

## FICINO IN ABERDEEN: THE CONTINUING PROBLEM OF THE SCOTTISH RENAISSANCE

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### **Introduction**

It is a complicating factor in the discussion of the renaissance if the historiography of a particular kingdom denies persistently that it ever existed there at all. When we began work on this article, Professor Chris Gane, a senior colleague at the University of Aberdeen, reminded us that the standard school histories of Scotland in use in the 1960s and 1970s simply stated as acknowledged fact that Scotland did not have a renaissance. The sources of this denial are not particularly difficult to diagnose: the domination of Scottish history by lowland Presbyterian agendas lasted a surprisingly long time. Another complication is the attempt to backdate the existence of a single people called 'Scots' where any early-modern Scot would have recognised a tripartite division into *Scoti* (the modern lowlands and borders) *Scoti Boreali* (the territories of Aberdeenshire and Moray under Gordon dominion) and *Scoti Montani* (the Gaelic-speaking territories, much more extensive than now).<sup>1</sup> These territories, of course, were under differing degrees of Royal control, and constituted distinct culture-provinces amenable in different ways to outside influence.

The denial, or qualified acceptance, of the idea of a Scottish renaissance is an attempt on one hand to impose some kind of retrospective coherence on very diverse regions, and (on the other) to produce a narrative of 'progress' in which the Kirk, literacy, the Protestant work ethic and other signposts on the way to modernity supersede Catholicism and ignorance. This requires the back-dating to the sixteenth century of a complex sequence of phenomena stretching well into the eighteenth.<sup>2</sup> In the course of all this the term 'renaissance' has been subjected to some remarkable contortions, when it has not been excluded altogether.

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<sup>1</sup> Distinction of 'boreali' is made axiomatically by such early historians as Hector Boece (cf. Watson 1946).

<sup>2</sup> The conformity of the majority of Scotland's many Episcopalians to the Kirk is a process which is not by any means concluded until the mid-eighteenth century.

The crux of the problem, in the light of twentieth-century English claims of a cultural *translatio imperii* of the renaissance to England,<sup>3</sup> is that the renaissance is seen as a positive movement, inextricable from vernacular literature, the introduction of printing, a popular religious reformation (Protestant), and an overall movement towards the eventual bright goal of the enlightenment. This focus on vernacular literature may be traced to four features of English culture. Only one of these is positive: the undeniable greatness of Shakespeare, perhaps the least educated major poet of his era. The three negative facts are that England did not produce painters to rival Leonardo and Michaelangelo, failed to generate any kind of literary figure who was recognised and appreciated beyond England by continental contemporaries,<sup>4</sup> and that, with the exception of Somerset House, sixteenth-century English architecture, however grandiose, paid little or no attention to classical canons of taste.<sup>5</sup>

It is worth stating that this is a highly local and peculiar definition of 'renaissance'. To a student of Italy or France, it is the recovery of ancient knowledge (hence the notion of 'rebirth') which is central to defining the renaissance – the recovery of long-neglected Classical Latin texts, the pruning-away of medieval adaptations of the Latin language to changing ideas and circumstances, the reimposition of Classical models for both prose and verse, and the rediscovery of Classical Greek following the fall of Byzantium. Marching along with these adventures in language was a new concern with evidence and exact scholarship which produced an efflorescence of activity in both the practical and theoretical sciences, including painting and architecture. Though Petrarch's vernacular verse was epoch-making for European literature, writing in the vernacular was not at the heart of the renaissance as an intellectual movement (and Petrarch himself, of course, was a distinguished Latin philologist). Naturally, since France and Italy have remained Catholic, choice of religious confession is not recognised as having anything to do with the matter at all.<sup>6</sup>

It follows that the first necessity in talking about the Renaissance in Scotland is to decide which variety of renaissance you have in mind, continental or

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<sup>3</sup> This was achieved, according to such early-twentieth-century critics as Sir Herbert Grierson, without the complicating interventions of the Latin *respublica litterarum*, the printing presses of the Spanish Netherlands, or the Society of Jesus. A comprehensive debunking of the myth of the relationship between renaissance Italy and Elizabethan England can be found in Wyatt 2005.

<sup>4</sup> In 1563, the well-connected Petrus Ramus confessed that he could not name a single English scholar (van Dorsten 1970: 12).

<sup>5</sup> Somerset House, in the Strand, built for Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset and Lord Protector of England, 'gave England its first classical building comparable in sophistication with what was being designed in Europe at that time' (Howarth 1997: 20).

<sup>6</sup> Erika Rummel (2000) considers this as a problem in its own right, suggesting an interesting direction for future research on Scotland.

English. The English renaissance template, designed to account for Shakespeare, is so difficult to impose upon the fractured reality of early-modern Scotland that for long enough, the solution of choice was, as a subsidiary strategy, to marginalise the cultural and intellectual lives of the *Montani* and *Boreali*, and, as a main strategy, to deny that the renaissance had had any coherent impact on Scotland until a very limited form of it had become possible after the Reformation Parliament of 1560.<sup>7</sup> There were Petrarchan poets in sixteenth-century Scotland, but to advance James VI's 'Castalian band' as the Scottish equivalent of the English renaissance canon of Wyatt, Surrey, Sidney and Shakespeare is a recipe for making Scottish culture look provincial and awkward. However, this begs the question of whether the English definition of renaissance is the only one which we might use.

The ways in which Scotland has been denied a renaissance of its own are predictable: a denial that fifteenth-century Scottish culture was sufficiently coherent to absorb new influences, or that Scots themselves were capable of comprehending a new intellectual movement, combined with the assertion that before 1560 the Scots were too backward, too poor, too superstitious or too downtrodden to have any time or capacity to absorb any renaissance influence which might have made its way so far north. As a consequence the international *respublica litterarum* of Latin letters and neo-Latin poetry has had to be sidelined as simply raising too many questions – or indeed, if one starts from the English position that the renaissance is about vernacularisation, it may not even be visible. Unfortunately, the result is that one of the major intellectual figures of the sixteenth century – a Calvinist to boot – the brilliant George Buchanan, is wiped off the cultural map of Scotland. The inadvisability of ignoring Latin, when in fact the Scottish contribution in this field was prolific and distinguished, will be the central point of the second section of this paper.

Court culture and the visual arts in Scotland, as well as most architectural manifestations of renaissance sensibility, have similarly been presented as fragmentary – a series of unconnected works either associated with the discontinuous 'foreign' courts of James V, Mary of Guise and Mary Queen of Scots, or merely produced during a series of brief visits made by foreign artists or architects. In fact, the fallacy of this last assertion is comprehensively demonstrated in Michael Bath's *Renaissance Decorative Painting in Scotland* (2003). The study of Scottish architecture, in particular, has suffered from the fact that buildings based on continental models and expressive of renaissance agendas are not characteristic of Henrician and Elizabethan England, and therefore must be downplayed as aspects of a Renaissance culture.

