Scottish Historiography in the 14th Century: A New Introduction to Barbour's Bruce

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Scottish Historiography in the 14th Century
A New Introduction to Barbour's Bruce

Barbour's account of Bruce's career is a verse chronicle written in the spirit of a noble romance, and its author managed to impart to it a unity rarely found in a continuous historical record.

Nine years ago the present writer opened the introduction to a volume of selections from Barbour's Bruce with the foregoing sentence; what follows is intended to elaborate certain comments made in that introduction concerning the work as history.

Preliminary to the study of Barbour's account, it is important to understand how mediaeval scholastics analysed the nature of history. R. L. Poole recalled the simple classification of Gervase of Canterbury, a 12th-century Benedictine monk who distinguished in his Chronicles two kinds of historical writing, both having the same aim, namely, the pursuit of truth. One was the history proper, conceived as a narrative, founded upon a personal selection of facts and opinions which by its cunning presentation persuaded its audience into accepting the composer's version. This was superior history, produced by masters of the grand style, like Bede, William of Malmesbury, Florence of Worcester, Henry of Huntingdon and other 12th-century authorities pre-eminent in their craft, whose talent for "bombast and swelling words" convinced the learned that such skill in Latinity partook of truth.

The second (and more common) form taken by historical writing Gervase describes as chronicles or annals. The chronicler was a humbler

1 Barbour: The Bruce, a Selection (Saltire Classics: Edinburgh & London, 1960), introd., p. 7. All quotations are from this edition, giving page number, followed by book and lines in parentheses. The text is based on Skeat's EETS edition, with some deviations in orthography.


"Ampullae et sesquipedalia verba" (Horace, Ars Poetica, 97).
aspirant to the historian's office than the imaginative narrator; like
Amyclas of old, he sat in contented poverty on his bed of seaweed, his
attention directed towards facts and dates, portents and miracles. Most
annalists were anonymous monks, disciplined by their vocational se-
clusion and engaged for long years in making records for a monastery
or cathedral church without reference to a wider lay audience, in a
humble style (*stylus humilis*) fit only for pedestrian descriptions of
limited scope.

Gervase's reliance upon this two-term rhetorical theory of elaborate
and simple ornament marks him as no innovator; it leaves out the
"stylus mediocris" or middle style of classical discutants in the subject
so that as a guide to the assessment of historical writing it is grossly
over-simplified if not misleading. Sharp division into uncompromising
categories is not valid when actual writers are being considered, since
most historians worthy of the name combine narrative with chronicle
in order to achieve an account emotionally as well as factually true.
Mediaeval audiences were fascinated by tales of the marvellous and the
romances, which spoke of fighting, love, strange happenings and the
capricious turns of Fortune, and which appealed to them as being close
to truth, *i.e.* to life as they knew it. Lively first-hand accounts of the
Crusades, such as *Anonimale Chronicle* (1333-81), and the French
chronicles of Ambroise and Robert de Clari are packed with personal
details, graphically narrated. After a century or more, incidents acquired
a veil of remoteness and fact was easily blended with fiction in order
that continuity might be achieved. Most mediaeval documents, though
compiled in good faith, mingled truth with falsehood and modern re-
search prefers to look back at the middle ages through records rather
than through contemporary histories or chronicles. Prejudice was in-
evitable and selection of material lacked control since one writer report-
ed another.

By the time of the Conquest a mediaeval theologian's conception of
"universal history" had been established, originating in the thesis of
St. Augustine's *de Civitate Dei*, in its turn inspired by the Book of
Revelation; it had a marked moral pre-occupation and a strong tendency
to long-drawn-out narrative, interpreting facts in terms of Christian
doctrine which assumed the march of history to be divinely-ordained.6

6 See R. L. Browne (ed.), *British Latin Selections A.D. 510-1400* (Oxford,
1954), pp. 73-5, which quotes the relevant passage from Gervase (*Prologus
in Chronicam*) with commentary.

