In the last decade of the twentieth century sustained interest in the growth and development of ‘collective’ or ‘national’ identities, national consciousness, origins of nationhood and the rise of nationalism has contributed to a growing corpus of literature emerging from academic disciplines. In Britain alone a voluminous and relatively well represented historiography highlighting aspects and constituents of national identities has continued to expand following Linda Colley’s path-breaking effort Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837 (New Haven, 1991). Between 1994 and 1998 the publication of Christopher Harvie’s Scotland and Nationalism. Scottish Society and Politics, 1707-1994 2nd edn. (London, 1994), a collection of essays edited by Dauvit Broun, R. J. Finlay and Michael Lynch entitled Image and Identity. The Making and Re-making of Scotland through the Ages (Edinburgh, 1997) and William Ferguson’s The Identity of the Scottish Nation: An Historic Quest, (Edinburgh, 1998) trumpeted a return to the question of non-British Scottish identities. While current events in Britain – most notably devolution – continue to play a role in shaping the historiography of Scotland and Britain, recent trends in British history also, to a large extent, colour how historians perceive the historical identities of the Scottish people. In particular, the popular core-periphery argument found in most British histories emphasising political and cultural divisions within Scotland prior to and following inclusive Union in 1707 suggest a lack of unifying factors which might indicate the presence of a separate Scottish national identity. More recently,
historians are engaged with an historically independent Celtic ‘crescent’ attempting to underscore the advances of the Gaelic communities of Britain, perhaps to an exaggerated extent, while refuting the early images of the barbarous Celt.

Keeping in line with this most recent trend is Dauvit Broun’s book, The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries (Woodbridge, 1999). Dr. Broun’s aim, at least in part, in writing this book is to offer an answer to the question posed by Sean Duffy in his article ‘The Bruce brothers and the Irish Sea world, 1306-1329’, published in CMCS 21 (1991), (55-86).

Starting from the premise that contemporaries perceived Alba and Eire to be separate countries and the Gaidil to be one people, Duffy asks whether the Gaidil Alban and the Gaidil Eren were one nation or two? (Broun, 3, Duffy, 53). Broun seeks his answer to this question through careful analysis of the royal genealogy of the Scottish monarchy and through examination of origin myths located in both Scottish and Irish sources. While acknowledging the ‘critical’ shortage of evidentiary source materials to support his claims (5), Broun maintains that Scottish men of letters in the twelfth and thirteenth century looked to Ireland as the homeland of the Scoti and the source of identity for the Scottish people. Addressing first the difficult question of terminology, Dr. Broun stresses the value of using terms such as ‘gaidil and Scoti ‘‘natio and gens’’ rather than offer negligible translations which might obfuscate the ‘original’ meanings (7). While the rationale behind this usage stems from a desire to put forth a past-centred analysis of contemporary thought, Dr. Broun’s argument against using the ‘cultural’ terms Irish or Gael as equivalents to Gaidil or translating the Latin Scoti as ‘Scot’ suggests a present-centredness hesitant to acknowledge anything which would strengthen alternative claims to his own. ‘Thus in Ireland the use of ‘Gaelic’ rather than Irish can seem like an attempt to deny national status, while in Scotland the use of ‘Gaelic’ rather than ‘Irish’ (Scots Erse) serves to affirm a native affinity with Scotland’ (7). Dr. Broun stringently reminds the reader ‘to take our minds out of our own times and discard the often painful memories and powerful emotions which are stirred by the choice between using or not using national and cultural
names (7).' However, from what the book both contains and omits it is uncertain for whom Dr. Broun intends this book. What is clear is that the reader will require a proficiency in reading medieval Latin as significant portions of this book are reprinted excerpts from the fourteenth-century Scottish chronicle Chronica Gentis Scottorum and other contemporary literature. The reader should also have a strong background in the theory of nationhood and national identities as The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots contains little or no discussion of the complexities, contradictions and general assumptions associated with such studies. Unfortunately, the debate over medieval nationhood and the problematic nature of early identities, discussed by Broun elsewhere, is clearly missing from this book. Even more problematic, thorough and insightful discussion of a Scottish or Irish identity of the kingdom of the Scots is absent and sorely missed in this study, especially ironic given the book's title.

