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Anne M. McKim

"Gret Price Off Chewalry": Barbour's Debt to Fordun



We know very little about the origins of the Scottish literary tradition: the paucity of surviving medieval manuscripts and the dearth of biographical detail about those authors who can be identified make our earliest writers seem curiously isolated from one another. This is strikingly so in the case of John Barbour who composed *The Bruce* in the vernacular and in verse in the second half of the fourteenth century. We do know that later Scottish writers knew and drew upon his biography of Robert Bruce, in particular the fifteenth-century chroniclers Andrew of Wyntoun (who wrote in the vernacular) and Walter Bower (who wrote in Latin), and succeeding biographers, notably Hary in his life of William Wallace (c. 1478), and Sir David Lindsay in his "Historie of Squyer Meldrum" (1582).¹ Yet, while Barbour has often been referred to as the founder of Scottish literature, his own literary heritage is less easy to establish. Although it is possible to deduce from *The Bruce* most of the Latin, French and English works which influenced Barbour's narrative, his debt to earlier Scottish

¹Andrew of Wyntoun, *The Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland* ed. David Laing, *Historians of Scotland*, vols. II, III, IV, (Edinburgh, 1872); Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon* ed. Walter Goodall (Edinburgh, 1759); *Hary's Wallace*, ed. Matthew P. McDiarmid. 2 vols. S.T.S., Fourth Series, 4, 5 (Edinburgh, 1968-9).

writing is virtually unknown, largely because so few anterior works have survived.²

Barbour was probably born around 1320, the year the barons of Scotland declared their passionate support for Bruce as the legitimate king of an independent country in the famous letter to Pope John XXII. As he grew up he no doubt heard vivid tales of the military exploits of Bruce in the early days of the struggle for Scotland's independence, some perhaps told by war veterans and relatives of those who had fought under the king's command. Clearly he drew on these accounts when he composed *The Bruce* all those years later.³ As he indicates himself (X, 356-7), he also had access to written sources during the preparation of his manuscript, but these are not identified.

It has been suggested before now that Barbour may have known John of Fordun's Latin prose history of Scotland, or *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, comprising a chronicle in five books which records the history of the Scottish people from mythical origins in Egypt to the death of David I, and some annals which continue the history of Scotland from the reign of Malcolm III, David's successor, until the late fourteenth century.⁴ I believe there is evidence that Barbour not only knew Fordun's work but that he was deeply influenced by it when he wrote his *Bruce*. The two clergymen were not only contemporaries but probably knew one another quite well. Barbour was Archdeacon of Aberdeen from 1357 to his death about 1395 and, according to the Royal Manuscript of the *Scotichronicon* which contains Fordun's chronicle in the interpolated continuation of Walter Bower,

²D. F. C. Coldwell's unpublished doctoral thesis, "The Literary Background of Barbour's *Bruce*" (Yale University, 1947), examines Barbour's literary debts, particularly to French romances. Barbour may have known the accounts of the Anglo-Scottish wars given by the English knight, Sir Thomas Gray in his *Scalachronica* (begun while he was a prisoner in Edinburgh Castle 1355-1359) ed. J. Stevenson (Maitland Club, Edinburgh, 1836) or by the French clerk, John Le Bel, writing 1352-1361, in his *Chronique* ed. J. Viard and E. Deprez 2 vols. (Soc. de l'Histoire de France, 1904-5).

³As McDiarmid suggests, Barbour probably started gathering material for his composition long before he sat down to write, perhaps in the 1350's and 1360's when informants like Alan of Cathcart (cited by Barbour IX, 580-81) were still alive. *Barbour's Bruce*, ed. Matthew P. McDiarmid and James A.C. Stevenson, 3 vols., S.T.S. Fourth Series, 12, 13, 15 (Edinburgh, 1980, 1981, 1985). All references to *The Bruce* are to this edition.

⁴*Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, 2 vols. ed. William F. Skene, *The Historians of Scotland*, I, IV (Edinburgh, 1871, 1872). The second volume is a translation. In my paper I refer to Fordun's work as his history, and to the two parts of it as the *Chronica*, or chronicle, and the *Gesta Annalia*, or annals.

Fordun served as a priest in the same cathedral. Even if this information about Fordun is discounted as uncorroborated by other sources, it is worth remembering that Barbour was a much travelled man: from early in his career he travelled in England and France on study leave; as archdeacon he was regularly called upon to travel outside his own diocese, often on crown business, and in all probability his research for *The Bruce* led him on some of these occasions to seek out the people, including Fordun, who could furnish him with relevant information.

It is usually accepted, however, that Fordun wrote his chronicle between 1380-1385, that is, some years after Barbour completed *The Bruce*, which was around 1377.⁵ But if Fordun's work is later than Barbour's, then his omission of any reference to *The Bruce* is particularly puzzling when one notes the reverence with which later medieval Scottish historians refer to the archdeacon's work as the definitive biography of Bruce. Wyntoun (c. 1420), for instance, actually skims over Bruce's career, directing his readers to Barbour's work for all the details (VIII, chs. v, 970-82 and xviii, 2923-30). Even when one takes into consideration that Fordun does not identify any of his native sources in his brief annals—although he follows the medieval practice of citing his authorities in his chronicle—the complete absence of any allusion, direct or oblique, to *The Bruce* lends support to the view that Fordun compiled his history before Barbour wrote *The Bruce*. The fact that Barbour does not acknowledge his debt to Fordun is not at all surprising; like other medieval romance writers he does not name his sources, although occasionally he quotes from or describes episodes in romances he has read.

Fairly frequent, if skanty, references to Barbour in contemporary church and court records slightly augment what we learn from allusions to him by writers like Wyntoun, but we can still only arrive at a patchy, rather circumstantial, account of him.⁶ About his fellow writer and lower-ranking church dignitary, John of Fordun, we know even less. Even what he wrote, as distinct from what was added by his successors, is difficult to establish beyond doubt, since amongst chroniclers the convention was to build on earlier works, not only by updating annals and chronicles but also quite frequently by abridging or interpolating that work. It is largely to Walter Bower (1385-1449), Abbot of Inchcolm, who continued the work begun by Fordun, that we owe the little knowledge we have of the

⁵According to the poet's own testimony, he was engaged in writing *The Bruce* in 1375-6 (XIII, 709-17).

