

## The Scottish Heresy

George Mackenzie's Pelagian Biographies

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*Pre-publication copy.*

In the middle of the Scottish winter, on 3 December 1725, George Mackenzie was laid to rest amongst his ancestors in the ruins of Fortrose Cathedral, his corpse attended by “all the Gentlemen of the Country”. It was a fitting end for a respected local physician, a member of one of the north of Scotland's most powerful noble houses, and the anonymous eulogy delivered upon him in the pages of the *Caledonian Mercury* later that month was fulsome: “His indefatigable Industry in the Pursuit of his Studies, impaired his Health and shortened his Days ... He was an upright honest Man, a loyal Subject, a true Son of the Church; and for his extensive Knowledge and Learning, deserves to be rank'd among the chief of the learned Authors he has given an Account of.”<sup>1</sup>

This essay will explore that “extensive Knowledge and Learning”, in particular the erudite physician's magnum opus, *The Lives and Characters of the Most Eminent Writers of the Scots Nation* (1708–1722).<sup>2</sup> It will reconstruct Mackenzie's life and recover the intellectual context of his sprawling, three-volume encyclopaedia of Scottish learning, before proceeding to interrogate the remarkable claims made therein for a Pelagian inheritance in Scottish theology. Read in this way, Mackenzie's works can tell us much about the continuing importance of ancient authorities in general, and Patristic writers in particular, during the Scottish Enlightenment. They can also help us understand Mackenzie's close engagement with the Pelagian heresy and the impact it has had upon the fate of his works, both in his own time and amongst subsequent generations. In so doing, this essay will begin to rehabilitate Mackenzie as a significant intellectual figure and a key point of reception for Patristic thought within the Scottish Early Enlightenment.

### Recovering Mackenzie

A biography of George Mackenzie appeared in the original *Dictionary of National Biography* (1893), written by T. W. Bayne, with an updated version, by Clare Jackson, included in the twenty-first-century *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.<sup>3</sup> Both sketches, however, share a single principal source: the obituary published in the *Caledonian Mercury* a few days after Mackenzie's death and referred to above. Mixed amongst genealogical and bibliographical detail, the author of the *Caledonian* obituary provided a snapshot of Mackenzie's life which would go on to shape both Bayne's and Jackson's interpretations of his career:

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<sup>1</sup> *Caledonian Mercury* (16 December 1725), 5682.

<sup>2</sup> George Mackenzie, *The Lives and Characters of the Most Eminent Writers of the Scots Nation; With an Abstract & Catalogue of their Works, their Various Editions; and the Judgment of the Learn'd Concerning Them*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1708–1722).

<sup>3</sup> DNB and ODNB, *s.nn.*

Having been well educated at the Schools, and having afterwards improved himself in the Studies of Philosophy and Mathematicks at the University of Aberdeen, he was sent to Oxford; where he staid a considerable Time, conversing with the learned Men there, and frequenting the Libraries, taking Notes of such Things as related to his Purpose, and laying in a Stock of Learning, which he made good Use of afterwards. He applied himself chiefly to the Study of MEDICINE, and for his greater improvement, went to Paris, where he continued some Years, pursuing that Study with the utmost Care and Diligence. After his Return to his native Country, he was created *Doctor of Medicine* in the University of Aberdeen, and made a *Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians* in Edinburgh.<sup>4</sup>

Although seemingly straightforward, this account is not without issues and is certainly incorrect in at least some of its details.

George was the second son of Colin Mackenzie, himself a younger son of the Earl of Seaforth and a university-educated Jacobite military officer as well as owner of the small estate of Kinachulladrum in northern Scotland. George's mother, Jean Laurie, was the daughter of Robert Laurie, Bishop of Brechin and Dean of Edinburgh.<sup>5</sup> His birth on 10 December 1669 thus placed him firmly within the nexus of Episcopally inclined royalist lairds who were then benefiting from the rising tide of the Restoration establishment.<sup>6</sup> On 5 January 1671 Mackenzie's mother was buried in Greyfriars kirkyard in Edinburgh.<sup>7</sup> A decade or so later, his widowed father married the widow Helen Sinclair, scion of a mixed Episcopal and Catholic family which included John Spottiswoode, Archbishop of St Andrews, amongst its ancestors and John Spottiswoode the jurist, and Father Richard Augustine Hay, the priest and antiquary amongst George's contemporaries.<sup>8</sup> Beyond the bald statement by his anonymous biographer that he was "educated at the Schools" nothing is known of George's life until his appearance at university. This was not, however, at Aberdeen, but rather at the University of Glasgow, where he and his elder brother Robert matriculated simultaneously in February 1685.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Caledonian Mercury* (16 December 1725), 5681–82.

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Mackenzie, *History of the Mackenzies With Genealogies of the Principal Families of the Name*, revised ed. (Inverness: A. & W. Mackenzie, 1894), 275; Sir James Balfour Paul, ed., *The Scots Peerage*, 9 vols. (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1904–1914), vii. 508.

<sup>6</sup> No contemporary source for the date of Mackenzie's birth has been discovered, but it is given as 10 December 1669 in William Anderson, *The Scottish Nation*, 3 vols. (Edinburgh and London: A. Fullarton & Co., 1867), iii. 23. Anderson is repeated without additional evidence by the *DNB* and *ODNB*. For the theological and political contexts of Mackenzie's age, see Clare Jackson, *Restoration Scotland, 1660-1690: Royalist Politics, Religion and Ideas* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003) and Alasdair Raffie, *The Culture of Controversy: Religious Arguments in Scotland, 1660-1714* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Henry Paton, ed., *Register of Interments in the Greyfriars Burying-Ground, Edinburgh, 1658–1700* (Edinburgh: Scottish Record Society, 1902), 417.

