

Anna Groundwater. *The Scottish Middle March, 1573-1625: Power, Kinship, Allegiance.* London: Royal Historical Society, 2010. x + 236 pp. \$95.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-86193-307-5.



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The border regions between Scotland and England have been characterized as much by mythology as by history, particularly since the early nineteenth century. The twentieth century, though, has witnessed a far more systematic and factually based examination of this contested and contentious area; and Anna Groundwater's meticulously researched study continues and extends the effort to shed light on what made the borderlands unique in the British Isles, and to place this region within the larger political and cultural context of the transition from Tudor to Stuart rule.

The specific area of Groundwater's research is the Middle March, the central region of the Scottish Borders, which overlapped its English counterpart both to the east and west. The Middle March included the "dales," dominated by a handful of extended family groups of frequently shifting allegiance and complicated by fractious quarrels, both between and within these surnames. The overall purpose of Groundwater's study is to situate the evolution of the Middle March within the reign of the Scottish king James VI, both be-

fore and after his accession to the English throne as James I, and to demonstrate how James utilized specific Scottish political and cultural institutions in his attempt to include this region within his personal conception of a single and united realm.

The popular conception of the Scottish borderlands has been as a turbulent and lawless region, with Englishmen habituated to the rule of law attempting to bring order to unruly and barbarian Scots still living in semi-tribal anarchy, a sort of sixteenth-century Waziristan riven by blood feuds and frequent "reiving," or organized theft of property and livestock. Groundwater proceeds to bring such fantasies under control, demonstrating that most of the surviving accounts of border turbulence proceed from English march wardens, who unsurprisingly sought to blame the Scots for every disruption while frequently minimizing the role played by English borderers. The first historical examinations of this region did little to dispel this image, beginning with those of George Ridpath in the eighteenth century. While Ridpath's work is an invaluable re-

source for study of this topic, Ridpath himself was a passionate supporter of the Act of Union, and wrote from an English perspective (the name "Ridpath" is an English border surname). Scottish rulers echoed these sentiments during the sixteenth century, particularly during the contentious regency for the young James VI between 1567 and 1578, frequently referring to their border subjects as vagabonds, malefactors, thieves, and "broken men." What appears to have motivated such opprobrium, though, was not so much actual crimes but the distressing independence of thought and action that tended to accompany them, a daunting prospect for a ruler determined to impose his vision of personal rule over a region accustomed to a significant degree of autonomy.

The Romantic-era novels of Sir Walter Scott, born with one of the Middle March's most prominent surnames, did little to correct the image of Scottish borderers, only now they were transformed into romance-novel caricatures rather than barbaric villains. The reality, as Groundwater maintains, is far more complex. While English bureaucracy was more differentiated than that of Scotland, it was not necessarily more effective at keeping order. While there might have been reiving and feuding by the more irrepressible surnames of the Middle March, such as the Armstrongs and the Elliots of Liddesdale, there was no Scottish equivalent of the Northern Rising of 1569, in which the earls of Northumberland and Westmorland, two of the principal four counties of the English Borders, openly rebelled against Elizabeth I.

The close proximity of English and Scottish borderers appears to have fostered a border mentality, in which differences tended to be resolved locally rather than by appeal to Edinburgh or London. James VI's approach to the Scottish Borders was, according to Groundwater, to coopt local lairds and surname leaders into serving the interests of crown policy, chiefly by granting them powers and privileges and then holding them re-

sponsible for the good behavior of their dependents. In England, meanwhile, greater authority was placed in the hands of march wardens, frequently from outside the region, who relied on crown authority rather than ties of kinship to enforce their will on the local population. Following James's accession to the English throne in 1603, he tried increasingly to unify the cross-border legal system, only to be faced with stiff opposition from local authorities, and chiefly in Scotland. As a result, during the 1620s the principal lairds in the Scottish Middle March were from the same families who had dominated the region in the 1570s, and it was still through traditional ties of kinship and allegiance that the region was governed, although the lairds now held government offices.

At the same time, Groundwater shows how disorder in the borderlands was sometimes utilized by James VI for ancillary political objectives. One example of this was the "rescue" from English captivity of "Kinmont Willie" Armstrong by Walter Scott of Buccleuch in 1596, following Armstrong's seizure by deputies of the English border warden Lord Scrope on an announced day of truce. Armstrong was a dependent of Buccleuch, so in so doing Buccleuch upheld his lordship by protecting a dependent, upheld his personal honor as a man not to be taken lightly, demonstrated martial prowess at the expense of the English, and publicly thumbed his nose at Scrope for violating Border custom. Despite the furious response by both Scrope and Elizabeth I, James would not turn Buccleuch over to English justice, but merely went through the motions of diplomatic nicety. This had occurred, though, at a time when James was growing impatient at Elizabeth's vague assurances of James's right to the English succession; and England, concerned with foreign policy, was not anxious to see an escalation of hostility on the Borders. Elizabeth contented herself with connecting payment of James's English government pension with the surrender of Buccleuch and another Scottish border laird, Robert Ker of Cessford; Buccleuch surrendered himself in 1597 and

Cessford in early 1598, and both were released on pledges in 1598. Both were subsequently drawn into Scottish government service and ennobled, Cessford as Lord Roxburgh in 1600 and Buccleuch as Lord Scott of Buccleuch in 1606. It is difficult not to see the hand of prior agreement in this resolution.

Following James's accession to the English throne, the imposition of order in the borderlands became a top priority for the crown, and it was accomplished steadily and methodically. The Scots did not become anglicized, and largely preexisting institutions were utilized in Scotland for imposing a greater degree of crown control in the region. In Groundwater's view, the mechanisms already in place in 1573 would have brought order to the region at that time had they been implemented coherently and systematically, but there was no compelling need for the Scottish government to do so at that time. After 1597 and the confirmation of James as heir to the English throne, James proceeded to do exactly that. The last large-scale raid into England was carried out, not surprisingly, by the Armstrongs and the Elliots in 1611, and James had eighteen of them hanged as a result. While the Borders had largely been pacified by 1625, the region did not become quiescent until after the Act of Union in 1707. Groundwater ends her study with the obligatory acknowledgment of the new British history, and warning, appropriately if not originally, that this new British history should not become the vehicle for yet another anglocentric interpretation of Scottish history.

Groundwater's book is meticulously researched, with an extensive bibliography of both primary and secondary sources. While it is well written, with clear and cogent exposition, and plentifully cited, it tends to read in places like a doctoral dissertation. One area that perhaps receives short shrift is the special and unique qualities of border societies, and the equally unique mechanisms of law and order in such societies. For example, the English Middle March warden,

Sir John Forster, walked the fine line between a law enforcer and a law breaker with as much finesse as the Earp brothers of frontier Tombstone, Arizona Territory some three hundred years later; and one wonders how many parallels could be found between the Kers and Scotts and their equivalents along the Welsh marches two centuries earlier. Overall, Groundwater's study is an essential addition to the corpus of Scottish border history, and contributes greatly to the recognition of the importance of Scottish institutions in the history of Great Britain.

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