

*Medieval Scotland* by Alan Macquarrie, Sutton Publishing, Hbk., £25, 242 pp. ISBN 0750929774.

This is a very readable and attractive volume. Alan Macquarrie has already published extensively on Scottish crusading, Scottish cults of Saints and the kingdom of Strathclyde. Here, he has succeeded admirably in his main goal of providing a clear, concise, 'non-controversial starting point' for readers and students interested in the wider development of the Scottish kingdom from *c.*AD79 to *c.*1460.

In the first two-thirds of this book especially, the author provides a strong and accessible narrative of events synthesised with important thematic developments, most prominently Scotland's evolving kingship and layered national and local identities and how these factors interacted with each other and external forces to make Scotland's emergence, make-up and political history very different from that of Ireland and Wales. In addition, the early chapters also outline matters of language, geography and climate. Impressive use is made of both historical and archaeological evidence in presenting even coverage of all the eras, regions and eventual fusions of Scotland's tribal peoples, including the 'often neglected' Britons, Angles and kingdom of Strathclyde [pp. 31-4, 74-5] as well as Picts and Scots: their story is entwined with those of waves of Vikings and Christian missionaries to *c.*900. One very welcome feature of the text to this point is the uncomplicated and judicious discussion of the historical sources – annals and literature – of the post-Roman and Dark Age period, often illustrated with extracts or vignettes. There is also a lush array of black-and-white photographs and maps as well as a splendid colour-plates section, all closely allied to the text with the whole pleasingly divided by logical sub-headings.

The broad strengths of this approach continue into the High and Later Middle Ages chapters. As would be expected from a scholar of Dr Macquarrie's credentials, developments in the church are especially well served and illustrated [chs. 6 and 11] as are the phases of introduction/intrusion of feudal structures and the events of each reign in turn from Malcolm III (d. 1093) to James II (d. 1460). The backbone here is perhaps very traditional in approach, with no real surprises or challenges to convention (although these would have been very interesting coming from this author), but this is entirely

appropriate for a book of this brief. However, it is fair to state that some of the binding themes so well threaded through the first hundred pages are somewhat obscured from sight in the second half.

For example, although the ‘Alexandrian’ age of the thirteenth-century and the long wars of Scottish succession *c.*1296-1357 are covered with a very clear narrative, there is no real reflective *discussion* of the resulting changes in national identity to mirror that periodic focus in the Dark Age chapters, even though such famous events as the canonisation/translation of St Margaret (1251) and the Declaration of Arbroath (1320) are briefly touched upon. Similarly, fourteenth- and fifteenth-century changes in noble lordship are highlighted as are some parliamentary developments, but the over-arching theme of the evolving nature of kingship is not really reflected upon with an even focus for *c.*1329-1437. What is perhaps most absent overall, though, is some illustration – either historical or archaeological – of everyday life for ordinary Scottish subjects. The impact of the plague (1349-) is dramatically illustrated, as are the evolution and organisation of the burghs, but there is no depiction of life on the land for the majority of inhabitants or of daily/weekly/seasonal worship alongside high church affairs (bishops, kings and Popes).

So, some small criticisms, yet it would surely be reasonable to hope for such topics to be worked in to what is otherwise an extremely valuable addition to the overview literature of medieval Scotland and one which is otherwise very successful in taking care to give equitable exposure to Scotland’s various regions and estates. A paperback edition should be welcomed, but perhaps, too, with an expanded bibliographic guide to accompany the index.