

PROPAGANDA

In the medieval period, people often wrote down events in a certain way in order to influence the reader's understanding of what happened and why, and therefore shape their opinions. Writers would not make things up out of thin air, but they would interpret the facts in a certain way which fitted with their view of the world at that time. The word used to describe this idea - of writing from your own point of view - is **bias**. It means that what we see written down cannot always be taken as factual. Instead we should read it in the context of who wrote it and why.

In modern times, people did this very consciously in order to sway whole populations to believe a certain political or social idea: this is called **propaganda**. This was when people were writing with a very particular **agenda** in mind, and they would mass produce these thoughts in order to reach as many people as possible.

The sources below are not examples of 'propaganda' in this sense as they all have a limited audience in mind. However, they are examples of people writing with a particular agenda in mind. The audience can sometimes be a named person (e.g. the Pope, a king), or other people living at that time (the writers' contemporaries), and sometimes even people in the future who might read the document.

ACCOUNTS OF WILLIAM WALLACE

DOCUMENT

This text was recorded by the English Exchequer – the department of government whose job it was to keep a record of the government's money. Every year, the clerks of the Exchequer would write down what had been spent and received and why into a long manuscript called the 'Pipe Roll'. This particular record is about the expenses that the sheriffs of London had to pay for the execution of William Wallace and for taking his quartered body to Scotland.

CONTEXT

Wallace was captured by the English and taken to London where he was put on trial in Westminster (the king's court), before being executed on 23 August 1305.

BIAS

The writers of this record were part of English royal government. This means that they will have a biased account of Wallace. The most interesting part about this account is that it says Wallace tried to be king of Scotland. The usual view of Wallace has always been that he governed Scotland as a Guardian, and he never claimed the crown for himself but ruled in the name of King John Balliol, the man he thought was rightfully king. Wallace's charters were issued with the following opening statement: 'William Wallace, knight, Guardian of the kingdom of Scotland, and leader of its army, in the name of the renowned prince, the lord John, by God's grace illustrious King of the Scots, by the consent of the community of the kingdom'.

The accusation in this account of Wallace's death contradicts this view of the man. The historian who discovered this account (Dr John Reuben Davies in 2011) said that this record 'confirms outright what historians had only suspected before: the reason that Edward I dealt so harshly with Wallace was that, above all else, he viewed him as a pretender to the Scottish crown.' Through this biased account, we can get an insight into how English contemporaries viewed William Wallace's role in the Scottish War of Independence.

Westminster: September 1305

English royal government's financial records (the 'Pipe Roll') give details about the death of William Wallace.

Expenses and payments made by the sheriffs of London (John of Lincoln and Roger of Paris) for William Wallace, as a robber, a public traitor, an outlaw, an enemy and rebel against the king, who in contempt of the king had, throughout Scotland, falsely sought to call himself king of Scotland, and slew the king's officials in Scotland, and also as an enemy led an army against the king. And by sentence of the king's court at Westminster was drawn, hanged, beheaded, his entrails burned, and his body quartered, whose four parts were dispatched to the four principal towns of Scotland. Payment: 61 shillings 10 pence [= about £1,700 today]

APPEAL OF THE SEVEN EARLS OF SCOTLAND

DOCUMENT

This letter was written by Robert Bruce (the grandfather of the future king, Robert the Bruce) to Edward I on behalf of the earls of Scotland (great landholders and important political figures in medieval Scotland). He asks Edward to intervene in Scotland because William bishop of St Andrews and John Comyn (both guardians) were trying to make John king.

CONTEXT

After news of Margaret's death (September 1290), there was no longer a direct heir of Alexander III to claim the throne of Scotland. Robert Bruce and John Balliol each claimed they had a right to the throne and so there was a real threat of civil war breaking up the country. The Guardians were ruling Scotland at this time, but they were divided in their support for Bruce or Balliol.

BIAS

It is a biased account because Robert Bruce was also trying to make himself king at the time. This means John Balliol, whose supporters he is complaining about, was his direct competitor to the throne and immediately makes Bruce's opinion biased against John.