⁶All the references are assembled by D. E. R. Watt, *A Bibliographical Dictionary of Scottish Graduates to A.D. 1410* (Oxford, 1977), s.v. "Barbour."

fourteenth-century Scottish chronicler and his work. From him we learn that Fordun was a clergyman, a *presbyter*, who wrote the first five books (and maybe the early chapters of Book VI) of the compilation known as the *Scotichronicon*, having first travelled widely conducting research.⁷ Evidently Fordun intended to produce a conventional medieval chronicle, comprising seven books in the manner of Ranulf Higden's *Polychronicon*—one of his many acknowledged authorities—but was unable to complete the task.

Study of the extant manuscripts of the *Scotichronicon* led W. F. Skene to divide them into those he believed contained Fordun's work only, that is the first five books of the chronicle together with materials, including annals, which were probably intended to form the basis of his final two books, and those which incorporated Fordun's work in later versions by other writers, most notably Bower.⁸ He also argued that the order in which the different portions of Fordun's work were compiled could be reconstructed from what he left behind at his death, around 1385, a date arrived at because the last entry in the annals occurs in this year.

Skene believed that Fordun's part of the *Scotichronicon* was compiled between 1384-1385, but the evidence he cites really only supports the possibility that Book V, ch. lx was composed during this period.⁹ The MSS. which arguably represent Fordun's own work fall into two categories: in one the text of the *Gesta Annalia* was apparently written during the reign of Edward III and terminates in 1363; in the second there is a later version of these annals apparently written in the reign of Richard II in which entries are brought down to 1385. Skene posits that between these two dates, 1363 and 1385, Fordun undertook the information-gathering trip to England and elsewhere referred to in Bower's prologue and that on his return he not only updated his annals but also compiled his chronicles, drawing on his collected materials.

What seems clear is that the first version of the annals was composed before the *Chronica* and before his trip, probably before 1363, and that a revised and expanded version was compiled sometime after 1377, when Richard II ascended the throne, and before 1385 when it is reasonable to suppose Fordun died, or through ill health abandoned his project. Books I-IV of his *Chronica* could therefore have been written at any time between 1363-1385, and it is quite possible that some of the materials used

⁷MS. Adv. 35.1.7 and MS. Adv. 35.6.7 cited by Skene, I, xviii-xix.

⁸William F. Skene, *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, I, xv-xxxii.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. xiv.

in these books could have been prepared before this period, though they were perhaps modified as a result of his research trip.

The reason I labor these points is that it seems to me not only that the earlier version of Fordun's annals and Books I-IV of the *Chronica* could have been written at any time during the 1360s and 1370s, but also that these compositions could have been available to John Barbour when he came to write his *Bruce* in 1375-6; this would help to explain the number of instances in *The Bruce* where Barbour appears influenced by or indebted to Fordun.

In his introduction to the most recent edition of *The Bruce*, Matthew McDiarmid concluded that Barbour "certainly knew and partially used" Fordun's *Gesta Annalia* and he allows Barbour's knowledge of Fordun's *Chronica* when he claims that the poet translates lines from Chapter XVI of Fordun's first book on several occasions in *The Bruce* (I, 229-31; III, 220-31; XVI, 607), but he explains what he sees as Barbour's very limited use of Fordun by conjecturing that Barbour only saw Fordun's work after he had completed his own and only then did he make a few changes, principally to the early part of *The Bruce*.¹⁰ In his doctoral thesis, Dr David Coldwell¹¹ noted a close resemblance between lines in *The Bruce* and passages in Books II and IV of Fordun's *Chronica*; but a case for definite borrowing has not, that I am aware, been made before now. This paper argues that Fordun's work had a seminal effect on Barbour, providing the initial inspiration and influencing the treatment of Bruce's career in the archdeacon's biography.

In those chapters of the annals which deal with the career of Bruce (CXII-CXLIII) Fordun's admiration for the Scottish king is quite obvious. But precisely because he was engaged in compiling annals, he confined himself to a chronological treatment of Bruce's well-known battles and exploits (*bella famosa, et gesta publica, per annos, quibus accidebant*). In a passage that suggests that he has no knowledge of Barbour's *Bruce*—surely confirming a pre-1375/6 date for the annals—Fordun alludes to the material that must be passed over in his modest annals, that is, the details of Bruce's personal valour and individual feats of prowess:

Insuper, inter tot adversa, et innumerabiles angustias, quas laeto animo pertulit et invicto, si quis suos particulares conflictus, et singulares triumphus, victorias et duella, quibus, Domino opitulante, propriis viribus, et humana virtute, hostium cuneos penetrabat securus, hos potenter prosternens nunc, et potenter nunc

¹⁰Barbour's *Bruce*, I, 38-9.

¹¹"The Literary Background of Barbour's *Bruce*," pp. 150, 162-3.

declinans poenam mortis evadendo, noverit recitare, probabit, ut arbitror, quod infra mundi climata, in suis temporibus, in arte pugnandi, et corporis vigore, nullos similes habebat.

With all the ill-luck and numberless straits he went through with a glad and dauntless heart, were any one able to rehearse his own struggles, and triumphs single-handed—the victories and battles wherein, by the Lord's help, by his own strength, and by his human manhood, he fearlessly cut his way into the columns of the enemy, now mightily bearing these down, and now warding off and escaping the pains of death—he would, I deem, prove that, in the art of fighting, and in vigour of body, Robert had not his match in his time, in any clime.¹²

It seems to me not unlikely that Barbour's romantic biography of Bruce was inspired by this passage, the poet spurred perhaps by Fordun's challenge that "no one, now living I think, recollects, or is equal to rehearsing, all this",¹³ for Barbour's poem concentrates on the very aspects to which Fordun alludes—Bruce's personal courage in the face of adverse fortune, his single-handed successes, his exemplary military conduct.

