

The chorographic tradition and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Scottish antiquaries

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Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century antiquarian works in Scotland have established an important foundation for studies of Scotland's past and its remains. While the tradition of British antiquarianism is well-known and widely studied, few scholars are familiar with the older tradition of 'chorography', with which many early antiquarians identified and which exerted tremendous influence on the broad approaches taken by antiquaries. This paper seeks to underscore the role of the chorographic tradition within the works of Scottish antiquaries of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A brief introduction to chorography's history and its theoretical and methodological approaches is given as a short introduction to the tradition. This is followed by a discussion of two key Scottish antiquaries (Sir Robert Sibbald and Alexander Gordon) of the period, focusing on the degrees to which they each practiced chorography despite their non-use of the term. The paper concludes with some thoughts on the role of chorography and its long-term impact through the legacy of the work of these antiquaries.

Chorography

Chorography is a pre-disciplinary tradition with firm roots in classical antiquity. Its name is Greek: χωρογραφία (*chorographia*), as a combination of χώρα (*chora*, 'country') or χώρος (*choros*, 'space or place') + γραφία (*graphia*, 'writing'). While most modern definitions emphasize *chora+graphia*, meaning 'writing about a country or region', I prefer to translate *graphia* more broadly as 'representation', with *choros* rather than *chora*; thus, in the simplest terms, I define chorography as 'the representation of space or place.'¹ This definition is supported by the broad corpus of chorographic works from antiquity up to the present.

Though few explicitly chorographic works have survived from antiquity, the tradition is well attested and/or described in classical texts by (for example) Arrian, Diogenes Laertius, Herodotus, Pausanias, Pliny the Elder, Polybius, Ptolemy, Strabo, and in a variety of fragments from now-lost or little-known works. Strabo refers to his own work as chorography,² refers several times to 'chorographer[s]'

¹ See Darrell J. Rohl, 'Chorography: History, Theory and Potential for Archaeological Research', *TRAC 2011: Proceedings of the Twenty-first Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference*, edited by Frances McIntosh, Maria Duggan, and Darrell J. Rohl, Oxford: Oxbow Books, In Press, for more on this definition and a fuller discussion of chorography's history and theoretical foundations; expected publication in March 2012.

² Strabo, *Geographica*, edited by Augustus Meineke, Leipzig: Teubner, 1877, 8.3.17. Loeb Classical Library edition edited and translated by Horace Leonard Jones, *The Geography of Strabo*, London: William Heinemann, 1917-32.

upon whose work he draws much of his second-hand information,³ and notes that it is not remarkable that different regions and countries each have their own chorographer.⁴ At least two classical works were also entitled *Chorography*.⁵ From this period, the best-surviving and most influential descriptions/definitions are found in the works of Strabo and Ptolemy, emphasizing regionality and concern with producing a 'likeness' of a place.⁶ While Strabo clearly identifies himself—at least in part—as a chorographer, it must be noted that Ptolemy describes himself as a geographer and that his discussion of chorography is part of an attempt to distinguish his notion of 'geography' from the closely-related but distinct cognates 'chorography' and 'topography.' Ptolemy appears to be the only classical author to attempt a clear-cut definition of these terms, and is thus widely used in the formulation of current definitions, but careful reading of works by self-identified classical-period chorographers reveals that his description of the tradition is woefully inadequate. Some of these issues have been raised by Fred Lukermann, who further suggests that both chorographic and geographic notions of space, place and location can be traced as far back as Homer.⁷

Following the fifth-century fall of the Western Roman Empire, chorography disappears for a millennium, and no known author continues to use the term until the renaissance rediscovery of Strabo and Ptolemy. With subsequent translation of these long-neglected Greek texts into Latin,⁸ they became widely influential and led a variety of scholars to revive and reformulate the tradition through the creation of new chorographies that fit classically inspired humanistic perspectives. Two early continental examples include Flavio Biondo's *Italia Illustrata* and Konrad Celtis' *Germania Illustrata*.⁹

The continental renaissance came late to Britain, but is commonly referred to as 'the Elizabethan era', 'the age of Shakespeare', or 'the English Renaissance', spanning most of the sixteenth-century. More recently, these designations have given way to the supposedly more neutral 'early modern period.'¹⁰ It is here when chorography—at least explicitly referred to as such—most visibly flourished in Britain. In this period, and within the works of the exact same authors, arose the

³ Strabo, *Geographica*, 5.2.7-8, 6.1.11, 6.2.11, 6.3.10.

⁴ Strabo, *Geographica*, 1.1.16.

⁵ Pomponius Mela, *De Chorographia*, edited by Carl Frick, Leipzig: Teubner, 1880; Eusebius of Caesarea's *Chorography of Judaea* is, unfortunately, lost but attested to in the preface to his *Onomasticon*, edited and translated by Greville Stewart Parker Freeman-Grenville, Jerusalem: Carta, 2003.

⁶ Ptolemy, *Geographia*, 1.1, edited and translated by J.L. Berggren and A. Jones, *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001.

⁷ Fred Lukermann, 'The Concept of Location in Classical Geography', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 51.2, 1961, 194-210.

⁸ Both Strabo's *Geographica* and Ptolemy's *Geographia* were brought to Italy in the first half of the fifteenth century and published in Latin translation between 1469-75. See Aubrey Diller, 'The Oldest Manuscripts of Ptolemaic Maps', *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 71.1, 1940, 62-67; A. Diller, *The Textual Tradition of Strabo's Geography*, Amsterdam: A.M. Hakkert, 1975, 102-32; Gerald Roe Crone, *Maps and their Makers: An Introduction to the History of Cartography*, London: Hutchinson, 1953, 68.

⁹ F. Biondo, *Italia Illustrata*, Rome, 1474; K. Celtis, *Germania Illustrata: or, De Origine situ Moribus et Institutis Norimberga Libellus Incipit*, Nuremberg, 1502.

¹⁰ Nigel Wheale, *Writing and Society: Literacy, Print, and Politics in Britain, 1590-1660*, London: Routledge, 1999, 9.

more familiar tradition of British antiquarianism. An examination of these early antiquarian works reveals the close links between antiquarianism and chorography; while I would be relatively comfortable saying that British antiquarianism is largely synonymous with chorography, it is more difficult to dispute that chorography was a primary method of British antiquarian work.¹¹ Key chorographer-antiquarians of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries include John Leland,¹² William Lambarde,¹³ William Camden,¹⁴ Robert Sibbald,¹⁵ William Dugdale,¹⁶ Alexander Gordon,¹⁷ William Stukeley,¹⁸ Thomas Pennant,¹⁹ John Wallis,²⁰ and others too numerous to mention here. Of them all, Camden was the most influential, with his sweeping and much republished/revised *Britannia* setting a model largely followed for more than two centuries.

