

## UHI Research Database pdf download summary

### “One man slashes, one slays, one warns, one wounds”: injury and death in Anglo-Scottish combat, c.1296-c.1403

MacInnes, Iain A.

*Published in:*

Killing and being killed: bodies in battle

*Publication date:*

2017

*Publisher rights:*

Copyright Transcript Verlag 2017

*The re-use license for this item is:*

CC BY-NC-ND

*The Document Version you have downloaded here is:*

Peer reviewed version

## [Link to author version on UHI Research Database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

MacInnes, I. A. (2017). “One man slashes, one slays, one warns, one wounds”: injury and death in Anglo-Scottish combat, c.1296-c.1403. In J. Rogge (Ed.), *Killing and being killed: bodies in battle: perspectives on fighters in the Middle Ages* (pp. 59-75). (Mainzer Historische Kulturwissenschaften). Transcript-Verlag.

### General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the UHI Research Database are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights:

- 1) Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the UHI Research Database for the purpose of private study or research.
- 2) You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- 3) You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the UHI Research Database

### Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at [RO@uhi.ac.uk](mailto:RO@uhi.ac.uk) providing details; we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

“One man slashes, one slays, one warns, one wounds”: Injury and death in Anglo-Scottish  
combat, c.1296-c.1403

*Iain A. MacInnes*

*University of the Highlands and Islands*

Taken from a verse written after the battle of Bannockburn (1314) by a captured English poet, the text quoted in the title reflects the cut and thrust of medieval combat.<sup>1</sup> For all that there is recognition of the violent nature of combat there has been, however, relatively little discussion of the impact of war on the medieval warrior.<sup>2</sup> A lack of a substantial amount of archaeological evidence means that medieval historians are forced to look elsewhere in an attempt to uncover the types of injuries suffered by contemporary combatants and their ability to survive them. Chronicles and other literary sources are particularly rich sources of information for such an investigation as accounts of warfare, including detailed descriptions of battles, skirmishes and sieges, were popular episodes within these works. Indeed for some writers providing accurate accounts of warfare satisfied the demands of their readers. For ‘chivalric chroniclers’ the whole intention was to “ensure that they included as full and correct as possible a list of the major participants and the deeds which they performed.”<sup>3</sup> While not all chroniclers fit neatly into the category of chivalric writers, there is little doubt that chivalric culture influenced many writers to the extent that warfare was something recorded carefully within their works. In such a literary environment it should be unsurprising therefore that descriptions of combat in these works were far more realistic than may be expected.<sup>4</sup> Chronicle accounts of fourteenth-century Anglo-Scottish warfare are particularly detailed in their depiction of combat and include numerous examples of injuries given and sustained by English and Scottish warriors. This paper will provide a survey of some of these accounts, examining the types of injuries involved, the areas of the body most effected, and the ability – where such is possible to discern – of these men to survive the injuries they suffered.

---

<sup>1</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vi, p. 375.

<sup>2</sup> For recent considerations of this topic, see MACINNES, 2015, pp. 102-27; WOOSNAM-SAVAGE/DEVRIES, 2015, pp. 27-56; GELDOLF, 2015, pp. 57-80; SKINNER, 2015, pp. 81-101.

<sup>3</sup> GIVEN-WILSON, 2004, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup> DEVRIES, 2004, pp. 1-15.

## Head and Facial Injuries

Despite the development by the fourteenth century of increasingly complex and sophisticated head protection, for the military elite at least, the head and in particular the face appear to have remained vulnerable to injury.<sup>5</sup> In particular Scottish soldiers in this period were exposed to the growing English use of the longbow and therefore to injuries caused by arrows.<sup>6</sup> As Thomas de Barri reflected when discussing the Otterburn Campaign (1388), “the archer stretching his bow was in no mood to be sparing, / sharpening the pointed darts of his arrows to cause a bitter wound.”<sup>7</sup> Massed archery fire in particular affected the Scots during several defeats in the fourteenth century. At Dupplin Moor (1332) “the Scots were defeated chiefly by the English archers, who so blinded and wounded the faces of the first division of the Scots by an incessant discharge of arrows, that they could not support each other.”<sup>8</sup> Less than a year later at Halidon Hill (1333) the Scots “were so grievously wounded in the face and blinded by the host of English archery [...] that they were helpless, and quickly began to turn away their faces from the arrow flights and to fall.”<sup>9</sup> Although at Neville’s Cross (1346) they were said to have lowered their heads so that the missile fire deflected off their helmets, several notable Scots received arrow wounds including the king himself who suffered two wounds to the face.<sup>10</sup> English barber surgeons were successful in removing one of these, but the other supposedly remained lodged in his head for several year after the battle.<sup>11</sup> Later examples demonstrate that, even towards the end of the fourteenth century, arrows continued to cause injury to many notable Scots even though they were surely the best armed of their fellow warriors. David Lindsay, earl of Crawford, lost an eye at Otterburn (1388).<sup>12</sup> Archibald Douglas, fourth earl of Douglas, was similarly blinded in one eye at Homildon Hill (1402).<sup>13</sup> For most of the men named here their injuries were survivable and some, like Douglas, would go on to receive further injury in later confrontations. Not all were so fortunate. The Scottish knight William

---

<sup>5</sup> RICHARDSON, 2011, pp. 311-4; SOUTHWICK, 2006, pp. 5-77.