Drawing on the accounts of surviving veterans and other eye witnesses and on the various orally transmitted legends that began to circulate soon after the events he chose to memorialize in verse, as well as on Fordun and probably some of the written sources that had been available to the chronicler, Barbour moulded his material into a biography of Bruce which highlighted the chivalrous qualities of his subject; in other words, he focussed on the heroic aspects of Bruce's career, often comparing him in the course of his narrative to the most renowned, if pseudo-historical, heroes of medieval tradition like Alexander, Arthur, Charlemagne, and even finding models for his own work in the romances about these heroes.¹⁴ Indeed Barbour acknowledges that romance is the fitting vehicle for the celebration of martial prowess in the course of his own work when he confesses to describing only a fraction of the known exploits and noble achievements of Edward, his hero's brother, in language which recalls Fordun's passage:

¹²*Gesta Annalia*, ch. CXVIII. This and all subsequent translations are by Skene, unless otherwise indicated.

¹³CXVIII.

¹⁴Barbour summarizes and translates passages from the *Roman d'Alexandre* (I, 529-36; III, 72-87; X, 711-40); the *Roman de Brut* (I, 549-60); the *Roman de Thebes* (II, 531-49; VI, 181-284); the *Roman de Troie* (I, 395-406, 521-8); and *Fierabras*, or one of the Middle English translations (III, 437-62).

And quha wald rehers all ye deid
 Off his hey worschip & manheid
 Men mycht a mekill [romany] mak,
 And nocht-for-yi I think to tak
 On hand [off him to say sum thing]
 Bot nocht tende part his trawalyn.
 (IX,495-500)

Even allowing for the use of the conventional modesty topos by Barbour and Fordun, one notes that both writers essentially agree about what is—and, to some extent, what is not—appropriate matter for inclusion in the different genres in which they write. Fordun confines his account to *bella famosa, et gesta publica*, omitting coverage of Bruce's many individual deeds (*ejus gesta particularia*) because there is no room for that kind of detail in an annal, and also because many of these exploits cannot be assigned to a precise time and place.¹⁵ For Barbour, on the other hand, who chose to write a *romany* (I, 446) the central concern is commemoration of valiant deeds (I, 21-29), which explains the largely episodic structure governing his narrative, while exactness about the year and the location of events is definitely a lesser consideration.

Yet in spite of the fact that Barbour and Fordun work in different genres and consequently adopt different approaches to recording history, the poet follows the chronicler in the ordering of the main events in Bruce's career. In the twenty books of Barbour's narrative can be found almost all the information Fordun supplies in chapters CXII-CXLIII of the annals, the chapters which trace the rise of Bruce against the background of the Wars of Independence to his death in 1329.¹⁶ The career of Bruce is the central concern of Barbour's narrative, from the point the king decides to rebel against English rule in Scotland until his death and the burial of his heart at Melrose Abbey. Events between the death of Alexander III and the coronation of Bruce, described in some detail by Fordun in chapters LXVIII-CXI, are skimmed over or slanted to suit Barbour's particular interpretation of Scottish history. For instance, he omits all reference to the government of Scotland by the Guardians, to the contribution of William Wallace to the war, and to Bruce's early career on the English side. He chooses to dwell on those details that tend to justify or legitimize Bruce's claim to the throne: the weakness of John Baliol as a

¹⁵*Gesta Annalia*, CXVIII.

¹⁶Fordun has three short chapters not included by Barbour: one on the death of Wallace (CXVI), one on the famine of 1310 (CXVII), and one on a harsh winter (CXXXVI).

king, the state of oppression that existed in Scotland prior to the emergence of Bruce as a national leader, and Bruce's inheritance of the royal mantle which, according to both Fordun and Barbour, was unjustly denied to his grandfather.

Occasionally Barbour conflates incidents which are described by Fordun as separate historical events, usually in the interest of a dramatically effective narrative. Far more commonly he elaborates on, or introduces information—for example, a description of the Battle of Loudoun Hill—not present in Fordun's account; and he develops the roles of other knights, Edward Bruce, the king's brother, James Douglas and Thomas Randolph, Earl of Moray, whose achievements are either briefly recounted by Fordun or scarcely mentioned at all.

For all the restrictions of the annalist's role, Fordun took the opportunity to present Robert Bruce in a heroic light, as a God-appointed saviour and champion of his beleaguered fellow-countrymen. He even elaborates a little on the obstacles the king has to surmount before he achieves any success when in a memorable passage of his annals he likens Bruce to Judas Maccabeus:

tanquam alter Machabaeus, manum mittens ad fortia, pro fratribus liberandis, innumeros et importabiles diei aestus, et frigoris, et famis, in terra et in mari, subiit labores, non inimicorum tantum, sed etiam falsorum fratrum insidias, et taedia, inedias, et pericula laetanter amplexendo.

[like another Maccabeus] putting forth his hand unto force, underwent the countless and unbearable toils of the heat of day, of cold and hunger, by land and sea, gladly welcoming weariness, fasting, dangers, and the snares not only of foes, but also of false friends, for the sake of freeing his brethern.¹⁷

The analogy was almost certainly suggested to him by the comparison of the Scottish king to the biblical hero he found in the Declaration of Arbroath (1320):

A quibus malis innumeris, Ipso iuvante qui post vulnera medetur et sanat, liberati sumus per strenuissimum principem, regem et dominum nostrum, Dominum Robertum, qui pro populo et hereditate suis de manibus inimicorum liberandis, quasi alter Maccabeus aut Joshua, labores et taedia, inedias et pericula laeto sustinuit animo.

But at length it pleased God, who only can heal after wounds, to restore us to liberty, from these innumerable calamities, by our most serene prince, king, and lord Robert, who, for the delivering of his people and his own rightful

¹⁷*Gesta Annalia*, CXII.

inheritance from the enemy's hand, did, like another Joshua or Maccabeus, most cheerfully undergo all manner of toil, fatigue, hardship, and hazard.¹⁸

While Fordun reproduces much of the language used in the Declaration to compare Bruce and Judas, he slightly alters the sense of the original passage to suit his own interpretation of the king's role in the war of independence. The innumerable calamities (*malis innumeris*) said by the author of the declaration to afflict the oppressed kingdom become in Fordun's rendering the innumerable and intolerable troubles (*innumeros et importabiles...labores*) suffered by the king; the hand of the enemies from which Bruce delivers the nation and reclaims his rightful inheritance (*pro populo et hereditate suis de manibus inimicorum liberandis*) becomes the hand of Bruce stretching out to use force to free his fellow countrymen (*manum mittens ad fortia, pro fratribus liberandis*). Fordun's alterations bring out more forcefully the parallels between Bruce and Maccabeus, especially as the Jewish leader is described in I Maccabees 3. His knowledge of Scottish history also led him to widen the analogy to include references to the specific tribulations endured by Bruce: physical hardships like inhospitable weather, hunger and exhaustion, as his enemies pursued him over land and sea (*importabiles diei aestus, et frigoris, et famis, in terra et in mari*), as well as the snares prepared by foes and treacherous friends (*non inimicorum tantum, sed etiam falsorum fratrum insidias*). The same trials are recited twice more by Fordun, in chapters CXVIII and CXXI, which has the effect of conveying the personal courage Bruce required to overcome them.

