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Women in Eighteenth-Century Scotland: Intimate Intellectual and Public Lives

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Lady Grisell Baillie (1665?1746) graces the front cover of this volume, her poise and thoughtful, questioning expression a fitting overture for a book that is peppered with images of 18th-century Scottish women, literally making them more visible. The traditional accounts of this period of Scottish history gave little consideration to women ? an oversight that has been challenged over the last several decades. This volume draws together a showcase of burgeoning research in this area, offering further challenges to those conventional narratives as well as a comparative body of research to add to our understandings of European women?s and gender history.

The 13 contributions are arranged into three sections on intimate, intellectual and public lives. They traverse varied and interdisciplinary territory, but Deborah Simonton and Katie Barclay?s succinct introduction weaves the strands together into a cohesive whole, presenting the book as an appreciation of the current strength of research into women?s and gender history in 18th-century Scotland. They affirm that the gathering together of these articles marks a moment to reflect on what we have learned about Scottish

women and where future research must be directed to enhance our understanding. At its core is the objective of considering how this knowledge changes our view of the established accounts of Scottish society, and to explain the role of women in its development.

Part one focuses on ?Intimate lives?, a title chosen to encompass emotional history, the self, identity and the body, drawing attention to the fact that these issues were intimate rather than private. This section is loosely structured around the lifecycle, commencing with birth, and progressing through discussions of courtship and pregnancy to roles within the family. It opens with Anne Cameron?s detailed study of birthing customs and beliefs, gleaned from letters and diaries, medical treatise and compendia of folklore. Situating Scottish practices in a broad European context, Cameron outlines where there were parallels and where regional peculiarities existed. She found that many traditional practices survived throughout the 18th century despite attempts by the Kirk to curb superstition and plans by the Faculty of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow to examine and license midwives.

This section goes some way to redressing the relative neglect of the history of the family in Scotland in comparison with research in other areas of Britain and Europe. Katie Barclay?s contribution is central here, and draws Scottish history into the folds of the history of emotions. Complementing her excellent monograph on elite marriage, in this article Barclay builds a picture of contemporary understandings of love as an emotion *across* social groups.(1) Picking out evidence from marital litigation, criminal court records and ballads, she dissects the changing meanings of love over this time. She makes a case for the ?embodied? nature of emotion, but set always within an economic and social context; family ties and financial resources remained important considerations for all. In a similar vein, Svetla Baloutzova mines the rich seam of the ballads collected by Francis J. Child to glimpse the views of women on birth out of wedlock. Scotland, in line with much of Western Europe, experienced a rise in illegitimacy rates at the end of the century. Kirk session records have been the chief source material in previous studies, prompting Baloutzova?s attempt to use repositories of oral culture to access women?s own views. She suggests that illegitimacy was very much understood as a breach of societal norms but that in cases of rape or infanticide the ballads display greater sympathy towards the women involved.

All four chapters in this section deal in some manner with the interaction between the ?public? world and inner worlds, emotions or the family. These themes are particularly brought out in Jane Rendall?s concluding contribution to this section, which discusses Margaret Cullen?s *Home: A Novel* (1802). Cullen was the daughter of well-known Scottish medical professor William Cullen, and the novel was shaped by her own experiences of kinship, family arguments over finances and inheritance and women?s place within that. Cullen?s engagement with Scots law and calls for reform to property rights for women within families underpins Rendall?s suggestion that the family and intimate lives were shaped and created by the public world in which they existed. Rendall places Cullen within a wider British context, in which her use of the language of the Scottish Enlightenment formed a distinctive contribution to the spirit of reform evident in contemporary writings by other women.

Rendall?s piece leads very neatly into the second section on intellectual lives. The theme is particularly apt, acknowledging the dominance of the Enlightenment over much of the historiography of this period. Education is the focus of the first two articles. Lindy Moore uncovers the practice of local civic authorities in supporting or establishing female burgh schools to provide instruction in sewing, cookery, household management and decorative handicrafts for daughters of burgesses and professionals. She argues that such skills, as well as more polite accomplishments, were considered as important amongst the middling ranks of society as academic subjects were for boys, with female teachers? qualifications closely scrutinised. Betty Haglund?s article explores women?s experiences of schooling through autobiographical writing, outlining the various ways that girls could acquire literacy. Girls had a more mixed, and shorter, education than that of boys, but familial or community literary culture could significantly expand access to books and study although sciences were generally more restricted. One woman who did acquire an incisive and rigorous scientific education was Mary Somerville, a largely self-taught female savant. Margaret Carlyle and James Wallaces? contribution examines her translation of Pierre-Simon Laplace?s *Mécanique Céleste* under the title *Mechanism of the Heavens* (1831). They demonstrate that Somerville?s knowledge of the latest in

French mathematics put her at the cutting edge of science. Yet her own original additions to the French text were not particularly recognised: active research was not as acceptable an activity for female academics as ?passive? translation.