By the mid-seventeenth century the term chorography had fallen out of regular use, though its characteristic approach remained current and relevant. While many antiquarians from this period onwards can fairly definitively be labeled 'chorographers', they rarely used the term, though their methods, organizational structure, and principle concerns continued to reflect earlier models that more explicitly stated their chorographic status. Michael Shanks and Christopher Witmore have argued that the nineteenth-century works of Sir Walter Scott qualify as chorographic,²¹ and William Bossing has identified the existentialist emplaced literature of Henry David Thoreau with the tradition,²² though neither Scott nor Thoreau appear to have been familiar with the term. Despite such continued examples of chorographic approaches, the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw chorography largely displaced by more narrowly focused and concertedly empirical

¹¹ See Stan Mendyck, 'Early British Chorography', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 17.4, 1986, 459-81; *'Speculum Britanniae: Regional Study, Antiquarianism, and Science in Britain to 1700*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989.

¹² John Leland, *The Itinerary of John Leland the Antiquary*, second edition, nine volumes, edited by Thomas Hearne, Oxford, 1745.

¹³ William Lambarde, *Perambulation of Kent*, London, 1576.

¹⁴ William Camden, *Britannia sive Florentissimorum regnorum, Angliae, Scotiae, Hiberniae, et insularum adiacentium ex intima antiquitate chorographica description*, London, 1586; first English edition, *Britain, or, A Chorographical Description of the Most Flourishing Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland*, translated by Philemon Holland, London, 1607.

¹⁵ Robert Sibbald, *An Account of the Scottish Atlas; or, The Description of Scotland Ancient and Modern*, Edinburgh, 1683; *Scotia Illustrata*, Edinburgh, 1684; *Historical Inquiries, Concerning the Roman Monuments and Antiquities in the North-Part of Britain called Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1707; *The History, Ancient and Modern, of the Sherrifdoms of Fife and Kinross*, Edinburgh, 1710.

¹⁶ William Dugdale, *The Antiquities of Warwickshire Illustrated*, London, 1656.

¹⁷ Alexander Gordon, *Itinerarium Septentrionale: or, a Journey Thro' Most of the Counties of Scotland and Those in the North of England*, London: 1726; *Additions and Corrections, by Way of Supplement to the Itinerarium Septentrionale*, London, 1732.

¹⁸ William Stukeley, *Itinerarium Curiosum: or, An Account of the Antiquities, and Remarkable Curiosities in Nature and Art, Observed in Travels through Great Britain*, London, 1776.

¹⁹ Thomas Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland*, Chester, 1771; *A Tour in Wales*, London, 1778.

²⁰ John Wallis, *The Natural History and Antiquities of Northumberland*, London, 1769.

²¹ Michael Shanks and Christopher Witmore, 'Echoes across the Past: Chorography and Topography in Antiquarian Engagements with Place', *Performance Research*, 15.4, 2010, 97-106.

²² William P. Bossing, *Chorography: Writing an American Literature of Place*, PhD Thesis, University of Kansas, Lawrence, 1999.

forms of topography and spatial analysis—particularly in the field of geography.²³ In the same period, antiquarianism gave way to a more formalized discipline of modern archaeology, where landscape phenomenologists²⁴ have taken up certain aspects of chorographic practice.

More recently, especially since the mid-1980s, chorography has become the topic of renewed scholarship across several disciplines, especially in historical and literary research on early modern Britain. Key figures in this field include Richard Helgerson,²⁵ Stan Mendyck,²⁶ Lesley Cormack,²⁷ and William Hall.²⁸ William Bossing has explored and considered chorography from a specifically American literary perspective, providing an informed theoretical discussion and retrospectively assigning several works of American emplaced literature to the tradition,²⁹ while Elizabeth Pettinaroli has explored chorography and ‘placemaking’ in the early modern Hispanic world.³⁰ Chorography has also found its way into recent archaeological discussion, with, for example, Richard Hingley examining its role in *The Recovery of Roman Britain* and using a chorography-inspired model to explore the long-term biography and life of Hadrian’s Wall,³¹ and Shanks discussing it in a variety of places, including in collaborations with Christopher Witmore and Mike Pearson.³² The past twenty years has also seen two very different, but conceptually similar, ‘exercise[s] in chorography’ in William Least Heat-Moon’s *PrairyErth* and Pearson’s *In Comes I*.³³

Recent scholarly works on chorography are helping to shed light on this ancient and long-standing tradition. While I have opted to provide my own—admittedly simplified—definition (i.e. ‘the representation of space or place’), I have been reluctant to do so. This reluctance is partially due to the breadth and complexity of theory and practice represented in the extensive chorographic corpus, but also for the same reasons some contemporary archaeological theorists are embracing the tradition’s somewhat ambiguous and protean nature while hesitating to provide a clear-cut definition: chorography’s greatest appeal and potential may

²³ Robert David Sack, ‘Chorology and Spatial Analysis’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 64.3, 1974, 439-52. It must be noted, however, that Sack’s ‘chorology’ is not exactly the same thing as ‘chorography.’

²⁴ Christopher Tilley, *A Phenomenology of Landscape: places, paths, and monuments*, Oxford: Berg, 1994.

²⁵ Richard Helgerson, ‘The Land Speaks: Cartography, Chorography, and Subversion in Renaissance England’, *Representations*, 16, 1986, 50-85.

²⁶ Mendyck, ‘Early British Chorography’; *Speculum Britanniae*.

²⁷ Lesley B. Cormack, ‘“Good Fences Make Good Neighbors”’: Geography as Self-Definition in Early Modern England’, *Isis*, 82.4, 1991, 639-61.

²⁸ William K. Hall, *From Chronicle to Chorography: Truth, Narrative, and the Antiquarian Enterprise in Renaissance England*, PhD Thesis, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1995.

²⁹ Bossing, *Chorography*.

³⁰ Elizabeth Pettinaroli, *Literary Emplacements: Chorography and Placemaking in the Early Modern Hispanic World*, PhD Thesis, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, 2008.

³¹ Richard Hingley, *The Recovery of Roman Britain 1586-1906: ‘A Colony so Fertile’*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008; *Hadrian’s Wall: A Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

³² Shanks and Witmore, ‘Echoes across the Past’; Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, London: Routledge, 2001.

