

THE HISTORICAL MACBETH

Edward J Cowan

'Some of our writers relate a number of fables, more adapted for theatrical representation, or Milesian romance, than history'.¹ Thus George Buchanan, himself no stranger to fabulism, writing of one of the most famous of the sons of Moray in 1582. William Shakespeare took the hint. Within twenty four years Banquo stood on a blasted heath in a thinning mist to enquire 'How far is't called to Forres?'.² The answer, never given in the play, is a journey of over half a millennium along a tortuous route, frequently shrouded in Celtic mists. When the play was first produced in 1606 it was edited to accommodate the short attention spans and fidgeting predilections of its distinguished audience, King James VI of Scotland who had recently succeeded to the English throne, and his brother-in-law King Christian of Denmark.³ It was designed to instruct and flatter James Stewart — perhaps the most flatterable, if least instructible of monarchs. It was written in the shadow of a spectacular series of Scottish witch trials just over ten years earlier when James' cousin Francis Stewart, Earl of Bothwell, had been accused of attempting to conjure, through witches' spells, the destruction of the king himself.⁴ If the witches failed in their objective with regard to James, Shakespeare succeeded admirably in destroying the historical MacBeth.

Yet another review of MacBeth's life and times may seem superfluous given the already considerable literature on the subject. Virtually everyone who has ever pontificated on medieval Scottish history has had something to say about this essentially obscure mormaer of Moray 'snorting with the indigested fumes of the blood of his sovereign'⁵ while others have tried to rescue him from 'the fabulist school of fawning sycophants who invented their lies centuries after his death'.⁶ One invention was the incredible concoction, *The Secret History of MacBeth* which first appeared in 1708 and was reprinted by Peter Buchan in 1828. In this piece of political pornography compiled by some anonymous opponent of Stewart absolutism, MacBeth's over-vaulting ambition is reflected in his monstrous sexual appetite as allegedly related by his one-time faithful, but now repentant henchman, Angus. The true hero of the tale is clearly Archibald ninth earl of Argyll (executed 1685) since his namesake, as a 'hater of tyrants' and 'leader of the patriots', led the attack on MacBeth.⁷ In 1797 it could be stated that 'the story of the Usurper's defeat, flight northward, and death at Lumphanan is known to every reader conversant in the history of Scotland'.⁸ He has been compared by a crazed clansman to Lord Kitchener and President Wilson, with a quotation from *The Canadian Boat Song*

thrown in for good measure.⁹ The 'Priestess of Tradition with her sovereign contempt of historic detail' has been invoked on his behalf.¹⁰ One valiant admirer tried to make an Arthur out of his hero. When MacBeth received his fatal wound 'his charger galloped away among the hills with the bleeding monarch and no man saw him die'.¹¹ On film he has been depicted as American gangster in *Joe MacBeth*, Japanese warlord in *Throne of Blood* and as Orson Welles. In print the distortionists have continued their clamour from spuriously historical treatments¹² to utterly preposterous fiction.¹³ The folkloristic aspects of MacBeth's story have been lucidly expounded¹⁴ but a highly respected modern historian uneasily contrasts 'a harsh, brutally violent Iron Age quality (which) characterized the struggles of these warlike mormaers' — of Moray, such as MacBeth — with the attitudes of 'those who were devoted to consolidating and preserving a new kind of Scottish kingdom'.¹⁵ Words such as usurpation, violence, brutality or chaos flow confidently from the pens of errantly confident beholders. Arguably the years of MacBeth's rule 1040-1057 were no more violent than the seventeen years which preceded James VI's succession to the English throne; in highlighting order, while minimizing violence, recent commentators on James VI's reign have hopelessly overstated their case.¹⁶

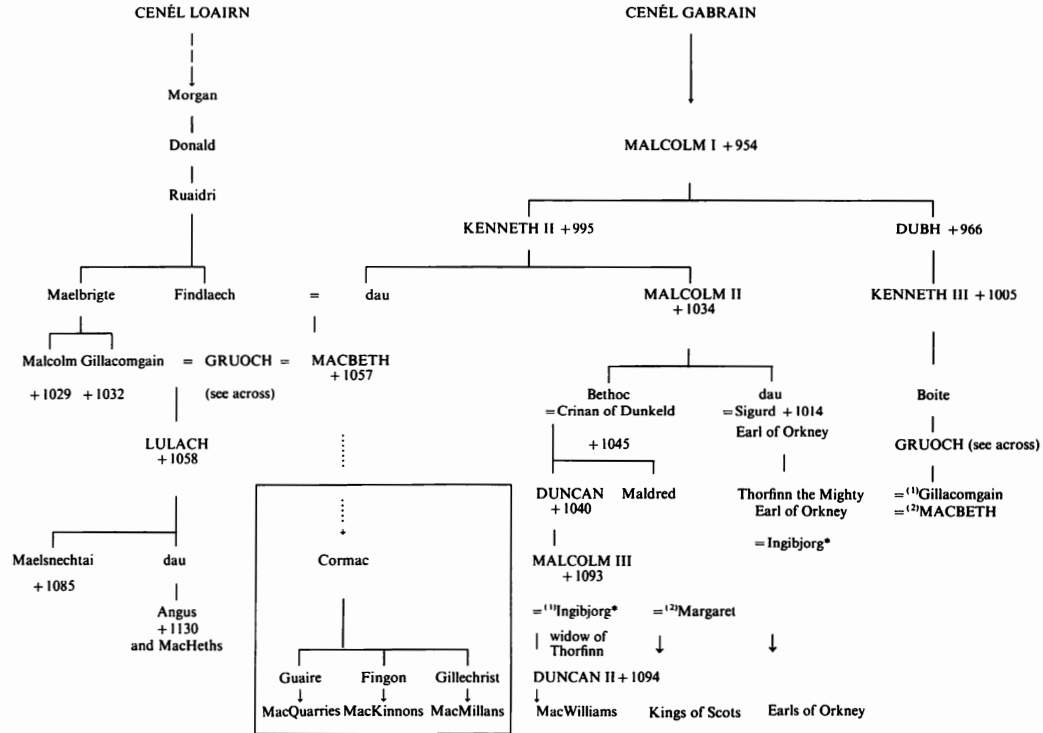
There are three main collections of sources for the career of MacBeth. Firstly, what might be broadly described as the contemporary evidence: annals and poems written in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Secondly, the hitherto overlooked material in the Icelandic sagas, notably *Orkneyinga Saga* which sheds considerable light on the topic in question. Thirdly, there are the accounts preserved in native Scottish medieval chroniclers and historians, the men responsible for transmitting the legend of MacBeth. Further evidence is to be gleaned from surviving genealogies and fragmentary records of donations and land grants. Finally and foreshadowed in the earlier histories, there has evolved since the eighteenth century an antiquarian tradition which associates historical sites with MacBeth's career and which is probably, in the main, quite bogus. What these sources cumulatively relate is a tale only partially full of sound and fury, and signifying nothing less than the remarkably successful reign of a mormaer of Moray who, through time, was to be regarded as the last great Celtic king of Scots.

The attempt to redeem 'that dead butcher and his fiend-like queen' must begin at the very dawn of Scottish history in order to refute Shakespeare's claim that MacBeth was a tyrant and a foul usurper. As is well known the first Scots or *Scotti* crossed to modern Argyll from Ireland under Fergus Mór mac Erc in the fifth century A.D. At least three clans or kindreds (*cenéla*) were established in the west, namely the Cenél nGabraín, Cenél Loairn and Cenél nOengusa. The kingship of Dalriada although held mainly by the Cenél nGabraín sometimes passed to the Cenél Loairn. In a

movement now attested only in the genealogies the Cenél Loairn gradually expanded their territory from Lorn through the Great Glen to Moray, and from this kindred MacBeth himself claimed descent.¹⁷ MacBeth's lineage was thus royal and impeccable. A further related point to be noted is that the Scottish kings in the tenth and eleventh centuries practised an alternating system of succession, sometimes called tanistry or collateral succession.¹⁸ There was also in eleventh century Scotland some form of gradation of kingship similar to that of Ireland where there were three grades — the *rí* king of a single *tuath* or tribe, the *ruiri* a 'superior king' recognized as such by the kings of two or more other tribes and a 'king of kings' the *rí ruirech*.¹⁹ The last-named has sometimes been identified with 'High-King' though the designation has been challenged.²⁰

In a Scottish context the terminology is confusing because the eleventh century was itself a period of transition and scribes were clearly fumbling with new, equivalent and/or alien vocabularies. The *Annals of Ulster* seem to designate the Scottish *rí ruirech* as *rí Alban* (AU 1034) or as *airdrigh Alban* (AU 1058). They used the Pictish term *mormaer* — 'great steward' to designate the *ruiri* or king of the middle rank (AU 1032).²¹ In the sagas *mormaer* is rendered *jarl* and he would soon become *comes* or earl in Scottish records as well. The annals, however, indulge in terminological confusion where the lesser king or *rí* is concerned. In Scotland *rí* was rendered variously as *toisech* or thane.²² Such competing terminology is not unimportant and in the present state of our knowledge is perhaps incapable of resolution; the main point to grasp is that it is the major source of confusion over the designation of individual members of the House of Moray and indeed of members of rival kindreds in the eleventh century; such confusion should be understood even if it is not comprehensible!

