

A recently discovered Latin chronicle of the Wars of Independence

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The challenge of studying chronicles

One of the project's objectives next year is an edition of the Chronicle of Melrose. The chronicle starts with the birth of Christ, and is the main chronicle-source for Scottish events in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. We will be focusing on the final section from 1216 until the chronicle's march through the years ends in 1270: it then stumbles on with a few stray items up to 1282. A chronicle like the Chronicle of Melrose consists largely of notices of unrelated events under each year. This means that, whenever a text like this was copied, the scribes could pick and choose what they were interested in. They could also copy only part of an item, or chose a different wording. It was also very easy to insert material: in the Chronicle of Melrose itself a poem on Magna Carta has been included, and also letters from the pope and the emperor, a Scottish king-list, and even an extended work championing Simon de Montfort in his battles against Henry III and the future Edward I in 1264-5. When you read a year-by-year chronicle, therefore, it is important to bear in mind that it is a more fluid type of Latin text than any other. This poses a serious challenge to anyone trying to understand how the text of a chronicle was created. And this needs to be grasped before historians can use it to greatest effect as a source. This is true even for the Chronicle of Melrose after 1216, whose text was mostly written only a few years or a decade after the events it recorded had taken place. It is possible to investigate when each item was written into the chronicle because, by a remarkable chance, the original manuscript written by generations of monks at Melrose survives as a living record of every time their quills touched the parchment between 1173 or 1174, when the chronicle was first created, through until it was taken to England sometime (probably) in the 1290s.^[1] Usually all we have to work with are copies; and in a copy, of course, none of the evidence of handwriting and the make-up of the original manuscript is preserved.

This is the case with another important Scottish chronicle, referred to by scholars as '*Gesta Annalia*'. It has been established that this ultimately consists of two independent texts, one running up to 1285, and the other from 1285 to (originally) 1363.^[2] It only survives in manuscripts of the mid- to late fifteenth century, where it is added to the history of the Scots written (or, rather, edited) by John of Fordun in the mid-1380s.^[3] There is an unexplained relationship between *Gesta Annalia* and the Chronicle of Melrose: identical chunks of prose are found scattered in both works from at least 1165 to 1249.^[4] By the time we turn in the project to editing the Chronicle of Melrose, we will want to have a clearer understanding of *Gesta Annalia*.^[5] The best hope of adding to our existing knowledge is if we could discover another chronicle which shares material with it. This would allow us to get a better sense of the pool of chronicle-material in late medieval Scotland, and how it has been used in *Gesta Annalia*. This, in turn, might offer insights into the joining together of the two parts of *Gesta Annalia* (i.e., the sections on the years before and after 1285) which could allow us to have a clearer grasp of the earlier part of *Gesta Annalia* that shared material with the Chronicle of Melrose.

A recently discovered manuscript

Such a discovery has recently been made. On 19 June 1990, a manuscript written in Scotland about 1510, bound together with another manuscript of about 1525, was sold by a bookseller in Bangor (County Down) at Sotheby's. The two manuscripts contain various texts relating to Scottish history, and

appear to have been bound together for Robert Robertoun, treasurer of Edinburgh. It passed eventually into the possession of John Lindsay of Balcarres, Lord Menmuir (d.1598). How it then found its way to Bangor is not known. In 1990 it was bought by the famous Norwegian collector of manuscripts, Martin Schøyen, and is now part of his collection in Oslo (Schøyen Collection MS 679: <http://www.schoyencollection.com/historyMedieval.html#679>, accessed 8 August 2011). The librarian of the collection very kindly supplied me with digital images of folios 1-24 (the first one and a half gatherings of 16 folios each).^[6]

