Remembering and Forgetting the Scottish Highlands: Sir James Mackintosh and the Forging of a British Imperial Identity

Onni Gust

Abstract This article explores the formation of British imperial identity through a focus on the career of Sir James Mackintosh (1765–1832), a well-known Whig intellectual and imperial careerist who originally hailed from the Highlands of Scotland. Using Mackintosh’s unpublished letters and autobiography, the article shows how he imagined and narrated his relationship to the Scottish Highlands from the vantage points of Bombay and London. In contrast to recent historiography that has focused on the translation of Scottish society, culture, and identity in British imperial spaces, this article argues that disidentification from the Highlands of Scotland and the erasure of different peoples, cultures, and textures of life was integral to Mackintosh’s configuration of a British imperial identity.

All over the Highlands of Scotland may be observed, here and there, the effects of a little stream of East or West Indian gold, running side by side with the mountain torrent, spreading cultivation, and fertility, and plenty along its narrow valley, and carrying away before it silently all those signs of rocky sterility, over which its elder companion has tumbled “brawling” since “creations morn.”

In the Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh (1835), Robert Mackintosh (1804–64), son of Sir James Mackintosh and editor of the Memoirs, lamented the hasty sale of his father’s Highland Scottish estate. Unlike other Scotsmen, whose imperial endeavors enabled them to return home with riches to improve their lands and develop their estates, Sir James Mackintosh (1765–1832) had sold his estate in 1801 in order to pay off the debts he had accrued as a result of living in metropolitan London.2 Mackintosh had left Scotland

Onni Gust is a research associate at the Five Colleges Inc., Massachusetts, and a visiting lecturer at Amherst College and Smith College. The author would like to thank Jane Rendall, Catherine Hall, Margot Finn, Uditi Sen, and the three anonymous reviewers and editors of JBS for their comments on drafts. The Arts and Humanities Research Council funded research for this article, and Five College Women’s Studies Research Center, Massachusetts, provided an institutional home from which to write it.

1 Robert James Mackintosh, ed., Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh, 2 vols. (London, 1835), 1:169.

2 See Andrew Mackillop, “The Highlands and the Returning Nabob: Sir Hector Munro of Novar, 1760–1807,” in Emigrant Homecomings: The Return Movement of Emigrants, 1600–2000, ed. Marjory Harper (Manchester, 2005), 233–61. Charles Grant (1746–1832), a member of the East India Company’s Court of Directors between 1794 and 1799, provides another example of a Highlander who returned from the colonies with considerable wealth. Unlike Munro, and perhaps more like Mackintosh, Grant showed
for London in 1788, after completing his education at Edinburgh University. Once in London, he relatively rapidly established himself as a radical Whig gentleman and an outspoken advocate of reform. Yet his ambitions exceeded his economic capacities, leading him to borrow heavily on the security of his Highland estate. Faced with the choice of selling the estate or leaving Britain for a career in empire, a prospect that he believed would be a “remote and miserable exile,” Mackintosh chose to sell his property. Nevertheless, if Mackintosh’s sale of his Highland estate served to postpone his so-called exile to the colonies, his sense of home lay far away from the Highland landscape and society into which he was born. Far from admiring the romantic scenes of his native land and claiming the distinct heritage of his Highland ancestors, James Mackintosh turned his back on the Highlands as soon as he was able. Instead, he forged for himself a British imperial identity, through which he asserted his belonging to what was considered civilized metropolitan society. Drawing on the extensive collection of Mackintosh’s letters and diaries, including an unpublished autobiography, this article explores the process of configuring and performing a British imperial identity in the early nineteenth century. In doing so, it endeavors to balance the current historiographical trend for researching the influence of Scottish culture and identity on imperial spaces by questioning the role of imperial power in forging the identities of some Highland Scots. In contrast to historians who have looked at the influence of Scottish culture, thought, politics, and religion upon the British Empire, this article explores the impact of the empire on the configuration and performance of social identities. Rather than looking at the content of ideas, beliefs, and ways of being that Scots brought to imperial spaces, it looks at the erasure of people and culture that was integral to the performance of belonging to a metropolitan, “civilized” British world.

The last two decades have seen an increasing scholarship and a growing literature focused both on the role played by Scotsmen (and, less frequently, Scotswomen) in the British Empire and on the place of the Highlands in national and imperial imagination. In 1997, David Armitage charted Scotland’s long and ambivalent relationship with England’s project of expansion and colonization. As both colonized and co-colonizers, Armitage argued, “Scots helped make the Atlantic Empire British.” Research into the role of Scots in colonial India has shown how Scottish education, religion, politics, and patronage networks pervaded every level of the

---

3 James Mackintosh to Mrs. MacGillivray, Bath, 15 June 1789, British Library (BL), Add. MS 78768, f. 2.

4 Ned C. Landsman, Nation and Province in the First British Empire: Scotland and the Americas (Cranbury, 2001); T. M. Devine, Scotland’s Empire, 1600–1815 (London, 2003); Geoffrey Plank, Rebellion and Savagery: The Jacobite Rising of 1745 and the British Empire (Philadelphia, 2006); James Livesey, Civil Society and Empire: Ireland and Scotland in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World (New Haven and London, 2009); Peter Womack, Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands (Basingstoke, 1989); Evan Gottlieb, Feeling British: Sympathy and National Identity in Scottish and English Writing, 1707–1832 (Cranbury, 2007); Kenneth McNeil, Scotland, Britain, Empire: Writing the Highlands, 1760–1860 (Columbus, 2007).

5 David Armitage, “Making the Empire British: Scotland in the Atlantic World, 1542–1707,” Past & Present 155, no. 1 (1997): 63.
imperial project.⁶ Avril Powell’s work on the Muir brothers and Martha McLaren’s research into what she sees as a distinctively Scottish school of East India Company administrators show how important Scottish education was to the structuring of Indian administration and Oriental scholarship on India.⁷ John MacKenzie has demonstrated how Scottish imperialists understood and imagined their new environments, whether in South Africa, India, or New Zealand, in relationship to the familiar landscapes they had left behind in Scotland. As he suggests, the process of forging a distinct Scottish national identity was a complex process of mythmaking and invented traditions, which took place in relationship to landscape and memories of a different texture of life.⁸ Most recently, John MacKenzie and Tom Devine have published an edited volume, *Scotland and the British Empire*, that brings together work on various aspects of Scottish relations with empire and imperialism between the seventeenth and the twentieth centuries.⁹

The publication of *Scotland and the British Empire* offers an opportunity to take a step back from a rapidly expanding field and explore emerging historiographical trends. As Andrew MacKillop points out in his chapter, “Locality, Nation and Empire: Scots and the Empire in Asia, c.1695–1813,” despite a seeming confluence of interests, the literature on Scotland and empire has rarely drawn on the conceptual themes raised by the new imperial history.¹⁰ This includes consideration of the ways in which apparently spatially, socially, and culturally distinct peoples are constituted in relationship to each other.¹¹ It is perhaps because demarcating the boundaries of Scotland vis-à-vis England as colony and metropole is so complex that the impact of wider imperial encounters on the configuration of Scottish identities threatens to further unravel an already tenuous whole. Scotland, in this respect, occupies a similar position to almost all postcolonial nations, in which fraught ques-

---

⁶ Andrew Mackillop, “Fashioning a ‘British’ Empire: Sir Archibald Campbell of Inverneil and Madras, 1785–9,” in *Military Governors and Imperial Frontiers, c.1600–1800: A Study of Scotland and Empires*, ed. Andrew MacKillop and Steve Murdoch (Leiden, 2003), 205–31.

⁷ Avril Powell, *Scottish Orientalists and India: The Muir Brothers, Religion, Education and Empire* (Woodbridge, 2011); Martha McLaren, *British India and British Scotland: Career Building, Empire Building and a Scottish School of Thought on Indian Governance* (Akron, 2001).

⁸ John Mackenzie, “Scotland and Empire: Ethnicity, Environment and Identity,” *Northern Scotland: Ethnicity, Environment and Identity* (2010): 24.

⁹ John Mackenzie and T. M. Devine, eds., *Scotland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2011).

