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# The Declaration of Arbroath: Pedigree of a Nation?

*Dauvit Broun*

It is almost impossible for us to read the most famous words of the Declaration of Arbroath without hearing in them the echo of our own modern notions of national self-determination.<sup>1</sup> The determination to fight to the death for a country's survival chimes easily with the rhetoric of so many struggles for independence in the modern age of nationalism. And the remarkable statement that King Robert would be expelled if he sold out to the English, and a new king chosen who could defend Scottish independence, can readily be read as an assertion of popular sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> It is a matter for debate how far the prism of our own perceptions distorts or illuminates our understanding of this text. Certainly, the distance of so many centuries has inevitably obscured what would have been instantly visible between the lines to those Scottish clerics and nobles who wrote and read and listened to these words as fresh prose in 1320. They all knew about Edward Balliol, the son and heir of King John for whom they or their fathers had fought before the final surrender of the Comyn-led government to Edward I in February 1304; they would also surely have known that Edward Balliol was at large in England since being received as a guest of King Edward II in November 1318.<sup>3</sup> They also knew that the future of Bruce kingship, since the death of Edward Bruce in October

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<sup>1</sup>See further Terry Brotherstone and David Ditchburn, '1320 and a' that: the Declaration of Arbroath and the remaking of Scottish History', in *Freedom and Authority. Scotland c.1050-c.1650. Historical and Historiographical Essays presented to Grant G. Simpson*, ed. Terry Brotherstone and David Ditchburn (East Linton, 2000), 10-31, esp. 20-24.

<sup>2</sup>Grant G. Simpson, 'The Declaration of Arbroath revitalised', *Scottish Historical Review*, 56 (1977), 11-33, at 22-24, has shown that the Declaration should be seen as belonging to a genre of government-inspired addresses to the papacy by the leading subjects of a kingdom which was designed to add political weight to a king's resistance to papal pressure. It could be argued, however, that the framework of political assumptions which underpins the purposefully dramatised prose in such documents was significantly different in the case of the Declaration. The threat to depose the king announced in the Declaration is decidedly more radical than the parallel statements in documents cited by Simpson ('The Declaration of Arbroath', 22-23) in which the king's subjects swore to back their monarch to the death (as in the baronial letter written in support of King John of England in 1212: H. G. Richardson and G. O. Sayles, *The Irish Parliament in the Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Philadelphia, 1964), 286-287), or in which they resolved to prevent their king from implementing the pope's ruling (as in the baronial response to Pope Boniface's denial of Edward I's claim to be lord superior of Scotland: *Foedera*, i, part ii, 926-927). See also G. W. S. Barrow, *Scotland and its Neighbours in the Middle Ages* (London, 1992), 12-14, for the contrast between the Declaration and documents of similar type. The significance of this 'momentous clause' as evidence for the precocious development in Scotland of the 'contractual theory of monarchy' is argued by E. J. Cowan, 'Identity, freedom, and the Declaration of Arbroath', in *Image and Identity: the Making and Re-making of Scotland Through the Ages*, ed. D. Broun, R. J. Finlay and M. Lynch (Edinburgh, 1998), 38-68, esp. 51-54. For an interpretation which sees both political ideas and expediency at play, see Alexander Grant, 'Aspects of national consciousness in medieval Scotland', in *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past*, ed. C. Björn, A. Grant, and K. J. Stringer (Copenhagen, 1994), 68-95, at 69-73. I would argue, however, that the radical aspect of the Declaration can be explained in the light of immediate political concerns (see below).

<sup>3</sup>Michael Penman, 'A fell coniuracioun agayn Robert the douchty king: the Soules conspiracy of 1318-1320', *Innes Review*, 50 (1999), 25-57, at 38-39.

1318, hung precariously on the lives of King Robert himself and the only surviving male heir of his line, his grandson Robert Stewart, who would have only just reached his fourth birthday.<sup>4</sup> When they heard of resisting a king who might yield to the power of the English, therefore, their minds would immediately have turned not to King Robert, but to Edward Balliol, whose potent claim to the throne was bound to mean concessions to his English hosts if he were ever to establish himself in Scotland.<sup>5</sup> And when they heard of making some other man king should Robert fail, they might have recognised in this a reassurance that, even if Robert I and his grandson should perish, the Bruce party meant to retain power, and might choose one of their number as king if necessary.<sup>6</sup>