The manuscript begins (from folio 1 verso to folio 7 verso) with items on early legendary British history and Scottish origins, and a list of Scottish and Pictish kings. This is followed (fols 7v-17v) by material which contains some identical prose with *Gesta Annalia*: an account of the ancestors of Alexander III (1249–1286) and of the descendants of Mael Coluim III and Margaret (d. 1093), and also an explanation of the descendants of David, earl of Huntingdon (d. 1219). Earl David, the younger brother of kings Mael Coluim IV and William the Lion, was the ancestor of both Robert Bruce (the elder) and John Balliol through whom they claimed to succeed Alexander III after Margaret, Alexander's only remaining descendant, died in September 1290 on her way from Norway. This provides a natural bridge to the most striking item of all: an account of Scottish events from 1285 to 1327, again with some material shared with *Gesta Annalia* (fols 17v-24r). All these items (from fo. 1v to fo. 24r) run from one to another without a gap. At fo. 24r, however, the text stops halfway down the page, leaving the rest blank. The text which follows in the manuscript was evidently regarded as an entirely separate item. The different items between fols 1v and 24r, by contrast, were treated as parts of a whole. For convenience, this compendium from British and Scottish origins to the year 1327 may be referred to as the 'Schøyen chronicle'.^[7] Our initial interest focused on the light it might shed on the textual habitat of *Gesta Annalia* and (ultimately) the Chronicle of Melrose. In the process, though, we have stumbled on a hitherto unknown text on the first War of Independence.

How credible is the information in the newly discovered chronicle?

For the project this new material is particularly important because of the fresh scraps of information it has on Scotland during the Wars of Independence. The first question, though, is whether it is a credible source. The manuscript, after all, was written about two hundred years after the events described in the chronicle. Fortunately there can be no doubt that the scribe who produced the manuscript around 1510 was copying from an earlier manuscript. This is shown by the fact that the chronicle shares much of its prose not only with *Gesta Annalia* but also, in sections not shared with *Gesta Annalia*, with Bower's *Scotichronicon* (written in the 1440s).^[8] (Some of the same material can also be traced in the verse history, in Scots, by Andrew Wyntoun, written sometime between 1408 and 1424.) There are places where the 'new' chronicle is more accurate than the others. For example, it gives the name of the earl of Buchan who was one of the guardians of the realm appointed in 1286 as, correctly, Alexander (not John, as *Gesta Annalia* and Bower wrongly have it), and it gives the correct date for the capture of Simon Fraser (the Assumption of the Virgin Mary, 15 August 1306, not the Annunciation, as in Bower).^[9] It also has some new detail which looks entirely credible. For example, it is known that John Lindsay was consecrated bishop of Glasgow by the pope sometime shortly before 10 October 1323, the date of the pope's written instruction to him to return to Glasgow.^[10] It is stated in the chronicle that he was consecrated by the pope on 9 October.

It is clear from all this that the material in the chronicle for the years 1285 to 1327 cannot have been created simply by copying material from *Gesta Annalia* and Bower's *Scotichronicon*. This means that any statement found only in this 'new' chronicle (such as the date of Lindsay's consecration as bishop of

Glasgow) should be taken seriously. We must always remember, however, that all we have is a copy of about 1510. There will be mistakes. It is plain that the scribe of about 1510 had difficulty at times in reading what he was copying: for instance, he left blanks for the names of Elizabeth, Robert I's queen, at her death in 1327, and (probably) Macduff, who fell at Falkirk in 1298. This suggests that the manuscript copied by the scribe was quite old by 1510, and its handwriting unfamiliar. The blank names are also vital indications that the scribe who produced the copy that we have today wished merely to reproduce the text, rather than refashion it, otherwise he would presumably have avoided the awkwardness of leaving such obvious gaps. Less easy to detect are the cases where misreading has led to the substitution of one name with another. Henry de Sully, butler of France captured by Bruce in a raid deep into Yorkshire in 1323,^[11] has become 'Hugh'; Alexander Bruce, Robert I's brother, has been changed into 'Alan'. Edward II married Isabella in Boulogne, not 'London'.^[12]

The scribe who produced our manuscript about 1510 may have been content to copy the text before him as best he could. It appears, though, that the chronicle itself has been composed (or edited at some point) by someone who was prepared very occasionally to change events to make them seem tidier. The most obvious example is that William Wallace's capture and execution, which in reality happened in August 1305, is moved to 1304, where it is made to come before the final collapse of Scottish resistance against Edward I before Robert Bruce's rising in 1306 took the war into a new phase. Significant areas of Scotland had, until 1304, held out against Edward I since Wallace's great victory at Stirling Bridge in 1297. It is as if it made better sense to think that Scottish resistance crumbled because Wallace had been captured and killed, than to admit that the Scottish government had capitulated while Wallace was still active, leaving him a fugitive from Edward's wrath for more than a year.

