



Macbeth the King

Nigel Tranter

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Across a huge colourful canvas, ranging from the wilds of Scotland to Norway, Denmark and Rome, here is the story of the real Macbeth. Set aside Shakespeare's portrait of a savage, murderous, ambitious King. Read instead of his struggle to make and save a united Scotland.

Macbeth the King Details

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Author : Nigel Tranter

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From Reader Review *Macbeth the King* for online ebook

Zjohnston says

So it seems your friend and mine Ol' Billy Shakespeare tells a great story, but not a very accurate one! Well, I guess people won't always pay to see the truth. Macbeth was deeply maligned in the Scottish Tragedy, but I'm sure he would expect such treatment from an Englishman.

It's been a while since I've read a historical novel of this type. Loved the time period description and the characters. A little much on the extensive explanation of travels across Scotland, though I probably would have enjoyed those if the map were more detailed and I could follow along the route.

Alastair Rosie says

MACBETH THE KING

In *The Letters of J.R.R Tolkien*, he refers to Shakespeare's portrayal of elves as silly deformed creatures as unforgivable and thus he sought to portray elves closer to the original Nordic and perhaps Celtic and Saxon traditions. I would agree with Tolkien in his assessment of Shakespeare's untruths but would also add that what he did to Macbeth was equally unforgivable. I know that Nigel Tranter's *Macbeth the King* was a historical fiction, but even without that obvious bias, the real Macbeth is so unlike Shakespeare's Macbeth that it is doubtful the two characters were one and the same.

Macbeth the King is a historical story that follows the actual story of Macbeth as closely as possible and some of the evidence is sketchy. What we do know is that he ruled Scotland for seventeen years that were relatively prosperous. He defeated King Duncan in battle although whether he killed him in person or not is disputed. In a time when the strongest, most vigorous chieftain became a lord or a king, the fact that he ruled for seventeen years and saw fit to make a pilgrimage to Rome tells us more than Shakespeare's bastardisation. An absent king would have been more vulnerable and could have returned to find his kingdom in ruins. He was a Pictish king who succeeded in uniting Pictland (Moray) with Alba (Scotland) to create the Scotland we know today. His defeat at the hands of Duncan's son is chronicled as is his death a year later. We know he was married to Gruoch, who was also of royal descent and that he was her second husband. It may have been a marriage of political convenience but that is nothing new for that era.

Tranter's story fills in the blanks, colouring the landscape and inviting us into a world that for us remains inaccessible unless we have a time machine. He has put a romantic twist on the relationship between Gruoch and Macbeth, which could also be an untruth but believable enough and serves to show us Macbeth the man. We see him enacting just and humane laws relating to the inheritance of land and titles by women, which back then favoured men, establishing merchant guilds and encouraging closer ties between church and state. Some of that we can only guess at to be honest but it does serve to bring us closer to an actual meeting with the historical Macbeth. The Celtic church was different to the Roman Catholic church in that their priests could marry and seem to have been a little more worldly and practical.

I found the story one of his more refreshing tales and opened my eyes a little wider to the silliness of Shakespeare's plays. The Macbeth of Tranter is portrayed as a king, husband and father, but also as a man with faults and failings like all the rest of us. As usual his descriptions are evocative and true to life, which back then was short, sharp and brutal. He manages to portray a divided Scotland that was only just beginning to emerge from the Dark Ages to become a united kingdom. Britain is on the cusp of change just before the

Norman invasion. The Danes still hold the northern parts of England against the Anglo Saxons to the south. Scotland was very much on the outer fringes but Tranter has his Macbeth trying to unite a fractured land and finding his worst enemies are not outside Scotland but far closer at hand. His betrayal and eventual death are not spoilers, we already know the end before we start the book.

It may not be the exact truth but *Macbeth the King* serves as a vital counter punch against the folly of Shakespeare and puts Macbeth in his rightful place as a king who for seventeen fruitful years ruled Scotland and was ultimately betrayed by his own people.

{Wild Night In} Cat says

Picked this up a lifetime ago and have been dipping in and out of it over the years.