All this continued to be asserted despite numerous scholarly works published in the later twentieth century which produced ample quantities of

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<sup>7</sup> The problem presented to a single, forward-moving narrative of progress in Scotland by the renaissance, is as nothing compared to the problem presented by Stuart loyalism and Jacobitism, where more extreme historiographical strategies were needed.

evidence to set against this set of historiographical misapprehensions. One highly visible example is the painstakingly nuanced discussion of the complexities of the sixteenth century in Michael Lynch's *Scotland, a new history* (1991).<sup>8</sup> Another important area of the twentieth-century rediscovery of the arts in sixteenth century Scotland has been its music and poetry: in the last four or five decades, this has become far better-known, and much of the music has been performed and recorded. However, the periodisations offered by some Scottish university departments long continued to fight shy of the word 'renaissance' or declined to admit that it applied to any period before the 1560s, despite the rediscovery of Robert Carver (c.1484–c.1568), a composer of startling sophistication, who, unfortunately for his later reputation, wrote Catholic religious music. The effect of this dichotomy between a vibrant culture of rediscovery and a cultural paradigm into which it cannot be fitted is hard to encapsulate: it might be said that an atmosphere has persisted which discourages a connected or confident approach to the renaissance in Scotland, despite the excellent scholarly work being produced in many disciplines.

There are other factors too — the destruction wrought upon the buildings of the Scottish renaissance in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially the astonishingly-early Falkland Palace, where James IV's work began in the 1500s, a palace which has been claimed not-implausibly as the first renaissance building in the British Isles. Scotland's history of religious and political conflicts inflicted such a degree of damage on the great houses and palaces of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that by the twentieth, all that was visible was, with few exceptions, either a reconstruction or a conserved ruin. Both, axiomatically, give a false notion of the intentions of the original builders and create an arena of scholarly uncertainty where academic fantasy can flourish.

Perhaps the most indicative surviving early-modern interior in Scotland is the long gallery at Pinkie House, Midlothian, painted for Alexander Seton, first Earl of Dunfermline (1556–1622). It is indicative because of the sophistication of its development and adaptation of continental models, although in its intentions and in its early-seventeenth-century date it is perhaps most accurately described as an early work of the international baroque.<sup>9</sup> But it is one of very few early Scottish interiors to survive *in situ* in good condition, and can be taken as a pointer towards other such rooms now destroyed.

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<sup>8</sup> His identification of James IV and James V as marking the end of a mediaeval *kind* of kingship is emphatically not an assertion that their reigns were, in Scottish terms, mediaeval. Another scholar who has consistently written at the highest level about renaissance, Catholic and internationalist Scotland is John Durkan. That these two are singled out implies no lack of appreciation of the work of others.

<sup>9</sup> There is a comprehensive, illustrated account of Seton's Gallery (Bath 2003; Bath 2007a). Pinkie House is currently part of a school, and access is therefore extremely difficult, especially during term.

In interpreting the Pinkie House gallery in its full international context, the disjunction between what actually appears on its walls and the preconceptions enforced by historiography become apparent. The study of the Scottish renaissance takes on an aspect of extrapolation from fragmentary evidence, lost – or deliberately destroyed – artefacts, ruined castles; a kind of ghost-hunt for a context. Indeed, our working title for this paper was for a long time *Ghost Renaissances*.

The impulse to bring a few indicative ghosts nearer to the light of day has been strengthened by the recrudescence of historiographical bad habits in the comparatively recent and highly-praised single-volume history of Scotland *The New Penguin History of Scotland from the earliest times to the present day* (Houston and Knox 2001), with the explicit sponsorship of the National Museums of Scotland. Despite scholarly clarity in the text itself, the editorial divisions run Mediaeval Scotland from 1100–1560, and 1560–1707 is identified as ‘Reformation to Union’. There are substantial index entries for ‘Reformation’, none at all for ‘Renaissance’, and the University of Edinburgh, founded in 1582, is described as ‘mediaeval’ (xlvi). With all respect to the learned authors of the individual chapters, no attempt is made overall to see any cultural coherence in renaissance Scotland. Subconsciously, the lack of belief that Scotland was prepared in the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to receive and absorb the new learning and the revitalised arts dominates the discourse of the whole book.

We would like now to advance some instances which suggest, on the contrary, the coherence and sophistication of the Scottish renaissance. They can only be *pars pro toto* in this context, but each has a connectedness which underlines the cogency of the reception of renaissance ideas, texts and images in Scotland. First, we would like to consider Hector Boece’s possession of a copy of Marsilio Ficino’s *De Triplici Vita* and the use to which he put it as Principal of the new King’s College in Aberdeen. This leads inevitably to a consideration of the integrity of the Aberdeen renaissance, in building, infrastructure, literary and historical activity, religious re-ordering and the use of the printing press.

The excellence of the Latin hymns composed in renaissance Aberdeen for the first substantial book to be printed in Scotland, *The Breviary of Aberdeen*, leads to a very brief consideration of Humanism in Scottish letters through the sixteenth century. The third part of this essay returns to the question of renaissance architecture and advances one startling piece of evidence for the sophistication of the mural painting of the Scottish sixteenth century (Bath 2007b; since these ideas are forthcoming in print, our treatment of them is of necessity brief). From here, some consideration of Scottish renaissance gardens leads to a concluding consideration of the anti-renaissance ‘black legend’ and its confessional origins as manifested in Scott’s *The Antiquary* (1816).

## I

Hector Boece (c.1465–1536) was summoned from his position at the University of Paris, where he had earlier studied with Erasmus as a fellow-student, to be the first Principal of the new University of Aberdeen, founded by Bishop William Elphinstone (1431–1514) in the 1490s (Royan 2008). Boece's career could be described as following the classic pattern for a renaissance *savant*. His *Scotorum Historia*, published at Paris in 1527, is not only a 'Livy' for the Scottish peoples, planting their origins in antiquity, but also makes full humanist use of recently-rediscovered classical sources: the *Annales* and *Agricola* of Tacitus, unearthed by Boccaccio and Poggio in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries respectively. In the same era, the Elphinstonian re-ordering of the diocese of Aberdeen, work on the Cathedral, foundation of the University, maintenance and building of bridges, was creating an exemplary renaissance church. The Bishop also sat for his portrait, the earliest known representation of a non-royal sitter in Scotland. Even more remarkable is that his foundation preserves it to this day.