What remains is a substantive and largely valuable analysis and discussion of origin myths contemporary to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and a re-examination of king-lists taken from Scottish, Irish and Pictish sources, to use such cultural names. Chapters two through five offer a new study of John of Fordun's Chronicle of the Scottish People; however, only the first part of Fordun's chronicle dealing with the origins of the Scoti as they journeyed from Egypt to what is now the west coast of Scotland via Spain and Ireland is under consideration. As Broun states, 'a discussion of the account of Scottish origins in John of Fordun's Chronica Gentis Scottorum' is 'the keystone of the book' (6). As critical chronicle analysis is perhaps one of the largest voids existing in Scottish historiography, this book is a welcome addition to the discipline. Broun's acumen for textual archaeology shines throughout this book as he examines various sections of Fordun, attempts to place it within the context of other contemporary literature, and provides the reader with a thoughtful reading of the existing origin myths in both Fordun as well as the Irish text Lebor Gabala and Sir Thomas Grey of Heton's Scalacronica begun c. 1355. Although by the very nature of the topic a slow and often arduous read, the sections of the book devoted to chronicle analysis is not for the non-expert. While
this in no way undermines Broun’s contribution to the study of early Scottish and Irish chronicles, it does limit the audience. Apart from the large sections of non-translated Latin excerpts, the technical analysis of the extant manuscripts between pages 16 and 132 is often tedious and not very user friendly. What is most disappointing, however, is the book’s failure to convincingly show a correlation between the Scoti’s early connections to Ireland and how contemporaries perceived the identity of the kingdom of the Scots in the twelfth and thirteenth century. In what appears to be a disclaimer, Dr. Broun reveals his own uncertainty about the arguments he puts forth:

The book’s focus on the kingdom’s Irish identity should not obscure the possibility that the kingdom had other identities that served other functions. Also, it should be emphasised that the historiographical texts with which this study is concerned can only be safely regarded as a direct witness to currents of opinion among men of letters. The extent to which such currents of opinion were shared by the elite in general in the kingdom’s heartlands (never mind the population at large) depends on the nature of the relationship which men of letters had with their social peers and with other sectors of society. It is possible to envisage men of letters as not only reflecting some of the aspirations and assumptions of their age but also, to an unquantifiable degree, as opinion-formers as well (10).

Despite this, Dr. Broun frequently reiterates that an Irish identity was thriving in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century kingdom of the Scots. Broun’s argument follows two basic premises: first, the Scoti, as presented in origin myths contained in early chronicle sources, were an offshoot of the Irish, leaving Ireland and arriving in Western Scotland in the fifth century; and second, that the inclusion by Scottish men of letters in the twelfth and thirteenth century of Irish kings in Scottish king-lists and in the royal genealogy affirms an Irish identity of the medieval
kingdom of the Scots. After making a case for the strengths and weaknesses of various extant manuscripts of Fordun (16-32) – the most useful being his argument against using MSS C, E, F, G, and S when they can alter meanings of words, when the acceptance or negation of words are at stake, or when there is a difference in the spelling of a word (especially proper nouns) (31) – Broun focuses in on edited, but untranslated, extracts of the accounts of Gaedel leaving Greece, marrying the eponymous Scotia daughter of Pharoah, his departure from Egypt and arrival in Spain and the ensuing exodus of the Scoti to Ireland under four different possible leaders, including both Eber and Partholón, respectively the son and ‘descendant’ of Gaedel (33-62). Although Broun’s analysis and discussion of the various chronicle extracts is useful for helping us better understand early Scottish and Irish origin legends, he is unable to draw a strong connection between these origin legends and an identity of the kingdom of the Scots. Instead, he rather haphazardly states, in a manner often disjointed from the preceding discussion, that because Scottish men of letters included in their writings the origins of the Scoti in Ireland they considered themselves offshoots of the Irish and perceived the identity of the kingdom of the Scots to be Irish. Ambiguity arises, however, out of Dr. Broun’s use of the word ‘current’ in reference to the homeland of the Scoti, as on page 63 where he states that ‘in this chapter it will be shown that in one of these accounts Ireland was emphatically portrayed as the current homeland of the Scoti.’

