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Rethinking Scottish origins

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The chair, which has existed for a hundred years, has changed utterly not only since it was first held by Sir Robert Rait, but even within my 23 years in this university. It used to mean being Head of Department for the rest of your career: Archie Duncan filled the role for a remarkable thirty-one years, raising the number of staff in Scottish History to seven when I arrived in 1990. (There are now five whose principal teaching and research is in Scottish History.). Now, thankfully, the post has been shorn of that kind of automatic institutional role. It is particularly daunting for me to be successor Archie Duncan and his successor, Ted Cowan. The range of their scholarship is phenomenal: Archie publishing pioneering papers on, at one chronological extreme, ecclesiastical politics in the early eighth century and, at the other extreme, the history of Scotland's central courts up to 1532. Within this span he has been a leading voice in the history of government, burghs, parliament, law, chronicles, charters and maybe above all the Wars of Independence. Ted Cowan, for his part, ranges from Vikings to Robert Service, a Canadian poet who died in 1958. His work covers popular culture, Covenanters, emigration, the Wars of Independence, Icelandic sagas and much more besides. It is ironic, given Ted's unique track record of publications in literature as well as history, that it was he who dropped 'Literature' from the chair's title. This is especially lucky for me, however, because the texts I find easiest to work with are those, like charters, year-by-year chronicles and king-lists, which have absolutely no literary merit at all.

¹ This is the text as delivered, except for some important changes in wording as a result of comments after the lecture from Stuart Airlie, Susan Stuart and Joanna Tucker. I am particularly grateful to Joanna Tucker for suggesting 'subconscious' as conveying much more clearly what I intended than the terms 'non-conscious' and 'unconscious' which I had used in the lecture itself. A fully referenced version of this lecture is due to appear in a volume of papers on Barbour's Bruce edited by Steve Boardman, published by Boydell & Brewer.

A particular quality shared by both Archie and Ted is an interest in the history of people at large. In this lecture I will attempt to maintain this tradition—even if, in my hands, ‘people at large’ is only a term of art to refer generally to those beyond the kingdom’s ruling elite. I hope thereby to give a new twist to a topic which has held my interest since my PhD days—namely the origins of Scottish identity. I will argue that, by engaging with the question of when and how a basic sense of ‘Scotland’ came into being—Scotland as we might recognise it today—we can understand something fundamental about the creation of Scotland not only centuries ago, but in the present day. Most of what I have to offer is through the medium of the discipline of History, of course. My discussion will also, however, depend at critical points on thinking—as our forbears did—in Latin, Gaelic and Welsh. In a less obvious, but equally critical way, I will also draw on insights gained from Archaeology and Digital Humanities. At a key juncture I will look for help from Philosophy: I am particularly grateful to Susan Stuart and John Llewelyn for making this possible for me. I thus find myself, rather fortuitously, conversing in some way with all the subjects that comprise the School of Humanities.

My starting point is not the political or institutional beginning of Scotland—the traditional concern of historians. It is when the kingdom’s inhabitants began to use the terms ‘Scotland’ and ‘Scots’ (in any language) to mean, at the most elementary level, what we living here now understand these terms to mean: that is, when they, like us, began to identify the Scottish kingdom as comprising a single country (‘Scotland’) and people (‘Scots’). As we will see, this was not how ‘Scotland’ and ‘Scots’ were understood before the thirteenth century. According to this approach ‘Scotland’ is essentially a phenomenon of the mind: an idea that, at some point, came to be thought of by its inhabitants as one-and-

the-same as the kingdom they lived in. On the face of it this is similar to Colette Beaune's understanding of national origins in her celebrated book, *Naissance de la Nation France*, published in 1985: the English version, indeed, was given the title *The Birth of an Ideology*. A key difference, I will suggest, is that Scotland does not readily accord with Beaune's (and others') 'top down' explanation of how an idea of country came into being and was disseminated. A new approach to this process will emerge from the Scottish evidence; this will, in turn, have implications for our wider understanding of national origins in pre-modern Europe. The material available for this kind of enquiry in Scotland before the Wars of Independence is, however, much more restricted than the range of sources used by Beaune. This means that, instead of attempting to explain 'love of country', as Beaune did, I will focus on the origin of the most basic aspects of the idea of 'Scotland' and 'Scots' that we take wholly for granted today.

It seems obvious to us that 'Scotland' refers to the Scottish kingdom of old, or a potential independent state in the future, and 'Scots' to its inhabitants or citizens. Before the thirteenth century, however, there was no expectation that the kingdom constituted a single country and people. Instead, 'Scotland' could signify all of the landmass north of the Forth, or merely the country bounded in the south by the Forth, in the north by the Spey and by Drumalban in the west. This was also reflected in what the term 'Scots' meant to the kingdom's inhabitants. Before 1260 it seems to have denoted not only the inhabitants of 'Scotland' in this restricted sense, but its Gaelic-speakers in particular. As we will see, it was not until the period between about 1260 and 1290 that the idea of country, people and kingdom coincided to form what can be recognised as the beginning of modern Scottish identity. It is this first coalescence of ideas of country, people and kingdom that I wish to focus on this evening.

Initially I will attempt to understand this fundamental change by outlining social, economic and institutional causes. I will then explore a comparative perspective. None of this, however, will fully meet the challenge of understanding how a sense of country and people could change so radically. This is exacerbated by the difficulty of showing that there was a commonly shared idea of ‘Scotland’ and ‘Scots’ in the first place. And yet, if I am to offer a meaningful analysis of the origins of Scottish identity as lived by Scots today, it must engage with this as a phenomenon that was embraced by people at large and could be transformed. The attempt to address this problem with the resources at a historian’s disposal will lead me briefly towards other disciplines—but only to return, refreshed, to engage with the historical material a-new.