Contrary to widespread misapprehension, held almost up to the quincentenary of the introduction of printing to Scotland, the press was introduced under Elphinstone's supervision essentially to print mass-books and breviaries, according to the Royal Privilege granted on 15 September, 1507, as well as

Legendis of Scottis Sanctis as is now gadderit and ekit be ane  
Reverend fader in God, William, Bishop of Abirdene.

([Muir] 1854: xxiii note)

This is all part of a profoundly renaissance examination of origins and plural antiquities. Later, we will consider the sheer literary merit of the most distinguished Latin hymns composed for the 1509–10 *Breviary of Aberdeen*, but here it is important to recognise it as a real work of historical scholarship, as well as an attempt to reform from within the devotions of the Church, reserving devotion for historical as opposed to legendary saints. It was a very real attempt to provide a unifying identity for the *ecclesia Scotticana*, a parallel to the *Historia*.<sup>10</sup>

Elphinstone also introduced the teaching of medicine to Aberdeen from the beginning, and it is in this context that we see Boece making use of the work of the Medici circle at Florence within a decade of its first (controversial) publication.

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<sup>10</sup> It may be advanced as an interim conclusion that its success was greatest amongst the *Scoti Boreali*: the Strathmore copy which was in the early sixteenth century in the possession of a canon of Glasgow Cathedral, has many Sarum commemorations written into it, and Scottish ones erased. (By the kindness of the Earl of Strathmore and Dr Bill Zachs, I was enabled to examine this copy.) Dr Arnold Hunt of the British Library advances the suggestion that the fragment of the *Breviary* which they hold has been used in the earlier sixteenth century as binding waste. Certainly, there was no reprint.

Aberdeen University Library Incunable 195 is a copy of Marsilio Ficino's *De Triplici Vita* in an edition printed in France about 1494 by Georg Wolf and Johann Philippi de Cruzenach, and finely bound in Paris (Mitchell 1965: 73-74 no. 195). It was presumably bought by Boece in Paris towards the end of his time as a student and a regent at the University there (c.1485–1497). His signature on the first leaf is torn but unmistakable. The book subsequently belonged to Robert Gray who was Mediciner in King's College (c.1522–1550). What is not noted in Mitchell's catalogue of Aberdeen incunables is that the book is annotated throughout in what is almost certainly Boece's hand (the annotations are not a commentary nor response so much as those standard renaissance marginalia which act as a kind of index reminding an owner which material is to be found on which page).<sup>11</sup> This suggests a degree of intimacy with the text, a continual study and re-reading. It is unsurprising that the new Principal of a new university should be drawn to Ficino's three-part work on the preservation of health, in that the first part deals with means of preserving the health of students.<sup>12</sup>

Much of *De Triplici Vita* reads strangely today, but in its time it represented an almost breathless digest of medical theory new-gathered from antiquity and late-antiquity. Its central tenet is astrological, the consideration of the benign and malign aspects of the planets, especially on scholars, who are prone to the melancholic diseases caused by study and solitude. Yet what the book is striving towards, without having a vocabulary or context for the expression of its nascent ideas, is a kind of psychology. Much of its material, although expressed in terms of astrological influence and counter-influence, is in fact about the danger of depression and possible mitigations of the depressive condition. It places great emphasis on the creation of an environment and regime of life to keep Saturnian depression at bay. When Boece bought his copy in Paris it represented perhaps one of the most advanced medical works then available. The book passed to the Mediciner Robert Gray, presumably on Boece's death. We would like to advance the conjecture that Boece consulted this text when he oversaw the original layout of the College buildings, and that they were so constructed as to maximise positive solar influences on the members of the university.

According to Ficino the chief danger to which scholars are exposed is the depressive condition induced by the influence of Saturn.

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<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, Gray has written a page of medical prescriptions on one of two leaves inserted at the end. One of them offers camomile and parsley as a cure for gall-stones, which would not seem to accord with Ficino's astrological theory of herbal medicine.

<sup>12</sup> The three parts of the book are 'On caring for the health of Students', 'How to prolong your life', and the third which is distinctly venturing into territories of neo-Platonist magic: 'On making your life agree with the heavens' which could also be translated 'On harnessing the life of the heavens'.

I must tell you to beware also Saturn, with too much of his busy and secret delight in the contemplative mind, for he frequently devours his own sons in this. He seizes them with the enticements of his more sublime contemplations, and knows that he is in the meantime cutting them off from the earth with a kind of scythe if they are lingering too long there. He often kills the earthly life of these unwary people (Ficino 1980: 66).

This suggests that the Theology students would need particularly to be protected. Ficino later affirms that Theologians stand in unique danger. The more Mercurial and Apollonian, therefore Solar, avocations are less prone to melancholy:

We are easily and suddenly exposed to the planets through the feeling and exertion of the soul[...] Very often therefore in human affairs we are subject to Saturn, through idleness, solitude or strength, through theology and more secret philosophy, and through civil religion and law [...] we are subject to the sun and to Mercury through the study of eloquence, skill in song, and the glory of truth (93).

Ficino's suggestion for a remedy is expressed in astrological terms, but it also advocates a balanced diet, sunlight, and gentle exercise in gardens and fields:

If you want your body and spirit to receive power [...] for example from the Sun, learn which are the Solar things among metals and stones, [...] for there is no doubt that they confer on you similar qualities. These and more should be held forth and taken inside for their powers, especially on a day and in an hour of the sun, with the Sun reigning in its figure in the sky. Solar things are all those that are called heliotrope – because they are turned to the sun – for example, gold and the colour of gold, [...] incense, musk, amber, balsam, golden honey [...] saffron (90).

Again and again, Ficino returns to the benign power of the sun for those who have worked and speculated themselves into depression:

Our spirit would become heavenly, to the extent that reason dictates, if the rays and influxes of the Sun, ruling over the heavens were strongly applied to it. Thus with this spirit in our midst, all the heavenly blessings will abide in our body and soul: I call them heavenly blessings but really they are all contained in the sun [...] the Sun when it is under Aries or Leo and the moon

facing it, especially in Leo, confers in its Solar spirit a power that makes our own spirit flourish so much that it protects it against the poisons of an epidemic (97).

It is time to turn to the way in which Boece attempted to put these somewhat arcane recommendations into practise. We have no contemporary representation of King's College as it was in the earlier sixteenth century: only the Chapel and one tower have survived subsequent rebuildings. There is an illustration of 1660, however, which gives a representation of Boece's buildings, changed only at the north-east corner of the quadrangle. Also, an inventory of 1542 gives us the remarkable, Ficinian, names of the chambers and sets of rooms for the accommodation of the Principal, some of the academic staff, and the students.