³³ William Least Heat-Moon, *PrairyErth: A Deep Map*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991; Mike Pearson, *In Comes I: Performance, Memory and Landscape*, Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2006. Quotation from Pearson, *In Comes I*.

lie in its open approach, 'provid[ing] a handle on a more immanent field of practices.'³⁴ Despite the genuine appeal of such openness, the present lack of a focal definition—that is not based primarily on Ptolemy's incomplete description—poses an obstacle to scholars and students who have not spent considerable time studying the tradition. My definition, thus, is simply an entry point for further exploration: it is based firmly on the term's etymology, but purposely interpreted in the broadest sense possible. Still, while this entry point is open and accessible, further elaboration is required to give a better sense of chorography's concerns, theoretical foundations and practical methods.

A decade ago Pearson and Shanks brought chorography into discussions of archaeology and performance, adopting Heat-Moon's term 'deep-map' as a useful alternative terminology:

Reflecting eighteenth-century antiquarian approaches to place which included history, folklore, natural history and hearsay, the deep map attempts to record and represent the grain and patina of place through juxtapositions and interpenetrations of the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the factual and the fictional, the discursive and the sensual, the conflation of oral testimony, anthology, memoir, biography, natural history and everything you might ever want to say about a place.³⁵

Elsewhere, Shanks further elaborates complex theoretical and practical considerations of the deep-map by quoting the late Clifford McLucas:

Deep maps will be big...slow...sumptuous...genuinely multimedia...will require the engagement of both the insider and outsider...will bring together the amateur and the professional, the artist and the scientist, the official and the unofficial, the national and the local...they will involve negotiation and contestation over who and what is represented and how...deep maps will be unstable, fragile and temporary. They will be a conversation and not a statement.³⁶

These ideas well represent the broad image of chorography that emerges from careful reading of chorographic literature from antiquity to the present, though

³⁴ Christopher Witmore, personal communication; for further discussion of the importance of ambiguity and open approaches to archaeological engagement, see Christopher Witmore, 'Prolegomena to Open Pasts: On Archaeological Memory Practices', *Archaeologies*, 5.3, 2009, 511-45, and Michael Shanks, *Experiencing the Past: On the Character of Archaeology*, London: Routledge, 1992.

³⁵ Pearson and Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology*, 64-65. The term 'deep-map' is borrowed from Heat-Moon, *PrairyErth*.

³⁶ Shanks, 'deep-mapping', [<http://documents.stanford.edu/MichaelShanks/51>, accessed 10 Apr 2011].

perhaps no single chorographic work entirely fits the mold. To these I can add my own observations on chorographic theory and practice.³⁷

Twelve basic observations can be made about chorographic thinking. As the definition adopted here states, chorography is at its most basic level about the *representation of space/place*. This fundamental focus on ‘representation’ suggests and leads to an inherently *multi-media* approach, including written description, multiple modes of visualization, and performance.³⁸ Chorography is concertedly *spatio-historical*, being concerned with both place and time, but wherein place is more prominent: ‘history, as a progression through time for which place is incidental, is transformed...becom[ing] instead, temporal depth recognized as a feature of place.’³⁹ From the time of Camden, if not before, a key component of chorography has been the bidirectional *connection of past and present* through the medium of space, land, region or country. Chorography goes ‘beyond an anthropocentric sense of “community” to suggest a more inclusive, biocentric orientation’, highlighting the *interdependence of human and environment*.⁴⁰ Chorography may also provide a welcome challenge to traditional views of centre and periphery, *de- and re-centering* perspective, by making the particular place or region under consideration the centre to which all roads lead. A particularly common feature is the clearly present and recognizable *authorial voice*, often in the first-person, emphasizing the personal and immanent aspect of encounter/engagement with place and establishing a sense of authoritativeness in which the chorographer plays the role of what Lambarde called the ‘xenagogus’, or ‘guide for foreigners.’⁴¹ Further, Lambarde’s notion of a ‘xenagogus’ suggests that chorography requires and is concerned with a degree of *native knowledge*, requiring real emplaced experiences. Chorography is also about *experience, memory and meaning*, recognizing that ‘landscape...is shaped as much by story as by topography...layer upon layer of meaning collects around us to form this place.’⁴² Chorography is also generative, or creative, by ‘calling places into being, not just by naming topographic features, but by dramatizing in the process of revealing the landscape how they matter.’⁴³ Chorography is highly *transdisciplinary*, offering a coherent body of thought and practice that melds concerns and techniques from a variety of disciplines. Finally, chorography is both *qualitatively and quantitatively empirical and critical*—not in a positivistic hypothesis-testing manner, but following from the observation regarding experience, emphasizing concern with authentic knowledge gained from personal observation and examination. These observations are not designed to be prescriptive but, rather,

³⁷ These are discussed more fully in Rohl, ‘Chorography: History, Theory and Potential for Archaeological Research.’ These observations are based on careful readings of a broad range of works of and about chorography, many—but not all—of which are referenced in this article.

³⁸ While this could, arguably, be considered an aspect of chorographic *practice* rather than *theory*, I choose to include it here because the use of multiple media and forms of representation are not merely ad-hoc practical decisions but are usually a fundamental requirement that shapes each chorography from the very beginning.

³⁹ Hall, *From Chronicle to Chorography*, 23.

⁴⁰ Bossing, *Chorography*, 154.

⁴¹ Lambarde, *Perambulation of Kent*, 7.

⁴² Bossing, *Chorography*, 3.

⁴³ Bossing, *Chorography*, 153.

represent relatively common guiding principles that appear to be present in a broad range of chorographic works from antiquity to the present.

In terms of practice, chorography can be seen to operate through the application of ten key methods. Despite the great antiquity of the tradition, these all remain familiar and well-practiced methodologies employed by those engaged in archaeological fieldwork or interpretation. They include *regional field survey, inquiry* using a variety of sources, *collection* of facts, stories and objects, *detailed description and/or measurement, listing* of notable features, items and historical events, specific and detailed *analysis* of collected and/or described items and places, *visualization* in a variety of formats, examination and tracing of previous accounts through an *historiographic* method, general *critical thinking* about all evidences and personal experiences, and communication of results through *presentation and/or publication*.

Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-century Scottish Antiquaries

Scotland has a long and colourful antiquarian history, though its antiquaries have received less attention than those from England. Among the most prominent antiquaries of Scotland are Sir Robert Sibbald and Alexander Gordon, each of whom made important contributions with lasting influence on later works and developments within Scotland. Neither appears to have used the term 'chorography', though their works reveal that they can be squarely assigned to the tradition. This is further supported by their acknowledged indebtedness to Camden's celebrated chorography, which provided an essential model for their work.⁴⁴

Sir Robert Sibbald (1641-1722)

Sibbald was an Edinburgh polymath and one of the most important early Scottish antiquarians. By trade Sibbald was a physician, but his academic studies (at Edinburgh, Leiden, Paris, and Angers) included divinity, botany and chemistry, as well as the more medically-inclined subjects of anatomy and surgery.⁴⁵ As a physician, Sibbald excelled: gaining appointment as Physician in Ordinary to Charles II and James VII (James II of England), becoming the first Professor of Medicine at Edinburgh University, and founding the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. Along with his appointment as Royal Physician, Sibbald was also made 'Geographer Royal' with a remit centred on providing a description of Scotland. With his friend and cousin Andrew Balfour he also founded what would later become the Royal Botanic Garden of Edinburgh. Sibbald's interest in natural history, and his good reputation and influence, also led to his name being used in the taxonomies of the Blue Whale (for which species he was the first to describe)⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Gordon notes Camden's influence throughout the preface to his *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, and Sibbald both acknowledges Camden in most of his publications and also served as a contributor to later editions of Camden's *Britannia*.

⁴⁵ Charles W. J. Withers, 'Sibbald, Sir Robert (1641-1722)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25496>, accessed 7 Oct 2011].

⁴⁶ R. Sibbald, *Phalainologia Nova, sive Observationes de rarioribus quibusdam Balaenis in Scotiae Littus ejectis*, Edinburgh, 1694.

and the wildflower commonly called Creeping Sibbaldia. While most of his antiquarian work was carried out during the late seventeenth century, Sibbald continued to contribute to antiquarian understanding of Scotland into the eighteenth and, as we will see, his influence endured long after his death, in 1722, at the age of 81.

Probably some time before his appointment as Geographer Royal in 1682, Sibbald began collecting information for an atlas of Scotland, which was formally announced via an advertisement: this informs that the Atlas was intended to be a 'Description of the Scotia Antiqua, & Scotia Moderna, and the Natural History of the Products of... SCOTLAND.'⁴⁷ Immediately, we see a chorographic interest in description, regionality, both the past and present, and natural environment. Sibbald offers a selection of twelve general 'Queries' for which he solicits responses that will help him complete the work, along with more direct questions aimed at 'the NOBILITY', 'the CLERGY', 'the GENTRY', 'the Royal BURROWS', and 'the UNIVERSIT[IES and COLLE]DGES.' The queries are rather exhaustive and wide-ranging, touching on government and laws, natural resources, transportation and infrastructure, antiquities and visible ruins, local historical knowledge, place-names, peculiar customs and dispositions of local inhabitants, and more.

Particularly illustrative of Sibbald's chorographic approach is a list of detailed instructions to individuals who responded to his queries:⁴⁸

1. In Order to an exact Description, remember to confine your self within one Parish at a Time: And, first, take Care to mention what other Parishes ly contiguous to that Parish on the S.N.E. or W. or whether it is bounded any where, with the Sea-coast.
2. Be careful to mention every Gentleman's House within the Parish; (beginning from one End, and advancing foreward to the other). Tell its distance and True Bearing from the next adjacent House or Two; or from a House of principal Note, tho' at some Distance. Item, the Distance and true bearing of a principal House from the next Village or City, not exceeding, however, the first Eight or Sixteen Points of the Compass. Item, Whether, and on what side of a river or large Burn a House stand, &c. and how close upon it: Do the same with Respect to the Church, and the Village which is commonly near the Church.
3. When there is a City or Village in the Bounds, tell what are its Privileges, what publick Buildings are in it, such as Church, Tolbooth, Hospital, &c. Item, on what River or large

⁴⁷ R. Sibbald, *Advertisement*, Edinburgh, 1682; National Library of Scotland, MS s.302 b.1 (21). This broadsheet is fully transcribed in C. W. J. Withers, 'Geography, Science and National Identity in Early Modern Britain: The Case of Scotland and the work of Sir Robert Sibbald (1641-1722)', *Annals of Science*, 53, 1996, 29-73.

⁴⁸ R. Sibbald, National Library of Scotland, MS Crawford Deposit MB.227; fully transcribed in Withers, 'Geography, Science and National Identity', Appendix III. Quoted here at-length for illustrative purposes.

Burn, and on what side of the River it stands; and especially its true Distance, and Bearing from one, or two or three of the Neighbouring Cities, or any capital City, tho' far distant.

4. Be exact to notice, which way the Current of each River or Brook runs, where it comes from, what Town or Towns it goes to; and what greater River it falls into, and where. Item, What remarkable Turn in its Course it happens to take: also, its Bridges, and of what Number of arches they consist. The Rise and Course of Rivers ought to be carefully given.

5. Tell if there is any Loch in the Bounds; [what the measurement] is in Breadth and Length; what Fish it or the River produces. And if there is anything else remarkable in or about them. Item, Forget not to mention where there is any considerable Wood, Moss or Moor.

6. Fail not to take notice of the Field of any ancient Battle. Item, any ancient Monuments, and natural Rarities, provided they be Real and not Fabulous. Any Ancient Tradition may likewise be noticed, if not ridiculous.

7. Where is any remarkable Hill, or Chain of Hills, mention them: Also, Take notice of the Course of the King's Highway, and the Places thro' which it passeth; And where two Shires happen to touch each other, be careful to describe the Boundaries exactly.

8. In giving Distances, let the Miles be the common computed Miles of the Place; and where the Distances are small, you say, A large or short Mile; or where they are still smaller, say about 1/2 or 1/4 of a Mile.

9. Omit nothing (tho' not mentioned here) that can any Way contribute to the Knowledge of the present Geographical Face of our Country.

10. Example, I, the parish of... in the Shire of... hath to the N. the parish of... to the S. and S.E. the parish of II, The church is 4 Miles from the Town of... to the North. III, The House of... is N. from the Church 1189 M. IV, The House of... is 2 M. to the W. of House and 4 M.E. of the City It stands close on the S. Side of the River... which falls into the Sea at the Town of... standing on the N. Side of it, &c. Place no Distance, &c. But such as consist with your own Knowledge.