Armed with such information it should be possible to make some sense of the fortunes of individuals who belong to MacBeth's kindred or *derbfine* (see genealogical table, Fig.7.1). The *Annals of Tigernach* relate that Findlaech mac Ruaidri, Mormaer of Moray, was killed by the sons of his brother Maelbrigte in 1020. The *Annals of Ulster* call him *rí Alban*, so testifying to the importance of the House of Moray at this period; he is said to have been slain by his own people *a suis occisus est*. The death (not the slaughter) of one of Findlaech's slayers, Malcolm mac Maelbrigte, is noted in 1029.²³ He is known to have granted lands to the monastery of Old Deer, Aberdeenshire.²⁴ Malcolm's brother, Gillacomgain mac Maelbrigte, Mormaer of Moray was burned to death along with fifty of his men three years later (AU 1032). It is not recorded who committed this deed. A clue may be afforded by the later medieval tradition that when MacBeth killed Duncan he married Duncan's widow, 'Dame Grwok'.²⁵ MacBeth did marry Gruoch but historically she was the widow of Gillacomgain. The confusion may have arisen because MacBeth was responsible for avenging



Note: A broken line indicates a claimed and plausible descent; a dotted line a claimed but implausible descent.

Fig.7.1 The House of Moray and succession to the Scottish kingship.

his father's killing by firing Gillacomgain's residence, a not uncommon method of despatching one's enemies at this period.²⁶ The noble notion, advocated by some critics that Gruoch would never have consented to marry her husband's killer is negated by contemporary Irish and Scandinavian evidence. Well over a hundred years after this episode Svein Asleifsson considered burning the house which sheltered his enemy even though it contained his own wife and children!²⁷ Incinerated spouses were not necessarily a deterrent to subsequent married bliss.

'It will have been collected from the foregoing particulars that not all was peace in the North in yon days'.²⁸ Such strife would not have been out of place anywhere else in Britain, or for that matter in Europe, at this period, but the particular problems among the men of Moray may have been symptomatic of fragmentation within the kindred. Such developments, as we know from other periods of Gaelic history, were most likely to take place when the clan as a whole was threatened by an external aggressor. Such existed in the powerful Norwegian earldom of Orkney to the north. It is also quite possible that Malcolm II, like many a later King of Scots, was not averse to dipping a royal spurtle into the cauldron of internecine strife. 'The honour of all the west of Europe' died in 1034 after a long reign. As the poem the *Duan Albanach* has it:

Thirty years verses proclaim
Maelcholuim was King of the Mounth²⁹

Reference to the Mounth was significant for it stressed that Malcolm ruled both north and south of the Grampians which historically had divided the kingdoms of the northern and southern Picts. Malcolm had at least managed to co-exist, however uneasily, with the men of Moray who acknowledged him as *ruiri* or overking, and probably as *ri ruirech*. Several references suggest that peace with the men of the north was bought for the price of a marriage between Malcolm's sister and Findlaech — the parents of MacBeth.³⁰ The important marriage between Malcolm's daughter Bethoc and Crinan lay abbot of Dunkeld produced Duncan who succeeded his grandfather almost certainly against the wishes and interests of the Moray kindred. Another daughter married Earl Sigurd of Orkney who was killed at the battle of Clontarf in 1014.³¹ Their son was the great Earl Thorfinn the Mighty of Orkney of whom more anon. What is to be noted is that these descendants of Malcolm II all belonged to the same *derbfine* or noble family. This was to prove highly significant.

The *St. Andrews Register* records a grant of Kirkness, Portmoak and Bogie to the Culdees of Lochleven by MacBeth and Gruoch, described as *Rex et Regina Scottorum*. Perhaps too much should not be read into this designation; at least one commentator thinks it significant the Gruoch is called queen and not consort.³² Yet the wording may somehow reflect the strength of Gruoch's own claims. The Lochleven grant states she was the

daughter of Bodhe.³³ The identity of Bodhe (or Boite) is problematical though he was probably the son of Kenneth III. The grandson of Boite mac Kenneth or Cinead was killed by Malcolm II in 1033 (AU).³⁴ We should be hesitant to ascribe too many motives of revenge when much closer kinsmen were cheerfully slaughtering one another but if there was prolonged rivalry between the descendants of the two Kenneths then Gruoch was clearly in the anti-Malcolm II camp. By marrying Gruoch MacBeth merged several claims to the kingship; his own as the son of Findlaech³⁵ and those of his wife through previous kings. He also acquired custody of Lulach, son of the marriage between Gruoch and Gillacomgain. Gruoch is the most conspicuous female in medieval Scottish History with the exception of St. Margaret, truly her *alter ego*. Her importance and reputation may stem from the strength of the claims combined in the person of *Gruoch Regina*.

What then, is known of the career of MacBeth from contemporary, or near-contemporary sources? After a reign of six years (1034-1040) *Donnchad mac Crinan ri Alban* (Duncan, son of Crinan, king of Scotland) was killed by his own people, *a suis occisus est* (AU). One account states that he was slain 'at an immature age' which cannot be strictly true since he had fathered at least three sons.³⁶ The 'pure and wise' Duncan was slaughtered at Pitgaveny near Elgin; in 1235 Alexander II used part of the burgh rents to endow a chaplaincy in the cathedral providing masses in perpetuity for the souls of his ancestor. Marianus Scottus (1028-1083), an Irishman also known as Maelbrigte the Hermit, who completed his *Chronicon* in Mainz in 1073, states that Duncan was killed *a duce suo MacBethad* on 14 August 1040. No other contemporary source shares this specific attribution in which the Latin *dux* is probably best translated as 'war-leader', an apt description of one of the functions of the mormaer. Marianus enjoyed immense popularity throughout Europe in the Middle Ages and his material was used by most chroniclers worthy of the name. It is tempting to believe that all accounts of MacBeth's personal involvement stem from this single assertion though as mormaer of Moray he undoubtedly had to shoulder some of the blame for a regicide that took place within his own province.

Of MacBeth's seventeen year rule there is not a great deal to report. Several Irish annals record in 1045 a battle between the Scots themselves in which Duncan's father, Crinan lay abbot of Dunkeld and 'nine score fighting men' were killed. English accounts (which are very confused at this point) suggest that a warband under Earl Siward of Northumbria also participated. Nowhere is MacBeth mentioned by name although the episode is generally interpreted as a rebellion by forces loyal to the family of Duncan, sometimes known anachronistically, but conveniently, as the House of Dunkeld.³⁷ 1050 found MacBeth on pilgrimage to Rome where according to Marianus 'he scattered money like seed to the poor'. Irish

and English accounts agree that in 1054 a great battle was fought between the Scots and the English. Earl Siward is credited with the defeat of MacBeth and with the restoration of Malcolm Canmore to his kingdom. Well over three hundred years later (circa 1420) Andrew Wyntoun related that the battle was fought at Dunsinnan or Dunsinane in the parish of Collace, Perthshire. MacBeth was eventually killed in 1057 by Malcolm Canmore; according to twelfth century tradition, in Lumphanan, Aberdeenshire. A verse in the *Chronicle of Melrose* states that in MacBeth's reign, *fertile tempus erat* — there were productive seasons 'but Duncan's son, named Malcolm, cut him off by a cruel death in Lumphanan'.³⁸

Northumbria in the mid eleventh century might almost be viewed as the Moray of England. The men of the English north were regarded by Edward the Confessor as aliens, a bastard breed of Britons, Anglo-Saxons and Scandinavians whose shared sense of identity did not preclude a little internecine distraction. Siward had risen to prominence under Cnut; he was 'a Danish parvenu' who became earl of York in 1033 and who conquered Northumberland nine years later, consolidating his position, as he would have done in a similar position in Scotland, by marrying the comital heiress, in his case Aelfleda daughter of Ealdred earl of Northumbria.

