CHAPTER 1

Patrons: Saints and Sovereignty in Medieval Scotland

Their patron so did not them learn,
Saint Andrew with his shored cross;
But sure St Trinnan of Quhytehorn,
Or Doffin their demigod of Ross.1

It was with these lines that an anonymous English poet censured the Scots for their calamitous decision to invade England in 1513. He blamed the belligerent nobility for the war, condemning them for failing to follow the example set by the Scottish patron saints, Andrew, Ninian and Duthac. Nearly five centuries later, two newly founded Scottish breweries based in Orkney and Glasgow named their first beers St Magnus Ale and St Mungo Lager.2 By choosing to name their products after these saints, who are familiar symbols of Orcadian and Glaswegian identity, these new enterprises were deliberately emphasising the local pedigree of their product. Both the poet writing in 153 and the twenty-first century brewers recognised that saints were potent and recognisable symbols of communities. While Magnus and Mungo (whose official name was Kentigern) have a continued symbolic resonance for some groups in modern day Scotland, in the middle ages this patronal role took on more varied forms. Saints were called upon to protect these communities in times of crisis and to unite disparate racial and linguistic groups. The patronage of particular saints was also used to justify and explain political sovereignty, local customs and legal rights. As with all aspects of the cult of the saints, the choice of the patron of a community, whether it be a town or an entire kingdom, evolved over time, subject to changing social and political conditions.3 In Scotland, the later middle ages saw a number of significant developments in this sphere.

2 The Highland Brewing company based in Swannay on the Orkney mainland was founded in 2005, while the West Brewery located on Glasgow Green was founded in 2006.
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The modern-day association between Scotland and St Andrew, strikingly depicted in the design of the Saltire flag, originated in the middle ages. Relics of the apostle, consisting of three fingers, part of his arm, a kneecap and a tooth, were possessed by the cathedral of St Andrews in Fife. Legends emanating from that church and the Augustinian chapter confidently dated the connection between the kingdom and their saint to the eighth century. However, in actuality it was a combination of ecclesiastical promotion and royal acquiescence between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries that led to the firm association of St Andrew with the security and prosperity of the kingdom of Scotland. The first stage in this drawn out process was the emergence of Andrew as the patron saint of the Scottish church. The catalyst for this development was challenges to the sovereignty of that church from the English church hierarchy. The Archbishops of York had been claiming metropolitan authority over the Scottish dioceses since the eleventh century. Their claims were supported by the formidable testimony of St Bede (d.735), who had stated in his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* that Gregory the Great (590–604) had intended to divide the British Isles between the jurisdictions of York and Canterbury. This claim was given greater substance in the early twelfth century when it was supported formally by a series of popes who pressured the Scottish bishops into accepting York’s authority. These bishops, as well as Scottish secular leaders, were fully aware that accepting English ecclesiastical sovereignty opened the door to more intrusive claims to political overlordship. Resistance to these claims in the reigns of Alexander I (1107–24), David I and Malcolm IV (1153–65) was based around efforts to have Scotland recognised as an independent ecclesiastical province, with St Andrews as its metropolitan see.

4 The earliest legends of the foundation of St Andrews and the arrival of the relics date from the early twelfth century, although as Broun has suggested, Legend A may be based upon an earlier work, Dauvit Broun, “The Church of St Andrews and its foundation legend in the early twelfth century: recovering the full text of version A of the foundation legend”, in *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500–1297*, ed. Simon Taylor (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 108–115.
