11. The European History of Medieval and Renaissance Scotland: a Post-Brexit Reflection

Kylie Murray

I would like to begin by inviting you, in this post-Brexit era, to imagine a scenario where Scottish leaders approach the figurehead of a European political and economic union, stating that Scotland identifies principally with Europe. The Scots are seeking an intervention from this European power because England is claiming constitutional jurisdiction over Scotland. While this narrative may sound like a plausible account of some recent post-Brexit events, what I am actually describing is something that happened in the late 1100s. After the Archbishop of York had claimed that the Scottish Church came under his authority, Scotland approached the Papacy at Rome. In 1192, Pope Celestine III issued a bull, known as the 'cum universi'. The document specifically stated that Scotland was a 'special daughter' of the apostolic see, with no intermediary. The Scottish Church was deemed an independent entity from that of England's, but equally a member of a larger European community and subject only to the Pope. I mention this landmark moment in Scotland's history because it shows us that the tension between Scotland's European and British identities is not new, although it remains highly topical and endlessly fascinating. Europe's role in articulating Scotland's identity is a rich, colourful and longstanding one. My focus is on how and why medieval and renaissance Scotland was so invested in European-ness. I present two case studies which I think are exceptionally engaging and relevant to us in these post-Brexit times.

The first concerns Scotland's myth of origin which claimed Greek and Egyptian foundations for the Scots. How and why did this happen? Mythical stories of beginnings and origins were known and deployed across Europe in the Middle Ages. But in Britain they were fiercely contested and give us intriguing insight into how the peoples of medieval Britain thought of themselves in relation, and often, in opposition, to each other, through the medium of European ancestry.

The English origin myth circulated extremely widely from the 12th century onwards, especially when Geoffrey of Monmouth recounted it at length in his Latin *History of the Kings of Britain*. The myth was frequently invoked during periods of Anglo-Scottish conflict as evidence of England's sovereignty over Scotland. It sought to locate England's roots in classical antiquity, by arguing that Brutus, grandson of Aeneas, was the eponymous founder of Britain following the battle of Troy. The inheritance of the island was divided up between Brutus's three sons and, in a particularly Anglo-centric turn, the largest and most valuable piece of land went to Brutus's eldest child, Locrinus – this land was what became England. Brutus's second son, Albanactus, inherited 'Albany' or Scotland, whilst the youngest son, Camber, inherited Wales. This narrative outlines a clear hierarchy of value and power within the island of Britain. No wonder every English monarch who invaded Scotland, from Edward I in the 13th century to Henry V in the 15th, took recourse to these sorts of accounts as part of their campaigns.

Scotland responded with a counter-mythology, recognisably framed within the same antique 'European' parameters. But their origin myth sought to refute and subvert England's classical Trojan roots. According to this counter-myth, Scotland also took its name from an ancient European founder, this time a woman. Scota was an Egyptian princess and daughter of a Pharoah. Since she belonged not to the Classical world, but the Biblical one, Scota's antiquity superseded Brutus'. But in addition, she married Gathelos, a Greek prince, in around 1500 BCE, 300 years before Brutus was even born. This combination of Scota's enhanced antiquity in comparison with Brutus', and her scriptural associations was seen to confer divinely ordained authority on the Scots. For according to the legend, with its Biblical resonances, Gathelos and Scota set sail westwards from Egypt with their people, the 'Scoti', arriving first in Spain, then Ireland, before finally finding their 'promised land' of Scotland.

Some variations of the myth state that they brought with them a sacred 'Stone of Destiny' on which rulers of their people should be crowned. And here we get a sense of how compelling and how vivid the European foundation legend was for medieval Scots. For the Scots sought to represent this myth through a tangible, material object. The Stone of Destiny, or Stone of Scone as we also know it today, was a prerequisite for Scottish coronations for centuries, and the fact Edward I removed it from Scotland and installed it in Westminster Abbey as *the* ultimate war trophy, shows that these origin myths were seen to shape and validate identities to a remarkable degree. Following our European theme, we should reflect for a moment on the fact that one of the most integral and defining artefacts of Scotland's national identity to date was imagined to originate not in Scotland, but on the other side of Europe, and to have reached Scotland essentially via descendants of Greek and Egyptian founders. Edward I's attempt to suppress Scotland's European identity was an acknowledgement of the authenticating power that that identity had. Yet, the harder he attempted to assert English sovereignty over Scotland, the more vigorously European Scotland's national consciousness became.

By insisting on a continuous line of kings, originating with Gathelos as *the* primordial ruler, Scotland was articulating that its genealogy, its roots, its primary affinity lay not with England, or Britain, but with Europe. The most assertive references to this are found when Scottish autonomy is at stake in the Middle Ages, especially during the Anglo-Scottish Wars of Independence in the late 13th and early 14th centuries. Consider, for example, the Declaration of Arbroath of 1320, sent to Pope John XXII in a curious echoing of the 'cum universi' of 1192 with which I began this paper. As part of its statement and justification of Scottish independence, the Declaration contends that 113 kings had ruled in Scotland since its foundation, which the Declaration describes as 'the line unbroken by a single foreigner'.