Again on page 78, following a lengthy discussion on the exodus of the Scoti out of Egypt into Spain and their arrival in Ireland, Broun states that ‘the central idea in the narrative of each account is based on Ireland as the current homeland of the Scoti.’ However, at no point during the analysis of these origin legends does Broun offer a definition of ‘current’ in the context in which he frequently employs the word. This he tries to remedy, but confuses further, on the top of page 83 when he writes: ‘The identification of Ireland as the perpetual (i.e. current) homeland of Scoti by the author of the ‘Partholón’ account raises the possibility that the kingdom’s Irish identity was current after the mid-twelfth century when Gaelic was in retreat in the kingdom’s
hearlands as a language of status and literacy.' The reader must assume the distinction made that Ireland, as the homeland of the Scoti, was 'perpetual' which Broun defines as 'current,' and conversely that an Irish identity was ‘current after’ the middle of the twelfth century implying that it was something contemporary and not perpetual. No other explanation is offered by Broun to show that this was an understood contemporary distinction. Moreover, the only reference made to Ireland as a perpetual holding is in the statement taken from extract XXI.2 of Fordun that Partholón held Ireland ‘in perpetuam sibi possessionem optinuit – as a perpetual possession for himself’ (66). Broun does not present any other evidence to indicate that twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scots perceived Ireland to be their ‘perpetual’ homeland. The only argument given is that Scottish men of letters included the account of Partholón in their origin myths and represented the first Scoti to settle in what is now western Scotland as being Irish.

As a means of leading into his discussion of Scottish king-lists, Broun emphasises the link between the Stone of Scone and Ireland (110), highlights the arrival of Fergus mac Ferchar from Ireland and his Irish roots, and stresses the connection made by Scottish writers between the Scottish monarchy and Ireland (110-131). Unfortunately, Broun fails to acknowledge the alternative argument that reveals a competing discourse of imperialism and propaganda between the Scottish and English literati focused on extending the antiquity and dignity of their respective kingdoms. Identifying Fergus mac Ferchar’s Irish roots, revealing the original transportation of the Stone of Scone from Ireland to Scotland and re-evaluating the exodus of the Scoti from Ireland, all of which took place before the end of the fifth century CE, does not further our understanding of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scottish identities. This sort of reasoning should find an Iberian identity as readily as an Irish identity for the kingdom of the Scots during the same period. The importance to twelfth- and thirteenth-century political discourse of lengthening the existence of a people and their ‘unbroken’ lineal monarchical succession, to borrow sentiment from the Declaration of Arbroath, regardless of their geographical location was at the fore of early identities. Broun does on occasion hint at the importance of written and spoken
Gaelic language and culture in fostering a shared sense of identity with Ireland. Unfortunately, Broun glosses over these constituents, burying them between his analysis of non-Gaelic literature such as Fordun and Grey and Irish works such as the Lebor Gabala and his stating of the largely unfounded claim that the history of early associations between Ireland and the Scoti found in Scottish chronicles represents an attempt by Scottish men of letters to bolster the Irish identity of the kingdom of the Scots.