G. W. S. Barrow has noted the special fascination the Books of the Maccabees seem to have held for late medieval Scottish writers who saw the Scottish War of Independence as a type of the Maccabean struggle for freedom from foreign oppression.¹⁹ It is impossible to trace the evolution of such an analogy before it found literary expression; perhaps it was an often-voiced comparison from early in the war, part of the rhetoric of the

¹⁸A *Source Book of Scottish History*, ed. William Croft Dickinson, Gordon Donaldson, and Isabel A. Milne, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (London & Edinburgh, 1958; rep. 1963), I, 151-8; translation, based on one published in 1689, from Gordon Donaldson, *Scottish Historical Documents* (Edinburgh, 1974), pp. 56-7. Although there is no specific allusion to the Arbroath Declaration in his work, Fordun clearly knew it and its influence is detectable in his description of Bruce's successes. He also possessed a copy, or at least copies of the document are found in the 'materials' preserved in the Trinity, Wolfenbützel, Trinity Col. and Dublin MSS.

¹⁹"The Idea of Freedom in Late Medieval Scotland," *The Innes Review*, XXX (1979), 30-1.

priests in their pulpit sermons, but as far as I know the reference in the Declaration of Arbroath is the earliest extant written allusion, with another echo in the brief issued in the following year.²⁰ Since Barbour, like Wyntoun, gives no sign that he knew the Declaration of Arbroath, a document that may have disappeared from general sight until as late as the seventeenth century according to Grant Simpson,²¹ it is quite possible that Fordun was responsible for the literary transmission of the comparison of Bruce with Judas to Barbour, as he certainly was to Walter Bower and to the sixteenth-century author of the *Liber Pluscarden*.²²

Barbour's own close knowledge of the Books of the Maccabees, especially the first, is evident in the number of occasions he puts into the mouth of his hero speeches and sentiments which echo those of Judas Maccabeus to his troops, although it is not Bruce but his brother Edward who is explicitly compared to the Jewish captain (XIV, 312-316). In fact, early in his narrative Barbour extends the analogy when he likens the corporate Scottish fight to recover national independence to the struggle of the Maccabees:

Yai war lik to ye Machabeys
 Yat as men in ye bibill seys
 Throw yar gret worschip and walour
 Fawcht in-to mony stalwart stour
 For to delyuer yar countre
 Fra folk yat throw iniquite
 Held yaim and yairis in thrillage.

(I, 465-71)

The second Book of the Maccabees also influenced his description of the war and, like Fordun, Barbour attributed the success of the Scots ultimately to divine grace:

...syne our Lord sic grace yaim sent
 Yat yai syne throw yar gret walour
 Come till gret hycht & till honour,
 Magre yar fayis euerilkane

(I, 450-53)

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 30.

²¹"The Declaration of Arbroath Revitalised," *Scottish Historical Review*, 56 (1977), 31.

²²Ed. Felix J. H. Skene, 2 vols., *Historians of Scotland*, VII, VIII. Two versions of the Declaration (Book VIII, ch. liiii; Book IX, ch.xx) as well as Fordun's developed version of the analogy (Book IX, ch. iii, p. 226) are preserved here.

The Scots are presented as instruments of divine wrath, taking revenge on a foe whose oppression is identified with evil:

Bot God yat maist is off all mycht
 Preserwyt yaim in his forsycht
 To weng ye harme and ye contrer
 At yat fele folk and pautener
 Did till sympill folk and worthy
 Yat couth nocht help yaim self.
 (I, 459-64)

The same view is expressed by Fordun:

Atque, Dei virtute, gens Anglorum perfida, quae multos injuste cruciaverat, jam justo Dei judicio diris subicitur flagellis, et, quae victrix extiterat, jam victa gemens succumbit.

Thus, by the power of God, the faithless English nation, which had unrighteously racked many a man, was now, by God's righteous judgement, made to undergo awful scourgings. CXXVIII.

While there can be no doubt that Barbour was thoroughly familiar with the Books of the Maccabees, there are a number of reasons for believing that he was influenced by Fordun's particular use of the analogy. In the first place, Fordun's description of Bruce as a divinely ordained national liberator who endured many afflictions before achieving his goals is adopted and developed by Barbour. The poet's concept of Bruce's heroism is summed up in his description of him as a "man sa hard frayit.../Yat eftirwart com to sic bounte" (II, 47-8), and is developed with particular attention not only to his prowess in battle, but to his courageous endurance, especially in the grim days after the defeat at Methven. Books II-VII of *The Bruce* deal mainly with the tribulations of the king following the murder of John Comyn—the lack of support he has in his bid for the throne, the persecution, imprisonment and execution of his family and friends, exposure to the elements and inadequate supplies of food and clothing—amplifying the much briefer treatment of these afflictions in chapters CXVIII-CXXI of Fordun's annals.