¹⁰ Andrew MacKillop, “Locality, Nation and Empire,” in Mackenzie and Devine, *Scotland and the British Empire*, 72–73.

¹¹ Ann Laura Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda,” in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1997), 2–3; Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 2002); Catherine Hall, “Introduction: Thinking the Postcolonial, Thinking Empire,” and Antoinette Burton, “Who Needs the Nation? Interrogating ‘British’ History,” in *Cultures of Empire*, ed. Catherine Hall (Manchester, 2000), 34, 137–53; Hall, *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination, 1830–1867* (Oxford and Cambridge, 2002); Mrinalini Sinha, “Britishness, Clubbability, and the Colonial Public Sphere: The Genealogy of an Imperial Institution in Colonial India,” *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001): 498–521; Mininalini Sinha, “Mapping the Imperial Social Formation: A Modest Proposal for Feminist History,” *Signs* 24, no. 7 (2000): 1077–82; Kathleen Wilson, *The Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London and New York, 2003).
tions of derivativeness and authenticity stand to reveal the “janus-faced discourse of the nation.”

Decentering the centers of imperial and national entities necessitates the fragmentation of the national narratives that serve as cultural delineators of those boundaries and thereby also takes apart any notion of a people’s homogeneity. Questions of race, gender, and class—the relationships among power, status, subjectivity, and embodiment—are integral to the formation of regional, national, and imperial identities. In the case of Scotland, the mythmaking and reconfiguring of traditions that has profoundly influenced today’s conceptualization of Scottish national identity has been well documented, particularly in relationship to the Highlands. Yet the categories of analysis that underlie recent critiques of traditional histories of empire appear not to have been adopted by the majority of historians of Scotland and empire. This is despite, for example, the hypermasculinity of nineteenth-century configurations of the Scottish Highlander; the wars over gender that were fought on the pages of the *Edinburgh Review*, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Review*, and English periodicals; and the importance of racialized differences that were integral to the development of stadial theory.

This article asks how the reiteration of a narrative of Highland Scottish “backwardness,” in contrast to an Anglo-British “modernity,” informed the performance of identity for Highlanders who sought access to the centers of imperial power. In doing so, it draws on the conceptual approaches of new imperial history (also referred to as “critical colonial studies”) to discuss the relationship between Scottish identity and empire, particularly in relationship to the Highlands. Heavily influenced by early nineteenth-century romantics, the idea of Scotland and identification with Scottishness was shaped through an ambivalent relationship to the

12 Homi K. Bhabha, “Introduction: Narrating the Nation,” in *Nation and Narration* (London, 1990), 1–7; Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse*? (London, 1986); Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?” *Representations* 37 (1992): 1–26; Sudipta Kaviraj, “The Imaginary Institution of India,” in *Subaltern Studies VII*, ed. Partha Chaterjee and Gyanandra Pandey (Delhi, 1992), 1–39.

13 Catherine Hall, “At Home with History: Macaulay and the History of England,” in *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and the Imperial World*, ed. Catherine Hall and Sonya Rose (Cambridge, 2006), 32–52.

14 Kathleen Wilson, “Introduction: Histories, Empires, Modernities,” in *A New Imperial History: Culture, Identity and Modernity in Britain and Empire, 1660–1840*, ed. Kathleen Wilson (Cambridge, 2004), 1–27.

15 Murray G. H. Pittock, *The Invention of Scotland: The Stuart Myth and the Scottish Identity, 1638 to the Present* (London and New York, 1991); Hugh Trevor-Roper, *The Invention of Scotland: Myth and History* (New Haven and London, 2008).

16 Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857–1914* (Manchester, 2004); Jane Rendall, “Bluestockings and Reviewers: Gender, Power and Culture in Britain, c.1800–1830,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 26, no. 4 (2004): 355–74; V. G. Kiernan, “Noble and Ignoble Savages,” in *Exoticism in the Enlightenment*, ed. G. S. Rousseau and Roy Porter (Manchester, 1990), 8–116.

17 I draw on Judith Butler’s notion of performativity, which sees the configuration of hegemonic identities as taking place through the reiteration of particular discourses. Her recent work has explored the ways in which these discourses render “unliveable” the lives of those it marginalizes. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990), chap. 1, and Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (New York and London, 2004).
Highlands. As Kenneth McNeil has argued, defining Scottish particularity required a simultaneous embrace and rejection of Highland culture, which provided romantic nationalists with both the inspiration for the invention of traditions and the embarrassment of “backwardness.” It was in the proximity to this “simplicity and wildness,” according to James Boswell, that one could witness “all the circumstances of remote time or place, so near to our native great island” that both enticed and troubled Scottish elites. Sir James Mackintosh’s extensive archive of letters, diaries, and drafts offers a remarkably in-depth insight into the literary and epistolary presentation of self from childhood through to old age, from the Scottish Highlands to Edinburgh, London, Paris, and Bombay. Looking at the relationship between socioeconomic change and the discursive construction of identity, I examine the ways networks of power, kinship relations, and cultural representations overlapped to inform Mackintosh’s performance of identity.

By the time of his death in 1832, Sir James Mackintosh was well known and well respected as a Whig gentleman, a man of letters, and a political and legal reformer. The firstborn son of a petty gentry, Highland family, with few connections and from an area of Britain’s internal empire deemed uncivilized and barbaric, Mackintosh’s rise to political, intellectual, and social prominence among Britain’s imperial elite was remarkable. Mackintosh’s thought, influenced by his education at King’s College, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh University, was fundamentally informed by the Scottish Enlightenment. Drawing on this intellectual inheritance, he first gained a reputation as a radical Whig as the result of the publication of the *Vindiciae Gallicae* (1791), a response to Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. While his ability to survive in the capital was initially reliant upon relatives and networks of professionals drawn from his days as a student at Aberdeen and Edinburgh, he was soon

---

18 McNeil, *Scotland, Britain, Empire*; Leith Davis, Ian Duncan, and Janet Sorensen, *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge, 2004); Katie Trumpener, * Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton, 1997); David Duff and Catherine Jones, eds., *Scotland, Ireland and the Romantic Aesthetic* (Lewisburg, 2007); Pittock, *The Invention of Scotland*.

19 McNeil, *Scotland, Britain, Empire*, 3–4.

20 Boswell’s *Journal of A Tour of the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, L.L.D.*, ed. Charles Bennett and Frederick Pottle (New York and London, 1936, 1st published 1785), 3.

21 Jane Rendall, “The Political Ideas and Activities of Sir James Mackintosh (1765–1832): A Study in Whiggism between 1789 and 1832” (PhD diss., University College London, 1972), ii; “Mackintosh, Sir James,” in *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1820–1832*, vol. VI, *Members L–R*, ed. David Fisher (Cambridge, 2009), 258–81; Patrick O’Leary, *Sir James Mackintosh: The Whig Cicero* (Aberdeen, 1989); Christopher Finlay, “Mackintosh, Sir James of Kyllachy (1765–1832),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/101017620/James-Mackintosh-of-Kyllachy (accessed 26 April 2012).

22 James Mackintosh, “*Vindiciae Gallicae*: Defence of the French Revolution and Its English Admiring Against the Accusations of the Right Honorable William Edmund Burke; Including Some Strictures on the Late Production of Mons. De Calonne,” in *Vindiciae Gallicae and Other Writings on the French Revolution*, ed. Donald Winch (Indianapolis, 2006); Knud Haakonssen, *Natural Law and Moral Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1996); Marcel Isnard, “Vindiciae Gallicae Revisited,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 19, *The French Revolution in English Literature and Art*, special number (1989): 219–30; William Christian, “James Mackintosh, Edmund Burke and the Cause of Reform,” *Eighteenth Century Studies* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1973–74): 193–206; Lionel McKenzie, “The French Revolution and English Parliamentary Reform: James Mackintosh and the Vindiciae Gallicae,” *Eighteenth Century Studies* 14, no. 3 (1981): 264–82.
immersed in wider Whig circles. Mackintosh’s later public denunciation of the French Revolution and his assertion of patriotism through his *Lectures on the Law of Nature and Nations* in 1799 made him palatable to moderate Whigs and Tories alike. A less radical character by the turn of the century, Mackintosh gained access to Holland House and the patronage of George Canning, who secured him a high-ranking position in Bombay. Between 1804 and 1811, Mackintosh and his family lived in Bombay, where he held the position of recorder of the Court. There, he established the Literary Society, later to become the Asiatic Society of Bombay. Mackintosh’s attempts to reform and regulate Bombay’s colonial governance marked the first steps in what he called “the most obscure and insignificant corner of India” toward redefining the nature of the relationship between the British state and the East India Company in Bombay. He returned to England in 1812, took up a position as professor of law at Haileybury College, and served as a member of Parliament, representing Nairnshire and later Knaresborough.