Besides this connection with European intellectual circles, this section draws out the trans-Atlantic world of which 18th-century Scotland was a part. Corey Andrews examines the different treatment that two Scottish women gave to slavery in their accounts of visits to tobacco plantations in the Caribbean. Pam Perkins? contribution discusses women travel writers within Scotland?s own borders, emphasising the elements of their accounts that were shared with male writers, and acknowledging women?s role in creating the image of the wild, romantic vision of Northern Scotland that became such an enduring one.

The final part of the book entitled ?public lives? turns to financial concerns, urban business opportunities and fashion, as well as criminality. Rosalind Carr?s excellent contribution argues a case for continuity in elite women?s influence in regional politics and landed power. Focusing on the women of prominent Scottish families, she shows that women continued to be able to exert political and financial influence after the Union of 1707 despite wide-ranging political, social and economic change. Carr raises pertinent points about how what we know about women?s lives can improve our broader understanding of 18th-century society, culture and politics.

Deborah Simonton and Lousia Cross scrutinise the activities of those in the social groups below the elite, adding to the growing research on urban enterprise in British and European history. They demonstrate the opportunities for women provided by the growing trade in luxurious or fashionable goods amongst polite society. Simonton locates women at the heart of urban economies, such as that of Aberdeen, and argues for increasing opportunities created by urbanisation and commercialisation. She is concerned with entrepreneurial activities, examining how women created business personas and negotiated the commercial world. Cross discusses fashion and polite society in Scotland, cautiously suggesting there may have been regional fashions distinguished from trends in London or elsewhere, and outlining the spaces available for women in providing fashion to the elite and middling sorts. Both present optimistic readings of the material, although neither is blind to the limitations that such women operated within.

The final chapter takes this section of the book in a different direction, by turning to look at women charged with assault. Anne-Marie Kilday presents findings from her study of 1,300 cases of common aggravated assault and aggravated assault of authority before the Justiciary Court. She found that women tended to act with others and to be involved in pre-meditated assaults on their neighbours or authority figures. These were acts of intentional disorder and an acceptable form of dispute resolution for women within their own communities.

The variety covered here underlines Barclay and Simonton?s point that the diversity of new work emerging on 18th-century Scottish women is to be celebrated and encouraged. The volume is a platform for current research, but just as importantly, it lays the foundations for that which is yet to be done. The editors highlight some pertinent themes in their introduction, suggesting that rural locations, single women and those of lower social status need more consideration. They point to the relative neglect of the earlier part of the century, and the potential to use more varied methodologies that consider subjectivity, space and performance to generate much needed further investigation into the family, political identities, work and leisure. The chapters on education provide new insights into women?s early schooling at different levels of society, but how girls acquired other kinds of training garners less attention. One of the intentions of this book is to bring the history of women to bear on the story of the transformation of Scotland to a modern state. This is very successful in their focus on understanding the creation of an urban, polite, commercial world; the early phases of industrial development unfolding alongside this receive a little less coverage. This does not detract, however, from the important work that this volume has started in asking what women?s experience can tell us about Scottish society and culture, politics and the economy, as well as how women?s experiences in Scotland reflect on a broader European history.

The volume is well set up to serve undergraduates as well as a more specialist audience, with a clear,

thematic guide to further reading. It is a rich and engaging work with some excellent contributions that will reward all with an interest in gender history in Scotland and beyond.

Notes

The authors would like to sincerely thank the reviewer for a kind and thoughtful review.

1. Katie Barclay, *Love, Intimacy and Power: Marriage and Patriarchy in Scotland, 1650?1850* (Manchester, 2011).Back to (1)

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[1] http://www.history.ac.uk/reviews/item/88015