This raises an awkward question. Would the stirring words we know so well ever have been penned had Robert I and his government not felt jeopardised by Edward Balliol and by the possibility of a dynastic crisis? The threat of a challenge to the throne was certainly very real: a few months later a conspiracy to oust King Robert was revealed. This has gone down in history as the ‘Soules conspiracy’, as if the object of the exercise was to put William de Soules, the king’s butler, on the throne. It has recently been argued convincingly that the real objective was to restore the Balliol kingship, and that after the coup had been savagely

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<sup>4</sup>Robert’s mother, Marjorie daughter of Robert I, was probably married not long after 27 April 1315; Robert Stewart himself was probably born before 25 March 1316. See discussion in *Scotichronicon* by Walter Bower, ed. D. E. R. Watt, vi (1991), 465, at note on chap. 25 lines 61-62; also *Regesta Regum Scottorum*, v, *The Acts of Robert I, King of Scots, 1306-1329*, ed. A. A. M. Duncan (Edinburgh, 1988), 652, which shows that the date of Robert Stewart’s birth is more uncertain than is apparent in *The Handbook of British Chronology*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn, ed. E. B. Fryde, D. E. Greenway, S. Porter and I. Roy (London, 1986), 59, where it is given without comment as 2 March 1316. Detailed provision for the royal succession was made in the tailzie of 1318, adopting the principles on which the Bruce claim was based in 1291-2: see A. A. M. Duncan, *The Kingship of the Scots, 842-1292: Succession and Independence* (Edinburgh, 2002), 327-328. If the direct line had died out, this would apparently have given the strongest claim to Domhnall Bán, earl of Mar, who was the son of Robert I’s sister. Domhnall, however, had refused to return to Scotland after Bannockburn, and remained in England until Edward II’s death in 1327.

<sup>5</sup>It has previously been recognised that the threat to remove the king may have been directed against a Balliol, but discussion of this has hitherto focused on King John himself, and in particular the need to explain how Robert I could have become king in 1306 while John was still alive and had not been formally deposed by the ‘community of the realm’: see Grant, ‘Aspects of national consciousness’, 71-72, and R. James Goldstein, *The Matter of Scotland. Historical Narrative in Medieval Scotland* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 1993), 95-97. For doubts about the retrospective intention of this key passage, see Brotherstone and Ditchburn, ‘1320 and a’ that’, 25 n.67.

<sup>6</sup>The most likely contender would probably have been Thomas Randolph, earl of Moray, who in the tailzies of succession of 27 April 1315 and 3 December 1318 was designated as guardian of the realm should Robert I die leaving a minor as his heir: *APS*, i, 464-465; Gordon Donaldson, *Scottish Historical Documents* (reprinted with corrections, Edinburgh, 1974), 52-54. Thomas Randolph’s grandmother was Robert I’s mother, so he would not have had the right of blood defined in the tailzie of 1318 (see Duncan, *The Kingship of the Scots*, 327, n.47. Robert I’s daughters by his second wife were not yet born: Margaret (who married William, earl of Sutherland, c. 1345) and Matilda (who married sometime in or after 1342, and died 20 July 1353): Bower, *Scotichronicon* (Watt) vi, 461, at notes on lines 231-233 and 235-238; *Scotichronicon* (Watt) vii, 471, at note on lines 54-61.

suppressed, Robert I was eager to minimise its significance by claiming that a far less credible candidate had been its intended beneficiary.<sup>7</sup>

It is necessary to look elsewhere in the Declaration for reassurance that the ideal of ‘national’ freedom was, indeed, a central part of its argument. This can be found in one of the least well known sections of the document, in a passage which is most at odds with our modern sensibilities. To any medieval reader, however, it would almost certainly have seemed the most impressive statement of Scotland’s claim to sovereignty that had ever been written. It reads as follows (in Professor Duncan’s translation):<sup>8</sup>

Most holy father and lord, we know, and we gather from the deeds and books of the ancients, that among other distinguished nations our own nation, namely of Scots, has been marked by many distinctions. It journeyed from Greater Scythia by the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Pillars of Hercules, and dwelt for a long span of time in Spain among the most savage peoples, but nowhere could it be subjugated by any people, however barbarous. From there it came twelve hundred years after the people of Israel crossed the Red Sea and, having first driven out the Britons and altogether destroyed the Picts, it acquired, with many victories and untold efforts, the places which it now holds, although often assailed by Norwegians, Danes and English. As the histories of old times bear witness, it has held them free of all servitude ever since. In their kingdom one hundred and thirteen kings of their own royal stock have reigned, the line unbroken by a single foreigner.

