

A newly identified Scottish Boethius manuscript

Rethinking Scotland's intellectual and literary culture in the Middle Ages

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Dr Kylie Murray, shown here at Kelso Abbey, is a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Oxford. Her research project is on 'Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* in Scotland, c.1120-c.1570'.

The *Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius (c.480-524 AD) was pivotal in the formation of Western intellectual and literary culture, and second in influence only to the Bible. A repository of information on classical history, myth, the natural world, and the human psyche, this work's legacy endured across medieval and early-modern Europe in myriad forms and languages. Its interrogation of free-will, fate, and mankind's place in the world, most acutely focused by its allegorical imagery of the wheel of fortune, was staple reading material for kings, academics, clerics, and poets, and came to underpin medieval university curricula. Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, authors of the French love-vision, the *Roman de la Rose* (c.1225-75), were acquainted with the *Consolation*, and Dante read and reflected upon the *Consolation* in 14th-century Italy. Chaucer translated the *Consolation* into English in the late-14th century, as did John Walton, a near contemporary in the early 15th. Scotland, however, has been almost entirely omitted from considerations of Boethius's European reception. The few existing studies assume that it was primarily from the 15th century onwards that Boethius's work reached Scotland, and predominantly through an English Chaucerian filter.

A 12th-century manuscript

Yet the manuscript evidence of Boethian works with Scottish connections reveals a radically different narra-

tive. The 16 Latin manuscript and printed copies of Boethius' work that I have identified as Scottish, either through their place of production or through their readers, tell us that it is not Chaucer, or even English copies of the text which are most influential in Scotland, but Latin ones – which reveal Scotland's lively engagement with European intellectual culture. They span the entire period c.1120-c.1570, and strongly suggest that Boethius's writing had a Scottish presence from the time when Scotland's literary culture as we now know it first began to emerge and develop. Indeed, rather than the 15th century, it is to the 12th century that we must turn in considering Scotland's earliest surviving response to Boethius. This article discusses the earliest Scottish Boethius manuscript yet identified, from the first half of the 12th century.¹

The Glasgow Boethius Manuscript (Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 279) is an almost complete copy of Boethius's *Consolation*, dating to c.1120-40 on the grounds of stylistic features of its script. It was donated to Glasgow University in 1807 by the distinguished obstetrician William Hunter (1718-83), who purchased it at auction in London in 1771. Its origins and place of production, however, have remained unresolved for centuries. Its only apparent indication of provenance is a Latin annotation on f.20r, 'David dei gracia rex Scotorum' ('David, by the grace of God, king of the Scots'; Figure 1). Despite this reference to a Scottish monarch – presumably David I (1124-53), rather than David II (1329-71) – scholars have almost unanimously ascribed a Durham provenance to this volume. This ascription has arisen principally because of a dearth of surviving Scottish literary manuscripts: there are only around a dozen 12th-century Scottish manuscripts currently in existence. Durham, by contrast, was prolific in its book production, and has hundreds of manuscript survivals.

1. Fuller discussion of this manuscript can be found in my forthcoming (autumn 2015) peer-reviewed article, 'Books Beyond the Borders: Fresh Findings on Boethius' Transmission in Earlier Medieval Scotland', *Medievalia et Humanistica*. This article discusses the three 12th-century Boethius manuscripts I have newly identified with Scottish provenance.