Unfortunately, despite records indicating that Sibbald received 77 contributions from at least 65 individuals (primarily local clergy),⁴⁹ his planned Atlas never

⁴⁹ Withers, 'Geography, Science and National Identity', Appendix IV provides a detailed list of respondents.

materialized. The reasons for this are uncertain, but his memoirs reveal a great deal of personal expense and strain related to the project.⁵⁰

Despite never completing his planned Atlas, Sibbald nevertheless published some of the material collected for its purpose. In 1684 he provided a natural history, entitled *Scotia Illustrata*, focused on flora and fauna, descriptions of mountains, agricultural geography and major topographic features.⁵¹ It is largely a work of descriptive prose, but also contains a variety of detailed illustrations of plants and animals throughout Scotland (e.g. Figure 1). While this work primarily focused on non-human aspects of contemporary Scotland, Sibbald relates this natural environmental character to its human inhabitants, describing them as 'products of their country, fitted both for war and the practice of arts by virtue of their native soil and the purity of their air.'⁵²



Figure 1 An example of Sibbald's natural history illustrations.
From Sibbald, *Scotia Illustrata*, Edinburgh, 1684, Plate 6.

⁵⁰ Withers, 'Geography, Science and National Identity', 53.

⁵¹ Sibbald, *Scotia Illustrata*.

⁵² Withers, 'Sibbald, Sir Robert (1641-1722)'.

Some of the regional material was also published in several works, including the *History Ancient and Modern of the Sheriffdom of Fife and Kinross* and the *Description of the Isles of Orkney and Zetland*. More specifically focused was the *Historical Inquiries*, which dealt primarily with Roman antiquities in Scotland, including the Antonine Wall, which is traced via both desktop survey using previous accounts and Sibbald's own personal observations on the ground, which are often used to either corroborate or critique existing knowledge. Included were a variety of illustrations, diagrams and site plans. Figure 2 is a rather detailed and sophisticated—if, also, incorrect in many of its aspects—plan of the various components of the Wall, which Sibbald likely commissioned. Not all of Sibbald's illustrations, however, were of such high quality. Figure 3, for instance, is one of the earliest drawings of Arthur's O'on, a possible Roman mausoleum or victory monument that used to be located north of the Antonine Wall at Stenhousemuir, Falkirk. Sibbald describes this monument in some detail, provides measurements and explains that he examined it personally, on multiple occasions, 'narrowly' and with a 'lighted Link.'⁵³ Unfortunately, despite the great attention he paid to this singular monument and the overall high quality of most of the illustrations found throughout his various works, this image is probably the poorest. I suspect that it is one of the very few actually drawn by Sibbald himself.

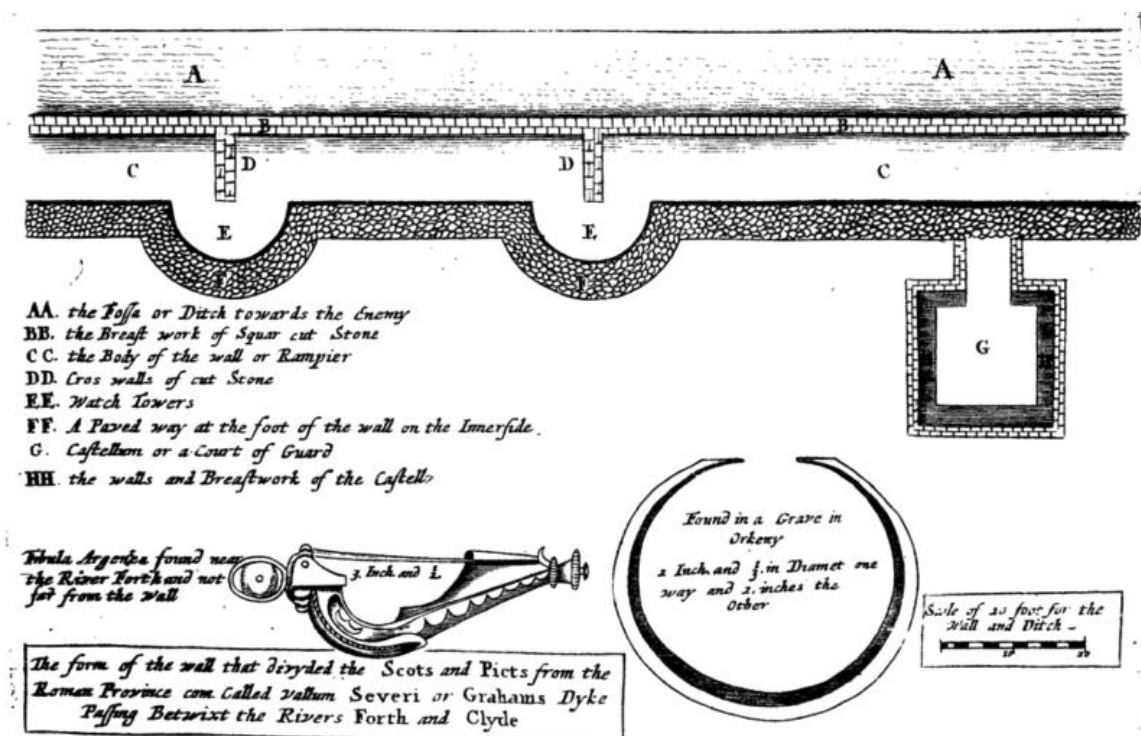


Figure 2 Sibbald's diagram of the Antonine Wall.

From Sibbald, *Historical Inquiries, Concerning the Roman Monuments and Antiquities in the North-Part of Britain called Scotland*, Edinburgh, 1707, Plate 2.

⁵³ R. Sibbald, *Historical Inquiries*, 42-46.

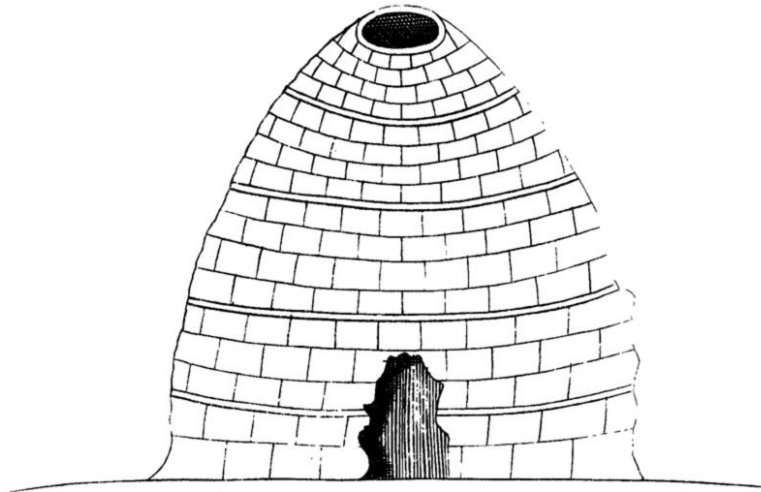


Figure 3 Sibbald's sketch of Arthur's O'on.
From Sibbald, *Historical Inquiries*, Plate 6.