The vast majority of the letters and diaries upon which this article draws are housed in the Mackintosh collection archived in the British Library, which predominantly comprises letters and diaries written by Mackintosh; his second wife, Catherine (née Allen, 1765–1830); and his expansive circle of friends and acquaintances. A small number of early letters relate to his education and family, but the majority date from after 1798, when Mackintosh married Catherine, after the death of his first wife, another Catherine (née Stuart, 1764–97). Many of the most detailed and informative documents date from the seven years that the Mackintosh family spent in Bombay, between 1804 and 1811. The letters, diaries, and journals of thoughts on politics and literature that James Mackintosh wrote while traveling or separated from his wider network of friends and family supplied the vital means of maintaining a presence in absence, “a chain to link to the mother country.”

Often read aloud in homes, clubs, and taverns, his diaries and journals were written with the intention of circulation, as were many of the Mackintosh couple’s letters. Writing to James Mackintosh from London in 1804, Richard Sharp (1759–1835) stated that having read his letters to all his many friends, “the poor thin paper has had a more troublesome journey in my pocket book about London, than it had in crossing deserts and seas.” As Sarah Pearsall argues, letters between itinerant members of families and friendship circles provided a means of reconstituting relationships. These letters and their circulation were the means

---

23 See Jane Rendall, “Scottish Citizens of London: Whigs, Radicals, and the French Revolution, 1788–1795,” in *Scots in London in the Eighteenth Century: Patronage, Culture and Identity*, ed. Stana Nenadic (Lewisburg, 2010), 272–99.
24 James Mackintosh, “Discourse on the Law of Nature and Nations” (1799), in *Winch, Vindiciae Gallicae and Other Writings*, 203–58.
25 Sir James Mackintosh to Robert Sharp, Bombay, 14 August 1804, Add. MS 52451a, f. 9, BL.
26 “Mackintosh, Sir James,” *The History of Parliament*, 258.
27 Kate Teitscher, “The Sentimental Ambassador: The Letters of George Bogle from Bengal, Bhutan and Tibet, 1770–1781,” in *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600–1945*, ed. Rebecca Earle (Aldershot, 1999), 93; Zoe Laidlaw, *Colonial Connections, 1815–45: Patronage, the Information Revolution and Colonial Government* (Manchester and New York, 2005), 17.
28 Rebecca Earle, “Introduction: Letters, Writers and the Historian,” in *Epistolary Selves*, 7.
29 Sharp to Mackintosh, London, 18 January 1805, BL, Add. MS 78764, f. 23.
30 Sarah Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2008), 5.
through which to create and maintain family and social networks, to assert belonging, to forge a persona and perform a self.\textsuperscript{31} Mackintosh’s unfinished and unpublished autobiography, upon which this article focuses, belongs materially in the midst of these letters, journals, and diaries. However, it also stands out as being somewhat different in both intention and genre. Autobiographical narrative, like narrative in general, allows events to be reorganized, chosen, reinterpreted, or erased, in order to present a congruent identity across time.\textsuperscript{32} Reading Mackintosh’s autobiography alongside his letters and diaries, this article explores the relationship among networks of power, affective communities, and the configuration of self in relation to imperial space.

James Mackintosh was born in 1765 into the Kyllachy branch of the Clan Mackintosh. The oldest cadet branch of the clan, the Kyllachy clan had possessed the lands around Aldourie, on the banks of the Loch Ness, where James Mackintosh was born and raised, since the early seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{33} The Clan Mackintosh, chiefs of the Highland confederacy Clan Chattan, could trace its origins back before the Norman Conquest and its ownership of lands and the castle at Inverness to Shaw MacDuff, the son of Duncan, fifth Earl of Fife, in the mid-twelfth century.\textsuperscript{34} Like many Highland clans, the Clan Mackintosh derived its size and status from the combination of land ownership and kinship ties that waxed and waned over the long stretch of a millennium.\textsuperscript{35} At the end of the eighteenth century, however, a small part of that long heritage that linked ancestry to land looked set to collapse. Having inherited the Kyllachy estate on the death of his father in 1788, James Mackintosh, then resident in London, began looking for ways to convert his “shreds of property” into money.\textsuperscript{36}

In 1799, five years before the sale was finally completed, an old friend of Mackintosh’s from his days in the Speculative Society in Edinburgh read of the intended sale of the Kyllachy estate in the newspapers. John Wilde wrote to Mackintosh, expressing his horror of the prospect: “Think, James, of your ancestors. Think of the hills themselves! ... Will you reject and fling away the trust of your ancestors, by which they have entailed the superiority of wisdom with their lands! Or can you allow any other than a Mackintosh to advise a Mackintosh! James! James! James! Think! Think of the space of power you throw away.”\textsuperscript{37} Wilde had always been Edinburgh based, the son of a tobacco merchant rather than of the gentry class, yet he keenly felt the significance of Mackintosh’s sale.\textsuperscript{38} In the passage that is quoted above, Wilde wove...
together history, power, and landscape, connecting the “space of power” to ancestral inheritance in a tone reminiscent of Edmund Burke’s denunciation of French revolutionary principles. “People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors,” Burke had proclaimed in his Reflections on the Revolution in France.39 Likewise, Wilde suggested that wisdom itself was imbibed through hereditary descent and that identity was bonded with the land and ancestry. “Think of the possibility of your passing that road and saying these are now the lands of a stranger. The very thought is dreadful!” Wilde wrote with sentimentality and outrage.40

James Mackintosh, who, in the Vindiciae Gallicae less than ten years earlier, had argued against rank, descent, and pedigree as the necessary qualifications for the nation’s rulers, appears not to have shared his friend’s sentimental attachment.41 Indeed, the decision to sell the estate was one that Mackintosh himself seems to have made with a sense of detachment. Writing to his aunt in the Highlands, Mackintosh claimed that he had been advised against holding onto “such property as that” and hoped that he could make money through other means.42 The option to leave London for a position somewhere in the British Empire or potentially Russia, or to sell his Highland estate in order to pay for his life in the metropole appears to have been straightforward.43 In his flippant tone, Mackintosh appears to convey little regard for his Highland estate. A letter five years later confirms Mackintosh’s disinterest, except as a source of possible revenue to fund a life in London, which he referred to as a “hard struggle” financially.44 With thinly veiled frustration, D. M. Campbell wrote to Mackintosh in 1795, stating, “I am indeed much hurt to see your matters in this country in a state of ruin. It is true the subject is small but were you worth £10 000 a year I beg leave to say the small property you have in Inverness shire deserves some little attention.”45

Nevertheless, Mackintosh had very little incentive to take an interest in his Highland estate. Contrary to John Wilde’s suggestion that he was throwing away a space of power, the Kyllachy estate, in fact, failed to afford Mackintosh any political standing. As Andrew MacKillop has argued, the dominance of the lairds of Grant in Invernesshire meant that political power did not accrue to lesser landed elites in that county.46 Ambitious from a young age, Mackintosh was obliged to look to other avenues of patronage if he was to gain access to the corridors of power. His entrance