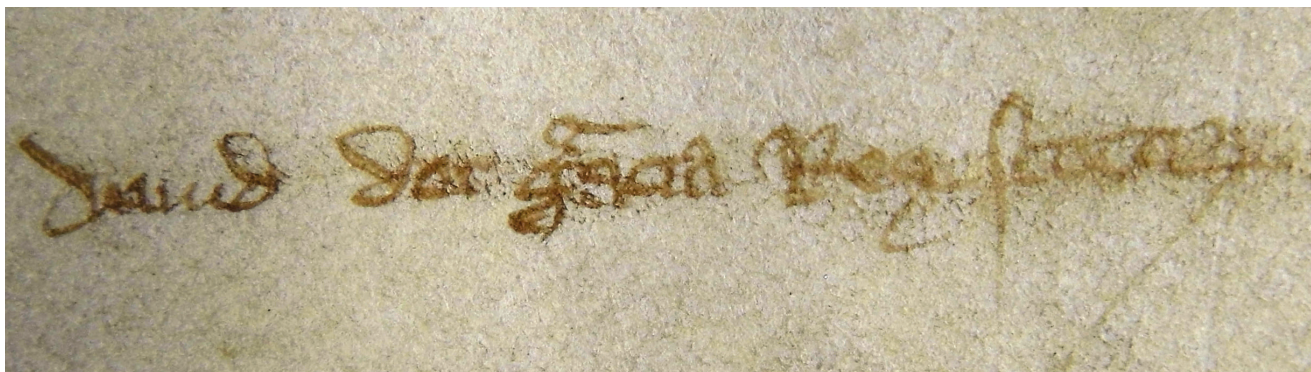


Figure 1
Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 279, f.20r detail. Reproduced with permission of Glasgow University Library.

Durham and the Anglo-Scottish border

Durham has been a plausible supposition, given the numerous cultural and historical connections between Durham and Scotland during the earlier Middle Ages, when the Anglo-Scottish border was more of a link than a division. These could explain how a northern English book might contain annotations relating to Scotland. For example, David I of Scotland had sought to gain Durham as part of his 'Scoto-Northumbrian' realm during the 1130s, and his mother Queen Margaret's confessor, Turgot, was a former Prior of Durham. Durham's patron saint, Cuthbert, was said by Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica* to be a Scot, who entered the monastic life at Old Melrose. The opening sentence of the *Melrose Chronicle*, a product of Scotland's earliest Cistercian community, founded by David I in 1136, describes Bede as 'decus et Gloria nostre gentis' ('the honour and glory of our people'), thus identifying as English, not Scottish. In a similar gesture, Adam of Dryburgh, writing just a few miles away, describes himself as being 'in terra Anglorum, et in regno Scotorum' ('in the land of England and in the kingdom of the Scots'). English territory and Scottish kingdom coalesced relatively peacefully in this period: Scottishness was less absolute and more inclusive as a result of more porous borders, not only for the Canmore dynasty or writers mentioned above, but the wider monastic and magnate communities.

Yet, interrogating afresh the question of a Scottish identity for this manuscript presents an exciting possibility. The lack of comparable Scottish literary manuscripts need not mean that this manuscript cannot be a product of the Scottish kingdom. In fact, there is rather more evidence *against* a Durham provenance than *for* it. Its script cannot be matched with the work of any known Durham scribe,² and it is more likely that an annotation about David I was made by a reader within the Scottish kingdom. Indeed, further interrogation into the origins of this manuscript, and the milieu surrounding its production, suggests that this Boethius manuscript is the earliest extant illuminated non-biblical manuscript from Scotland.

2. I am very grateful to Professor Richard Gameson for drawing this point to my attention.

King David of Scotland

Aside from implying a Scottish reader, the annotation on f.20r – 'David dei gracia rex Scotorum' – is also indicative of a particularly intelligent Scottish response to the main text, since it praises Scotland's king, and acknowledges Scotland's place in the world, alongside a juncture in the *Consolation* where Philosophy discusses world geography and the distinctions between nations:

*Consider also that in this little habitable enclosure there live many nations, different in language and customs and in their whole ways of life; because of the difficulties of travel, and differences of language, and the rarity of trading contacts, the fame not merely of individual men but even of cities cannot reach them all.*³

The penmanship and the letter formations of the annotation could suggest a later 13th- or 14th-century script. If so, it is not impossible that it could be a reference to David II (1329-71). Yet, whether it refers to David I or David II, the annotation is still almost certainly a response from a Scottish reader of Boethius who pre-dated the 15th century, thus dispelling the standard scholarly narrative that Boethius's transmission in Scotland began as a result of Chaucer's English translation.

