Review


The *History of Warfare* series to which this collection of essays belongs provides readers with cutting edge research on a variety of topics and periods of warfare. So it is no surprise that this volume on Anglo-Scottish warfare between the battles of Dunbar and Flodden appears in the series; it was much needed. The editors of this volume should be praised for putting together these fourteen essays which will help historians better understand not only how those in borderlands waged war, but how they lived it as well.

Arranged chronologically, this volume illustrates the importance of using literary sources when examining warfare on the Anglo-Scottish border during the late medieval period; there are numerous extant sources, many of which were written with first-hand knowledge of the events. However, this volume also presents the dangers that historians face when using these sources. For instance, Thea Summerfield’s essay examines the varying viewpoints that Brut chronicles had of Edward I’s Scottish affairs between 1305 and 1340, which she attributes to the contemporary conditions of the chroniclers. Whereas Pierre de Langtoft expressed vehement hatred for the Scots, Robert Mannyng's translation of Langtoft omitted this abusiveness and considered Robert Bruce as a stabiliser of peace. Moreover, Mannyng amplified French affairs over Scottish ones, which Summerfield ascribes to the later environment in which he wrote. To him, she argues, the Scots were not the greatest threat to England. Other
chroniclers, such as Thomas Castleford, saw Edward as a conqueror of Scotland, period, while some barely mentioned the conflict at all. Similarly, Katie Stevenson and Gordon Pentland’s essay presents the altering images of the battle of Flodden through the ages, and how these images suited the differing needs of the generations that referenced Flodden up to today.

Andrew Spencer’s essay on John, Earl Warenne attempts to remove some of the blame that chroniclers and modern historians have placed on him for the English defeat at the battle of Stirling Bridge. By detailing Edward I’s fixation on and utilisation of money and soldiers for continental affairs, Spencer aptly illustrates the difficulties Warenne faced. Knowing that the battle of Dunbar did not solve the Scottish problem, he was increasingly forced to cope with a shortage of both funds and experienced soldiers. Nevertheless, these problems were exasperated by the fact that the earl was an inadequate commander, a point that Spencer needed to stress more. Indeed, it is hard to see the decision to engage the Scots by crossing the bridge, which Spencer attributes to a “fatal combination of the pressure of what the king needed and contempt for the Scots” (49), as anything more than poor leadership and overconfidence. Overall, Spencer persuasively illustrates how chroniclers such as Walter of Guisborough were too harsh in their criticisms of the aged and ailing earl; however, he misleadingly downplays the earl’s tactical blunder at Stirling Bridge.

Michael Brown’s analysis of the formation of wardenships in Scotland between 1340 and 1480 reveals how very different the post was from its English counterpart. Rather than being financed to garrison castles as well as raise and maintain armies for border defence, he argues that Scottish wardens largely assumed the financial burdens involved in defense and justice. Moreover, they frequently dealt with warfare within, not beyond, the Scottish marches.
Consequently, the bounds within which wardens functioned largely corresponded to landed interests, reflecting not prevaricating royal policies but “political and military realities” (209). This theme of the importance of regional power structures pervades Jonathan Gledhill’s interesting and convincing essay as well, in which he argues that military security dictated the local allegiances of Scottish freeholders in Lothian. Indeed, while uneasy about John Comyn’s murder in 1306, they were prepared to shift their allegiance to Robert Bruce after the battle of Bannockburn (at the expense of their English lands) once relieved of English military pressure.

Boardman argues that Highland Scots were much more involved in Anglo-Scottish warfare than has been previously believed. By examining records that span nearly the entirety of the Anglo-Scottish wars, he shows that, in addition to fighting in royal armies on the border, Highland Scots were “regularly employed in defending the king’s interests in the north and west” of the kingdom (246). Additionally, he stresses the importance of Highland lords with Gaelic connections in Irish-related conflicts. These conflicts, although not on the Anglo-Scottish border, had repercussions in the Anglo-Scottish wars, thus increasing Highland Scots’ contribution.

The other essays in this collection, although not mentioned, are all of value to the historian studying Anglo-Scottish warfare during the late Middle Ages. Furthermore, David Simpkin and Andy King’s introduction is a wonderful piece of historiography and should not be overlooked.

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