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ROOTED IN MYTH? SCOTLAND'S LANGUAGES IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY NORTH-AMERICAN JOURNALS

Throughout the nineteenth century, journals, magazines, books and the popular press more in general played a very important part in the popularization of scientific contents – see Dossena (2016). In addition, such materials were invaluable for the dissemination of knowledge concerning literature, history and cultural issues. Circulating libraries, inexpensive books and even broadsides were sources of information among a readership whose level of schooling was not always very high. Similarly, readers outside Britain could employ the same kind of documents to expand their knowledge of topics that pertained to “the Auld Country”, regardless of their status as recent immigrants or as people who had already begun to develop a more distant relationship with the land of their ancestors, but who were still interested in its cultural background and indeed wished to retain links with it, so as to enhance or preserve their sense of rootedness – see Dossena (2012).

Within this framework, it may be of interest to investigate if and how Scotland's languages were discussed in journals and other printed materials aiming to reach a wide audience in North America. The articles printed in both US and Canadian journals place themselves in the context of a relatively widespread interest in the origins of languages that pervaded Late Modern times: an interest that underpins the development of philological studies, certainly, but which on the other hand was also often tarnished by mythical interpretations of religious and literary presuppositions, especially as distance increased from original materials whether diachronically or geographically.

My presentation will aim to discuss to what extent such articles reflect well-established ideas or whether they have any innovative traits. While my approach will be mostly qualitative, key items will be the object of investigation in a critical discourse analytical perspective. Starting from an overview of the distribution of articles on Scotland's linguistic history in various journals, which may indicate how extensive the readers' interest was, and whether it concerned Scots more than Gaelic, or the other way round, I will then investigate the indebtedness of these articles to views of Scotland's past that could be traced to literary sources. The discussion will centre on how such sources may have reinforced perceptions that were not necessarily true for the languages per se, but which instead were based on very popular (and carefully constructed) registers.

References

- Dossena, Marina. 2012. “A Highly Poetical Language'? Scots, Burns, Patriotism and Evaluative Language in Nineteenth-century Literary Reviews and Articles.” In: Carol Percy and Mary Catherine Davidson (eds.). *The Languages of Nation: Attitudes and Norms*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters. 99–119.
- Dossena, Marina. 2016. “‘Terms of Art and Manufacture’: An Early Investigation into Late Modern Dictionaries of Specialised Discourse.” *Textus* 29 (3): 127–145.