<sup>6</sup> KARGER/SUDHUES/BRINKMANN, 2001, pp. 1550-1555.

<sup>7</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vii, p. 427.

<sup>8</sup> LANERCOST, 1913, p. 270.

<sup>9</sup> LANERCOST, 1913, p. 279.

<sup>10</sup> BAKER, 1889, p. 88; GRANT, 1998, p. 29; HARDY, 1998, pp. 112-31.

<sup>11</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vii, pp. 259-61; PENMAN, 2004, pp. 138-9.

<sup>12</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, viii, p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, viii, p. 49.

Lundie was shot in the face by a crossbow bolt at Otterburn and, about three months later, died as a result of his wounds.<sup>14</sup> Arrow wounds were not suffered however solely by Scottish warriors. Although Scottish archery was generally seen as inferior to the English longbow, sieges often involved the use of archers to pressure those defending towns and castles. During the Scottish capture of Roxburgh Castle the castellan, Guillemin de Fiennes, was apparently killed by archery fire.<sup>15</sup> Roger Horsley, the English constable of Berwick Castle, lost an eye to an arrow during the Scottish siege of the town in 1318.<sup>16</sup> Although in reference to a different type of missile weapon, Thomas Gray wrote that his father was hit in the face by the bolt from a springald during the English siege of Stirling Castle (1303). Knocked out by the blow Gray *senior* was assumed to be dead until he woke up not long before his planned burial.<sup>17</sup>

While such notable examples demonstrate that missile fire could indeed cause injury, even to the best-armoured men on the battlefield, the examples of Scottish suffering under massed archery fire suggest that these attacks were more of an “impediment” than they were fatal.<sup>18</sup> Describing the battle of Ben Cruachan (1308), Barbour wrote that James Douglas and his men softened up their opponents by “wounding them with swift arrows” before finishing off their enemy at close quarters with swords.<sup>19</sup> At Bannockburn the Scots suffered from the “horrible shower” of steady English archery fire which left “tokens behind them that needed medical treatment.”<sup>20</sup> While incredibly dangerous, and capable of causing troops to bunch together with potentially deadly results, such examples do suggest that the quality of armoured equipment was sufficient to ensure that death did not immediately result from an arrow wound. This is validated by Bower’s comment about the Scots at the Homildon Hill (1402). Under withering English archery fire the Scots were described as being “smothered [...] with arrows [which] made them bristly like a hedgehog.”<sup>21</sup> This in itself does not necessarily appear to have been deadly, although the arrows that pinned their hands to their spears were likely of greater concern. Arrowhead design may have been adapted over time to produce slimmer points that

---

<sup>14</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vii, p. 419.

<sup>15</sup> BRUCE, 1997, pp. 384-6. See also SCALACRONICA, p. 51.

<sup>16</sup> GRAY, 1907, p. 58.

<sup>17</sup> GRAY, 1907, pp. 25-6; PURTON, 2006, pp. 85-8.

<sup>18</sup> For a twelfth-century crusade example of such injuries, see MITCHELL/NAGAR/ELLENBLUM, 2006, pp. 152, 150.

<sup>19</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 364.

<sup>20</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 482.

<sup>21</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, viii, p. 47.

allowed for penetration between chainmail links.<sup>22</sup> This could account for injuries such as some of those described above, although with plate armour increasingly replacing mail during this period it would have affected the rank and file soldiers more than the military elite. This might then explain the lethal impact of such concentrated fire experienced by the Scots at Dupplin Moor (1332). Here men tried to escape the incessant discharge of arrows by turning inward, which only resulted in their deaths in the resultant press where “many died [...] without a wound in the collision of bodies, the friction of armour, and the stumbling of horses as they were crushed against each other.”<sup>23</sup> Even without examples like Dupplin, the longbow remained a dangerous weapon and men could be killed as a result a number of variables, including “the type of bow used, the velocity of flight, the design of arrowhead and the part of the body injured”, as well as simple (mis)fortune.<sup>24</sup>