This is more-or-less pure fiction, of course. It does nothing for us today, except perhaps repel us as an embarrassingly brazen piece of propaganda. There can be no denying its importance for those who drafted the Declaration, however. They chose it as their opening statement, following on immediately from the list of those in whose name the Declaration was sent (and the customary offer of devout kisses to the pontiff’s feet). It defined the freedom which, in the succeeding sections of the document, we are told that Edward I had defiled, Robert Bruce had restored, and which Scots would fight for to the death. It was the freedom to be a sovereign people; a kingdom ruled by a king of their own kind.

The notion that a kingdom had been independent since remotest times was not particularly unusual in this period. It was assumed, in the Middle Ages as much as in more modern times, that political status was justified by

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<sup>7</sup>Penman, ‘*A fell coniuracioun*’. The suggestion that Edward Balliol was the intended beneficiary of the conspiracy was first made in A. A. M. Duncan, ‘The war of the Scots, 1306-23’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> series, 2 (1992), 125-151, at 129-131.

<sup>8</sup>John Barbour, *The Bruce*, ed. A. A. M. Duncan (Edinburgh, 1997), 779-782.

History. If you claimed to be an independent kingdom, then this automatically meant that you believed that you had been an independent kingdom in the deep past. This was explained with compelling candour by Scottish procurators at the papal Curia in 1301:<sup>9</sup>

It is certain that, just as the kingdom of Scotland has recently been shown to have been free when its last king died [Alexander III in 1286], so it is presumed to have been free from antiquity if we make an assumption from the recent past and apply it to the more remote past before then, just as the laws dictate.

There are other examples of kingdoms at this time which boasted a long history. The Irish Remonstrance of 1317, which has been regarded as a kind of dishevelled sister of the Declaration of Arbroath, proclaimed that Ireland had an even more impressive record of freedom, stretching back for 197 kings until, it was stated, the English Pope Adrian ‘improperly conferred *de facto* lordship’ on Henry II of England in 1170.<sup>10</sup> The English themselves regarded Geoffrey of Monmouth’s vivid account of over 100 British kings spanning about 1,800 years up to the seventh century AD as the ancient history of their monarchy.<sup>11</sup> Further afield, we may note the amazing coincidence that King Eirik of Denmark, who was Robert Bruce’s contemporary (both were born in 1274), was, like Robert in the Declaration of Arbroath, advertised as the 113th king of his country.<sup>12</sup> There are also instances, like the Declaration of Arbroath, in which a claim to ancient independence was elaborated precisely because the kingdom’s sovereignty was at issue. Ancient Danish history, for example, was first given shape by Saxo Grammaticus sometime in or between 1208 and 1218, writing (so he tells us) at the behest of Absalon, archbishop of

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<sup>9</sup>*Scotichronicon* (Watt) vi, 151 (bk XI, ch.51, lines 71-75).

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 384-403, at 386-387. In comparison with the Declaration of Arbroath, the Remonstrance has been described by Scottish historians as ‘a rambling, loosely organised piece of writing’ (Grant Simpson, ‘The Declaration of Arbroath’, 24), and ‘a rambling tirade of invective’ (Barrow, *Scotland and its Neighbours*, 14).

<sup>11</sup>The process by which Geoffrey’s *Historia Regum Britannie* came to be regarded as English History is discussed in R. William Leckie jnr, *The Passage of Dominion: Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Periodization of Insular History in the Twelfth Century* (Toronto, 1981). The results of how the British past was ‘captured and possessed by the English’ has recently been explored perceptively in R. R. Davies, *The First English Empire: Power and Identities in the British Isles 1093-1343* (Oxford, 2000), 41-43.

<sup>12</sup>*Annales Ryenses*, s.a. 1287 (Eirik’s coronation). For the text of the chronicle, see *Danmarks Middelalderlige Annaler*, ed. E. Kroman (Copenhagen, 1980), 150-176. Kroman’s edition is from Hamburg Stadtbibliothek MS 98 b, which he dates to c. 1300 (see *ibid.*, 149). This is the only manuscript to which he refers. The chronicle is a fusion of annals and a king-list, and begins with the legendary origins of the Danes: the first annalistic item is s.a. 1028 (the martyrdom of King Ólafr of Norway), and the annalistic element only becomes frequent from the late eleventh century. The chronicle ends in 1288, and presumably assumed its surviving form sometime in that year or soon after. Hamburg Stadtbibliothek MS 98 b is a copy (as can be seen, for example, in the appearance of Eirik as king no. ‘116’ rather than 113, a simple mistake in copying minims: see *ibid.*, 176, apparatus).