One way this source's bias is very clear is in Bruce's claim that Scottish earls and people had the right to decide who was king of Scotland. Scottish law did not say this was the case. (In fact kings were decided by a system called 'primogeniture' i.e. the rule that your title would be passed down to your eldest son when you died.) As Bruce himself was an earl, this shows he was trying to assert his authority over the matter of who should be king, and influence Edward to agree with him by stating that this was the law.

Between September 1290 and 10 May 1291

The seven earls of Scotland say they have the right to make someone king of Scotland. Robert Bruce (grandfather of the future king), appointed to write this letter on behalf of the earls, writes to Edward I to appeal against William Fraser bishop of St Andrews and John Comyn (two of the Guardians elected in 1286), who are trying to make John Balliol king of Scotland. William and John Comyn are also responsible for ravaging Moray. Bruce appeals to Edward to help the earls and help him in his claim to the Scottish throne over John Balliol.

Since the death of Lord Alexander, late king of Scotland, the royal throne of the kingdom has been vacant until now. By the laws and customs of Scotland, it is one of the rights, privileges and liberties of the seven earls of the realm of Scotland, and of the community of the realm, to make a king of that realm, and to set him upon the royal throne. This must be done, lest William, bishop of St Andrews, and John Comyn, who are acting as Guardians of the realm of Scotland, should put forward any king to exercise rule or should do anything to prevent the liberties and rights of the seven earls.

I, appointed in the bishop's presence on behalf of the said seven earls, along with the bishops, abbots, priors, earls, barons, and free land-holders of Scotland and the community of the same supporting them, appeal by this document to Lord Edward, king of England, against William, bishop of St Andrews and John Comyn and the part of the community supporting them, and also against John Balliol, lest he should take any action in the realm.

I seek your help, placing myself, the seven earls and the others mentioned above, under your peace, protection and defence. Since William, bishop of St Andrews and John Comyn, holding themselves as Guardians, have made no amends for all the losses and injuries caused from the time of Alexander, king of Scotland until the present, I thus appeal to you.

The said William and John have substituted others as subordinate guardians, for which no power or authority was given by the nobles and magnates, and these subordinates have gone to the land of Moray, directly under the rule of the king of Scotland, and have destroyed and robbed the lands and villages belonging to freemen of the king of Scotland, and have burnt these villages. I have therefore been appointed on behalf of Donald, earl of Mar, one of the seven earls, and also in the name of the freemen of Moray, and of those of the earl of Mar, to secure a remedy and gain compensation. I appeal to you and place the earl of Mar and others named under your protection.

The said William and John, along with some other people of the realm, intend to make John Balliol king in the realm of Scotland in order to preserve and defend the laws and customs of the realm and to give each person the right which belongs to him by law. This they plan to do even though I, Robert Bruce, lord of Annandale, as the legitimate and true heir-designate to the rule of the realm of Scotland have put forward a claim concerning the right which I have in the realm and am urgently pursuing my right. William and John plan to give Balliol the rights and honours which go with the realm, to the hindrance of my and the earls' rights.

I thus appeal to you for help in obtaining my right which I have in Scotland and on behalf of the earls.

THE DECLARATION OF THE CLERGY

DOCUMENT

This document was written at Robert the Bruce's first parliament as king at St Andrews on 17 March 1309. It was then reissued at a Church council meeting in Dundee on 24 February 1310. The document is a declaration by the major churchmen of the kingdom (the clergy) explaining why Robert the Bruce was now king, and not John Balliol who was still alive and had been king (at least in name) until the government of John 'the Red' Comyn surrendered to Edward I on 9 February 1304.

CONTEXT

Robert Bruce held his first parliament as king in St Andrews in March 1309. Many Scottish towns and castles were still controlled by Edward II. Robert I had had a few significant successes, however; in particular, he had taken Aberdeen in August 1308. With the assistance of Philip IV of France he had negotiated a truce with Edward from 2 February 1309. This continued until the middle of 1310. Robert I lost no time in summoning a parliament. It was important to use the occasion to justify his position as king. Before Robert seized the throne in March 1306, Scottish independence had been fought in the name of John Balliol. Balliol was still alive in France. The document known as the Declaration of the Clergy is the statement of why Robert Bruce was now king. A remarkable feature is the emphasis on the role of the people, by whose authority he had been raised to the kingdom. The Declaration was intended for an international audience, and for that reason was reissued when a Church Council met in Dundee in February 1310.