How important is the 'new' chronicle?

Because the chronicle is so similar to other well known sources relating to the Wars of Independence, it contains only tit-bits of new information, such as an extra piece of detail (as we have seen already) or a fresh comment. Comment can be useful, even if it only gives us access to what was being said at some point in the later Middle Ages. For example, the only contemporary explanation for the killing of Duncan, earl of Fife, by some Fife landowners in 1289 that has hitherto been known to scholars is given in the Chronicle of Lanercost (at this point copying a work written by a friar, probably of Haddington). There it is said that Earl Duncan was assassinated because of his greed.^[13] In the 'new' chronicle, however, we are told more specifically that it was because he had 'stolen the patrimony' of the major landholder and kinsman of the earl who had incited the assassins. Historians have suspected that this was a dispute over property.^[14] We now have a potentially contemporary statement that states this explicitly.

These additions to our stock of material on the period are best explained as the result of independent use of a common body of chronicle-text shared *Gesta Annalia* and Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon*—a body of chronicle-text that was treated in different ways to produce significant parts of these two extant works as well as our 'new' chronicle. They could, of course, all ultimately be derived from a single lost chronicle. If so, however, this could never be reconstructed in its entirety. A simple genealogy of texts is likely to be an oversimplification, especially if we recall the inherent instability of year-by-year chronicles, because of the susceptibility of their text to being selected, reduced, altered and added to in ways that we cannot always detect. Our 'new' chronicle is not a completely new source. What it does is give us a little more information than we had before, and a better understanding of the legacy of chronicle-material from the time of the Wars of Independence. We will look at a striking example of each of these bonuses in next month's 'feature', and consider how it changes our understanding of key aspects of this

period.

When was it written?

Finally, when was the text of this account of the period 1285–1327 originally written? This is a question about the creation of the text, not the writing of the manuscript (which has, as I have said, been dated to about 1510). It will be recalled that the Schøyen chronicle consists of ultimately separate items (king-list, genealogy, origin-legend as well as standard year-by-year chronicle material). These will have come together in more than one stage. The latest information mentioned in the Schøyen chronicle as a whole is Robert II as king (he reigned 1371–1390). This is in the genealogical material, and could suggest not only that the Schøyen chronicle is no older than 1371, but that it might date from the time of Robert II. It seems likely that whoever created the chronicle did so simply by adding one or two pre-existing texts to an earlier compilation.^[15] One of those pre-existing texts would have been the chronicle for 1285–1327 (which may have originally extended before 1285, with only 1285–1327 copied to form the Schøyen chronicle itself).

In trying to answer when the account of 1285–1327 as we have it was written, the first place to look is the end. As it stands it finishes with an account of the raid into northern England in July and August 1327 that left Edward III frustrated when the Scottish army—much smaller than his own force—slipped through his grasp despite having them cornered.^[16] This is a strange place to conclude an account of the wars. These hostilities were a prelude to an invasion of Northumberland by Robert I that led the English government in October 1327 to begin negotiations towards a lasting peace. The result, the Treaty of Edinburgh, recognising Scottish independence, was agreed the following year. The ‘new’ chronicle therefore finishes when a much more natural endpoint was within easy reach. This makes it less likely that the scribe in about 1510 stopped where he did simply because he had had enough of the task of copying. It will also be recalled that he stopped in the middle of a page, leaving the rest blank. You can never rule out the possibility that the scribe did not complete his transcription, however. This would be one way to explain how, despite finishing with events in August 1327, the chronicle in its note on the birth of David II in 1324 includes the fact that David succeeded his father, Robert Bruce, as king. This did not occur until 1329. This need not be conclusive: it is possible to imagine this obvious information being added by a scribe copying the chronicle (for example, the person who added it to other items to create the Schøyen chronicle itself). Perhaps, on balance, it seems more likely that the chronicle goes no further than August 1327 because when the final part of the source for the material between 1285 and 1327 was written, the major turning point of the English negotiations for peace in October had not yet occurred. Be this as it may, this can readily be acknowledged as a vital independent witness of the pool of chronicle material from the Wars which we have hitherto only known in Latin through *Gesta Annalia* and Bower, and in Scots through the verse history by Andrew Wyntoun, written sometime between 1408 and 1424.