Lund (1178-1201), in a deliberate attempt to give substance to Denmark's independent status which Absalon was keen to advance.<sup>13</sup>

The significance of the Declaration of Arbroath is that it represents the high water mark of a Scottish vision of ancient independence. Nothing so uncompromising and compelling, at least to a medieval audience, had been attempted before, or would be tried again. This was not, however, achieved by making the most extreme claims for Scottish history ever. Little or nothing of any substance, in fact, had not already been anticipated in earlier attempts to set Scotland's origins in writing. The genius of the account of Scottish origins in the Declaration was in bringing a range of key elements together to produce a more potent portrayal of a primordial past. Scotland's pedigree as a sovereign kingdom had never been articulated so comprehensively and crisply before. Let us look at each element in turn:

The idea that the Scots originated in Scythia (or Greece) had been repeated for centuries. It owes its origin to the observation in the well known *Etymologies* of Isidore, bishop of Seville in the early seventh century, that the Latin word for Scythians, *Sciti*, was very close to *Scoti*. When Isidore wrote, of course, *Scoti* meant 'Irish' or 'Gaels'. The stop-off in Spain had also been a stock feature of learned Christian attempts to explain Irish/Gaelic origins from the outset.<sup>14</sup> So far the account in the Declaration of Arbroath is giving a standard explanation of how *Scoti* fit into the greater scheme of peoples as this was understood in medieval Christian learning. One feature stands out, however: the idea that the Scots retained their independence in Spain despite the best efforts of savage Spaniards to subjugate them. The need to fight for their freedom at this very early stage is found in other accounts of Scottish origins. One particularly dramatic example has the Scots clinging on to dear life in the Pyrenees, depending on wild plants and robbing their neighbours for their survival, but never, no matter how desperate they became, surrendering their freedom by submitting to the rule of a king other than their own.<sup>15</sup> This probably belonged to a rewriting of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History* from a Scottish point of view which has been identified by John and Winifred MacQueen, and may be dated tentatively to sometime before 1285.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Saxo Grammaticus, *The History of the Danes*, i, trans. Peter Fisher, ed. Hilda Ellis Davidson (Cambridge, 1979), 4 (preface). For the date of Saxo's work, see *ibid.*, 1. For Archbishop Absalom, see *ibid.*, ii, commentary by Hilda Ellis Davidson and Peter Fisher (Cambridge, 1980), 19. Absalom advised Knud IV (1182-1202) that he should refuse to repeat the homage which Danish kings in the twelfth century had hitherto made to the German emperor.

<sup>14</sup>The origins of the legend are discussed in John Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend: Synthetic Pseudohistory*, Quiggin Pamphlet no.1 (Cambridge, 1994), 8-12.

<sup>15</sup>Dauvit Broun, *The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Woodbridge, 1999), 48-49, for edition of this part of Fordun's chronicle.

<sup>16</sup>*Scotichronicon* (Watt), i, xxviii-xxix. This included the 'Partholón' account of Scottish origins which can be identified in Fordun's chronicle: see Broun, *The Irish Identity*, 76-81 (where a

Much less common is the claim that the Scots reached Scotland 1,200 years after the Children of Israel crossed the Red Sea. It was not entirely unprecedented, however. In *Historia Brittonum*, a seminal collection of pseudo-history written in 829 or 830, it was stated that the *Scoti* reached Ireland 1,002 years after Moses led the Israelites through the Red Sea: the crossing of the Red Sea coincided with the departure from Egypt of the eponymous Scota daughter of Pharaoh with her Scythian or Greek husband, progenitors of the *Scoti*.<sup>17</sup> One fundamental difference with the Declaration's account is immediately apparent. There is no mention of Ireland. In the Declaration the *Scoti* go straight from Spain to Scotland. Obviously *Scoti* in the Declaration means Scots in the same basic sense as we understand the term today. There is no suggestion that *Scoti* meant Irish or Gaels. This was something of a novelty. Up to the 1290s the Scots had been represented, in accounts of their origins, as an offshoot of the Irish, and Ireland (not Scotland) had been presented as their homeland.<sup>18</sup> The Declaration was not the first occasion in which Scottish origins had been focused on Scotland rather than Ireland: the Scottish procurators at the Curia in 1301, led by Baldred Bisset, had rewritten the legend of Scota, eponym of the *Scoti*, so that, for the first time, Scotland became her ultimate destination.<sup>19</sup> Ireland was not completely forgotten by Baldred Bisset and his team, though. It was, however, relegated to a mere staging post where Scota acquired reinforcements. The innovation in the Declaration was to omit Ireland altogether.