The head was exposed to other forms of injury unrelated to missile fire. In spite of the protection provided by bascinets and helmets it was likely still at risk. Indeed it may have been deliberately targeted in close-quarter combat as a means of more quickly incapacitating an opponent in situations where blows to other protected parts of the body proved ineffective.<sup>25</sup> What resulted was effectively blunt force trauma to the head. Barbour’s account of the battle of Methven (1306) suggests just such an occurrence in a confrontation between Christopher Seton and Philip Mowbray. Both men were mounted when Seton struck Mowbray with a blow “that caused him to reel dizzily, although he was [a man] of great strength; [Mowbray] would have fallen straight to the ground had he not been propped up by his steed.”<sup>26</sup> Several years later, following his adoption of Bruce/Scottish allegiance, Mowbray was injured in similar fashion at the battle of Faughart (1318). Barbour wrote that he was “knocked senseless in the fight” and dragged off the battlefield by two enemies who took him for ransom. Mowbray recovered his senses while being carried from the field and was able to escape his captors.<sup>27</sup> Such examples, and the already-mentioned case of Thomas Gray *senior*, show the dangers inherent in blows to the head. For those less well-armoured than the chivalric elite blows to the head were more likely to be fatal. Evidence from a series of excavated bodies relating to the Danish battle of Visby (1361) demonstrates that a majority of those killed as a result of blade

---

<sup>22</sup> MITCHELL, 2004, p. 177; JESSOP, 1996, pp. 192-205.

<sup>23</sup> BOWER, vii, pp. 77-9.

<sup>24</sup> MITCHELL, 2004, p. 156.

<sup>25</sup> POWERS, 2005, p. 10; MITCHELL, 2004, p. 117.

<sup>26</sup> BRUCE, 1997, pp. 100-2.

<sup>27</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 672.

injuries died as a result of wounds inflicted to the head.<sup>28</sup> It was perhaps at greatest risk following defeat when soldiers fleeing the battlefield on foot were often chased down by mounted victors, where blows from above were often likely fatal.<sup>29</sup> This appears to have been the experience of Scottish soldiers following their defeats at Halidon Hill (1333) and Neville's Cross (1346). At Halidon in particular the English "pursued [the fleeing Scots] on horseback, felling the wretches as they fled in all directions with iron-shod maces."<sup>30</sup> Sieges too provided a dangerous environment in which head injuries were likely, although in this case it was the attackers who were more in danger of suffering such injury. During the English siege of Berwick (1319) the Scottish defenders struck "their foes so hard with stones that they left many lying [there], some dead, some hurt, some passed out."<sup>31</sup> Similarly at the siege of Dunbar (1338) some English attackers were killed by a stone thrown from a siege engine that "dashed [their] heads [...] to pieces."<sup>32</sup>

Even the types of head protection that did exist may have proved insufficient when dealing with certain blows, or those from particular weapons. Barbour's description of the battle of Bannockburn (1314) states that the Scots "gave such blows with axes that they split heads and helmets."<sup>33</sup> Although it may appear that comments such as these are little more than literary hyperbole to emphasise the strength of Scottish warriors, the possibility of an axe blow in particular penetrating a helm is suggested by Robert I's killing of Henry Bohun in the same battle. In this example the Scottish king struck the onrushing English knight with an axe "with such great force that neither hat nor helmet could stop the heavy clout that he gave him, so that he cleaved the head to his brains."<sup>34</sup> Moreover descriptions such as these appear relatively common in contemporary sources where it was often used to depict the heroic strength of the writer's heroes. Barbour wrote of James Douglas that "he cleft the skulls of so many that none alive can tell of them."<sup>35</sup> Mimicking to an extent his feat of strength at Bannockburn, Barbour also relates that Robert I was capable of committing similar injury to various men during his

---

<sup>28</sup> THORDMAN/NØRLUND/INGELMARK, 1939, i, pp. 160-92; MITCHELL, 2004, p. 110.

<sup>29</sup> For discussion of possible evidence of men killed while fleeing the battlefield, see KJELLSTRÖM, 2005, pp. 23-50.

<sup>30</sup> LANERCOST, 1913, pp. 279-80, 341.

<sup>31</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 648.

<sup>32</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vii, p. 129.

<sup>33</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 488.

<sup>34</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 450.