Second, Barbour's debt to chapter CXXI of the *Gesta Annalia*, which is heavily influenced by the Books of the Maccabees, is particularly noticeable. In this chapter Fordun depicts Bruce fleeing from his enemies, both English and Scottish, and stresses the many misfortunes suffered by the king before God took pity and intervened to help him. Condemned to live as outcasts, Bruce and a small group of companions, like the Maccabees in the wilderness, survive on raw herbs and water according to

Fordun.²³ In his account, Barbour recounts how Bruce and his small band of faithful followers live like outlaws "Dreand in ye Month yar pyne" (II, 497), forced to skulk in the woods and mountains because the king does not command a force equal to tackling open battle with the English, or powerful Scottish enemies like John of Lorne.²⁴ Barbour goes on to say that they "Eyte flesch and drank water syne" (II, 498), that is, raw meat and water, according to the Edinburgh MS (1489), the earliest extant reading, but the 1571 Lekpreuik edition preserves an interesting variant on "flesch": "flureis", or plants, which makes better sense of Barbour's lines since the harshness of subsistence living is the point being made, and this reading preserves the intended parallel with the Maccabees. That Fordun rather than the Bible is Barbour's immediate source receives further support from a small but telling detail found in the accounts of Barbour and Fordun, but not in the Bible or, for that matter in the Arbroath Declaration: both Fordun and Barbour mention that after a while wandering in wild terrain the king ends up without shoes to protect his feet (II, 511-4).²⁵

Third, Barbour's description of this bleak period when the king's "caus yeid fra ill to wer" (III, 302), contains verbal echoes of Fordun's description of the king's trials, and concludes with a modest rejoinder to the chronicler conceding that no one can adequately describe Bruce's sufferings:

And ye king and his cumpany
Yat war [twa hunder] and na ma
Fra yai had send yar hors yaim fra
Wandryt emang ye hey montanys,
Quhar he and his oft tholyt paynys,
For it wes to ye wynter ner,
And sa feile fayis about him wer
Yat all ye countre yaim werrayit.
Sa hard anoy yaim yen assayit

²³II Maccabees 5:27.

²⁴Barbour allows Bruce to find in Aberdeen temporary refuge from these afflictions (II, 515, 560-9), but as McDiarmid points out in his notes to these lines, Barbour's dating of this visit may be incorrect, *Bruce*, I, 72.

²⁵According to Barbour, Bruce and his men resort to making shoes from raw hide (II, 513-4). Jean Le Bel reports that he was one of the English party who came across over 10,000 old shoes made from raw leather left behind by the Scots when they stealthily decamped at Weardale, (*Chronique* i, 73), cited by Antonia Gransden, *Historical Writing in England*, 2 vols. (London, 1974, 1982), I, 86.

Off hunger cauld with schowris snell
 Yat nane yat levys can weill it tell.
 (III, 368-78)

Barbour, nevertheless, successfully conveys something of the harsh reality of the day-to-day struggle to survive in his frequent mention of the pressing need for the king's small party to find "meit" (II, 498, 572; III, 316, 393, 471, 542, 567; IV, 339; VI, 29), their constant fear of discovery (III, 315, 413, 468) exacerbated by the tedium and frustration of inaction (IV, 345, 353), and the insidious temptation to lose heart, as the Earl of Atholl does (III, 307-24). The poet also details some of the trials undergone *in mari* when he describes the crossings to Kyntyre (III, 569-637) and Rathlin (III, 680-724), both of which are fraught with perils. Whether on land or sea, the ever-present threat of attack or danger of discovery is never far from Bruce's mind, Barbour reminds the reader (III, 315, 413, 468).

In the fourth place, Barbour picks up and develops Fordun's references to the snares prepared by the king's enemies and the plots laid by traitors (*non inimicorum tantum, sed etiam falsorum fratrum insidias*), so that they become a major theme in his narrative. With the killing of John Comyn and the coronation at Scone, Bruce instigates a civil war in Scotland, a war he has to win before he can engage the powerful forces under the English king's command. With only a small number of declared adherents and beset by enemies on all sides, the king decides, after defeat at Methven and Dalry, to hide out in the highlands and islands of Scotland and to avoid open confrontation with enemy armies. He cannot assume support even in his own lordship of Carrick and has to ascertain through a messenger, Cuthbert, "quha freynde or fa wald be" (V, 126). He also relies on spies to gather intelligence about his enemies' movements and launches guerrilla attacks when opportunities arise. He defends this use of "slycht" or "sutelte" as honorable as long as faith is not broken.²⁶ When foes like John of Lorne, Sir Ingram Umphraville and Sir Aymer de Valence²⁷ can-

26 For werrayour na fors suld ma
 Quheyer he mycht ourcum his fa
 Throw strenth or throw sutelte,
 Bot yat gud faith ay haldyn be.

(V, 85-8)

This is quite in accord with the views expressed in medieval chivalric handbooks, e.g. Honore de Bonet, *L'Arbre des Batailles*, ed. Ernest Nys (Brussels & Leipzig, 1883), IV, xlv.

²⁷ John of Lorne seeks revenge for the murder of his cousin, John Comyn (III, 1-5; VI, 504-8); Sir Ingram d'Umphraville was related to the Baliols and was an ally of the

not engage Bruce in open battle, they too resort to the use of guile, though with less success and, in Barbour's view, fewer scruples than Bruce has. They devise abortive ambushes, pursue the king as if he were a hunted animal (using sleuth hounds on two occasions to track him), and seek out and employ traitors to assassinate him.

Experience teaches the king to beware of traitors. He is prepared to meet with treachery in Carrick when he learns about the traitors who pursue his loyal supporter, the Earl of Lennox, on the crossing to Kyntyre (III, 591-632); he is warned by the betrayal of Sir Christopher Seton by McNab (IV, 16-21); and the loss of Kildrummy castle through a traitor and the subsequent execution of his brother Neil (IV, 105-24) confirm the need for vigilance. The fates of his family and friends leave him "dredand for tre-soun ay" (III, 671).²⁸

Bruce himself becomes the target of a number of surprise attacks by traitors who usually outnumber him by at least three to one. Even sworn enemies like the MacIndrossars or the men seeking revenge for the murder of Comyn are described as traitors because cowardice leads them to attack the king when he is alone, in a difficult spot, or unarmed (III, 93-146; VII, 415-94). Taking his cue from Fordun, Barbour demonstrates that the greatest danger to Bruce lay in the treachery of professed friends, pointing out that:

Nane may betreys tyttar yan he
Yat man in trowis leawte.
(V, 531-2)

For forty pounds worth of land, "a man / Off Carrik", whom Bruce has reason to trust, and his two sons are hired by Sir Ingram D'Umphrville to kill the king, but he is warned of their intended treachery and so is armed in preparation for the attack (V, 485-658). On another occasion three strangers carrying a wether attempt to deceive the king about their real intention when they feign friendship (VII, 105-232). The king may be surprised by his attackers, but he is never completely off guard for "he traistyt in nane sekryly" (III, 673).