6 See C. A. Patrides, *The Phoenix and the Ladder: the Rise and Decline
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When human events were considered as inevitable products of a God-ordained universe in which the Old Testament predicated the New and the destiny of man was thought capable of forecast in historical allegory the creative imagination found wings. As C. V. Wedgwood remarks

Much can be said against the romantic approach to history. It tended too easily to the theatrical and the fanciful; also it came into being at an epoch when the conviction that human life was a constant forward progress towards an unattainable perfection was very strong.*

and, indicating the common ground shared by history and literature, points out that “From the fusion of a little that was historic with much that was poetic sprang many of the great epics.”7 Official documents on the other hand, are lifeless survivors of vital activity and, when drawn up by contemporaries involved in the same events they seek to record, cannot easily escape unreliability. The creative imagination of the romantic historian and the writer of epic were thus stimulated to much the same end, to improve, to instruct and to please—an aim clearly stated by Barbour at the very beginning of Bruce:

Storyss to rede ar deliabill,
Supposs that thi be nocht bot fabill;
Than suld storyss that suthfast wer,
And thi war said on gud maner,
Have doublill plesance in herynge,
The fyrt plesance in the caryng,
And the tothir the suthfastnes,
That schawys the thing rycht as it was;
And suth thyngis that ar likand
Tyll mannys herynge, ar plesand.
Tharfor I wald fayre set my will,
Giff my wyt myche suffisce tharrill,
To put in wrayt a suthfast story,
That it lest ay furth in memory,
Swa that na lenth of tyme it let,
Na ger it haly be forȝe.
For aulde storys that men redys,
Representis to thaim the dedys
Of stalwart folk that livyr as,
Rycz as thi thai in prescence war.*

Barbour puts the “caryng” before the “suthfastnes” while at once insisting that he aims never to lose sight of the verus historiae for two

*17 (1, 1-20).
reasons, first, because it doubles the enjoyment of the audience, and second, because he is writing for all future generations. He later reinforces this statement of purpose in a passage which confirms Robert I’s reign as an example of wise government to be followed by his descendants:

God grant that that, that cummyne ar
Of his ofspring, maynteyme the land,
And hald the folk weill to warrand,
And maynteyme richt and ek laure,
As weill as in his tyme did he!*  

Throughout the work, Barbour makes constant reference to historical incident, both classical and biblical, as a means of bringing Scottish experience into line with “universal” experience. In the first book, the Scots are compared with the Maccabees, who fought successfully against their oppressors, and acts of treason are condemned with reference to Alexander, Caesar and Arthur, all great conquerors who succumbed to violators of trust. This method of parallel illustration from renowned authority or legend is one of the more obvious and “characteristically mediaeval” features of Barbour’s narrative style; it is supported by the numerous digressions in the course of which he preaches against political and social vices and extols their corresponding virtues. Thralfdom and liberty, cowardice and valour, the importance of good captaincy in war as determining fighting spirit, the vanity of those who claim to predict the future through astrology or necromancy and the value of fidelity are all subjects on which Barbour digresses, though never for long—he is inevitably anxious to return to his account of the Scots. The effect is to impart a strong preaching tone to the work.

Of Bruce’s story G. W. S. Barrow observes that “if it were cast in the form of a romance it would possess at least one of romance’s essential requirements, incredibility.” 10 Bruce is in fact a “romance” in the late mediaeval sense of the word, that is to say, a narrative of heroic action, and it is described as such by its author:

Lordis, quha likis for till her,
The Romanys now begynnyes her,
Off men that war in gret distress,
And assayit full gret hardynes,
Or thai mycht cum till that entent.11

* 81 (XIII, 708-12) and see also n. 2.
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Its form and character are those of the classical epic, which represented a combination of some fact with a great deal of fancy and it is written in a contemporary form of English, emphasising its popular literary character. Generally speaking, literature and history stand apart, because the historian's chief object is to make true record, not to embellish the human experience, but when a creative writer makes a historical statement the result can be a work capable of being examined both as a historical document and as a literary artifact. This is particularly true when conflict of dates or disagreement of supporting documents is minimal or, as is the case when a single testimony is relied upon, non-existent.