There are many positives to this book: it is well-written, honest, and utterly smashes the propaganda of Shakespeare's "Macbeth".

That being said, I never really clicked with the writing style: it felt earnest and understated in the way that history textbooks can be. Definitely one for the history and historical fiction buffs. Just not me.

Katherine Stewart says

I find Nigel Tranter's work to be refreshing; a glimpse into past versions of humanity that helped shape our present. That was the strength of this book.

Susana says

The way Tranter accounts the story of Macbeth the king is very enlightening to the acts and thoughts of that great man. I appreciate the way lady Grouch is depicted here. Their relationship leads to an understanding of mind and soul that proves very successful and profitable for their kingdom. Liked it very much and was very delighted making and impossible comparison with Dunnet's King Hereafter, of which I was reminded through the book.

Jan-Maat says

[given the setting, more novel and less historical (hide spoiler)]

Iset says

Review coming soon.

Lisa says

Excellent book! Tranter brought to life truer picture of the only Northern High King in Scotland's history. Definitely not Shakespeare's version

Christine says

Learning about a different Macbeth was refreshing. Wonderful story teller

Pat says

Clearly written historic fiction. It would be a good companion read to Shakespeare's play to show another point of view of the historic events.

Reread February 2018 as book 5 in the Chronological Order of Nigel Tranter books

Gary says

It is clear that the Shakespeare play- Macbeth- bears little or no resemblance to the true facts and events of the time or the real character of MacBeth mac Finlay King of Scots.

Nigel Tranter has put much meticulous research into this work, which most likely traces events close to how they really were. Nowhere do we read , in this book, about the vicious and bloodthirsty tyrant portrayed by Shakespeare.

MacBeth is here revealed as a strong and courageous ruler, who together with his beautiful young queen Gruoch (much maligned by Shakespeare as 'Lady MacBeth), are committed to the unity and freedom of Scotland from England, the Danes, the Roman Church and self-serving and arrogant nobles.

Together MacBeth and Gruoch rule justly and fairly, and MacBeth is helped by his half-brother the redoubtable Nordic Prince, Thorkill Forsterer, Earl of Orkney.

Duncan is revealed as not the benevolent and just king in the Shakespeare play, but a worthless and scheming coward, who MacBeth kills in battle.

The saga takes us all over Scotland, and to Norway, Denmark and Rome.

MacBeth's battle for the sovereignty and welfare of Scotland is brought to an end by Duncans' son Malcolm and the jealous Duncan MacDuff.

Interestingly MacDuff, in this volume, is not even a great warrior, and in the final chapter has MacBeth dispatched by a Norman knight, rather than fight him himself.

Obviously historical novels depend of imagination and deduction, as well as research, but a study of the subject would certainly verify the portrayal and events in htis novel as more authentic.

Enthusiasts of millitary histor and wargames will enjoy the detailed battle descriptions, and lovers of historical fiction will find this rich and rewarding.

Pearl says

My second time reading this novel. MacBeth, the deep -thinking, patriotic grandson of the king, placed up against his scheming cousin, forced into deadly combat and thereafter to rule with an uneasy peace alongside his viking half-brother. And the fateful moment when Birnam Wood comes to Dunisnane is beautifully handled. Nigel Tranter was always the master of the novelisation of Scottish history. He never disappoints.

Marquise says

Completely different to Shakespeare's rendition, and a very amenable read all round. Macbeth is a sympathetic character here, and tragic by the end, which follows one of the elements of the prophecy in Shakespeare's rendition with a more realistic explanation that sounded plausible to me.

This was definitely much better than Dunnett's awfully sluggish novel, too. Macbeth is a good king, and I liked his relationship with the two most important people in his life: his wife Gruoch (who's nothing like the infamous Lady Macbeth), and his half-brother Thorfinn Sigurdsson, a loud and boisterous but loyal Viking earl. The history of the time is presented in a way that doesn't overwhelm the reader, and it never gets slow because you get just the amount of information you need.

Overall, it's been a nice three and a half stars read. I only wish I were more interested in the time period and place as to have enjoyed this even more.
