

MACBETH, KINGS OF SCOTS, 1040–1057

Scotland in the eleventh century was very different from Scotland even in the twelfth or thirteenth century. It was almost entirely a tribal Celtic area, speaking almost entirely Celtic languages: the ancestor of Welsh in the south, and Gaelic in the central, north eastern and western Scotland. But the area nominally within the area of influence of the High King or *Ard-Righ* — a man of exalted dynasty who ruled over a number of petty kings — did not include the far north of Sutherland and Caithness, or the Orkneys and the Western Isles which were Norse areas under the sway of the king of Norway, at least at the time our story begins. In the early part of the eleventh century Scotland was divided into six tribal areas ruled by Mormaers, derived from a Gaelic word meaning High Steward.¹ There were also two petty kingdoms in the south. To use modern versions of the original Celtic descriptions the tribal areas were Moray, Atholl, Angus and Mearns, Marr and Buchan., Fife and Strathearn. The largest of these stewartries was Moray which ran from the east coast all the way across Scotland to the west coast.² Atholl was the next largest. The name Atholl is derived from the original Gaelic name which means 'New Ireland'.³ The stewartry of Strathearn included the Firth of Clyde and the Firth of Forth, which in later times became the political and economic heartland of Scotland.⁴ The area south of the Clyde and the Forth, worked differently. It was governed by a Petty King — a man who to all intents was a sovereign ruler of his territories but who often acknowledged a more powerful neighbour as his overlord — who accepted the High King as his superior or suzerain. There was a kingdom of Strathclyde with its capital at what is now Dumbarton.⁵

The second kingdom was the area now called Cumbria, in the far south west.⁶ The people in the two kingdoms in the south spoke the antecedent of the Welsh language. Most of what we now think of as early Welsh literature was written in these southern kingdoms, all the rest were Gaelic speaking.⁷ The capital of the High King was Scone which was not a large city.⁸ The whole country was essentially rural dotted with small villages, but no large towns.⁹ It was only in MacBeth's childhood that the country started to be known as Scotia, after the Irish *Scotti*, or 'skirmishers'.¹⁰ Scotia was most definitely not adopted as the country's name in honour of the mythical daughter of the Egyptian Pharaoh who was supposedly the ancestrix of the Scottish people! There was a highly developed legal system of Celtic law, the most

¹ The Gaelic word for an area means approximately a stewardry.

² A.M. Duncan, *Scotland: The Making of the Kingdom* (Edinburgh, 1975), pp. 137 and 165-166.

³ K. Jackson, 'Two early Scottish names', *Scottish Historical Review* [hereafter *SHR*], vol. 33 (1954), pp. 14-18 and Duncan, *Scotland*, p. 17.

⁴ Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 179-180.

⁵ Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 65-66.

⁶ Duncan, *Scotland*, p. 121.

⁷ Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 52 and 65.

⁸ G. Donaldson and R.S. Morpeth, *A Dictionary of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1977), p. 193.

⁹ Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 102-03.

¹⁰ This word simply means 'fighter'. The origin of the name of the Scottish house of Scrymgeour, who are the hereditary banner bearers of Scotland, also derives from this word: P.B. Ellis, *MacBeath: High King of Scotland* (New York, 1980), p. 2.

notable feature of which was that land was never owned by a single person but always held in common ownership for a clan.

The office of the High King and the officer of *mormaer* were not hereditary, but elected. Primogeniture, the right of succession of the eldest son, did not exist in Celtic law or Scotland of the eleventh century. The candidates for election as High King, *Mormaer* or petty king had to be capable of carrying out the duties of office — that meant in practical terms a mature man with military experience and some personal standing. The electors were an assembly of principal chieftains and churchmen, but obviously the opinion of the *Mormaers* was very persuasive to the lesser men in the assembly. The rivals for the position of High King were usually the *Mormaers* of the two main *stewartries*, *Moray* and *Atholl*, and those *Mormaers* were in turn usually chosen from the one family in *Moray* and another single family in *Atholl*. In addition to the right of election, the electors also had a right to depose even the High King and elect another. Such actions however often led to armed conflict.¹¹