<sup>8</sup> Mackenzie, *History*, 275, identifies his stepmother as "Lady Herbertshire", i.e., Helen Sinclair, widow of William Stirling of Herbertshire. See Sir William Fraser, *The Stirlings of Keir and Their Family Papers* (Edinburgh, 1858), 175, and Richard Augustine Hay, *Genealogie of the Sainteclaires of Rosshyn* (Edinburgh: Thomas G. Stevenson, 1835), 154. She was a granddaughter of Archbishop Spottiswoode (Sir Robert Douglas of Glenbervie, *The Baronage of Scotland* [Edinburgh, 1798], 248) and her brother James Sinclair of Roslin was the stepfather of Richard Augustine Hay (Richard Augustine Hay, *Genealogie of the Hayes of Tweeddale* [Edinburgh: Thomas G. Stevenson, 1835], 50).

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Robertson and Cosmo Innes, eds., *Munimenta Alme Universitatis Glasguensis*, 4 vols. (Glasgow: Maitland Club, 1854), iii. 142.

Despite this error, the *Caledonian* obituarist was accurate in supposing that Mackenzie had spent time in Oxford. The extended Mackenzie kingroup had unusually close ties to that university for a Scottish noble family; ties formed in large part by George's cousin Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh who had sent his nephew Simon to Christ Church in 1685 and ultimately retired to Oxford after his deposition from the post of Lord Advocate.<sup>10</sup> While there is no evidence that George ever formally matriculated at any of the Oxford colleges, he later referred in his proposal for the *Lives and Characters* to "his Painful Search in the *Bodleian Library at Oxford*", no doubt the same "laying in [of] a Stock of Learning" mentioned by his obituarist, probably sometime in the late 1680s or early 1690s.<sup>11</sup>

Once again, there is no direct evidence for Mackenzie's time in Paris, though the Francophile nature of his writings and his evident acquaintance with numerous French texts make it seem plausible. He had certainly returned to Scotland by 1703, for on 22 November of that year he received a *diploma ad eundem* from King's College, Aberdeen, "in consideration of the goode service done by his father and family to the college, and in consideration of his present circumstances", subsequently being granted a doctorate of medicine from the same university towards the end of his life.<sup>12</sup> In 1705 he was appointed physician to Heriot's Hospital in Edinburgh through the patronage of his predecessor, Sir Archibald Stevenson, but soon found himself embroiled in controversy. He was removed from his post in 1711 and engaged in a protracted dispute with the governors of the Hospital during the subsequent three years, at one stage writing an incendiary pamphlet complaining of his treatment as an Episcopalian there.<sup>13</sup> He seems to have lived between Edinburgh and Fortrose, a small northern cathedral town in the centre of his extended family's estates, during this latter period of his life, although 1712 saw him at least temporarily in London.<sup>14</sup>

During this period Mackenzie became part of a circle of Jacobite scholars active in Edinburgh, all Episcopalian or Catholic. He was a drinking companion of Archibald Pitcairne, the heterodox physician and Jacobite, as well as being well-acquainted with the scholar-printer Thomas Ruddiman, the Catholic historian Patrick Abercromby, the Historiographer Royal David Crawford of Drumsoy, the genealogist George Crawford, and the herald Alexander Nisbet.<sup>15</sup> The years in

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<sup>10</sup> ODNB, *s.n.* Evidence of Simon Mackenzie of Allangrange's time at Oxford comes from his correspondence with his uncle Rosehaugh, St Andrews University Library msdep75/3/3/4, 5, 31, 34. Some decades later, Rosehaugh's son George also attended the university, matriculating at University College, 27 October 1702 (John Foster, ed., *Alumni Oxonienses: The Members of the University of Oxford, 1500–1714*, 4 vols. [Oxford: Parker, 1891], iii. 957).

<sup>11</sup> His name does not appear in Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, iii. 957; George Mackenzie, *Proposals for Printing the Lives and Characters of the Most Eminent Writers of the Scots Nation* (Edinburgh, [1707?]), verso.

<sup>12</sup> Peter John Anderson, ed., *Officers and Graduates of University & King's College, Aberdeen* (Aberdeen: Spalding Club, 1893), 124. The ODNB errs in dating Mackenzie's M.D. to 1696, mistakenly assuming it was granted at the same time as the previous entry in Anderson when it is in fact undated. That Mackenzie is there specifically described as author of the *Lives and Characters* in "tribus vol. in folio" suggests that the Aberdeen M.D. was probably granted after the publication of the third volume of the *Lives* in 1722.

<sup>13</sup> William Steven, *History of George Heriot's Hospital*, new ed., ed. Frederick W. Bedford (Edinburgh: Bell & Bradfute, 1859), 90–93.

<sup>14</sup> In that year he obtained a manuscript from Gilbert Burnet, Bishop of Salisbury, which claimed to be Patrick, Lord Ruthven's autograph admission to the contrivance of David Rizzio's murder (Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, iii. 64).

<sup>15</sup> For Pitcairne, see Robert Wodrow, *Analecta*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Printed for the Maitland Club, 1842–1843), iii. 291; for Ruddiman, Thomas Ruddiman, *A Vindication of Mr. George Buchanan's Paraphrase of the Psalms* (Edinburgh, 1745), 126; for Abercromby ("my learned and worthy Friend"), Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, iii. v; for David Crawford, Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, i. xviii; for George Crawford, George Crawford, *Peerage of Scotland*

which he published his *Lives and Characters* found him existing within the midst of the Scottish Early Enlightenment, engaging with the authors and texts which defined Scotland's vibrant intellectual culture at the turn of the eighteenth century.<sup>16</sup>

But his place within that culture – itself none too well known beyond a few specialists – has been almost completely forgotten by modern scholarship. This long-term decline in his reputation was first prompted by a particularly acid note in the radical Presbyterian scholar Robert Wodrow's *Analecta* (first published in 1843):

