Abstract

This article, based on a paper given at a conference discussing links between the Hebridean islands of Skye and Lewis, examines the lordship of Sìol Torcail, or the Macleods of Lewis which embraced both these islands together with parts of the adjacent Scottish mainland in the sixteenth century. The first section of the paper concentrates on the political (and dynastic) history of the Macleods of Lewis and their frequent rebellions in the face of the extension of royal control and pressure from neighbouring ‘Highland’ clans such as the Mackenzies of Kintail, a process which culminated in the expropriation of the Macleods and attempted plantation of Lewis (1598-1609) by lowland Scottish settlers. The fate of the Macleods of Lewis is discussed within the wider context of James VI & I’s Highland policy, such as the Statutes of Iona, and the favouring of client clans such as the Mackenzies. The second section of the paper briefly considers the human and physical geography of the lordship of Sìol Torcail inasmuch as this can be reconstructed and the final section considers the fisheries which were, it is argued, of crucial importance in attracting outside interest to the area.
In the literature of sixteenth-century England there existed, together with new currents, many traditional elements. Thus in a period we are apt to think of as witnessing profound changes, writers continued to assume, and expect their readers to assume, certain views about the nature of things that had been accepted for centuries past. This picture of the world, or the universe, was geocentric and anthropocentric. It derived ultimately from the works of Aristotle and Ptolemy, whose ideas had been given a Christian interpretation. In the sixteenth century they were usually selected to be made knights from amongst the leading families of each of the forty counties of the kingdom, and the title could not be inherited. You had to be made a knight again in each new generation. Some women in particular might hold positions of great status and power by virtue of their birth and their inheritance, and we'll meet quite a few of them in the course of the sixteenth century. But nonetheless, although women were obviously distinguished by their rank, they were also collectively distinguished by gender, the social roles deemed proper for the different sexes, and such distinctions were also fundamental to the structure of the social order, as the Homily on Obedience makes clear.