Apart from the Principal's quarters, there were two rooms named after constellations, five after planets and eight after signs of the zodiac. Excepting the Scorpio Chamber, which was the Old Library, there was accommodation in the last group for 13 Students in the arts, in the planet group for five founded Theologians and in the constellations group for the sub-principal and possibly the Dean of the faculty of arts or the Rector, only one of whom could reside in college.

On the South side of the chapel was a sundial at a height of 30 feet. Thomas Ross said it was 'the earliest example of a sundial known in Scotland'. If one takes it in conjunction with the names applied to the chambers one has a symbolic representation of the macrocosm (Pickard 1979: 1.3-4).

So the building overseen by Boece is a quadrangle oriented with the sides square to the four points of the compass. The Chapel occupies the north side, the east side is the Common Hall over the Schools. The west front to the street may have contained teaching rooms or the lodging of the Principal. The South range is the lodging range, its windows overlook the College Garden to the south and face the gilded Sundial on the south face of the Chapel across the quadrangle to the north. The famous Crown Spire of the chapel occupies the north-west corner. The south-west corner has a fine round tower with pinnacle, and with, at least by the 1660 drawing, large leaded windows. The south range is provided with fifteen south-facing windows and four chimneys. The south-east tower we know to have been the site of the original library in a chamber called Scorpio, later used as a strong-room.

The use of these rooms seems to have varied over time. The simplest version would suggest that

in the rooms on the south side: seven, named after the planets and constellations, were occupied by staff and senior students; seven, named after the signs of the Zodiac, were shared by the students of the arts (Carter and McLaren 1994: 16).

The full list is found in the text of the 1542 *Inventory* ([Muir] 1854: 574-76). The rooms would seem to have stretched from the east end of the west range, where were the substantial set of rooms for the Principal (which incidentally had a French Map amongst their ornaments: Ficino suggests a map coloured in green, azure and gold as a powerful talisman (1980: 151-52)). The Principal's rooms do not have an astrological name.

There seem to be two types of room: single chambers, sometimes shared, and sets of rooms, sometimes possibly shared by students, or intended for staff. These double chambers have a 'bibliotheca' or study. Perhaps in the south-west tower were the rooms with study identified as *Jove*, its benign influences countering the negative *Saturn* which follows. (Oddly, at one point this room seems to have been assigned to a student of theology; perhaps because the Humanist, who in Ficinian terms was the best able to withstand saturnine influence, lived outwith the college in a manse opposite.) In the south range, the *Corona* has a study, *Hercules*, *Luna*, *Mercury*, and *Venus* (these were at one point assigned to the Dean and students in theology). There follow rooms at one point assigned to thirteen students in the arts. *Aries*, *Taurus*, *Gemini*, *Cancer* (which had been the room and study of Subprincipal William Hay, and had maps still in it when the inventory was made), *Leo*, *Virgo*, *Libra* and finally, after the south window of the common hall, *Scorpio* in the south-east tower.

Almost all these rooms overlook the College Garden to the south, another Ficinian recommendation for the securing of benign influences being to frequent gardens:

In the same way, by the frequent use of plants and living things, you will be able to draw a great deal from the spirit of the world [...] You should walk as often as possible amongst sweet-smelling plants [...] with their fragrance, as if with the breath and spirit of world life, they will refresh you and make you flourish (Ficino 1980: 116-17).

That is all the evidence which remains to us: however the idea that the whole College itself is a microcosm relates to Ficino's somewhat obscure recommendation of the benign effects of representations of the macrocosm, as a fresco or image or map (1980: 150-55), as positive for health and spirits. Less obscure, indeed compelling, is the evidence that Boece was disposing the lodgings of his students following Ficino's suggestions for the best preservation of their

health.<sup>13</sup> Constructed from ghosts, perhaps – a set of annotations and a manuscript inventory – but still evidence for Ficino in renaissance Aberdeen, for the rapid transmission of texts from Florence to Scotland.

Amongst the other achievements of Aberdeen humanism at the turn of the sixteenth century we should probably include a number of hymns from the Aberdeen Breviary. Some of the material on Scottish saints which Elphinstone introduced to the Propers for their respective celebrations almost certainly dates back to the pre-Norman Scottish church. Others are more probably of recent composition, such as the following:

En futura Anne Ioachique  
Proles nunciatur concipiturque  
Crescet hec nobis parietque virgo  
Credula nobis

Sidus hoc primum rutilare cepit  
Ut careremus tenebris opacis  
Ut procellosos via per timores  
Tuta pateret

Anne conceptus reticendus ille  
Tantus ac talis canit ecce terra  
Pontus exultat recinuntque coelo  
Phoebus et astra.

Interim toto studio canamus  
Gloriam patri, genito sacroque  
Pneumati, namque est Deus unus illis  
Ignis amorque

Lo: it is announced to Anna and Joachim  
That a child will be conceived  
And she will grow for our sake,

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<sup>13</sup> Michael Bath reminds me that the Palace Block at Stirling, built by James V in the later 1530s has representations of the planetary gods. Copies from prints by Hans Burgkmair of Jupiter and Venus that are clearly identifiable. RCAHMS Stirlingshire says Sol and Saturn are also copied, but the resemblance is too slight to be convincing. Burkmair's Venus and Mars are also copied on Henry VIII's writing desk, now in the Victoria and Albert museum in London. Burgkmair's are fully Italianate renaissance designs. Gifford and Walker (2002: 682) do not commit themselves to iconographies or identifications, but concede that the theme of the sculpture would seem to be unified by 'a strong sun theme'. For an early attempt on this subject, though eclipsed by later scholarship, see Shire (1996).

And this believing virgin will give birth for us.

This star first begins to shine  
So that we may be freed from deep darkness  
So that the way through storming terrors  
May lie safe.

Should so great and wonderful a conception of Anna's  
Be greeted with silence? Behold, the earth sings,  
The sea rejoices, the sun and the stars re-echo  
From the heavens

Meanwhile, let us sing with all our force  
Glory to the father, to the sacred son  
To the spirit, for God is one in them  
And the fire of love.

(our translation; for the Latin, see *Breviarium Aberdonense* as  
edited in Breve and Blume 1892: XII. 53-54)

It is not impossible that this elegant hymn on the conception of the Virgin is by Elphinstone himself: he had a special devotion to the Virgin, on the evidence of Boece, and while we have no evidence that he versified, his father was certainly able to do so, as we know from a brief poem addressed either to himself, or perhaps to his little son, in one of his books of lecture-notes now at Aberdeen (AUL MS 196, fol. 132v). Alternatively, there would have been others among his coadjutors, such as Hector Boece or John Vaus, capable of such work.

