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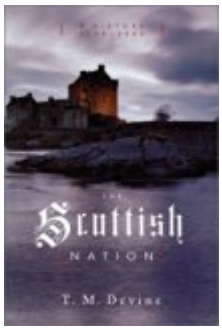
T. M. Devine. *The Scottish Nation: A History 1700-2000.* New York: Viking, 1999. xxiii + 696 pp. $40.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-670-88811-5.



Reviewed by Irene Maver

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Since the 1975 publication of his award-winning study of eighteenth-century Glasgow and the transatlantic tobacco trade, Professor Tom Devine has established himself as one of Scotland's most prolific and distinguished historians. Over the years he has tackled a number of diverse themes, from the process of urbanization during the industrial growth years of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to the complexities of Highland society up to the 1900s. Devine's formidable research output underpins this ambitious new history of Scotland from 1700 to 2000, which the author claims in the preface to be a work of ^Ñinterpretative synthesis'. However, given the wide remit of the book, which goes beyond the distinctively Devine preoccupation with economic and social issues, the efforts of recent historians have been liberally incorporated to augment the analysis. *The Scottish Nation* is consequently scholarly and detailed in approach, consciously challenging and demystifying preconceptions of Scotland's past. As a single-volume history, Devine's book is particularly valuable as a readily accessible information source for a plethora of key Scottish issues, from the debate over the 1707 Union with the English Parliament to industrialization, population change, politics, power and identity.

There can be little doubt that *The Scottish Nation* will become a standard work on the history of modern Scotland. This is not just because of Devine's reputation for applying microscopic rigour to his analysis, but also because of the timeliness of the book's publication. The advent of the millennium coincided curiously with the inauguration of the devolved Scottish Parliament in 1999, resulting in considerable retrospective interest in the route to constitutional change. Scottish history and its practitioners attracted unprecedented media attention, and *The Scottish Nation* was launched in a blaze of publicity, more like a movie or a pop CD. It has been unusual for a book focusing on Scotland to be quite so energetically promoted by one of the giants of the international publishing world, and this level of enthusiasm bodes well for the future.

Yet if other Scottish historians can bask vicariously in the glow cast from the British marketing success of *The Scottish Nation*, there is a danger

in becoming too beguiled by the magnitude of Devine's achievement. The book is solid and substantial, covers a huge amount of ground, but what of its stylistic merits? And crucially, as a professed work of synthesis, how far does it reflect the weaknesses as well as the strengths of recent Scottish historical research?

Devine's personal research interests have concentrated overwhelmingly on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and he acknowledges from the outset that the core of his book relates to the 'era of massive transformation' between 1760 and 1914. This rather diminishes the publisher's claims about the broad sweep of the narrative, although overall it is the later period that loses out. Three chapters out of twenty-five are devoted to the decades after 1939, with the vexed question of Scottish self-government constituting the lion's share of the discussion. Unfortunately, the overcompression of the book's last section gives a disconcerting sense of anti-climax, just as the chronology moves towards the constitutional denouement of the 1990s.

To be fair, Scottish twentieth-century history has been surprisingly under-researched, so Devine was working from a narrow base of existing secondary sources. He is much more expansive (and at ease) in dealing with the relatively fertile historical terrain before 1914. Drawing from his own extensive published research, he carefully and concisely explains such central themes as commercial opportunities, industrialization and land utilization. Indeed, it is evident even from the political chapters that the shifting pattern of Scottish land-holding is a subject close to the heart of the author. He refers repeatedly to land as an instrument of power, and to the dogged survival of landed interests despite the pace of change from the late eighteenth century.

Devine's emphasis on economic and social development, especially as it affected landholding, runs throughout the book, and inevitably skews the focus of analysis towards related areas. Cultural history, for instance, is far less prominent, and women are largely confined to a chapter concentrating on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Again, the relatively raw state of research into the experience of Scotland's women accounts for their inconsistent appearance in ***The Scottish Nation***, although it is disappointing that in one lengthy paragraph, explaining cultural regeneration during the 1980s and 1990s, the assorted writers, artists, musicians and media personalities enumerated by the author are all conspicuously male. Devine generally seems to be uncomfortable about elaborating the personality factor in Scottish history, perhaps because (for him) it elicits too subjective a response. It could also be a reaction to the proliferation of romanticized and swashbuckling stereotypes in Scottish history, which is understandable in a book aiming to probe ^Ñnew fields of investigation', but at times makes for rather dense and colourless reading. Moreover, while synthesis offers the advantage of drawing together the diverse strands of current research, this has meant that the use of primary sources as a mirror for reflecting contemporary ideas and idiosyncrasies has been rather underplayed.

For this reviewer, the relation of sources to text is one of the most problematic areas of Devine's book. There are too many sweeping references to 'recent perspectives', 'current historical opinion', 'modern research', which do not have the enlightening benefit of footnotes. At times individual scholars are acknowledged directly by name, but there is no elaboration of their work in the footnotes or further reading. As Devine pays effusive tribute to the efforts of fellow historians, it would have been consistent to open out the rather sketchy select bibliography to aid the explorations of the interested reader.

A further helpful embellishment would have been illustrations, but apart from five positional maps, the only visual representation is the cover photograph. For the North American edition this

is singularly uninspiring, depicting an eerily tranquil lochside setting, without a person or even a sheep to indicate a living community. Perhaps American sensibilities rather than Scottish realities were at issue here, as the British edition of ***The Scottish Nation*** uses a striking pastiche of Joe Rosenthal's celebrated photograph of US marines raising the Stars and Stripes at Iwo Jima. While the composition is identical to the 1945 original, the figures are civilians and the flag is the resurgent Scottish saltire. Devine's book is emphatically in keeping with the wryly optimistic spirit of the second illustration, portraying the development of a modern society built on the fluctuating fortunes of industrialization, and now embarking on an uncertain, if hopeful, future.

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