Fordun had said that any one capable of rehearsing Bruce's own struggles, and singlehanded triumphs (*suos particulares conflictus, et singulares triumphus*) would prove that by his extraordinary prowess Bruce

Comyns (Barrow, 158); and Sir Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke and John Comyn's brother-in-law, was Edward I's lieutenant in Scotland.

²⁸Barbour's strong feelings about traitors are expressed in IV, 26, when he comments on the betrayer of Sir Christopher Seton: "In hell condampnyt mot he be."

surpassed all his peers (CXVIII). The treacherous attacks on the king described in Books V-VII of *The Bruce* illustrate Fordun's point, although slightly less dramatically than the account of the king's solitary stand against two hundred enemies at a ford (VI, 32-180). Barbour presents Bruce's valour in these encounters as of crucial importance. Not only do his successes boost the morale and cement the loyalty of his men, but they also inspire the waverers to join him. Barbour's Bruce emerges, therefore, as a charismatic leader, acutely aware of the importance of setting a personal example, especially to men who, like the Maccabees, are easily outnumbered by their enemies. He is identified by Barbour as one of those good captains:

Yat he dar put him till assay
 His folk sall tak ensample ay
 Off his gud deid & his bounte,
 And ane off yaim sall be worth thre
 Off yaim yat wikkyt cheftaine hais.
 (IX, 71-5)

So far, the inspiration for Barbour's subject and its treatment has been traced to that part of Fordun's unfinished work usually referred to as the *Gesta Annalia*. Further evidence indicates that Barbour also had access to Fordun's *Chronica*, and that the importance he attaches to the treachery encountered by Bruce, and the way this affects the structure of his narrative, were influenced by his reading of Fordun.

In the fourth book of his *Chronica* Fordun has a chapter on treason entitled "Concerning the vice of treachery, the vilest of all vices ..." (*"De vitio prodicionis. omnium vitiorum vilissimo, ab omnibus execrando et cavendo"*, ch. xlii), in which he vehemently denounces treachery as a breaking or renunciation of faith. In the course of deploring the vice, his contempt is largely conveyed by the high value he attaches to the thing betrayed, loyalty, which he regards as the firmest virtue of the human heart. While the views expressed in this chapter are quite conventional, there are signs that Barbour drew on his contemporary's reiteration of them.

Like Fordun, Barbour saw treachery as above all a breaking of faith, a betrayal of trust. This is evident in the attacks on the king which, as I have suggested, form a key motif in the early part of *The Bruce*; it is also apparent in the fact that at the beginning of the poem the Scottish loss of independence is presented as the result of treachery. In the first book the Scots are betrayed when their trust in Edward I's good faith ("lawte", l. 89) to settle the succession dispute turns out to be disastrously misplaced. Edward abuses his position as arbiter, making of it an opportunity to oc-

cupy Scotland. In Barbour's view the Scots are partly to blame for not being warned by the examples of Wales and Ireland:

A blynd folk full off all foly,
 Haid 3e wmbethocht 3ow enkrely
 Quhat perell to 3ow mycht apper
 3e had nocht wrocht on yat maner.
 Haid 3e tane keip how at yat king
 Always for-owtyn soiournyng
 Trawaylyt for to wyn senzhory
 And throw his mycht till occupy
 Landis yat war till him marcheand
 As Walis was and als Ireland,
 Yat he put to swylk thrillage

.....
 3e suld for-owtyn his demyng
 Haiff chosyn 3ow a king yat mycht
 Have haldyn veyle ye land in rycht.

(I, 91-101; 116-8)

For all he rebukes the Scots, Barbour manages to suggest that they are virtuous to a fault:

Bot 3e traistyt in lawte
 As symple folk but mawyte.
 (125-6)

The price of such naiveté is high and the Scots, like the Welsh and the Irish, are betrayed into thralldom.

The first book of *The Bruce* concludes with yet another treacherous act—Comyn's betrayal of Bruce—effectively focussing on the theme of betrayal and preparing the reader for the important place it occupies in the early part of the work. According to Barbour, John Comyn breaks a covenant with Bruce and reveals to Edward I Bruce's intention to assume the kingship of Scotland and oust the English.²⁹ We are left in little doubt about Barbour's attitude, for he classes Comyn's offence with some of the most famous instances of treason known to medieval audiences: the fall of Troy, the poisoning of Alexander the Great, the assassination of Julius Caesar, and Modred's betrayal and murder of Arthur. Barbour's brief description of these various treasons, which probably derives from one of the

²⁹C.f. *Gesta Annalia*, CXIII. G. W. S. Barrow argues that this view of the event, shared by Wyntoun, is without historical basis. *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1976), pp. 197-8.

contemporary *ballatis* on the Nine Worthies,³⁰ is prefaced with a caveat that evinces the influence of Fordun's opening words in his excursus on treason:

Neque vero tantae probitatis et excellentiae rex, tantaeque fortitudinis invictae princeps, necnon tantae virtutis et audaciae miles evadere posset, quin sceleratorum occumberet saevitia proditorum. O nefanda proditorum rabies!

Neither the king of great probity and excellence, nor the prince of unconquerable bravery, nor the soldier of great virtue and boldness can escape, when the malice of wicked traitors strikes. Oh sinful plague of traitors!³¹

Barbour's lines on treason closely resemble Fordun's:

Bot off all thing wa worth tresoun,
For yar is noyer duk ne baroun
Na erle na prynce na king off mycht
Yocht he be neuer sa wys na wycht
For wyt worschip price na renoun,
Yat euer may wauch hym with tresoun.
(I, 515-20)

These two instances of treachery, Edward I's betrayal of the trust placed in him by the Scots and John Comyn's betrayal of Bruce, frame the events depicted in Book I, creating the impression that these provided the justification for Bruce's uprising, and forming an apt introduction to Barbour's portrayal of Bruce's career. With Bruce and his country presented as the victims of treachery, the struggle for independence takes on the aspect of a just war of retribution, ("To weng ye harme and ye contrer / At yat fele folk and pautener / Dyd till sympill folk and worthy", 461-3), in which Bruce's enemies frequently resort to treachery, while he must rely on the loyalty of friends and allies to defeat them.