MacBeth was born in 1005, the son of *Findlaech* (*Findlay*) *MacRuaridh* and his wife *Doada*.¹² *Holinshed*, the author of the chronicle used by Shakespeare as the source for his famous play, calls MacBeth's father 'Sinal, Thane of Glamis'.¹³ A *thane* was a minor noble who acted as an official of the Crown with certain fiscal, and later judicial, authority over a tract of land; a baron under the feudal system before the fifteenth century.¹⁴ *Andrew of Wyntoun*, the author of a chronicle of Scotland compiled some three hundred and fifty years after MacBeth's death, includes a lyrical account of the wooing of the hero's mother. This resulted in a pregnancy which saw MacBeth only legitimised some years after his birth. This account is, however, surely an apocryphal fancy.¹⁵ MacBeth was a common name meaning 'Son of Life'.¹⁶ MacBeth's father was *Mormaer of Moray*. His mother was reputedly a daughter of the High King *Malcolm II* who reigned from 1005 to 1034.¹⁷ *Donaldson*, however, errs on the side of caution by stating that she was only probably the daughter of *Malcolm II*.¹⁸ However chroniclers of the time all record MacBeth when a young man as being tall, yellow haired and handsome.¹⁹ In accordance with the custom of the time at the age of seven for his education the young MacBeth was sent to reside in another home with a teacher.²⁰

A note should probably be included here regarding the MSS. sources available for the study of MacBeth's life. The most popular account is obviously Shakespeare's famous play, *MacBeth*. The play was based almost wholly on *Holinshed's History of Scotland* (London, 1571).²¹ This in turn was based largely on *Hector Boece's Scotorum Historicum, or History of Scotland*, and to a lesser extent on *John Major's De Gestis Scotorum* (Edinburgh, 1521). As an Englishman, *Holinshed's* preference for *Boece* is somewhat odd as *Boece* was strongly anti-English; *Boece*, for example, blamed the softness of Scottish manners in the reign of *Malcolm Canmore* upon English influence. Furthermore, *Boece* was already discredited as a reliable historical source before *Holinshed* borrowed from him despite the fact that the Welsh

¹¹ Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 57 and 112.

¹² Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 2.

¹³ *Shakespeare's Holinshed: An Edition of Holinshed's Chronicles (1587)*, ed. R. Hosley (New York, 1968), p. 14.

¹⁴ *Concise Scots Dictionary* (Aberdeen, 1985).

¹⁵ *The Original Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun (from the Cottonian and Wemyss MSS.)*, ed. F. J. Amours, 6 vols (Edinburgh, 1903-1914), vol. 4, pp. 277-81.

¹⁶ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 13.

¹⁷ Duncan, *Scotland*, p. 99.

¹⁸ *Donaldson and Morpeth, Dictionary*, p. 133.

¹⁹ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 13.

²⁰ *Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, vol. 4, pp. 280-81.

²¹ *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p. 116.

antiquarian, Humphrey Lhuud, described him as ‘a malicious falsifier without all shame or honesty’.²² Why then did both Holinshed and later Shakespeare reproduce Boece’s version of MacBeth’s life? According to the editor of *Shakespeare’s Holinshed; An Edition of Holinshed’s Chronicles* it was because Boece puts forward a notion of operative rights between ruler and subject through his long recantation of the antique Scottish throne. Boece, significantly, was the first author to present the classic ‘forty-five kings of Scotland’ which were said to begin with Fergus 1 (c.330 B.C.).²³

The importance of Boece’s suggested ‘constitutional’ condition of the Scottish throne can be seen in the fact that George Buchanan’s *De jure apud Scotos* (Edinburgh, 1572) drew heavily on Boece in order to justify the Act of Deposition which forced Mary Queen of Scots to abdicate in favour of her baby son, James VI.²⁴ Shakespeare, however, did not use Holinshed’s version of Boece’s description of MacBeth’s life for this reason. The playwright was more interested in MacBeth’s story as a tragedy than as history. Shakespeare therefore played down Boece’s strong insistence on the cumulative weight of the Scottish royal pedigree in order to inflate the individual pathos, violence and depravity of MacBeth’s life by removing its context.²⁵ Thus, Shakespeare presented MacBeth’s transition from the ‘most diligent punisher of all injuries and wrongs attempted by any disordered persons within his realme’ to a man whose soul was so tortured by fears of conspiracy among his nobles that he became a tyrant.²⁶

Battles between clans and leaders were common. Malcolm II, MacBeth’s grandfather had become High King after defeating and killing his predecessor, and first cousin Kenneth III and his eldest son, Girc, in a battle at Monzievaaird in Strathearn. Malcolm II was fifty-one when elected — unusually old for election to that office.²⁷ The High King was regularly engaged in wars, either with the Norse to the north or the Angles to the south, with frequent assaults from the Danes.