Barbour's Bruce provides a rare example of coincidence of this kind since it is still accepted as the main authority for the events of Bruce's campaign and for biographers of the King to draw upon. Other sources do nothing to upset or even seriously challenge that authority for, whichever way the student turns, he finds himself unable to dispense with Barbour as a primary source of information. The author of Andrew of Wyncot's Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland worked independently of John of Fordun and did not see his Scotichronicon (Chronica gentis Scotorum), issued under several hands in 1447. Walter Bower, Abbot of Inchcolm, gave Scotichronicon to the world and all copies of Fordun's own work and of its continuation (to 1384) include Bower's additions. Though a contemporary of Barbour, Wyncot did not attempt a version of his own, though he quoted at some length from Books I and II of Bruce, concluding

Quhat that effir this Bros Robert
In all hys tyme dyde effirwart,
The Archedene off Abbadene
In Breyss hys Buke has gett be sene,
Mare wysly treyde in-to wriyt
Than I can thyknk with all my wriyt.
Therefore I will now thus lychtly
Oure at this tyme passe the story.12

Wyncot seems to have held Barbour in great esteem; he imitated his octosyllabic metre but he himself was a recorder of the pedestrian school as defined by Gervase. Not given to filling gaps by speculation,

12 Fordun compiled Scotichronicon or Chronica Gentis Scotorum in the 1380s but only Books I-V are of his authorship. The notes for the rest of the work, bringing it up to date, he left with Bower. These notes are known as Gesta Annalis and Bower based Books VI-XVI on them.


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he evidently held Barbour in sufficient respect as a reliable authority as to justify his own withdrawal from writing the annals of Scotland insofar as they concerned Bruce. Walter Bower, a dull and prolix compiler, informs his audience that Edward II took Robert Baston to Scotland to celebrate the anticipated victory at Bannockburn but Baston, taken prisoner during the battle, was made to acknowledge the triumph of Bruce's cause, which he attributes chiefly to its righteousness. The chronicler stresses the lavish equipment of the English army and supplies details of Bruce's tactics in digging ditches during the night preceding the battle in order to impede the enemy cavalry, but from Bower one learns nothing substantial.

So much for specifically Scots vernacular histories and Latin chronicles. English compilations were more numerous but none of them dealt directly with the events of Bruce's years of campaigning, though all treat, in more or less detail, of the culminating battle at Bannockburn. In Annales Londinienses the conflict is described as "praetium horribile;"\(^{14}\) in the so-called "Monk of Malmesbury's" Vita Edwardi Secundi a long account of it is accompanied by parallel illustrations based on the defeat of Xerxes at Lacedemonia and on the then recent battle of Courtrai (1302). The Brut, an Anglo-French compilation, took the account to the battle of Halidon Hill (1333); the Chronicle of Pierre de Langtoft, who hated the Scots, reflects the bitterness of contemporary feeling in Edward I's reign and is the chief source for that period in all prose Brut chronicles, whether in Latin, French or English. Other authorities include the Annales Paulini, the Commentarii Lamentabilis of John de London, the Anonomalle Chronicel (already mentioned), the Chronicles of Marimuth and Avesbury, and the Canon of Bridlington's Gestas Edvordi de Carnavon, which contains a long account of Baliol's Scottish campaigns, the reign of Edward II and the early years of the reign of Edward III. These make many references to Bruce and most name the English nobles slain at Bannockburn. The Lanercost Chronicle (to 1346) describes in graphic sentences how Bruce and his men climbed into Berwick in 1312.\(^{15}\)

Jean Froissart's Chronicles of France, Flanders, England, Scotland and Spain approached Gervase's ideal of history-writing. His characters and scenes are colourful and stirring, upholding fading standards of


\(^{15}\) See M. Dominica Legge, Anglo-Norman Literature and Its Background (Oxford, 1953), ch. XI, for an account of AN annalists.
chivalry in an era when they were very much on the wane. Froissart was no cloistered author; he accompanied King David Bruce on his tour of Scotland and collected his facts by interview but what he achieved was not an historical method but a seductive verisimilitude. His truth was that of the chanson de geste, for Froissart wrote lyrically to please his patrons; his other works include a romance proper, interrupted after 30,771 lines, called Mélïador, written while Barbour was composing Bruce and read aloud in 1388. With roots in Le Roman de la Rose and Guillaume de Machaut, Mélïador describes how the titular hero, son to the Duke of Cornwall, wins the hand of Princess Hermondine of Scotland as his prize for victory in a five-year competition. The principal setting is Scotland and the interest of this tedious-appearing work seems to have lain in the detailed descriptions of tournaments with which it abounds. It affords a view of Froissart's tastes, which are not those of a clerical historian of the school of Barbour, though he could at times write with considerable economy, as his bald account of Wat Tyler's march on London demonstrates.