BIAS

The main priority of the Scottish clergy during the War of Independence was to make sure it remained separate from the English church. This was difficult when Scotland was subjected to English rule, and so the clergy were very interested in supporting anyone who would help them remain independent. At different points in time, this was a different person, and so when their allegiances swapped to someone new (e.g. Robert the Bruce) they had to justify themselves. That is exactly what this document does: the clergy claim that they always thought Bruce's grandfather should be king (even though Balliol was made king), that under God's guidance the people made Bruce their king (even though there was much resistance to Bruce at first), and that any documents that had been written contradicting this were not reliable because they were written under fear and force. The document skews the facts to suit their new position of allegiance to Bruce, who was their one hope of achieving independence from England.

Dundee: 24 February 1310

The major churchmen of Scotland state that when Edward I made John Balliol king during the succession crisis, they always supported his opponent, Robert Bruce. Once Balliol had been taken away, they agreed to make Robert the Bruce king of Scots.

We, the bishops, abbots, priors, and other clergy of the realm of Scotland, make known that when a dispute arose between John Balliol, lately installed as king of Scotland de facto by the king of England, and the late Robert Bruce, the grandfather of Robert who is now king, concerning which of them had the better title, by right of birth, to inherit the rule over the people of Scotland, the faithful people always believed that Robert, the grandfather, was the true heir after the death of King Alexander and of his granddaughter, the daughter of the king of Norway.

The whole people of the realm of Scotland were wearied by the stings of many sufferings: their King John had been captured by the king of England and imprisoned and deprived of his realm and people, the kingdom had been betrayed and reduced to slavery by John and laid waste by much plundering, the people were filled with the distress of constant sorrow, they were exposed to every danger and given over to the occupier (Edward), and tortured by war, and made captive, and oppressed, overthrown and enslaved by the slaughter of many innocent people and by continual burnings. The people were near to eternal ruin unless speedy repair was brought by divine counsel to fix such a disfigured and desolated kingdom and its governance.

The people were unable to bear any longer such numerous, great and heavy injuries more bitter than death, often coming to them because they had no captain and faithful leader. And so, by the guidance of God, under whose authority kings rule and princes govern, the people agreed on Lord Robert, who now is king, the rights of his father and his grandfather to the kingdom. And with their knowledge and approval he was received as king so that he might reform the defects of the realm and correct things needing to be corrected and steer those that lacked guidance. By their authority he was set over the realm, and formally established as king of Scots. The faithful people of the kingdom wish to live and die with Robert who, by the right of his blood and other cardinal virtues, is fit to govern and is worthy of the name of king because he has repaired such a damaged and forsaken kingdom by repelling injury with the sword, just as many previous princes and kings of Scots had done by the sword in former times.

If anyone claims that he has right to the kingdom by producing sealed letters from the past, which record the consent of the whole people, you should know that all this arose by force and violence which nobody could then resist, and amid numerous fears, tortures of bodies and various terrors which could well have disturbed the senses and minds of perfect men and destroyed the most committed people.

We therefore have sworn fealty to Lord Robert, our king of Scotland, and his successors, being compelled not by force or deceit but by pure wish. And in sign of our testimony and approval of all these things we attach our seals to this writing.

THE RAGMAN ROLL

DOCUMENT

The Ragman Roll is a list of just over 1,600 Scots who swore loyalty to King Edward I of England in 1296. It included most of the people who held land in the kingdom, both men and women. As well as swearing loyalty, the Scots also abandoned an alliance they had made with the French king.

Each person, or group of people, gave proof of their loyalty by fixing their seal to a document. Each of these documents were later copied out by English scribes into a long piece of parchment (called the Ragman Roll) to act as evidence of the Scots' submission to English rule.

CONTEXT

On 23 October 1295, the Scots made a treaty (an agreement or pact) with France against Edward I. Between March and April 1296, Edward I invaded Scotland and destroyed the town of Berwick. The Scottish army was then defeated at the Battle of Dunbar, and most of the Scottish leaders were captured. After the capture of Dunbar, James the Steward of Scotland surrendered Roxburgh Castle, and King Edward was able to move through most of Scotland unopposed.