---

39 Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France (New York, 2006, based on the “Seventh Edition,” 1790), 51.
40 John Wilde to James Mackintosh, Edinburgh, 3 April 1799, Add. MS 78765, f. 19, BL.
41 Mackintosh, “Vindiciae Gallicae,” 150.
42 James Mackintosh to Mrs. MacGillivray, Bath, 15 June 1789, Add. MS 78768, f. 2, BL.
43 Letter of Recommendation by Dugald Stewart, London, 4 June 1788, Add. MS 52451b, f. 10, BL.
44 James Mackintosh to Mrs. Macgillivray, 14 Serle Street, Lincoln’s Inn, London, 16 November 1796, Add. MS 78768, f. 4, BL.
45 D. M.(?) Campbell to James Mackintosh, Charlotte Street, Portland Place, 8 April 1795, Add. MS 78765, f. 1, BL.
46 Andrew MacKillop, “The Political Culture of the Scottish Highlands from Culloden to Waterloo,” Historical Journal 46, no. 3 (2003): 515; see also, Amanda Epperson, “It would be my earnest desire that you all would come”: Networks, the Migration Process and Highland Emigration,” Scottish Historical Review 88, no. 2 (2009): 313–31.
into Parliament in 1813 as member for Nairnshire was secured through the patronage of Lord Cawdor, who was more closely connected with his second wife’s Pembrokeshire family than with his own Highland one.\textsuperscript{47} When Mackintosh finally sold the Kyllachy estate in 1804 to Provost Phineas Mackintosh of Drummond for £9000, most of the money was eaten up in loans that had been previously drawn on the estate in anticipation of its sale.\textsuperscript{48} Although the estate remained in Mackintosh hands, there is little evidence that this was James Mackintosh’s intention or that the sale held much interest for him beyond pecuniary gain.\textsuperscript{49} To Mackintosh himself, the securities on, and ultimate sale of, Kyllachy offered a means of affording the life to which he aspired, one that was marked by a sense of belonging to the centers of metropolitan power. With little to gain from his own networks of kin and clan, Mackintosh moved away from the Highlands to form other relationships that would provide him with a greater chance of access to social and political power. The necessity of this move, however, informed Mackintosh’s own identification with, and configuration of, his Highland Scottish history and heritage.

\textbf{■ ■ ■}

When he left the Highlands for King’s College, Aberdeen, in 1782, James Mackintosh followed in the footsteps of previous generations of young men from Highland clans who attended Lowland universities. For nearly two centuries, clan elites had educated their sons in urban Lowland universities—Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Edinburgh. It was a practice that had originally been decreed by the Crown through the Statutes of Iona in 1609 in an attempt to break up clanship and create a reformed, “civilized” class of landowners.\textsuperscript{50} By the time James Mackintosh was studying at King’s College, many of the practices and loyalties associated with clanship had been gradually eroded through a combination of state intervention and changing lifestyles, especially among the elite. The tradition of \textit{cuid-oidheiche}—the obligation of tenants to provide hospitality for their chiefs and his household—had been gradually replaced by a more standardized form of rent paid in money or kind.\textsuperscript{51} The physical, economic, and lifestyle distances between landowner and tenant slowly widened as landowners (lairds) spent more time in urban centers and, much like James Mackintosh himself, looked to their lands to yield significant surplus in order to afford urban lifestyles. However, if the sovereignty of clanship had been largely undermined, practices nonetheless remained. In 1785, for example, Chief Aeneas called upon James Mackintosh to attend the rendezvous of Brae Lochaber. It was an experience that James Mackintosh represented as an adventure into an entirely different world from which he appeared to feel himself far removed.\textsuperscript{52}

The same Lochaber to which James Mackintosh was summoned by the chief of the Clan Mackintosh in 1785 was later referred to by Thomas Babington Macaulay in his

\textsuperscript{47} Elisabeth Inglis-Jones, “A Pembrokeshire County Family in the Eighteenth Century, Part I,” \textit{National Library of Wales Journal} 15, no. 2 (1971): 136–60.
\textsuperscript{48} O’Leary, \textit{Sir James Mackintosh}, 54.
\textsuperscript{49} Fraser-Mackintosh, \textit{Letters of Two Centuries}, 318.
\textsuperscript{50} Charles Withers, \textit{Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region} (London and New York, 1988), 7.
\textsuperscript{51} Dodgshon, \textit{From Chiefs to Landlords}, 57.
\textsuperscript{52} Rendall, \textit{The Political Ideas}, 25; O’Leary, \textit{Sir James Mackintosh}, 52.
History of England, published in 1848. Writing of “barbarians” across the British Empire, Macaulay narrated and celebrated the taming of the Highlands and the Highlander, conjuring up a picture of nature eventually controlled “till there was as little danger of being slain or plundered in the wildest defile of Badenoch or Lochaber as in Cornhill.” The historian to whom Mackintosh bequeathed his volumes of archival notes spoke with a disdain for Highlanders that provoked a small public outcry and much admonition. Yet Mackintosh, whose Whiggism prestaged and informed much of Macaulay’s own political thought, would probably have concurred with the younger and more successful historian. Unlike a number of his contemporaries, who were looking to the Highlands to provide them with inspiration for the romantic reinvention of a uniquely Scottish past, Mackintosh completely dismissed the Highlands and even Scotland more generally. Reflecting on Walter Scott’s Lady of the Lake, Mackintosh predicted that the author’s fame would be short-lived, a “national, almost country poet.” He selects in a barbarous period of a very barbarous country the two most barbarous bodies of men,” Mackintosh wrote with disdain and detachment from the country of his birth.

Both Mackintosh and Macaulay drew on an idea of the Highlands that was prevalent in the official, metropolitan discourse of the eighteenth century. For example, the Society in Scotland for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SSPCK) wrote a report in 1774 that blamed Highland problems on “superstition, popery, feudal relations.” It claimed that the majority of Highland people were “inslaved” by their chiefs and attributed their “rude, ignorant and disaffected” nature to an “obstinate adherence of the inhabitants” to their own Gaelic tongue. Such pejorative and pervasive imagery of backwardness and barbarity placed more elite Highland Scots in complex and contradictory positions, even as they themselves often employed and propagated this imagery. On the one hand, elite Scots looked to Highland traditions, landscape, and legend to define Scottish nationality. On the other hand, they sought to “civilize” the Highlands, erasing the very differences that they looked to in order to demarcate national identity. More so than Lowlanders—men like James Boswell and Walter Scott—Highland Scots seeking access to metropolitan networks tended to emphasize the “barbarity” over the beauty of the Highlands. In a letter of 1806, Anne Grant (1755–1838), the well-known author of Highland manners and customs, noted Highlanders’ disdain for the Highlands. Writing of her Edinburgh-based, Highland-born friends, she stated their belief that “our Celtic ancestors were little better than ourang-outangs; that we should never think of or mention our ancestors, unless to triumph in our superiority over them; that the Highlands should be instantly turned into a great sheep-walk, and

53 Thomas Babington Macaulay, The History of England from the Accession of James II, 5 vols. (Philadelphia, 1871, 1st published 1848), 3:239.
54 Catherine Hall, Macaulay and Son: Architects of Imperial Britain (New Haven, 2012), 305–08.
55 See Devine, Scotland and Empire, 347–60; Peter Womack, Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands (Basingstoke, 1989).
56 Journal, Bombay 1811, Add. MS 52438a, f. 29, BL.
57 Ibid.
58 An Account of the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge. From its Commencement in 1709. In which is Included, the Present State of the Highlands and Islands of Scotland with Regard to Religion (Edinburgh, 1774), 1–2.
59 McNeil, Scotland, Britain, Empire, 4.
that the sooner its inhabitants leave it, the better for themselves and the community.”