The figure of 1,200 years for the period between the crossing of the Red Sea and the arrival of the Scots at their homeland, rather than 1,002 years, is highly unusual. It appears to be a copying error. The fault, however, does not lie with those who drafted the Declaration. They had, it seems, inherited this mistake from their source. If we try to chase up this source, we are led to an unexpected conclusion: the author of the Declaration used a *History of the English* for most of his account of Scottish origins! The trail begins with Andrew of Wyntoun's immense poetic history written in Scots in three editions sometime between 1408 and 1424.<sup>20</sup> As part of his project he related a number of different accounts of Scottish origins. The

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*terminus ante quem* of 1301 is suggested). The earlier *terminus ante quem* is based on the suggestion that much of Fordun's chronicle is derived from an earlier work datable to sometime in or between February and April 1285: see most recently Dauvit Broun, 'The Picts' place in the kingship's past before John of Fordun', in *Scottish History: the Power of the Past*, ed. Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay (Edinburgh, 2002), 11-28, at 25-27.

<sup>17</sup>*The Historia Brittonum*, 10 vols, ed. David N. Dumville, iii, *The 'Vatican' Recension* (Cambridge, 1985), 69-70. The other volumes are forthcoming: for the place of this section in other recensions see *ibid.*, 56-57. Text, translation and commentary are given in Carey, *The Irish National Origin-Legend*, 5-7.

<sup>18</sup>Broun, *The Irish Identity*, esp. 109-132.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 120, 198; *Scotichronicon* (Watt) vi, 182-183.

<sup>20</sup>*The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, ed. F. J. Amours, Scottish Text Society, 6 vols (1903-14). For the dating 1408x24 see Broun, *The Irish Identity*, 96 n.40.

third and last is derived ultimately from *Historia Brittonum*,<sup>21</sup> but instead of giving the figure of 1,002 years from the Red Sea crossing to final settlement, Wyntoun has 1,200 years, just as in the Declaration of Arbroath. Wyntoun's source was not, however, *Historia Brittonum* itself, but Henry of Huntingdon's *History of the English*, written in the second quarter of the twelfth century, in which the origins of the *Scoti* as given in *Historia Brittonum* is repeated with the additional information that the *Scoti* were, in fact, *Navarri* (which presumably refers to Basques)!<sup>22</sup> The curious reference to *Navarri* by Wyntoun in very similar terms and in the same context as in Henry of Huntingdon leaves little doubt that Wyntoun was using a copy of Henry of Huntingdon. Henry of Huntingdon himself, however, correctly repeated the figure of 1,002 years given in *Historia Brittonum*. The mistake of 1,200 years instead of 1,002 years seems therefore to have occurred in a copy of Henry of Huntingdon's *History of the English* which was used not only by Wyntoun but also, about a century earlier, in the composition of the Declaration of Arbroath.

Perhaps the most brazen fiction in the Declaration's account of Scottish origins, however, is the statement that the Scots, on arrival in Scotland, not only drove out the Britons, but also destroyed the Picts.<sup>23</sup> It had been a commonplace to regard the Scots and Picts as originally living side-by-side for hundreds of years until the mid-ninth century; only then, and not in the primeval mists of time, were the Picts said to have been annihilated by the Scots led by Cinaed mac Ailpín. Again, however, what was said here in the Declaration was not wholly new. Such a radical rewriting of Scoto-Pictish relations had already been achieved by Baldred Bisset and his team of procurators. It is possible, indeed, to see Bisset and his colleagues making this up as they prepared their pleadings. In their first draft they routinely proposed that the Scots, on arriving in Scotland, had lived alongside the Picts. In their final text, however, they decided to make the primeval association of Scots with Scotland absolutely clear by removing the Picts immediately from the scene, insisting that the Scots destroyed them as soon as they reached Scotland.

This complete takeover of Scotland by the Scots from the very beginning went hand-in-hand with the next striking statement: namely, that there were 113 kings without the intervention of a single foreigner. This proclaimed the enduring freedom of the Scots as the rightful possessors of Scotland from the deepest past right up to Robert I himself. The figure of 113 may seem outrageous, but it was not picked at random. It was the result of a slight but hugely significant change in the way the most complete Scottish king-list was read.<sup>24</sup> The antecedents of Cinaed mac

<sup>21</sup>*Chron. Wyntoun* (Amours), ii, 202-207. For the passage in *Historia Brittonum*, see n.00, above.

<sup>22</sup>Henry, *Archdeacon of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum. The History of the English People*, ed. Diana Greenway (Oxford, 1996), 28-31.

<sup>23</sup>For this paragraph, see Broun, 'The Picts' place in the kingship's past', 11-16.