King Edward followed an eastern coastal route, via Edinburgh, Stirling, Perth, Forfar, Montrose, Kincardine, Aberdeen, Banff and Elgin, returning via a similar route, and taking in Kildrummy, Brechin, Arbroath, Dundee, and St Andrews, until he reached Berwick again on Wednesday 22 August. A few Scots swore loyalty to Edward during this journey. On 28 August over 1,600 swore loyalty to Edward I (including some who had done so already).

The following spring, various uprisings were led by Scots all over the country against the English. Edward had to come north again in 1298 in order to crush the rebellion. The next few years were spent debating the relationship between Scotland and England in the Pope's court in Rome. Edward used the submissions made by the Scots in 1296 as evidence of his overlordship.

BIAS

In Edward's eyes, once King John Balliol had surrendered Scotland had no king, and was therefore no longer a kingdom. When this happened in July 1296, Edward had to make sure he recorded the moment the Scots surrendered to him in writing. By having these submissions in writing, he would be able to copy the documents and use them as proof in the future of his authority over Scotland. We can tell Edward wanted this arrangement of the Scots being loyal to England to last for a long time because the text mentions 'the heirs' of both the Scots and Edward.

The important thing about the way the text was written is that it showed the people giving themselves to Edward *willingly*, not by force. However, though they were not directly forced to swear loyalty, there was no other option for the Scots: if they didn't agree they would risk being taken to prison and their land taken away from them and their family.

July and August, 1296

The documents in the Ragman Roll mostly read as follows:

Since we have become faithful and subject to the will of the most noble prince, our well-loved lord Edward, by the grace of God king of England, lord of Ireland, and duke of Aquitaine; we promise on our own behalf and that of our heirs, upon punishment of body and property and whatever else we can forfeit, that we shall support him; and we shall serve him well and loyally against all mortal men, every time that we are called upon or summoned by our said lord, the king of England, or by his heirs; and that if we shall come to know of anything harmful to them, we shall do all in our power to obstruct it, and we shall make them aware of it.

In order to hold to and keep these promises, we pledge ourselves, our heirs, and all our goods. And we have furthermore sworn this upon the holy Gospels. As proof of this matter we have caused these open letters to be written, and sealed them with our seal.

THE DECLARATION OF ARBROATH

DOCUMENT

This letter was written from the barons, free land-holders and the whole 'community of the realm' of Scotland to the pope, John XXII. It was written in Latin and dated at the Abbey of Arbroath, on 6 April 1320. The title of 'declaration of Arbroath' has only been used in modern times.

CONTEXT

Pope John XXII was refusing to acknowledge Robert's title as king, and the Pope blamed Robert for fighting Edward II, king of England. In June 1320, before he received the declaration, the Pope excommunicated Robert and the main Scottish bishops. This meant they were excluded from taking part in the rituals of the church, and was seen as a terrible punishment.

Another problem was that Edward II showed no sign at all of recognising that Scotland was an independent kingdom.

All of this meant that King Robert was under serious pressure at home in Scotland to show that it was an independent country with its own king.

BIAS

All the facts given by the writers are from the perspective of Scots who wanted to be independent from English rule. We can see this perspective very clearly in their description of where the Scots came from: this account is not strictly factual as they didn't know where the Scots had come from originally, but it served the purpose of demonstrating to the pope that the Scots and their kings were as separate from the English then as they were in the past.

Another cause for a biased account was the fact that there was a wider audience for this document than just the pope. It was hoped that people at home in Scotland would hear the words of the document as well. This Scottish audience actually included those who were sending the document to the pope: the barons of Scotland themselves. They would be told what the document said (it is likely that they themselves could not read) as they went to attach their seals. This could have been a warning to anyone who was trying to push out King Robert and become king themselves. The main people in mind here were Edward Balliol and his supporters, who were trying to put Balliol on the throne by using English support, in exchange for Scotland's subordination to the king of England. The declaration (and in particular two sentences called 'the freedom clause' and 'the deposition clause' – 7 and 8 below) was a warning that Bruce's supporters would not let this happen.