Froissart's philosophy of history follows Boethius. He sees the governance of the external world as lying in the hands of Fortune outside the control of man, and most of his characters, fictional or historical, are concerned only with worldly ambitions, a desire for fame and social approval, a love of shows and glittering armour and with longings for military success. His Chronicles tell of the turn of fortune in the house of Plantagenet from Edward II's murder until Richard II's and provide the main contemporary account of the Hundred Years' War, as it happened a suitable example for Froissart's purposes, for it was a period filled with notable instances of change of fortune. The figure of Fortune has its immediate origins in Boethius, from whom Froissart learned that men whose concerns were entirely of this world need not count on direct intervention by God. He believed that worldly success or failure is a result of accident. These lines come from one of his love poems: "I feel that she (Fortune) is so wicked, full of malevolence, that she should raise a man up and not care how things go with him, cast him down and bring him to grief."


"... elle met un homme en haut
Ne l'en chaut
Comment voist, puis le reuverse
Et le bese
A un trop villain bersaut

(4ème lai)
This attitude to human action sets Froissart apart from the clerical historians, who adopted the Judaic position in regard to man’s fate at the hands of God the punisher of evil and the rewarder of good; universal history was grounded in the persistent action of a just Providence, which judged the actions of individuals. Barbour’s references to “ure” or destiny are generally qualified by allusions to God’s power to aid the brave, for it is accepted that “ure” originates with God, who leaves the individual to take his own chance. Shakespeare expressed the same idea in the words of Brutus before Philippi:

There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.
On such a full sea are we now afloat,
And we must take the current when it serves,
Or lose our ventures.10

Much closer to what passes for real-life experience based on personal recollections is Sir Thomas Gray of Heton’s Scala Chronica (1562). Gray is the only non-clerical English annalist, a soldier whose father had been captured at Bannockburn and who himself had also experienced Gefangenschaft in the hands of the Scots. His record combines clerical with aristocratic attitudes; he shows close acquaintance with the Brut annals, which had a mythic basis—in this case the Fall of Lucifer, stated in a dream-allegory prologue summing up his sources on the analogy of a scale or ladder, shown him by the Sibyl, in which each rung represents a different source of tradition. This was a stock metaphor of the Judaico-Christian view of history, which summed up human experience in Jacob’s Ladder, having the Eternal City for destination and Christ as guide; the original and historically valuable part of Scala Chronica is that containing Gray’s autobiographical record of what happened to him (and to his father during the days of Bruce’s

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10 E.g. I, 312; II, 434; VI, 17; IX, 68; XI, 405; XV, 376; XIX, 611. When Bruce sees his men flee at the Battle of Methven he rallies them by saying:

“Lordingis, sen it is swa
That ure rynnyg agane us her,
Gud is we pass off thar daunger,
Till God us send eftsonys grace”

p. 29 (II, 433-6). For Barbour “ure” implied good luck.

10 Julius Caesar, IV, iii, 217-23.


10 See Patrides, op. cit., p. 9.

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harrying raids on English garrisons). Of all the writers of historical narrative during this period, Gray is the only man-of-action to leave an account of first-hand experience, lucidly and concisely presented.

Bruce itself is hard to assess because it does not easily fit into a category, literary, historical, narrative, chronicle, aristocratic, clerical. It is recognised, by Sir William Craigie and others that Barbour wrote with the aid of established literary precedents and followed a "Northern tradition" which may be isolated and identified with reference to other mediaeval Scots writers subsequent to Barbour himself, but there are no extant examples of works in this tradition produced by his Scots forbears; in fact, because he was the first to be charged with this "Northern element" and because Scottish literary historians needed a Chaucer-figure with whom to begin their chronological accounts Barbour was accorded the title of "father of Scots poetry." It is clear, however, that he owes much to Anglo-Norman romances of chivalry such as Fierabras and Alexander, which furnished him with stock patterns of heroic action.

