REVIEW


‘Scottish independence’ calls to mind images of Bruce, Wallace and the struggle of the Scots against Edward I and his successors, but the notion of an independent Scotland predates the Wars of Independence in expressions less dramatic than pitched battles or foundational documents such as the Declaration of Arbroath. Dauvit Broun investigates the articulations and ideas of Scotland as an independent kingdom, as well as Scotland’s place in Britain, prior to the death of Alexander III in 1286. In the process, he re-examines several widely-established conclusions about Scottish history between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. The sparse sources such as charters, chronicles, king lists, and hagiography shed light on this relatively unexplored period of Scottish history. The book, which contains both modified versions of several previously published articles and new material, is divided into four main parts; however, Broun is thorough in connecting the material to produce a unified study. The development of the idea of the king as the ultimate secular authority, and the production of a history of the Scottish kingship are two themes revisited throughout the book.

The first section examines the development of national histories, the transformation of the word Alba from meaning Britain to referring specifically to Scotland, and the place of the Pictish lineage in the development of Scottish regnal identity. Broun traces the production of texts narrating the continuous history of a kingdom by focusing on the
kingship itself and contrasts the development of the genre in England, Wales, and Ireland in the eleventh and twelfth centuries with its later emergence in Scotland in the fourteenth. He observes that Scottish kings were depicted as either successors of the Pictish or the Dal Riatan dynasties until the thirteenth century, when the lineages were combined to create a longer, more impressive regnal history. As mention of the Picts disappears from historical sources, at roughly the same time writers begin to use Alba to refer to Scotland in particular, it has long been assumed that this departure was the result of the Picts’ defeat by and subsequent merge with the Scots of Dal Riata. Broun, on the other hand, argues that the lack of references to the Picts indicates a change in language, not identity. The Pictish past continued to play a key role in the projection of a Scottish kingdom with a long and illustrious history.

Broun continues his study by arguing that Scottish independence was explicitly articulated and fought for in the ecclesiastical rather than the political arena, and that the papal bull securing the independence of the Scottish church was obtained by the efforts of a single man. Throughout the twelfth century, the Scottish church was caught in a battle for power between Canterbury and York, in which each see claimed supremacy over the Scottish dioceses. The Scottish bishops ignored papal instructions to acknowledge obedience to York. Broun posits that the first expression of an independent kingdom of Scotland was included in a text written in response to these papal orders: the longer version of the St. Andrews foundation legend. Eventually, Pope Alexander III issued a bull declaring that Scottish bishops were answerable only to Rome. Broun presents a strong case that the papal bull was the result of the efforts of Bishop Jocelin of Glasgow, who was primarily concerned with securing the independence of his own diocese, but provided the impetus for a wider escape from ecclesiastical obedience to England. It is fitting that the church served as the first stage for the expression of an independent kingdom, given how active Scottish bishops were in later struggles.
From the emergence of expressions of independence stemming from ecclesiastical circumstances, Broun next examines the first articulations of regnal sovereignty in Scotland. He joins R. R. Davies in arguing that, while not viewing themselves as subservient in a feudal sense, Scottish kings did not necessarily consider themselves equal to kings of England. During the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, this situation began to change, and Broun sees ‘the earliest extended expression of the claim that Scotland was a sovereign realm’ in Alexander III’s inauguration in 1249, when, among other innovations, the young king was enthroned in front of a standing cross to signify his divine authority. Through close analysis of language used in royal charters, he also traces the idea of the Scottish king as a sovereign authority. Independence and sovereignty are abstract concepts, and their articulation is not always exhibited in a straightforward way, but Broun mines lesser-known sources to offer compelling evidence for their development.

The last portion of the book is dedicated to an examination of the sources for John of Fordun’s *Chronicle of the Scottish Nation*, written in the last quarter of the fourteenth century and long considered the earliest continuous account of the kingdom’s history. Scholars now question this assumption, and Broun puts forward the idea that in compiling his text Fordun used a much more complete version of the chronicle known as *Gesta Annalia*, which, in turn, was based on an earlier, Scottish version of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s work. According to Broun, the Scottish version of Geoffrey of Monmouth can be equated with the chronicle by Veremundus, which was mentioned by historians in the sixteenth century and is not extant, but which Broun believes can be traced in Fordun. If Broun’s hypothesis is correct, it would mean a continuous history of the Scottish kingdom existed more than a century before Fordun’s *Chronicle*. What is especially interesting is that both the longer version of *Gesta Annalia* and Veremundus highlight Scotland’s freedom for the time of its origins, as well as embracing both the Pictish and Dal Riatan pasts.
In this book, Broun offers intriguing arguments challenging several well-established assumptions concerning Scottish history and opening the door to exciting prospects for further research. Throughout his study, he places Scottish history in its wider insular context, thus highlighting the parallels and divergences between Scotland and its neighbours. *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain* reminds readers that independence and sovereignty were important issues before the era of Bruce and Wallace and is an intriguing and illuminating addition to the scholarship on the central Middle Ages in Scotland.

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