Siward's considerable energies were diverted by the aggressive actions of Scottish kings, who were intent upon exploiting English weakness caused by the Scandinavian presence, through advancing the Scottish border to the south at Northumbrian expense. Malcolm II unsuccessfully attempted to take Durham in 1006. In 1018 he won a significant victory at Carham, in which battle his ally Owen the Bald king of the Cumbrians of Strathclyde, was killed. The ancient kingdom of the Cumbrians extending all the way from Loch Lomond to Stainmore had long been a thorn in Northumbria's side; after the demise of Owen it became a painful lance in a bleeding wound since the heirs of the Scottish kings, certainly in the cases of Duncan and Malcolm Canmore, were given the title of king or prince of the Cumbrians.³⁹ In alliance with his Cumbrians Duncan also besieged Durham in 1040; indeed his lack of success may have contributed to his overthrow later that same year.

When MacBeth triumphed Duncan's sons fled the kingdom. A more important figure at this juncture was possibly Maldred brother of Duncan; this individual was married to Ealdgyth daughter of Earl Uhtred of Northumbria and granddaughter of King Ethelred. Their son was to be Cospatic earl of Northumbria and later earl of Dunbar. There was a distant relationship with Siward who was married to Uhtred's granddaughter by his first marriage, while Maldred was the husband of a daughter of Uhtred's third marriage. The demise of the House of Dunkeld played straight into Siward's hands for he could barter assistance to recover a kingdom against security on his frontier. It has been convincingly suggested that his prime pawn was Maldred and that the expedition of 1045,

backed by Maldred's father Crinan, was designed to place Maldred in the kingship of the Scots.⁴⁰ It was not to be. In an unnamed battle Crinan was killed. English accounts, mostly late, imply several expeditions by Siward as well as retaliation by MacBeth. There is also some evidence that Siward attempted to exert ecclesiastical pressure by having two Scottish bishops ordained by the Archbishop of York.⁴¹ MacBeth also afforded shelter to exiles, for when Earl Godwin temporarily displaced Edward the Confessor in 1052 certain Normans in his retinue, fearing Godwin's wrath, fled to Scotland, presumably in the expectation that they would provide assistance against the Northumbrians.⁴² Siward attempted abortive diplomatic overtures in 1053 but the following year more traditional methods triumphed at a great battle on the Day of the Seven Sleepers, 27 July 1054.⁴³ Siward's force was supported by supply ships. The battle was hard-fought; in it fell Siward's son Osbeorn, and his nephew, as well as Dolfin son of Thorfinn from Cumbria. MacBeth was defeated, his Normans killed, while he fled northward to Moray. Malcolm became king though it was to be three years before he finally despatched MacBeth. Siward returned home with 'booty such as no man had before obtained', a statement which one commentator soberly views as 'a remarkable testimony to the excellence of MacBeth's government and the soundness of whatever economic policy he may have followed';⁴⁴ a year later the 'giant' of Northumbria died at York. In later years the propaganda department of Edward I would anachronistically claim that Malcolm Canmore had become the vassal of the English king. It is salutary to recall, however, that Malcolm himself eventually died in battle while attacking the Northumbrian frontier. They were worthy opponents these warriors of pre-feudal Britain — MacBeth, Siward and Malcolm. In their ranks should be placed at least one other — Earl Thorfinn the Mighty of Orkney.

A major source for the history of Northern Scotland in the eleventh century is *Orkneyinga Saga* or *Jarla Sogur*, the saga of the earls, a version of which was written down shortly before 1192.⁴⁵ It mentions by name some six hundred men and women and over one hundred and fifty place-names in the British Isles. Historians still manifest some reluctance in utilising the saga corpus — the great Icelandic vernacular prose narratives — in their investigations and this is not the place to discuss their credits and demerits.⁴⁶ The unknown author of *Orkneyinga* betrays the strengths and weaknesses of the genre. He made great use of skaldic poetry, or the compositions of the skalds, poets who were mainly Icelandic and who like their Celtic counterparts, the bards, were as capable of immortalising a man's ignominy as they were of celebrating his great deeds. Arnor Thordarsson — earl's skald (*jarlaskald*) — for example, composed in honour of his great patron Thorfinn the Mighty of Orkney.⁴⁷ Naturally the sagaman was mainly interested in the powerful earls of Orkney and his knowledge of Scottish affairs was often pretty hazy. Nonetheless his

localism is often more rewarding to the historian than the wilder assertions of contemporary, and equally hazy, English chroniclers.

However the hand behind *Orkneyinga Saga* is described — as that of scribe, author, editor or compiler — he was committing the oral medium to vellum. Notoriously in that medium the exploits of one great hero are transferred without comment to another, the deeds of lesser mortals absorbed by the better known heroes. The sagaman, like the Irish annalists, was understandably confused by the plurality of Scottish kings. Like many subsequent commentators he conflated Malcolm mormaer of Moray who died in 1029 with Malcolm II. He related that Earl Sigurd Hlodverson of Orkney married a daughter of Malcolm King of Scots — *Scotakonungr* — probably Malcolm II. The offspring of this marriage included Earl Thorfinn the Mighty, one of the greatest heroes in the saga (cap.13). The saga also mentions Malcolm Longneck (*langháls*) i.e. Canmore and his son Duncan (cap.33). Thus only two Scottish kings for the period 1005-1094 are not mentioned by name; these are Duncan I and MacBeth. At the period which coincides with their rule a mysterious individual, not recorded in any other source, appears in the saga. This is the famed Karl Hundason whose identity has exercised the minds of many historians.⁴⁸ Most commentators have gone astray in attempting to identify this individual by assuming that the name, which means ‘man son of a dog’, bears pejorative connotations, that it was a term of abuse. This view cannot be sustained. No nominal criticism is implied in other individuals called Karl; for example Karl of Moer during a brief appearance in *St Olaf's Saga* is a ‘manly fellow ... of noble lineage, a man of great enterprise, an athlete and resourceful in many ways’.⁴⁹ In the *Tain Bo Cuilnge* Cu Chulainn is the ‘Hound of Ulster’ named for a magnificent hunting hound and the Celtic equivalent of the lion.⁵⁰ There was thus no disgrace in the name. The sagas abound in abusive appellations as calculated as they were offensive; Karl Hundason is innocuous.

Duncan was considered an obscure king by a number of annalists in both England and Ireland. It would not be surprising therefore if he were similarly treated in *Orkneyinga*, particularly since, apart from visiting Pitgaveny to be killed, he presumably operated in a southern rather than a northern orbit. If Duncan was overlooked in the saga then Karl Hundason would appear to be MacBeth. There is further reason for such an identification.

Both *Orkneyinga Saga* and *Njal's Saga* describe battles fought between the Orkneymen and the native earls. *Orkneyinga* (cap.2) relates that ‘a Scottish jarl called Finnleik’ challenged Earl Sigurd to fight him at Skitten. Sigurd fearing the odds against him consulted his mother who was a sorceress. She contemptuously told him that ‘if I thought you might live forever I’d have reared you in my wool-basket’. Armed with a raven banner (fatal to whoever carried it) and stung by maternal taunts Sigurd

went on to defeat Finnleik. At least three well respected authorities⁵¹ have suggested that this was probably the same battle as that described in *Njal's Saga* (caps.85, 86) as having been fought at Duncansby Head. On this occasion Earl Sigurd, assisted by Kari and the Njalssons confronted Earl Hundi and Earl Melsnati. Admittedly Skitten (now Kilimster north west of Wick) is ten miles south of Duncansby Head but such a short distance would not detain a sagaman, particularly since Duncansby would be a more familiar place-name to the author of *Njal's Saga*. Several battles have migrated over greater distances in the more recent past. In *Njala* the raven banner is absent but the same story — 'all those who bear it get killed' — is told of it at the Battle of Clontarf (cap.157). At Duncansby Sigurd was victorious as in the *Orkneyinga* version. Melsnati is the same name as Maelsnechtai, a name recorded for the Moray kindred. Much more significant, however, is the identification of Hundi and Finnleik or Findlaech, for the son of Hundi must be the son of Findlaech and hence, MacBeth.