David I remains the most likely subject of the annotation, especially given the contexts informing 12th-century manuscript culture. Books of this period were usually monastic productions, and David's reign has persistently been defined by his religious devotion, apparent particularly in his numerous and generous monastic foundations, which ranged from the Tironensian community at Selkirk in 1113, to the Cluniacs on the Isle of May in 1153. Indeed, I would argue that the most plausible and likely origin for the manuscript and its annotation are a monastic house founded by David. These monastic houses provided scribes for David's

3. 'Adde quod hoc ipsum brevis habitaculi septum plures incolunt nationes lingua, moribus, totius vitae ratione distantes. Ad quas tum difficultate itinerum tum loquendi diversitate tum commercii insolentia non modo fama hominum singulorum sed ne urbium quidem pervenire queat.' Quotation and translation taken from Hugh Stewart, Edward Rand and S. Jim Tester (eds), *Boethius: The Theological Tractates, De Consolatione Philosophiae* (London and Cambridge, MA, 1973).



Figure 2
Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 279, f.54v detail: inhabited initial 'D', opening Book V. Reproduced with permission of Glasgow University Library.



Figure 3
Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 279, f.45v detail. Reproduced with permission of Glasgow University Library.

charters: with over 200 surviving, these are the most prolific textual productions of the period. But those same scribes would also have copied literary works for David. Moreover, the legend ‘David dei gracia rex Scotorum’, is one of two principal forms of royal style used to open David I’s charters throughout his reign. The form ‘dei gratia’, identical to the Boethius annotation, occurs in 26 of David I’s charters dating from 1124 to 1151, with seven instances of the phrase appearing in the virtually unabbreviated form seen in the Boethius manuscript.

Decoration and visual clues

The manuscript’s decoration further supports a Scottish provenance, by distinguishing it from Boethius texts produced in England – as two key examples demonstrate. The only remaining illustrated initial from the entire manuscript is the inhabited letter ‘D’ opening book five (f.54v; Figure 2), which departs significantly from the letter decoration we see in northern English, particularly Durham manuscripts, where a distinctive ‘clove curl’ form is thought to have originated during the early to mid-12th century.⁴ There is a gesture towards the tendril and clove curl design in the bottom of the decorated initial,

beside the lion’s feet, but the prominence of animal forms is a clear contrast with the Durham style. Although our manuscript does not match either Durham’s script or decoration, Durham could still remain an influence, or a point of departure, rather than a provenance. A visual portrayal of animals also rules out a provenance for the manuscript in a Cistercian monastic house, since these were instructed by the order’s headquarters, the General Chapter at Cîteaux, to exclude figures of humans or animals in their book decoration.

A more compelling case for origins in the Scottish kingdom is the codex’s most elaborate and sophisticated miniature, immediately following Book IV, metrum 3, on f.45v (Figure 3). Thought to be unique among all existing Boethius manuscripts, it portrays Odysseus’ men metamorphosing into beasts, watched by Odysseus and his winged guide, Hermes. This pictorial and textual interpolation is a scientific commentary, discussing the physical properties of bodies. For this commentator, the metamorphosis portrayed in the image, and the story of Circe is not a literary or imaginative phenomenon, but

4. I am once more indebted to Professor Gameson for discussion about the ‘clove curl’ and Durham manuscripts. For a detailed study, see Anne Lawrence-Mathers, *Manuscripts in Northumbria in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Woodbridge, 2003).



Figure 4
Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland, MS Dep.255, Kelso Charter (1159), detail.
Reproduced with permission of the National Library of Scotland and Duke of Roxburghe.

a physiological one, exemplified by the consumption of food by animals, and by the digestion of plants which they discuss at length. Such a scientific focus suggests that the book's origins lie with a Scottish community involving both monastic and scholastic traditions.