Anne Grant’s comments are evidence of the attitudes that had led to the gradual erosion of clan links and Highland culture, achieved by the seemingly irresistible pull that market forces held for Highland elites. Particularly in the aftermath of the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, government initiatives to civilize the Highlands led to increased commercialization, dependence on the import of Lowland and English goods, and the selling of land to the highest bidder rather than keeping it within the clan. This led to soaring rents, increased competition, greater initiatives to exploit the land (predominantly through sheep farming), the beginning of the clearances, and the concomitant emigration from the Highlands to North America. The drive for such changes came as much from Highland elites as from state actions in the aftermath of the rebellion. The measures to civilize the Highlands were laid out in an “Act for Annexing certain Forfeited Estates in Scotland.” Having outlawed Highland dress and the carrying of arms in 1746 and abolished heritable jurisdictions leading to the centralization of justice in 1747, the Crown took possession of over fifty Jacobite estates. The estate of one Lachlan Mackintosh was among them. Cluny, where Mackintosh was raised, was also among those named but was unable to be forfeited because it was held by superiors. The majority of these estates were sold at auction to the highest bidder, but thirteen forfeited estates were to be annexed with the intention of using their rents and profits to promote Presbyterianism, good government, industry, and loyalty to the Crown. Thus, the means of “civilizing” the Highlands rested upon securing tenancies; enabling agricultural improvement through enclosure; creating parishes; building schools, churches, and prisons; and encouraging law and order. Eight years after the annexation act, the SSPCK, alongside commissioners, began to work with the annexed estates. Their schemes of “improvement” were neither immediately forthcoming nor necessarily successful, but they marked the beginnings of a momentum that would eventually lead to land clearances and the displacement of the Highland poor. The economic boom of the 1760s and 1770s that saw the industrialization and urbanization of the Lowlands ultimately destroyed traditional society in the

---

60 Anne Grant to John Hatsell, London, Stirling, 27 November 1806, in Memoir and Correspondence of Mrs Grant of Laggan author of Letters from the Mountains, Memoirs of an American Lady, 3 vols., ed. J. P. Grant (London, 1844), 1:81–82.
61 T. M. Devine, Clanship to Crofters’ War, 32–34.
62 Bruce Lenman, The Jacobite Clans, 213–14; Stana Nenadic, Lairds and Luxury: The Highland Gentry in Eighteenth-Century Scotland (East Linton, 2007), 5–6; Robert Dodgshon, From Chiefs to Landlords, 243; Andrew Mackillop, “Highland Estate Change and Tenant Emigration,” in Eighteenth Century Scotland: New Perspectives, ed. T. M. Devine and J. R. Young (East Linton, 1999), 247.
63 A Bill Intitled, An Act for Annexing Certain Forfeited Estates in Scotland to the Crown Unalienably; and for Making Satisfaction to the Lawful Creditors thereupon; and to Establish a Method of Managing the Same; and applying the Rents and Profits thereof, for the Better Civilising and Improving the Highlands of Scotland; and Preventing Disorders there for the Future (1752).
64 Peter Womack, Improvement and Romance: Constructing the Myth of the Highlands (Basingstoke, 1989), 4.
65 Alexander Mackintosh Shaw, Historical memoirs of the House and Clan of Mackintosh and of the Clan Chattan (London, 1880), 497.
Highlands, leading to a “new order based on quite different values, principles and relationships.”

One significant change in “values, principles and relationships” came about as more opportunities to serve in the British army were presented to young Highland men. While Highland men had always been involved in military pursuits, often serving as mercenaries in European armies, after 1750 there were increasing opportunities in the British army and navy across the empire and in Europe. For Highland gentry, a commission in the military was a practical, high-status, and occasionally lucrative means of providing for younger sons, while providing recruits from among the adult male tenants of their lands could oil the cogs of patronage networks. The pitfalls of military opportunities, however, were manifold. As Stana Nenadic has illustrated, the lure of active service, foreign travel, and new experiences made many young men of gentry origin desperate for a commission in the military. This placed immense pressure on relatives (and particularly wealthy widows) to pay large sums of money to buy commissions, uniforms, and advances to cover preliminary expenses. Sometimes these investments paid off, with a salary and status for life, as well as trade during peacetime, that could bring in revenue for the wider family. Yet across the late eighteenth century, as trade became increasingly looked down upon and military glory appeared far more exciting than managing an estate, Highland families often suffered from, rather than gained from, their military relatives. Reliant on the revenue from estates in which they had little interest, young Highland officers often lost more money than they earned by service, through trying to afford the luxuries that a military lifestyle demanded. Entering a world whose status orientation was heavily based upon conspicuous material consumption and expensive sociability, women and older men who remained in the Highlands often found that the young men whom they had supported very soon had little identification or sense of attachment to their Highland origins.

James Mackintosh’s own father offers an example of such a trajectory. The younger son of a younger son, Lieutenant (later Captain) John Mackintosh (d. 1788) gained a commission in the British army, although by what means remains unknown. Unlike many of the Highland officers whose career paths and lives Stana Nenadic has traced, John Mackintosh did marry and returned intermittently to the Highlands. It is not clear whether he met James’s mother, Marjory (née Fraser, d. 1778), in South Carolina, where her father and mother lived, or, more likely, in Inverness, where her birth was recorded and from where the family originated. What is almost certain is that Marjory Mackintosh spent a lot of her time in Invernesshire while her

---

66 Devine, Clanship to Crofter’s War, 30–32.
67 T. M. Devine, “Soldiers of Empire, 1750–1914,” in Scotland and the British Empire, 180–81.
68 Nenadic, Lairds and Luxury, 8; Lenman, Jacobite Clans, 214; Charles Withers, Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Culture Region (London and New York, 1988), 79; Stana Nenadic, “The Impact of the Military Profession on Highland Gentry Families,” Scottish Historical Review 85, no. 219 (2006): 75–99.
69 Nenadic, Lairds and Luxury, 91.
70 Nenadic, “The Impact of the Military,” 93.
71 Ibid., 93–94.
72 O’Leary, Sir James Mackintosh, 1–2.
husband traveled around Europe and the British colonies serving in the 23rd Regiment of Foot, which later became the 68th Regiment of Foot. John Mackintosh had been seriously injured in the Seven Years’ War but continued to serve in Antigua, then in Gibraltar, where his wife accompanied him and later died, and in Dublin.  

Like many Highland officers, Captain John Mackintosh was clearly a source of frustration and worry to his relatives. Writing to Bailie John Mackintosh, James’s paternal aunt, Mrs. MacGillivray, noted the disagreeableness of mentioning their cousin. Hoping that John Mackintosh would “soon see the impropriety of his former conduct,” Mrs. MacGillivray urged Bailie John Mackintosh to support the boy’s education and board. The exact nature of that “impropriety” remained unstated, but it most probably referred to the captain’s desertion and ultimate separation from his second wife, to whom he was married a year or two after the death of James Mackintosh’s mother. It was a marriage on which his son had congratulated him only two years’ previously in a letter that is illustrative of his father’s negligence and lack of attachment to his Highland family. Having requested money in several previous letters, James Mackintosh, then seventeen years old, apologized for reminding his father of his needs but stated that “they are now become so distressing that I can no longer delay intreating [sic] that you would answer my letters.” Money, however, was not the only problem. The connections that Captain John Mackintosh had gained through military service were flung across the British imperial world. Arriving in Edinburgh to embark on a very different career path to that of his father, James Mackintosh appears to have found his father’s connections to be few and fairly useless for the scholarly career that he desired. Having set his heart on gaining the affections and hand of a young woman, James Mackintosh sought a position as professor at Aberdeen in order to afford to marry. His father, he wrote in his autobiography, “was of no help in getting him the position,” having only one contact, a Major Mercer, to whom Mackintosh implored his father to write but to no avail.

Young men of the Highland gentry were not, however, the only Highlanders to physically move away from their Highland origins. Across the eighteenth century, nongentry members of Highland society “formed a steady stream” to America and exploited opportunities for gaining land and particularly accessing trade. In 1735, 163 members of the Clan Chattan responded to a call by the recruiting agents of James Oglethorpe to go to Georgia to serve in America against the Spanish. Among them was probably James Mackintosh’s maternal family, the MacGillivrays, who earned their money through trade in South Carolina. Trading predominantly in pelts, the extensive MacGillivray family lived and worked alongside American Indian tribes with whom they not uncommonly intermarried.