If this identification is accepted then *Orkneyinga Saga* sheds considerable light on MacBeth's career, albeit conceived in the eyes of the sagaman as a minor adjunct to that of Earl Thorfinn. The latter was five years old when his father Sigurd was killed at Clontarf. Malcolm II is said to have given Thorfinn Caithness and Sutherland and to have conferred the title of earl upon him (cap.13). The earlier part of the earl's career was absorbed in a power struggle with his brothers for control of Orkney, two thirds of which he controlled by the time Karl Hundason appeared on the scene in succession to Malcolm II whose support for Thorfinn was said to have greatly strengthened the latter's position in Orkney. Karl (or if we may presume) MacBeth demanded tribute from Thorfinn for his earldom of Caithness. Refusal led to reciprocal attacks. MacBeth attempted to establish his nephew Mutatan or Muddan as earl or mormaer in Caithness, an individual who is almost certainly the eponymous of the Celtic-Norse family known as Moddan of the Dale.⁵²

Moddan was driven out of Caithness while Thorfinn resided at Duncansby 'keeping five well-manned longships with him' (cap.20). MacBeth responded by personally leading a fleet of eleven ships to the north, despatching Moddan with an army overland so planning to encircle Thorfinn. The saga contains a graphic description of what ensued. MacBeth landed in Caithness, unknown to Thorfinn who set sail for Orkney. 'They were so close to each other that MacBeth and his men were able to make out the sails of Thorfinn's ships' as he was crossing the Pentland Firth, to cast anchor off Deerness. There MacBeth took the Orkneymen completely by surprise. Naval battles involved the ships grappling each other to create a floating platform, on which to all intents and purposes a land battle was fought. Thorfinn urged his men on with assurances that 'the Scots would never stand up to the pressure'. The hard fought and bitter conflict was

celebrated by Arnor Jarlaskald:

Made clear then to King Karl
the close of his iron-fate,
east of Deerness, defied
and defeated by warrior-kin.
Confronting the foe, Thorfinn's
fleet of five ships
steered, steadfast in anger
against Karl's sea-goers. Ships grappled
together; gore as foes fell,
bathed stiff iron, black
with Scots' blood;
singing the bows spilt
blood, steel bit; bright
though the quick points quaked
no quenching Thorfinn⁵³

MacBeth, however, *was* quenched, jumping overboard to scramble on to another ship and retreating to the Moray Firth to recruit fresh troops.

Thorfinn and his foster-father Thorkel pressed their advantage by plundering the shores of the Moray Firth. Thorkel Fosterer was then despatched with an army to dispose of Moddan. He 'was able to travel in secrecy for all the people of Caithness were faithful and loyal to him'. At Thurso Thorkel sliced off Moddan's head as he leapt from his burning house. He then rejoined Thorfinn and the two once again confronted MacBeth, who was supported by reinforcements from Ireland, at Tarbat Ness. Resplendent in golden helmet Thorfinn was conspicuous as he 'outfaced the Scots king'. According to the saga the rout was so total that there were reports that MacBeth had been killed in the battle. Thereafter the sky, or indeed Fife, was the limit, for Thorfinn is said to have carried fire and sword all through Scotland to the shores of the Forth, plundering, pillaging and seizing hostages. The campaign ended gloriously if inconclusively, as Thorfinn went on to even greater feats of conquest in the Hebrides, Galloway and Ireland.⁵⁴ And now MacBeth is out of the saga, that is, assuming he had ever been in it!

It was perhaps in gratitude for Thorfinn's withdrawal from Fife that MacBeth and Gruoch 'with the utmost veneration and devotion' granted Kirkness (appropriately a Scandinavian place-name), Portmoak and 'Mac-torfin's Bogie' — was MacBeth now haunted by the name Torfinn? — to Lochleven. The premise is as dubious as the notion that Thorfinn ever raided Fife but the saga does shed an interesting beam on otherwise totally undocumented aspects of MacBeth's career. It suggests that Thorfinn was embroiled in the same strife which was potentially destroying the kindred of Moray. These men did not require enemies when they had kinsmen. The saga shows the Orcadians and the Moraymen at loggerheads over a

period of almost two hundred years, preserving as it does personal names known to have been used by the Moray kindreds. Maelbrigte of the poisoned tusk had despatched an earlier Earl Sigurd of Orkney in truly treacherous Celtic fashion killing a man by whom he had already been decapitated (cap.5). An earlier Jarl MacBeth (Magbjóðr) defeated an earlier Earl of Orkney at an earlier battle of Skitten (cap.10). The late Nora Chadwick made the fascinating suggestion that lines in the awesome poem *Darradarljóð*, which was probably composed in Caithness, related not to the battle of Clontarf but to the power struggles between the men of Orkney and the native mormaers.

Lands will be ruled
By new peoples
who once inhabited
outlying headlands⁵⁵

By one of those quirks in which two threads are spliced in the same historical tapestry, Thorfinn also went on pilgrimage to Rome (*OS* cap.31). It is not recorded whether he booked passage with MacBeth. Since the Second Coming had failed to transpire in 1000 A.D., 1050 was a good year to visit the Eternal City. Persistent doubts about the authenticity of MacBeth's pilgrimage are needless. King Dyfnwal of Cumbria had visited in the tenth century. In 1028 Sitric king of Dublin and his neighbour Flannacan king of Brega set off for Rome together. Flaithbertach Ua Néill king of Ailech went in 1030, King Cnut the following year and the King of Gailenga and his wife in 1050. Duncan MacBrian, king of Ireland and King Echmarcach of Dublin died in Rome in 1065.⁵⁶ MacBeth returned to further problems with Siward and Northumbria. Thorfinn, having received papal absolution for all his sins, gave up his viking expeditions to devote 'all his time to the government of his people and country and to the making of new laws'. At Birsay 'he built and dedicated to Christ a fine minster, the seat of the first bishop of Orkney' (cap.31). The suggestion made long ago by Skene that MacBeth and Thorfinn somehow partitioned Scotland between them is as anachronistic as it is erroneous.⁵⁷ Despite his grandiloquent obituary Thorfinn never held 'nine Scottish earldoms, the whole of the Hebrides and a considerable part of Ireland' (cap.32). Thorfinn's alleged achievements owe not a little to the contemporary activities of Sven and Cnut of Denmark and to the imperialistic ambitions of Harald Hardrada of Norway. The Orcadian empire never extended south of Strathoykel on the Scottish mainland and its tenure on the Hebrides was tenuous. Had he not been distracted by struggles with his own kinsmen in the earldom or involved in political intrigue with the kings of Norway Thorfinn might have displaced MacBeth. As it was the son of Findlaech more than held his own. If the two did travel together to Rome then each held the other hostage for the safety of their territories in their joint absence. They were, after all, civilized men of the world.

It may be reasonably objected that the name Karl Hundason bears not the remotest resemblance to the name MacBeth. The latter literally means 'son of life',⁵⁸ but this may be thought to be an ecclesiastical name and it does not preclude the possibility, indeed the probability, that MacBeth had another name or names. MacBeth would presumably be favoured by the monastic scribes and annalists who preserve most of what is known of him. On the other hand name changes are not uncommon. In *Orkneyinga Saga* King Sigurd of Norway gave Kali Kolsson the title of earl and the (new) name of Rognvald because it was considered lucky (cap.61). Much later than the eleventh century competing names for individuals are confusing — consider the designation of clan chiefs — and the subject requires more study. The use of nick-names also compounds the problem.

Scottish history, asserted the learned Roderic O Flaherty, 'is no more than a fabulous modern production founded on oral tradition'. Elsewhere he observed that there were certain individuals in the Scottish king list 'such as their mother never felt the travails of their birth but were hatched in historians' brains'.⁵⁹ The legend of MacBeth was born, or at the very least nurtured, in the works of several medieval chroniclers and historians. The first major Scottish chronicler was John of Fordun who completed his *Chronica* about 1380. He depicts Duncan as an easy going and popular king, 'murdered through the wickedness of a family, the murderer of both his grandfather and greatgrandfather, the head of which was Machabaeus or MacBeth son of Finele'⁶⁰. The murderers then drove Duncan's sons out of the kingdom. Their supporters were harshly treated — 'some he delivered over to death, others he thrust into loathsome dungeons, others he reduced to utter want'. MacDuff Thane of Fife, nowhere mentioned in eleventh century sources, became a notable target for MacBeth's wrath and he escaped to join the exiled Malcolm Canmore in England. Fordun supplies a long account of a debate between MacDuff and Malcolm in which the latter claims that he cannot return to Scotland because he is unfit to be a king, lustful and sensuous as he is, a thief, a liar and a deceiver. This test of MacDuff's integrity was, of course, to become the basis of *MacBeth* Act IV Scene III.⁶¹ Malcolm then, with the assistance of Siward of Northumbria, returns to Scotland and MacBeth is defeated. Fordun has no mention of Dunsinnan or Birnam but he depicts MacBeth as retreating ahead of the advancing army before he is killed at Lumphanan.