Textual and visual culture at Kelso

The most likely place of production, I would argue, is the Tironensian Abbey of Kelso, in the Scottish borders, the Scottish monastic house most famed for its library, scribes, educational influence, and royal connections. According to the 13th-century book survey, the *Registrum Anglie*, only Melrose Abbey contained more books, with 102 volumes, compared to Kelso's 96. Although no Boethius manuscript is listed, nor is the only surviving manuscript with a Kelso note of provenance, the copy of Augustine, *Sermones de uerbis Domini et apostoli* (now Trinity College Dublin, MS 226).

Rather, it is to the charter culture associated with Kelso that we must turn for particularly arresting evidence. Some of the best charters of David I and his grandsons were produced here, and the most celebrated, a charter from 1159, features an illumination which constitutes the earliest conclusively Scottish non-biblical figure drawing to survive (Figure 4). David I and his grandson, Malcolm IV (1154-65) are the subjects of this miniature, which pre-dates any English or French

charter illumination by at least a century. The royal figures and Romanesque beasts which form the letter 'M' of 'Malcolonus' bear a far stronger resemblance to Glasgow's Odysseus miniature than any Durham work I have seen. I would argue for a resemblance between the figure of David I in the Kelso Charter, and Odysseus in the Glasgow Boethius miniature, with stylistic affinities between their long narrow faces, particularly the execution of their eyes, hair, and hands. There are also parallels in the detail of the carefully executed drapery of both figures. The figures are not identical, and it is unlikely that they are by the same artist, as the Boethius manuscript predates the Kelso charter by up to 40 years. Yet it remains distinctly possible that they are products of the same monastic scriptorium or community. If the Glasgow Boethius does originate with Kelso, then the Odysseus miniature can be understood afresh as the earliest extant non-biblical illumination from Scotland to portray human figures.

Kelso's broader artistic milieu aligns well with the Glasgow Boethius MS. In marked contrast to the Cistercians, the Tironensians were an order particularly famed for their interest in art, illustration and decoration, as can also be seen in the Romanesque animal figures portrayed in Kelso's architecture. Even Kelso's daughter-house at Lesmahagow, founded in 1144, which had no recorded scriptorium, produced a Missal (now NLS MS 16495, c.1200-30), decorated extensively and colourfully, although in a much more rudimentary fashion than the

Kelso charter or Glasgow Boethius MS. Nonetheless, if such a minor foundation maintained an abiding interest in manuscript production and decoration, what sort of literary manuscript could be produced by Kelso, ‘the richest and in many ways the most influential of medieval Scots religious houses’?⁵

Kelso’s historical and cultural significance further bolsters its credibility as a compelling provenance. The Tironensian foundation at Selkirk (1113) – which David moved to Kelso in 1128 – was not only David’s first monastic foundation, but also had wider national and even European significance as ‘the earliest settlement anywhere in Britain of any of the communities of “reformed” Benedictines [...] This first crossing of the Channel by any of the “new orders” is in itself a memorable fact of British monastic history.’⁶ Very unusually, and in sharp contrast to the Cistercian filiation network, no Scottish Tironensian house was affiliated with an English one. Instead, the Selkirk/Kelso monks had come directly from Tiron in France. This has significant implications for the Glasgow Boethius MS, which has only been considered in relation to English, specifically Durham, contexts.

Roxburgh and education

Kelso’s nexus of influence between Durham, the diocese of Glasgow, and David I, is equally applicable to the Glasgow Boethius MS. The transition from Selkirk to Kelso placed the Tironensian monks much nearer David’s main royal residence at Roxburgh, and they were his preferred monastic community. David’s interest in the Tironensians had been long standing: his tutor and chaplain, John, was probably Tironensian, and initially persuaded David to introduce the order to Scotland. David’s interest persisted throughout his reign: a year before he himself died, David buried his son Henry at Kelso, rather than Dunfermline. Tweeddale and Teviotdale, where Kelso and Roxburgh are located, had been under Durham’s jurisdiction, but David I later made them part of the bishopric of Glasgow.

