

Manuscript Anthologies in Renaissance Scotland

This session will explore the diverse motives converging in the compilation of manuscript anthologies as practiced in early modern Scotland. The most celebrated of Scottish verse collectors, George Bannatyne, was hailed by Sir Walter Scott as a patriot with the 'the courageous energy to form and execute the plan of saving the literature of a whole nation'. Scott's vision of Bannatyne mirrored a contemporary antiquarian concern with the preservation of a distinctive Scottish culture that reflected the age of Scott, but not necessarily that of Bannatyne. Nevertheless, Scott's assessment has exerted an influence on the course of manuscript studies manifested in the relative neglect of other important Scottish miscellanies, such as the group associated with Sir Richard Maitland of Lethington (1496–1586), and other less well known collections. This panel will examine the extent to which such antiquarian judgments may be considered as responses to practices of social distinction inscribed within the manuscript culture of early modern Scotland. How do the activities of these early modern collectors contribute to the formation and cohesion of communities? To what extent do these activities articulate social and political investments that foreshadow ideas of nationhood? What are the ideological implications of the choices of early modern collectors for the development of ideas of Scottish literary tradition? And if collectors north of the border may indeed be shown to self-consciously occupy a Scottish tradition, how then are we to read the English poetry routinely transcribed in such miscellanies? How do these collectors evoke and reimagine the literary past? This panel will take the particular intersection of aesthetic and political forces within early modern Scotland as a focus for reflection on the ways in which the possession and collection of literature is implicated in the production of social and cultural distinctions.

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