The Sapphic stanza (as used in the hymn above), deployed with the utmost elegance by Horace, was revived by ninth-century Latin poets such as Sedulius Scotus, and appears intermittently thereafter wherever Christian hymnodists were capable of writing in Classical metre. Such works, by virtue of their classicising form, are extremely hard to date. However, surprising though it might seem, the Virgin is not a usual topic for Irish and Scottish hymnographers. The liturgical celebration of the conception of the Virgin entered the Catholic festal year in the eighth century, but was not strongly promoted until it was championed by Sixtus IV, who was only ten years dead when Elphinstone visited Rome in 1494. The fact that this is a hymn for a feast which that repository of Celtic saint-lore, the *Martyrology of Oengus*, does not even mention, suggests that it does not long predate the *Breviary*. The tight elegance of its train of thought, expressed through a series of images, marks it as the work of a writer of great ability – and thus we have more evidence of a renaissance sensibility in the north of Scotland, this time in the form of refined Latin poetry.

## II

The Piccolomini Library in the cathedral of Siena is decorated throughout with a sequence of frescoes by Pinturicchio, representing the achievements of Pope Pius II, painted between 1502 and 1507. This particularly light, bright and graceful sequence of paintings includes a representation of James I graciously receiving the papal envoy, Aeneas Sylvius (as Pius II then was), in the year 1435. The king is portrayed sitting on a raised throne in an elegant Renaissance loggia, surrounded by exquisitely dressed courtiers. On the one hand, this is not what a fifteenth-century Scottish court was actually like. On the other, Pinturicchio expresses a sort of truth. Fifteenth-century Scotland was strange, grim, and poor in the eyes of a cosmopolitan Italian such as Aeneas Sylvius, but in terms of the life of the mind, it was not barbarian. Scotland had three universities by the end of the fifteenth century, St Andrews (1411), Glasgow (1451) and Aberdeen (1495). Centuries later, Samuel Johnson remarked, 'I know not whether it be not peculiar to the Scots to have attained the liberal, without the manual arts, to have excelled in ornamental knowledge, and to have wanted not only the elegancies, but the conveniences, of common life' (Leask 1910: xxix). One might conjecture that more elegancies and conveniences might have been visible before a century of civil wars and religious conflict.

The renaissance affinities of the Scottish monarchy are revealed by their literary patronage. The Scottish royal library included an exquisite Renaissance Italian manuscript of the *Aeneid* (EUL 195, written by one 'Florius infortunatus'). Since the illuminations include the royal arms, this was a commissioned book, not merely a purchase. James III, the probable patron of this manuscript, also commissioned portraits of himself, his queen and his son from the Flemish master Hugo van der Goes (McQueen 1977: 194).<sup>14</sup> His son James IV was a patron of poets; five payments to Blind Hary, author of the *Wallace*, are mentioned in the treasurers's accounts between 1490 and 1492, and the court also supported William Dunbar with an annual pension of £10 (McQueen 1977: 196).

As Pinturicchio implies, the Scots court was a centre of humanistic learning. James III's royal secretary for much of his reign, Archibald Whitelaw, was a graduate of St Andrews who had taught both at his *alma mater* and at Cologne before entering royal service. Not a few of his books survive, both incunables and manuscripts; they include texts by Lucan, Appian, Horace, and Sallust (Durkan and Ross 1958: 159). We have here in Aberdeen a composite Italian manuscript of Florus, Orosius and Dares Phrygius which belonged to him (AUL MS 214). He composed and delivered a Latin oration in 1484 at Nottingham, addressed to Richard III, which seems to be the first piece of extended humanistic prose

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<sup>14</sup> James also commissioned a manuscript of *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* in 1467.

composed by a Scot. In its eight highly Ciceronian pages, he refers to Cicero four times, Virgil five times, Seneca, Sallust, and Livy, once each.<sup>15</sup>

Towards the end of the fifteenth century, James IV spoke Latin very well, as well as French, German, Flemish, Italian, Spanish, and Gaelic, according to Pedro de Ayala, the Spanish ambassador. While he supported vernacular poets, James also continued to employ Whitelaw, and his chief secretary, Patrick Panter, was an able latinist.<sup>16</sup> But his interest in the new learning is also witnessed by his support of the Italian alchemist John Damian de Falcuis, who attempted to fly from the walls of Stirling Castle in 1507 (Leslie 188-95: II.125). Damian crash-landed in a dunghill and broke his leg in 1507, but James continued to maintain him until 1513.

Most of the writers patronised by James IV wrote in Scots rather than Latin. There is a real case for the view that in 1500, Scots was a more flexible and sophisticated literary language than was English. Gavin Douglas, a very bad bishop but a very good poet, translated the *Aeneid* into Scots at the beginning of the sixteenth century; the first complete English translation, and in the view of C.S. Lewis and Ezra Pound, among others, one of the best which has ever been made. 'He makes the world of the *Aeneid* seem almost contemporary; Virgil's characters might be just around the corner' (Austin 1956: 16-17). His version locates, or as it were, naturalises the *Aeneid* in the landscape familiar to him. The essentially humanist nature of this undertaking is signalled by the fact that he also translated the so-called thirteenth book of the *Aeneid*, written by the Italian humanist Maffeo Vegio.

The royal court thus supported a variety of humanistic activity in the second half of the fifteenth century, but so of course did the three Scottish universities. Fifteenth-century Scots were among the international tribes of wandering scholars, going from one university to another. Even before then, and marching along with the establishment of native seats of learning, Scottish scholars learned, and indeed taught, on the continent, most commonly in Paris, but also in centres such as Cologne and Navarre. James Ledel, or Liddel, was teaching in Paris in the 1480s, where two short tracts of his composition reached print; making him the earliest Scotsman to publish his work in his own lifetime (Johnstone and Robertson 1929-30: 14). The next, Gilbert Crab, was also an Aberdonian.

Erasmian humanism came to Scotland as part of the intellectual, and indeed, physical baggage of men such as the Archibald Whitelaw already mentioned, and Hector Boece, historian, and first principal of Aberdeen. In addition to the copy of Ficino which has already been discussed, Aberdeen

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<sup>15</sup> Other Latinists supported by the court were John Ireland, and John Reid of Stobo (Durkan 1990: 123-40).

<sup>16</sup> Patrick Panter was a man of some learning, who had attended the Collège de Montaigu in Paris and studied at the University of Louvain from 1498-1503. He became tutor to two of the king's illegitimate sons.

University Library includes a number of Boece's own books, including a copy of Ptolemy's *Cosmographia*, printed by Leonardus Holle at Ulm in 1482, with some contemporary hand-colouring and an inscription in Boece's hand presenting the book to the University. Boece was a personal friend of the Erasmus, and the dedicatee of his only volume of poetry (1495). John Mair the theologian was another enthusiast for the new learning. When, against a background of official criticism, the Italian scholar Girolamo Aleandro introduced the teaching of Greek to Paris, Mair was one of his pupils. Aleandro wrote: 'There are many Scottish scholars to be found in France who are earnest students in various of the sciences and some were my most faithful hearers — John Mair, the Scot, doctor of theology, and David Cranston, my illustrious friends' (our translation; Renaudet 1953: 614 note).