<sup>35</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 60.

career.<sup>36</sup> That reality could reflect such literary depictions is suggested by the case of William Ramsay who perished as a result of wounds sustained in a border tournament against Henry of Lancaster (c.1342). His injury occurred when he “was pierced by a lance through his helmet and brain.”<sup>37</sup> Ramsay’s case is particularly interesting because one Scottish source claims that he was in fact able to recover from the injury sustained and did not in fact die.<sup>38</sup> Archaeological evidence provides examples of individuals who were able to survive quite severe head trauma. Contemporary surgery, where available, could treat such wounds and in such instances broken skull fragments were extracted to relieve pressure on the brain caused by fractures. That treatment like this was available to more than just the elite is also suggested by archaeological evidence.<sup>39</sup> Archaeology also provides examples of men who survived quite serious head injury to fight (and die) another day.<sup>40</sup> For those who survived it was likely the depth of the wound that proved all-important. Even then men could still perish, not as a direct result of the wound but as a consequence of post-injury or post-operative infection.<sup>41</sup>

### **The Torso and Extremities**

Injuries to the body are, in comparison, less common in chronicle accounts than those to the head. Interestingly this appears to replicate archaeological evidence, although the lack of finds relating to these injuries is likely the result of decomposition of the soft tissue most affected by such wounds.<sup>42</sup> Armour and other forms of protective equipment should, of course, have ensured that blows and penetrative strikes to the torso were blocked or prevented from being fatal. Chronicle examples provide numerous instances when this was, and was not, the case. In Thomas Gray’s account of the murder of John Comyn by Robert Bruce, Comyn’s uncle is said to have “struck [Bruce] with a sword in the breast, but he being in armour, was not wounded.”<sup>43</sup> The assumption here would appear to be that, if properly equipped, a warrior had less to fear

---

<sup>36</sup> BRUCE, 1997, pp. 116-8, 220-2.

<sup>37</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vii, p. 137.

<sup>38</sup> WYNTOUN, 1872-9, ii, pp. 443-4.

<sup>39</sup> MAYS, 2006, p. 101.

<sup>40</sup> POWERS, 2005, p. 12; WILKINSON/NEAVE, 2003, pp. 1343-48. For detailed consideration of the remains of numerous individuals relating to a late medieval battle, see FIORATO/BOYLSTON/KNÜSEL, 2007.

<sup>41</sup> ROKSANDIC/WOOD/VLAK, 2007, p. 639; MITCHELL, 1999, pp. 335-7; POWERS, 2005, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> MITCHELL, 2004, p. 108.

<sup>43</sup> GRAY, 1907, p. 30.

from similar attacks. Other chroniclers and writers take a similar approach and reinforce the reality that the armoured nature of their protagonists ensured their survival in armed conflict. In his *Bruce*, John Barbour creates a series of vignettes in which Robert I is repeatedly placed in a position of fighting alone against groups of armed enemies. The fact that he wins all of these encounters demonstrates Bruce's bravery and military prowess. The examples also, however, acknowledge the additional virtue of the king's military preparedness. In one example, faced by a group of men guarding a ford, Bruce "was protected in armour [and therefore] did not need to fear their arrows."<sup>44</sup> In a similar encounter "the king was placed in such straits there, that he had never been so [badly] placed before, and but for the armour that he wore, he would have been dead, without a doubt."<sup>45</sup> And in another instance the king was struck by a man with an axe but sustained no apparent injury as a result of being well-armoured.<sup>46</sup> The author also took advantage of such tales to reinforce the dangers of warriors finding themselves in situations when they were unprepared and underequipped. Facing three men armed with bows and arrows, Bruce "had a great fear of their arrows because he was without armour."<sup>47</sup> On this occasion the king resorted to words over actions and appealed to chivalric virtue. He argued that his enemies should face him like men with swords, rather than killing him from afar with arrows. This they did and were defeated as a result. Although Bruce won the encounter, the dangers of going into battle without being fully prepared were obvious.

Other examples similarly highlight the dangers of combat for those ill-equipped to participate in it. In Barbour's description of the Scottish capture of Roxburgh Castle (1314), the first man over the walls was Simon Ledhouse. There he fought with two sentries. According to Barbour, Ledhouse won the encounter because he "was armed and strong" while at least one of his opponents "was unarmed [...] and had nothing to stop the blow [he received]."<sup>48</sup> Chronicler recognition of the effectiveness of armour for those who had its protection was so prevalent that they were at times apparently forced to construct their tales with an eye both to the reality of conflict and to the desired effect of emphasising the qualities of their heroes. So, for example, Walter Bower described William Douglas of Nithsdale as being "so strong that whomsoever he had stuck with a blow of his mace or sword or a thrust of his lance fell dead to

---

<sup>44</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 230.

<sup>45</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 268.

<sup>46</sup> BRUCE, 1997, pp. 220-2.

<sup>47</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 278.

