Assessing Gender in the Construction of Scottish Identity, c. 1286-c. 1586.

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Abstract:

Drawing on insights from gender studies, postcolonial theory, and debates around nation and identity this thesis offers a new reading of selected medieval and sixteenth-century Scottish histories and literature and focuses on the intersection of gender and Scottish identity. Historical and theoretical scholarship has shown that power and identity formation are complicit in the construction of both gender and nation, yet are usually discussed as separate entities. Moreover, theorists of nation argue the concept of 'nation' is a modern construct that has no history prior to the late eighteenth century. Therefore, by ignoring the rigid periodisation given to the study of the nation and identity I demonstrate a Scottish identity existed between c. 1286 and c. 1586, one that was underpinned by gender ideologies. Scottish historians have recently acknowledged the paucity of writings on medieval and early modern Scottish national identity and culture from a gendered perspective. Using gender as a tool of historical analysis uncovers the multiple dimensions that make people and institutions what they are, giving them meaning. People and institutions are informed and guided by relationships of power and a gendered analysis provides a framework where one can

examine and understand the cultural and social relationships people had with the religious and political institutions that governed them. This thesis examines foundation myths, kingship, heroes and heroines, and personifications of the land to illuminate the complexities of gender existing in the primary texts. All the chapters question the singularity of a hegemonic masculinity which was perceived as the norm and excluded women, the feminine and 'other' men. By challenging traditional power relationships this thesis demonstrates that images and languages of gender helped construct and inform medieval and sixteenth-century Scottish identities. This research will provide a fresh and innovative look at gender and nation, going beyond archival facts and demonstrating that the historical literature exposes changing cultural and ideological definitions of masculinities and femininities.

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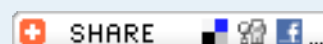
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