Barbour wrote with a stern purpose. He aimed to make the nation, as it then was, conscious of a clear destiny. In 1375 Scotland needed a modern history, for the only accounts available, about Celtic battles, feuds and intrigues, were concerned with building myths of doubtful origin into a universal structure. Barbour's clerkly concern for chronological accuracy pulls away from romance. Barbour strikes away from the Brut tradition and, instead of the fictitious Troy of Dares and Dictys a realistic Scotland possessed of an authentic topography becomes the background for a solidly-rooted narrative of heroic action shot through with the glamour of an apparent truth no less strange in its way than the romance of Troy. The hero is on a liberating quest and the work has a moral as well as an historical unity. Bruce, his disciples and his gradually-increasing influence are on the side of right, though the "rights" are not so much moral as political and territorial. He is one of the last mediaeval kings properly so called, a projection of nationalist feeling, portrayed as an exile who succeeds against overwhelming odds, no demi-god endowed with superhuman qualities, but a flesh-and-blood man liable to failure.

Nevertheless Barbour's hero is a stereotype, a compound, borrowed from romance sources, classical history and anecdotal tradition, but with certain simple biographical attributes imposed upon him. It is impossible to say with certainty what models Barbour actually did draw

"The Northern Element in English Literature" (Toronto, 1933).

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upon; the "Bruce-Stewart family tradition," as R. L. C. Lorimer has postulated,23 may well be the main source for stories about Robert I and his chief supporters, but the Bruce of Barbour is a historian’s hero, a monolithic symbol constructed from epic stereotypes rather than from a collection of personal and traditional fragments transmitted orally. When he resolves to "tak the ure that God wald send" he is shown forth by Barbour in the rôle of a man of destiny, a near-archetypal image inherited in a recognisable form from popular precedents for a clerical historian to embellish with a few obvious marks of humanity. Thus when he moves ruggedly into action by slaying the Comyn, an easily-grasped human motive—fierce rage on Bruce’s part—is linked with "ure" which, by God’s grace, is to guide events in Scotland’s favour. Barbour was writing at a time when a national pride of fairly recent origin needed some reinforcement and his conception of "truth" was truth of account of successive incidents, military tactics, detail of battles and skirmishes and accuracy of chronology rather than truth of motive on the part of his hero. Personal ambition is not stressed.

It is well known that in the fourteenth century Bruce’s Scottish nation was made up of a variety of peoples of different stock—Scots, Picts, Britons, Gaels, Scands, English, Flemings and Normans, welded together by Celtic tradition.24 Bruce and his tenants were Scots of five generations standing and although he had Norman origins there is no evidence that families like his own or even with more obviously Norman names like Balliol or Umfraville were thought of as being "foreigners." Many Scots landed families had been founded by a younger son of an established English family and many Scots lords married Englishwomen. Since marriage involved the transfer of land many Scots held English land and vice-versa. Barbour’s poem has thus to be considered not against a background of dynastic legitimacy but against that of community of the realm, a welding of diverse interests into one nation and the creation of a new Scotland in the heroic spirit.25 Whereas the armies of the Old English kingdoms were made to depend upon feudal levies and the obligation of the peasantry to serve under arms the motive for service with Bruce was one of clan solidarity and a dislike of the foreigner. Barbour’s account of his hero’s early military expeditions makes no suggestion that it was self-interest which encouraged Bruce to action, nor does he mention his several changes of side;

24 See Barrow, op. cit., pp. 6ff.
25 See ibid., pref.

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in 1296, as Earl of Carrick, he had sworn fealty to Edward I and fought with the English against Wallace in 1297. He then went over to the Scots army but soon returned to the English side. As one of Scotland's four Regents he spent some time at the English court. Many Scots nobles, like Bruce, were landowners in England and had no motive to take up arms against "kith and kin"; what active opposition to the English did exist was, though resolute, sporadic in character—guerilla harrying actions carried out not by the flower of chivalry but by indignant small farmers, loosely organised, who had suffered personally at the hands of uncontrolled English soldiery. In the eyes of the English, a fomenter of peasant insurrection, like Wallace, had no representative status and was branded as a traitor, suffering ignominious death by mutilation following legal process. Apart from making brief reference to stories of his valour, extant Scots records of events leading up to Bruce's entry into affairs ignored Wallace or dismissed him with brevity. Blind Harry revived Wallace's reputation a century after Barbour, but the audience for which Barbour wrote wanted an impeccable royal hero.