Malcolm II had three daughters, one of who was the mother of MacBeth. Another daughter married the Mormaer, or Earl, of Atholl. This nobleman also held the position of Abbot of Dunkeld. In the Culdee, or Celtic Church, even high churchmen were married and there was no rule about celibacy of the clergy.²⁸ The third daughter married into the most powerful political force threatening Scotland who was Sigurd Hlodversson, Jarl, or Earl, of the Orkneys, a Viking warrior who presented a threat to the north and west of Scotland.²⁹

The political and military significance of the Norsemen changed dramatically on 23 April 1014, when the Irish High King Brian Boru defeated the Norsemen at the Battle of Clontarf.³⁰ Brian Boru had been assisted by a large contingent of Scots sent by Malcolm II under the command of the Mormaer of Marr and Buchan. That Scottish contingent was sent even though the Norsemen in the battle of Clontarf were led by Malcolm II’s son-in-law, Sigurd Hlodversson. Sigurd had sent his wife and young son, Thorfinn, to live with Malcolm II during these wars, but was killed at the battle of Clontarf.³¹ Malcolm II took advantage of Sigurd’s death and his control of Sigurd’s son, Malcolm’s grandson, Thorfinn, by proclaiming him the ruler of Caithness with the title of Earl - the first such title in Scotland. He

22 I.D. MacFarlane, *Buchanan* (London, 1981), p. 419.

23 *Shakespeare’s Holinshed*, p. 117.

24 *Shakespeare’s Holinshed*, p. 118.

25 *Shakespeare’s Holinshed*, pp. 118-19.

26 *Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, vol. 5, 270 and *Shakespeare’s Holinshed*, pp. 120-21.

27 Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 95-98.

28 Culdee comes from the Latin meaning servant of God: Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 104-05.

29 A Jarl was an Old Norse or Danish chief, originally a man of noble birth. The title is ‘Earl’ in English: *Concise Old English Dictionary* (London, 1976); Duncan, *Scotland*, p. 100.

30 Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 22.

31 Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 50.

put his grandson into possession with a strong force thereby bringing Caithness into the area controlled by the High King.³²

The Norsemen of Caithness followed the rule of hereditary succession of the eldest son, even though Thorfinn was not the eldest, and Thorfinn's half brothers retained the Orkney and Shetland Islands.³³ Malcolm II also was fortunate in the south. As the result of the invasion of England by the Dane, Sweyn Forkbeard and his son Canute, England was in turmoil.³⁴ Before Canute had fully gained control Malcolm II went south, and captured the Kingdom of Bernica adding that to the area under his dominion. Scotland at this time reached the largest extent of their territorial power during the Celtic High Kings.³⁵

In 1020 when MacBeth was fifteen years old, MacBeth's father Findlay MacRuairidh, Mormaer of Moray, was killed by his brother's two sons, MacBeth's cousins.³⁶ There appears to be only one theory about his murder which was the jealousy by the houses of Moray and Atholl, and that Findlay had allowed Moray to be too close and friendly with Atholl - which was Malcolm II's house. One of the murderous nephews was then elected Mormaer of Moray. He controlled Moray until he died when his murderous brother, Gillecomgain, was elected Mormaer of Moray in 1029. Gillecomgain had ambitions to become the High King. To strengthen his position he married Gruoch, grand-daughter of Kenneth III whom Malcolm II had killed in order to gain the High Kingship.³⁷ She and her brother were Kenneth III's only surviving grandchildren, Malcolm II having killed all the others.³⁸

Malcolm II did not find this growing power of Gillecomgain to his liking. In 1032 men of Atholl, perhaps under direct orders of Malcolm II, surprised Gillecomgain Mormaer of Moray, and fifty of his men in his fortress burnt them to death. It seems probable that Gruoch and her son were also intended to be killed but they were absent at the time. The widow Gruoch's son to Gillecomgain, Lulach, was ultimately MacBeth's successor as High King.³⁹ The struggle between Moray and Atholl was growing more acute. Malcolm II by this time was in his late seventies and the succession was a matter of concern. Malcolm II had nominated his eldest grandson Duncan, son of Crinan the Mormaer of Atholl, to be his successor. But that was subject to the approval of the electors when the time came.⁴⁰ Duncan's most likely challengers at an election were likely to have been Gillecomgain, who had been murdered, and Gruoch's brother Malcolm MacBodhe, surviving grandson of Kenneth III. Malcolm II had arranged the murder of Malcolm MacBodhe in 1033.⁴¹ Following the death of Gillecomgain, the position of Mormaer of Moray fell vacant. MacBeth, then aged 23 years, was elected. There is no record of any dissent by any of the Moray clans which tends to confirm that MacBeth was not seen as being allied to the Atholl men or Malcolm II who were responsible for the death of Gillecomgain. Further, MacBeth now married his widow Gruoch and adopted her son Lulach, thereby giving them the protection of the House of Moray against the House of Atholl. On 25 November 1034 Malcolm II died of natural causes, aged eighty, at Glamis. About a month later, Malcolm II's nominee, Duncan at the age of thirty-three was elected High King. Duncan was married to a Danish princess, a cousin of Jarl Siward who was to become Earl of Northumbria. Duncan had been 'king' of Cumbria. On his election as High King, the

³² Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 100 and 113.

³³ Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 118 and 550.

³⁴ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 15.

³⁵ Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 193-4.

³⁶ Duncan, *Scotland*, p. 99; Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 28.

³⁷ *Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, vol. 4, p. 275.

³⁸ Duncan, *Scotland*, p. 99.

³⁹ Duncan, *Scotland*, p. 99.

⁴⁰ Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 99-100.

⁴¹ Malcolm MacBodhe was Malcolm II's first cousin twice removed - i.e. the grandson of his first cousin: Duncan, *Scotland*, p. 99.

Kingship of Cumbria passed to his brother, Maldred MacDuncan, who had strong ties with the English ruling families of Northumbria.⁴² So Duncan's accession left three grandchildren of Malcolm II in crucial positions — In the north, Thorfinn, the able and powerful Jarl of the Orkneys, Sutherland and Caithness.⁴³ At Scone there was Duncan, ambitious for more power, and between the two of them was MacBeth, Mormaer of Moray — on long standing friendly terms with Thorfinn and at least maintaining the traditional rivalry of the House of Moray and the House of Atholl, married to the widow of his predecessor as Mormaer of Moray, who had been murdered to secure Duncan's claim to election.⁴⁴

Duncan lasted six years as High King. During that period he proved himself incompetent, losing four major battles — Durham, Deerness, Thurso and Burghead — in endeavours to expand his territory.⁴⁵ Contemporary chroniclers, who were later followed by Andrew de Wyntoun and Hector Boece, describe Duncan as a vicious, bloodthirsty selfish tyrant.⁴⁶ In 1040 in the sixth year of his High Kingship Duncan made the classical blunder of opening a war to gain more territory on two fronts. He marched south with one army to attack northern England.⁴⁷ It was a good time to attack England which was in a state of almost civil war following the death of Harold Harefoot on 17 March 1040, and a disputed succession which is not of consequence here.⁴⁸ Before marching south, Duncan sent a peremptory message north to Thorfinn demanding that he should recognise Duncan as High King over Caithness on the ground that Malcolm II had installed him there. Thorfinn was unimpressed. Duncan then named his nephew, Moddan, as ruler of Caithness and sent a force of Atholl clansmen, under Moddan, north against Thorfinn to enforce the claim. Thus he had two armies marching in opposite directions at the one time.⁴⁹ Marching south Duncan attacked Durham. Contemporary accounts criticise Duncan's generalship for sending cavalry against the fortifications of the City of Durham. The cavalry was annihilated by the defenders on the walls. They then came out of the city with their cavalry in a counter attack and Duncan lost most of his foot soldiers. The remnant of the Scots panicked and fled, Duncan suffering a massive defeat. The contemporary account by Simeon of Durham reports Scots' heads on posts in the city market place. Duncan retreated to Berwick - then still part of the domain of the High King.

Meanwhile in the north Moddan had been confronted at the border of Caithness by a large force under Thorfinn. Moddan had wisely retreated, pursued for some distance by Thorfinn. Duncan then decided to concentrate on the north. Moddan was to gather a new and larger army and march north by land. Duncan himself would gather another force and proceed north with eleven warships. Duncan's fleet met Thorfinn's five longboats off Deerness, on the coast of Caithness. Although outnumbered Thorfinn went into the attack concentrating on Duncan's own ship. It was a battle described in detail in the Orkney Saga:

The ships drove alongside,
On the decks dropped the host,
Hard steel swung
In dark Scottish blood.
Our prince was stout-hearted.
Bow sang, steel bit,
Blood flowed, shafts flew,

⁴² Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 98-99 and 125.

⁴³ Ellis, *MacBeath*, pp. 29-36.

⁴⁴ Duncan, *Scotland*, p. 118; Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 39.

⁴⁵ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 40.

⁴⁶ *Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, cited in Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 43; Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 98-100, 113 and 222.

