The thorny issue of contemporary perceptions of Bruce as a usurper who found it difficult to win the universal trust and support of Scottish nobles, is tackled to good effect, as is the concerted effort made by Bruce and his key advisers to wage a diplomatic and ideological offensive every bit as important as the battles and skirmishes that have tended to dominate popular consciousness of this period. Indeed, Penman largely eschews intense scrutiny of military strategies and battle formations (which have received, perhaps, inordinate attention elsewhere), and concentrates rather on the fascinating complexities of perceptions and projection of kingship. The rights and dignity of the office of the crown were well understood by Bruce, and this informed much of the justification rhetoric produced in such documents as the letter to Pope John XXII, dated 6 April 1320, which has assumed its own iconic status in recent times as the Declaration of Arbroath; a status that has tended to obscure its original intentions or contemporary impact. Penman offers a thoughtful scrutiny of the context and likely authorship of this document, as well as cogent analysis of its subsequent significance.

A short review is insufficient to draw attention to any but a selection of the impressive elements of this thought provoking and comprehensive study, but it is hoped that it conveys some sense of Robert Bruce: King of the Scots as a highly readable, rigorously researched book that deserves to be an essential resource for investigation of this period for some time to come.

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DOI: 10.3366/inr.2017.0132


In his typically lively paper in this volume, Edward Cowan suggests that the recent crop of books published to commemorate the battle of Bannockburn ‘adds little to our knowledge particularly when compared with those that appeared in 1914.’ This volume is an exception, providing an up-to-date account of recent research, and covering a wide range of topics dealing both with the battle itself, and the way it has been treated over the centuries since it took place.

The possible site of Bannockburn has long been discussed; although the general location is clear, there have been many different theories as to where precisely the battle took place. Tony Pollard
explains the difficulties of all the suggested sites, and uses modern surveying methods and archaeology to try to resolve them. Regrettably, the wet and acidic nature of the soil means that little has survived, but a few finds of metal objects suggest that the Carse, close to the Forth, is the most probable site. Environmental science helps to demonstrate the context of climate and landscape at the time the battle was fought. Two papers, one by Alasdair Ross, and another by Richard Tipping and a dozen co-authors, analyse the complex terrain, with its water-courses, mosses and pools, which made Bannockburn such a difficult battlefield for the English. Tipping and his colleagues conclude that the area where the battle was fought was probably not much affected by the climatic downturn that was taking place. Ross on the other hand considers that though there is no evidence for the weather at when the battle was fought, conditions might have been dreadful.

David Caldwell discusses the development of Scottish battle tactics in the years leading up to Bannockburn. The battle was one of several in the early fourteenth century in which armies composed largely of footsoldiers defeated heavily armoured horsemen, in very different circumstances and with distinctly different tactics. For the Scots, the development of the schiltrom was vital, while Bruce’s earlier victory at Loudoun Hill in 1307 showed the importance of careful selection and management of the battle site. There is another side to the story, that of the failure of the English to adapt to Scottish fighting methods. Victory at Falkirk in 1298 had given them an undeserved over-confidence.

Two papers concentrate on the English. Unfortunately no pay rolls for their army survive, nor is there a heraldic roll of arms for the 1314 expedition. However, Andrew Ayton provides a superb analysis of Edward II’s cavalry, examining the scale of involvement by the military elite, and the impact of the defeat. He shows that while Bannockburn was disastrous, the losses caused by the civil wars and political upheavals of the 1320s had at least an equal effect. He argues that Edward III turned to a new generation when war broke out with France in 1337. However, there was one experienced veteran of BannockBurn, Henry de Beaumont, still serving then, and it is conceivable that his memories and advice were influential in the transformation of English tactical methods. David Simpkin looks at the heraldry of the English army. In the past, heraldry was a very distinct discipline, called upon rarely by historians, but this paper shows that the study of coats of arms provides a valuable tool in reconstructing the links that tied men together in retinues and affinities.

Stirling castle in 1314 was very different from today, and Peter Yeoman explains what is known of its layout. He discusses the burials
under the floor of the royal chapel, excavated in the 1990s. Three skeletons are from the first half of the fourteenth century; one was that of a powerfully built woman, surely a fighter. Though these cannot be directly linked to Bannockburn, the brutal way these three were killed reveals the savagery of the Wars of Independence.