An incomparably more amusing source is Andrew Wyntoun's interminable metrical chronicle of Scotland composed in vernacular Scots about 1420. Wyntoun was a canon regular of the priory of St. Andrews and he became prior of St. Serf's, Loch Leven, in Fife. He doubtless knew of MacBeth and Gruoch's benefactions. He was a great Fife chauvinist and the William MacGonagall of his age. Wyntoun very likely drew upon material in the now lost great register of St. Andrews, specifically the *Historia* which in turn had incorporated earlier oral tradition.⁶² His great

value lies in his preservation of rival traditions about MacBeth and his notable adversary, Malcolm Canmore.

According to Wyntoun MacBeth had a dream in which

He sawe thre wemen by gangand
And thai wemen than thought he,
Thre werd systers mast lyk to be.
The fyrst he hard say gangand by
Lo yonder the Thane of Crumbachty. [Cromarty]
The tothir woman sayd agayne
Off Morave yonder I see the Thane.
The thryd than sayd I se the king
All this he hard in his dremyng.

Wyntoun then inserts a passage obviously culled from existing records since the content can be checked from earlier extant sources:

All this tyme was gret plenté
Aboundand bath in land and sé.
He was in justice rycht lawchfull
And till his legis all awfull.
Quhen Leo the Tend was Pape off Rome
As pylgryme to the curt he come
And in his almus he sew sylver
Till all pure folk that had myster; [need]
And all tyme oysyd he to wyrk
Profitably for Haly Kyrke.

So far so good but Wyntoun cannot resist communicating certain strange tales about the conception of MacBeth:

Bot as we fynd be sum storys
Gottyne he wes on ferly wys. [marvellous]

MacBeth's mother, unnamed — it was not until Hector Boece wielded his inventive pen that she was revealed as Doalda or Donalda — had a great penchant for wandering in the woods. One day she became enamoured of a handsome stranger that she met by chance and before the word 'haughmagandie' could be uttered, he had fathered a child upon her. His pleasure taken he informed the lady that he was none other than the Devil himself but he bade her 'no be fle'y'd (scared) o that' and assured her with reference to her unborn son,

na man suld be borne off wyff
off powere to reive him hys lyff [remove]

When he became king MacBeth decided to build a great house 'apon the hicht of Dunsynane' and he gathered oxen from all over Angus and Fife to haul timber for the construction. When the oxen of MacDuff, thane

of Fife, did not work hard enough the king threatened to place their owner in the yoke in their stead. MacDuff wasted no time. When he

Makbeth herd speke
That he wald put in yhok his neke,
Off all hys thowcht he mad na sang
Bot prewaly oot off the thrang
Wyth slycht he gat
And als swyne as he mycht se
Hys tyme and oppurtunitye,
Oot of the curt he past and ran.

In due course he had a similar debate with Malcolm to that described by Fordun.

There were also, however, stories about the peculiar circumstances of Malcolm's conception. Wyntoun the churchman had something of a hang-up where the sexual mores of the Scottish royal family were concerned. Malcolm was the illegitimate son of Duncan by his 'lemman lewyd', the daughter of the miller of Forteviot, and Duncan's desire to place Malcolm on the throne had caused MacBeth's revolt in the first place.

Malcolm and MacDuff returned to Scotland, 'past owre Forth Syne straucht to Tay' and up the water to Birnam where, wondering how to tackle MacBeth in his stronghold, they learned of his fantastical notion that he would never be defeated,

(Until) wyth his ene he suld se
The wode brocht off Brynnane
to the hill of Dunsynane

This gave them the idea of cutting boughs. MacBeth saw the wood advancing, took to flight across the Mounth and was killed in Lumphanan.⁶³

It is a relatively straightforward matter to explain how the MacBeth myth arose. Malcolm Canmore established a strong dynasty which produced some outstanding kings and which survived until the eve of the Wars of Independence. However, the Men of Moray continued to plague these kings. The nephew of Maelsnectai mac Lulach, Angus earl of Moray, was killed in rebellion against David I in 1130. Irish annalists noted that the battle was between the 'men of Scotland and the men of Moray' the latter being slaughtered. A supporter of Angus mormaer of Moray — Malcolm MacHeth, almost certainly a kinsman, carried the banner of resistance into the reign of Malcolm IV and beyond. This man's story has not so far been adequately investigated. He identified closely with the forces of reaction, the anti-feudal faction which included the great Somerled of Argyll and Harald Madaddsson earl of Orkney. His actions led to the transplantation of the men of Moray in the reign of Malcolm IV, but the struggle continued under Donald MacHeth and later under Kenneth MacHeth who was killed resisting Alexander II in 1215. The MacHeths in turn were associated with the MacWilliams, another disaffected kindred.

Remoteness of location, rebellion and revolt, and possibly even reality, conferred a kinship with MacBeth upon these two kindreds. The last of their line was a young child of MacWilliam descent who in 1230 had her brains dashed out on the mercat cross at Forfar.⁶⁴

Elsewhere in Europe the Normans earned a well deserved reputation for behaving little better than thugs encased in steel. The ruffians on the Scottish frontier were the match of their counterparts on the Welsh marches or in Ireland. The chronicler of Lanercost considered the episode of 1230 'a somewhat-too-cruel vengeance for the blood of the slain' but the perpetrators of the deed were desperate men in a desperate time. Faced with such prolonged resistance the House of Dunkeld, or the Canmore dynasty as it is sometimes called, resorted to other methods of defence by mounting a deliberate campaign to blacken MacBeth's name. The means at its disposal was that of the *fili* or bard, the court poet who was commissioned to manufacture the libels which Wyntoun preserves. The bards, like their counterparts in the Norse world, the skalds, excelled in venom and scurrility. It is no coincidence that *skald* produces the English word *scold*⁶⁵ while in the fifteenth century William Dunbar wrote 'wondor laith wer I to be ane baird, flyting to use richt gritly I eschame'. That some kind of flyting did indeed develop is suggested by the account of Malcolm Canmore's lowly mother;⁶⁶ clearly the Moray bards reciprocated. The Celts, after all, were as effective at battling with words as with swords.

It is of considerable interest that the stories about MacBeth drew upon existing motifs in Celtic and Old Norse literature. The dream motif is very common in Celtic stories and Norse sagas (as it is admittedly in many other literatures). The three weird sisters derive directly from the Norns or Fates in Old Norse mythology; in Norse they were *spákonur*, *spæwifes* in Scots, who could predict the future. The story of MacBeth's father is basically a Celtic *compert* or conception tale and so is that relating to Malcom's birth. MacBeth thus joins the ranks of other 'fatherless' heroes — Taliesin in the *Mabinogion*, Ambrosius Aurelianus and St. Mungo. The cutting of the boughs at Birnam is borrowed from the traditional Celtic motif of the travelling wood known in Welsh as the *Cat Godeu*, the battle of the trees, which is also found in Germanic literature as early as the eighth century, notably in the *Gesta Francorum* of Gregory of Tours. The idea of a seemingly impossible condition or conditions being fulfilled before the hero can be killed is an example of *geis* (pl. *gessa*) which has many parallels in both Irish and Old Norse tales.⁶⁷ At one time there were probably many more traditions about MacBeth and his opponents in circulation. Fortunately for posterity at least some of the effusions of the bards have been preserved by the medieval chroniclers.