⁴⁷ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 46.

⁴⁸ Duncan, *Scotland*, p. 118.

⁴⁹ Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 97-8.

Spear-point glittered.⁵⁰

Duncan's ship was overrun. Duncan escaped overboard to another ship with the men on his ship who were still able to swim. Duncan tried to break off the engagement but Thorfinn grappled his longboats to Duncan's ships and continued the fight. Eventually what was left of Duncan's fleet withdrew to the Moray Firth. Meanwhile the Scottish land forces of Atholl clansmen under Moddan arrived at Thurso, but were awaiting some additional forces from Ireland. The fact that Duncan had to rely on Irish forces shows that he could not rely on enough Scottish Clansmen, which strongly suggests how unpopular Duncan had already become. Thorfinn's forces, who included the loyal clansmen of Caithness, under his main General, Thorkell Fosterer, were able to attack the Scottish forces at Thurso in the night.⁵¹ The Scottish forces were killed or captured and Moddan was killed.

Duncan persisted. On 14 August 1040 Duncan and his fresh forces, said to be between 5,000 and 10,000 men, including the Irish levies, met Thorfinn and his forces at Burghead. The *Orkney Saga*, which gives an account of the battle, praises Thorfinn's generalship and criticises Duncan's management of the battle. Thorfinn firstly attacked the Irish levies who crumpled. Then Thorfinn successfully beat off the Scottish counter-attack. Certainly Thorfinn had a great victory. From the Norsemen's point of view they were stunningly victorious; "it ended in the flight of the king, and some say he was slain".⁵² The *Orkneyingra Saga* thus reported Duncan's death in the battle, and this belief was later reiterated in Wyntoun's *Chronicle*. Wyntoun, however, unequivocally states that MacBeth murdered Duncan at Elgin:

But Makbeth Fynlak, his sister son
that purpose lettyt to be don,
And other gret purpose als;
For til [sic: to] his e[ne]me he was ful fals,
that brought hym up right tendyrlly.
And relewit him [hely].
He murthrist hym in Elgyne.⁵³

Another chronicler, Tighernach O'Braein,⁵⁴ says that Duncan was killed by his own men immediately following the battle.⁵⁵ This indeed seems more plausible than Wyntoun's suggestion, made 30 years later in the reign of MacBeth's assassin, that MacBeth was responsible for killing Duncan following the battle of Burghead. It is clear that Duncan died at least on the same day as the battle of Burghead and MacBeth was almost certainly not there. Some reasons for this conclusion are, firstly, that The *Orkneyingra Saga* tells a lot about who was at the battle of Burghead and MacBeth is never mentioned.⁵⁶ Secondly there seems to have been few if any clansmen of Moray there. The Mormaer of Moray, MacBeth, would not have been there without his clansmen. Thirdly MacBeth was on good terms with Thorfinn and not on good terms with Duncan. He would have been unlikely to be fighting for Duncan against Thorfinn.

The position of High King was elective, allowing the opportunity for his removal.⁵⁷ Duncan had led the country into expansionist wars north and south - he had lost four battles in

⁵⁰ *Orkneyingra Saga*, quoted in Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 49.

⁵¹ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 48.

⁵² *Orkneyingra Saga*, quoted in Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 53.

⁵³ *Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, vol. 4, p. 259.

⁵⁴ Tighernach O'Braein later invaded Thomond, in Ireland, with the aid of his men of Connaught: See *Annals of the Kingdom of Ireland, by the Four Masters*, ed. & trans. J. O'Donovan, vol. 2 (Dublin, 1854), p. 867.

⁵⁵ Donaldson and Morpeth, *Dictionary*, p. 133.

⁵⁶ Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 85,87,100 and 192.

⁵⁷ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 54.