<sup>24</sup>For what follows, see Dauvit Broun, 'The birth of Scottish History', *SHR*, 76 (1997), 2-22, at 12-13.

Ailpín's kingdom were regarded as a 'Scottish' kingdom west of Drumalban and a Pictish kingdom in the east. Ideally the kings of these earlier kingdoms should have been listed in parallel columns, to make it clear that, in the period prior to Cinaed mac Ailpín, Scottish and Pictish kings reigned at the same time. Instead, these kings were presented in a single column: the Scottish kings before Cinaed mac Ailpín were given first, followed by Pictish kings, and then by Cinaed mac Ailpín and his successors. Nevertheless, it was made perfectly clear that the Scottish kings who preceded Cinaed were the contemporaries of Pictish kings, *not* their predecessors. At some stage in the late thirteenth century, however, this crucial detail was overlooked. Someone decided that all the kings belonged to a single series, as if they were kings of one-and-the-same kingdom. The pre-Cinaed Scottish kings were thus presented as the predecessors of the Picts; as a result, the Scottish king Ailpín, who was obviously meant to be Cinaed's father, became separated from his son by about a millenium, with 60 Pictish kings intervening between them.<sup>25</sup> If all the kings, both Scots and Picts, who were thus reinterpreted as constituting a single series, were to be added up, the total (including John Balliol and Robert Bruce) would be 113. The idea of reckoning these kings in this way with such scant regard for any sense of chronological propriety was not, however, an innovation of the Declaration of Arbroath. The earliest occasion in which it is found is in a king-list produced sometime in the reign of King John, in which it is proclaimed, in a supreme final flourish, that on the day John Balliol was inaugurated as king (30 November 1292) the kingdom of Scotland, through its succession of Pictish and Scottish kings, was 1,976 years, 9 months and 8 days old.<sup>26</sup>

Any distinction between Pictish and Scottish kings was lost in the Declaration. Indeed, given that the Picts were, as we have seen, treated as foreigners who had to be rubbed out as soon as the Scots arrived in Scotland, it may seem a bit rich that the figure of 113 kings 'unbroken by a single foreigner' actually included 60 Pictish kings. But we should not rush to condemn. Such cynicism could only be imputed if the authors of the Declaration had a king-list before them. The global total of 113, however, could have been taken from an existing global figure without realising that less than half were Scots.

The idea of insisting that all kings of Scotland were Scots was not new to the Declaration. An earlier poetic account of Scottish history, written sometime between 1296 and 1306, but subsequently continued by Walter

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<sup>25</sup>This is archetype  $\beta$  (which included king-list and origin-legend), probably written sometime in the 1290s: Broun, *The Irish Identity*, 109, 198.

<sup>26</sup>This is archetype  $\gamma$  (which included king-list and origin-legend), written sometime during the reign of King John (1292-1304): Broun, *The Irish Identity*, 109, 198. It survives translated into French in Thomas Grey's *Scalacronica*, begun sometime in or after 1355 and completed sometime in or after 1363. The king-list section of this text in *Scalacronica* (known by the siglum **K**) is edited in Marjorie O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Edinburgh, 1980), 286-289.

Bower, seems originally to have ended with this striking statement at the end of its comparatively modest enumeration of 52 kings:<sup>27</sup>

Thus far these kings had all been Scots like their people, and, if God grants it, may it be henceforth just as it was before. When a body has an alien head, it is all filth: so a people is defiled when a foreigner becomes king.

There was little or nothing in terms of content or ideas, therefore, that was new in the account of Scottish origins in the Declaration of Arbroath. The only novel detail was the omission of Ireland from the itinerary before the Scots reached Scotland; the refocusing of the primordial odyssey on Scotland rather than Ireland had, however, been anticipated by Baldred Bisset and his fellow procurators in 1301. What makes the Declaration so outstanding compared to other accounts is in the range of elements that have been brought together. Only in the Declaration would you learn that Scotland and the Scots had not only been ruled by a succession of 113 kings, but also that they had never submitted to a foreign power, and that Scotland had been possessed in its entirety by the Scots, free of Picts or Britons, from 1,200 years after Moses led the Israelites across the Red Sea. Scotland's primordial integrity as an independent kingdom and people had never been stated so clearly.