^[1] Dauvit Broun & Julian Harrison, *The Chronicle of Melrose Abbey*, vol. i, *Introduction and Facsimile* (Woodbridge 2007), 40–55, 71–7.

^[2] Dauvit Broun, ‘A new look at *Gesta Annalia* attributed to John of Fordun’, in B. E. Crawford (ed.), *Church, Chronicle and Learning in Medieval and Early Renaissance Scotland* (Edinburgh 1999), 9–30.

^[3] Dauvit Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain from the Picts to Alexander III* (Edinburgh 2007), 215–68.

[4] A. A. M. Duncan, 'Sources and uses of the Chronicle of Melrose, 1165–1297', in Simon Taylor (ed.), *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500–1297* (Dublin 2000), 146–85, at 163–85.

[5] A fundamental study of closely related material is Alice Taylor, 'Historical writing in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scotland: the Dunfermline compilation', *Historical Research*, 83 (2010), 228–52.

[6] I am grateful to Elizabeth Gano Sørensen, Librarian for The Schøyen Collection, for sending me a copy of the catalogue description and other material relating to the manuscript, and to Martin Schøyen for permission to work on this manuscript and publish the results.

[7] With Martin Schøyen's permission. Although not all the elements are in the standard 'chronicle' format of events given year-by-year, it is a prominent feature. As explained, chronicles are flexible and can incorporate other kinds of text.

[8] *Gesta Annalia* is edited in W. F. Skene (ed.), *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum* (Edinburgh 1871), 254–383, 406–37 (which he regarded as separate), and translated in Felix J. H. Skene (trans.), W. F. Skene (ed.), *John of Fordun's Chronicle of the Scottish Nation* (Edinburgh, 1872), 249–372 (the material regarded as separate has not, however, been translated). Bower's *Scotichronicon* is edited and translated in D. E. R. Watt (gen. ed.), *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, 9 vols (Aberdeen/Edinburgh 1987–98). For Wyntoun, see F. J. Amours (ed.), *The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, 6 vols (Edinburgh 1903–14). Its date of composition is discussed in Dauvit Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots* (Woodbridge 1999), 96 n. 40.

[9] See discussion in Norman F. Shead, Wendy Stevenson & D. E. R. Watt (ed.), *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, vol. vi (Aberdeen 1991), 480–1.

[10] D. E. R. Watt & A. L. Murray, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae Medii Aevi Ad Annum 1638* (Edinburgh 2003), 190.

[11] On this incident, see G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland*, 4th edn (Edinburgh 2005), 317.

[12] This seems to be a different kind of miscopying than in the other cases: London is mentioned shortly before and after in this passage, and has doubtless caught the scribe's eye.

[13] Joseph Stevenson (ed.), *Chronicon de Lanercost M.CC.I-M.CCC.XLVI*, Bannatyne Club (Edinburgh 1839), 127.

[14] G. W. S. Barrow, 'Some East Fife documents of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries', in G. W. S. Barrow (ed.), *The Scottish Tradition* (Edinburgh 1974), 23–43, at 38; Michael Brown, 'Aristocratic politics and the crisis of Scottish kingship, 1286–96', *Scottish Historical Review* 90 (2011), 1–26, at 5–9.

[15] For example, it includes a compendium of origin-legend and king-list that can be found independently. See Dauvit Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Woodbridge 1999), 81–110. It is closest to the hypothesised text identified there as γ , datable to 1292 × 1304.

[16] There are a number of near contemporary accounts of this incident, but their detail is difficult to reconcile: for discussion, see Barrow, *Robert Bruce*, 4th edn, 482 n. 83. Although the account in the Schøyen chronicle is brief, it seems quite matter-of-fact, especially compared with Bower's heightening

of the Scots' achievement, despite the fact (as the Schøyen chronicle, e.g., makes clear) that the Scots had avoided battle and eventually withdrawn altogether. For Bower's account, see A. B. Scott & D. E. R. Watt with others (ed.), *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, vol. vii (Aberdeen 1996), 34–5.