The first significant step towards a sense of country and kingdom as one-and-the-same may be detected in charters of donation where the land or church concerned was said to be held as freely as anywhere else in the ‘kingdom of Scotland’ or ‘of Scots’. This became frequent from the 1180s. This is the earliest indication that local lords were beginning to think of the kingdom as a land with common laws and customs. It can be argued that this was one of the more remarkable unintended consequences of the legal and administrative reforms in England during Henry II’s reign (1154–1189). Because the landowning elite were by then part of a single, Anglo-Norman society across Britain and northern France, they would have been acutely aware of the rapidly growing difference between the Scottish kingdom and the kingdom of England that emerged during Henry’s reign. For example, in England, the king’s courts became accessible to all but the poorest freemen, a development that can only have made the exercise of baronial authority more difficult. This did not apply to Scotland, of course: indeed, in Scotland, baronial power became more

entrenched. This suggests that the main spur towards beginning to regard the Scottish kingdom as a single country may have been an intensification of royal power not in Scotland, but in England. This could have bestowed a sense of unity to the Scottish kingdom almost by default simply because the French-speaking landed elite experienced it as a kingdom that was not England—a kingdom where local lordly jurisdictions were maintained, not diminished.

There is one example of a member of this Franco-British elite in the early thirteenth century who identified himself as a ‘Scot’ on his seal so that he could be distinguished from a namesake and close relative in England. More generally, however, the identification of country with kingdom does not appear to have led in a domestic context to the adoption of Scottish identity throughout the kingdom, that is by those of the king’s subjects who had not hitherto seen themselves routinely as Scots. Monks of Melrose in the eastern Borders, writing in their chronicle in 1218, referred to the south east and Galloway as in ‘Scotland’; but even in 1259, they considered Scots to be different from themselves—indeed, a people who, along with Galwegians, behaved beyond the limits of Christian decency. It was not until sometime after Easter 1286 and before (probably) May 1291 that they entered material into their chronicle in which they showed themselves willing to identify themselves as Scots. This suggests that the idea of the kingdom’s inhabitants as a single people seems only to have taken root shortly before the Wars of Independence. This unified identity did not, however, dissolve the distinction between Gaelic-speaking Scots and the ethnically English or Anglicised inhabitants of the kingdom. This continued in a new form: Gaelic-speakers north of the Forth, instead of being ‘Scots’, were now ‘highland Scots’, a phrase first detectable in an historical work completed in 1285. The monks of Melrose may have become Scots, but this does not require that they ceased to be English. It depended on context. This

‘new’ kingdom-centric Scottish identity was grounded in obedience to the king of Scots. It is conceivable, therefore, as Steve Boardman has pointed out, that people continued to regard themselves as ‘English’ in the sense that their mother tongue was English, and at the same time identified themselves as Scots. In Barbour’s *Bruce*, for example, a Scot is defined by allegiance, not language.

If we locate the beginning of Scotland, as we understand it today, in the emergence of a sense of kingdom, country and people as facets of a single identity in the late thirteenth century, then how is this to be explained? If we accept the evidence of the *Chronicle of Melrose* for the chronology of this change, the key period coincided with significant developments in the lives of those with property and possessions.

One change was the adoption of a mechanism for reporting the results of local inquests to the king, whose clerks retained them in a central archive. This was in operation from around 1260. The procedures for safeguarding property had for many years been conducted locally on the king’s orders. Now, however, royal authority was involved explicitly in the outcome as well as at the outset in a form that was intended to endure. As such, those obliged to attend sheriff courts—including lesser landholders in their own right or on behalf of greater lords—would have witnessed the king acting as guarantor of property in a new, more tangible way.

The most striking change in this period was the increase in economic activity revealed by the amount of money in circulation. This grew dramatically between around 1250 and around 1280. It has been suggested by Nicholas Mayhew that, whereas in England the value of coin in circulation rose by a little over 50%, and in Ireland by a little under 50%, in Scotland it may have tripled. He pointed out that the figures are difficult to pin down—the amount for

Scotland around 1250 could be an underestimate. Even if this is taken into account, though, in his view the amount at the time of the recoinage of 1280 'remains outstanding'.² Royal burghs were the focal point of the money economy: the great majority of those involved in trade (including smallholders with surplus produce to sell) would therefore have had a regular experience of royal authority, and become aware of their dependence on it for their livelihoods. By this time royal burghs had also become the nodal points in the administration of justice at a regional level, with old provincial assemblies becoming sheriff courts, or being superseded by them. When economic growth and the increasing importance of burghs is combined with the change in the procedure for inquests that has just been mentioned, it may be envisaged that those with property and possessions came more and more to identify with royal authority as a key background element in the pattern of their lives.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this as far as the wider adoption of Scottish identity is concerned was that the economic and institutional differences between 'old' Scotland, bounded by the Forth, Spey and Drumalban, and the area south of the Forth had dissolved. One explanation for the extraordinary expansion of coin in circulation in Scotland compared with England and Ireland in this period is that the geographical spread of the money economy was greater, gathering strength in areas where it had been weak. This is suggested by the unprecedented spread of mints across the country from Inverness to Dumfries. The same is true for the infrastructure of sheriff courts that emerges during the thirteenth century. By 1200, burgh, coin and sheriff were well established in Lothian, but in only a few major centres north of the Forth. When Alexander III died in 1286 they were widespread except in the far north and west.

² N. Mayhew, 'Alexander III—a silver age?: an essay in Scottish medieval economic history', in *Scotland in the Reign of Alexander III, 1249-1286*, ed. Norman H. Reid (Edinburgh, 1990), 53–73, at 61–3.

Unfortunately this account of the beginning of modern Scottish identity, focusing particularly on the decades after 1260 as the period when it finally took shape, depends chiefly on the evidence of the Chronicle of Melrose for its chronology; it is only because of this chronology that it makes sense to turn to innovations in inquests and the figures for the growth in money supply for an explanation. But how representative is it? What is the nature of the supposed connection between incidental references to ‘Scots’ in the Chronicle of Melrose and what ‘Scots’ meant to smallholders attending sheriff courts, or to those buying and selling in burghs? What would justify using the Chronicle as a source for a fundamental change in the identity of those in the bustling world outside the monastery?

Let us go back to scratch and take a closer look at the striking idea that, before the thirteenth century, ‘Scotland’ (in any language) habitually referred to the region between the Forth, the Spey and Drumalban. Was this, indeed, the way contemporaries understood the term routinely? This needs to be answered if we are to grasp the nature of the change which resulted in the emergence of modern Scottish identity.