Scotland's affinity with the Greeks, as a response to English identifications with classical Troy, is especially revealing here since the Greeks were adversaries and ultimately conquerors of the Trojans. The Scota legend, then, eclipses the Brutus myth and overturns England's imperialist agenda in multiple ways, as we've seen. Scotland's origin myth represents a desire to align with Europe while rendering English rule irrelevant on supposedly historical and constitutional grounds. Such myths of ancient European identities thus become a vividly politicised

and competitive medium in Britain, attempting not merely to describe historical events, but also to prescribe them.

Such integral openness and receptivity to European culture is a defining feature of our second case study, the remarkable rise of Scotland's universities and intellectual culture in the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance. I turn now to some brief examples of how Europe shaped Scotland's universities, leading thinkers and even the advent of print in Scotland.

By 1500, Scotland had three university foundations, all profoundly influenced by European intellectual culture. The University of St Andrews owed its foundation in around 1410-13 to Henry Wardlaw, bishop of St Andrews, royal tutor to James I of Scotland and a graduate of Oxford and Paris. Glasgow University's foundation in 1451 was brought about by William Turnbull, bishop of Glasgow, who had studied at St Andrews, followed by Leuven in Belgium and Pavia in Italy. In 1495, King's College, Aberdeen came into existence through the efforts of William Elphinstone, bishop of Aberdeen and graduate of Paris and Orleans. Curiously, a second, protestant University – Marischal College – appeared in Aberdeen in 1593. It is not often acknowledged that where England only had two Universities – Oxford and Cambridge – until the 19th century, by 1600 Scotland had twice that number. Outward looking Scots who spent time in Europe were playing a huge part in this flourishing of education. For although some Scots studied in England, there was a far stronger and indeed longer tradition of Scots heading to continental universities, and not only to study, but also to teach.

To touch upon just two examples, the logician George Lockert from Ayr who taught at Paris University was prior of the Sorbonne in the early 16th century, before becoming rector of St Andrews in the 1520s. His near contemporary, John Mair from Haddington, was one of the most seminal theologians, philosophers and historians of 16th century Europe. An associate of Erasmus, Mair had spent time teaching at the Sorbonne and lectured across Europe before becoming principal of Glasgow University and provost of St Salvator's College in St Andrews, where he taught John Knox.

Yet the movement of Scots to Continental Europe and back again was not the only route by which Scotland accessed European ideas. In the 1530s, the Abbot of Kinloss in the far north of Scotland recruited the Italian humanist Giovanni Ferrerio to overhaul the curriculum for pupils

at Kinloss and nearby Beauly. Conversely, numerous Scots travelled to Continental Europe and remained there. The celebrated neo-Latinist, Florence Wilson of Elgin, who graduated from Aberdeen in the early 16th century, is a key example. He found himself acting as Cromwell's agent in Paris, before teaching in the South-East of France in the 1530s. He later wrote a philosophical treatise on the tranquility of the mind, the *De animi tranquillitati*, in which he described his homesickness for Scotland and reminisced about his happy student days there. Yet Wilson's Latin work was firmly intended for a broader European audience, printed as it was in Lyons in 1543.

The printed text is an especially compelling medium for providing insight into Scotland's European engagement. Firstly, Scots could contribute to wider European audiences through this form, as we see in the example of John Vaus, Aberdeen's first Latin grammarian from around 1510 onwards. His grammatical commentary, the *In Primam Doctrinalis Alexandrini*, was first printed in Paris in 1522 by the well-known humanist printer, Badius Ascensius, who published numerous further editions. But Vaus' first foray into printing reflects a landmark moment for the emergence of print within Scotland. For Vaus is the probable author of the Scots translation of Aelius Donatus's *Ars Minor,* a ubiquitous Latin grammar: we think, the earliest Scottish printed fragment. Only one leaf survives, dating to around 1507, but it looks to have been published by the well-known printer Andrew Myllar, who was himself a Scot. Based in Rouen, Myllar was James IV's book-supplier from 1503 onwards. But he also appears to have learned the printing trade while there. He is thought to have printed this leaf either shortly before or soon after his return to Scotland. Because by 1508, Andrew Myllar had settled in Edinburgh and established Scotland's first printing press with his new partner, Walter Chepman. Andrew Myllar, as a Scot who learned his printing trade on the Continent and then introduced it to Scotland, is following in the footsteps of those Scots who studied on the Continent and returned to Scotland to found universities or to run them.

What, then, can we conclude from medieval and renaissance Scotland's engagement with Europe? At the most fundamental and profound level, Europe clearly shaped Scotland. In ways which are often now overlooked, Europe was central to some of Scotland's landmark cultural beliefs, moments, institutions and achievements, whether we are thinking of the Stone of Destiny, Scotland's universities or the emergence of print. What should we make of the tension between Scotland's British and European identities, seen here from the 1100s onwards, and which

have been acutely focused once more by the Brexit vote? As Scotland begins to ponder its possible membership of the EU, despite the UK's referendum outcome, it is worth reflecting on Scotland's broader European backdrop. For Scotland's outward looking relationship with Europe was not mediated by or dependent upon England. Scotland's European links have long been rich, powerful and abiding, and will clearly go on being so, whether we refer to that relationship by a specific name such as 'EU membership' or not.