Elphinstone's creation, King's College, was among the most humanistically oriented institutions in sixteenth-century Scotland. It is worth observing that the books which Elphinstone and Boece left to King's are, to a surprising extent, printed – incunables almost equalling the number of manuscripts which they left. Like Elphinstone himself, sponsor of the Aberdeen breviary, the King's professoriate were strongly committed to the use of the press as a teaching tool from very early on. John Vaus, the first Professor of Humanity, wrote the earliest grammatical primer in Scots, known as *Rudimenta puerorum*, which was published in Edinburgh by Andro Myllar in 1507. Hector Boece published the earliest advanced classbook, written for the King's dialectics class and printed in Paris in 1519; a little poem dedicates it affectionately 'Ad generalis Aberdonensis gymnasii studiosam dialectice iuventutem', or 'to the studious youth in dialectic of the common school of Aberdeen' (Johnstone and Robertson 1929-30: 1.23).

The Italian humanist Giovanni Ferrereio (who will be a crucial witness in the third part of this essay), in the preface to his defence of Cicero's poetry which was published at Paris in 1540, but composed at the Abbey of Kinloss in Moray in 1534, heaps praise on the University of Aberdeen as worthy to hold its place in terms of intellectual distinction with greater universities in Europe. He mentions by name, and praises highly for their skills in their avocations, Hector Boece, Robert Gray the Professor of Medicine (and subsequent owner of Boece's Ficino) Boece's brother Arthur, and the grammarian or Humanist John Vaus (Anderson and Johnstone 1889-98: xxii-iii note).

In Scotland, which was in this respect quite unlike England, the Reformation coincides with a retreat from the vernacular. The sons of that reformation subsequently sought to marginalise Scottish achievement in neo-Latin because so much of it was the work of Catholics and Episcopalians, but in fact, the reasons for clinging to Latin were practical rather than confessional. Despite the considerable merits of Scots as a medium for literature, demonstrated by such sophisticated writers as Dunbar and Henryson, simple economics prioritised Latin

as a medium for the intellectually ambitious. James V, Mary, and James VI all came to the throne as very young children; regency governments are caretakers, and seldom *loci* of literary patronage. Once adult, James VI went through a phase of supporting Petrarchan poetics in Scotland (see Shire 1969), but in 1603, he moved the court to London and turned his attention elsewhere. Even after a century of printing, the internal market for books was tiny, so scholars and writers needed to look to patronage for their support. Without a monarch on the throne, few pensions were to be had (some Scottish writers received patronage from major magnates, but there were few who could afford anything very extensive). One of the very few sixteenth-century Scots writers in the vernacular who could realistically look for an audience in England was John Knox, who spent many years there, and successfully mastered the language.<sup>17</sup>

However, Scots who stayed home were taught to write Scots, not English, alongside Latin: James Melville described his internationally-famous uncle Andrew, a distinguished Latin poet and theologian, who had studied and taught in Paris, Poitiers and Geneva, as having been reputed in his youth 'the best philosopher, poet, and Grecian, of anie young maister in the land'; and Andrew it was who would teach his nephew 'the tongues'. As even these few words from James's autobiography makes clear, he himself wrote in a full system of Scots, and hardly anyone south of Hadrian's wall was prepared to make the effort to read Scots (Pitcairn 1842: 39).<sup>18</sup> Writing in Latin, on the other hand, offered potential fame and position not only in England, but elsewhere in Europe.<sup>19</sup> Andrew Melville ended his days as a professor in Sedan, an outpost of Calvinism in northern France.

Perhaps the single most remarkable Scottish product of the Reform is George Buchanan (1506–1582), who to the Parisian humanist printer, Henri Estienne, was 'poetarum nostri saeculi facile princeps' (easily the greatest of the poets of our age), studied by both Protestants and Catholics (Leask 1910: III.278). Buchanan taught at various times in Scotland, France and Portugal; he was the

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<sup>17</sup> Much of Knox's oeuvre is in English, for example, *An Answer to a Letter of a Jesuit called Tyrie*, though it was printed in St Andrews by Robert Lekpreuk (1570). Somewhat later, William Drummond of Hawthornden could also write English (e.g. *Forth Feasting: a panegyrike to the King's most excellent maiestie* (1617), but this was not a common accomplishment – Drummond, again, had spent considerable time in England.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew's poetry for royal occasions, such as the 1590 coronation of Anna of Denmark at Holyrood, or the birth of Prince Henry Frederick, was naturally in Latin for international consumption. James translated several of his uncle's Latin poems into Scots for domestic consumption; his own late letters to his exiled uncle in France are in Latin, as was his posthumously published *Ad Serenissimum Jacobum Primum [...] ecclesiae scoticanae libellus supplex* (1645), aimed at an international audience.

<sup>19</sup> The only important writer of the Scottish Reformation period to do so in Scots is David Lindsay (c. 1490–1555).

author of a number of Latin plays, and above all, of a set of psalm paraphrases that were read throughout Europe, as well as of a history of Scotland.

Moving on to the early seventeenth century, another writer equally central to the corpus of Neo-Latin, John Barclay, was the son of a Scottish father, though since he was an exile for religion's sake, his son's upbringing was entirely continental. Barclay is the author of perhaps the most successful novel ever written in Latin, *Argenis* (1621), but this cannot really be said to reflect more than indirect credit on his fatherland.<sup>20</sup> But the record of native Scottish humanism was not undistinguished, as it is exhibited in the Scottish Parnassus created by Drummond of Hawthornden as part of the entertainment offered to Charles I on his visit to Edinburgh in 1633. It is an interesting insight into who a sophisticated Scot of the period perceived as the intellectual giants of his own nation (only two out of the list wrote in Scots rather than Latin, Douglas and Lindsay):

In the middle of the streete, there was a Mountain dressed for  
*Parnassus*, where *Apollo* and the *Muses* appeared, and ancient  
Worthies of Scotland, for learning was represented; such as  
*Sedullius*, *Ioannes*, *Duns*, Bishop *Elphinstoun* of *Aberdeen*, *Hector*  
*Boes*, *Joannes Major*, Bishop *Gawen Douglasse*, Sir *David Lindsay*,  
*Georgius Buchananus*; the word over them was

*Fama super aethera noti.* (Drummond 1633: 13)

The first two names, Sedulius Scotus and John Scotus Eriugena, are respectively those of a ninth-century proto-humanist Latin poet, grammarian and student of Greek, and of a profoundly learned Neoplatonist, the most original thinker of the ninth century (and also a Greek scholar), both of whom were active in the Frankish empire. Both were in fact Irishmen, but early modern Scots, unaware that the term 'Scot' had changed its meaning, claimed them as their own. The thirteenth-century John Duns Scotus, who was genuinely a Scot, was one of the most important theologian-philosophers of his century, taught in Paris and Cologne, and bore the sobriquet of 'the Subtle Doctor'. Drummond might also have finished up by mentioning his own uncle William Fowler, educated in St Andrew's and Paris, the author of a translation of Petrarch's *Trionfi*, among much else.

