

SCOTLAND'S BRAVE-HEARTED HEROES FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM

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Abstract: *The present paper highlights two of Scotland's brave-hearted heroes: William Wallace and Macbeth who acted according to those times' requests. The old Scotland is still of present interest through its legends that speak of a long forgotten past in which the Scots were fighting for their freedom. William Wallace was an outstanding noble, brave and selfless knight who became a national hero. Macbeth must be remembered as a bold and liberal king and not as a tyrannical one. Although both of them used violence to reach their goals, in those times, war was a natural thing and the only way through which they could gain the freedom of their country.*

Keywords: *Scotland, hero, freedom, war, noble, brave heart.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Scotland has always been fascinating. Nowadays it is even more. Although, at first sight, Scotland seems to have no more secrets, there are still many things to be discovered. To my mind, no other country has succeeded to put together fact and legend so greatly that the two of them became almost impossible to distinguish one from the other.

When we say Scotland we think of warriors. Scotland is famous for its heroes who were very good at fighting, back pipes, whisky, kilts, the Loch Ness Monster and so on. There are many legends speaking of brave heroes, but many of them do not turn out to be as admirable or tyrannical as they first appear.

In the following lines, I have tried to discover some of the real features of two of Scotland's most famous historical characters, that is, William Wallace and Macbeth.

2. WHO IS WILLIAM WALLACE?

William Wallace is considered to be the greatest hero of Scotland.

After the Canmore line's sudden ending, the throne of Scotland remained vacant and thirteen different claimants insisted they should be the

future king. In order to prevent a civil war from happening, the Scots addressed to Edward I of England to choose their king. Edward I agreed, but insisted that whomever he chose must acknowledge him, as his overlord. Naturally, all the thirteen claimants agreed because this gave them a better chance to be chosen [5]. Nevertheless, John Balliol, Scotland's new king had no intention of keeping his word and rebelled against Edward Longshanks. But, Edward defeated him and occupied Scotland with his own troops.

The Scots began to resist and that is when William Wallace appeared on the scene. Wallace and his father were knights thought to be too unimportant to swear loyalty to Edward. So they never did [7].

In 1291 Wallace's father was killed and later, Wallace was outlawed after getting into a fight with a group of English soldiers. Even though, there is no proof that he ever got married, it is said that Wallace got into this fight because some troops were molesting his wife.

He was outlawed because he killed Hazelrig, the English Sheriff of Lanark as he resisted being arrested. Having nothing to lose, he began to rally the Scots with the intention of destroying English oppression and returning exiled Balliol to the throne.

In 1297 he faced the English army at Stirling Bridge that he defeated. The military genius of Wallace is often cited as the reason for the Scots' great victory that day. In fact, Wallace was only commander. His friend, Andrew de Moray, was equally in charge. Another overriding factor in the Scots' victory was the arrogance of the English commanders.

Snarling at the defeat, Edward I sent another gigantic army north. Wallace was now the Guardian of Scotland leading powerful nobles who did not much like the idea of living rough in the woods for months. So Wallace gathered up all the men he could and, once again, faced a superior army, this time at Falkirk.

Wallace was now without Andrew de Moray, who had died from wounds he received at Stirling Bridge and nobles who secretly objected to being led by a *commoner* supported him. Wallace had planned a surprise night attack, but two of his own barons, the Earl of Angus and the Earl of Dunbar, alerted Edward. So, he was defeated, and he never raised another army and, in shame, resigned his post as Guardian.

With a price on his head, he remained in hiding in the next years coming out from while to while with a small band to attack the English.

In 1305 he was betrayed and taken to London for trial. As a punishment for treason, Wallace was hanged, drawn and quartered.

3. WILLIAM WALLACE'S HISTORICAL FIGURE COMPARED TO MEL GIBSON'S IMAGE IN BRAVEHEART

Though there are no paintings of William Wallace, it is said to have been a handsome man and a very tall one. He was also very young for a great leader. When he died he was only 35. This is all that fits in Mel Gibson's image.

Besides, when William Wallace died, England's Queen was still a young child and their passionate relationship cannot have occurred. Finally, concerning Edward I of England, he was neither a tyrant nor a butcher but a simply powerful leader.

Mel Gibson has not followed the true path of history making some compromises for the

story telling purposes.

The most absurd thing of the movie is the idea that William Wallace could have been the father of the future king of England. The movie presents the fact that William Wallace had an affair with Longshanks' daughter-in-law, Princess Isabella, and that he was indeed the real father of King Edward III.

4. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN TWO FAMOUS LEGENDS

If we consider carefully Wallace's life, the comparison with Robin Hood becomes unavoidable. Wallace was a knight who became a national hero and who was outlawed for killing an English Sheriff. According to known facts, William Wallace lived hiding in a forest, in *Legland Woods* from where he often attacked and robbed convoys carrying English taxes. He ensured the loyalty of the common people by sharing the stolen goods with them. Another similarity is the fact that Wallace fought just like Robin Hood, against an unpopular king while his own king was abroad. "*Not only the known facts, but also the legends about Wallace fit the story of Robin Hood*" [3].

Wallace is supposed to have fallen in love with Hugh Braidfute of Lamington's daughter, Marion Braidfute. They could not marry because Wallace was an outlawed and so they carried on a secret affair until she was murdered.