See below for more analysis

Arbroath: 6 April 1320

An outline of the text is given here. For a full text of the document, see the National Archives of Scotland website: <http://www.nas.gov.uk/downloads/declarationArbroath.pdf>. The numbers of paragraphs in this outline have been added for clarity.

1. The letter opens with a list people who send greetings to the pope: 40 named noblemen, plus 'the other barons, free landholders and the whole community of the realm of Scotland'. The letter is formal, and written as though in the voice of these individuals.
2. There is then a short account of where the Scots came from and how they arrived in Scotland and took over the country after they had destroyed the Picts. 'As the histories of ancient times bear witness, it has held them free of all servitude ever since.'
3. Scotland's history is reinforced with the statement that 'in their kingdom, 113 kings of their own royal stock have reigned in a line unbroken by a single foreigner.'
4. It is then said that the Scots, 'even though settled in the uttermost ends of the earth', were among the first to become Christian through St Andrew, the brother of St Peter.

5. The Scots, we are told, lived in freedom and peace until Edward I 'came in the guise of a friend and ally to invade them as an enemy' at a time when the Scots were without a king. Edward's 'innumerable outrages' are listed.
6. The Scots, however, have been saved by the efforts of Robert Bruce. It is said that Bruce had been made king (i) 'by divine providence', (ii) by 'succession to his right according to our laws and customs which we will maintain to the death', and (iii) by 'the due consent and assent of us all'.
7. Then is the sentence known as the deposition clause: 'Yet if he [King Robert] should give up what he has begun, seeking to make us or our kingdom subject to the king of England or to the English, we would strive at once to drive him out as our enemy and a subverter of his own right and ours, and we would make some other man who was able to defend us our king.'
8. Then is the sentence known as the freedom clause: 'For as long as a hundred of us remain alive, we will never on any conditions be subjected to the lordship of the English. For it is not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we fight, but for freedom alone, which no good man gives up except with his life'.
9. The pope is then asked to urge the king of England, 'who ought to be satisfied with what he has, since England used to be enough for seven kings or more', to leave the Scots alone, 'who live in poor little Scotland, beyond which there is no dwelling place at all'.
10. It is then stated that the reason Christian rulers fail to go to help fight in the Holy Land (on Crusade) is because of wars with their neighbours. It is claimed that, if only the king of England would leave them in peace, the Scots would be ready to go there and help.
11. It is pointed out to the pope that, if there is further slaughter and misery because he continues to accept the English version of events, this will be laid at his door by God. They emphasise their obedience to the pope, and their trust in God.
12. The letter ends with a dating clause: 'given at the monastery of Arbroath in Scotland' on 6 April 1320, the fifteenth year of the reign of Robert Bruce.

FURTHER ANALYSIS ON THE DECLARATION OF ARBROATH

Dynastic crisis

Although Robert had successfully driven the English out of Scotland, his political position was weakened by two vital factors:

1. Robert's brother, Edward Bruce, had been killed in October 1318 while fighting in Ireland. After this, there was no obvious adult male alive who could succeed Robert I as king. The heir was Robert Stewart, Robert I's grandson (through his daughter, Margaret, and her husband, Walter Stewart). But Robert Stewart was only an infant boy. This meant that it was becoming risky for nobles to back Robert I: what would happen if he and his grandson died — who would be king then?
2. There was an obvious answer to this question: Edward Balliol. Edward was the head of a family whose main supporters had been defeated by Robert Bruce. Bruce had become king in 1306 by seizing the throne once occupied by John Balliol, Edward's father. John had died in 1314. In 1320 Edward was in his thirties and living in his lands in France. Edward must have hoped for English support and recognition to regain his father's throne from Bruce if the opportunity arose.

Conspiracy against Robert I

In December 1318, a law was enacted in parliament against anyone spreading rumours about King Robert and his government. This is a sure sign that there was much unrest and speculation about the future in the country at that time.

This unrest was confirmed within a few years. Just months after the Declaration was written, a conspiracy against King Robert was revealed and its leaders dealt with savagely in early August 1320. The 'official' line was that the conspirators intended to oust Robert and install William Soules as king. The incident is therefore known as the 'Soules Conspiracy'.