The documentary evidence of Roxburgh as a centre of learning, in addition to its status as royal capital and location of David’s court, also resonates closely with the Glasgow Boethius. David I’s confirmation charter to Kelso Abbey (1147×52) makes references to ‘omnes ecclesias et scholas eiusdem burgii’,⁷ and Kelso is known to have patronised schools at Roxburgh, as well as having its own almonry school. Schools were not, of course, unusual, although evidence of them in this early period remains shadowy. Kelso and Roxburgh’s learning community, however, reveals how the emergence of literary and intellectual culture here made a contribution of national and European significance.

5. G.W.S. Barrow, *Kingship and Unity: Scotland 1000-1306* (Edinburgh, 1988), p. 91.

6. G.W.S. Barrow, *The Kingdom of the Scots: Government, Church, and Society from the Eleventh to Fourteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 2003), p. 177.

7. Aelred Squire, ‘Aelred and David I’, *Collectanea Cisterciensia*, 22 (1960), 356-377 at 357. For a transcription, G.W.S. Barrow (ed.), *Charters of David I* (Woodbridge, 1999), no. 183 (p. 143).

Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-67), the leading European intellectual, is thought to have been educated at Roxburgh in the earlier 12th century, before becoming abbot of Rievaulx. Indeed, it is thought that Roxburgh, where he was tutored alongside David I, is where he developed an interest in Cicero’s *De Amicitia*, a text which influenced him profoundly in developing his celebrated cult of friendship. By a curious and fascinating coincidence, the Glasgow Boethius was originally bound with a copy of Cicero’s *De Amicitia* (now Glasgow, University Library, MS Hunter MS 278), copied in the same hand as the main *Consolation*. It appears to have preceded Boethius in the original manuscript arrangement, and, as an early inscription tells us,⁸ the codex contained a third text (now Hunter MS 280), a commentary on Martianus Capella’s *Satyricon* (also known as *The Marriage of Mercury and Philology*), called by its most recent editors ‘perhaps the most widely used schoolbook of the Middle Ages.’⁹ The form and manuscript arrangement of these three Hunter texts in one volume, or codex, points clearly to a monastic and educational setting.¹⁰ These manuscripts could, for the first time, provide contemporaneous material evidence of the sorts of ways in which Aelred encountered Cicero as part of his early studies. Aelred of Rievaulx’s eulogy to David I, the *Vita Davidis Scotorum Regis*, has been described as a ‘speculum of kingship’ by Joanna Huntington.¹¹ This work, produced by a figure connected with Scotland’s earliest Boethian text, can be read as the earliest example of the *speculum principis* (‘mirror for princes’) advisory mode which became the defining feature of late-medieval Scottish literature.

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Boethius’ earliest Scottish reception encourages us to rethink Scotland’s literary and intellectual cultures. The Glasgow MS overturns prevailing scholarly views by showing that Boethius was read in Scotland around 300 years earlier than previously thought. As the product of a vibrant, sophisticated, and colourful cultural moment, the manuscript shows that exciting discoveries about earlier Medieval Scotland continue to be made.

Dr Kylie Murray and Dr Daniel Lee (a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow 2012-15) are among 10 academics to have been selected as ‘New Generation Thinkers 2015’ by BBC Radio 3 and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). The New Generation Thinkers scheme identifies academics at an early stage of their career who are passionate about communicating modern scholarship to a wider audience.

8. ‘In hoc volumine continentur Tullius de Amicitia . cum glosis . Boethius de consolacione philosophie / Martianus...’ (‘In this volume is contained Cicero’s On Friendship, with gloss. Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy. And Martianus...’)

9. Evan L. Burge, Richard Johnson, and William H. Stahl (eds), *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts* (New York, 1971-7), p. 22.

10. Intriguingly, the earliest named provenance for the original codex of three texts is a sixteenth-century Scottish reader from Fife, who inscribes the first leaf ‘P Junio / D.D. hunc librum nobilis cum primis / et humanus vir D. à Rossyth / 1570’.

11. Joanna Huntington, ‘David of Scotland: Vir Tam Necessarius Mundo’, in Stephen Boardman, John Davies, and Eila Williamson (eds), *Saints’ Cults in the Celtic World* (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 130-145 at 145.