A straightforward approach would be to investigate the evidence for forms of government and social organisation peculiar to ‘Scotland’ in its most limited sense. Was the region bounded by the Forth, the Spey and Drumalban experienced by contemporaries as being a distinct entity? The most compelling indication that this region had its own forms of social organisation in the twelfth century is in extant compilations of royal enactments recently brought to life by Alice Taylor. These include an assize detailing how anyone in possession of disputed goods was to verify their ownership of them. Alice Taylor has argued

compellingly that this is an enactment of King William (probably after 1186) based on an earlier assize of David I (1124–1153). In the original assize of David I (following Dr Taylor's analysis) it was decreed that anyone dwelling between the Spey and the Forth or between Drumalban and the Forth who was accused of theft had fifteen days to fetch his guarantor for the disputed goods who would show that they were his. The guarantor and the disputed goods were to be taken to the place designated by the king for this purpose in the province where the accusation had been made. William I extended this so that, in the case of guarantors cited from elsewhere in the mainland north of the Forth, an extra month was allowed. Any cases involving people south of the Forth, including Galloway, were to be resolved at meetings every six weeks at the bridge at Stirling across the Forth. It is striking that, although it was expected that people could be summoned from one part of 'Scotland' (in its most restricted sense) to another, and additional provisions were made to fetch guarantors from north or west of 'Scotland proper' despite the distances and hazards involved, no-one was expected to cross the Forth beyond Stirling.

An obvious way to take this further is to examine the earliest extant description of Scotland by one of the king's subjects. This is the tract *De Situ Albanie* ('The Description of Scotland'), written sometime in or between December 1165 and December 1184. This reveals that the term 'Scotland' was not fixed geographically when restricted to north of the Forth. Two versions are given of an imagined ancient sevenfold division north of the Forth—one excluding Argyll, the other including Argyll but not Caithness. Later, after being told in passing that Argyll is in the western part of 'Scotland', we meet the statement that Drumalban is the 'mountains which divide Scotland from Argyll'. As far as the southern border is concerned, however, there is no doubt that this was fixed firmly in the author's mind as at the Forth. It is not simply that he offers no

alternative. He describes it in astonishingly vivid terms, explaining that the Firth of Forth is called *Scottewatre* ‘because it divides the kingdoms [regna] of the Scots and the English’. By this point Edinburgh (south of the Forth) had been ruled by kings of Scots for two centuries. It might be wondered, therefore, how the author of *De Situ Albanie*, who was plainly a subject of the king of Scots, could refer to the Forth in this way. I will return to this towards the end.

The only feature in the definition of ‘Scotland’ in *De Situ Albanie* that is shared with David I’s assize on guarantors for disputed goods is the Firth of Forth. It is noteworthy that this is referred to so graphically in *De Situ Albanie*, and is also the only boundary in the assize which people were not expected to cross in the pursuit of justice. The significance of this border is also vividly apparent in one of the earliest maps of Britain, where Scotland north of the Forth is imagined as an island. This was despite the fact that the Forth had for centuries ceased to correspond to a political or cultural division. I will return to this in due course. By contrast, the only trace in *De Situ Albanie* of ‘Scotland’ as only the eastern part of the landmass north of the Forth is in the passing reference to Drumalban as dividing Scotland from Argyll; there is no sign of the Spey as one of its limits. This invites the conclusion that the Forth was the only boundary that was universally recognised, and that anything else depended (at best) on context. This picture of ambiguity, however, rests heavily on the evidence of *De Situ Albanie*, a text which may hardly ever have been read: it was written as the preface to a collection of Scottish historical material that survives in only one copy, as part of a manuscript produced in York about 1360. It would be unsafe to assume, without further evidence, that the different permutations of ‘Scotland’ revealed by its author were shared by other people. And so we return to the dilemma of how to access the way ‘Scotland’ was understood routinely

by people at large, and not just by those whose words we can read, never mind those who self-consciously set out to describe the country.

The first step to a solution is if we focus on the incidental use of the terms ‘Scotland’ and ‘Scots’ in the limited written material we have to hand. If ‘Scotland’ (or ‘Scottish’ or ‘Scot’) is mentioned only in passing, it is likely that it is being used unselfconsciously in a way that was unquestioned and common at that time. Once all incidental references have been gathered together, if they are consistent with one particular idea of ‘Scotland’, it is likely that this was taken for granted and widely accepted. As such, it can be proposed that it was so deeply embedded in regular discourse that it would have been used spontaneously by everyone who had any occasion to bring ‘Scotland’ to mind.

The one ‘spontaneous’ idea of ‘Scotland’ that can be traced consistently is that of the region lying between Moray, Argyll and the Forth. It is true that, apart from the assize on guarantors for disputed chattels, the only other text that refers in the same breath to more than one of the limits of this idea of ‘Scotland’ is a chronicle which describes William I in 1214 returning from Moray to Scotland, and then proceeding from Scotland to Lothian.³ This, combined with the assize, provides an anchor for the stray indications that Moray, or Argyll, or Lothian (or points beyond) were seen as lying outside ‘Scotland’, reinforcing the impression that each relates to the same single idea of a country bounded by the Forth, the Spey and Drumalban.

³ *de Moravia rediit in Scocia, de Scocia vero profectus in Laudoniam*: William F. Skene (ed.), *Johannis de Fordun Chronica Gentis Scotorum* (Edinburgh, 1871), 279. This is from ‘Gesta Annalia I’, identified in ‘A new look at Gesta Annalia attributed to John of Fordun’, in Church, *Chronicle and Learning in Medieval and Early Renaissance Scotland*, ed. B. E. Crawford (Edinburgh, 1999), 9–30. It almost certainly incorporates contemporary material (such as the account of Alexander II’s inauguration a few weeks later: W. W. Scott, ‘Fordun’s description of the inauguration of Alexander II’, *SHR* 50 (1971), 198–200).