It is not unintentional then that in the initial book, too, the value of loyalty is stressed in the person of Bruce's companion-in-arms, James

³⁰The theme of the Nine Worthies gained currency with poets and historians alike in the later Middle Ages. Verses or "ballatis" on this theme ultimately derived from Jacques de Longuyon's poem, *Les Voeux du Paon*, in turn derived from the *Roman d'Alexandre*. Israel Gollancz, in his preface to "The Parlement of the Thre Ages," *Select English Poems*, 2 (Oxford, 1915), maintained that verses on these nobles were particularly popular in Scotland and the North of England.

³¹My translation. Some chapters, including this one, are omitted by Skene in his translation.

Douglas, who is singled out by the poet on account of his pre-eminent quality of loyalty (364-77). Fordun has little to say about this knight in his annals, but the oral accounts of his deeds must have impressed Barbour, for he makes Douglas the joint hero of his narrative, and accords him this status mainly because of his loyalty.³² This virtue is precisely defined by Barbour as a staunch refusal to deal with treachery and falsehood (I, 375-7), a point that is reiterated in Douglas's obituary at the end of the poem (XX, 526-30). Indeed there is a deliberate juxtaposition of the vice and the virtue in the very first book, one that prepares the reader for the pervasive contrast of the two that informs the entire narrative. Although there are fewer *specified* examples of loyal conduct in *The Bruce*, the many instances of treachery throw into sharp relief the steadiness of Douglas's loyalty. In other words, Douglas's loyalty is pointed up by the references to its opposite. As Barbour himself says (of freedom and thralldom):

Thus contrar thingis euer-mar
Discoweryngis off ye toyer ar.
(I, 241-2)

Although Barbour's portrait of Douglas owes nothing to Fordun, nonetheless the latter influenced the poet's depiction of Douglas's chief virtue as well as its opposite, treachery. In the course of his castigation of treachery, Fordun praises the virtue of loyalty:

Fides, dicit philosophus, firmissimum humani pectoris bonum est, nulla necessitate fallendum cogitur, nullo praemio corrumpitur, qui sine fide est, omni vero bono vacuus est.

(Fordun IV, xlii)

Faith, says the philosopher, is the firmest virtue of the human heart, in no case held to be disposable, corrupted by no reward; he who is without faith is void of all true virtue.³³

³²Fordun, CXXX, CXL, CXLIV. The French chronicler Froissart, who visited Scotland in 1365, may also have drawn on oral reports for his account of Douglas. *Chroniques*, ed. George T. Diller (Geneva, 1972), XXV, XXXVII, and XXXVIII. For a full discussion of Douglas as the joint hero of *The Bruce* see my article, "James Douglas and Barbour's Ideal of Knighthood," in *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, XVII (April, 1981), 167-80.

³³My translation.

In his initial catalogue of Douglas's qualities, Barbour digresses to consider the nature of loyalty. His lines read like a loose translation of Fordun:

Leavte to luff is gretumly,
 Throuch leavte liffis men rychtwisly.
 With a wertu & leavte
 A man may 3eit sufficyand be,
 And but leawte may nane haiff price
 Queyer he be wycht or he be wys,
 For quhar it fail 3eys na wertu
 May be off price na off valu
 To mak a man sa gud yat he
 May symply callyt gud man be.
 (I, 365-74)

While there is no counterpart to Barbour's last two lines in the quoted passage from Fordun, the chronicler's denunciation of traitors which immediately precedes his purportedly authoritative definition of fidelity may well have influenced Barbour's concluding statement:

Vere proditor, quia fidem perdit, homo non est, nec alio nomine dignus, [quam] quod renunciando fidem sponte suscepit, hoc est, proditor.

Truly the traitor who breaks faith is not a man, nor worthy of any other name, than that which he willingly accepts by renouncing his faith, namely, traitor.³⁴

These parallels may not by themselves establish that Barbour was familiar with Fordun's chapter on treachery but there is another, longer, passage in *The Bruce* that appears to derive from the same chapter. Just as Bruce's virtues are often highlighted by Barbour through comparison with renowned heroes, so too the essence of Douglas's loyalty is conveyed when he is compared to the classical hero Fabricius, who also "Had souerane price off leawte" (XX, 574). Fordun's chapter concludes appropriately with an exemplum illustrating both "the beautiful faithfulness, and the vile treachery, that can be found in a man" (*Sequitur exemplum quam pulchra sit in homine fidelitas, et quam vilis proditio*). He then relates how the Roman legate Fabricius behaved honorably towards his enemy, Pyrrhus, by exposing the traitor in the Greek king's camp. The close resemblance between Barbour's lines on Fabricius and Fordun's description of the Roman

³⁴My translation.

hero has been noted by Coldwell,³⁵ scrutiny of the two passages reveals a number of notable details in common, which suggests that Fordun is Barbour's source for the exemplum rather than the classical authors usually cited. Here is Fordun's version:

Olim vero pro captivis Romanorum redimendis Fabricius Epirorum regni Pirro missus est, quem cum pauperem cognovisset, quarta parte regni promissa sollicitare voluit, ut ad se dimissa patria transiret, quod contemptus est a Fabricio. Interjecto quidem anno, idem Fabricius cum exercitu pugnandum directus est contra Pirrum, et cum ejus et Fabricii castra vicina fuerant, Pirri medicus ad eum nocte venit, promittens veneno se Pirrum occisurum, si sibi aliquid policeretur; quem Fabricius vinctum reduci jussit ad dominum, Pirro dici, quid contra caput ejus spondidisset. Tunc rex admiratus dixisse fertur: Iste est Fabricius, qui difficilius ab honestate quam a cursu suo sol averti potest.

Long ago, Fabricius was sent to King Pyrrhus of Epirus to bring back some Roman prisoners; when Pyrrhus saw he was a poor man, he tried to win him over by promising him a quarter of his kingdom, if he would abandon his native land and come over to him. Fabricius reacted with contempt. After a year, the same Fabricius was sent with an army to fight Pyrrhus, and when they had dug adjoining camps, Pyrrhus' doctor came to him in the night offering to kill Pyrrhus with poison, if he would promise something. Fabricius sent him to his master in chains. Then the king said in admiration: Such is Fabricius who would be harder to turn from honour, than the sun from its path.³⁶

In his account of Fabricius, Barbour draws only on the second part of Fordun's description, but perhaps the details about Fabricius's refusal to betray his country in return for power is remembered in Barbour's description of Bruce the elder's similarly honorable rejection of Edward I's proposal that Bruce should become king of Scotland on the condition that he recognize Edward's suzerainty.³⁷

In Fordun's chapter, the Roman's exemplary conduct presents a striking contrast not only to the treachery of his enemy's physician in the story, but also to the other examples of treachery cited there. In *The Bruce*, mention of Douglas's renowned contempt for traitors is the occasion for introducing the comparison with Fabricius (XX, 526-30). As in Fordun's version, the traitor who offers to poison Pyrrhus is identified as the latter's doctor; Fabricius sends the traitor to Pyrrhus; there is dialogue, although

³⁵Coldwell, p.150.