I find Dr M'Kenzie, the writter of our "Lives," is dead. My Lord Grange informs me he was a relation of his, had Oxford education, and was a great pretender to things he understood not. As a physitian, he kneu nothing of his oun bussines. His [Grange's] brother, the Earle of Marr, imployed him to give him a litle money, but found him not to be trusted to. He was a cronny of Dr Pitcairn's, and drunk with him. The Doctor at first commended his Lives to every body, but when he had read of them, he declared they wer not worth a button.<sup>17</sup>

Wodrow was no friend to Episcopal writers – certainly not to any so outspoken as Mackenzie – and it is tempting to see only sectarian partisanship in this summary of his character and work. However, criticism of Mackenzie was not limited to those on the opposite side of the theological divide. Thomas Ruddiman, writing almost twenty years after his friend's death, reminisced that "it was the good Man's Weakness, that he was sometimes too credulous; of which . . . there are several other Instances in [the *Lives and Characters*]; and of which I have also been Witness in general Conversation".<sup>18</sup> Another Episcopal scholar, Bishop Robert Keith, expressed doubt in his *History of the Affairs of Church and State* (1734), as to the existence of a letter quoted by Mackenzie, implicitly allowing for the possibility of forgery.<sup>19</sup>

Given such unanimity of assessment regarding both his character and scholarly capacities, it is little wonder that Mackenzie has been neglected. But how should these assertions be interpreted? Was he really as credulous, if not duplicitous, as some of his contemporaries claimed? If so, this impacts significantly upon the larger British national biographical tradition, for many of Mackenzie's assertions in the *Lives and Characters* were either explicitly or silently co-opted by David Irving in his *Lives of the Scottish Poets* and so found their way into the *Dictionary of National Biography* and more recent, indebted sources.<sup>20</sup> If not, Mackenzie's work stands in urgent need of

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(Edinburgh, 1716), 437–38; for Nisbet, George Mackenzie, *The Works of that Eminent and Learned Lawyer, Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1716–1722), i. sig. \*2r–v.

<sup>16</sup> For the wider context of this culture, see Kelsey Jackson Williams, *The First Scottish Enlightenment: Rebels, Priests, and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming). For the intersection of Jacobitism, Episcopacy, and Enlightenment exhibited by Mackenzie and his network, see also C. D. A. Leighton, "Scottish Jacobitism, Episcopacy, and Counter-Enlightenment", *History of European Ideas* 35 (2009): 1–10. As well as the *Lives and Characters*, discussed here, Mackenzie also wrote "The Author's Life" in Mackenzie, *Works of that Eminent and Learned Lawyer*, i. i–xix, a composition heavily indebted to Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses: An Exact History of All the Writers and Bishops . . . of Oxford*, 2 vols. (London, 1691–1692), cols. 905–906. A "Genealogical History of the Fitz-Geralds and MacKenzies" written by him survives in manuscript at EUL MS Coll-51/1/3 and BL MS 40720.

<sup>17</sup> Wodrow, *Analecta*, iii. 291.

<sup>18</sup> Ruddiman, *Vindication*, 126.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Keith, *The History of the Affairs of Church and State in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1734), 43.

<sup>20</sup> David Irving, *The Lives of the Scottish Poets, With Preliminary Dissertations on the Literary History of Scotland, and the Early Scottish Drama*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 2 vols. (London and Edinburgh, 1810), *passim*.

reinterpretation and restoration into the intellectual canon of the Scottish Enlightenment. The present essay proposes that the latter is true, and that the condemnations of his contemporaries stemmed not from his gullibility or shoddy antiquarian scholarship, but rather from his unacceptably heterodox theological position. To make a case for this, however, requires a preliminary survey of what the *Lives and Characters* were and what they can tell us about Mackenzie's intellectual project as a whole.

### ***The Lives and Characters***

Mackenzie's *Lives and Characters of the Most Eminent Writers of the Scots Nation; With an Abstract and Catalogue of Their Works; Their Various Editions; and the Judgement of the Learn'd Concerning Them* is a monumental work. Beginning in late antiquity, it consists of a chronological series of biographies of eminent Scottish writers and is particularly rich in the lives of sixteenth-century humanists, especially Scottish scholars abroad. Each biography contains a survey of its subject's life and works, followed by a summation of their character and a detailed bibliography of their writings, both in print and in manuscript. Sources are, on the whole, well-cited and suggest wide and discerning reading on the part of the author.

Mackenzie was no innovator in constructing his work along these lines, instead drawing upon the long tradition of *historia literaria*, the bio-bibliographical histories of letters which had become staples of European scholarship during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>21</sup> As it stands, its three volumes represent only a portion of Mackenzie's overall ambitions. He had intended at least one more volume containing "the Writers of lesser Note" in the sixteenth century as well as ambitiously imagining appendices containing "a *List of all the Religious Houses*, with the *Names of the Founders*, and *Shires* in which they are; together with an *Account of the First Rise* of all the *Ancient Families of the Nation*".<sup>22</sup> What did see print, however, was both substantial and intellectually complex.

The first volume of the *Lives and Characters* was published by the Edinburgh printer James Watson in 1708.<sup>23</sup> A second volume rapidly followed from Watson's press in 1711, and a third, somewhat belatedly, from that of William Adams, Junior, in 1722. Watson was one of a group of Edinburgh-based Episcopal and Jacobite printers who specialised in "patriotic" or nationalistic scholarly and polemical printing (Mackenzie's friend Ruddiman was another) and like a number of other productions from this community of printers, the *Lives and Characters* were published by subscription.<sup>24</sup> Amongst those subscribers were many of the leading intellectual and political figures of the day, with a particular imbalance in favour of the Jacobite minority. Any remaining doubt as to the political allegiances of the work and its author melts away upon reading the rabble-

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<sup>21</sup> For *historia literaria*, see Kelsey Jackson Williams, "Canon before Canon, Literature before Literature: Thomas Pope Blount and the Scope of Early Modern Learning", *Huntington Library Quarterly* 77 (2014): 177–99.