This can be corroborated by looking beyond texts (in a conventional sense) at the evidence of place-names, particularly in Gaelic—the vernacular shared by local communities across almost the entire kingdom in this period. If a place-name includes a reference to a Scot as its distinctive marker (e.g., *Coir' an Albannaich*, literally ‘corrie of the inhabitant of Scotland’), it can be inferred that the place itself was not routinely regarded as part of Scotland by those who coined the name. Presumably they were local, especially in the case of a name like this that must only have been useful to those who frequented the corrie in question. Place-names like *Coir' an Albannaich* have the potential, therefore, to take us directly to Albannach, ‘Scot’, on the lips of people far removed, both socially, culturally and geographically, from the royal clerks and monks who penned the charters, chronicles and tracts that we can read. Again, the evidence is consistent with Albannach as inhabitant of the region bounded by the Forth, the Spey and Drumalban.⁴ This is significant not only in corroborating what was deduced about the general understanding of ‘Scotland’ from written sources. Place-names provide evidence more for the use of ‘Scot’ (Albannach) than for ‘Scotland’, whereas with written sources it is the other way round. It is doubly reassuring, therefore, that these should complement each other. The textual references, for their part, are vital for showing when this spontaneous usage was current, which can in turn be invaluable for suggesting when the place-names with this specific element could have been coined.

The birth of modern Scottish identity can, on the strength of this, be said to have involved a radical change in how people at large in the kingdom—both north and south of the Forth—thought spontaneously of ‘Scotland’ and ‘Scots’. This can be seen most obviously among those living south of the Forth, who began in

⁴ W. J. Watson, *The History of the Celtic Place-Names of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1926), 12–13, 349; Ian A. Fraser, ‘The place-names of Argyll: an historical perspective’, *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* 54 (1984–6), at 188; Broun, *Scottish Independence and the Idea of Britain*, 7, and 27 n.30 for Penalbanach on Mull.

the thirteenth century to see themselves as ‘Scots’ living in ‘Scotland’; presumably those north of the Forth also began routinely to share this identification of country and people with the kingdom, even though there is no direct evidence for this before this period. How is this change to be explained?

Scotland is not the only country, of course, to have its origins in a similar transition in which the name of the historic core (as it were) was, during the central middle ages, adopted for the territory of the kingdom as a whole. It seems natural, given the connections between Scotland and France at this time, both directly and as part of the legacy of the Anglo-Norman world, to think of the example of France. Suger, abbot of St-Denis, for example, writing in the second quarter of the twelfth century, talks of Louis VI going into France from Berry and from the Auvergne. ‘France’ typically meant an area between the rivers Meuse, Loire and Oise. According to Colette Beaune, it was only during the reign of Philippe II (1180–1223) that the equation of ‘France’ with the kingdom became more common.⁵ She saw the origins of France as essentially a ‘top down’ process driven by those closest to the kingship, traceable through the formulas deployed by the royal chancery, royal ceremonial, and also in histories of French kings, climaxing in *Les Grandes Chroniques de France*, a royal initiative of the late thirteenth century.⁶ Bernd Schneidmüller likewise talks of ‘a theory of French monarchy based on the concept of a royal nation’ in the thirteenth century that drew on earlier strands of imagining French kingship

⁵ Colette Beaune, *Naissance de la Nation France* (Paris, 1985), 310; Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology*, trans. Huston, ed. Cheyette, 284. For a juridical perspective, see Wood, ‘Regnum Francie’, who argued (at 32) that regnum Francie was used at least two ways: (i) to refer to that part of the kingdom over which the king can be said to have exercised particular protection (the domain as a ‘juridical concept’ where they exercised ‘both immediate and final jurisdiction’: 136–7), and (ii) all territory over which he may have no more than general protection. The growth of royal power from the mid-thirteenth century caused this to change so that, by the time of Philippe IV (1285–1314), ‘an almost all-inclusive sovereignty and jurisdiction’ was claimed (145).

⁶ Her ‘top down’ view of this process is clear in the French version of her book. Although a degree of ambiguity is introduced into the English version, the original emphasis is particularly evident when noting how ‘national feeling first saw the light of day at St-Denis’, she talks of the ‘spread of national feeling’ through ‘national propaganda’ that ‘was able to reach its public’, with ‘images of the king and nation ... spread abroad in many different ways’ within France: Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology*, 320–2. As a result of the replacement of Rex Francorum by Rex Francie by the royal chancery in 1254, ‘Francia was finally accepted by all to mean the whole of the kingdom (ibid., 284–5).

articulated by those close to the king in symbols, chancery-practice and history-writing.⁷ This had its origins in what he calls the ‘collective consciousness’ of the political elites close to the monarchy.⁸

Could a similar process help to explain what, crudely, might be called the expansion of Scottish identity in the thirteenth century to embrace the entire kingdom, stretching south of the Forth? There were certainly deliberate efforts by Alexander II (1214–49) and Alexander III (1249–86) and those closest to them to advance a more powerful image of Scottish kingship. This includes the adoption of new features in royal charters, changes to the royal inauguration ritual in 1249, and also the creation of the first traceable continuous narrative of Scottish history from ancient times written by the Frenchman Richard Vairement, probably not long after 1259. (Vairement came to Scotland in 1239 as chancellor to Queen Marie de Couci, Alexander II’s second wife.) Each of these novelties was designed specifically to proclaim a new sense of Scotland as an independent kingdom. There is nothing, however, to suggest that a broader application of Scottish identity was directly encouraged as part of this programme. In fact, the idea that the kingdom was particularly associated with north of the Forth, far from being ignored, plays a conspicuous part in the narrative framework attributable to Vairement.

To take another example: Melrose Abbey showed a keen interest in the history of Scottish kings at exactly this time, by inserting brief notices of each of them throughout its chronicle—which was largely English in content up to the twelfth century. It is no surprise that Melrose was ‘on message’, as it were: not only was it a royal foundation, but it was the burial-place of Alexander II himself.

⁷ Bernd Schneidmüller, ‘Constructing identities of medieval France’, in *France in the Central Middle Ages, 900–1200*, ed. Marcus Bull (Oxford, 2002), 15–42, at 41.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

And yet it will be recalled that, as late as 1259, the chroniclers of Melrose still regarded Scots as the (generally unsavoury) natives of north of the Forth. There is nothing here to suggest that those who were close to the kingship were especially keen to promote any supposed rebranding of the kingdom's inhabitants—including the monks of Melrose themselves—as Scots.