<sup>48</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 382.



the ground.”<sup>49</sup> At first glance this appears to be a normal description of a heroic Scottish military figure. Bower, however, also felt the need to include the caveat that when faced by those “protected by some kind of armour” Douglas instead caused the enemy to “[fall] on his back scarcely half alive.”<sup>50</sup> The emphasis on Douglas’s strength and prowess remains, but Bower recognised the reality that even a figure such as he was not superhuman. The emphasis on realism in this depiction of events reinforces the idea that chroniclers often wrote of conflict in a way that warriors themselves would recognise as lifelike and that their descriptions of armour, weaponry, injury and death in combat are more representative of ‘real life’ than may be expected. A final example helps to emphasise this point. Walter Bower, in his description of the battle of Dunbar (1296), provides an account of the knight Walter Siward. Although an Englishman by birth, Siward fought on the Scottish side at Dunbar. Having escaped the battlefield the knight was killed by his own servant who “stabbed the sorrowing master in the back with a lance, and throwing him off his horse to the ground, immediately slaughtered his unsuspecting and defenceless master with his sword.”<sup>51</sup> The obvious implication in this episode is that the knight’s armour was sufficient to ensure that the spear-thrust was not fatal. What it did instead was force the knight to the ground where his heavy armour restricted his movements and likely stopped him from being able to raise himself. In this largely defenceless position he was open to attack by the servant who, with his sword, could provide the killer blow.<sup>52</sup>

The protection provided by armour was not, however, all-encompassing and as much as chroniclers often appear to assume that armour would protect the body, they paradoxically also create literary motifs around occasions when armour failed to perform its function. For example they often describe injuries sustained in the melee in quite spectacular fashion, such as the description that “blood burst out of [...] mail-coats.”<sup>53</sup> Barbour in particular uses this phrase, or variations thereof, quite frequently.<sup>54</sup> Writing of the battle of Roslin (1302), Bower commented that “[the English] attack was so heavy and savage that many had their armour

---

<sup>49</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, p. 411.

<sup>50</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vii, p. 411.

<sup>51</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vi, p. 73.

<sup>52</sup> Descriptions of battle do suggest that quite often the Scottish infantry would attack English horses to bring down the well-armoured knights. According to chroniclers, those who were brought down in such fashion were often killed (see, for example, BRUCE, 1997, p. 434).

<sup>53</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 98.

<sup>54</sup> See for example, BRUCE, 1997, p. 476.

pierced and were deprived of their lives.”<sup>55</sup> Another example relates to the Scottish knight John Stewart who, at the battle of Connor (1315), “was wounded in the body there, by a spear which pierced right sharply.”<sup>56</sup> The impact of spear thrusts, or blows from mounted warriors’ lances, was often related in chronicle accounts to torso injuries, some of which resulted in death. Examples include the injury suffered by William Douglas of Liddesdale at the skirmish at Crichton (c.1337). Here “his body [was] transfixt with a lance, [and] he barely escaped from the hands of his enemies; but fortunately he recovered quickly.”<sup>57</sup> A similar injury that resulted in fatal consequences was suffered by two warriors at the skirmish at Burgh Muir (1335). A Scottish man-at-arms, Richard Shaw, fought with a foreign knight in which both “drove their horses on with their spurs, and at a gallop they each transfixt the body of the other with their lances, and thus with a mortal wound fell dead to the ground.”<sup>58</sup> A particularly bizarre fatality involves the example of William Keith at the siege of Stirling Castle (1337). The Scottish chronicler Andrew Wyntoun provides the fullest account of this incident. He describes Keith climbing the castle wall only to be struck by a stone thrown from the battlements. Borne from the ladder by the stone, Keith’s lance appears to have struck the ground first “and stekyd hym on his awyn spere: / and off that wounde sone deyde he.”<sup>59</sup> The unfortunate nature of Keith’s death may explain its prominence in this chronicle. Despite the dangers to attackers inherent in siege warfare, this was a particularly curious example and one that emphasised that, no matter how well-armed, death was always a possibility for those who fought. Even those events which mimicked war could be dangerous, and in some examples fatal. The dangers of tournament fighting are apparent in two examples. In the first, Patrick Ramsay and Richard Talbot fought a series of tilts on the border in the 1340s. According to Bower the English knight “was run through by Sir Patrick’s lance, and after confession breathed his last.”<sup>60</sup> Wyntoun’s account, however, goes into far more detail about this encounter, describing two separate clashes between this pair. In the first tilt Talbot was struck by Graham’s lance which pierced a double

---

<sup>55</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vi, p. 295.

<sup>56</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 554.

<sup>57</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vii, p. 139. The translation of Wyntoun words things slightly differently, stating that ‘Dowglas wes strykyn throw the body; / Bot he lywyd efftyr in gud hele’ (WYNTOUN, 1872-9, ii, p. 448).

<sup>58</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vii, p. 113. Bower’s tale has more than a suggestion of being invented. In the aftermath of the skirmish both warriors were stripped of their armour and the foreign knight was apparently discovered to be a woman.

<sup>59</sup> WYNTOUN, 1872-9, ii, pp. 455-6, 438; BOWER, 1987-98, vii, p. 131.