In a paper which demonstrates the gulf that can exist between different academic disciplines, Sarah Tolmie describes her concerns with Barbour’s *Bruce* as ‘cognitive rather than historical’ (p. 141). She examines the work’s literary structure, and suggests that the way in which the narrative is constructed, with interlaced incidents as it unfolds, and strong appeals to the emotions, make it particularly memorable. Readers of Barbour’s work, she argues, will have ‘the satisfaction of being hermeneutically implicated in the text, of helping it to produce its meaning’ (p. 151).

A group of papers look at the way in which Bannockburn has been treated since the nineteenth century, and its place in Scottish identity. John Morrison examines the way in which the artist Sir William Allan treated the Scottish past, in particular with his treatment of the battle in a huge panoramic painting, based on Barbour, which was left unfinished at his death in 1850. Michael Penman studies the role of the battle in political debate in the century after Waterloo. Fascinating details reveal that the entire Airdrie town band was imprisoned in 1819 for playing ‘Scots, wha hae wi’ Wallace bled’, while in contrast the Stirling town band interrupted the nationalist speakers at Bannockburn in 1911.

Bannockburn has no memorial as grand as the Wallace monument, but Andrew Wright provides an intriguing account of the way it was commemorated by the Borestone, flagstaff and, eventually, the statue of Bruce by Pilkington Jackson. The saga behind this provides a superb example of the problems involved when committees need to make decisions.

The volume concludes with Edward Cowan’s bravura survey of the huge range of historical literature on Bannockburn from the 1370s to the present day. He summarizes the many different arguments, skilfully bringing out the remarkable range of controversy inspired by the battle. William Scott, author of six books on the battle, whose ‘language is intemperate to say the least’ and who is ‘throughout his whole output, ridiculously repetitive’ (p. 236), would probably not expect praise from an academic historian, but is congratulated for his work on the topography of the battle site.

This book provides an admirable survey of the latest research on the battle itself, while the various discussions of its cultural legacy give it a distinctive focus. The publishers are to be congratulated on producing an attractive volume, with many colour plates, which extend
from nineteenth-century dramatic imaginings to a photograph of Nicola Sturgeon and Alex Salmond at a Bannockburn Day rally.

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DOI: 10.3366/inr.2017.0133

_In Dialogue with the Agallamh. Essays in Honour of Seán Ó Coileáin._

This volume arises from a conference held at University College Cork in 2012 to honour the work of Seán Ó Coileáin, formerly Professor of Modern Irish at that institution. It comprises eleven essays focusing on various aspects of the text known as _Agallamh na seanóirach_, ‘the Dialogue of the Ancients’, a work that survives in numerous different versions dating from the late-medieval period to the twentieth century, and which lies at the heart of _fianaigheacht_ literature, or the body of prose and verse material relating to the mythical figure Fionn mac Cumhaill and his warriors.

Ó Coileáin’s own contribution to this field of study is readily illustrated by the first and last chapters in the volume, which are reprints of essays previously published by him elsewhere. Both are concerned with one of the defining features of the literary genre in question, which is its portrayal of real and imagined landscapes through an exploration of place-names. The _Agallamh_ is structured as a frame-tale whose protagonists, pagan warriors of Ireland’s heroic past who have mysteriously survived until the period of conversion, reminisce about the lore of various locations, and about the significance of particular toponyms, as they journey around Ireland in the company of St Patrick. The volume thus begins with Ó Coileáin’s 1993 _Studia Hibernica_ article on ‘Place and placename in _fianaigheacht_’ (pp. 6–20), in which the author weighs up the significance of reality and myth with regard to the geographical setting of the _Agallamh_ and related texts. This discussion is complemented by the more specific focus of the final chapter in the volume, namely Ó Coileáin’s 2004 essay on ‘The setting of _Géisid cuán_’, which revisits arguments concerning the location of events depicted in one of the most frequently commented poems associated with the _Agallamh_ (pp. 218–30).

The earliest version of _Agallamh na seanóirach_ is thought to have been compiled in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, and is preserved in four distinct manuscript witnesses. This recension forms the principal focus of the majority of new essays in the volume, which explore various interconnected aspects of the narrative. Anne Connon’s