

*Freedom and Authority: Historical and Historiographical Essays Presented to  
Grant G. Simpson.*

Edited by Terry Brotherstone and David Ditchburn. Pp. xii, 292.

ISBN 1 898410 79 8.

East Linton: Tuckwell Press. 2000. £25.00.

As the editors of this well-produced volume stress, Grant G. Simpson's great contribution as one of a generation of pioneering post-war Scottish historians will not lie on a singular monograph. Rather, it will rest upon the many branches – some still to bear fruit - of his wider interests across medieval and early modern Scotland, on his scholarly skills in editing primary sources, and on his supervision of a further generation of Scottish historians. As such, this collection of eighteen essays is not purely a *potpourri* of exciting new work by his friends and colleagues from the Scottish Record Office (now the National Archives of Scotland), Aberdeen, the Pitlochry Scottish Medievalists and elsewhere. This may disappoint some. But the more exact remit of including trailers for the work of five of Dr Simpson's twelve doctoral students, as well as archival and historiographical papers on themes close to his own interests and methodologies yields much of value.

The editors' introduction - 'The Steam Behind the Spectacles' - is an affectionate delight, if perhaps a little short. Readers may want to hear more, say, about the Scottish Baronial Research Group and the family Simpson's *History in the Making* plc! Part of this appetite might have been satisfied with a full list of Dr Simpson's publications to date, referring readers back to many rewarding articles. Of course, this list would almost immediately have been incomplete, as the editors hint in noting their subject's highly anticipated writings on feudal developments in Scotland pre-1286.

Interaction between old native and new feudal elements in early medieval Scotland forms a theme of articles from each of this volume's three sub-sections: Historians and the Uses of History; Authority and Freedom in Country and Town; Sources and the Use of Sources. In the first, Richard Oram's 'Gold into Lead?' is a pessimistic survey of the charter-based studies of MacMalcolm Scotland to date. It outlines the dearth of recent research which examines the continuity of Celtic structures and customs after 1124 and/or engages with the integrationist, British-history approach to medieval Scotland first suggested by Professor Barrow in 1956. The author might have been more upbeat writing in 2001 in the light of his own published study on Galloway and a forthcoming edited volume on Alexander II. But whilst there is undoubtedly a huge field of opportunity in medieval Scottish studies, Oram does his heartfelt duty in warning of the lack of skilled scholars keen to tackle the earlier period. On its own, this piece is also a rewarding historiographical introduction for undergraduates.

Evidence of Celtic conservatism in the face of feudal encroachment is revealed by Cynthia Neville, in section two, in a fascinating piece on the palatine nature of the earldom of Strathearn, 1171-1223. Application of charter studies honed in Dr Simpson's own doctoral thesis on de Quincy, reveals that Earl Gilbert of Strathearn modified conventional feudal Latin charter forms and household organisation to sustain the customary, tenurial lord-man relationships of his ancient province and to resist Crown- and church-led pressure to adopt the service-tenure typified by the knight's fief. In section three, Keith Stringer's commentary on his collection of the sixty-five extant acts of the Lords of Galloway before 1234 further questions the processes of this gradual integration of old and new. Thirdly, Ulrike Morét - one of three scholars here whose thesis Dr Simpson examined - traces late medieval and humanist views of Celtic Britain,

including a comparative survey of English attitudes to the Cornish and Welsh as displaced 'foreigners'. This definitely leaves the reader anticipating a wealth of insights from her thesis which might, though, have been hinted at here.

Over-arching themes are less obvious among the remaining papers. In section one, the editors provide an entertaining survey of the debate surrounding interpretation of the Declaration of Arbroath: from Barrow's community-led statement of constitutional kingship, or Nicholson's, Duncan's and Simpson's diplomatic context for the barons' letter as conventional, if impressive, propaganda for the medieval European stage; to the more general background of popular nationalist interpretation. Again, here is proof of Dr Simpson's great contribution to Scottish history through, perhaps, his most celebrated article, as well as a valuable historiographical piece for students. This last can also be said of Steve Boardman's and Michael Lynch's survey of the 'State of Late Medieval and Early Modern Scottish History'. Much more upbeat than Oram's companion essay, it should be the first stop (along with this journal's 'Whither Scotland?' special of 1995) for those in search of inspiration.

The remaining essays of section two are more eclectic. Alexander Stevenson provides a richly sprinkled survey of growing Scottish activity in Bruges c. 1300-1500, bearing out resoundingly Dr Simpson's call - in the introduction to one of his three edited volumes on Scotland's European contacts - for scholars with language skills to mine continental archives. Sonja Cameron then goes some way to proving that 'sentiment' saw Robert I select the Good Sir James Douglas to take his heart on crusade, not a desire to distract a potential trouble-maker (in a piece which makes interesting reading alongside Dr Simpson's own 'The heart of Robert I: Pious crusade or marketing gambit?' in B. Crawford (ed.), *Church, Chronicle and Learning in Medieval and Early Renaissance Scotland* (2000)). Alastair J. Macdonald's essay on 'War and the Later Medieval Scottish Nobility' provides a solid trailer for his splendid monograph of last year. His revisionist argument here, that Michael Brown's work on the Black Douglases presents a mono-causal approach to explain the war motivations of Scottish nobles (using war as a conscious tool to maintain power in the borders) is surely a little artificial. But this piece rightly impresses the importance of explaining the identity and drive of generations of Scots in prosecuting war against England very often when common sense should have dictated otherwise.

Elizabeth Ewan's neat title, 'Mons Meg and Merchant Meg - Women in Later Medieval Edinburgh', headlines a useful survey of female economic roles and attitudes to women in the period. This essay and Jane Thomas's statistical study of the growing influence of craftsmen in Elgin c.1540-1660, both re-echo the considerable wealth of untapped material in burgh archives. A more public, inter-disciplinary approach to preserving and interpreting the fabric of Scotland's historic burghs (a cause championed by Dr Simpson) is called for more directly by E. P. Dennison's illustrated paper which closes section three.

Two early-modern topics on which Dr Simpson has not published round out section two. Robin Macpherson's sketch of the maverick career of Francis Stewart, fifth earl of Bothwell, is action-packed but, again, brief - more of the ground-breaking work of his thesis might have been previewed. But it is a useful lead-in to Jenny Wormald's convincing search for proof that the hunt for witches in league with the devil was a popular obsession *before* James VI returned from Denmark in 1590 to investigate accusations of Bothwell's intrigues with the North Berwick coven. Might it be suggested, though, that James VI's uncertain fear of, but doubts about, diabolic plots could be traced to the tutoring of George Buchanan, who beat the young king over an essay about James III, whose brother, Mar, was said to have conspired with witches?

Opening section three, Leslie Macfarlane provides a wise user-guide to late fifteenth and sixteenth-century material from particular Papal records now held on microfilm at Glasgow; then Colin McLaren sketches a handy early history of Aberdeen University and its marvellous-sounding Charter Chest – a picture of which should surely have been included among this volume’s plates? Finally, Alexander Grant provides another of his invaluable source-survey articles by collecting the ninety-two *acta* of Archibald, fourth earl of Douglas: this allows him to quantify the predominant kinship basis of the inner circle of this noble’s regional affinity (illustrated in a very satisfying table), as well as the earl’s political focus on Edinburgh and his continued search for military services from his lord-man ties.

In sum, this collection is a mixed bag in terms of depth, but certainly a fond and worthy reflection of Dr Simpson’s wide historical horizon, exemplary scholarship and inspiring teaching. The editors are also to be thanked for a detailed index.

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