Alexander Gordon (c.1692-1754?)

We know very little about Gordon's early life, though he was born sometime around 1692, probably in Aberdeen, where he received a Master of Arts degree.⁵⁴ While he is best known as a Scottish antiquarian—possibly the most famous of the country's antiquaries, thanks in large part to Sir Walter Scott, who immortalized him as 'Sandy Gordon', a favourite antiquary of Jonathan Oldbuck⁵⁵—he was also an accomplished opera singer, having performed on some of the great Italian stages, as well as in London and Edinburgh. He sometimes served as a tutor, bookseller and art dealer. Later in life, in 1741, after a variety of difficulties, he emigrated to the new world colony of Carolina to serve as secretary to his friend James Glen, the new colonial governor. He died there, probably around 1754.

Gordon's main claim to fame was his *Itinerarium Septentrionale*,⁵⁶ or 'A northern Journey', which focused primarily on the Roman and early medieval (Viking age) antiquities and ruins throughout Scotland. The bulk of the work focuses on remains that were either known or thought to date to the Roman period, though Gordon is careful to provide an account or description of a variety of sites or remains that were relatively unknown regardless of their actual date. The work is based on, and is largely presented in the form of, a personal journey through Scotland, which he explains was carried out over the course of three years. Gordon paces out and records his journey, taking careful measurements (specifically mentioning that 'I took...an actual survey, having measured...with a Gunter

⁵⁴ Iain Gordon Brown, 'Gordon, Alexander (c.1692-1754?)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/11021>, accessed 7 Oct 2011].

⁵⁵ See especially Sir Walter Scott, *The Antiquary*, Edinburgh, 1816.

⁵⁶ A. Gordon, *Itinerarium Septentrionale*.

Chain⁵⁷) and making a variety of detailed site plans and copper engravings of discovered inscriptions and monuments. He personally examines every artefact and site to the best of his ability, critically comparing his own phenomenological experience and empirical observations with previous accounts from classical and more recent writers, as well as the tales and traditions of local inhabitants. This journey took Gordon as far as the north-western brochs of Glenelg, but he primarily focused on the lowlands and central belt of Scotland. For his journey along the Antonine Wall, he was accompanied by James Glen, then-provost of Linlithgow but later governor of Carolina; for his visit to Hadrian's Wall, he had Sir John Clerk, Baron of the Exchequer and noted antiquarian expert, for his guide and companion.

Gordon's work was more narrowly focused than Sibbald's, with a specific interest on history and antiquities of Roman and early medieval date. There is very little of the natural history aspect associated with Sibbald's more comprehensive agenda, yet Gordon still maintains enough of a chorographic approach to fall within the tradition. Most noticeable is Gordon's use of the personal journey or 'perambulation', his inclusion of local and historical place-names, and his attempts to connect the contemporary nature and character of the places he describes with received knowledge about the past, as well as suggestions for practical improvements and developments. For example, he was one of the first to put forward the idea of a navigable canal to connect the Forth and Clyde,⁵⁸ though this was somewhat ridiculed at the time, particularly by Lord Ilay, who deemed it uneconomical.⁵⁹

In addition to his detailed textual descriptions and critical interpretations of remains and sources, Gordon also provides a variety of detailed illustrations and plans. These include some of the best and most complete early visual interpretations of sites along the Antonine Wall and Hadrian's Wall. Figure 4, for example, is a plan of Bar Hill fort, on the Antonine Wall. Figure 5 is a diagram, or 'view' of what he called Hadrian's and Severus's Walls, with the stone version being dated to the time of Severus. And to compare with Sibbald's sketch of Arthur's O'on (Figure 3), Figure 6 provides Gordon's view of 'The Roman Sacellum of Mars Signifer, or Mars Ulltor, vulgarly call'd Arthurs - Oon,'⁶⁰ which is still considered to be the best and probably most accurate representation of this now-lost monument, which was tragically destroyed shortly after he moved to America.

⁵⁷ A. Gordon, *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, 64.

⁵⁸ These plans see various mention throughout A. Gordon, *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, and *Additions and Corrections*.

⁵⁹ I.G. Brown, 'Gordon, Alexander.'

⁶⁰ A. Gordon, *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, Plate 4.

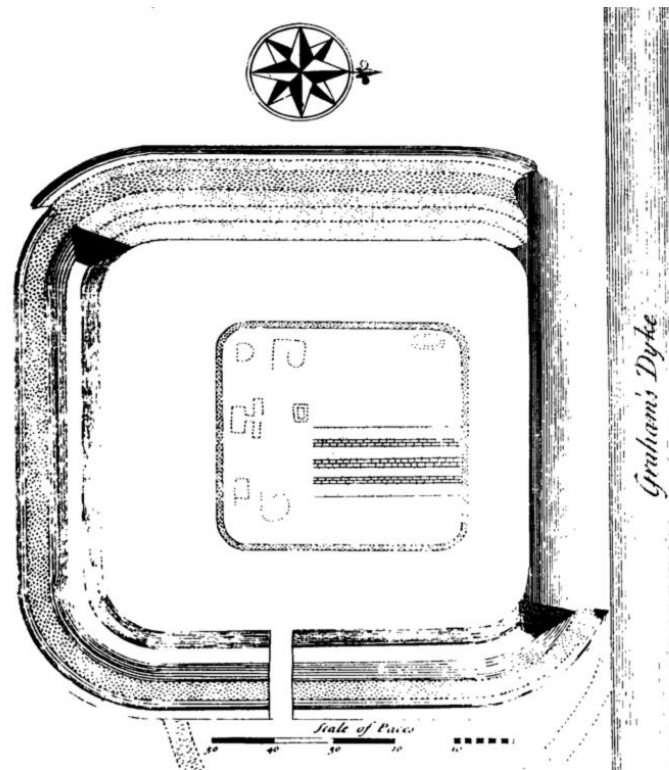


Figure 4 Gordon's plan of Bar Hill Roman Fort.
From Gordon, *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, London, 1726, Plate 22.

