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0521642027 - Geography, Science and National Identity: Scotland since 1520

Charles W. J. Withers

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GEOGRAPHY, SCIENCE AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

Scotland since 1520

Charles Withers' book brings together work on the history of geography and the history of science with extensive archival analysis to explore how geographical knowledge has been used to shape an understanding of the nation. Using Scotland as an exemplar, the author places geographical knowledge in its wider intellectual context to afford insights into perspectives of empire, national identity and the geographies of science. In so doing, he advances a new area of geographical enquiry, the historical geography of geographical knowledge, and demonstrates how and why different forms of geographical knowledge have been used in the past to constitute national identity, and where those forms were constructed and received. This book will make an important contribution to the study of nationhood and empire and will therefore interest historians as well as students of historical geography and historians of science. It is theoretically engaging, empirically rich and beautifully illustrated.

CHARLES W. J. WITHERS is Professor of Historical Geography at the University of Edinburgh. Recent publications include *Geography and Enlightenment* (1999), co-edited with David Livingstone.

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The Earth does not owe gratitude only to those who create books, unite maps to the art of Geography, and fit lands to sky and sky to lands as with a plumbline; but also to those who persuade, urge, correct and increase these works, promote them with money and expense, strengthen the feeble, recover the lost, and give shape and polish to the deformed, so that the illustrious offspring can be born and reborn and appear with beauty into the light and faces of men.

(Johannes Blaeu, *Atlas Novus*, 1654, from
a translation by I. Cunningham)

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Preface

There has been much interest lately and from several quarters in the histories of geography and geographical knowledge, in the situated social nature of science, and in national identity. Amongst historians of geography, questions have been raised about the nature of geographical knowledge in different historical and geographical contexts. Historians of science have considered the geographical nature of science as well as its social construction. Scholars of national identity have addressed the forms taken in such identity, including the representation of geographical space.

This book is an attempt to bring these literatures together in order to understand the geographical ‘making’ of Scotland as a matter of historical geography. Simply, I am interested in knowing how geographical knowledge, variously understood, was used to give geographical identity and meaning to Scotland in the past. More exactly what is meant by a historical geography of geographical knowledge will become evident in what follows. It is also worth noting what this book is not. I am not here simply or primarily writing a history either of geography or of geographical knowledge *in* Scotland (although the main elements of such a history are present). This is not a book about the historical geography *of* Scotland in any strictly materialist sense, where the concern is with what the human landscapes of Scotland looked like at various moments in the historic present and with knowing their ‘processes of becoming’. I am not taking the questions of ‘geography’, ‘science’ or, indeed, ‘national identity’ as simple immutable givens, and I am certainly not proposing either an ‘essential’ Scottish geographical style, or national identity as a geographical matter, to be simple and shared.

I am, rather, interested in knowing how the ideas and practices of geographical knowledge were used to constitute a sense of what Scotland was geographically. Because geographical ideas and practices were produced by and for people working in particular places in certain ways in the past, there is, we should suppose, a recoverable historical geography of such endeavours. Thus, this book is about the historical geography of a particular form of

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intellectual and scientific endeavour – geographical knowledge – and with the places of production of such knowledge, the means used to determine, to disseminate and to represent such knowledge, and with knowing who the audiences were for such knowledge.

As will be clear from what follows, more is known about some of these issues than others, and my debts to certain literatures and conceptual questions is greater than to others. Most books are a collective enterprise in one way or another. This one is no exception. Many scholars in different disciplines have discussed my ideas with me. I am grateful to John Bartholomew, Michael Bravo, Alex Broadie, John Cairns, Felix Driver, Roger Emerson, Richard Finlay, Chris Fleet, Michael Heffernan, Michael Hunter, Jean Jones, Colin McArthur, John MacKenzie, Roger Mason, Graeme Morton, Miles Ogborn, Gillian Rose, Jan Rupp, Domhnall Uilleam Stiubhart, Jeffrey Stone, Margaret Wilkes and Heather Winlow. I am grateful to Peter Jones and the staff of the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities in the University of Edinburgh for allowing me, as a Sabbatical Fellow, the time and space to begin writing this book. Conference audiences in Boston, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Fort Worth, Göttingen, Kingston Ontario, London (England and Ontario), Toronto, Vancouver, Victoria and Winnipeg have all helped me refine my thinking.

Three people in particular, however, must be singled out. This book was in part made possible by a Larger Research Grant from the British Academy. Funded from that grant, Andrew Grout was a wonderful research assistant: without his work, this book would have been very different. David Livingstone and Paul Wood, good friends and critical scholars both, have encouraged, criticised and challenged. They may not agree with what I have done, or with how I have done it, but I am nevertheless deeply indebted to them.

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Charles W. J. Withers
Edinburgh