Scotland's Second War of Independence, 1332-1357 by Iain A. MacInnes presents a detailed and clear examination of Scottish warfare in the fourteenth century. The author's contribution to the historiography of military history is threefold. First, he rectifies a gap in Scottish history, as historians up to this point have allowed Scotland's first war for independence, in 1296-1328, with prominent characters like Robert the Bruce, to overshadow the second war. Secondly, MacInnes contests previous claims regarding the organization and leadership of the war effort. While most scholars assume that due to King David II's absence the military efforts were scattered bouts of futile attacks, MacInnes provides evidence of a disciplined, organized, and efficient Scottish military that successfully defended Scotland from both internal and external forces. Finally, this book challenges the idea that the Hundred Years War fundamentally altered Scotland's fate by causing a distraction for the English. Rather, this research suggests Scotland's success had far more to do with their military strategy, leadership, and a national war effort.

The first chapter of the book provides a chronological outline of politics, skirmishes, and battles between Balliol Scots, Bruce Scots, and the English. MacInnes explains the differences between the opposing Scottish parties, describes foreign involvement, and brings human presence to the seemingly dense and sporadic altercations of the war. The upfront presentation of the events creates the space for more thematic discussions in the following chapters. The second chapter surveys the organization of the Scottish military, delving into the ways in which Scotland called, structured, and funded an army. MacInnes argues that while Scotland could summon a sizeable army, there remained a clear divide between trained and equipped professional soldiers and conscripted fighting men (p. 81). Elite members of the military were well trained and armored but much of Scotland's infantry was poorly equipped and inadequately trained for combat, contributing to their loss in major battles (p. 96). Rather than
continue to lose men and ground, the Bruce Scots adopted a strategy of battle avoidance, using ambushes, small-scale conflicts, and raids to attack Balliol Scots and English forces (p. 96). The third chapter considers individual actors of the war. MacInnes documents the participation of Scottish nobles and their often faltering loyalties, provides evidence for the development of the military ethos the Scots would come to be known for in the following centuries, and highlights the social advancement warfare could offer (pp. 155-156). The groundwork of evidence, analysis, and narrative in the previous three chapters creates the necessary framework for the arguments in the final two chapters examining the realities and perceptions of war.

MacInnes investigates the impact of the war on rural, urban, and ecclesiastical spaces in the fourth chapter, with each section relaying back to his overarching argument that the Bruce Scottish forces were an organized, controlled, and conscious force rather than a cobbled-together group barely enduring Balliol/English advances. He argues that the ability of the Bruce Scots to target individual areas and avoid others which corresponded with truces and shifting loyalties indicates organization and authority on a remarkable scale (p. 168). The final chapter considers the perceptions of war. MacInnes begins with the idealized concepts of bravery, honor, and probity, cataloging what chroniclers depicted for both English and Scots forces. He then focuses on the soldier’s perspective of war, factoring in Christian values, the professionalization of war, and the possibility of social advancement through combat. MacInnes contends chivalry more often than not represented the reality of the contemplation of those who witnessed and recorded war as well as the warrior’s actions (p. 238).

Through comparison of English and Scottish chronicles, a detailed depiction of battles, casualties, and leadership emerges. MacInnes, however, acknowledges the possibility from the impact of chronicler bias upfront and combines the narratives with military records of supplies, soldiers, horses, ships, and weapons to help combat any exaggeration of events. The most impressive use of his sources though, appears in the fifth chapter with his use of silences in the archives. While war certainly took its greatest toll on the rural countryside and tales of peasant suffering circulated, he notes a lack of depictions of indiscriminate slaughter of innocents or the burning of children and churches, all of which were present in previous wars (p. 204). This research artfully complicates the narrative of Scottish military history. Scotland’s Second War of Independence, 1332-1357 by Iain MacInnes adds valuable insight into the development of Scotland’s own military history while contributing to broader European narratives regarding the Hundred Years War and the Auld Alliance between France and Scotland.
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