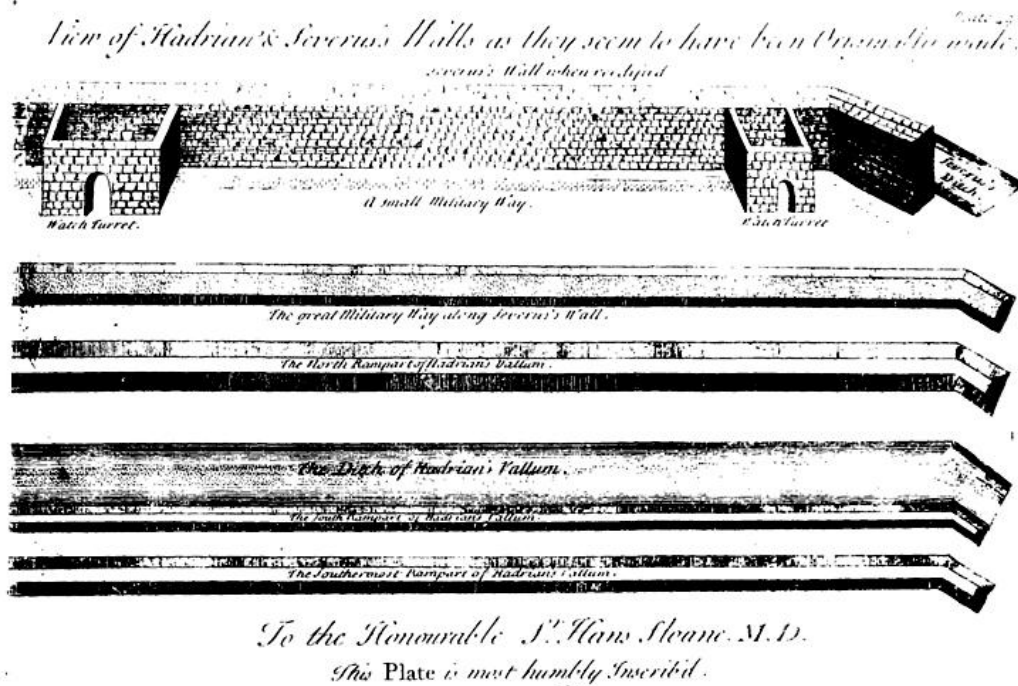


Figure 5 Gordon's 'view' of 'Hadrian's and Severus's Walls.'
From Gordon, *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, Plate 49.

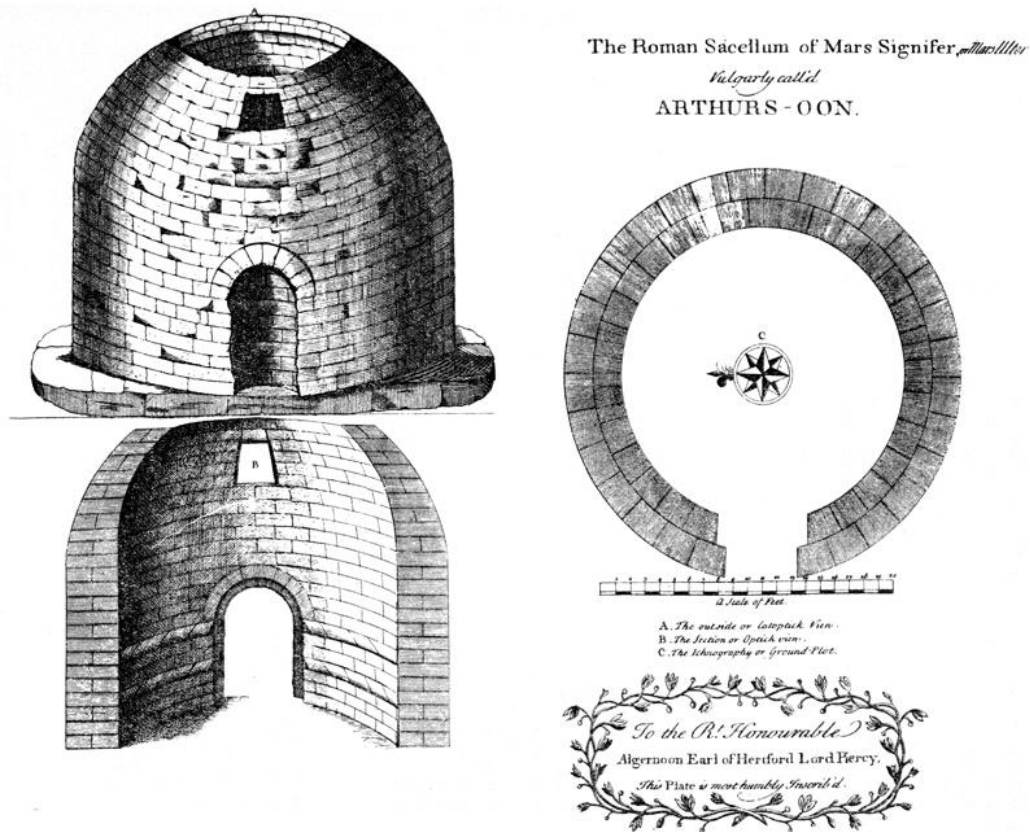


Figure 6 Gordon's illustrations of Arthur's O'on.
From Gordon, *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, Plate 4.

As a final note on Gordon, I would like to bemoan the fact that one of his promised works never materialized. This was advertised at the end of *Itinerarium Septentrionale* as 'A Compleat View of the Roman Walls [i.e. Hadrian's Wall and its vallum] in Britain...in a large Map, near 14 Foot in Length, and 6 in Breadth' as well as a separate map of the Antonine Wall 'of about 6 Foot in Length, and 4 in Breadth.'⁶¹ These were to be designed to 'present the Publick with such Draughts of these stupendous Works, as may hand down to Posterity their true Image and Representation', including all the Forts, features and drawings of every inscription found along their lengths. Without a doubt, these plans clearly demonstrate that Gordon was thinking chorographically. It is a shame that this was never brought to fruition; for if it had, this work would have been of immense value, and would certainly be counted among the greatest contributions to the history and archaeology of Roman Britain.