It has been argued that William Soules would not have been a credible king, and that the conspiracy was really an attempt to restore the Balliols to the throne. Edward Balliol was certainly in England in July 1320. Four of the nobles named in the Declaration were among the conspirators. Were they already plotting against Robert when they affixed their seals to the document?

Creating the Declaration

The letter's main points were probably drafted by King Robert and his council when they met at Newbattle (a few miles south of Edinburgh) in March 1320. Although the letter is dated 6 April, it may not have been sent until May.

More nobles sealed it than are named individually in the document. Professor Duncan's study of how the letter was sealed has shown that this was an impressive government-led effort, with nobles being urged or required to send their seals to where the document was kept. This could have taken weeks. This is important for our understanding of the text. It was not drawn up by a large assembly of nobles. Instead, the fifty or more who sealed it were presented with a finished document. It is also highly likely that some did not see the Declaration at all, but sent a clerk to attach their seal on their behalf.

Sources

Biblical and Roman

As well as using quotations from the Bible, it has been shown that the freedom clause has been taken nearly word for word from a work called *The Conspiracy of Cataline* by a Roman author, Sallust, writing before the Christian Era.

English

The account of where the Scots originated is taken mainly from Henry of Huntingdon's *History of English Kings*, written in the twelfth century.

Scottish

The statement that there were 113 kings is derived from a list of kings which was in parts totally unhistorical. It began with early kings of Dál Riata in Argyll (who reigned between the 6th and 8th centuries), followed by kings of the Picts, and ended with kings of Scots from Cinaed mac Ailpín (Kenneth mac Alpin, d.858), probably going as far as John Balliol. The inclusion of Pictish kings is ironic, given that we are told in the Declaration that the Picts were destroyed when the Scots first arrived in Scotland!

Authorship

The only certainty is that whoever drafted the text in the first place was a highly trained writer of prose. The text would have had to be approved by the king's chancellor, but that does not mean that he wrote it. There is evidence of slight editing at a late stage. There is no conclusive proof of the author's identity. However, these two people have been suggested:

1. Bernard of Linton: in 1320 he was the royal chancellor and the abbot of Arbroath Abbey. He has long been regarded as the most likely author. If not the author, he would certainly have known the Declaration's text intimately.
2. Alexander Kinninmonth: he was one of the messengers who took the Declaration to the pope. He also would have known in detail what the text said.

Were the barons aware of what the Declaration said?

There has been some debate about how much the nobles who sealed the document knew about what it said. There are key questions to be asked about the Declaration's significance: was the famous 'deposition clause' written only for the pope's ears, or did they also have a domestic audience in mind? If the barons named at the beginning were largely ignorant of its contents, and were not expected to know what it said, then how could the letter have been written with an eye to the political situation at home? If those who sealed it thought it was simply a letter to the pope, how appropriate would it be to see it as a 'declaration' of constitutional significance to Scotland?

The nobles, of course, could not have read and understood the Latin of the document. But they were also accustomed to dealing with this handicap. In this period, almost all public documents in Scotland (such as charters) were in Latin. A noble would normally have a clerk to read it and translate it for him before he sealed it. Presumably on this occasion the nobles sent their clerks with their seals. It is hard to believe that the clerks would not have read the letter and told their lords the main points of what it said.

Those outside Robert I's council may not have had a say in what the Declaration said, but the text could still have been written in the expectation that they would learn of its contents — especially the most dramatic parts.

Historians' Debates

Everyone accepts that the letter is superbly written, and is one of the most evocative pieces of official prose from the Middle Ages. This high estimation rests particularly on the two most famous clauses: the deposition clause and the freedom clause. But historians do not agree on how to interpret them.

The deposition clause

All would agree that the clause has some constitutional content. But some questions are still debated:

- Was it meant to be read primarily as a deliberate statement of the relationship between the king of Scots and his people?
- Was it little more than a rhetorical flourish?
- Was it written for an immediate political purpose — to challenge those who thought a Balliol, and not Robert Bruce, should be king?

A rhetorical flourish?