Scottish humanism might be said to have come of age with the publication of a substantial volume, *Delitiae Poetarum Scotorum*, set on foot by Sir John Scot of Scotstarvet, a close friend of Drummond's, and the founder of the Latin Chair at St Andrews. This was published in Amsterdam by Johann Blaeu in 1637, in imitation of the national collections of neo-Latin verse created by Jan Gruter, *Delitiae*

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<sup>20</sup> Though he did, however, write in praise of the Scots in the *Icon Animorum* (1614), a collection of sketches of the characters of nations. He does not, however, seem to have visited Scotland, and was not formed by Scottish renaissance culture, except in his family.

*Poetarum Belgarum, Italarum*, and so forth. Perhaps the most distinguished of the thirty-seven poets included in the collection was Arthur Johnston, who was also its editor. Other poets include Thomas Reid, Latin secretary to James VI, and a major donor to Aberdeen University library, and David Wedderburn, who not only taught at Aberdeen, but had among his duties, a sort of local laureateship:

To compose in Latine, both in prose and verse, quhatsumever purpose or thame concerning the common affairis of the toune ather at hame or a-field as he sal be required by any of the magistrattis or clerk in tyme comeing (Walker 1887: 46-47; Anderson and Johnstone 1889-98: I. 185).

Require they did; Wedderburn's work include public verse such as *In obitu Summae Spei Principis Henrici* (*On the Death of our greatest hope, Prince Henry*), *Syneuphranterion in reditu regis in Scotiam* (*General Rejoicing on the Return of the King to Scotland* (1617)), and, of more local interest, *Liddeli Apotheosis* (*the Apotheosis of Duncan Liddel*).

Liddel was an astronomer, mathematician and doctor of medicine who made his career abroad (at Frankfurt, Breslau, Rostock and Helmstedt), began his education at King's, and ended his life back in Aberdeen, much involved with the then newly-founded Marischal College. He left money for a town orator and a *certamen poeticum*; some of George Jamesone's portraits of grave black-clad scholars sporting an unexpected flower behind the ear signal thus their status as the winners of poetic *certamina* (Anderson and Johnstone 1889-98).<sup>21</sup>

It might reasonably be asked what part, if any, women played in early Scottish humanism. It is a question easier to ask than answer. Mary Stuart, in common with all the Valois princesses of her day, could turn a Latin distich and read the standard authors with ease, but she, of course, was educated at the French court. In the mid-sixteenth century, Joachim Du Bellay wrote a poem to a woman with the good Scots name of Marie Hay ('Ad Mariam Hayam'), praising her verses, without making it clear whether they were in Latin or French (1558: 29-39).<sup>22</sup> The most thought-provoking learned Scotswomen actually brought up in her native land is Marie Maitland, daughter of Richard Maitland, Lord Lethington (1496-1586). A poem in Scots which appears to be hers, written in the 1580s, reveals

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<sup>21</sup> Jamesone's portrait of Johnston, now University of Aberdeen, Marischal Museum, ABDUA 30093, is described as 'Oil painting on an oak panel, bust portrait of Johnston wearing large ruff, with pink flower behind right ear, bearded, ginger hair. Johnston was an MA and Professor of Mathematics in 1633. He took receipt of William Jamesone's (George Jamesone's brother) mathematical instruments and books in the terms of Jamesone's will' (online museum catalogue at <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/lemur>).

<sup>22</sup> George Hay, Minister of Rathven and moderator of the General Assembly in 1570, was educated in Paris (Leask 1910: III.120): did he have a learned sister?

considerable knowledge of Classical history; fascinatingly, it can be fairly claimed as the first overtly lesbian poem from anywhere in the British Isles, written from one woman to another expressing a wish that one of them change sex so they can marry (the Maitland Quarto manuscript, Pepys MS 1408: fols. 78v-79v; printed in Craigie 1929: 160-62 no. xlix; see also the Maitland Folio, Pepys MS 2552; Craigie 1919-27).<sup>23</sup> An anonymous poem in the same Quarto manuscript, 'To your self' (fol. 126r; cf. Craigie 1929: 257) makes considerable claims for Marie Maitland as a learned poet, since stanza 1 compares her to Sappho, and stanza 2 to the sixteenth-century Latin poet and polymath, Olimpia Morata. We think it likely that Marie Maitland could read Latin, though this cannot be directly demonstrated.

Despite the fact that there are very clear instances of Scottish families in which a tradition of learning was maintained, there is no direct evidence for learned wives or daughters until the end of the sixteenth century, when Anna Hume, daughter of David Hume of Godscroft, the historian, Latin poet and essayist, translated the Latin verses in her father's *History of the Houses of Douglas and Angus*. She is probably also identifiable as the 'Gentlewoman' responsible for the editing and publication of this work, referred to in a letter of William Drummond of Hawthornden (NLS MS 2061; no. 30), and she translated Petrarch's *Trionfi*. In the seventeenth century, the mathematician James Gregory (1638–1675), who was somewhat sickly as a child, received his early education (including an introduction to geometry) from his mother Janet Anderson, suggesting that her family had taken to educating its daughters.

Leaving aside the apparent absence of women from the ranks of Scottish humanists, Latin learning thrived in seventeenth-century Scotland. On the threshold of baroque internationalism in the arts, this is a good point to end this survey, emphasising how firmly Drummond's 1633 Parnassus in the streets of Edinburgh simply assumed a common consent that Scotland had a distinguished humanist, fully renaissance, tradition stretching back into the fifteenth century (or even the ninth), universally acknowledged and, at the time, a matter of national pride.

### III

We spoke in the introduction to this paper of the pursuit of *ghost renaissances* – the reconstruction of a mentality or a phenomenon from fragmentary references, such as Boece's Ficino, or the *Breviary's* sophisticated hymn. Another such passing reference suggests a world of sophistication in the Scottish élite reception of renaissance design in the earlier sixteenth century, of which hardly any examples survive. Bishop William Elphinstone's efforts in the diocese of Aberdeen were supported by a reforming prelate at the Cistercian abbey of Kinloss in Moray,

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<sup>23</sup> Pepys MS 1408, the Maitland Quarto MS, was written either by or for Marie Maitland.

