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The Declaration of Arbroath: History, Significance, Setting
(review)

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essential reading for students. It most definitely is not a masterpiece of research. Had I paid for this book I would have demanded my money back.

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The Declaration of Arbroath: History, Significance, Setting.

Edited by Geoffrey Barrow. Pp xiii, 148.

ISBN 0 903903 27 X.

Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. 2003. £19.99.

The appearance of a second book in two years dealing with the Declaration of Arbroath is testimony to the special significance accorded to this letter by modern audiences. No other mediaeval Scottish diplomatic missive has produced even a fraction of the material written on this 1320 letter in the name of the Scottish barons to Pope John XXII. It has even become the focal point for global celebrations of Scottishness as well as being the subject of a conference in 2001 whose proceedings form this volume. At the outset, however, it is important to understand the importance of the sub-title, 'History, Significance, Setting'. For this is a book about the place of the Declaration, geographical and historical, more than about its content or immediate context.

The arrangement of the seven articles included could have made this clearer. Rather than being organised alphabetically they might have been more helpfully grouped according to theme. For example two chapters clearly deal with setting. Richard Fawcett provides a detailed architectural description and history of Arbroath Abbey which includes a fascinating account of the move from hostility through neglect to conservation in the treatment of the building after the Reformation. This account would sit well alongside the excellent discussion of the abbey's foundation and growth up to 1320 by Keith Stringer which gives a convincing analysis of this exceptionally well-endowed community. Stringer's argument that fresh impetus was provided by new endowments from King William in the 1190s exactly fits with Fawcett's dating of the main building period, not to the initial foundation of the 1170s but to the end of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. These two articles provide a second study of a major reformed abbey alongside the recent study of Melrose Abbey by Fawcett and Richard Oram.

Three papers deal with the transmission and commemoration of the Declaration. Grant Simpson discusses the recent debate about the document, in which his role has been central, and then looks at the early transmission of the text. What is clear from this examination is that, for someone like Walter Bower, the 1320 letter had no special importance and its purpose was imperfectly known. Bower included many similar documents and accords greater significance to the writings of Baldred Bisset twenty years before. J.N.G. Ritchie's discussion of celebrations in Arbroath to mark the Declaration is a fascinating account of twentieth-century perceptions of the Scottish past and their importance (even sensitivity) in discussions of the Scottish present and future. By comparison Edward Cowan's piece relating the development of 'Tartan Days' in North America and Australasia seems rather too close to the events it describes, both in terms of the author's personal attitudes and in terms of chronology.

What is most striking about this collection is that only two of the essays actually focus on the events of the early fourteenth century. Moreover, one of these, Archie Duncan's analysis of the context and content of the letters of 1309-10, known as the Declaration of the Clergy, is something of a prequel. Though long known about and much-quoted, this is the first detailed examination of the

dating and purpose of the four versions of this text. Duncan's argument that the letter was issued twice for the purpose of presenting Robert's case to the council of the church at Vienne is based on good reasons. However, reasons could also be advanced in its language and aims to suggest that it had an internal purpose. None of the manuscript copies of the letter was found beyond Britain. Moreover, the absolution of Scots from oaths to King John or Edward of England by the leading Scottish clergy, which the letter claims to give, would have been an important message within Scotland. If the arguments about Robert Bruce's qualities and rights and the denunciation of his enemies in the name of the Scottish church were not central planks of Bruce propaganda to his subjects, what were his partisans saying to win and consolidate support in the kingdom at this crucial point?

It is left to Dauvit Broun's article to shed new light on the Declaration itself. Broun concentrates on the pedigree of the Scots as a people and, he argues, more importantly, as the possessors of the line of kings referred to in the letter. He demonstrates that the precise claims to 113 kings were the product of a process of drawing up and extending the royal line which had been sponsored by the crown in the preceding century and which had seen some unscrupulous grafting onto the family tree. Broun concludes with a passage in which he analyses the value of such a claim of descent for an elite and a king who knew themselves to be 'foreign' in ethnic Scottish terms. He also argues convincingly that ideas of nationhood in the letter should be equated not with ethnicity or even shared descent but with membership of a common structure of allegiance to a king and to a line of kings. The development of this as an exclusive loyalty between the late thirteenth and late fourteenth centuries is also suggested. Indeed, it was surely the main result of the wars, with the 1320 letter as a key landmark in the process.

This is a valuable collection with much to recommend it but, Broun apart, there is something of a Declaration-shaped hole in the volume. As Simpson suggests, the key statements about the document were made thirty or so years ago, especially by himself and Professor Duncan. Current analysis remains on a plateau and, while it is well-suited by its language and content to act as a totemic symbol of the Scottish historical past, the letter should not be allowed to overshadow other efforts to judge the political values of this crucial era.

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Scotichronicon: Volume 9.

Edited by D.E.R. Watt with Alan Borthwick, Dauvit Broun, L.J. Engels, Nicholas Hadgraft, Catherine Hall, John Higgitt, Sally Mapstone, A.B. Scott, W.W. Scott and J.B. Voorbij. Pp. xxiii, 558.

ISBN 1 873644 647.

Edinburgh: Aberdeen University Press. 1998. £45.00.

It is not easy to review a work which its own editor describes as 'one of Scotland's great national treasures' (p. xv). What is certain is that current and future generations of Scottish historians will treasure the new edition of the *Scotichronicon* which has been published under the general editorship of the late Professor D.E.R. Watt. The publication of Volume 9 of this new edition in 1998 marked the completion of a project which has proved remarkable in its scale and achievement. As the editor relates here, the idea of a new edition of the *Scotichronicon* was first mooted in 1958 and the project was set in progress seriously in 1976. It has involved the collaboration of nearly a score of scholars