Grant Simpson in particular has argued that the Declaration should be seen as one of a number of letters to the pope in which a king justified his resistance to the pope's demands (in this case, that King Robert should stop fighting the English). The main element in these letters was that it was claimed that the barons would not allow the king to obey the pope. There are examples of letters of this kind from Kings John and Edward I of England and Philip II of France. In this context, the threat to depose the king is simply a dramatic pose. It was written for the pope's benefit alone. It was never intended to be read as a constitutional statement, and was not remembered as particularly significant until modern times.

Lynette Wyness (in an unpublished study) has pointed out that the Declaration is unique in saying that the king might be deposed. Other letters of this kind went no further than suggesting that the barons might prevent the king from doing something.

A constitutional statement?

Professor E. J. Cowan in particular has argued that the deposition clause is the first statement by a government in Europe of the 'contractual theory' in its full sense that a king who fails should be deposed by their barons in the name of the people. It was accepted in theory that, if a ruler was incapacitated, he might remain only as a figurehead while someone else governed in his place. But medieval thinkers were generally reluctant to go the whole way and state that a bad king should be deposed by his people. The first to do so in theory was John of Paris in 1302.

Cowan argued that when Robert Bruce became king in 1306 he saw himself as deposing John Balliol who, though still alive, had failed. According to Cowan, Robert in the Declaration made it explicit that a king would be deposed if he failed the essential test of preserving the kingdom's independence.

The community of the realm

Professor G. W. S. Barrow saw the clause in terms of the king's relationship with the 'community of the realm'. Who or what was this? Barrow's answer is: 'in practice, no doubt, nobles, prelates and substantial freeholders, but in theory the entire Scottish nation'.

In the absence of a monarch after the death of Alexander III in 1286, government had been by the authority of the community of the realm. This had been reasserted even when there was a king again after 1292. In 1295 the running of the kingdom had been taken from the hands of John Balliol and entrusted to a council of twelve. After Edward I's conquest in 1296 had been largely overturned, government by the authority of the community resumed with William Wallace and other guardians until Edward I reconquered Scotland in 1304. In 1306 a new stage was reached when Robert Bruce had, in effect, been elected not as a guardian but as king by a group intent on reviving the idea of government by authority of the community.

If the community could create a king, it was a small step to think that they could remove a king who threatened their existence.

An attack on Balliol?

A literal treading of the 'deposition clause' is that it was directed at Robert Bruce himself. But it would be absurd to imagine that Robert Bruce, now that he was king, was likely to 'sell out' to the English. Also, the threat of deposition must have been written into the Declaration with his approval. Was the statement really directed at someone else?

- John Balliol: James Goldstein and Alexander Grant have pointed out that Robert Bruce needed to justify the fact that in 1306 he had replaced John Balliol as king of Scots. Even though King John had left the country in 1296, he was still the king in whose name the cause of independence had been fought by Wallace and the Comyns. The deposition clause stated a basic criterion that every king should satisfy. John Balliol had failed, therefore he had been replaced by Robert Bruce, who had succeeded.
- Edward Balliol: Dauvit Broun has argued that Edward Balliol, not his father King John, was the target. The clause talks not about a king failing despite his best efforts, but of a king who actively seeks to make the kingdom subject to the English. The Bruce government was worried by the threat posed by Edward Balliol's supporters in Scotland, and wanted to make two points: firstly, if Edward Balliol became king, he would throw away Scottish independence because he would depend on English support, and secondly, anyone could be king as long as he could preserve Scottish independence — so, even if the Bruce dynasty died out, their cause would continue because they were prepared to make 'some other man who was able to defend us our king' (presumably one of Bruce's leading henchmen, such as Thomas Randolph). Broun has also pointed out that in the previous clause there is full statement of how Robert became king. This shows that the Declaration had a conventional view of how kings became kings. It should not, therefore, be read as constitutionally radical. The 'deposition clause' should therefore be understood as written for a specific political purpose (to warn anyone thinking of supporting Edward Bruce), not as a general constitutional statement.

The freedom clause

The Declaration speaks vividly of freedom from the English. But some questions are still debated:

- Is this simply freedom for the kingdom from the domination of another?
- Or is it linked to personal freedom?
- If so, whose freedom?

Personal freedom and the freedom of the kingdom

Professor Barrow shows that the freedom clause has been carefully written from different parts of *The Conspiracy of Cataline* by the Roman author, Sallust. The result is 'to emphasize liberty, individual as well as regnal, as the overriding desire of the nation'.