Furthermore, Edward Little was one of Wallace's comrades in arms. Wallace was a very tall man and he had a smaller brother called John. And when we combine these factors we get *Little John*. His old friend, the Benedictine monk, John Blair, who joined Wallace, is surely the inspiration for *Friar Tuck*.

So, William Wallace is two times more famous than one can believe.

5. WHO IS MACBETH?

One of Scotland's famous kings all over the world is Macbeth. And that is due to William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*, the story of a "*backstabbing psychopath*" [9] king as opposed to Duncan, an elderly brave monarch.

Macbeth became king in 1040. At that time, the country he ruled was known as Alba. His kingdom was menaced by the Norsemen who were holding power in the North and by the Anglo-Saxons who occupied Northumbria.

Unlike England, where kingship was hereditary, in Alba the High Kings were elected. But, although the new king was always from a highborn family, the throne was not always occupied by the next of kingship. The future monarch had to be considered worthy of charge. And so, Macbeth had become king by following the normal process of selecting a new ruler: the war.

Even though Macbeth did indeed kill Duncan, the latter being not the "*ageing and venerable monarch*" as he was described by Shakespeare in his play. He was in fact a "*haughty and spoiled young man*" [7] who did not bring glory to Scotland during his reign. Against his counsellors' advice, Duncan invaded Northumbria. Therefore, the invasion was disastrous for him and for his army as he was forced to withdraw. Consequently, when he returned to Scotland, since the news of his defeat was already known among his lords, he had to face a revolt.

So, king Duncan died in battle at Bothgaunan. There is not enough proof to support the theory of Macbeth killing Duncan, but if he really did kill Duncan in order to become High King of Alba, he did not murder him in his sleep, he killed him in battle. And even if he did kill him, in those times Macbeth's action was normal. Then it was commonplace to succeed to the throne by murdering whoever occupied it.

6. WAS MACBETH A TYRANNICAL RULER?

He seems not to have been a tyrannical ruler since Chronicles describe him as a liberal king who ruled in a productive and generous way. Andrew Wyntoun, for instance, tells us that Macbeth "*did many pleasant acts in the beginning of his reign*" [5].

Macbeth ruled successfully for seventeen years and in those tumultuous times, this was quite a record. A sign of popularity among his subjects is that in 1454 he went on a

pilgrimage to Rome for a year and when he returned, he found his kingdom still intact.

Furthermore, Macbeth did not kill Malcolm, Duncan's son; he exiled him. But in 1057, Malcolm (known as Canmore), with the English support, raised an army and invaded Scotland. He defeated Macbeth and killed him at Lumphanan.

Malcolm's reign effectively began the forced anglicisation of Scotland. He invited southern nobles to Scotland and he introduced feudalism in direct opposition to the clan system, condemning the population to little more than slavery. Now Anglo-Norman lords, who cared little for the Scots' welfare, ruled them. Margaret, Malcolm's queen, was just as detrimental, doing her utmost to romanise the Celtic church, which had always striven to maintain its own identity. Malcolm then betrayed his own allies and invaded England, beginning years of hostility between England and Scotland.

And if anyone resembles Shakespeare's portrayal of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, it is Malcolm and Margaret. But, as it always happens, the winner rewrites history and Malcolm became Scotland's *Warrior King* and Macbeth the nasty, usurping villain and Lady Macbeth is condemned to go down in history as an insane tyrant and Margaret became a saint.

7. DID SHAKESPEARE HAVE A SPECIAL REASON FOR CHANGING HISTORY?

After the long reign of Elisabeth I, under whom Shakespeare had prospered, James Stuart, the farmer king of Scotland, became king. So, Shakespeare set about writing a Scottish play. He changed the story of Macbeth and introduced MacDuff, Banquo and the witches so that he could illustrate certain points. Shakespeare took advantage of James' strong belief in witchcraft's evils by emphasizing their influence on Macbeth's treacherous actions.

Banquo represents the Stuart dynasty in the play. Banquo is a honourable and decent man and his heirs inherit Scotland's throne by means of lineage and not by means of violence or election [3]. However, the power of Shakespeare's play cannot be denied. Despite

its historical absurdity, *Macbeth* is one of the masterpieces in English literature.

And therefore, the real Macbeth never stood a chance.

8. CONCLUSIONS

The old Scotland is still of present interest through its legends that speak of a long forgotten past in which Scots were fighting for their freedom.

Scotland has a very turbulent history, a history full of battles and violence. From the early beginning when the inhabitants of the territory, now called Scotland, had to fight with the invading waves that crossed the country, till the Independence Wars against the Englishmen who wanted to make Scotland and English territory, Scotland and its people had lived a constant struggle for gaining the independence and for being a free country.

Both William Wallace and Macbeth were courageous and honorable knights who acted according to those times' requests.

It does not matter whether William Wallace was the inspiration for the *Legend of Robin Hood* or not. What matters is that he was not some ordinary Scot rebel but an outstanding noble, brave and selfless hero. That is a lesson to be learned by all of us, no matter the country we were born in.

Concerning Macbeth, despite Shakespeare's play, he must be remembered as

a brave and liberal king and not as a backstabbing and tyrannical one.

And although both of them used violence to reach their aims, we must accept that in those times war was regarded as a natural thing and, moreover, it was the only way they could gain the freedom of their country.

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