Dunsinnan Hill is still where it was in MacBeth's day, in the beautiful Howe of Strathmore (Fig.7.1). The hill is crowned by most impressive ramparts of a dark-age fortress, one of the largest enclosed areas of any

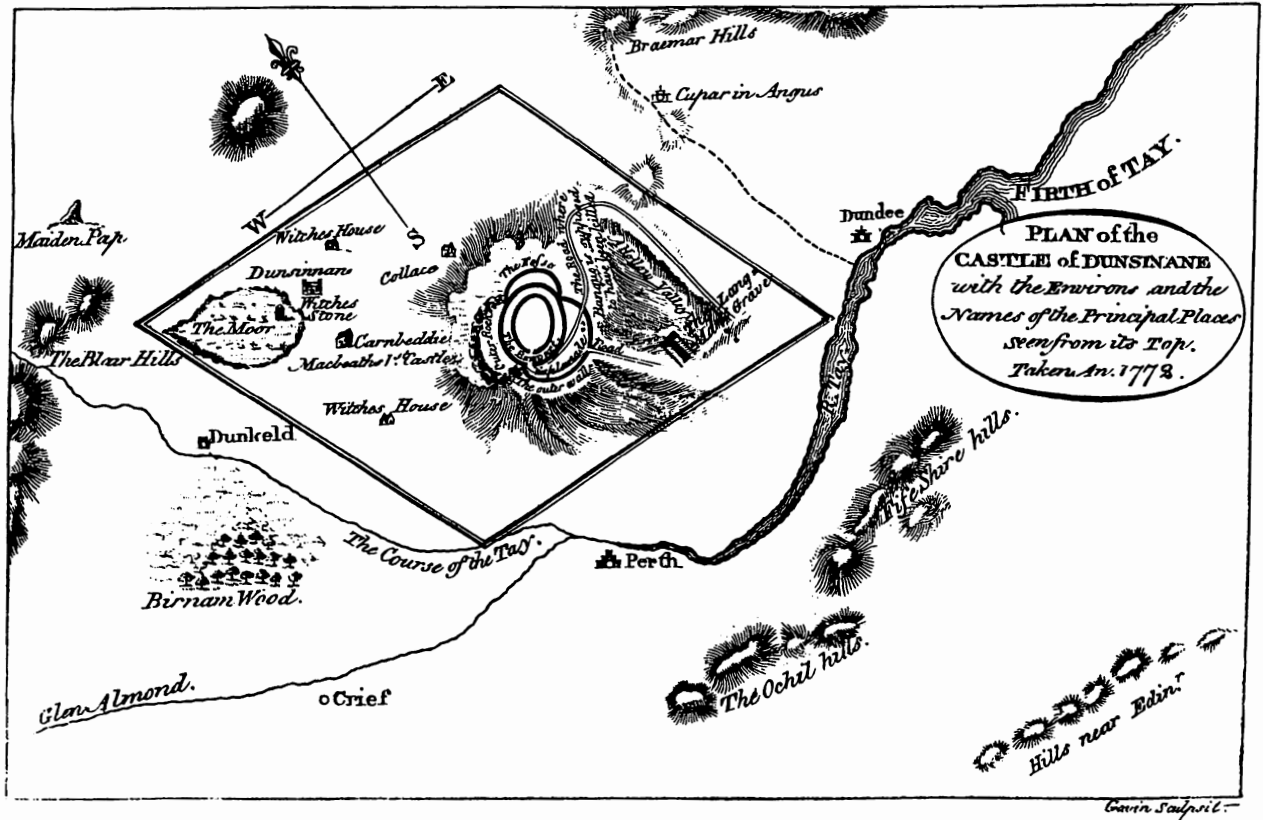


Fig.7.2 Plan of the Castle of Dunsinane, 1772.

surviving Scottish fortification from the period. From the summit the woods of Birnam can clearly be seen to the west along the Tay valley. To the east the city of Dundee and the Firth of Tay are clearly visible.⁶⁸ Northwards the great mass of the Grampians conceals the hill tracks and glens that would lead MacBeth to Lumphanan. In the vicinity are a number of sites associated with our hero — Carnbeddie, supposedly MacBeth's Castle; MacBeth's stone, a large chunk of whinstone some twenty tons in weight which could only have been lifted by a veritable Cu Chullain; and the tumulus of Belle Duff where the dead were supposedly buried. The vicinity was surveyed by Sir John Sinclair in 1772, satisfactorily proving to himself the highly improbable thesis that Shakespeare had actually visited the place to do a little field work.⁶⁹ There are similar attributions in MacBeth's Cairn and Cairn Baddy in Lumphanan.⁷⁰ The route of retreat from Dunsinnan to Lumphanan has been minutely traced via Brechin, across the Fir Mounth Road to Aboyne, through Cromar to the slopes of Mortlich where MacBeth's well marks a place of refreshment during his last great battle.⁷¹ All of these sites almost certainly post-date Shakespeare. The Scots were a literate lot and many a canny soul must have invented sites for the credulous tourist.

Considering the amount of propaganda in circulation about MacBeth in the centuries following his death and the prolonged resistance to the central monarchy on the part of the Men of Moray it is perhaps surprising that the name itself remained fairly common until about 1300 when, as a forename it seems to disappear.⁷² It was not MacBeth of Moray who left his name on MacBeth's Castle up Manor Water in Peebleshire; the name clearly was not avoided as was that, for example, of John, considered unlucky at a later date, since fairly impressive lists of the name's occurrence have been compiled.⁷³ It is perhaps even more surprising that in the fifteenth century a number of clans claimed descent from none other than MacBeth. Such was the boast of, among others, the MacQuarries, MacKinnons and the MacMillans. Epigraphical confirmation for such genealogical claims has recently been uncovered.⁷⁴ It is, however, difficult to believe that this descent is actually genuine⁷⁵ involving as it does such hoary questions as 'How many children had Lady MacBeth?'⁷⁶ We can discount the tradition that a standing stone in the parish of Tough marks the spot where MacBeth's son died⁷⁷ but what is not in doubt, as above indicated, is that strenuous efforts were made to exterminate anyone remotely related to the king. Lulach son of Gruoch and Gillacomgain was killed in Strathbogie in 1058,⁷⁸ wrongly regarded by some as MacBeth's son rather than his step-son⁷⁹. He stands at the head of a bloody procession extending all the way to the child at Forfar in 1230, a chronicle of carnage written by those 'devoted ... to a new kind of Scottish kingdom'. If a son of MacBeth had survived to procreate it is almost inconceivable that he would have escaped notice. On the other hand the fifteenth century clans

associated with the Lordship of the Isles knew perfectly well what MacBeth represented. To them he was the last great Celtic king of Scots, a challenge to the encroachment of centralising authority and a mirror of their own aspirations.

Did William Shakespeare, then, perpetuate a wilful and unforgivable fraud in his treatment of MacBeth? The answer, like so much in Scottish history, is poetically ambiguous. Shakespeare clearly intended, in presenting his play, to warn James VI and I of the danger of tyranny, reminding him that 'a good and virtuous nature may recoil in an imperial charge' — the kingly office may corrupt. Few kings have had to suffer so much advice as the unfortunate James. George Buchanan harped on the danger of power overextended, reinforcing the idea that the king was bound by a contract with his subjects. The presbyterian ministers, headed by Andrew Melville, played the same tune. It was a relief for 'God's sillie vassal' to flee to England only to receive more lectures from the scribbler of Stratford. Yet Shakespeare did hit the mark, though he chose the wrong target. The Scots throughout the centuries did control their kings more rigorously than other nations. This tradition derived from an ancient, and by no means exclusively Celtic belief, in sacral kingship. If the country was ruled by a good king, if he had the power of truth, his personal prosperity would be reflected in the well-being of his subjects and kingdom. Conversely the bad king would bring war, famine, pestilence and poverty upon his kingdom and the solution then, the way to restore prosperity or normality, was quite simply to kill the king.

It is a superb irony that Shakespeare makes precisely the same point — MacBeth's unnatural act assures that the times are out of joint:

Thou seest the heavens as troubled with man's act,
Threatens his bloody stage: by th' clock 'tis day,
And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp:
Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame,
That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
When living light should kiss it? (Act II Scene IV)

A falcon was killed by a mousing owl. Duncan's horses ate each other. Shakespeare strengthened his drama by borrowing the witches of Forres from the tenth century reign of King Duff but to similar effect he totally suppressed Duncan's 'softness and over much slackness in punishing offenders'.⁸⁰ Historically virtually nothing is known of Duncan save his abortive siege of Durham in 1040, the very year in which he was removed, possibly on account of the 'immaturity' with which he is credited by Marianus Scottus. Shakespeare in a superb example of dramatic irony was guilty of a colossal historical inversion in his treatment of MacBeth. The single most important fact that has been preserved about the king is enshrined in the *Chronicle of Melrose* in a line borrowed from a Latin poem composed within a generation of MacBeth's death — in his time

*fertile tempus erat.*⁸¹ In his time there were productive seasons, a perfect reference to the idea of sacral kingship, rendered by Wyntoun:

All his tyme was gret plenté
Aboundand bath in land and sé.

MacBeathadh the famed⁸² was also celebrated in similar vein by the Prophecy of St. Berchan:

... the ruddy-faced king will possess the kingdom of high-hilled
Scotland.

After the slaughter of the Scots, after the slaughter of the foreigners,
the liberal king will possess Scotland.

The strong one was fair, yellow haired and tall.

Very pleasant was that handsome youth to me.

