been beneficial. Most surprisingly of all, however, is the relative lack of engagement with guilds as landholders. Whilst it is true that York is almost entirely absent the guild certificates brought about by the royal writ of 1388, the work of David Crouch on Yorkshire guilds would surely have been informative in this regard. That said, these minor quibbles should not detract from what is an excellent and thought provoking study, one which will inform and reshape many of the ongoing issues surrounding urban life in the middle ages.

ALAN KISSANE
University of Nottingham


The ‘new British history’ arrived as a subject of historical inquiry in the mid-1970s, a time of national soul-searching for Britain as the ‘winds of change’ that swept away what remained of the empire in the 1960s were followed by Britain’s entry into the common market in 1973. Michael Brown’s most recent book appeared on the eve of another decisive moment for the United Kingdom: the referendum on Scottish independence. *Disunited Kingdoms* is a title with more than a whiff of whiggishness about it, suggestive of a counter-narrative that locates the origins of the present disjuncture in the mutually reinforcing processes of war-making and state-making that were characteristic of the late Middle Ages. To some extent that would be fair comment. But this is a book of significance for less presentist reasons. More so than their colleagues in Wales and Ireland, Scotland’s medievalists have held themselves somewhat aloof from the enterprise of ‘British history’. Their criticisms have often been salutary. ‘British’ history was intended to be pluralist, but even in the hands of its most sensitive and sophisticated practitioners, such as R. R. Davies, it held the risk of becoming English history writ large. Interconnection and integration received more attention than contrast or comparison. And it was precisely this stress on patterns of integration that caused the ‘British’ approach to run aground in the later Middle Ages, since within the realm of high politics this was, as Alexander Grant aptly put it, ‘a time of disengagement, of divergence instead of convergence’.

Not the least of the achievements of *Disunited Kingdoms* is that it breaks the pattern of Scottish historians only doing ‘British’ history while holding their noses. Michael Brown demonstrates amply the value a pluralist ‘British’ approach that explores comparisons and contrasts in the later Middle Ages,
while still placing appropriate weight on the processes of political disaggregation. The result is a marvellous synthesis of at least four national historiographies—no mean feat in itself—that will be accessible to interested readers from undergraduate level upward. Indeed, the last book to survey the constituent lands and peoples of Britain, Ireland and the associated islands of the Atlantic archipelago with such sympathy and attentiveness to detail was Robin Frame’s instant classic, *The Political Development of the British Isles, 1100–1400* (1990). Brown’s focus, of course, is on the later Middle Ages: he picks up the story in 1280, when English power within Britain and Ireland was already nearing its zenith, and he extends the analysis up to 1460. This chronological framework is less novel than it first appears since the book is weighted towards the first half of the period surveyed: only the final two chapters (out of ten) explore the century from c. 1360 to 1460. What Brown brings to the familiar narrative arc is a satisfying degree of complexity and open-endedness. He rightly refuses to lend explanatory power to any single set of political processes. Instead he argues that the warfare that characterized Britain from c. 1280 to the mid-1330s became less intense (or, better put, English aggression was re-directed towards the kingdom of France) from c. 1340. The political configuration of the late-medieval British Isles was, then, a product of ‘unresolved conflicts, animosities and disruption’ (p. 10). If there is an overarching theme here it is the increasing definition of national or ‘regnal’ solidarities in England and Scotland—the ‘disunited kingdoms’ of the title. But Brown makes no bones about the fact that this was a messy process. This emerges from his discussion of colliding languages of power: the royalist rhetoric of sovereignty (*imperium*) which appeared in the thirteenth century was well met by peoples (English and non-English) who asserted their privileges and grievances in the language of ‘community’, ‘nation’ and ‘liberty’.

At the core of the book are five chapters (chs. 3–7) that provide what might be termed a stratigraphy of lay solidarities and identities in late-medieval Britain and Ireland. The pithy chapter titles are not as helpful as they might have been in offering a descriptive guide to their contents, but there is a logical progression to the argument, which moves from the largest political structures of nation-states-in-the-making to networks of interaction that were regional, trans-regional, marcher and local in focus. Chapter 7 (‘Borderlands: lords and regions’) usefully challenges the prevailing assumption that geographical peripheries were of peripheral importance, concluding (correctly) that in times of royal crisis ‘the character of these borderlands could exert a major influence on the internal politics of the English and Scottish realms as a whole’ (p. 189). Some of Brown’s most interesting programmatic comments on the utility of the
‘British history’ paradigm are hidden away in a chapter on the wider European context of the Hundred Years War (ch. 8): here he observes (rather late in the day, it has to be said) that ‘rather than focusing on the British Isles, a wider world defined by Anglo-French rivalry and conflict provides an easier basis for understanding relationships and policies from the 1290s to 1450s’ (p. 210). Quite so, and there is still more to be done in bringing historians of the late-medieval insular world and historians of Anglo-French relations into mutually-enriching dialogue. The problem is that La ‘France angloise’ is a subject which, for obvious reasons, francophone historians would rather forget.

For a synthetic work of this kind, there are remarkably few errors of fact (Lionel duke of Clarence died in 1368 not 1367 [p. 223]; Edmund Mortimer died at Cork in late 1381 not 1382 [p. 224]) and only occasional typographical slips (‘Creçy’ for Crécy [pp. 200, 204, 218, 276]; ‘Mòr’ for Mór [pp. 171, 187]). What is so impressive is Brown’s control of the evidence outside his stomping ground of medieval Scotland, its monarchy, magnates and military enterprises. He has delved deep into the primary and secondary literature on Ireland and Wales. Indeed Irish historians have much to learn from the way Brown bestrides with confidence the fragmented political geography of the island, paying due attention both to the native Gaelic lordships and English colonial enclaves. It is only in the presentation of England itself that the analysis occasionally slips into John Bull-type caricature; but then, as with all caricatures, that of war-mongering England holds an element of truth.

PETER CROOKS
Trinity College Dublin


As the editors of this important volume of essays note, doubt was ‘everywhere and nowhere’ (p. 3) in the Middle Ages. The explorations of that simultaneous presence and absence by thirteen leading medievalists from a variety of disciplines are insightful, provocative and — unusually for many collected papers — they add up to more than the sum of their parts. The editors go on to claim, rather modestly in my view, that the papers provide ‘compelling evidence for a sceptical undercurrent’ (p. 9) in medieval thought. This is clearly an understatement. It was more than an undercurrent. I will return to the possible explanations for this apparent reticence. One of the major reasons why