a row: Durham, Deerness (a sea battle), Thurso (a night massacre) and Burghead.⁵⁸ As a result of these military defeats many Scottish clansmen had been killed. He was also not generally popular. He was ripe for deposition. In late August 1040 the battle of Burghead where Duncan was defeated and killed by MacBeth, Mormaer of Moray, who, as a result, was elected High King and enthroned at Scone.⁵⁹ On MacBeth's election Thorfinn quietly withdrew north and did not seek any advantage from his three successes against the Scots. Perhaps this was not surprising given the boasting in his own saga which claimed he possessed "nine earldoms in Scotland, the whole of the Hebrides and a large estate in Ireland".⁶⁰ It would seem that this was because of his good relationship with MacBeth, and tends further to confirm that MacBeth had not been personally fighting against Thorfinn, and certainly not as one of Duncan's generals. Controversy surrounds this point as in fact Thorfinn is reputed to have dictated the conditions of the separation.⁶¹ MacBeth confirmed Thorfinn's earldom of Sutherland, Caithness and the Orkneys, and conceded some small additional territory to him. As a result peace was restored to the north which MacBeth never sought to disturb. The other King crowned in 1040 was Hardicanute, the last of the Danish kings of England crowned at Canterbury.⁶² He was reputed to be a murderous tyrant - but ironically it was not the English king of the same year whom positively gave the bad reputation. The election of MacBeth began seventeen years of seldom interrupted peace, north, south and west, and seventeen years of prosperity and plenty. All of the contemporary historians talk of those prosperous untroubled years of MacBeth's reign. St. Berchan described him as 'the liberal King'. And Andrew de Wyntoun, writing 350 years later, echoes this sentiment, saying "all hys tyme was great plente [i.e. well spent]. Aboundand both in land and sea. He was in justice rycht lawfull" but even Wyntoun impishly adds "and til [i.e. to] his legis all awfull!"⁶³ Later still, Holinshed borrowed the sentiments which Hector Boece had originally taken from Wyntoun, saying "Thus was justice and law restored again to the old accustomed course by the diligent means of MacBeth's."⁶⁴ He seems to have been a uniformly popular High King during his seventeen year reign.⁶⁵ In particular he upheld the Celtic law. Private property was not introduced during his reign. The election of Mormaers and petty kings continued. The Celtic Church was supported and Celtic languages predominated through all of the High King's territories.

The only area in which the election was not popular was in Atholl, where the Mormaer of Atholl, Crinan, Abbott of Dunkeld, father of Duncan, immediately sent his grandchildren out of the country for fear of assassination.⁶⁶ Malcolm the eldest grandchild was sent south to England where he was brought up at the Danish court of Siward, earl of Northumbria, and at the Norman-French court of Edward the Confessor. Thus, Malcolm became imbued with the Norman feudal traditions, the system of private property and the rules of primogeniture which were ultimately to have a big effect in Scotland.⁶⁷ Malcolm's brother, Donald Ban, was sent to Ireland where he was raised in the Celtic tradition, a matter of great significance when he was in due course elected High King after the death of Malcolm III (Malcolm Canmore), in 1093. The fifteenth-century historian, Hector Boece, attributes liberal sounding laws to MacBeth's period. Thus daughters could inherit as well as sons, officers in the High King's service had to swear to protect women and orphans and the compulsory teaching of a trade to those without a legitimate way of earning a living was introduced. Boece could therefore conclude that

⁵⁸ For a geographical description of Burghead see Donaldson and Morpeth, *Dictionary*, p. 31.

⁵⁹ Duncan, *Scotland*, p. 50; Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 54.

⁶⁰ *Orkneyinga Saga*, quoted in Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 56.

⁶¹ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 58.

⁶² Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 60.

⁶³ *Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, vol. 4, p. 277.

⁶⁴ *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p. 16.

⁶⁵ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 61.

⁶⁶ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 64.

⁶⁷ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 64-65.

"Makbeth [sic] did many pleasant actis in the beginnyng of his regne".⁶⁸ The Celtic law already allowed women to retain their own separate property, and to be elected to lead a clan. MacBeth seems to have had a reputation for upholding all the Celtic laws. He took particular action to enforce the Celtic law of hospitality, to ensure that in every part of Scotland each clan maintained a free hostel for the travellers, including a lamp in a window at night to guide the traveller to the hostel. For the first five years of MacBeth's rule peace reigned except for a minor raid by Thorfinn into Galloway (a name derived from Gaelic meaning 'Foreign Gaels') which did not cause any problems to MacBeth since Thorfinn used his base in Galloway to raid south into Northumbria.⁶⁹

The year 1045 saw the only domestic rising against MacBeth. Crinan, the Abbott of Dunkeld and the Mormaer of Atholl, the father Duncan, and grandfather of Malcolm and Donald Ban, raised a force of Atholl clansmen against MacBeth, resulted in a battle near Dunkeld.⁷⁰ MacBeth put down the rising in which Crinan was killed and a hundred and eighty of his clansmen with him.⁷¹ After this brief trouble, Scotland settled back to another nine years of peace and prosperity. So secure was the country that MacBeth was able to make a pilgrimage to Rome in 1050 and on his return the country was still as he left it. Peaceful. However, Scotland was surrounded by strife - Denmark, Norway and England were involved in constant internal wars. Meanwhile Malcolm MacDuncan was growing up in England becoming familiar with intrigue, raising armies and disputing succession - a valuable training for what followed. By this time the principles of primogeniture were well established in England. Malcolm was therefore brought up in the belief that as the eldest son of High King Duncan, he was entitled to succeed as High King - regardless that his father had been elected under Celtic law. He also had had contact with the Danish principle of kingship in which force was the ultimate vindication of action.⁷²