Brimful of food was Scotland, east and west,

During the reign of the ruddy, brave king.⁸³

Historically it was most likely Duncan who was sacrificed for good seasons. What James knew, thanks to George Buchanan, and what Shakespeare presumably did not, was that if MacBeth truly had been the tyrant depicted in the play, he would have been removed by his own people — no assistance from England would have been required. MacBeth strutted his hour upon the Scottish stage of kingship for seventeen years. He contained the House of Dunkeld, fought off the might of the earldom of Orkney and resisted the southern threat posed by Earl Siward and his Northumbrians. His kingdom was sufficiently secure to permit him to visit Rome. He was to be remembered as the great champion of the Men of Moray and latterly of Gaelic Scotland. But above all, in his time there were productive seasons.

Notes

1. James Aikman, *The History of Scotland Translated from the Latin of George Buchanan* 4 vols. (Edinburgh 1827) i, 336.
2. Robert Douglas, *Annals of the Royal Burgh of Forres* (Elgin 1934) relates the story that one Alexander Duff, a native of Forres who emigrated to the United States, was summoned by the President who was anxious for information about the 'blasted heath'. Since this was in the 1880s he was a little late for Abe Lincoln who opined 'I think nothing equals *MacBeth*. It is wonderful ...' (*Complete Works* vol. IX).
3. Henry N Paul, *The Royal Play of MacBeth* (New York 1948) 317-31, 399-402. The latest editor of *MacBeth* considers it unlikely that the play was ever designed for court performance [Nicholas Brooke, *Tragedy of MacBeth* (The Oxford Shakespeare, 1990)].
4. Edward J Cowan 'The Darker Vision of the Scottish Renaissance; the Devil and Francis Stewart' in *Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland* edd. Ian B Cowan and Duncan Shaw (Edinburgh 1983); Peter Stallybrass 'MacBeth and Witchcraft' in *Focus on MacBeth* ed. John Russell Brown (London 1982).

Existing investigations of 'topicality' or attempts to uncover the contemporary model for MacBeth are not convincing eg. Sir James Fergusson, *The Man Behind MacBeth and Other Studies* (London 1969), Arthur Melville Clark, *Murder Under Trust or The Topical MacBeth and other Jacobean Matters* (Edinburgh 1981); but the obvious candidate in the crowded gallery of rogues and miscreants in Jacobean Scotland is clearly Bothwell.

5. John S Keltie, *History of the Scottish Highlands* 2 vols. (Edinburgh 1875) i, 54.
6. Somerled MacMillan, *A Vindication of MacBeth and His Claims* (Ipswich, Mass.1959) 3.
7. P Buchan, *The Secret History of MacBeth* (Peterhead 1828) 19, 66. This remarkable production would repay further study. It enraged poor John MacBeth (*MacBeth King, Queen and Clan* (Edinburgh 1921) 13-19) but its pages preserve rare specimens of Scottish erotica and such hitherto suppressed historical nuggets as the assertion that 'Banquo was a latitudarian in love but never asked a man to pimp for his sister' (p. 85). Just why Peter Buchan, the well known ballad collector, should have thought it worth reprinting is a mystery.
8. *Stat.Acct.* xx, 246.
9. John MacBeth, *MacBeth King Queen and Clan* (Edinburgh 1921) 32, 66.
10. Ruaraidh Erskine of Marr, *MacBeth* (Inverness 1930) 77.
11. *MacBeth King Queen and Clan* 64.
12. Peter Berresford Ellis, *MacBeth High King of Scotland 1040-57* (London 1980).
13. Dorothy Dunnett, *King Hereafter. A Novel* (New York 1982).
14. Nora Chadwick 'The Story of MacBeth' (1949) *Scottish Gaelic Studies* vi, pt.1, and (1951) *S.G.S.* vii, pt.2.
15. G W S Barrow 'MacBeth and Other Mormaers of Moray' in *The Hub of the Highlands* (Inverness Field Club 1975) 113, 122.
16. Gordon Donaldson, *Scotland James V to James VII* (Edinburgh, London 1965); Maurice Lee, *Government by Pen. Scotland under James VI and I* (Urbana 1980); Jenny Wormald, *Court, Kirk and Community. Scotland 1470-1625* (London 1981); Keith M Brown, *Bloodfeud in Scotland. Violence, Justice and Politics in an Early Modern Society* (Edinburgh 1986).
17. John Bannerman, *Studies in the History of Dalriada* (Edinburgh 1974) 108ff, 132; David Sellar 'Highland Family Origins — Pedigree Making and Pedigree Faking' in *The Middle Ages in the Highlands* (Inverness Field Club 1981) 104.
18. Alfred P Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men. Scotland AD 80 - 1000* (London, 1984) 218ff.
19. D A Binchy, *Celtic and Anglo-Saxon Kingship* (Oxford 1970) 31; Bannerman, *Dalriada* 134.
20. Francis John Byrne, *Irish Kings and High Kings* (London 1973) 42.
21. *Annals of Ulster to AD 1131* [AU] edd. Sean MacAirt and Gearoid MacNiocaill (Dublin 1983).
22. See K Jackson, *The Gaelic Notes in the Book of Deer* (Cambridge 1972) 110ff. *The Book of Deer* contains a clear example of one who was both *rui* and *ri* — Muiredach, 'it is he who was mormaer and toisech' (pp.30, 33, 112). The identification of toisech and thane is, of course, the source of all those thanages which clutter up the legend of MacBeth. See G W S Barrow 'Pre-feudal

- Scotland: shires and thanes' in *The Kingdom of the Scots* (London 1973). Symeon of Durham describes Crinan, lay abbot of Dunkeld, as Crinan the thane (Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History* (Edinburgh, 1922) ii, 41. A confused reference in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* names Malbeth (? MacBeth) as a 'king' who submitted to King Cnut, along with Malcolm II in 1031 (Anderson, *Scottish Annals from English Chroniclers* (London, 1908) 82-3).
23. A O Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History* [ES] 2 vols (Edinburgh 1922) i, 571.
 24. Jackson, *Book of Deer* 31, 34, 52.
 25. Andrew Wyntoun *The Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland* (Historians of Scotland, Edinburgh 1872) ii, p.128.
 26. The burning of Njal is the central episode in *Njal's Saga*. Moddan of Caithness is smoked out in *Orkneyinga Saga* [OS] (cap.20), while Frakokk and her associates were burned to death by Svein Asleifsson (cap.78). That such time-honored methods were by no means redundant by the late 16th century is attested by such ballads as 'The Burning of the Bonnie Hoose o Airlie' and 'The Burning of Frendraught'.
 27. OS cap. 95; Edward J Cowan 'Caithness in the Sagas' in *Caithness. A Cultural Crossroads* ed. John R. Baldwin (Edinburgh 1982) 37.
 28. Erskine, *MacBeth* 42.
 29. Kenneth Jackson 'The Duan Albanach' (1957) 36 *SHR* 133.
 30. *ES* i, 580.
 31. OS cap.12.
 32. MacMillan, *MacBeth* 9.
 33. A C Lawrie, *Early Scottish Charters prior to AD 1153* (Glasgow 1905) 5-6, 231-2.
 34. Anderson notes a reference, which he suggests may mark a stage in the feud which continued through MacBeth's reign, in the *Annals of the Four Masters*, 999 — 'Dungal Kenneth's son was killed by Gillacomgain Kenneth's son', an intriguing juxtaposition of patronymics (though hopefully different *patres*) which doubtless appealed to the annalist (*ES* i, 520). AU 1035 notes that the granddaughter of Gilla Caemgein son of Cinaed and her husband Cathal together with his hound were killed by the son of Cellach son of Dunchad. The *Scottish Chronicle* (Anderson's Chronicle King List A) a generally reliable source [see E J Cowan 'The Scottish Chronicle in the Poppleton Manuscript' 32 *Innes Review* (1980)] states that Malcolm mac Donald (943-954) 'went with his army into Moray and slew Cellach' (*ES* i, 452). Another Cellach is mentioned as reigning in the 960s. As Barrow 'MacBeth', p.3 notes the *Annals of Tigernach* 976 record 'three mormaers of Scotland - Cellach son of Findguine, Cellach son of Bard and Duncan son of Morgand' (*ES* i, 480). Cellach may indeed be a Moray name as Professor Barrow suggests and the events of 1035 may be somehow linked to those of 999. For some reason the Irish annalists remained very interested in the activities of the Men of Moray right through until the 12th century. [However, there may be some confusion here between the names Gilla Comgain and Gilla Caemgain - Ed.]
 35. Shakespeare derived the name of MacBeth's father, Sinell (Brooke, *Tragedy of MacBeth* i, 3, 71) from Holinshed where 'S' has clearly been rendered for 'F'.

