Review


This collection is dedicated to a seminal female Scottish historian, Jenny Wormald, who boldly broke the boundaries between medieval and early modern by straddling the mid-fifteenth to early-seventeenth century in her work. This trail, which many still shy away from pursuing, is one which this volume pursues by drawing upon the expertise of a chorus of prominent voices in Scottish history from across three centuries.

The volume opens with a double introduction: Boardman and Goodare outline the purpose and content, and former student Keith M. Brown gives a thorough exposition of Wormald’s career and impact. Both emphasise the key areas where Wormald’s impact can be found: kinship and feud; the importance of bonds; reinterpretation of Scottish nobles and Stewart monarchs; the “tone and colour of Renaissance Scotland” (p. 19); and a reassessment of James VI and I. The main body of the work is split into two parts – “Lords and Men” and “Kings and Lords” – and these themes run across both sections.

Boardman opens part one by discussing the kinship networks of Margaret Stewart, countess of Mar and Angus (c.1354–c.1418), casting much needed attention on female bastions of noble power in Scotland. This section also includes Mark Godfrey’s critical analysis and reassessment of ‘the justice of the feud’ (p. 142) – a term coined by Wormald – in the light of subsequent research. While the “Kings and Lords” section considers bloodfeud, and granting of remissions, Alexander Grant places the Scottish situation in the context both of medieval Europe and the modern wider world (including an opening comparison with Saudi Arabia) in a fascinating comparative essay.

The subject of bonds is addressed in part one by Jane Dawson, who considers the development of religious bonds from
mid-sixteenth-century protective bonds, akin to traditional bonds of maintenance, to the National Covenant of 1638. Anna Groundwater assesses the crossover found between private bonds of obligation and public justice through the central case study of Sir Walter Scott of Buccleuch in the years surrounding 1603. Bonds also feature in part two. Michael Brown offers a reassessment of the “Lanark Bond” (1453) and the “appoyntemente” (1452) to place these misunderstood arrangements in the tradition of the wider culture of bonding between the crown and nobles in the fifteenth century. Furthermore, Goodare analyses the oft brushed aside “Ainslie Bond” (1567) between the earl of Bothwell and members of the Scottish political elite, presenting the evidence of signatories drawn from the various manuscript copies of the bond and parliament attendance in useful tables to support his discussion.

Christine Carpenter and Hector MacQueen reassess relations between “overmighty” nobles and “weak” kings in part one; the former offers a comparative essay on bastard feudalism in fourteenth-century England and the latter discusses the justiciars of Scotland from c.1306 to 1513 (including a useful appendix recording all known Scottish justiciars). In part two Roger Mason discusses Scotland’s conciliar development and constitutional identity from the Declaration of Arbroath to George Buchanan, and what these suggest about relationships between kings and nobles, the “right to resist” and “public consent”.

Mason emphasises the influence of continental European trends, as much as Scottish individualism, in this arena and thus the theme of a vibrant cultural development also features here. John Watt carries the cultural baton in an analysis of the work of English poet, John Skelton (c.1460–1529), particularly his opinions on the nobility. Alasdair A. Macdonald’s discussion of James III’s chapel of Restalrig, royal piety and Scottish Renaissance culture further extends Wormald’s emphasis on such developments being rooted firmly in the fifteenth century.

Felicity Heal and Jamie Reid-Baxter continue along a cultural vein, but the dominant focus is Anglo-Scottish relations in the sixteenth century and reassessments of James VI and I. Heal’s contribution looks at Anglo-Scottish gift-giving across the sixteenth century, forming a comparison between James IV and V, and James
VI (and to an extent Mary); whilst Reid-Baxter offers a new angle of reassessment of James as a Protestant crusader, specifically as seen through the poetry of Thomas Murray.

While offering much of interest, Reid-Baxter’s piece does seem over-populated with lengthy quotes at times (an appendix of essential poems might have been more reader friendly), and another noticeable issue occurs in Macdonald’s piece (fn. 4, p. 247) where it is stated that no Treasurer’s Accounts survive for the reign of James III. In comparison to the fuller records for James IV, those extant for James III are minimal (Aug 1473 – Dec 1474), but to suggest there are none seems misleading. Overall, however, there is little to fault other than minor details; such as inconsistencies in the italicisation of Latin translations in Reid-Baxter’s piece, and typos in the manuscript numbering on two of Goodare’s tables of information (pp. 307–309).

These small matters aside, this collection provides a veritable feast of exciting research developing many of the trails blazed by Wormald. In so doing, it achieves its aim of emphasising the inspirational nature of her vision and its resounding continuing impact on the study of Scottish history.

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