³⁶My translation.

³⁷*Bruce*, I, 153-64.

this is expanded in Barbour's narrative; and the probity of Fabricius is expressed in the image of the sun inexorably following its course:³⁸

I trow ye lele Fabricius
Yat fra Rome to werray Pyrrus
Wes send with a gret mengne
Luffyt tresoun na les yan he,
Ye-quheyer quhen Pirrus had
On him and on his mengne maid
Ane owtrageous discumfitour
Quhar he eschapyt throw auentour
And mony off his men war slayne,
And he had gadryt ost agayne,
A gret maistre off medicyne
That had Pyrrus in gouernyne
Perofferyt to Fabricius
In tresoun to sla Pyrrus,
For in-till his neyst potioun
He suld giff him dedly pusoun.
Fabricius yat wondir had
Off yat peroffre yat he him maid
Said, "Certis Rome is welle off mycht
Throw strenth off armys in-to fycht
To wencus yar fayis, yocht yai
Consent to treusoun be na way,
And for yow wald do sic trewsoun
[You] sall [to] get a warysoun
Ga to Pyrrus and lat him do
Quhat-euer him lyis on hart yar-to."
Yan till Pyrrus he send in hy
Yis maistre and gert opynly
Fra end till end tell him yis tale.
Quhen Pyrrus had it hard all hale
He said. "Wes euer man yat swa
For leawte bar him till his fa
As her Fabricius dois to me.
It is als ill to ger him be
Turnyt fra way of rychtwisnes
Or ellis consent to wikkitnes
As at mydday to turne agayn
Ye sone yat rynnyis his cours playn."
(XX, 531-68)

³⁸These details are not supplied by Cicero or Valerius Maximus, the sources suggested by McDiarmid in his commentary on lines 531-74, *The Bruce*, I, 109.

While Barbour's stated intention in introducing the comparison with Fabricius is to convey the quality of Douglas's loyalty, the exemplum itself is manipulated in a way that reinforces other themes in *The Bruce*. Fabricius's speech, which has no counterpart in Fordun's version, nor in Fordun's likely source Higden's *Polychronicon*,³⁹ is probably Barbour's invention. In the course of rebuking the traitor, Fabricius claims that Romans do not stoop to treachery to achieve an advantage over their foes; they can and will triumph honorably through strength of arms. The Scots, implies Barbour, resemble the Romans in their refusal to employ treachery to gain the upper hand, and this of course is entirely consistent with the view expressed elsewhere in the poem, usually through Bruce, that there is a vital difference between cunning and treachery. The point would have been pertinent too because Barbour depicts Douglas as a master of guile, especially in his use of ambushes. It is noteworthy that Barbour concludes his account of Fabricius with the additional information that Fabricius later vanquished Pyrrhus by fair means in open battle (XX, 569-71). At the turning point of the war against England, the Scots also confronted and routed superior enemy forces at the Battle of Bannockburn.

Finally, in his chapter on treason Fordun refers to the assassination of Julius Caesar as an example of treachery. Coldwell has already suggested that Barbour could have got his account of Caesar's assassination (I, 537-48) from Fordun (II, xix), whose version is ultimately derived from Suetonius. Barbour may have read Suetonius himself, but in view of the other instances of apparent influence it seems justifiable to accept Coldwell's argument favoring Fordun as Barbour's immediate source for the account of Caesar's death.

In the space of an article it is not possible to be exhaustive about the influence exerted by Fordun on Barbour, but I hope I have managed to demonstrate that Barbour's debt to Fordun was fairly considerable. In his contemporary's annals, Barbour found the inspiration for his poem's subject, its presentation and major themes. He developed what he borrowed, whether it was the comparison of Bruce with Judas Maccabeus, or the series of obstacles Bruce had to overcome before he achieved victory. According to Fordun, one of the greatest perils faced by Bruce was betrayal. Barbour adopted this idea and, influenced by Fordun's excursus on treason in his *Chronica*, made it into a dominant strand in *The Bruce*. Even

³⁹*Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden*, ed. Joseph Rawson Lumby, *Rerum Britannicarum Medii Aevi Scriptores*, Rolls Series no. 41, Klaus Reprint (Liechtenstein, 1964), vol. IV, Book III, pp. 22-4.

the presentation of the other major hero in *The Bruce*, Sir James Douglas, owes something to Fordun's insistence on the value of loyalty, especially to the exemplum concerning Fabricius used to convey this conviction.

If Fordun's annals and chronicle belong to the older traditional style of historical writing, then *The Bruce* represents a newer kind of historiography, one heavily influenced by romance models. While both works are patriotic in tone, *The Bruce*, as Antonia Gransden has pointed out, displays the other major features characteristic of the new secular historiography which emerged in fourteenth-century Europe; it is written in the vernacular and it expresses chivalric values.⁴⁰ In these respects Barbour's work resembles that of the French chroniclers, Jean Le Bel and Jean Froissart, or the Chandos Herald who composed the life of the Black Prince. In Scotland *The Bruce* stimulated the composition of other biographies in the vernacular, notably *The Wallace* and *Squire Meldrum*, which commemorate the chivalrous deeds of other patriotic Scottish warriors.

While Fordun and Barbour can be regarded as representing two different traditions of medieval historiography, it is revealing to discover and examine the degree of interaction between the two kinds of writing. I have drawn attention to Barbour's debt to Fordun's chronicle, but the fact that succeeding chroniclers, whether working in the popular vernacular tradition like Wyntoun, or in the learned Latin tradition like Fordun, Bower and their successors, acknowledged the importance of *The Bruce*, suggests that Barbour's own significant contribution to medieval Scottish historiography requires investigation.

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⁴⁰*Historical Writing in England*, p. 81.