36. *ES* i, 581
37. *ES* i, 583-4; AO Anderson, *Scottish Annals from English Chronicles AD 500 to 1286* (London 1908) 84.
38. *ES* i, 600-02.
39. William E Kapelle, *The Norman Conquest of the North. The Region and its Transformation 1000-1135* (Chapel Hill 1979) 27-49.
40. *Ibid.*, 42-4.
41. *Ibid.*, 44.
42. Frank Barlow, *Edward the Confessor* (London 1970) 126.
43. The Day of the Seven Sleepers, 27 July, is named for seven young men who defied the Emperor Decius at Ephesus. They hid in a cave in Mount Coelius subsequently sealed up. Over two hundred years later they were awakened from their slumber miraculously believing they had slept only one night. A festival was established in their honour (R Chambers, *The Book of Days* 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1864) ii, 127; *The Catholic Encyclopedia* 15 vols. (New York 1909) loc. cit.). Some aspect of the story may have influenced the legend of MacBeth.
44. R L G Ritchie, *The Normans in Scotland* (Edinburgh 1954) 7.
45. Peter Foote 'Observations on Orkneyinga Saga' and Paul Bibire 'The Poetry of Earl Rognwald's Court', in *St. Magnus Cathedral and Orkney's Twelfth-Century Renaissance* ed. Barbara E Crawford (Aberdeen 1988) at 197 and 212 respectively. For *Orkneyinga Saga* see A B Taylor, *The Orkneyinga Saga. A New Translation with Introduction and Notes* (Edinburgh, 1938); *Orkneyinga Saga. The History of the Earls of Orkney* trans. Hermann Palsson and Paul Edwards (Harmondsworth 1978); and *Orkneyinga Saga* ed. Finnbogí Gudmundsson *Islenzk Fornrit* (Reykjavik, 1965).
46. Cowan 'Caithness in the Sagas' 25-7.
47. Lee M Hollander, *The Skalds* (Ann Arbor 1945) 177-88.
48. Almost all commentators have interpreted Karl Hundason as a name of abuse. Skene identified Karl with Duncan who is nicknamed *Ilgalrach*, diseased, in some Irish sources (WF Skene, *Celtic Scotland* 3 vols (2nd ed. Edinburgh 1886-90) i, 400-404). Many have followed him eg. Ellis, *MacBeth* 46ff. A B Taylor, 'Karl Hundason "King of Scots"' *PSAS* lxxi (1936-7) 334-341 which suggests tht Karl was an otherwise unknown *regulus* of Argyll is quite unconvincing.
49. Lee M Hollander, *Heimskringla. History of the Kings of Norway* (Austin 1964) 429.
50. Two other persons named Hundi are mentioned in the saga. Hundi or Hvelp a son of Earl Sigurd was taken hostage by Olaf Tryggvason (cap.12), an episode also noted in *Heimskringla* (Hollander p.351). Once again the name Whelp need not be considered in a pejorative sense. The other reference occurs in the name Holdbodi Hundason, a great chieftain in Tیره (caps.66,67).
51. Anderson, *ES* i, 499; Taylor, *OS* p.356; and Chadwick 'MacBeth' (1951) 5.
52. Cowan 'Caithness in the Sagas' 33.
53. *OS* cap. 20.
54. A most suggestive skaldic verse referring to Thorfinn is translated by Taylor (p.173) as follows:
The Man of the Sword

Seeking Scotland's throne,
 Ever won victory.
 Fire flamed fiercely,
 Fast fell the Irish host
 And flower of Welsh manhood (cap.22)

This translation has been eagerly embraced by Ellis, *MacBeth* 42. However there is nothing in the original text which would justify the first part of Taylor's translation. Thus the passage:

Ymisst vann sás vnni
 írsk fell drott, pás sótti,
 Baldrs eða brezkar aldir.
 brá eldr Skota veldi (Gudmundsson p.59)

is less misleadingly rendered by Palsson and Edwards,

The warrior laid waste
 now the Welsh, now the Irish
 now feasted the Scots
 with fire and flame (*OS* cap.22)

55. *Njals Saga* cap.157; Chadwick 'MacBeth' (1951) 22.
56. Kathleen Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London 1966) 256; *ES* i, 592.
57. William F Skene, *Celtic Scotland. A History of Ancient Alban* 3 vols, (2nd ed. Edinburgh, 1886-90) i, 405.
58. John Bannerman, *The Beaton's: a medical kindred in the classical Gaelic Tradition* (Edinburgh 1986) 1.
59. Roderic O'Flaherty, *Ogygia or a Chronological Account of Irish Events* trans. Rev. James Hely (Dublin 1793) 226.
60. For this and what follows see Johannis de Fordun *Chronica Gentis Scotorum* [*Chron.Fordun*] i, 187-206, iv, 174-94. Fordun's assertion might actually be correct. The Men of Moray and the stench of treachery are linked in notices of the killings of Malcolm I (954) and Kenneth II (995). To each that sinister phrase is applied — *a suis occisus est*, almost a code in the annals (*ES* i, 451-4, 511-16). In Walter Bower's *Scotichronicon* [*Chron.Bower*] MacBeth's murder of Duncan furnishes an excuse for a homily on kingship (vol.2, edd. John and Winifred MacQueen (Aberdeen 1989) caps.49-55, pp.419-441).
61. *MacBeth's* recent editor 'does not know' where Holinshed 'found the dialogue between Malcolm and MacDuff' (Brooke, p.70)
62. Chadwick 'MacBeth' (1949) 199.
63. Wyntoun, ii pp.122-41. *Berchan's Prophecy*, a problematical source, contains the line 'In the middle of Scone he (MacBeth) will vomit blood, on the evening of a night, after a wound' (*ES* i, 601). It has been suggested that the passage should be interpreted to mean, not that MacBeth died at Scone, which would contradict every other account, but that he was surprised at Scone, was wounded and escaped. The legend of Birnam Wood does seem to support the idea of a surprise attack (Erskine, *MacBeth*, 74-5; Ellis, *MacBeth*, 92-3).
64. The troubled history of the MacHeths may be traced through the pages of Anderson, *Early Sources*. The *Chronicle of Holyrood* notes that in 1163 *rex Malcolmus Murevienses transtulit*, king Malcolm transferred the men of Moray (Anderson, *Scottish Annals from English Chroniclers* 142-3, 190). Fordun

expanded this to a full blown transplantation — ‘Malcolm collected an army and transferred the rebel nation of Moray to the other districts, on both sides of the mountains, so that not one remained; and placed in Moray a peaceful population’ (*Chron.Fordun* i, 256-7). Mackay historians cited this reference to explain the arrival of their supposed ancestors, the MacHeths, in Sutherland. The eponymous of the MacHeths is alleged to be Aed husband of Lulach’s daughter [Angus Mackay, *The Book of Mackay* (Edinburgh, 1906) 21], which if true would neatly link the MacHeths into the MacBeth kindred, but the matter is contentious.

65. Bibire, 212.
66. cf. David Sellar ‘Marriage, Divorce and Concubinage in Gaelic Scotland’ in (1981) 51 *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 1978-80, 475-6.
67. Chadwick ‘MacBeth’.
68. George Stevens, *MacBeth, Earl Siward and Dundee. A contribution to Scottish history from the Rune Finds of Scandinavia* (Edinburgh 1876) argued on the basis of a runic inscription from East Gotland that the battle of Dunsinnan was actually fought at Dundee. His arguments do not convince.
69. *Stat.Acct.* xx, 241-6.
70. *Stat.Acct.* vi, 388; *NSA* xii, 1082-4.
71. Erskine, *MacBeth* 74-8.
72. Bannerman, *Beatons* 1.
73. MacBeth, *MacBeth King Queen and Clan* 93-5; George Chalmers, *Caledonia* 4 vols. (Edinburgh 1807) i, 412.
74. Kenneth Steer and John Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Edinburgh 1977) 103.
75. Sellar, ‘Highland Family Origins’ (above, note 17) 106.
76. L C Knights ‘How many Children had Lady MacBeth?’ in *Explorations* (London 1946).
77. *Stat.Acct.* viii, 269.
78. *ES* i, 602-4.
79. *Ibid.*, i, 604; O’Flaherty, *Ogygia* 263.
80. Raphael Holinshed, *The Scottish Chronicle or a Complete History and Description of Scotland* (Arbroath 1805) 293-7, 336.
81. *ES* i, 601.
82. Jackson ‘Duan Albanach’ 133.
83. Ellis, *MacBeth* 63.



Lochindorb, (G. Stell).