If 'Scotland' and 'Scots', in the sense we would recognise today, originated as an idea that emerged in the century after the 1180s, it does not seem to have operated in the same way as envisaged by Beaune in France, where the transition to a recognisably modern French identity is understood to have originated as part of a royal programme. We are left with the suggestion that it may be connected in some way with the growing importance of royal authority in relation to property and possessions, and the ironing out of differences north and south of the Forth that came with this, a development particularly of the third quarter of the thirteenth century. Is there any way to be more precise about the proposition that 'Scotland' and 'Scots' originated as ideas, when, as ideas, they were not consciously coined and promoted?

So far, I have argued that 'Scotland' and 'Scots'—referring to the area between the Forth, Spey and Drumalban, and its inhabitants—were taken for granted and used spontaneously by people at large. I have also argued that the new idea of country and people coinciding with the kingdom emerged in the late thirteenth century without being consciously promoted. It, too, would therefore appear to belong to the same subconscious domain of spontaneous taken-for-granted ideas as the older notion of 'Scotland'. An important aspect of this is that the new idea of 'Scotland' did not erase the older one, which can still be found in the fifteenth century. Contradiction of this kind would have been unproblematic as long as these ideas functioned on some subconscious level. We have seen a

striking example already. It will be recalled that, in *De Situ Albanie*, Scotia is referred to, in passing, in two different senses in the same passage, first as including Argyll, and then as differentiated from Argyll:

‘For its principal part, that is the head, is in Argyll in the western part of Scotland (Scotia) above the sea of Ireland; ... its arms, however, are the mountains which divide Scotland (Scotia) from Argyll...’

Scotia here is used unthinkingly, deriving its sense not from a coherent and rational use of language, but from a deeper level of non-verbal consciousness. Returning to the ‘new’ idea of Scotland—the one that endures to this day—the challenge is to understand how notions of people, country and kingdom in people’s minds could have coalesced not as a result of anyone’s conscious effort, but in this subconscious domain through a form of inarticulate shared experience.

The relationship between inarticulate shared experience and ‘spontaneous’ ideas brings us naturally to some recent developments in the philosophy of mind. Instead of focusing on language and conscious thought, attention among those in the analytical tradition has focused on perception, such as our own Fiona MacPherson’s work on hallucination. Rather than going in this direction, however, I will turn for help to recent work on what is referred to as the ‘background’.⁹ Although ‘background’ has been developed within the philosophy of language as a term for those elements of discourse which are taken for granted,¹⁰ it has increasingly been deployed in phenomenology to

⁹ This philosophical field has recently expanded significantly in a collection of essays, *Knowing without Thinking. Mind, Action, Cognition, and the Phenomenon of the Background*, ed. Zdravko Radman (Basingstoke, 2012), based on a conference held in 2007.

¹⁰ Daniel D. Hutto, ‘Exposing the Background: deep and local’, in *Knowing without Thinking*, ed. Radman, 37–56, at 38–40, summarising the seminal discussion of ‘Background’ in John R. Searle, *Intentionality. An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Cambridge, 1983). Searle is credited as ‘the actual father of the philosophical usage of the term’: *Knowing without Thinking*, ed. Radman, ix.

embrace a deeper range of automatic knowing involving body as well as brain.¹¹ This hinges on the realisation that ‘what we know is a lot more than is processed in consciousness, language and rational deliberation’ (to quote Zdravko Radman, editor of the book *Knowing Without Thinking*, published last year).¹² This subconscious knowing has been described by Radman as the ‘non-reflective, implicit guide in our coping with the world’,¹³ with routine and habit shaping who we are.

This approach has already established an impressive interdisciplinary momentum involving neurology and psychology as well as different branches of philosophy. There are possibilities for history, too. For example, our own Susan Stuart has emphasised the crucial importance of our interaction with others, linking people together in an essential interdependence with themselves and their world: ‘We act in the world, not as isolated selves, but as conscious, socially and culturally embedded, phenomenal agents, rich in our unique experiential histories, but also rich in our greatly distributed, complex array of felt affective relations and interrelations with other agents, entities and things’.¹⁴ Historians engage with many aspects of shared living which are relevant here, such as the regular rhythms of a society, the nature of its public arenas, and the patterns of criss-crossing personal encounters. This has led some to Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus*, but I find this a touch problematic, especially given

¹¹ See in particular Susan A. J. Stuart, ‘Enkinaesthesia: the essential sensuous background for co-agency’, Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, ‘Steps entailed in foregrounding the background: taking the challenge of languaging experience seriously’, and Richard Shusterman, ‘The body as background: pragmatism and somaesthetics’, in *Knowing without Thinking*, ed. Radman, 167–86, 187–205 and 206–23. Hubert L. Dreyfus, ‘The mystery of the background qua background’, in *Knowing without Thinking*, ed. Radman, 1–10, at 3–9, discusses (what is now referred to as) background in the philosophy of Husserl, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and also Wittgenstein. I am grateful to Susan Stuart for indicating that the aim of phenomenology is to establish the necessary conditions for the very possibility of experience.

¹² Zdravko Radman, ‘Preface’, in *Knowing without Thinking*, ed. Radman, at xi.

¹³ *Ibid.*, x.

¹⁴ Susan Stuart, ‘The mindsized mashup mind isn’t supersized after all’, *Analysis* 70 (2010), 174–83, at 179. See Susan Stuart, ‘Enkinaesthesia: the fundamental challenge for machine consciousness’, *International Journal of Machine Consciousness* 3 (2011), 145–62, for fuller discussion. Shaun Gallagher, ‘Social cognition, the Chinese Room, and the robot replies’, in *Knowing without Thinking*, ed. Radman, 83–97, esp. 86–7, on ‘interactive theory’, is important, too, as also, more generally, Zdravko Radman, ‘The background: tool of potentiality’, in *Knowing without Thinking*, ed. Radman, 224–42, at 234–7.