<sup>60</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vii, p. 139.

layer of plate and penetrated an inch or more into Talbot's chest. Having survived this injury, the two clashed again the following day and on this occasion Talbot was killed when he was run through by Graham's lance.<sup>61</sup> In the second example an English chronicle accounts that John Dunbar, earl of Moray, died from wounds received at an English tournament. Notably he was said to have suffered broken ribs. While a fall from his horse in the fight could have resulted in such an injury, it is also possible that Moray's horse fell with him, as suggested in the chronicle account, and crushed the knight under its weight. The earl died as a result of his wounds on his return journey to Scotland.<sup>62</sup>

Beyond the torso, injuries to a warrior's extremities are even less prevalent in narrative accounts than those suffered to the body. This is likely a result of their relatively minor nature and the fact that they would have seldom been fatal. Paradoxically, however, their very nature may have also made them more common. Evidence from archaeological excavations suggests that injuries to the forearms – mostly taking the form of defensive injuries – and to the lower leg were amongst the most common recorded wounds alongside those to the skull.<sup>63</sup> In one historical example of such an injury it was actually good fortune for the recipient. William Keith, fighting in Spain with James Douglas and his companions on their quest to take Robert I's heart on crusade, was forced to spend the day in his quarters because "his arm was broken in two."<sup>64</sup> Barbour does not make clear how Keith came by this injury, but it ensured his absence from the skirmish with Muslim forces at Teba in which Douglas and the rest of the Scots were almost all killed. Other injuries to the extremities were suffered by men such as the English knight Anthony Lucy. In the border skirmish at Dornock (1332), Lucy was injured in the hand and foot, as well as in the eye, but was said to have recovered well from all his wounds.<sup>65</sup> William Douglas of Liddesdale similarly suffered an injury from which he was able to recover, but one which was potentially more serious. During the siege of Perth (1339) Douglas was "seriously wounded [...] in the thigh with a bolt from a crossbow."<sup>66</sup> He was able to make a suitable recovery, but as the previous example of William Lundie suggests, crossbow

---

<sup>61</sup> WYNTOUN, 1872-9, ii, pp. 444-5.

<sup>62</sup> BRUT, 1906-8, p. 348.

<sup>63</sup> MITCHELL, 2004, pp. 116-7.

<sup>64</sup> BRUCE, 1997, p. 766.

<sup>65</sup> LANERCOST, 1913, p. 278.

<sup>66</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, vii, p. 143. Bower went on to say of this occurrence that 'the besiegers were upset by the great degree of malice in this action', although it is unclear why this particular action was filled with more malice than any other.

injuries could easily prove fatal. Liddesdale was injured again around 1341, although in a very different scenario. In this instance he was fighting in a border tournament against Henry of Lancaster, earl of Derby. In the first tilt Douglas “brak his spere; And a sclys off the schafft, that brak, In till his hand a wounde can mak.”<sup>67</sup> Demonstrating his personal chivalric qualities, Derby called a halt to proceedings after this occurrence, likely because Douglas’s injury precluded him from fighting to his full potential thereafter. At the battle of Glen Brerachan (1392), David Lindsay of Glen Esk – who was mounted at the time – was injured by a sword stroke that cut through his stirrup and boots into his foot and “straik the Lyndesay to the bane.”<sup>68</sup> Evidence from the Visby battlefield demonstrates that similar injuries were quite common and it has been suggested that such blows – whether to mounted or foot soldiers – were intended “to bring the opponent to the ground before finishing him off.”<sup>69</sup> Injuries to the leg were certainly more likely to occur when a mounted warrior, such as Lindsay, fought enemies who were fighting on foot.<sup>70</sup> Further injuries to extremities were inflicted by missile weapons. At Homildon Hill (1402), as already discussed, English archers poured fire into the ranks of the stationary Scottish divisions, “transfixing the hands and arms of the Scots to their own lances. By means of this very harsh rain of arrows they made some duck, they wounded others, and killed many.”<sup>71</sup> The number of injuries caused by such an attack must have been enormous, but as the chronicler makes clear not all were fatal. Far more dangerous was the fact that the Scots could not withstand such an assault indefinitely and resorted to ill-disciplined flight where attacks such as those described above likely resulted in far greater casualties

## **Conclusion**

This article has provided a brief consideration of evidence contained within literary and chronicle sources and its usefulness for studies of the impact of war on the warrior. Examples of the types injuries sustained, the parts of the body most affected and the lethality or survivability of such injuries, provide detailed evidence of the warrior’s bodily experience of combat. That the head was perhaps a more likely target than the torso points to deliberate tactics in one-to-one combat that focused on incapacitating the enemy as quickly as possible. Injury

---

<sup>67</sup> WYNTOUN, 1872-9, ii, p. 441.

