

Dan Embree, Edward Donald Kennedy, and Kathleen Daly, eds. *Short Prose Scottish Chronicles*.

Medieval Chronicles 5. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2012. ix + 396 pp. \$99. ISBN: 978-1-84383-745-9.

The short chronicles edited and translated here (some for the first time) were all written in the late fifteenth or early sixteenth centuries. Nearly all describe Scottish origins and ancient history and provide a list of kings from (at least) Mael Coluim III and Saint Margaret (both d. 1093) to the fifteenth century. The exceptions are

The Scottis Originale (which does not give a listing of kings), *The St Andrews Chronicle* (a summary of kings from Fergus son of Ferchar that survives only as fragments, breaking off in the seventh century), and *The Ynglis Chronicle*, which concerns itself with early English history and the kings of England from William the Conqueror. The longest of these short chronicles is *Nomina Omnium Regum Scotorum* (running to approximately twenty pages of edited text: it is edited in parallel with the closely related *Brevis Chronica*) and *La Vraie Cronique d'Escoce* (nearly fifteen pages of edited text). The greater length of *Nomina Omnium Regum Scotorum* is chiefly because its list of Scottish kings begins with Fergus son of Erc (here presented — as was normal in the later Middle Ages — as an early fifth-century king).

With the exception of *The St Andrews Chronicle*, which is derived from Boece's *Scotorum Historia* (published in 1527), these short Scottish chronicles are all based firmly on the foundations of the *Scotichronicon* of Walter Bower (completed by 1447). The rewriting of *Scotichronicon* known to scholarship as *The Book of Pluscarden*, completed in 1461, was also influential as a full statement of Scottish history: it can be traced as a source for *The Scottis Originale*. It is striking that William Schevez, archbishop of St. Andrews (1479–97), a leading figure in the government of James III (1460–88), commissioned copies of both *Scotichronicon* and *The Book of Pluscarden* to be made, as well as acquiring a copy of *Cronica Gentis Scotorum* of John of Fordun (datable to the mid-1380s), a history of the Scots from their origins to 1153 that Bower copied as the basis of *Scotichronicon*. The short Scottish chronicles therefore represent highly abbreviated versions of an established view of the Scottish past that lacked a canonical text. It is notable that the briefer of these short chronicles are in Scots: one of the most striking aspects of medieval Scottish historiography is the lack of an extended treatment of the national story in Scots, despite the fact that, by this period, it was fully established as a language of government and courtly literature. Ambitious vernacular accounts of English, Welsh, and Irish history, for example, were circulating from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The first attempts to render an account of Scottish history on a similar scale into Scots are the translations/adaptations of Boece's *Historia Scotorum*. Looking more closely at the content, it is also striking that a clear upbeat narrative of pivotal aspects of the Scottish past — such as the character of Gaythelos, husband of Scota and therefore “father” of the Scots, or of the wars of independence — were not provided by Fordun and Bower. In *The Book of Pluscarden* the difficulties of the wars of independence were ironed out. The authors of the shorter chronicles had to resolve Gaythelos for themselves — something that is not explained in the discussion of Gaythelos in the volume's introduction (23).

The chief significance of the short chronicles is that they reveal what were regarded as the essential features of the Fordun-Bower account of Scottish history by Scots in various contexts in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It is suggested that some were produced for specific political occasions, others as executive summaries for busy administrators. All serve to emphasize the antiquity of

the Scots and their kings, often (but not to the same degree) laced with vitriolic anti-English sentiment, and reflecting a (largely sketchy) vision of good kingship. It is extremely welcome to have, for the first time, editions and translations of these texts from all the manuscripts, complete with explanatory notes, textual notes, glossary, and indexes. Arguably the explanatory notes and introduction could have said less about actual historical events and developments (for no one should read these texts as history) and even more than is already offered about these texts in relation to other texts, enabling them to be assessed more precisely within a spectrum of burgeoning historiographical activity in Scotland in this period that ranged from even barer summary chronicles, through the shorter chronicles, to more ambitious abbreviations of the Fordun-Bower narrative (such as John Law's chronicle begun in 1521), through to *Extracta e Variis Cronicis Scocie* (written no earlier than 1522), and ultimately to the reworkings of *Scotichronicon*, such as *The Book of Pluscarden* or the unpublished version produced by Patrick Russell (ca. 1480). A deeper intertextual study could also consider pre-Fordun material still in circulation, as in the unpublished compendium by James Gray, Archbishop Schevez's secretary, in his commonplace book, NLS Adv. MS 34.7.3, or in Oslo, Schøyen Collection MS 679, produced ca. 1510. This, however, would be a significantly different volume to the one published here. Instead of wishing the book was something else — a cardinal fault in a review — I should end by thanking and congratulating the editors for a wonderful achievement that will make detailed intertextual work much easier to accomplish in the future.

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