For a multitude of reasons, the Wars of Independence era has been heavily scrutinized both by historians of Scotland and by popular writers, but a great deal of this material has done little more than to rehash existing works. In *Under the Hammer*, the culmination of many years of work, Fiona Watson has avoided viewing the period as an episode in the larger careers of Edward I or Robert Bruce, while at the same time refusing to focus her attentions upon the career of William Wallace or any other single individual. Instead, she has taken a novel and useful approach to the subject which is both interesting and highly instructive, and for which she should be commended.

The central question of *Under the Hammer* has to do with how, despite obvious military, financial and numerical inferiorities to their enemy, the Scots managed to resist the annexation by the English which had so recently been performed upon Wales. In answer to this question, Dr Watson has considered the nature of
the administrative framework Edward I put into place to govern his new Scottish subjects after 1296, and the difficulties which plagued him thereafter. She has demonstrated the spectacular failure of Edward's initial grandiose, extensive and somewhat naive administrative scheme, and the more guarded, measured and cautious pace of his subsequent plans. According to Watson, Edward was hampered by three problems in particular, the greatest of which by far was extracting from England the necessary money and victuals to pay for and sustain the king's soldiers and administration, especially during times of intense military activity.

Through detailed analyses of the sizes of and provision for the various English garrisons in Scotland during the period, Watson has demonstrated the tremendous cost involved in the slower and more cautious approach to conquest adopted after 1298, the frequency of English mutiny and desertion, and the manner in which these difficulties influenced Edward's priorities and activities as time passed.

While the issue of cost dominates her argument, Dr Watson has pointed out two other significant English problems which were crucial to Scotland's having succeeded where Wales had failed. First, she has shown the extent to which most of Edward's appointees to Scottish administrative posts were thoroughly reluctant to accept, unmotivated and uninspired in their duties, and quick to look for excuses to be relieved and replaced. Second, in discussing how Scotland was dealt with after the submission of 1304, Dr Watson
has illustrated Edward's frustrating difficulties in trying to reward and satisfy his loyal followers on one hand and trying to mollify his enemies on the other. She shows these difficulties to have been particularly evident in Edward's attempts to wrest control of the Scottish legal system away from the Scots themselves while still relying upon their expertise on matters of Scottish law and custom, and his attempts to convey Scottish lands and honours to Englishmen without excessively threatening or offending the Scots. On the whole, Dr Watson's case for the ultimate futility and untenability of the English position, despite Edward's short-term triumphs, is well-constructed, carefully researched and thoroughly convincing.

One of the most satisfying aspects of her work is Dr Watson's having brought to light the efforts of men like Richard Abingdon, Walter Amersham, James Dalilegh and other accomplished English and Scottish administrators whose abilities lay at the heart of Edward's successes in Scotland. Understandably eclipsed by such contemporaries as Edward himself, William Wallace and Robert Bruce, these men of lesser rank have found due recognition in Under the Hammer. Perhaps most notable in this regard is Watson's generally favourable treatment of Hugh de Cressingham, Edward's much maligned first treasurer in Scotland. Her description of Cressingham as Edward's most dutiful, able and committed official in Scotland bears little resemblance to the man whose avarice has been seen as a principal cause for Scottish unrest, and who remains
best known for the grisly nature of his death in battle at Stirling Bridge.

Although her work on Edward’s Scottish administration is founded firmly in evidence, when considering the nature and activities of the native Scottish government during this period Dr Watson is on significantly less sure ground, sometimes relying upon tiny fragments of evidence. By including these elusive events in Under the Hammer, she has rightly recognized the countless actions, whether atrocious or heroic, of hundreds of nameless partisans on both sides of this significant conflict that might otherwise have been forgotten.

The effect of the decision to present these evidentiary fragments is entirely positive: Dr Watson has succeeded in creating the necessary impression of a continued, organized and determined resistance on the part of the Scots, attacking storehouses and supply trains, scorching the earth and launching occasional large-scale raids and sieges. When forced to engage in speculation, she has openly admitted the ultimate unprovability of her ideas and made cautious, well-considered and reasonable conclusions.

Under the Hammer is a well-written and very necessary piece of scholarship, in which the inclusion of tables and graphs in conjunction with statistical information is prudent and helpful. One quibble: for some reason, the secondary title on the front cover is Edward I and Scotland 1286-1307, when the interior title page and page headers (in harmony with the content) read Edward I and Scotland 1286-1306.
Dr Watson’s tone in dealing with her subject - one which has often aroused strong nationalist passions - is refreshingly sober, and to her credit it is generally unapparent whether she is a “Scottish” or an “English” historian.

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