Abbot Thomas Crystall: the Italian scholar, Giovanni Ferrerio, taught a humanist curriculum, including the Greek language, there from 1532.<sup>24</sup>

In his history of Kinloss, Ferrerio makes passing mention of a painter, Andrew Bairhum, who has painted three altarpieces in the abbey church with religious subjects, but he also painted the Abbott's cell, and a large chamber leading up to it: 'In the lighter style of painting which is now customary throughout Scotland' [pictura levioere quae nunc est per Scotiam receptissima]. Professor Bath suggests that this can only refer to the style of painting after the antique, now internationally identified as 'grotesque'. Ferrerio's expression 'painted in the lighter style' matches exactly the title of one of the earliest sets of Italian, mannerist ornament prints, published in about 1540. *Leviores et (ut videtur) Extemporaneae Picturae Quas Grottesches Vulgo Vocant (Lighter, and (as it seems) Improvised Pictures, which in the Vulgar Tongue are called 'grotteschi')* (cf. Berliner and Egger 1981: nos. 277, 179). Bath explains that

If Ferrerius's comment means that the 'lighter style' was grotesque painting, then we have to believe that this style was already becoming fashionable in Scotland as early as 1538.

He concludes,

We should not make the all too common mistake of assuming that Scotland was a provincial, outlandish backwater. On the contrary, it was in touch with the heights of decorative taste in its use of this 'lighter style' of painting (Bath 2007b).

Indeed, little attention has been being paid to a remarkable fragment in another monastic building not far from Kinloss. This is on the underside of the chancel arch at Pluscarden Abbey, near Elgin (there appears to be no notice of the painting in the pioneering work on Scottish painting by Apted and Hannabuss, 1978)). It shows sun, moon and stars as if falling, and at the bottom of the north side, much damaged but still fluently outlined, St John with eagle in an aedicule, with traces of

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<sup>24</sup> He wrote a history of the abbey; *Ferrerii historia abbatum de Kynlos* (Wilson 1839), in humanist Latin. Kinloss (Moray) was in the diocese of Brechin, not of Aberdeen. However, Crystall not only improved monastic observance at Kinloss, winning praise from the historian Hector Boece, but also at its daughter-houses of Culross and Deer, which he had power to do according to the Cistercian system of filiation. He was a liberal almsgiver, and also bought books for the library (Durkan 1981: 181-94). Ferrerio later worked on the continuation of Hector Boece's standard *History of Scotland*, and whilst working at Kinloss he compiled a collection of Latin proverbs, many of which found their way into Erasmus's great *Adagia*. He was very intensely connected to the humanist community of Aberdeen as his praise of them, see p. 15 above, suggests.

a landscape behind. The work would very plausibly date from the second quarter of the sixteenth century. Presumably, it constituted a subsidiary part of a doom painting on boards filling the chancel arch as at the church of Foulis Easter in Angus.

Together with Ferrerio's notice of painting at Kinloss, this begins to suggest considerable activity in painting in an accomplished, international style, which may have been far from uncommon in the northern counties. Certainly, it suggests that there were informed patrons there, with connections to Paris and Italy, as well as to the internationalist University in the regional capital.

Perhaps the single most destructive historical trope is to interpret as primitive and random any Scottish manifestation of informed internationalism. This trope gives rise to a whole set of errors from the total falsification of early-modern Scottish literature which results from the attempt to sideline Scottish Latin, to the persistent (and pernicious) habit of showing renaissance castles stripped back to the stone as though they were the caves of *banditti* rather than the palaces of members of a European élite.

A final example of a Scottish renaissance work generally treated as an inexplicable grotesque when it is in fact part of a continuum, is the castle garden at Edzell in Angus, built for Sir David Lindsay, Lord Edzell in the years 1604–10. His continental affiliations and interest in contemporary mining technology seem unexceptional in the context of a renaissance Scotland perceived as such. The garden at Edzell occupies a natural point in the development of the renaissance garden in northern Europe, informed by the kinds of astrological and iconographic awarenesses which attended the early botanic gardens (cf. Prest 1981) and moving towards the sensibility which later produced the *Hortus Palatinus* at Heidelberg.<sup>25</sup> The series of reliefs of Planetary Deities, Liberal Arts and Virtues (all derived from continental engravings) have been subjected to wildly speculative interpretations, as though they had neither context nor point of reference.

However, seen in the light of Boece's Ficinian layout at King's College Aberdeen (or indeed in the light of the microcosmic layout of the Botanical Garden at Padua) they appear much less surprising as a renaissance way of articulating place, possibly as a *locus memoriae*, possibly along the lines of astronomical affinity (and antipathy) with the arts and virtues.

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<sup>25</sup> The question of the 'King's Knot' at Stirling must also be borne in mind. There is considerable uncertainty of the date of the garden work now visible as earthworks. The Buildings of Scotland favour a seventeenth-century date, but it seems wholly possible that this campaign was to repair works undertaken at the same time as the building of the Palace block. What seems worth considering is the degree to which the octagonal mount with its space for artificial water with a central island on its summit may reflect that important source for the renaissance garden throughout Europe, the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* by Francesco Colonna, published at Venice in 1490. Certainly the 'King's Knot' as now visible has a good deal in common with the topography of the gardens of that dream-narrative.

This garden has a not-insignificant fictional afterlife. In Sir Walter Scott's novel *The Antiquary* set in a curiously-imagined north-eastern Scotland – Angus with some aspects of Aberdeenshire and Moray – the evil German swindler, *illuminatus* and treasure-hunter in the service of a local laird recalls Lord Edzell's German technicians and the magical affinities read into his garden.

At the heart of the novel – dweller in dark corners and source of darkness – is the Catholic Lord Glenallan, a summary of all that Scott feared from the territories beyond Aberdeen with their dissident religious history. Glenallan's household is depicted as a place of mediaeval darkness surviving into the last decade of the eighteenth century. The statement could hardly be made more clearly that Catholicism, and, by implication, Jacobitism, of themselves enforce a mediaeval condition of life on their adherents.

The extraordinary contemplation remains to us that the confessional and historical prejudices of 1816, may have gone underground into a species of academic collective unconscious, but they still inform the chapter divisions of the Scottish history of 2001 sponsored by the Museums of Scotland. That history would extend the Scottish middle ages until the year 1560, reducing the Erasmian and Ficinian learning of late fifteenth-century Aberdeen, the use of printing to advance the reform-from-within of the early sixteenth century Church, and a century of humanist achievement in Latin letters to a set of inchoate responses to foreign models by a nation which only acquired in the year 1560 the intellectual maturity to understand the matter of the international renaissance.

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