73 Autobiography, Bombay 1804, Add. MS 52436b, f.1, BL. (Henceforth “Autobiography.”)
74 Mrs. MacGillivray to Bailie John, Inverness, February 1774, Add. MS 78771a, f. 1–2, BL.
75 O’Leary, Sir James Mackintosh, 9.
76 James Mackintosh to John Mackintosh, 29 December 1782, Add. MS 52451b, f. 6, BL.
77 Ibid., 6.
78 Autobiography, 14.
79 Lenman, Jacobite Clans, 199.
80 Letters of Two Centuries, appendix 6, 386; M. Mackintosh, The Clan Mackintosh, 50.
81 The most famous example being Alexander MacGillivray. See John Walton Caughey, MacGillivray of the Creeks (Norman, 1938), 9–11; Edward Cashin, “MacGillivray, Alexander,” in Oxford Dictionary of
MacGillivray, one of the clansmen who emigrated in 1736, married a part-French, part-Muscogee woman, Sehoy Marchand.\(^82\) Their son, Hobi-Hili-Miko, or Alexander MacGillivray, was brought up in the culture and language of his Wind tribe and educated in English at Charlestown. Hobi-Hili-Miko formed for himself a powerful position within his own tribe and among the imperial powers that was enabled by his straddling of cultures.\(^83\) More commonly, however, marriage and business partnerships were formed within the clan, leading to networks of kin and clan that spread across a widening imperial world. For example, Lachlan Mackintosh, the laird of Kyllachy in the early eighteenth century, left Kyllachy to his brother, Alexander, on his death. Alexander lived and traded in India but had married Elizabeth Barbour of Aldourie; Aldourie was part of the parish of Dore in which James Mackintosh’s birth was registered in 1765.\(^84\)

Another member of the clan whom Mackintosh encountered in India had left the Highlands at the age of nineteen, sailed to China, and then settled as a merchant in India. He wrote to James Mackintosh in 1805, describing the family and dependents that comprised his household. Claiming that “I can be of more use to those who need my assistance as a resident here than at home,” L. Mackintosh wrote that “I have heretofore been unable to tell my worthy mother when to expect the fulfilment of her wishes in my return.”\(^85\) L. Mackintosh presented his Highland family as remaining in close proximity in his mind and feelings of attachment. The letter book in which James Mackintosh’s own letters are found includes letters between L. Mackintosh and Bailie John Mackintosh, James’s uncle. Tables of investments and trade suggest economic ties and business links with Bailie John Mackintosh in the Highlands.\(^86\) Yet L. Mackintosh suggested that he had little intention of returning to the Highlands. “Possessed of an independence which would be equal to my wants and indeed to my wishes,” he suggested that he was torn between his family commitments in Calcutta and those of his Highland kin.\(^87\) Retaining the use of “home” to refer to the Highlands, L. Mackintosh nonetheless saw little possibility of return and, not wanting the “relinquishment of present comforts,” seemed determined on staying with his family in Calcutta.\(^88\)

Emigration to other parts of the British Empire and service in the British army dispersed families and put intense strain on networks of kin and clan. Nevertheless, perhaps more than geographical distance, it was practices of socialization and cultural, class, and ethnic identification that led to the diminishing of traditional Highland culture and kinship bonds. One fleeting reference to speaking Gaelic with a

---

\(^82\) Edward Cashin, “MacGillivray, Lachlan,” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford, 2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com.silk.library.umass.edu/view/article/68622 (accessed 10 April 2013).

\(^83\) Cashin, “MacGillivray, Alexander.”

\(^84\) *Letters of Two Centuries*, 317.

\(^85\) L. Mackintosh to James Mackintosh, Bombay, 25 November 1805, MS 6360, f. 94, National Library of Scotland.

\(^86\) Correspondence of L. Mackintosh, merchant in Calcutta, MS 6360, National Library of Scotland.

\(^87\) Ibid., 94.

\(^88\) Ibid.
colleague in Bombay is the only evidence that Mackintosh spoke Gaelic, though he probably did so fluently and from childhood. He made no further mention of Gaelic but frequently commented upon English usage as a marker of civility, taste, and elegance. The lack of affective ties to culture, not even a romantic attachment to the Highlands, was mirrored in Mackintosh’s breaking of ties with his Highland relatives. Despite the fact that Mackintosh returned intermittently throughout his adult life to the Highlands to visit relatives, his identification with them seems to have faded rapidly upon leaving Scotland. Imagining his ideal situation upon his return “home” from Bombay, Mackintosh located himself and his family on the outskirts of London. The family and friends he longed to reconnect with, the space and society upon which he based his sense of belonging, resided far from the Highlands. Turning to Mackintosh’s own reflections on his childhood in his unpublished autobiography, I explore the ways in which his detachment from his own family was mapped onto his representation of the Highlands.

The main source for information on James Mackintosh’s Highland Scottish childhood comes from an unpublished and unfinished autobiography penned in the early years of his residence in Bombay. In his opening preface, Mackintosh discourses apologetically on the egotism of autobiographical writing, emphasizing the modesty of his pursuit with self-effacing remarks about the lack of achievement in his life to date. Mackintosh claimed that he was preparing a document for the amusement of his old age or, should he not reach it, by which his friends and family might remember him. However, Mackintosh had another, more ambitious reason for writing, one that spoke to a much wider public and illustrated his desire for fame and recognition. “Whether England and Europe will ever feel any curiosity to know the events of my life and the feelings they excited in my mind I cannot presume to conjecture,” but he wrote nonetheless in the “hope that at some future time I may hope to be better known to the public than I now am.” From current obscurity in Bombay, Mackintosh projected himself onto an imagined and hoped-for future of fame that resided away from Highland Scotland in “England and Europe.” The nature of such fame, he suggested elsewhere in letters and diaries, was undecided. Would he be “a man of action or letters,” a lawgiver or a historian, a member of Parliament, or a reclusive but productive scholar? Whichever life pursuit he chose, he would satisfy his desire to be recognized by and exert influence over an unspecified public in the present and the future. Access to this public, however, was fundamentally reliant upon passing as, and properly performing, a specific gender, class, and ethnicity. In order to belong to this public and to

89 Journal, 24 June 1811, Add. MS 52438b, f. 28, BL.
80 Journal, 16 February 1811, Add. MS 52438a, f. 65, BL. For a discussion of language and imperialism, see Janet Sorensen, The Grammar of Empire in Eighteenth-Century British Writing (Cambridge, 2000).
81 Journal, 12 September 1810, Add. MS 78769, f. 66, BL.
82 Autobiography, 1.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 James Mackintosh to Catherine Mackintosh, Bombay, Tuesday, 15 April 1810, Add. MS 78769, ff. 13–15, BL.
shape its nature and course, it was necessary first to establish and mold an identity, to create a character that would allow him to perform his belonging.\textsuperscript{96}

In 1804, when Sir James Mackintosh, recorder of Bombay, sat down to narrate his life and to set his identity upon the page, he made no mention of either the Clan Mackintosh or the Clan Chattan confederacy of which the Mackintoshes were chiefs. When he set out his origins, instead of locating himself in the genealogy of the clan, Mackintosh began by placing himself on a map of male relatives who had served in various parts of the British Empire. His father, Captain John Mackintosh, James Mackintosh defined through his service in the British army, with emphasis laid upon the fact that he was wounded in the Seven Years’ War. His mother, Mackintosh described in relationship to her own male family and those in particular who also served the British Empire. She was, Mackintosh relates, “Marjory MacGillivray of Mr Alexander MacGillivray by Anne Fraser, sister of Brigadier General Fraser, killed in General Bourgogne’s army in 1777, aunt to Dr Fraser, Physician in London and to Mrs Fraser Tytler, wife of Lord Woodhouselee, now a judge of the court of session in Scotland.”\textsuperscript{97} It was through this catalog of more distant male relatives that Mackintosh established his maternal family in the context, not of the Clan Chattan of which they were also a part, but of the British imperial world of the male, professional middle classes.\textsuperscript{98}

Thus, Mackintosh begins his autobiography by locating himself in relationship to a network of male relatives, serving, wounded, and dying in the British Empire, or practicing professions in the metropole, all far beyond the Highlands. In stark contrast to these far-flung men, he then turns to present a huddle of women in a “small house called Cluny” in which he spent his infancy. “The only infant in a family of several women,” he wrote, “they rivalled each other in kindness and indulgence towards me.”\textsuperscript{99} His mother, Mackintosh claimed, was unhappy, an unhappiness that “contributed to her extreme affection which she felt for me.”\textsuperscript{100} Not sufficiently provided for by her husband, whose pay was “not too much for his own expenses,” she was forced to rely upon her own family and lavished her love upon the only dependent she had.\textsuperscript{101} From the center of this scene of female fixation, Mackintosh, pondering his younger self “at the distance of twenty years and of fifteen thousand miles,” gazed out—out of the window of “our little parlour” to view “the Lake with its uninterrupted expanse of twenty-four miles and its fortifications of perpendicular wooded rock.”\textsuperscript{102}

The focus of Mackintosh’s gaze, however, was fixed far beyond the Highland landscape, on the activities of his father and uncles fighting the wars of American Independence and the fortunes of Great Britain in the wars against France and Spain.