Conclusion and long-term legacy

In conclusion, both Sir Robert Sibbald and Alexander Gordon operated—to different degrees—within what can be described as the chorographic tradition. They dealt with history, geography, ancient remains and other subject-matter in a way that

⁶¹ A. Gordon, *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, 188.

emphasized particular places and regions, attempting to show how their various topics were relevant to contemporary society, and helping to create a deeper sense of local, regional and national identity. Their chorographies relied on former accounts as well as direct contemporary observation, and they both attempted to integrate local knowledge within the framework of established scholarly ideas. They represented place in a multi-media format, using rich textual description, cartographic maps, perspective drawings and other illustrations. While their work, and some of their interpretations, may not pass muster in a current academic environment, they both provided worthwhile and sophisticated assessments of their native Scotland, and they should be read within the context of their own time and socio-political setting.

While they both experienced some failures, and were ultimately unable to deliver what promised to be their greatest contributions, Sibbald and Gordon remain relevant and have contributed greatly to our knowledge of Scotland and its past. Both men should certainly be seen as integral to the later formation of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in 1780,⁶² and both included implicit suggestions for the formation of something similar in various places throughout their published works. Rosemary Sweet argues that the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland 'had come about primarily upon the whim of its founder, the earl of Buchan, rather than out of a gathering of like-minded individuals', and that Buchan 'had identified a need for a forum in which to encourage and develop antiquarianism within Scotland, which he saw as crucial to maintaining a spirit of Scottish patriotism.'⁶³ While Buchan's role in the establishment of the Scottish society should not be minimized, it is important to note that the seeds of such a society had been planted and cultivated by previous Scottish antiquaries, not least of which included Sibbald and Gordon. The specifics of the society's formal establishment may be inextricably linked to the political issues of 1780s Edinburgh, as Sweet rightly notes, but the idea itself was not a mere 'whim' of Buchan, who was certainly familiar with Gordon's and Sibbald's works, and for whom Sibbald was a 'model as a patron of antiquities and natural history.'⁶⁴ Though neither Sibbald nor Gordon were instrumental in the actual establishment of the Society, their influence must not be underestimated. As key antiquaries in the build-up to the Society's foundation, they provided an important basis for its relevance and set important examples of wide-ranging chorographic approaches to Scotland and its heritage.

Similarly, while Gordon's idea of a navigable canal connecting the Forth and Clyde was deemed somewhat preposterous and uneconomical in 1726, construction of the Forth and Clyde Canal began in 1768 and was completed by 1790. Even Sibbald's almost-impossible Atlas is reflected by the *Statistical Account of Scotland*, which saw its first version in a twenty-one volume set published between 1791-1799. Here, again, the term 'chorography' is absent but the whole work is united by undeniable elements of chorographic thinking and practice. This has influenced

⁶² The Society was founded in 1780 but not incorporated until 1783 due to political wrangling and opposition from some University of Edinburgh professors and the faculty of advocates. For fuller discussion see Rosemary Sweet, *Antiquaries: The Discovery of the Past in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, London and New York: Hambledon and London, 2004, 111-14.

⁶³ R. Sweet, *Antiquaries*, 111.

⁶⁴ R. Sweet, *Antiquaries*, 113.

more recent work epitomized by Scotland's Historic Land-use Assessment (HLA) and English Heritage's Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) programmes.⁶⁵

In other areas, though, both Gordon and Sibbald appear to have been relegated to the margins of discourse on British antiquarianism. This could be because of their northern—or more specifically, Scottish—perspective. Along with other Scottish antiquaries, Sibbald and Gordon receive little attention in many treatments of antiquarianism in Britain: in Sweet's important book on the subject, for example, Sibbald is referenced on only four pages and Gordon on ten, mostly consisting of minor mentions;⁶⁶ the bulk of discussion focuses on English and—to a lesser degree—Welsh antiquaries. This seemingly southern British bias appears very early, largely contemporary with the flurry of antiquarian work in the eighteenth century, and may reflect more the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reception and politics of antiquarian ideas than it does the ideas of twenty-first-century scholarship. While Sibbald continued to have influence through his contributions to later editions of Camden's *Britannia*, Gordon was embroiled in competition and disputes with contemporary English antiquaries. Shortly after the publication of *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, Gordon's work became largely overshadowed by John Horsley's competing survey of Britain's Roman antiquities.⁶⁷ He also faced particular criticism from Robert Gale, who carried on a highly critical correspondence with other notable antiquaries of the day, including Gordon's patron Sir John Clerk. Richard Hingley has discussed the Gordon-Gale dispute, also noting that 'modern scholars have followed Gale in criticizing Gordon's political motivation.'⁶⁸ If this marginalization had not begun in the eighteenth century, it is possible that both Sibbald and Gordon would play a more prominent role in contemporary discourse on antiquarianism and the history of archaeology.

Sibbald and Gordon made important contributions to the study and understanding of Scotland. As scholars belonging to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, they worked in a period when many learned gentlemen held widely varied interests, ranging from art and architecture to natural history, geography, local traditions, and antiquities. In Britain, these varied concerns were joined into a single and relatively coherent chorographic approach from the sixteenth century, emphasizing the rich detail of particular places and regions. While neither Gordon nor Sibbald explicitly labeled their own works as 'chorography,' they nevertheless must be considered to belong to this tradition. Recent scholarship in early modern history and literature, the development and philosophy of science, as well as archaeology has begun to explore this chorographic tradition, contributing important insights into antiquarian work. The broader tradition has also inspired several ongoing projects that seek to apply

⁶⁵ See especially Jane Grenville and Graham Fairclough, 'Characterisation: Introduction', *Conservation Bulletin*, 47, 2004, 2-3, and other papers in this issue of the bulletin.

⁶⁶ R. Sweet, *Antiquaries*. Sibbald is referenced on pages 43, 111, 113, and 176. Gordon is referenced on pages 60, 72, 87, 121, 130, 160, and 165-68. It is important to note, however, that Sibbald's *floruit* was primarily in the late seventeenth century, before the period explored by Sweet.

⁶⁷ John Horsley, *Britannia Romana: or, the Roman Antiquities of Britain*, London, 1732.

⁶⁸ Richard Hingley, "'The most ancient Boundary between England and Scotland": Genealogies of the Roman Walls', *Classical Receptions Journal*, 2.1, 2010, 25-43.

chorographic thinking and practice to current approaches in archaeology and heritage.⁶⁹

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⁶⁹ Michael Shanks and Christopher Witmore are working on a new chorography of Greece; Shanks is also undertaking chorographic work on the English-Scottish borders; Richard Hingley is using a chorography-inspired approach to investigate the life of Hadrian's Wall from the Roman period to the present and to think about the genealogy of empire; and Darrell J. Rohl is completing a PhD thesis that will offer a new chorography of the Antonine Wall.