<sup>22</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, ii. viii.

<sup>23</sup> He had published a proposal for subscriptions some time before in which he imagined the work would consist of two volumes in folio and emphasised both the novelty of his work and that "nothing shall be *Asserted* . . . but what shall be *Prov'd*, either from Their [the subjects'] own Writings, the Writings of these Co-temporary with them, or by other Writers of Unquestionable Veracity" (Mackenzie, *Proposals*, verso).

<sup>24</sup> I. S. Ross and S. A. C. Scobie, "Patriotic Publishing as a Response to the Union", in *The Union of 1707*, ed. T. I. Rae (Glasgow: Blackie & Son, 1974), 94–119. Indeed, the first volume of Mackenzie's *Lives* is the first work published in Scotland known to contain a list of subscribers.

rousing, anti-unionist, pro-Jacobite dedication of volume two to John Erskine, Earl of Mar, in which Mackenzie encouraged his patron to “reflect upon the vast Multitudes of Men slain upon our Mountains and Plains, fighting for their Liberties and Country, when all the other Nations about them were tamely submitting themselves to a foreign Yoke”.<sup>25</sup>

This political stance is significant in part because it links Mackenzie to a larger early eighteenth-century Jacobite tradition which emphasised the long and glorious record of Scotland in “arms and arts”, both as the proudly undefeated adversaries of the Romans (and, by extension, the imperialistic English – for this strand in Scottish thought see Alan Montgomery’s chapter in the present volume) and as the purveyors of learning to continental Europe through the ages.<sup>26</sup> This tradition drew heavily on earlier humanist scholarship and so it is unsurprising to find that Mackenzie took his initial inspiration from an early Scottish bio-bibliography, the massive and controversial *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Scotorum* of Thomas Dempster.<sup>27</sup>

This marks the first strike against Mackenzie, both by the standards of his contemporaries and by those of many more recent scholars. Dempster’s work was a cultural landgrab, defining (incorrectly as it would eventually prove) the medieval ethnic designation *Scotus* to mean Scot rather than Gael and so enlisting the whole host of medieval Irish saints and scholars – as well as the stray Anglo-Saxon and German – to serve under the Scottish banner.<sup>28</sup> Mackenzie himself was well aware of Dempster’s subsequent reputation, a reputation not improved by being a Catholic exile from a Protestant country, and admitted in his introduction to the first volume of the *Lives* that “it may seem indeed somewhat strange, that I should Cite [Dempster] so often, after that I had acknowledg’d him to be a *Fabulous Writer*”. But Mackenzie was no fool. Realising that Dempster was “Naturally *Credulous*” he “never made use of his Authority in any thing concerning the Ancient Writers . . . but when he says, that he either saw the *Books* themselves in such *Libraries*, had them in his own Possession, or that they were Publish’d in such *Places*, in such a Year of GOD.” In such instances, however, “[i]t were very hard to Question” his veracity.<sup>29</sup> In other words, Mackenzie only made use of Dempster’s reportage on specific, identifiable books, rather than trusting to his ambiguous, often creative lists of the supposed “works” of this or that author.

From the outset, then, Mackenzie presented a face of critical acumen at odds with the assessments discussed above. His place within the Enlightenment biographical tradition which grew out of humanist *historia literaria* is confirmed by his own points of stylistic reference. “I have Imitated”, he wrote, “the best Biographers of this Age; such as Dr. *Cave*, M. *Du Pin*, M. *Le Clerc*,

<sup>25</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, ii. sig. Av.

<sup>26</sup> Aspects of this tradition are discussed in Colin Kidd, “The Ideological Significance of Scottish Jacobite Latinity”, in *Culture, Politics, and Society in Britain, 1600–1800*, ed. Jeremy Black and Jeremy Gregory (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), 110–30; William Ferguson, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation: An Historic Quest* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998); Murray Pittock, *Poetry and Jacobite Politics in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Dempster, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Scotorum*, lib. XIX (Bologna, 1627). A typographical facsimile of the original was edited in two volumes by David Irving (Edinburgh, 1829).

<sup>28</sup> For Dempster and his contexts, see Ulrike Moret, “An Early Scottish National Biography: Thomas Dempster’s *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Scotorum* (1627)”, in *A Palace in the Wild: Essays on Vernacular Culture and Humanism in Late-Medieval and Renaissance Scotland*, ed. L. A. J. R. Houwen *et al.* (Leuven: Peeters, 2000), 249–69; John Durkan, “Thomas Dempster: A Scottish Baronius”, *Innes Review* 54 (2003): 69–78; Jason Harris, “Exiles and Saints in Baroque Europe: George Conn and the Scotie Debate”, in *The Ulster Earls and Baroque Europe: Refashioning Irish Identities, 1600–1800*, ed. Thomas O’Connor and Mary Ann Lyons (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 306–26.

<sup>29</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, i. x.

Dr. *Smith, &c.*”, not only in their style and methodological approach, but also in their habit of embedding lengthy digressions within a biographical framework.<sup>30</sup> Of his contemporaries, it was Louis Ellies Du Pin to whom he was most indebted. The Gallican theologian’s vast *Nouvelle bibliothèque des auteurs ecclésiastiques* provided an ample mine for Mackenzie, both in its French original and its English translation, and Dupin’s mixture of biography, intellectual history, and theology is echoed in the structure of Mackenzie’s own work.<sup>31</sup>

More than anything, the intellectual-historical digression was Mackenzie’s signature and from the outset he made a vigorous argument for its value as a way of making sense of the larger intellectual and cultural histories of his subjects.<sup>32</sup> This quickly supplanted the purely biographical and in the introduction to his second volume he significantly recast the purpose of his work:

In one Word; I hope this *Collection* may be of some Use to those *Gentlemen*, whose Occasions and Circumstances cannot allow them to be furnished with great *Libraries* or *Collections of Books*; since they will find, in what I have already published, an *Abstract*, or *Abridgement*, of *An Hundred and Fourty Three Volumes*, and *Seventy Six Letters*, written upon the most useful Parts of *Learning*.<sup>33</sup>

As it evolved, Mackenzie came to understand the *Lives and Characters* as something similar to Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionnaire*, a work anticipating, in its omnivorous nature, something of later Enlightenment encyclopaedias. By the third volume, his subjects – still, albeit uneasily, squeezed into the frames of individual lives of Scottish scholars – came to include topics as diverse as the history of astronomy, Greek comedy, the Septuagint, and an account of the persecution of Jews and Christians under tyrannical rulers.<sup>34</sup>

In the end, the *Lives and Characters*, which had begun life as an example of humanist *historia literaria*, ended as an Enlightenment encyclopaedia: a powerful, multivalent text which encapsulated much of the learning of the Early Enlightenment within an erudite, largely tolerant collection of antiquarian biographies. It was not the structure of the *Lives* which gave offence, but the content – particularly that of the first volume, which began with a lengthy biography of none other than the heresiarch Pelagius, whom Mackenzie proudly claimed not only as a Scot, but as the earliest Scottish thinker of note.

### **(Semi-)Pelagianism in Early Modern Thought**

Mackenzie’s controversial biography raises two questions: why did he associate both himself and Scottish intellectual culture as a whole with a widely reviled, still theologically live heresy? And why did he believe the fifth-century theologian was a Scot? The answers to these two questions are inherently linked.

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<sup>30</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, i. x.

<sup>31</sup> Louis Ellies Du Pin, *Nouvelle bibliothèque des auteurs ecclésiastiques: contenant l’histoire de leur vie, le catalogue, la critique, at la chronologie de leurs ouvrages . . .*, 19 vols. (Paris, 1683–1715); Jacques Gres-Gayer, “Un théologien Gallican, témoin de son temps: Louis Ellies Du Pin (1657-1719)”, *Revue d’histoire de l’Église de France* 72 (1986): 67–121.

<sup>32</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, i. viii.

<sup>33</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, ii. viii.

<sup>34</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, iii. vi.

Pelagius's principal heterodox beliefs were calculated to invoke the ire of an early modern audience, especially a Calvinist one.<sup>35</sup> He had proposed that there was no such thing as Original Sin; humans were born into innocence and sinned of their own free will. Nor was there any such thing as predestination, or, in Mackenzie's words, "all Man may be saved, if they will".<sup>36</sup> Divine grace, in other words, was not a prerequisite to following the divine commandments. Unfortunately for Pelagius, one of his principal opponents was St. Augustine, who forcefully rebutted his interpretation of Christianity. All humans, Augustine wrote, were subject to Original Sin; free will, while not extinguished, required God's grace to be effective; and God chose those to whom he would offer grace (in a nutshell, the doctrine of predestination which formed such a central tenet of early modern Calvinism).

This ancient heresy once again became current news at the beginning of the seventeenth century when Arminians, particularly the Dutch Remonstrants, began to be accused of holding "semi-pelagian" views. In reality, the Arminians' belief in Original Sin, rejection of predestination, and somewhat qualified belief in free will were far milder than Pelagius's interpretation, but seemed sufficiently similar to hard-line Calvinists that the accusation became a mainstay in polemic between the two groups. The Synod of Dort in 1618–1619 decisively rejected the brand of Christianity offered by the Remonstrants – at least within the Dutch Reformed Church – but had the ironic effect of making Pelagianism, or at least Semi-Pelagianism, rather better known than it had been before.<sup>37</sup>

It was within this charged atmosphere that the Dutch scholar Gerardus Joannes Vossius published his *Historia de controversiis* in 1618.<sup>38</sup> Approaching his topic from a historical perspective, first and foremost, Vossius made a plea for moderation in the post-Dort era. In responding to Pelagius, he argued, Augustine had gone well beyond the mainstream teaching of the Church Fathers and, as such, his verdict could not be considered entirely canonical, particularly in the matter of predestination. Instead, Vossius suggested, it was just as erroneous to deny free will as it was to deny grace, and the erudite churchman should look for a *via media* between Augustinian predestination and Pelagian heresy.<sup>39</sup> The long-term consequences of both the Synod and Vossius's historico-philological riposte were less a general warming towards the positions of the Remonstrants than a new fashion for the slurs "Pelagian" or "Semi-Pelagian" against Arminians or similar thinkers in Calvinist countries. As a potential indicator of heterodoxy, Pelagianism had arrived to stay in the theological controversies of the seventeenth century.

Against this wider backdrop, Pelagius and his heresy presented especial difficulties for early modern Britons. Classical sources identified the heresiarch as a native of Britain and church historians across the three kingdoms were quick to embark on a programme of damage control against any such undesirable claim for their respective nations. In 1639, James Ussher, the erudite Archbishop of Armagh, set the game afoot with an ingenious string of etymological conjecture.

<sup>35</sup> For Pelagius in general see B. R. Rees, ed., *Pelagius: Life and Letters* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, i. 3.

<sup>37</sup> Margo Todd, "Justifying God: The Calvinisms of the British Delegation to the Synod of Dort", *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 96 (2005): 272–90; Jan Rohls, "Calvinism, Arminianism and Socinianism in the Netherlands until the Synod of Dort", in *Socinianism and Arminianism: Antitrinitarians, Calvinists and Cultural Exchange in Seventeenth-Century Europe*, ed. Martin Mulrow and Jan Rohls (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 3–48.

<sup>38</sup> Gerardus Joannes Vossius, *Historiae de controversiis, quas Pelagius ejusque reliquiae moverunt, libri septem* (Leiden, 1618).

<sup>39</sup> For Vossius's argument and its implications see also Jean-Louis Quantin, *The Church of England and Christian Antiquity: The Construction of a Confessional Identity in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 173–75.



