

Editorial

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At the transition point between the editorship of Professor Alexander Fenton (Volumes 31 and 32) and the editorship of Dr John Shaw (Volume 34 onwards), I am editing a volume with an emphasis on fairs, as proposed at the 4th annual conference of the School of Scottish Studies Cosmos Project which was held in 1995 on the topic of 'Fairs and Fair Days'. Since this is the only publication specifically arising from that project, it will be appropriate here to outline its activities. It was established in 1990, when Donald Archie MacDonald was Acting Director of the School, and held its first conference in 1992. The complete series of conferences to date has been on the topics: 'Between Cosmology and History in Scotland and Ireland' (1992), 'The Twelve Days' (1993), 'Gender, Religion and Society' (1994), 'Fairs and Fair Days' (1995), 'Fairs and Festivals' (1996), 'Set-Apart Places' (1997) and 'Custom, Cosmos and CD-Rom' (1998). In 1999, some of the ideas put forward at the last of these conferences took rapid shape through a very timely and generous anonymous donation to the Traditional Cosmology Society which allowed a Fellowship to be offered to one of the School's postgraduate students, Aude Le Borgne, to produce a pilot CD-Rom of 'The Lyle Cosmological Model' for use in teaching the Scottish Ethnology Honours class in Traditional Cosmology. The model takes a multi-layered and three-dimensional approach which is offered as appropriate to the understanding of a worldview first projected in an archaic period without writing and flowing from a deictic standpoint.

It is now possible to approach prehistory through three disciplines: archaeology, language and cosmology, and the last of these is capable of dispersing some of the mists that have hung over the beginnings of our customary practices. The traditional cosmology at the root of our customs, of course, long precedes the formation of nation states and accordingly, when the focus is on Scotland as in this journal, much early national material is better treated historically, as is done here. However, when introducing the topic of fairs at the 1995 Cosmos Project conference, I made a plea for awareness of that small part of our information that requires to be understood in cosmological terms such as, for example, the placement of fairs at the quarter days. Cosmological understanding is partly advanced through comparative methods and so cannot be confined within national borders. The journal *Cosmos*, founded in 1985, aims to provide a forum for broad discussion in this area and can be used to complement such journals as *Scottish Studies* which have a specific cultural and geographical remit. In this particular volume of *Scottish Studies* it has proved possible to offer an interesting range of topics

in addition to its opening articles on fairs and to treat also sport, neighbourliness, second sight, and language shift in Gaelic. I am grateful to all those who have advised me on illustrations and worked on production, especially David Patterson, Carol Smith and Liz Short.