
JOSIPA PETRUNIC, University of Toronto, IHPST

The local nature of mathematical knowledge: mathematics in Edinburgh, 1830-1870

This paper relates to mathematics in Edinburgh leading up to and just following the Universities Act (Scotland) in 1858. Philip Kelland, Professor of Mathematics from 1838, and Peter Guthrie Tait, Professor of Natural Philosophy from 1860, were both Cambridge-trained Senior Wranglers. Yet, neither actor advocated a wholesale implementation of Cambridge-style Tripos examination in Edinburgh, despite the fact the Universities Act provided them with the space to do so. Tait and Kelland also collaborated on the development of the highly analytical mathematics of quaternions, though neither actor sought to impose an analytic-heavy curriculum on their students. Despite their potential to serve as conduits through which Cambridge mathematics could have been more explicitly imposed in the north, both Kelland and Tait contributed to the development of mathematical curricula in Edinburgh in ways that were shaped by the university's institutional geography—a space where natural philosophy was privileged over and above symbolical mathematics.