

Northern Maps: Re-negotiating space and place in the Northern Isles and Norway in the eighteenth century

This article argues that cartography and topographical description played a significant role in the way in which areas of the Scottish Northern Isles were represented and visualised, as a regional space, after the political union of England and Scotland in 1707, and, alongside that, the development of the concept of a British state and nation. Not only did topographical literature become more professionalised and commercially-oriented during the eighteenth century, but the visual representations of territories created in maps and charts became part of a network of cultural practices that both linked and divided historical regions across the British Isles. On the one hand, map-making re-negotiated national spaces in order to contribute to the formation the United Kingdom or Great Britain (itself a complex national entity) and, on the other hand, it provided an opportunity to re-create a sense of place or Northern regional identity, continuing to be part of an intercultural Northern European maritime region linked by the North Sea. As can be seen in the following case studies from the Shetland Islands and Western Norway, at 'image level', the change in perceptions about a region's identity (or one's own, within that region), often follows a long process, 'since shifts in the attitudes of mental mapping tend to slowly follow changes in political and social conditions, mixing with philosophical and aesthetic conventions of the time'.

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