As always events in England had an impact on Scotland. When in 1052 Earl Godwin was restored to power in the mainly Norman French court of Edward the Confessor, the court left the country, many going north into Scotland, where MacBeth let them stay, probably in accordance with the Celtic law of hospitality.⁷³ The presence of Norman French over the northern border was, however, seen as a threat by Earl Godwin's party, particularly Harold Godwinson after Earl Godwin fell ill in 1052. (He died in 1053). By this time Malcolm MacDuncan was twenty-one years of age and in a political climate where his claims to the Scottish Crown began to be taken seriously in England.⁷⁴ But the English condition for support of Malcolm MacDuncan was that when he succeeded to the Scottish Crown he was to acknowledge the overlordship of the king of England - to which he eventually capitulated and which was to haunt Scotland for the next 300 years.⁷⁵

In 1054 Edward the Confessor agreed to help Malcolm MacDuncan by making a force available to be led by the Danish Earl Siward of Northumbria. The force assembled for the expedition were Danes and English. No significant number of Scots ever joined this invasion force, even when they reached Atholl. MacBeth let the advancing Anglo-Danish army get well into Scotland and battle was eventually joined on 27 July 1054. Shakespeare put it at Dunsinane, near Perth and Scone, but he was simply following Holinshed's interpretation; it seems more likely that the battle was near Dundee, which is not all that far distant.⁷⁶

⁶⁸ H. Boece's *Scotorum Historicum*, cited in Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 65.

⁶⁹ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 68.

⁷⁰ Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 122 and 125.

⁷¹ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 70.

⁷² Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 71.

⁷³ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 81; Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 117-18.

⁷⁴ Duncan, *Scotland*, p. 118.

⁷⁵ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 83.

⁷⁶ *Shakespeare's Holinshed*, p. 28.

Apparently there was no clear-cut victor although the nearest contemporary sources say 3,000 Scots and 1,500 of the Anglo-Danish forces were killed. Few people of great note seem to have been slain; for example, only the name of Doilfiinn, son of Finnnotor, is recorded among the slain in the *Annals of Ulster*.⁷⁷ The end result saw the withdrawal of Siward and Malcolm MacDuncan from Scotland leaving MacBeth on this throne. Among the Anglo-Danish casualties was Earl Siward's own son, and his nephew. Interestingly, the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* reported the battle and claims that Siward carried off a lot of booty but does not mention Malcolm's involvement at all. But a communication from the court of Edward the Confessor to Pope Boniface in Rome says that "Edward, the King of England, gave the kingdom of Scotland to be held for him, to Malcolm, the son of the King of Cumbria".⁷⁸ Duncan had been King of Cumbria before his election as High King. The failure to refer to Duncan having become High King may have been at least in part due to Edward's court not wishing to accept that Malcolm had any claim to the High Kingship other than as the gift of the English King. In fact contemporary historians, such as Simeon of Durham, wrote that MacBeth was the legitimate heir of Malcolm II, not Duncan.⁷⁹ There was an immediate result of the campaign of 1054. Siward was able to install Malcolm to the petty kingship of Cumbria, the southern most part of the High King's domain, which Duncan had held earlier.⁸⁰

The following year, 1055, Earl Siward died, so no further plans for the invasion of Scotland were prepared. Malcolm MacDuncan had lost his main supporter. But he was fortunate when Edward the Confessor took the Earldom of Northumbria from Siward's son and gave it instead to Harold Godwinson's brother, Tostig Godwinson, who happened to be a close friend of Malcolm MacDuncan, they had grown up together at the English Court.⁸¹ For the next three years, until 1057 there seems to have been consistent incursions or pressure from Northumbria and Cumbria into the rest of the High King's territories. The clansmen however seem always to have remained loyal to MacBeth. Throughout those years MacBeth remained in control of the capital Scone and the vast majority of the High King's traditional territories. Thorfinn remained a friendly neutral in the north. This stability, this "Habundande [abundance] on land and see [sic]" as Wyntoun described it, allowed MacBeth to make a pilgrimage to Rome:

Qwhen pape was Leo the [nynt] in Rome,
As pilgrayme to the couwrt he coyne,
and in his almus he sew silver
Til al pure folk that had mystere;
In al tyme oyssit he to wyrk
Profitably for halikyrk.⁸²

But trouble in Scotland was not long in coming. One of the incursions got a far way to the north in August 1057.⁸³ Apparently MacBeth and his bodyguard were travelling north from Scone to his own clan territory of Moray when Malcolm and a small force caught up with him and prevented him from reaching a safe haven. MacBeth and his bodyguard were outnumbered but stood and fought, but MacBeth was killed.⁸⁴ Wyntoun tells the story of MacBeth's belief that he could not be slain by a man not born of a woman. But on the fateful

⁷⁷ *The Annals of Ulster*, to A.D. 1131, eds. and trans. S. MacArt and G. MacNiocall, pt. 1 (Dublin, 1983), p. 491.

⁷⁸ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 88.

⁷⁹ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 89.

⁸⁰ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 89.

⁸¹ Donaldson and Morpeth, *Dictionary*, p. 69.

⁸² *Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, vol. 4, p. 277; Donaldson and Morpeth, *Dictionary*, p. 133.

⁸³ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 97.

⁸⁴ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 99.

day he found himself in combat with a knight who had been born by a *cæsarian*⁸⁵ The precise date of MacBeth's death seems to have been 15 August 1057 at Lumphanan.⁸⁶ This was three years after the large army led by Earl Siward had not been able to unseat MacBeth. MacBeth was buried on Iona, as all lawful High Kings had been before him.⁸⁷ Malcolm MacDuncan was still even then being referred to only as the King of Cumbria. It is notable that when Malcolm MacDuncan died many years after he had attained the High Kingship, he was not buried at Iona - and treated at least in burial as having been a usurper.

Even though Malcolm MacDuncan King of Cumbria had killed MacBeth, Scotland was not his yet. Soon after killing MacBeth, Malcolm and his followers had to retreat south again. There were no clans rising in support of him. The Mormaers, chieftains and high churchmen met at Scone and elected a new High King, Lulach, the adopted son of MacBeth, the son of Kenneth III's grand-daughter, Gruoch and Gillicomgain, murdered by Malcolm II.⁸⁸ Lulach was twenty-five years of age at this time. All contemporary historians agree he was properly elected High King. MacBeth's supporters were still numerous after seventeen years of prosperity. Malcolm MacDuncan had to start again. High King Lulach had to hold out against Northumbrian forces made available by Earl Tostig Godwinson, forces from Malcolm's own kingdom of Cumbria and was probably joined by Atholl clansmen.

On 17 March 1058 Malcolm managed to bring about the death of High King Lulach, obscurely called "the Fool" by Wyntoun, at Essy in Aberdeenshire (Strathbogie).⁸⁹ It seems clear that he was killed by some treachery. There is heraldic evidence to support this in the arms of his descendants. These were probably adopted in the sixteenth-century, long after these events took place. They symbolically represent MacLulich's treachery by displaying a Wyvern with its back pierced through by a sword. Lulach was also buried in Iona with full ceremony.⁹⁰ At last, having killed two lawfully elected High Kings and waged war for three years, in the absence of any other claimant, Malcolm was crowned at Scone on 25 April 1058.⁹¹ Lulach's two sons were successively elected Mormaer of Moray, until Malcolm III was able to eliminate each in turn. Malcolm III's reign marked the beginning of the decline of Celtic culture. As to religion the change from the Celtic Church to the Roman Church was advanced by his wife St. Margaret.⁹²

Malcolm D. Broun, AM, QC
President
Sydney Society for Scottish History

⁸⁵ *Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, vol. 4, p. 300.

⁸⁶ Donaldson and Morpeth, *Dictionary*, p. 133.

⁸⁷ For a description of the importance of Iona see Donaldson and Morpeth, *Dictionary*, pp. 105-6.

⁸⁸ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 102.

⁸⁹ *Chronicle of Andrew of Wyntoun*, vol. 4, pp. 305 and 325.

⁹⁰ For references to Lulich and his death see Duncan, *Scotland*, pp. 100, 113, 165 and 193.

⁹¹ Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 102.

⁹² Malcolm III is usually referred to as Malcolm Canmore. Canmore is an anglicisation of Ceann Mor — big head. Gaelic nicknames usually referred to some physical feature (Cameron — twisted nose; Campbell - twisted mouth) so presumably his head appeared abnormally large: Ellis, *MacBeath*, p. 103.