Bourdieu's concern for structures across time and place (what Craig Calhoun has called 'transhistorical invariants').¹⁵ Philosophy of mind as articulated by Stuart and others is inherently more sensitive to the historical. Lived experience can never be static or empty of previous experience. It embraces an already living body of spontaneous taken-for-granted ideas. There is always an interplay between changing circumstances and existing background patterns of thinking, with some of the possibilities latent in these patterns becoming activated by the lived experience of new emerging social contexts.¹⁶

Any attempt to discuss this in plain prose is bedevilled by the paradox of trying to express something that is, at heart, non-verbal. In order to grasp any part of this miasma of inarticulate lived experience, we have to pluck it from the context which it is inseparably part of—which is impossible. This means that background patterns of social imagination are inherently resistant to being exhibited for discussion. They are, of their nature, hidden from direct view. If they could be articulated deliberately and exposed to rational investigation they would, by definition, cease to be subconscious. Writing from a different philosophical perspective, John Llewelyn has made much the same point when (summarising work he published in 1961) he noted that 'the mark of an absolute

¹⁵ Craig Calhoun, 'Habitus, field and capital: the question of historical specificity', in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*, eds Craig Calhoun et al. (Cambridge, 1993), 61–88, at 66–7. Bourdieu's concept of habitus is used, for example, in Chris Wickham, *Courts and Conflict in Twelfth-Century Tuscany* (Oxford, 2003), 307–8. Habitus (as I see it) refers to how people unconsciously acquire, through physical encounters with each other in particular oft-repeated settings, an embedded sense of a range of possible actions and reactions which they draw on when interacting with others—others who are, of course, doing exactly the same themselves at the same time. The effectiveness of this as a concept depends on what is meant by the setting (or 'field' in Bourdieu's terminology: e.g., 'the artistic field', 'the political field', 'the religious field'; see his inaugural lecture of 1982 in Pierre Bourdieu, trans. Matthew Adamson, *In Other Words. Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford CA, 1990), 177–98, at 191). Key questions remain about Bourdieu's understanding of the relationship between field and habitus: Judith Butler, 'Performativity's social magic', in *Bourdieu. A Critic Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford, 1999), 113–28, esp. 116–19, and Alan Warde, 'Practice and field: revising Bourdieusian concepts', CRIC Discussion Paper no.65, April 2004: <http://www.cric.ac.uk/cric/Pdfs/DP65.pdf> (accessed 6 January 2013). For the tension between the inherent fluidity of habitus and Bourdieu's concern for 'transhistorical invariants', see Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, 'Can there be a science of existential structure and social meaning?', in *Bourdieu*, ed. Shusterman, 84–93 (originally published in Bourdieu, eds Calhoun et al., 35–44).

¹⁶ Dreyfus and Rabinow, 'Can there be a science of existential structure and social meaning?', in *Bourdieu*, ed. Shusterman, 84–93, give a compelling account, based on phenomenology, of habitus as innately fluid, and therefore appropriate to the discourse of humanities rather than science (pace Bourdieu). From a different philosophical perspective, the explanation of 'transcendental temporality' in John Llewelyn, *Departing from Logic, Returning to Wales* (Talybont, 2012), 198–9, is particularly helpful.

presupposition is that one cannot think it. Once you think of it, making it an object of thought rather than letting it work as a deep structure formative of how you think, it ceases to be absolute'.¹⁷ Or again, from yet another philosophical viewpoint, this can be recognised in what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari refer to as 'THE plane of immanence', which (they explain) 'is, at the same time, that which must be thought and which cannot be thought.' Indeed, they suggest that 'perhaps this is the supreme act of philosophy: not so much to think THE plane of immanence as to show that it is there...'.¹⁸

How, then, can historians access this world of subconscious patterns of thinking? This would only be hopeless if deliberate forms of communication were divorced from subconscious social and bodily imagination. But they are not. Because background patterns of thinking are wholly taken for granted and embedded as part of our social being, they are unavoidably present in any conscious articulation of a topic that relates to it. If creative forms—text, image or ritual—cannot exist independently of subconscious imagination, then it would follow that they must reflect it. It would be a mistake, of course, to expect this to take a rational form. The linkage of ideas is more likely to be associative, each with a range of potential trajectories that may, in some cases, seem to be mutually exclusive. These links would not therefore simply operate 'lineally' between articulate ideas and the taken-for-granted assumptions that underpinned them; they would spring from criss-crossing connections within the less stable background of subconscious patterns of thinking, responding to the totality of social experience highlighted by Stuart.

¹⁷ Llewelyn, *Departing from Logic*, 217, summarising key points in John E. Llewelyn, 'Collingwood's doctrine of Absolute Presuppositions', *Philosophical Quarterly* 11 (1961), 49–60.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchill (London, 1994), 59.

Three immediate conclusions flow from the fact that anything consciously created cannot exist independently of the subconscious imagination. The first is that any conscious expression—however unique—can be taken as shedding light on the patterns of thinking that were at that time embedded and taken for granted. A one-off text like *De Situ Albanie* should not be discarded. Even its most idiosyncratic statements—such as the Forth as the frontier between the Scottish and English realms—may help us understand better the undercurrents of assumptions about kingdoms in the twelfth century. The second conclusion is that, within the same broad culture, ideas can be recognised as linked in a significant way even though the connection seems rather crude and there is no explicit path of transmission that can be traced from one to the other. They spring from similar patterns of taken-for-granted, subconscious thinking. For example, the striking association in *De Situ Albanie* of a major topographical divide—the Forth—with the frontier of kingdoms, may be compared with a similar conflation of geography and kingship in the semantic hinterland of the Welsh word for ‘island’, *ynys*, which was occasionally used to translate Latin *regnum*, ‘kingdom’. It is also found in this sense in the phrase *tair ynys Prydain*, ‘the three realms of Britain’, which Geoffrey of Monmouth (writing in the mid-1130s) evidently took to mean England, Wales, and Scotland. It might be possible in this way to identify a substratum of political ideas which were part of the fertile soil in which intellectual articulations of political philosophy had their roots. Finally, the third point is that no new idea can be completely new (as it were), because it must be formed from and within the existing patterns and trajectories of the subconscious imagination.

Now that we have this outline, let us return to the change in ‘Scotland’ and the ‘Scots’ to mean something we can recognise today. The fact that country and people now coincided with the kingdom suggests that we should understand this

change as arising from undercurrents of assumptions about kingship and, in particular, its role in society. It will be recalled that much creative effort in the mid-thirteenth century was expended in promoting the idea of Scottish independence—an insistence that the king of Scots was the ultimate secular authority for those he governed. This would be consistent with the earlier suggestion that the expansion in Scottish identity was related to the growing presence of the crown as guarantor of property and possessions. But this can now be seen as only part of the picture. Two other elements can be recognised as particularly significant. One is a fundamental continuity with long established taken-for-granted ideas of Scottish kingship. The other is a change within the broader environment of ideas about ultimate secular authority.