\textsuperscript{96} For a discussion of belonging, see Nira Yuval-Davis, “Belonging and the Politics of Belonging,” Patterns of Prejudice 40, no. 3 (2006): 197–214.
\textsuperscript{97} Autobiography, 2.
\textsuperscript{98} For a very different formulation of identity, see Matthew Brown, “Gregor MacGregor: Clansman, Conquistador and Coloniser on the Fringes of the British Empire,” in Colonial Lives across the British Empire: Imperial Career ing across the Nineteenth Century, ed. David Lambert and Alan Lester (Cambridge, 2006), 49–54.
\textsuperscript{99} Autobiography, 2.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
during the 1770s. Mackintosh wrote that his first poem was an elegy to his uncle Brigadier General Fraser, a man who he probably never met but would have heard about through family and in letters. By recording and placing emphasis upon his attempts at poetry—written, presumably, in English or Latin—Mackintosh was projecting onto his youth his status as a man of letters, a member of the literati that he was later to become. Furthermore, his description of this poetry, one apparently based upon Rollin’s Ancient History, illustrated his patriotism, and his interest and involvement in the activities of a country whose center of power was far beyond his immediate geographical location. “I thought it a noble example to Great Britain,” he wrote, “then threatened with invasion when the combined fleets of France and Spain were riding triumphant in the Channel.”

Whether concerned with the battles fought across the British Empire or with ancient classical literature, Mackintosh represented himself as a youth immersed in worlds that were, for the most part, temporally, linguistically, and spatially far removed from his day-to-day existence. It is only in matters of religion that he suggested his immediate experiences informed his choices. Saying nothing about the religious beliefs and practices of his own family, Mackintosh recorded that his experience of religious prejudice against one of his fellows at school “contributed to make my mind free and inquisitive.” Having read Burnet’s Exposition on Thirty-Nine Articles and witnessed the Orthodox Calvinism of his boarding mistress and school parson, Mackintosh claimed that he “became a warm advocate for free will . . . probably the boldest heretic in the Country.” By proudly declaring what he called his youthful heresy, Mackintosh distanced himself from his context. His emphasis on his own inquisitiveness and use of the superlative is set in implicit contrast to the mentality of the country in which he resided. Thus, he painted a suggestive picture of a country in which orthodoxy reigned supreme and in which expressions of free will were lacking. Finally, he linked his own personal trajectory to what he saw as the much broader progress of nations, stating, “[T]heological controversy has been the general inducement of individuals and nations to engage in metaphysical speculation.” In his discussion of his community’s culture of orthodoxy, conformity, and lack of “metaphysical speculation,” Mackintosh represented himself as standing apart from, and implicitly above, the context in which he grew up. In a note briefly reminiscing on Mackintosh’s youth, Pryse Gordon recalled a story from a relative who had taught Mackintosh and described his zeal in putting forward the Whig case against the wars of independence in America. What other people remembered of his childhood and what Mackintosh himself chose to record in his autobiography laid emphasis upon a political and scholarly identity that looked far beyond his local and immediate context.

For James Mackintosh, his period of schooling between the ages of ten and twenty-two mark some of his first steps toward becoming a professional man, an intellectual,

103 Ibid., 6.
104 Ibid., 3.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Extract from the portfolio of Pryse L. Gordon, Add. MS 78771a, f. 225, BL.
a lawyer, and ultimately a historian. From the moment of his arrival at Fortrose, Mackintosh’s autobiography becomes a narrative dominated by the impact of books and study that he directly related to the formation of his character. The picture of Cluny as a closed, affective, and feminine sphere stands in contrast to the male-dominated world of scholarship into which Mackintosh first ventured when he went to school in Fortrose. Mackintosh related his dreams of power as a young boy inspired by Erhard’s *Roman History* to imagine himself emperor of Constantinople: “I distributed offices and provinces among my schoolfellows. I loaded my favourites with dignity and power and I often made objects of my dislike feel the weight of my imperial resentment.”

Mackintosh connected the attributes and prowess of ancient heroes to those of his distant male relatives, borrowing the form of ancient verse to give content to the lives and actions of absent uncles. In *The Gender of History*, Bonnie Smith has argued that early readings of the ancient classics encouraged schoolboys to identify with their hero-scholars and promoted the idea that scholarship itself was a masculine activity. Mirroring the activities and disposition of those ancient heroes, Mackintosh wrote of the dreams of castle building and imperial dominance that he stated remained with him throughout his life. Of his propensity toward “castle building,” Mackintosh stated that “I have no doubt that many a man surrounded by piles of folios and apparently engaged in the most profound researches is in reality often employed in distributing the offices and provinces of the Empire of Constantinople.”

Across James Mackintosh’s narrative of his childhood, it was nation, power, and conquest that stood at the heart of his reflections on boyhood experiences and preoccupations. Passing rapidly over the details of his life at home, Mackintosh located the influences that shaped his character largely in the world of literature. Yet Mackintosh’s education did not begin at the Fortrose grammar school. Such schools expected boys to arrive, usually between the ages of eight and ten, with a knowledge of English reading and writing. Mackintosh, it would seem, arrived significantly better equipped and was, according to the reminiscence of a relative of his schoolmaster’s, “by far the cleverest boy” the teacher had ever taught.

That his mother, Marjory, took her son’s education beyond the rudiments of literacy is also suggested by her husband’s disapproval that she would render the boy a “mere pedant” through too much learning. Where Marjory gained her own education and what methods and tools she used to teach her son remain unknown. Described by the *Calcutta Review* as “a woman of a very superior stamp,” it was probably she who introduced Mackintosh to the volumes of Swift and Pope that he claims to have “found” on his grandmother’s shelves. However, Marjory Mackintosh’s role in her son’s education is given neither mention nor significance and is only briefly mentioned in his own autobiography.

---

108 Autobiography, 4.
109 Bonnie Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 82.
110 Autobiography, 5.
111 Henry Grey Graham, *The Social Life of Scotland in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1899), 443.
112 Extract from the portfolio of Pryse L. Gordon, 225.
113 “Article 12: Memoirs of the Life of the Right Honourable Sir James Mackintosh,” *Calcutta Review* 14 (1850): 481; Autobiography, 2.
Placed in a context that is overwhelmingly concerned with love and emotional affect, his mother’s labor, and that of his aunts and grandmother, is entirely separated from his formal schooling. This separation enabled Mackintosh to represent his world as divided into two spheres. One was dominated by adult men and boys whose vision extended outward and beyond, to power, empire, intellectual pursuit, and war, while the other, ruled by women and occasionally older men, was based in the household and characterized by affect. Any blurring of those boundaries was dismissed from Mackintosh’s narrative. Thus, despite the education and instruction that Marjory Mackintosh gave to her son, her impact on James Mackintosh’s learning and sense of scholarly self goes almost entirely unrecognized. Indeed, it was Marjory’s dependence on her family, rather than his own dependence on her, that Mackintosh emphasized in his autobiography. Far from seeing her efforts as the fundamental building blocks upon which his own intellectual achievements rested, Mackintosh presented his life with his mother and female relatives in Cluny as an enclosure against which he was straining.

