to those in the website. The articles consider a number of the pedigrees discussed by Sellar, with Black indicating his assent or difference from the former's views on them, as the case may be. As with the work of Woolf and others, the details of these comments are noticed in the editorial footnotes to the Sellar collection. However, Black's series does not yet cover all the pedigrees in MS 1467.

Despite the lack of a critical edition, some general points have been made about MS 1467 which provide significant possible contexts for its compilation. The writer of the MS identifies himself as Dubhghall Albanach mac mhic Cathail, who is thought likely to have been in the service of John, Lord of the Isles 1449-1493, and to have produced his compilation relying on an earlier one produced around 1400.[97] Dubhghall may also have been a MacMhuirich (MacVurich), a member of a hereditary caste of poets and genealogists to the Lord of the Isles who moved into the service of the Clanranalds after the final forfeiture of the Lordship in 1493; indeed, Dubhghall may have already been in the service of the clan by the mid-fifteenth century. MS 1467 gives the pedigree of 'Clann Raghnaill', i.e. Clanranald, as a cadet branch of Clan Donald. The eponymous Raghnall was the son of John Lord of the Isles and Amy MacRuairi and inherited from his mother the lands of the MacRuairis. All this raises to a likelihood Sellar's thought in 1986 that the 'Clann Raghnaill' section of MS 1467 might be a later addition to the other MacDonald material indicating a Clanranald connection in the compiler.[98]

John Bannerman thought that the genealogies in MS 1467 might be divided into four groups: one those of the chiefs of clans who recognised the authority of the Lord of the Isles and inhabited territories directly controlled by him. Other groups in such territories included the MacDougalls, while a third group inhabited areas in Perthshire and yet another was located in Wester Ross. This last group was consistent with Donald Lord of the Isles 1387-c.1423 laying claim to the earldom of Ross through his wife Mariota Leslie.[99]

This interpretation has since been refined by others. In particular, Martin MacGregor casts doubt on the claim that the Lordship's influence extended to Perthshire and draws attention to the compiler's "denigratory treatment of the main MacDougall lineage".[100] MacGregor shows that the compiler of around 1400 also drew

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93 The research, to which Ronnie Black kindly alerted me, is being conducted by Fiona M. Lundy. It is worth noting that the present clan chief has not taken part in the research.

94 See Jaski (2013), 17 ("… parental ancestry is not culture. It excludes many aspects of what makes an individual. … If genetic studies teach us anything, it is that we are all, paternally or maternally, somehow related to each other."). See too Durie (2017), 179 ("humans are, in a genetic sense, all virtually the same").

95 Sellar, 'Clans, Castles and DNA', 42 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 239).

96 https://1467manuscript.co.uk/index.html.

97 See Ó Baoill (1988), 122-139; also MacGregor (2000), 131-46, 135-6; Thomson (1968), 57-78, 71-4.

98 Sellar, 'MacDonald and MacRuari Pedigrees', 11 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 92).

99 See Bannerman, 'Lordship of the Isles', in Steer and Bannerman (1977), 205 (also in Bannerman (2016), 337-8).

100 MacGregor, 'Genealogies of the Clans' (2000), 145

on an earlier source (possibly from as far back as 1350) containing MacDonald, MacRuairi and MacDougall pedigrees, to which the compiler also added the genealogies of five contemporary MacDougall galloglass lineages. This, MacGregor suggests, might have been in part a census of the military resources that might be available to the Lord of the Isles (ahead of the battle of Harlaw in 1411) in enforcing his wife's claim to the earldom of Ross. The 1400 manuscript was then edited by a MacLachlan genealogist between 1440 and 1448 before it became the basis for the work of Dubhghall Albanach in 1467.[101]

Ronald Black's studies in *West Highland Notes & Queries* are more detailed analyses of specific pedigrees than of MS 1467 as a whole, but it is clear that he accepts the attribution to Dubhghall Albanach, and that Dubhghall's work was based on another manuscript of around 1400. Indeed, "It seems that some great compilation of genealogies was made in Scotland about 1400, perhaps ordered by Donald, Lord of the Isles, that it became canonical, and that it was seized upon by Irish antiquarians";[102] hence the inclusion of much of its content in the later Irish genealogies. Black also endorses the view that the claim of the Lord of the Isles to the earldom of Ross was an important factor underpinning both the 1400 and the 1467 manuscripts:

> "During this entire period, 1400–67, the thoughts and energies of successive Lords of the Isles and their followers were focused on the immensely valuable earldom of Ross: fighting for it, especially in the campaign that culminated in the horrific battle of Harlaw in 1411; acquiring it, which was achieved c.1437; and defending it by every possible means, which was still going on in 1467, but which led to losing it in 1476, and forfeiting the Lordship of the Isles as well in 1493."[103]