Turning first to ideas of secular authority, a particularly significant development was the increasing emphasis on law as legislation and (as a result) the articulation by jurists of the concept of jurisdictional primacy. Although first fashioned with the pope in mind, this came in the thirteenth century to be applied to secular rulers. This was not yet ‘sovereignty’ in a modern sense, but it was the beginning of a doctrine of kingdoms as independent jurisdictional entities. A crucial dimension, from a Scottish point of view, was the maxim that those who held the same office were independent of each other’s jurisdiction. Pope Innocent IV, indeed, had in 1251 recognised Scotland’s *de facto* independence when he invoked this principle in rejecting Henry III of England’s request to collect a papal tax in Scotland: Innocent IV declared baldly that it was utterly unheard of for a king to do this in another’s kingdom. Now, there are various ways in which those at or near the helm of royal government in Scotland could at some level have absorbed this dawning idea of royal sovereignty. They did not, however, apply juridical principles directly. Scottish sovereignty was, instead, expressed through the common law idea of holding

land of a superior. The key phrase was that the king of Scots held his kingdom of God alone—a concept that seems almost to have become an official mantra directed at a Scottish audience as much as the king of England. Presumably it was expressed that way because its immediate context was a denial of the king of England's claim to the Scottish king's homage for Scotland. It is worth asking, though, whether it would have been possible at all without the new concept of independence sanctioned by university professors and the pope in the thirteenth century. Either the concept of the king holding of God alone might be seen as a deliberate reformulation of a juridical principle, such as the idea of a king who recognises no (earthly) superior—an idea acknowledged by Innocent III in relation to France—or the link lies deeper in the subconscious current of ideas about kingship.

The subconscious current of ideas is particularly important if we seek to understand how those close to the Scottish kingship in the mid-thirteenth century seem to have taken it for granted that Scotland should be an independent kingdom equal to any other kingdom. This was new. I have argued elsewhere that there are indications that William the Lion (1165–1214) in the last decades of his reign was unable to see himself as anything other than as a subordinate of the English king. At the same time, though, he did not see this as necessarily undermining his authority as king in his own realm. By the mid-thirteenth century this had changed: parity of status with the king of England was an inescapable corollary of the claim to being a king in any meaningful sense by exercising jurisdictional primacy. This parity was actively pursued—for example, in requests to the papacy for coronation and anointment in the first year of Alexander III's reign, and then when he reached adulthood in 1259.

Where did this new self-confidence in the thirteenth century come from? It ceases to be a puzzle once long-established assumptions about the nature of Scottish kingship are taken into account. Sovereignty (limited to the secular sphere) is only a novelty insofar as it represented an updated form of a very old idea of the kind of realm over which the king of Scots was the final authority. He had always been more than just ruler of a region like Galloway or Moray with its own sense of ‘people’. The king of Scots was first-and-foremost king of the landmass north of the Forth.

It will be recalled that a striking feature of the earliest attempts to map Britain on its own (datable to the mid-thirteenth century)—rather than in miniature as part of a world map—is the portrayal of Stirling Bridge as the only link between two islands. Although this seems absurd today, it captured the reality of the Forth and the boggy ground to the north as a barrier to travel before the era of agricultural improvement. Apart from Stirling Bridge and the ford at Drip nearby, the only established crossing point was at the Fords of Frew. The image of the Forth as marking a fundamental division was so strong that it is still found after the Wars of Independence. In the 1440s Walter Bower reported someone describing the battle of Bannockburn as fought ‘beside the royal burgh of Stirling in Scotland, lying on the boundary of Britain’. Bower added that ‘it is said that the bridge over the Forth at Stirling lies between Britain and Scotland, forming the border of both’. This is strikingly similar to the image in *De Situ Albanie* of the Forth as the frontier between the kingdoms of Scots and English. Overall, then, we seem to have kingdom, country and people coalescing round the image of Scotland north of the Forth as an island, an image rooted in an awareness of a genuine topographical barrier. By the late thirteenth century kingdom, country and people had coalesced anew around the dawning concept of sovereignty. The sense of ultimate secular authority shared by both had

moved its centre of gravity from geography to jurisdiction. Without the former, however, it must be doubted whether the latter would have occurred with the same force, if at all, for the Scottish kingdom.

The original focus on the God-given facts of geography was not unique to Scotland. When, for example, writers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries created long successions of English, Irish and Welsh kings extending deep into the mists of time, they imagined them as kings of Britain or Ireland. Athelstan, from a modern historical perspective, may have been the first king of England,¹⁹ dying in 939, but as far as his own scribe was concerned, he was ‘raised by the favour of the All-Accomplishing One on the throne of the whole kingdom of Britain’.²⁰ When the High Cross at Castlebernard was inscribed by Colmán to commemorate his patron, Mael Sechnaill mac Maíl Ruanaid, preeminent king of Uí Néill from 846 to 862, he identified him as ‘king of Ireland’.²¹ The islands of Ireland and Britain were much more clear-cut geographically than Scotland north of the Forth, of course. This must go a large way to explaining why it was so much easier to imagine Ireland as an ancient kingdom with a continuous succession of kings; the same is true for England, because its ancient kingdom was envisaged as the island of Britain. Indeed, it is striking that, in the twelfth century, the Scottish kingship focused its legitimating ancestry on descent from kings of Ireland and England, rather than on Pictish kings confined to the region north of the Forth. The ancestries of the dynasty’s founding couple, Mael Coluim III and Margaret (who both died in 1093), made it possible to do this.

¹⁹ David N. Dumville, ‘Between Alfred the Great and Edgar. Æthelstan, first king of England’, in idem, *Wessex and England from Alfred to Edgar. Six Essays on Political, Cultural and Ecclesiastical Revival* (Woodbridge, 1992), 141–71: at 171 he is described as ‘the father of mediaeval and modern England’.