<sup>68</sup> WYNTOUN, 1872-9, iii, pp. 59-60.

<sup>69</sup> THORDMAN/NØRLUND/INGELMARK, 1939, 171-8; MITCHELL, 2004, pp. 111, 117.

<sup>70</sup> MITCHELL, 2004, p. 117.

<sup>71</sup> BOWER, 1987-98, viii, p. 47.

to the head as a result of less precise forms of warfare in the form of massed ranks of archers are also understandable in terms of angle of fire and ‘accidental’ injuries through weak points such as helmet visors. Importantly, examples collated from written sources appear to align largely with existing archaeological evidence which can be used to provide corroboration for descriptions of injuries sustained, and the warriors’ ability to survive such wounds. Indeed, further and more detailed analysis of available sources offers the opportunity to study such themes in far greater depth than has been attempted up to this point. The Anglo-Scottish conflict provides a particularly good focus for such an examination, spanning as it did the majority of the fourteenth century and coming at an important point in the development of tactics, strategy, military organisation and both offensive and defensive military equipment. Considering the focus in many works on the Hundred Years War, the Scottish Wars of Independence present a valuable comparative example against which to consider the accepted maxims regarding warfare in this period. For example, casualty lists of Scottish nobles killed in battle in the fourteenth century seem disproportionately high. Conventions of ransom and chivalric conduct should, in theory at least, have ensured that a larger number were spared if for no other reason than that such prisoners were valuable commodities. If noble prisoners were not able to survive the battlefield as easily as their fellows in the Anglo-French conflict, then what does this suggest about the nature of Anglo-Scottish warfare?<sup>72</sup> Does it imply that Scotland’s nobles were less well-protected than their contemporaries elsewhere? Were they more likely to suffer injury and death in the flight that resulted from numerous Scottish battlefield defeats? Or were they perhaps less likely to have access to sufficient quality medical care to ensure their survival post-battle? These questions are beginning to receive some consideration, but far more could be undertaken to better understand the nature of warfare in this period and, in particular, the Scottish warrior experience.<sup>73</sup> Incorporating the themes of injury and lethality into such analysis provides an under-utilised perspective on the physical impact of warfare on the individual and therefore points towards a more realistic understanding of contemporary conflict. The complementary use of archaeological and historical sources allows comparison of the depiction and the physical remains of combat and reaffirms medieval literary sources as an essential resource in understanding not only the mentality of the age, but also the physicality of the medieval period. Considering the modern developments in the study of military history

---

<sup>72</sup> For discussion of the rules of ransom and their use in the Hundred Years War, see AMBÜHL, 2013.

<sup>73</sup> For recent discussion of some of these questions, see MACINNES, 2015, pp. 102-27; MACINNES, 2016 (*forthcoming*); MACDONALD, 2013, pp. 179-206.

more widely, these sources and approaches offer exciting opportunities for the study of medieval warfare generally, but also in particular for lesser-studied and under-sourced periods of conflict.

## Literature

### Sources

ANON, *The Brut or Chronicles of England*, ed. by FRIEDRICH W.D. BIE, London, 1906-8.

ANON, *The Chronicle of Lanercost, 1272-1346*, ed. by HERBERT E. MAXWELL, Glasgow 1913.

LE BAKER, GEOFFREY, *Chronicon Galfridi le Baker de Swynebroke (Rolls Series)*, ed. E.M. THOMPSON, Oxford, 1889.

BARBOUR, JOHN, *The Bruce*, ed. by ARCHIBALD A.M. DUNCAN, Edinburgh 1997.

BOWER, WALTER, *Scotichronicon*, ed. by DONALD E.R. WATT *et al*, Aberdeen 1987-98.

GRAY, THOMAS, *Scalacronica*, ed. by Herbert E. Maxwell, Glasgow 1907.

WYNTOUN, ANDREW OF, *The Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland*, ed. by David Laing, Edinburgh, 1872-9.

### Secondary Literature

AMBÜHL, RÉMY, *Prisoners of War in the Hundred Years' War. Ransom Culture in the Late Middle Ages*, Cambridge 2013.

DEVRIES, KELLY, *The Use of Chronicles in Recreating Medieval Military History*, in: *The Journal of Medieval Military History* 2, ed. by BERNARD S. BACHRACH/CLIFFORD J.

ROGERS/KELLY DEVRIES, Woodbridge 2004, pp. 1-15.

FIORATO, VERONICA/BOYLSTON, ANTHEA/KNÜSEL, CHRISTOPHER (eds.), *Blood Red Roses. The Archaeology of a Mass Grave from the Battle of Towton AD 1461*, Oxford, 2007.