Black, however, also draws attention to the significance of what is not in MS 1467, in particular a tendency to obscure or edit out where possible Norse names in the pedigrees[104] and the absence of any pedigree for the MacLeods. The latter he links to the manuscript's inclusion of a Nicolson pedigree:

> "None of this is reflected in our pedigree, whose purpose is presumably to bolster the claim of the surviving Nicolson chiefly line to their inheritance. By the time of our text the earldom of Ross was subject to rival claims by the families of Sir Walter Leslie (d. 1382) and Donald of the Isles (d. 1423), both of whom had married heiresses to the title. Seemingly the MacLeods were favoured by the Leslie/Stewart interest, the Nicolsons by the Lords of the Isles; … In other pedigrees we have noticed a tendency for Norse names to be edited out. The situation here is entirely different. Lewis, Harris, Skye, Raasay and the seaboard of Wester Ross had perhaps never been Gaelic-speaking territories. They had belonged to the kings of Man and the Isles, and were as Norse as Orkney and Shetland. Now, in the early fifteenth century (when we may assume our text was compiled), they appear to have been in the lordship of Ross, which was controlled by earls of Ross and the Stewart kings. The transfer of regional power from the Nicolsons to the MacLeods was still a living memory, and was no doubt hotly disputed. Now, too, the earldom and lordship of Ross were being claimed by Donald, Lord of the Isles. The MacLeods had been recognised as legitimate lords of Lewis, Skye, Glenelg and Assynt by the earls of Ross and the kings of Scotland; it was natural, therefore, that the Lords of the Isles should support the claim of the MacLeods' still-powerful rivals the Nicolsons. If it is true that shortly before 1343 the legitimate Nicolson line ended in an heiress and her immediate family were drowned, the first few names in our pedigree must represent an alternative line of claimants, while the last few are designed to showcase their regal Norse credentials – certainly the best card that a descendant of Somerled could play in such a region."[105]

Despite all this, there seems to have been little discussion of the fact that the first three pedigrees in MS 1467 are those of the kings of Scots down to David I (1124-1153), of Lulach (d.1058), Macbeth's stepson and short-term successor as king of Scots, and finally a much shorter one of Macbeth himself, ruler of Moray and then king of Scots from 1040-1057. John Bannerman thought that these pedigrees denoted recognition by the Lords of the Isles of their identity as Scots, which tallies with Alex Woolf's notion of fourteenth-century MacDonald commitment to what he terms "Project Scotland".[106] But whatever the position before 1400, a questioning note may be raised about the position in 1467. Just five years before, John Lord of the Isles had put his name, alongside that of the already forfeited and exiled James earl of Douglas, to the Westminster-Ardtornish 'treaty' with Edward IV of England under which, if Scotland were conquered and became subject to the English crown, John and James would divide the territories north of Forth equally between them, while the latter would hold all the territories between the Forth and the English border, each giving homage and fealty heritably to Edward

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101 Ibid., *passim*.

102 Black, '1467 MS: The MacMillans' (Aug. 2015), 4–14, 13.

103 Black, '1467 MS: The MacKenzies' (Nov. 2018), 10–18, 10.

104 See Black, 'The MacLerans' (Jan. 2012) 3–17, 12, 13, 14; '1467 MS: The MacMillans', 10; '1467 MS: The MacKenzies', 15.

105 Black, '1467 MS: The Nicolsons' (July 2018), 3–18, 4, 16.

106 Bannerman, 'Lordship of the Isles', in Steer and Bannerman (1977), 214-15 (also in Bannerman (2016), 303); and see above, text accompanying n. 80.

and his successors.[107] Neither the David nor the Lulach pedigrees were extended down to 1467, and as Bannerman himself observed, the Bruce and Stewart kings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were descended from David only in female lines, which gave them no claim under the Gaelic kin-based system of succession.[108] Indeed, David himself was king by virtue of descent from his great-grandmother Bethóc. But, as Dauvit Broun has pointed out, MS 1467 obscures this by converting her into a male through reading the *meic ingen* ('of the son of the daughter') of earlier pedigrees as *meic Fingen* ('son of Fingen'[109]), which would sound the same in oral transmission. The Irish genealogists may not have had access to Bruce and in particular Stewart pedigrees in 1467, the earliest known example being in O'Clery's seventeenth-century genealogies.