“Pelagius”, he supposed, derived from the Latin *pelago ortum* (“rising from the sea”), the equivalent of the “British” *marigenam* (“sea born”), whence it could be easily concluded that he was in fact named “Morgan” in his native tongue and was obviously a native of Wales (for similar erudite and pseudo-erudite etymological games, see Anthony Ossa-Richardson’s chapter in the present volume).<sup>40</sup> This Welsh origin was not purely Ussher’s own invention, also deriving some support from medieval sources, but it was presumably in response to Ussher that Edward Stillingfleet in his *Origines Britannicae* made it clear that Pelagius had nothing to do with Wales and was, in reality, far more likely to have been an Irishman.<sup>41</sup> Nor were Scots lacking in readiness to wash their hands of heresy. Thomas Dempster performed a tendentious reading of the relevant texts to prove that “Pelagius, the British heretic of damned memory”, could be no other than an Englishman.<sup>42</sup>

One Patristic text complicated this ethnic blame game, however. St. Jerome, in his preface to the First Book of Jeremiah discussing Pelagius and his master Rufinus, described one of them as *nec recordatur stolidissimus & Scotorum pultibus praegravatus*: grown fat with the porridge of the *Scoti*.<sup>43</sup> Vossius had identified the offending figure as Pelagius himself and had no reservations in describing him as *professione monachus, natione Scotus* (“by profession a monk, by nation a Scot”), but others were less convinced.<sup>44</sup> Both Ussher and his Catholic counterpart, the Counter-Reformation historian Cesare Baronio, had read the passage as referring to Rufinus rather than Pelagius and so this crux could be overlooked by Stillingfleet, Dempster, and others.<sup>45</sup> But this was not to last. In his posthumously published *Critica historico-chronologia in universos annales ecclesiasticos* (1705), the French Jesuit Antoine Pagi returned to Jerome’s barbed comment. There he argued not only that the passage referred to Pelagius, but that the reference to *Scotorum pultibus* implied that Pelagius belonged “to that nation known as the Scots or Irish”.<sup>46</sup> His assessment was taken up and simplified in Jean Le Clerc’s 1706 summary of Pagi’s work in the *Bibliothèque choisie*; according to Le Clerc, Pelagius was *Ecossois*, Scottish.<sup>47</sup>

But, even assuming that Jerome was referring to Pelagius, what was the saint really saying? Modern medieval scholars are aware that *Scotus* and *Scotia* were slippery words, referring to Gaeldom, most often Irish Gaeldom, in Latin texts from the late antique period until about the tenth century CE and only then gradually being transferred to the Dalriadic nation which flourished in ancient Alba, modern Scotland.<sup>48</sup> To the early moderns, however, this was much less obvious. The ambiguity of the word led in the sixteenth century to the ownership of several continental Irish monasteries passing into the hands of Scottish monks on the grounds that their founders, the *Scoti*, were clearly Scots rather than Irish, and this in turn led to a long-running

<sup>40</sup> James Ussher, *Britannicarum ecclesiarum antiquitates. Quibus inserta est pestiferae adversus Dei gratiam à Pelagio Britanno in ecclesiam inductae haereseos historia* (Dublin, 1639), 207.

<sup>41</sup> Edward Stillingfleet, *Origines Britannicae, or, the Antiquities of the British Churches* (London, 1685), 182–83.

<sup>42</sup> Dempster, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 534.

<sup>43</sup> St. Jerome, “Explanatio . . . in Jeremiam prophetam prologus”, in *Opera*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 11 vols in 23, ed. Domenico Vallarsi and Scipione Maffei (Venice, 1766–1772), iv/1. cols. 835–36.

<sup>44</sup> Vossius, *Historiae de controversiis*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Ussher, *Britannicarum ecclesiarum antiquitates*, 208; Cesare Baronio, *Annales ecclesiastici*, 12 vols. (Rome, 1588–1607), v. 305.

<sup>46</sup> Antoine Pagi, *Critica historico-chronologia in universos annales ecclesiasticos*, 4 vols. (Antwerp, 1705), ii. 100–101.

<sup>47</sup> Jean Le Clerc, ed., *Bibliothèque choisie, pour servir de suite à la Bibliothèque universelle*, 28 vols. (Amsterdam, 1703–1718), iv. 305–308.

<sup>48</sup> Dauvit Broun, “The Origin of Scottish Identity”, in *Nations, Nationalism and Patriotism in the European Past*, ed. Claus Bjørn, Alexander Grant, and Keith J. Stringer (Copenhagen: Academic Press, 1994), 35–55.

controversy in which the Scottish and Irish Catholic refugees of the post-Reformation era competed for continental patronage by each claiming the illustrious intellectual pedigree which went with the tag of *Scotus*.<sup>49</sup>

By the seventeenth century, this controversy had taken an increasingly combative turn with the publication of Thomas Dempster's *Historia ecclesiastica* (discussed above), which claimed, amongst other things, that all *Scoti* were clearly Scots and aroused a storm of indignant responses from Irish priests and scholars across Europe. As the debate became more heated, both sides became ever more entrenched in their interpretations: for Scottish scholars, *Scotia* was self-evidently Scotland, whilst for their Irish counterparts, it was just as clearly Ireland. It was within this environment that Pagi delicately refrained from clarifying the offending word, simply glossing it as *Scotum seu Hibernum*, "Scottish [in the modern sense] or Irish". Le Clerc was less subtle and his simplification of Pagi's position is important because his summary was read, most probably in the year of its publication, by someone who would attempt to fundamentally reshape European interpretations of both Pelagianism and Scottish history.