Neither would it be expressed again in such an uncompromising way.<sup>28</sup> Later accounts allowed the Picts to populate Scottish history up to Cinaed mac Ailpín, and fell shy of following the Declaration, or Baldred Bisset and his colleagues, in promoting Scotland's unity under the Scots as something achieved from the very beginning a millennium earlier. The Declaration's vivid outline of the kingdom's past was never made the basis of a more substantial narrative. The full-scale histories of John of Fordun and his followers made less extreme claims, particularly when it came to dealing with the Picts or adding up Scottish kings. John of Fordun, his revisers and to some extent his readers can be recognised as scholars; the vision of Scotland's ancient roots in the Declaration, however, was created by lawyers and politicians for lawyers and politicians. It was a different subspecies of regnal history to the de luxe multi-tome version elaborated by Fordun and Bower. This distinction should not be carried too far, however. The Declaration of Arbroath was bound in with some manuscripts of Fordun's chronicle, and was quoted in full by Bower and in histories derived from Bower's *Scotichronicon*. What, we may wonder, did readers of Fordun and Bower make of the Declaration's bold assertions about the kingdom's past? An innovative

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<sup>27</sup>*Liber Extravagans*, ed. Dauvit Broun with A. B. Scott, in *Scotichronicon* (Watt), ix, 54-127, at 78-79. For the date of the poem see *ibid.*, 56-57 (where grounds for a tighter date-range of 1304x1306 are noted).

<sup>28</sup>For what follows, see Broun, 'The Picts' place in the kingship's past', 17-19, 28.

piece of research by Murray Tod, principal teacher of History at Rannoch School, is yielding some interesting answers.

One obstacle remains before the account of Scottish origins can readily be accepted as the part of the Declaration that made the greatest impact on contemporaries in 1320 as a statement of Scotland's 'nationhood'. It is a nagging question. How could Robert Bruce and the majority of those who sealed the Declaration of Arbroath *not* have noticed that, in relation to the immense span of Scottish history proclaimed in that document, their lineages were recent arrivals, and that in this sense they should have regarded themselves as foreigners? Some kind of answer might be assembled on the basis of intermarriage. Robert Bruce's ancestry from Gaelic earls of Carrick was certainly crucial for him: it gave him a political base from which he could begin to restore his fortunes after the collapse of his forces in 1306. But this, I think, would be to miss the point. Again, I suspect that our modern assumptions about nations creates inappropriate expectations in the context of the Middle Ages. In the modern era it became commonplace to regard statehood as 'natural' only if it coincided with an ethnic community, typically thought of as speakers of the same language. It was assumed, moreover, that these ethnic communities constituted natural and exclusive divisions of humanity which had their origins deep in the past, whose destiny could only be fulfilled if they achieved political independence.<sup>29</sup> When, therefore, we read in the Declaration the claim that the Scots were an ancient sovereign people, it is tempting to understand this as expressing a sense of ethnic community. This is where the trouble begins: on these terms the statement of Scottish origins in the Declaration of Arbroath seems to fly in the face of reality so obviously that it is hard to accept that Robert Bruce and company could have meant it except as a brazen propaganda ploy. How could such a 'national' pedigree have convinced anyone?

There is a fairly straightforward response to this conundrum. It needs to be remembered that the definition of a nation as an ethnic community—the idea that sovereignty should be legitimated by language and culture—is a modern concept which was first articulated as a doctrine by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803). It went hand-in-hand with a theory of government which had as its touchstone the equal participation of all inhabitants, and unenforced consent as its ideal, in deliberate opposition to the prevailing notion of an inherited ruling class who

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<sup>29</sup>The most influential of the various attempts to explain such assumptions are: Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn (London, 1991); Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983); Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth and Reality* (Cambridge, 1990); Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Hardmondsworth, 1991). For a critical assessment of these approaches see Adrian Hastings, *The Construction of Nationhood: Ethnicity, Religion, and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1997) and Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History. Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Cambridge, 2000).

maintained their authority by coercion.<sup>30</sup> None of this would have made any sense to those named as the Declaration's sponsors. If we want to know what Scottish nationality meant to them, then we should look more closely at the Declaration itself, and also at the texts which have been mentioned already as precursors of the Declaration. The core idea was of the Scots as a people obedient to the inherited authority of their king, free from the control of another king. The doctrine here was that sovereign kingdoms constituted peoples, not that ethnic communities should be politically independent; nations were communities of submission, not people bound together equally by a common culture; they were justified by lengthy king-lists, not fat dictionaries or vernacular epics.<sup>31</sup>