Barbour, too, passes lightly over the events of Edward I's reign, implying loosely that Bruce had been associated with Scottish patriotic activity before February, 1306, when he burned his boats by knotting the Comyn. In fact, Barbour introduces his champion as "Thys lord the Bruce, I spak of ayr," usually said to be a scribal error or a mistake on the author's part; it is as likely to represent deliberate confusion of Bruce with his grandfather, Baliol's rival, dead since 1394, in order to give the impression to posterity that there had been a family resistance of two generations' standing. From the beginning, therefore, Bruce is made to personify anti-English Scotland, whereas in fact Wallace was a far better symbol historically. But apart from the stock trappings of a rather utilitarian courtisie, Bruce has little original "psychology" and to detach him from his context is to find oneself grasping at a personification biographically no more solid than Byrthnoth of The Battle of Maldon. Other superficially biographical works, such as, for example, the contemporary Life of the Black Prince by the herald of Sir John Chandos, or the earlier Histoire de Guillaume le Maréchal (ca. 1226) may be summed up in the same way; deeds, values and personality are amalgamated in the named hero.

One typical source of the heroic character, regularly mentioned by mediaeval historians, was the figure of Alexander of Macedon.56


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Most accounts of the reigns of the three Edwards refer to him. The ME Kyng Alisaunder, written before 1330, was based on the AN Roman de Toute Chevalerie of Thomas de Kent, while the earlier OE prose Alexander romance, of unknown authorship, composed in the 13th century, was an older successful vernacular version. Alexander's life is the subject of Book IV of Vincent de Beauvais' Speculum Historiale on which Ranulf Higden's account in Polychronicon is founded. Vita Edvardi Secundi, Annales Londinenses and Commentatio Lamentabilis all compare Edward I with Alexander. The Greek conqueror was thus endowed with qualities alongside which those of subsequent great warriors and particularly contemporary kings of the warrior breed, could be easily compared.

The mediaeval view of Alexander was based on mainly anecdotal evidence which pursued its own independent line of development distinct from the main historical and legendary streams of information. His rôle as conqueror underlay moral considerations of Alexander as a cruel seeker after glory. The prevailing portrait of him was taken from the Bible and from a miscellany of writers such as Valerius Maximus, Seneca, Cicero and the Church Fathers. Philosophers discussed his qualities as a ruler, theologians and universal historians were compelled to accept his conquests, commenting that they availed him nothing at his death, while the secular historians discuss him as a conqueror in comparison with other conquerors, past and present, or with patrons, such as Edward I, whom they wished to flatter. The dominant note is one of admiration.

Alexander was the possessor of an "over-reaching" spirit not diminished by considerations of God. God has little control over Alexander, whose desire for glory and belief in his own destiny makes of him a powerful mental force in which valour, physical hardiness and the courtly virtues are combined to fashion a man not in need of divine succour. God is Alexander's friend. He furthers his own victories, under the influence of Fortune; at the heart of the secular portrait of Alexander is the individual who stands alone, ruthless, vainglorious and supremely confident. Chaucer's sketch of him in The Monk's Tale as the predatory knight whose ultimate destiny was to fall into the hands of death the leveller opens with these lines:

   The storie of Alisandre is so commune,  
   That every wight that hath discretioun  
      Hath herd somewhat or al of his fortune.

Barbour's references are admiring ones. That in Book I 27 is typical of

   II. 529-36.
the 14th-century story-teller’s reverence for the hero; it stands, like Chaucer’s, in contrast to Augustinian references which accuse Alexander of pride and which were sometimes cited by theologians searching for examples of this particular deadly sin. In Book X, a longer illustration is given concerning Alexander’s conduct at the siege of Tyre, inserted by way of a parallel to describe Randall’s capture of Edinburgh Castle following a besiegement. It is Alexander the military leader who is reincarnated in Bruce (and in Edward I), not the flawed Alexander of clerical tradition. Barbour does not describe Bruce directly as he describes James of Douglas, whose appearance is etched in some detail even down to his slight lisp (a traditional speech defect of Hector’s which Nicholas Trivet also accorded to Edward I). Instead, Bruce’s qualities are allowed to emerge in a succession of physical incidents, acts of violence, individual combat against larger numbers of foes and a chivalrous attitude towards all men. Alexander, as mirrored in secular writings, had by the late 14th century developed many courtly qualities, derived from the chansons de geste, which combined with the well-established portrait of the man of valour to provide a scholar like Barbour with a rough-and-ready model for just such a man of action as he sought to depict in Bruce.