### Mackenzie the (Semi-)Pelagian

This was, of course, George Mackenzie. He had read all of the works discussed above and was quite certain that the heretic who so enjoyed his *puls* was supping on nothing more nor less than good Scots parritch. The biography of Pelagius which followed was detailed and sympathetic, drawing heavily on the Patristic accounts of Pelagius, his life, and his disciples, and pairing this account with St. Augustine's rebuttal. This was not done in an attempt to hammer down the Pelagian peg with the mallet of Augustinianism, however. Instead Mackenzie wrote resignedly that "the Christian World is not as yet, nor (I'm afraid) ever will be of one Mind about them", implicitly accepting the accusation of (semi-)Pelagianism then rampant in Europe.<sup>50</sup> Rather than dismissing such modern-day followers of the heresiarch, though, he abjured judgment with the telling comment that he would leave "to the Reader his Free-will of Condemning or Approving of what he pleases", "Free-will" being the very point of contention between the two ancient theologians.<sup>51</sup>

Without explicitly praising Pelagius and his position, Mackenzie made two sufficiently radical moves. First, he turned the British tradition of Pelagian exegesis on its head, embracing him as a Scot rather than attempting to pawn him off on another part of the British Isles. Second, he made no condemnation of his heresy, but left the reader to make their own judgment of this man who, in Mackenzie's summary, "was Smart and Quick in his Answers, Wise and Circumspect in his Actions, of a great Capacity, and very successful in Perswading: But there was nothing that he deserved so much to be Prais'd for, as his Innocent and Exemplary Life".<sup>52</sup> Mackenzie was laying the foundations for a systematic restoration of Pelagius's role as a Church Father. He was building upon Vossius's earlier work, but going much further in his praise.

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<sup>49</sup> See Harris, "Exiles and Saints", 306–26, and Mark Dilworth, *The Scots in Franconia* (Edinburgh and London: Scottish Academic Press, 1974), chaps. 1–2.

<sup>50</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, i. 10.

<sup>51</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, i. 10.

<sup>52</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, i. 15.

Nor was this to be found solely in his life of Pelagius. Throughout the first volume of the *Lives* he returned to the same fundamental questions. In his life of John Scottus Eriugena he placed particular emphasis upon his “Treatise of Predestination”, explaining to his readers that Scottus Eriugena believed that:

There cannot be a double Predestination, or one to Glory and another to Damnation; and that Predestination doth not impose any Necessity, but that Man is absolutely free . . . the Torments of the Damn’d are meer Privations of Happiness.<sup>53</sup>

Lest his point be missed, Mackenzie pointedly observed that “*Wemlo* or *Ganelo* Arch-Bishop of *Sens*, having read this work . . . found, as he thought . . . the Errors of *Pelagius*”.<sup>54</sup> Albin, the supposed Scottish founder of the University of Pavia, was likewise “deeply tinctur’d with the *Pelagian* Heresy; for all the *Pelagian* Tenets are to be found in his Confession of Faith”.<sup>55</sup> Rabanus Maurus went even further, playing Pelagius to the Augustine of one “*Gotteschalcs* . . . a German by Birth” in a ninth-century debate over grace and predestination.<sup>56</sup> If this was not enough, Mackenzie also took his own heterodox stand on another textual crux which had traditionally worried Scottish historians. The ecclesiastical chronicler Prosper of Aquitaine referred to the role of the fifth-century missionary Palladius in combatting Pelagianism amongst the Scots, a charge of primal heterodoxy which scholars such as the Catholic Thomas Innes were keen to sweep under the rug,

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<sup>53</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, i. 49. Mackenzie followed Dempster (*Historia ecclesiastica*, i. 42) in claiming Eriugena for Scotland on the grounds that his cognomen was a portmanteau meaning “born in the city of Ayr”. In reality “Eriugena”, like his other cognomen of “Scotus”, simply meant born in “Ériu”, *i.e.*, Ireland. See Mary Brennan, “Materials for the Biography of Johannes Scottus Eriugena”, *Studi Medievali*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser., 27 (1986): 413–60.

<sup>54</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, i. 50.

<sup>55</sup> Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, i. 69. Mackenzie was referring to the mildly Pelagian *Confessio fidei* inaccurately attributed to Alcuin in *Scriptorum veterum fide Catholica quinque opuscula*, ed. Pierre François Chifflet (Dijon, 1656); see Douglas Dales, *Alcuin: Theology and Thought* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2013), 285–86, for its pseudonymous nature. As this case of double misattribution suggests, Mackenzie’s Albin was an altogether questionable figure who appears to have been brought into existence by earlier misreadings of a passage in the *Gesta Karoli Magni imperatoris* of Notker the Stammerer. Notker (I.1) referring to *duos Scottos de Hibernia* in France, told how one, Clement, remained there, while another – whose name is missing from all surviving manuscripts – *in Italiam direxit, cui et monasterium sancti Augustini iuxta Ticinensem urbem delegavit, ut illuc ad eum qui voluissent ad discendum congregari potuissent* (Notker the Stammerer, *Taten Kaiser Karls des Grossen*, ed. Hans F. Haefele [Berlin, 1959], 1, 3). As Mackenzie relates (i. 64), this unnamed Irish priest was conflated with Alcuin – whose name appears in the following paragraph – by later scholars and then separated by Mackenzie, who correctly concluded that “*Alcuin* was a different Person from *Clement*’s Companion or Colleague”, but who instead created the Scottish ghost “*Albin* or *Alcuin*” in so concluding (i. 64). Modern scholarship suggests the unnamed Irishman may have been Dungal of Bobbio or the scholar Cadac-Andreas (Notker, *Taten*, 3). In either case, Mackenzie was correct in thinking that a *Scotus* had played a role in pedagogy at the monastery of St. Augustine in Pavia and that the Pseudo-Alcuin’s *Confessio fidei* smacked of Pelagianism, but wrong in making the Pavian pedagogue the author of the confession.