The David and Lulach pedigrees did however emphasise their respective descents from the Cenél nGabráin and the Cenel Loairn, the two leading kindreds in the early kingdom of Dalriada. By contrast, the much shorter Macbeth pedigree disclosed no such link. As Sellar pointed out in his piece on pedigree making and faking without, however, referring to the MS 1467 pedigree, a much longer one for Macbeth was already in existence in Ireland by about 1130, "[tracing] his descent back patrilineally to two Dark Age kings of Dalriada of the tribe of Loarn, Ainfcellach (d 719), and his father Ferchar Fota (d. 697)."[110] Sellar declined to judge the genealogical soundness of this pedigree but the Lulach pedigree in MS 1467 also refers to Ainfcellach and Ferchar Fota (*Aircheallaigh mhic Fercair Fada*), so the manuscript compiler may either have detached it from Macbeth's, whether or not deliberately, or added it as it stood at a much earlier stage in previous manuscripts. For some at least Macbeth had usurped his step-son's better claim to the kingship,[111] while Lulach was of course overthrown by King Malcolm III, progenitor of the line from which David sprang. So the conjunction of the three pedigrees as they stand in MS 1467 raises many more questions than it answers. Dauvit Broun suggests that, while the David I pedigree "acts as a stem which most of the other genealogies [in MS 1467] join as branches",[112] a pedigree for the new royal kindred of Lulach had been constructed (probably by Irish genealogists) "by splicing together a couple of pedigrees in the tract on the four chief kindreds of Dál Riata datable to about 730 or 733", in order to accommodate Lulach's line within the genealogy of the kings of Scots.[113] The topic of how the detail of these royal pedigrees related to what followed them in MS 1467 would clearly repay further research.[114]

Conclusions

This article has sought to show how David Sellar's engagement with issues of pedigree and power in medieval Highland and Island Scotland bore rich fruit, not only in terms of its own results, but also in stimulating others to take up the challenging source materials and make them go a little further. He was always modest about his own achievements and eager to help others in their forays into a field that he had made his own from an early stage. The collection demonstrates his capacity for bringing into play and persuasively tying together many different strands of evidence, be they made up of documents, heraldry, material culture or oral tradition. His work transformed his field and many of the pieces gathered in the published collection remain foundational for their subjects and the discipline as a whole. They are all the more remarkable for having been mostly composed while he taught at the Law Faculty in Edinburgh University and also worked intensively on Scottish legal history.[115] He had ambitions to spend his retirement drawing together his findings in medieval genealogy and legal history, possibly as monographs; but he was not spared to accomplish that. The collections now published must stand in the stead of those books and it is hoped that they will confirm just how noteworthy and valuable David Sellar's scholarship was and remains.

Acknowledgements

This article owes more than can be well said to my friends Ronald Black, Dauvit Broun, Martin Macgregor, Alex Maxwell Findlater and Alex Woolf. Of course, I alone am responsible for any errors of fact and judgment remaining within the article despite their kind support.

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107 *ALI*, no. 75. The 'treaty' is in point of fact an indenture between the parties.

108 Bannerman, 'Lordship of the Isles', in Steer and Bannerman (1977), 214 (also in Bannerman (2016), 302). The royal pedigree reported in *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower* (1993-8) [*Chron Bower*], vol. V, 294-295, gives the descent down to Alexander III but makes no mention of Macbeth or Lulach. It does note that David's father Malcolm III (Canmore) was the son of Duncan son of Bethoc daughter of Malcolm II. See further the comments in Sellar, *Continuity*, 94-6 (discussing the story in *Wyntoun's Orygynale Cronykil* (1871), vol. II, 120, that Malcolm III was the offspring of his father's liaison or union with the miller of Forteviot's daughter).

109 Broun, 'The Genealogy of the King of Scots' (2019), 209-60, 211-12.

110 Sellar, 'Highland Family Origins', 104 (Sellar, *Pedigrees*, 41-2).

111 See further e.g. Woolf, *From Pictland to Alba* (2007) 255-66, 321; Ross (2011) 111-34.

112 Broun, 'Genealogy of the King of Scots' (2019), 215.

113 Ibid., 231. For the tract (*Cethri prímchenéla Dáil Riata*) see further Broun (2015), 63–72. The possibility that the Lulach pedigree splices two others was first raised by Chadwick (1949), 96 n. 1.

114 See also Broun, 'Genealogical 'Tractates'', unpublished. I am indebted to the author for kindly providing me with a copy of this paper (originally intended to appear in *Northern Scotland*, 26 (2006)).

115 The fruits of that research may be surveyed in Sellar, *Continuity* (above, n. 36).

Abbreviations

ALI *Acts of the Lords of the Isles*, eds. Munro, Jean and R.W. (SHS, 1986).

ES *Early Sources of Scottish History 500-1286*, ed. Anderson, A.O., 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1922; repr. Stamford, 1990).

ODNB MacLean, Iain Crichton Smith & Donald E. Meek, 'MacLean, Sorley [Somhairle MacGill-Eain], *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB (Oxford, 2004-present).

PSAS *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*.

SLT Scots Law Times.

SHS Scottish History Society.

TGSI *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*.

WHNQ *West Highland Notes and Queries.*

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