A second heroic stereotype which undoubtedly influenced Barbour was drawn from the Arthurian legend. By 1350 the various streams of Arthurian tradition had fused into one broad legend, mingling fact and fiction, reflected in the Brut narratives of Geoffrey of Monmouth, Wace and Lagamon, as well as in the romances of Chrétien de Troyes and the lais of Marie de France; from this emerged the chivalric Arthur, in Lagamon’s hands an actual English monarch conquering his enemies. In the reign of Edward III Arthurian chivalry came to represent an ideal of soldierly conduct, and contemporary historians, such as Froissart, wrote of Edward with Arthur (and occasionally Hector) in mind.

Scots chroniclers say little about Arthur; he is scarcely mentioned  

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28 ll. 706-13.
29 Annales Sex Regum Angliae. The tradition appears in Guido de Colonna’s Historia Troiana, turned into English as the Gest Hystoriale of the Destruction of Troy (l. 3881).
30 See R. H. Fletcher, The Arthurian Material in the Chronicles (1906), 2nd ed. expanded by R. S. Loomis (New York, 1966), ch. X, “The Scoto-Scottish Versions” (241-9). After the 14th century Arthur came to be represented by Scots’ historians as a bad king, since the Scots, legendary enemies of Arthur, contributed to the latter’s military glory. The author of the alliterative Morte Arthur drew his portraits of the valiant king from Plantagenet history and Malory’s model bears traces of Henry V as original. See also Pinlayson, ed. cit. introd. pp. 15ff.
by Fordun or by Wyntoun, although the latter knew Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, and ascribed the alliterative *Morte Arthure* to Huschown of the Awle Ryale. This poem, composed about the same time as Barbour's *Bruce*, takes its real-life tactical details from records of Edward III's campaigns in Brittany in the 1340s. In like fashion Barbour, said by Wyntoun to have been the author of a *Brut* chronicle (not extant), presents in Robert Bruce a leader skilled in the arts of war, at his best when outnumbered, resolute in pressing home his attack, shrewd in generalship and never losing sight of his main objective, namely, to drive the English out of Scotland and regain the heritage which is his by right. But, unlike the feudal Arthur, Bruce has no time to spare for the distractions of hunting or the attentions of women; Barbour conceives him as a national hero mirroring the unadorned virtues of Scots resistance. In the words of the *Declaration of Arbroath* (1320)

... so long as one hundred men remain alive, we shall never under any conditions submit to the domination of the English. It is not for glory or riches or honours that we fight, but only for liberty, which no good man will consent to lose but with his life,\(^3\)

sentiments which Barbour expressed in his address to freedom in Book I, the rough-hewn figure of his hero looms large.

In Bruce Barbour embodied a group of qualities desirable in a hero symbolising the *natio* as he would like it to be, and as an individual his warrior does not exist above and beyond these. No mediaeval historian, Barbour included, tried to probe below the surface and analyse individual motives or moral attributes. A hero's heroism could be summed up in a half-dozen adjectives, taken from rhetorical models such as that of Matthew of Vendôme:

All men lyfth him for his bounte;
For he wex off full faire effet;
Wyys, currais, and debonor;
Larg and luffand als wes he,
And our all thing lyfth lawee...\(^3\)

\(^3\) Trans. Cooper (McLaren, *op. cit.*, Appendix I).

A NEW INTRODUCTION TO BARBOUR'S BRUCE

followed by a short physical description, brings Sir James of Douglas to life—a more sustained definition than is ever given of Bruce himself "that hardy wes off hart and hand" who betrays a few primary emotions such as anger and sorrow at the actions of the English and the plight of the Scots.

Loyalty to such a champion is loyalty to the natio. To create such a symbol Barbour needed no second-hand knowledge of the intimacies of Bruce's character and personal life. His virtues, prowess and the goals to which he aspires are constructed according to a formula, that of the chanson de geste, and Barbour gave the work unity by summing up in his hero popular sentiments associated with success in war, and particularly with resistance against a foreign oppressor. His audience must have included descendants of the named personages in Bruce, many of the latter sharing in the heroism of their leader, and Barbour's appeal was for this reason direct. The common people, as a group, are of one accord with their officers and "traitors" stand out as despicable enemies of Scotland. Just as Arthur of Albion was the type of a successful British king so did Bruce become his Scottish counterpart, a general heroic figure suited to Barbour's purpose in compiling his "suthfast story."

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