This book is ambitious to a fault. On one level, *The Matter of Scotland* is a detailed investigation into the nature of medieval Scottish historiography, particularly of the Wars of Independence. This investigation, however, inevitably provokes an ancillary discourse about the extent to which historiography, and perhaps specifically early Scottish historiography, becomes an act of commemoration. Goldstein thus recognizes, if not embraces, the interrelatedness of historical narrative and national mythology and literature. This recognition, however, provokes yet another theme: a running meditation over the extent to which historical writing becomes inevitably judged by the standards of modernity.

Goldstein declares the fundamental object of his inquiry to be the "formation of the Scottish state and its struggle for preservation and self definition." Simultaneously, he is interested in the manner by which this formation was recorded and ultimately, the role such a narrative subsequently played in the formation of what might broadly be designated as a national consciousness. In this view, *The Matter of Scotland* does not dwell upon the Wars of Independence as representing the "triumph of the Scottish monarchy, church and national community against the proimperialist ambitions of its stronger neighbours." Instead, the wars provide the material for an extended speculation about the "postmodern insistence that history is already constructed without ironically dismissing reality as an arbitrary fiction."

The work begins with a relatively straightforward presentation of the events of the late thirteenth century: Wallace, Bruce and Edward I. It proceeds to place these events into the context of what Goldstein refers to as the "war of historiography." Indeed, he is able to suggest that Edward’s attempt to establish his claim
to Scottish suzerainty through an "appeal to history" neatly encapsulates the way in which historiography is both subjective and exploitable. In these chapters, as well as his subsequent treatment of John Fordun's Chronica Gentis Scotorum, Goldstein discerns the emergence of a distinctly Scottish character and ideology. His metaphysical approach allows him to juxtapose treaties and chronicles with such mythopoetical accounts as Fordun's, since neither can be presumed to be objective.

Traditional medieval romance countenances four great "matters": the matter of Greece (Troy), the matter of Rome (Caesar), the matter of France (Roland), and the matter of Britain (Arthur). These matters each hinged upon an act of betrayal. The existence of a Hebraic matter, involving the betrayal of Christ is never formally expressed, and if it were, it would be presumed blasphemous (and out of the realm of narrative romance). Goldstein is able to argue successfully that the proliferation of such literary treatments as Barbour's Bruce and Bower's Wallace in tandem with the various other parahistoric accounts and nationalistic manifestoes, constitute the equivalent of a "Matter of Scotland." The bulk of the book proceeds to juxtapose historical and literary analysis, largely in an attempt to get at the way literature is an "active process situated in historical struggles between those who ruled and those who were ruled." Goldstein thus appealingly blurs the distinction between literature and history.

Although recent events in scholarship and critical theory support Goldstein in his acknowledgment of subjectivity and mediation, such an endorsement of needs renders one's own text subject to the same limitations. Nonetheless, one of the achievements of The Matter of Scotland is that it imports the techniques of contemporary hermeneutics to medieval Scotland, a time arguably more ripe for these techniques despite its obscurity. Toward this point, Goldstein quotes Brian Stock: "The war of historiography provides an illuminating instance of how
the Middle Ages... ‘offer the moment in time in which texts become recognizable forces in historical development in Western Europe.’ "This leitmotif - with its continual references to Foucault, Bartes, Lacan, Marxian and feminist theory - can be a bit distracting, however.

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he Neolithic peoples which inhabited northern Scotland have left a variety of impressive monuments, the remnants of a once thriving culture. Yet much about their culture remains elusive. A.S. Henshall and J.N.G. Ritchie have gone far in extending our understanding of Scotland’s Neolithic peoples.

The Chambered Cairns of Sutherland is the third in a series of four works examining the chambered cairns of passage grave type in northern Scotland. The study of Sutherland’s chambered cairns represented an imposing task as only four cairns have been thoroughly excavated and many have been damaged or all but disappeared over time. This fact not only highlights the difficult task which confronted the authors, but also illustrates the necessity of such a study at the present time.

The book is divided into two separate sections. The first section, which forms most of the book, examines what the cairns tell us about the societies which erected and made use of them: the economic basis of these early farming communities, the cairns relationship to geology, soil type and the surrounding landscape. Further sub-sections examine, in detail, the various components
of the sites themselves: the passages, the cairns surrounding the chambers, the chambers and the deposits found within. Section two is an invaluable inventory of the cairns located in Sutherland.

The work begins with a valuable discussion of the development of the study of cairns. This not only provides an interesting introduction to the book, but places the study of the cairns in historical perspective, illustrating how interpretations have evolved over time and how new applications such as radio carbon dating have modified our understanding. To the present writer the following sub-section was of greatest interest. Here the authors examine the Neolithic environment and the relationship of the Cairns to the landscape in which they were located. The authors examine the topography, geology and soil composition of Sutherland and place the construction of the Cairns within the context of the Neolithic environment. In doing this the authors illustrate that the Cairns are clustered in distinct geographical regions with large tracts of land between them - suggesting that the structures can be used as indicators of Neolithic settlement patterns. Such an approach not only provides valuable insights into the purpose and function of the Cairns, but also demonstrates how new information may be brought to light through the application of different methods of examination.

The book is well illustrated, both with black and white photographs and detailed drawings. Excellent maps are also provided. The inventory will be particularly useful to anyone interested in visiting the sites as the cairns can be extremely difficult to interpret. However, the book's primary significance is that it provides an authoritative, readily accessible source for the chambered cairns of Sutherland. This work supplies an important piece to the puzzle of the Neolithic Age in northern Scotland, a puzzle much closer to being solved through the inclusion of this work alongside the other volumes in the series.

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