<sup>56</sup> *Lives*, i. 88. To claim the ninth-century Frankish Benedictine Rabanus Maurus as a Scot may seem peculiar to modern eyes, but the poems which provide details of his life were considered spurious by at least some early modern writers (notably Mackenzie’s frequent source Du Pin, *Nouvelle bibliothèque*, vii. 266) and there also existed a sixteenth-century erroneous belief that Maurus was a Scot (or at least *Scotus*) which is documented by Mackenzie in *Lives and Characters*, i. 81.

but Mackenzie accepted Prosper's account without comment.<sup>57</sup> In his reconstruction, such widespread Pelagianism would have been only natural.

This wholesale annexing of Pelagianism to the Scottish theological tradition was something unprecedented and wholly unexpected. What did Mackenzie think he was doing? The most plausible explanation lies in the history of Scottish Episcopacy during Mackenzie's lifetime. After the shock of the disestablishment of their church by the 1690 Revolution Settlement, Scottish Episcopalians found themselves in a state of existential crisis (not to mention sporadic, state-sponsored persecution).<sup>58</sup> Freed from the Presbyterian rump of the old Scottish church, they existed in a state of fluidity and redefinition for much of the first half of the eighteenth century. In the process of this search for a new and stable identity, some looked back to the history of the Scottish church (as in the case of Robert Keith) while others attempted to go even further back to the Patristic era itself (as with Thomas Rattray).<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, the church was riven by debates over the exact nature and function of everything from the liturgy to the so-dearly-preserved hierarchy itself, with some members even advocating, ultimately unsuccessfully, for a union with the Orthodox communion along lines which had been mooted in England by Archbishop Laud a century before.<sup>60</sup>

Mackenzie's fascination with Pelagianism must be read in this context of doctrinal flux. As an obstreperously high-profile Episcopalian, he was articulating another way of reinventing the church: in this case as an ultra-Arminian communion which embraced, or at the very least accepted, the Pelagian heritage he had recovered for Scotland (in doing so, he was not so far distant from other attempts at radically transforming Scotland's classical inheritance – see, for example, Alan Montgomery's discussion of eighteenth-century Scotland's relationship with the Romans elsewhere in this volume). This is a point of interest in itself, but it also bears directly upon the negative reception of his work discussed above. Of what did the "credulity" of Mackenzie consist? Why was he believed to be "a great pretender to things he understood not"? The answer seems not to be historiographical, but rather theological. His vision of a Pelagian Scotland was a threat, not just to Presbyterians such as Wodrow and Lord Grange, but also and even more so to conservative Episcopalians such as Ruddiman (Pitcairne, himself heterodox, albeit in a different direction, was another matter).<sup>61</sup> To praise a text which made such doctrinally unacceptable claims was out of the question and so the whole mass of the work was condemned in terms which have led to its subsequent under-valuation and dismissal.

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<sup>57</sup> St. Prosper of Aquitaine, "Epitoma chronicon", in *Chronica minora saec. IV. V. VI. VII.*, ed. Theodor Mommsen, (Berlin, 1892), i. 472, and paraphrased in Mackenzie, *Lives and Characters*, ii. 41. Innes commented on the passage in his *Civil and Ecclesiastical History of Scotland*, ed. George Grub (Aberdeen: Spalding Club, 1853), 50–51.

<sup>58</sup> Alasdair Raffae, "Presbyterians and Episcopalians: The Formation of Confessional Cultures in Scotland, 1660–1715", *English Historical Review* 125 (2010): 570–98.

<sup>59</sup> See Keith, *History of the Affairs of Church and State*, and Thomas Rattray, *The Ancient Liturgy of the Church of Jerusalem, Being the Liturgy of St. James* (London, 1744), in conjunction with Stuart G. Hall, "Patristics and Reform: Thomas Rattray and the *Ancient Liturgy of the Church of Jerusalem*", *Studies in Church History* 35 (1999): 240–60.

<sup>60</sup> Henry Sefton, "The Scottish Bishops and Archbishop Arsenius", *Studies in Church History* 13 (1976): 239–46; NLS Adv. MS 31.1.17, "Concerning the Union of the Episcopal and Orthodox Churches". For the earlier Laudian moment of attempted ecumenical union see Hugh Trevor-Roper, "The Church of England and the Greek Church in the Time of Charles I", *Studies in Church History* 15 (1978): 213–40.

<sup>61</sup> For Pitcairne's heterodoxy, which took a rather different form than Mackenzie's, see Alasdair Raffae, "Archibald Pitcairne and Scottish Heterodoxy, c.1688–1713", *The Historical Journal*, published online 22 July 2016, 1–25.

Understanding Mackenzie's doctrinal positioning, then, helps us to better appreciate not only his heterodox leanings, but also the *Lives and Characters* themselves. While Pelagianism was one string to Mackenzie's bow, his magnum opus contains far more than this single proposition, embracing a rich and untapped expanse of Early Enlightenment learning and historical conjecture. As well as representing one of the last interventions in the long-running dispute between the Scots and Irish over their shared late antique and early medieval heritage, it was also one of the first modern attempts to understand Scottish history through the lenses of its principal writers and thinkers, contextualising George Buchanan, William Barclay, Hector Boece, Gavin Douglas, and a host of others within the European Republic of Letters and, through them, reading Scotland's place within early modern Europe. In turn, Mackenzie's influence upon nineteenth-century compilers such as Irving and Anderson has given his interpretations a longer-term influence which has yet to be fully understood, while his polymathic and extensive researches still offer up the possibility of new discoveries in the history of Renaissance and post-Reformation Scotland. To return to the theme of this volume, however, it is only through a full appreciation of the ways in which Mackenzie used and adapted the classical and Patristic inheritance that we can understand both the intellectual backbone of his work and its summary dismissal. Once Mackenzie's writings have been understood on terms which go beyond their contemporary condemnation, it is to be hoped that they will be explored further as important documents in the history of the Scottish, indeed the European, Enlightenment.

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