Dr. Broun continues with this line of argument in his analysis of Scottish king-lists. Using the pioneering work of Marjorie Anderson as a starting point, Broun’s examination of the royal genealogy begins to diverge from Anderson in his attempt to emphasise, as a means of identifying a regnal identity, that ‘the royal genealogy would, in particular, have proclaimed the Scottish king’s descent from kings in Ireland in the deep past’ (189). This point Broun makes explicit on page 133 when he states, ‘in order to assess the role of Irish identity in the legitimation of the kingship it is necessary to examine to what extent, if at all, king-lists were used as a way of endowing the kingship with an authenticating ancient past.’ Between pages 133 and 136, Broun attempts to identify the origins of ‘Marjorie Anderson’s X-group of regnal lists’ and ‘Anderson’s y-group of regnal lists beginning with Cinaed mac Alpin’ as a means of showing the connection between when they were created and their originators being influenced by the desire to reflect a strong connection between the Scottish kingship and Ireland. While Broun offers little new, other than the Irish emphasis, in his analysis of Scottish king-lists, the break in his reasoning that occurs between pages 136-137 undermines his thesis. In his analysis of Anderson’s regnal list I (136) Broun suggests that the author offered ‘improvements’ on the exemplar he worked with by ‘rearranging it so that the Pictish list rather than the Dal Riata list came first.’ Rather than using this example to build on the argument that he had already put forth, namely that ‘king-lists were used as a way of endowing the kingship with an authenticating ancient past’ specifically for the purpose of extending the length of monarchical succession in order to enhance the dignity of the kingdom, the inclusion of the
Pictish list is left without discussion. This is an especially notable omission given Broun’s belief that the inclusion of Irish kings in Scottish king-lists was an indication of Scottish men of letters looking ‘to Ireland for the legitimating ancient history of their kingship’ (192). Again we need to ask whether Fergus mac Ferchar’s Irish ethnicity endowed twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scotland with an Irish identity? Seemingly convinced that this was the case, Broun argues that ‘an important aspect of the argument which can be advanced for the continuing vitality of Irish identity vis-à-vis the Scottish kingship is that the royal genealogy remained a significant element in defining kingship throughout most of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries’ (174-175). This Broun confirms on page 187: ‘the author of the Gesta Annalia gives a striking affirmation of Alexander III’s Irish identity when he stated that the ‘first Scot’ was the son of Gaedel and Scota who, according to the synthesis used by Fordun in his chronicle, was the first Scotus to colonise Ireland.’ In a day when historians readily refute the mythical origins of the Britons articulated by Geoffrey of Monmouth as attempts by medieval English imperialists to politicise the ethnic origins of the Welsh, Scots and English, it is a wonder that Dauvit Broun can be so readily persuaded by similar sources to identify the collective identity of twelfth- and thirteenth-century Scotland so closely with Ireland, especially when other elements such as Gaelic culture, language, and religion would perhaps better support his case. The fact that Broun chose to ignore the multiplicity of identities and the awareness of distinct cultures and regional identities articulated in Fordun reveals how narrow this evaluation is of the identity of the kingdom of the Scots in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

This is not Dr. Broun’s first foray into the complex, highly theoretical, largely over-analysed realm of nationhood and identities. Indeed, Dr. Broun has contributed essays on the subject of early Scottish national consciousness to the journal History Today (‘When did Scotland become Scotland,’ Vol. 46, No. 10, 1996), to a collection of essays edited by C. Bjorn, A. Grant and K. Stringer, Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past (Copenhagen, 1994), and to the volume of essays, Image and Identity (Edinburgh, 1998). And upon glancing at the bibliography
appended to the end of his latest work, The Irish Identity, it is evident that Dr. Broun has much more to say about this subject. What remains to be determined is whether or not the continuation of this trend of privileging certain constituents of an identity at the expense of others, or far worse as a means of diminishing the impact of others, is in any way conducive to reaching a firmer understanding of national identities. Responsibility for this tendency of course should not be laid entirely at the feet of Dr. Broun. As it stands, The Irish Identity of the Kingdom of the Scots in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries offers valuable insight into the development of early chronicles of the Scottish kingdom and provides a starting point to bridge the expansive gap in Scottish historiography caused by a lack of chronicle studies within the discipline. However, this book falls short in convincing readers that an overarching Irish identity was present in the kingdom of the Scots in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Instead, it leaves the lasting impression on the reader that two separate book projects were combined here to meet one objective.

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