GELDOF, M.R., "And to describe the shapes of the dead": Making Sense of the Archaeology of Armed Violence, in: *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture (Explorations in Medieval Culture 1)*, ed. by LARISSA TRACY/KELLY DEVRIES, Leiden 2015, pp. 57-80.

GIVEN-WILSON, CHRIS, *Chronicles. The Writing of History in Medieval England*, London 2004.

GRANT, ALEXANDER, Disaster at Neville's Cross: The Scottish Point of View, in: The Battle of Neville's Cross 1346, ed. by DAVID ROLLASON/MICHAEL PRESTWICH, Stamford, 1998, pp. 15-35.

HARDY, ROBERT, The Military Archery at Neville's Cross, 1346, in: The Battle of Neville's Cross 1346, ed. by DAVID ROLLASON/MICHAEL PRESTWICH, Stamford 1998, pp. 112-31.

KARGER, BERND/SUDHUES, HUBERT/BRINKMANN, BERND, Arrow Wounds: Major Stimulus in the History of Surgery, in: World Journal of Surgery 25 (2001), pp. 1550-1555.

KJELLSTRÖM, ANNA, A Sixteenth-Century Warrior Grave from Uppsala, Sweden: the Battle of Good Friday, in: International Journal of Osteoarchaeology 15 (2005), pp. 23-50.

MACDONALD, ALASTAIR .J., Courage, Fear and the Experience of the Later Medieval Scottish Soldier, in: Scottish Historical Review, 92,2 (2013), pp. 179-206.

MACINNES, IAIN A., Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes: Injury and Death in Anglo-Scottish Combat, c.1296-c.1403, in: Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture (Explorations in Medieval Culture 1), ed. by LARISSA TRACY/KELLY DEVRIES, Leiden 2015, pp. 102-27.

MACINNES, IAIN A., Scotland's Second War of Independence, 1332-1357, Woodbridge, 2016 (*forthcoming*).

MAYS, SIMON A., A Possible Case of Surgical Treatment of Cranial Blunt Force Injury from Medieval England, in: International Journal of Osteoarchaeology 16 (2006), pp. 95-103.

MITCHELL, PIERS D., Medicine in the Crusades: Warfare, wounds and the medieval surgeon, Cambridge, 2004.

MITCHELL, PIERS D., The Integration of the Palaeopathology and Medical History of the Crusades, in: International Journal of Osteoarchaeology 9 (1999), pp. 333-343.

MITCHELL, PIERS D./NAGAR, YOSSI/ELLENBLUM, RONNIE, Weapon Injuries in the 12th Century Crusader Garrison of Vadum Iacob Castle, Galilee, in: International Journal of Osteoarchaeology 16 (2006), pp. 145-155.

PENMAN, MICHAEL, David II, East Linton, 2004.

POWERS, NATASHA, Cranial Trauma and Treatment: A Case Study from the Medieval Cemetery of St. Mary Spital, London, in: International Journal of Osteoarchaeology 15 (2005), pp. 1-14.

PURTON, PETER, The myth of the mangonel: torsion artillery in the Middle Ages, in: Arms and Armour 3,1 (2006), pp. 79-90.

RICHARDSON, THOM, Armour in England, 1325-99, in: Journal of Medieval History 37,3 (2011), pp. 304-20.

ROKSANDIC, MIRJANA/WOOD, CAROLINE/VLAK, DEJANA, Death in the Line of Duty: Late Medieval Burials at the Site of Lepenski Vir, Serbia, in: *International Journal of Osteoarchaeology* 17 (2007), pp. 635-642.

SKINNER, PATRICIA, Visible Prowess?: Reading Men's Head and Face Wounds in Early Medieval Europe to 1000 CE, in: *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture* (Explorations in Medieval Culture 1), ed. by LARISSA TRACY/KELLY DEVRIES, Leiden 2015, pp. 81-101.

SOUTHWICK, LESLIE, The Great Helm in England, in: *Arms & Armour* 3,1 (2006), pp. 5-77.

THORDMAN, BENGT/NØRLUND, POUL/INGELMARK, BO ERIC (eds.), *Armour from the Battle of Visby, 1361*, 2 vols, Stockholm, 1939.

WILKINSON, CAROLINE/NEAVE, RICHARD, The Reconstruction of a Face Showing a Healed Wound, in: *Journal of Archaeological Science* 30 (2003), pp. 1343-48.

WOOSNAM-SAVAGE, ROBERT C./DEVRIES, KELLY, Battle Trauma in Medieval Warfare: Wounds, Weapons and Armor, in: *Wounds and Wound Repair in Medieval Culture* (Explorations in Medieval Culture 1), ed. by LARISSA TRACY/KELLY DEVRIES, Leiden 2015, pp. 27-56.