Broun has argued that the idea of freedom in the Declaration was already articulated vividly in a history of Scotland written no later than the 1260s.

Whose freedom?

Not everyone was 'free' in society. Anyone was regarded as 'free' if they had property with the right to pass it on to their children. This could include peasants as well as knights. Their land and goods were theoretically guaranteed by the king because he was regarded as the ultimate authority in the kingdom. This would be threatened if Scottish sovereignty was challenged. For these people personal freedom and the freedom of the kingdom and were intimately linked.

But there were also many who were not regarded as free. They and their children were tied to a lord and were therefore seen as someone else's 'property'. For Goldstein, this inequality means that 'freedom' was only for those who lived off the labour of the unfree.

Personal freedom

Why did those who were already 'free' in society fight the English 'for freedom'? Professor Duncan has argued that, after Edward's conquest in 1296, when all the leading nobles were taken captive, the free landholders who formed the backbone of the Scottish infantry took matters into their own hands in the cause of resisting the heavy demands of Edward I's government. For them, freedom from the English was not just about Scottish independence in its own right, but was also because they rejected Edward I's oppressive style of government and demands for taxation.

Freedom from tyranny

Professor Cowan sees this desire for freedom from oppression in constitutional terms. The intrusive style of government of Edward I and Edward II was tantamount to tyranny, and some political theorists asserted that it was legitimate to depose tyrants. In this way Cowan links the freedom clause with the general principle which he sees behind the deposition clause.

Suggested reading

Translation

Many translations have been published, but the one that is referred to most often is by Professor

A.A.M. Duncan published as an appendix to his edition and translation of Barbour's *Bruce*:

John Barbour, *The Bruce*, edited with translation and notes by A. A. M. Duncan, Canongate Classics 78 (Edinburgh 1997), 779–82.

Classic studies

G. W. S. Barrow, *Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland* (first published in 1965, new editions in 1976, 1988 and by EUP in 2005).

A. A. M. Duncan, *The Nation of Scots and the Declaration of Arbroath, 1320*. Historical Association Pamphlet (1970).

Grant Simpson, 'The Declaration of Arbroath revitalised', *Scottish Historical Review* 56 (1977) 11–33.

Recent books

Geoffrey Barrow (ed.), *The Declaration of Arbroath: History, Significance, Setting*. Society of Antiquaries Monograph Series (Edinburgh 2003).

Edward J. Cowan, *'For Freedom Alone': the Declaration of Arbroath* (Tuckwell Press, East Linton 2003).

Recent analysis on-line

<http://www.breakingofbritain.ac.uk/blogs/feature-of-the-month/july-2012/>

Other studies

G. W. S. Barrow, 'The idea of freedom', *Innes Review* 30 (1979) 16–34 (reprinted in G. W. S. Barrow, *Scotland and its Neighbours in the Middle Ages* (Hambledon, London 1992), chapter 1).

Terry Brotherstone and David Ditchburn, '1320 and a' that: the Declaration of Arbroath and the remaking of Scottish History', in Terry Brotherstone and David Ditchburn (eds), *Freedom and Authority, Scotland c.1050-c.1650. Historical and Historiographical Essays presented to Grant G. Simpson* (East Linton 2000), 10–31.

Dauvit Broun, 'The Declaration of Arbroath: pedigree of a nation?', in *The Declaration of Arbroath: History, Significance, Setting*, ed. G. W. S. Barrow (Society of Antiquaries Monograph Series, Edinburgh, 2003), 1–12.

Dauvit Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain from the Picts to Alexander III* (EUP, Edinburgh 2007), chapter 9.

A. A. M. Duncan, *The Kingship of the Scots 842–1292: Succession and Independence* (EUP, Edinburgh 2002), final chapter.

R. James Goldstein, *The Matter of Scotland. Historical Narrative in Medieval Scotland* (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln and London 1993), esp. chapter 6.

Alexander Grant, 'Aspects of national consciousness in medieval Scotland', in C. Bjørn, A. Grant and K.J. Stringer (eds), *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past* (Academic Press, Copenhagen 1994) 68–95.