In theory, then, the family origins, mother tongue, and social *mores* of those Scots named in the Declaration were irrelevant to their sense of being Scottish. What made them Scottish was their obedience to the king of Scots.<sup>32</sup> This idea of Scottishness was not peculiar to the generation of 1320. It is found, for example, in Barbour's *Bruce*, written in 1375 or 1376. There we are told, for example, that Laurence of Abernethy, when he rode with his men to help Edward II at Bannockburn, 'was at that time still an Englishman'.<sup>33</sup> When Sir Ingram de Umfraville appeared in Robert I's court in the aftermath of the Soules conspiracy, we are told that he 'was then with the king as a Scotsman'.<sup>34</sup> Barbour described the changes of allegiance by these men without adverse comment: in Barbour's narrative their switch from one king to the other was made openly and for reasonable cause. The most significant text for the emergence of this definition of Scottishness is the Chronicle of Melrose, which included a century of contemporary recording from the late twelfth century to the late thirteenth. For most of this period 'Scots' is used in the chronicle as a term for the Gaelic population north of the Forth.<sup>35</sup> The monks of Melrose evidently regarded themselves as English, living in 'the land of England, and in the kingdom of the Scots', as the prior of neighbouring Dryburgh

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<sup>30</sup>F. M. Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought. From Enlightenment to Nationalism* (Oxford 1965), 141-4.

<sup>31</sup>Attempts in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to create the cultural infrastructure for Celtic nations are discussed in David Greene, *Makers and Forgers*. The G. J. Williams Memorial Lecture 1975 (Cardiff, 1975).

<sup>32</sup>On this aspect of the Declaration, note also the similar observation made in Seán Duffy, 'The Anglo-Norman era in Scotland: convergence and divergence', in *Celebrating Columba. Colm Cille á Cheiliúradh. Irish-Scottish Connections 597-1997*, ed. T. M. Devine and James F. McMillan (Edinburgh, 1999), 15-34, at 17-18.

<sup>33</sup>... *he was Inglisman yet then*: Barbour, *The Bruce*, ed. Duncan, 509 (bk. XIII, line 560/556).

<sup>34</sup>... *than/ Wes with the king as Scottisman*: *ibid.*, 703 (bk. XIX, lines 73-74).

<sup>35</sup>Dauvit Broun, 'Anglo-French acculturation and the Irish element in Scottish identity', in *Britain and Ireland 900-1300. Insular Responses to Medieval European Change*, ed. Brendan Smith (Cambridge, 1999), 135-153, at 141-142. This point is discussed in more detail in *idem*, 'The Attitude of *Gall to Gaedel* before John of Fordun' in *Miorun Mór nan Gall: the Great Ill-will of the Lowlander. Lowland Perceptions of the Highlands*, ed. D. Broun and M. MacGregor (Stornoway, forthcoming).

put it.<sup>36</sup> By the time the final section of the chronicle was being written up (sometime between 1285 and 1291), however, the monks of Melrose had begun to regard themselves as Scots.<sup>37</sup> For them, the term ‘Scot’ had lost its exclusive cultural associations. They were now Scots only because this term was now understood to embrace the totality of the king’s subjects.

The account of Scottish origins in the Declaration of Arbroath, as the pedigree of Scottish self-determination, was not a statement of biological descent or ethnic affiliation. It was the pedigree of an allegiance, a pattern of obedience intended to demonstrate the kingdom’s credentials as a thoroughbred institution with generations of history behind it. Is this the pedigree of a nation, though? Not if by ‘nation’ we mean an idealised ethnic community. The Declaration of Arbroath shows, however, that the idea of a sovereign community could be articulated without reference to ethnicity. This formulation was not, of course, peculiar to Scotland. Susan Reynolds has shown that the idea of sovereign peoples was deeply embedded in European political consciousness by the fourteenth century.<sup>38</sup> It is possible, therefore, to see the nineteenth-century ideal of nations as ethnic communities as merely a reformulation of an older idea of nationhood. At the very least, if we wish to understand the ideas which underpin the modern phenomenon of nations, consideration should be given to the medieval ancestry of some of its core concepts, not least the notion that political sovereignty and primordial communities were two sides of the same coin.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Adam of Dryburgh, *De tripartito tabernaculo* in *Patrologiæ cursus completus ... series Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1841-), cxcviii, cols. 609-792, at col. 723: *...in terra Anglorum, et in regno Scotorum...*

<sup>37</sup>Dauvit Broun, ‘Defining Scotland and the Scots before the Wars of Independence’, in *Image and Identity. The Making and Re-making of Scotland through the Ages*, ed. Dauvit Broun, R. J. Finlay and Michael Lynch (Edinburgh, 1998), 4-17, at 9, 15-16.

<sup>38</sup>Susan Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe, 900-1300* (Oxford, 1984).

<sup>39</sup>I would like to thank the organisers of the conference for the invitation to deliver this paper, and Dr Nerys Ann Jones for her continued support and encouragement.