²⁰ *per omnipatrantis dexteram totius Britannię regni solio sublimatus*: the phrase is found in originals that have been identified as the work of the scribe ‘Æthelstan A’, who was clearly in Æthelstan’s household: *Facsimiles of Ancient Charters in the British Museum*, part III (London, 1877), nos 3 (Sawyer 416) and 5 (Sawyer 425), dated 12 November 931 and 28 May 934 respectively. See *Facsimiles of Anglo-Saxon Charters*, ed. Simon Keynes (Oxford, 1991), 9, for comment on this scribe (identified as exemplar of no.27, Sawyer 405, dated 930).

²¹ Peter Harbison, *The High Crosses of Ireland. An Iconographical and Photographic Survey*, 3 vols (Bonn, 1992), vol. i, no. 35.

The power of geography as an expression of ultimate secular authority continued even once this had been reformulated in terms of jurisdiction. In the Hereford Mappa Mundi, for example, the border between Scotland and England—almost the same as the modern border—is represented as dividing Britain in two, with the northern island kingdom extending as far south as Berwick.

What, then, does all this mean for our understanding of Scottish origins? According to the view I have explored this evening, Scottish identity as something we can readily recognise today has its origins in changing patterns and trajectories of subconscious thinking relating to secular authority in relation to society at large that emerged in the century after the 1180s. This can be recognised as growing from existing patterns of background imagination about the independence of kings. The continuity of ideas could be very old. The earliest explicit surviving statement that Scotland north of the Forth constituted an ancient kingdom and people can be dated to sometime between 862 and 876. It is found at the beginning of the longer version of the Pictish king-list, and identifies the landmass between Fife and Caithness as the primordial land of the Picts. It is possible, therefore, to see an organic continuity from a core element of Pictish identity through to Scottish identity today, with the pivotal period of change in the thirteenth century, rather than the ninth or tenth when the Picts ‘disappeared’.

Patterns of thinking that were long established and arose from a basic sense of geography are likely to have been shared widely across society. All that it involved was the combination of a notion of ultimate secular power with the image of an island, neither of which would need to have been consciously articulated or promoted in order to gain force. This, then, may be recognised as

part of the nexus of subconscious ideas that were associated with the taken-for-granted idea of 'Scotland' in the twelfth century. In the thirteenth century new patterns of experiencing and imagining kingship became embedded through new arenas for routine encounters with royal authority, principally the royal burgh and sheriff court. This would have been pivotal for the livelihoods of many who had property and possessions, even on a small scale. These new rhythms of life could readily have been shared across society, not only by those with surpluses to sell, but also those who aspired to join them. In this environment, it can be envisaged how the existing nexus of ideas of kingdom, country and people would have coalesced imperceptibly into a new sense of Scotland as an independent realm, a new sense of Scotland that was shared by people at large.

I'll finish with a few broader points. Although my focus has been on a core issue for Scottish History, it has implications for how the origins of other European countries might be explored. The idea of Scottish independence may only have been articulated fully by those at or near the heart of royal government. Rather than following Colette Beaune in envisaging royal propaganda persuading people to love their country, however, the Scottish evidence suggests that the basic shared sense of country, people and kingdom as 'one' need not—indeed, could not—have originated and become established that way. Instead, it can best be understood as a phenomenon of what has been described by Hubert Dreyfuss as 'a non-propositional, non-intentional, on-going background field of forces'.²² This background field of forces may be equated with what I have referred to as subconscious patterns of thinking, and also Deleuze and Guattari's 'plane of immanence'. I have argued that this was the ultimate source of the assumptions and taken-for-granted ideas that can be

²² Dreyfus, 'The mystery of the background', 9.

detected in the textual evidence at our disposal. It goes without saying that this potentially has a much wider application for historians than simply as an essential dimension of national origins.

It may be objected that alternative philosophical approaches are more readily applicable specifically to understanding changes in ideas of kingship and country. John Searle, the analytic philosopher who has been credited as the ‘father of the philosophical usage of the term’ background,²³ maintains that ‘all of known institutional reality is created and maintained in existence by Status Function Declarations’ (which embraces what he calls ‘nonlinguistic or extra-linguistic institutional facts’).²⁴ Colette Beaune’s understanding of the origins of France would seem, on the face of it, to be particularly well suited to this approach. This would still, however, leave the Scottish historian searching for the initial impetus for the speech acts that not only made ‘Scotland’ and ‘Scots’ what they are today, but allowed them to enter the repertoire of spontaneous ideas shared by people at large.

The rethinking of Scottish origins that I have explored this evening also offers a new way to think about national origins that combines insights of both the main camps in social science on this issue—perennialists and constructivists—by recognising the full range of imagination that is involved: there is both conscious creativity (such as Vairement’s history and the choreography of Alexander III’s inauguration) and also the subconscious patterns of thinking behind such creativity. At the end of the day, however, what I have offered is triggered first-and-foremost by encountering historical sources. I hope that I have shown that engaging intimately with texts from the medieval past has the

²³ *Knowing without Thinking*, ed. Radman, ix.

²⁴ John R. Searle, *Making the Social World. The Structure of Human Civilization* (Oxford, 2010), 110–12. He defines a ‘Declaration’ as a particular kind of ‘speech act’, such as ‘I promise’, in which the promise becomes a reality through being uttered: *ibid.*, 12–13. Joseph Margolis, ‘Contesting John Searle’s social ontology: institutions and background’, *Knowing without Thinking*, ed. Radman, 98–115, is a sustained criticism of Searle’s approach.

potential to stretch us beyond frames of reference that we are comfortable with today, and reveal ways of thinking that may now seem strange, such as the old idea of 'Scotland' and the notion of kingdoms as islands that I have outlined this evening. It is only by so doing that we can bring to mind certain species of thinking or viewing our world that are otherwise inaccessible or lack sufficient presence to be readily acknowledged. Simply by recognising these as part of a continuing flow of subconscious ideas, this could enable us to become aware of our own assumptions and see them as if for the first time. History's particular power is that it allows us to experience intimately what is intrinsically remote ('the past'); it gives presence to what is otherwise unreachable. In this way, History may have the potential to allow us to glimpse undercurrents of social imagination that are normally beyond our consciousness. Deleuze and Guattari suggested that the supreme act of philosophy is not so much to think the 'plane of immanence' as to show that it exists. Perhaps History's supreme act is to make it possible to reveal some of these subconscious patterns of thinking. By bringing them to our conscious minds from the past (as it were), it may be possible to begin to examine them and so make the unthinkable thinkable.