Less than a year after beginning his autobiography, Mackintosh wrote a letter to his brother-in-law, John Allen, in which he made evident his sense of disconnection from the family and society into which he was born. “I have been gradually detached from my own relations, I had formed many most invaluable friendships—but till I met you I had found nothing that I could take to my heart as kindred.” In asserting his sense of belonging to his wife’s family as “kindred,” Mackintosh turned away from his Highland kin and looked, instead, to a more metropolitan form of society, politics, and sociability that was embodied in the Allen-Wedgwood family. Catherine, née Allen, was born in 1765 and raised in Pembrokeshire, one of eight sisters and a brother, and the daughter of John Bartlett Allen, a wealthy, if highly unpopular, landed gentleman with coal mines on his estates that generated a significant income. The family’s connections to the Wedgwood circle through the marriage of Catherine’s older sister Elizabeth (Bessy) to Josiah (Jos) Wedgwood brought them close to a wide circle of Whigs—both landed gentry and wealthy professionals and businessmen. When Mackintosh met Catherine in 1797, the young women of the Allen family were assembled at Cote House in Bristol, which had become a fashionable center for “young intellectuals.”

If Mackintosh had severed affective ties to his Highland family, however, occasional encounters appear to have been unavoidable. In 1810, Catherine Mackintosh wrote to her husband about an afternoon spent in the company of his family in London. She wrote to Mackintosh about her meeting with his family in a tone that left no uncertainty as to her opinion of his “thousands of relatives.” “Your female cousin the citizen Ann is a mighty plain spinster and spinster I think she will be likely to remain, for there is nothing piquante in her ugliness and she seems besides to have no accomplishment except that of speaking the head Highland

114 Mackintosh to (John) Allen, Parell House Bombay, 22 February 1805, Add. MS 78768, f. 61, BL.
115 Inglis-Jones, A Pembrokeshire County Family.
116 Barbara Wedgwood and Hensleigh Wedgwood, The Wedgwood Circle, 1730–1897 (London, 1980), 106.
117 Catherine Mackintosh to James Mackintosh, 20 October 1810, Add. MS 78769, f. 106, BL.
Scotch like Henry,” Catherine wrote of one, although she was equally disparaging of the others.118 With no social circles in common and not being among “literary ladies,” Catherine found herself at a loss for conversation. Making evident her distaste toward Mackintosh’s female relatives, Catherine belabored their difference from their “southern neighbours.” The “simplicity” of these Northern women she found endearing, but she condescendingly commented, “Your Scotch women have no heads for metaphysics nor much for the lighter thinking or reading.”119

For Catherine Mackintosh, her husband’s family was a rather foreign curiosity, somewhat rustic and distasteful. Her emphasis on the size of his family drew subtly and probably unconsciously on popular English stereotypes of the Scottish and is evidence of the pervasiveness of English prejudice against Scots.120 Of far greater concern, however, was her sister-in-law, Mary, who would have to be dispatched immediately back to Scotland before Mackintosh himself arrived back in London. Having established a lodging house in London, her sister was apparently boasting of her relationship to Sir James Mackintosh. It was a situation that would afford extreme social embarrassment to Mackintosh, whose own position among, and patronage by, London’s respectable Whig elite was not without fragility. “Nothing but Scotland or every scheme of fame for yourself or respectability for your family is out of the question,” Catherine wrote. “How could you live in London with any comfort with so near a relation keeping a lodging house?”121 Catherine’s alarm about her sister-in-law’s activities in London is illustrative of the profound socioeconomic differences that separated her own origins from those of her husband’s. Mackintosh’s marriage to Catherine in 1798 had elicited several expressions of concern from her relatives. Writing in early 1798 from Cote House, Catherine mentioned dining with two female cousins who “congratulated me in private on my happy prospects but lamented that we should not be richer.”122 Yet in the networked world of politics, clubs, dinners, and balls, it was less the disparities in disposable income and more the disparity in cultural conventions and conversation that marked people as different and, in this case, inferior. As Catherine’s description of her encounter with her husband’s relatives and her fears about his sister’s activities in London make evident, being associated with the women of the Mackintosh family threatened to compromise her family’s prospects. To be associated with them in the “civilized” world of London, where reputations had to be carefully protected, represented a threat to their own social status.

Catherine Mackintosh’s meeting with her husband’s female relatives brought together people separated by distances that spanned more than just miles. As the eldest son, greater resources were devoted to Mackintosh’s education than to that of his siblings, neither of whom he mentioned in his autobiography. His younger brother, John, was given fewer opportunities and spent the first few years of his schooling in an institution far inferior to his older brother’s school in Fortrose. Writing to Bailie John Mackintosh, the boys’ father, Captain John Mackintosh, expressed his intention to remove his younger son to a “more respectable”

118 Ibid.
119 Ibid.
120 See Linda Colley, Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1837 (New Haven, 1992), 120–22.
121 Ibid.
122 Cote House to James Mackintosh, 28 February 1798, Add. MS 78768, f. 19, BL.
school. Whether this move ever took place, John (junior) appears never to have followed his older brother to college or university. His father eventually gained a position for his son as an ensign in the army, albeit only on half-pay. John Mackintosh (junior) went to the West Indies, but not before suffering hardship and uncertainty, unable to afford the voyage out. When he did finally manage to travel with his regiment to Honduras, John Mackintosh (senior) wrote to his aunt that “[h]is society and situation are not the most agreeable in the world. I wish I could remove him to more agreeable quarters but my interest is so small that I have little hopes of doing it soon.” John junior died in Honduras, sometime between 1799 and 1800. Mackintosh’s sister, Mary, was given still fewer opportunities. She may have been educated by her mother or attended the local parish school, but girls’ education was focused on activities that would make them good wives, with anything beyond reading discouraged. In his occasional letters to his aunt, Mackintosh did not deny that he had a financial responsibility toward his sister, yet it was one that he appeared never to have fulfilled.

Gender inequality and the prioritization of the eldest boy’s education, could lead—and did lead, in Mackintosh’s case—to intellectual and class gaps within families. Indeed, it was at the intersection of socioeconomic class and Highland ethnicity that the sense of radical alterity was generated. It was this sense of difference from which Mackintosh endeavored to disassociate himself. Through disidentification with the space of his childhood, Mackintosh smoothed over and erased the complex and overlapping worlds into which he was born. Instead, he constructed himself as always identifying with a socioeconomic elite, British imperial world, with London at its center. That Mackintosh was able, eventually, to inhabit that center was the result of an education and socialization that he received in school, college, and university in Fortrose, Aberdeen, and Edinburgh, all at the expense of his Highland relatives, many of them women. It was an education that gave him access to networks of patronage and the skills that, combined with his intelligence, enabled his first forays into the world of journalism and his ultimate fame—later infamy—with the publication of the Vindiciae Gallicae. However, as the generation of Scottish scholars who taught Mackintosh in Aberdeen and Edinburgh understood and related better than most, access to metropolitan, “polite” society and its patronage networks was dependent upon a way of being, identifying, and performing a metropolitan, middle-class civility, which left little room for significant cultural difference.

It has been twenty years since the publication of Linda Colley’s Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707–1832, in which she illustrated the dominant role played by Scottish

123 Captain Mackintosh to Bailie John McIntosh, Inverness, North Britain, 11 May 1783, Add. MS 78768, f. 29, BL.
124 O’Leary, Sir James Mackintosh, 14.
125 James Mackintosh to his Grandmother, 14 Serle Street, Lincoln’s Inn, London, 16 November 1796, Add. MS 78768, f. 3, BL.
126 James Mackintosh to his Grandmother, 15 November 1799, Add. MS 78768, f. 34, BL.
127 R. D. Anderson, Education and the Scottish People, 1750–1918 (Oxford, 1995), 8.
128 Nenadic, Lairds and Luxury, 55–57.
129 Nicholas Phillipson, “Adam Smith as Civic Moralist,” in Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment, ed. Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff (Cambridge, 1983), 180.
men in the expansion and consolidation of the British Empire. Colley’s argument that a construction of Britishness based upon Protestantism and forged by war provided an umbrella identity under which other regional and national identities could nestle has been widely criticized and significantly complicated. On the face of it, Mackintosh’s public prose would seem largely to support Colley’s argument. In a speech to the “Loyal North Britons” in 1803, he made clear the interrelated role of empire and European warfare in forging a bond between individual nations: “I know I speak the sentiment of every honest man, Englishman, Irishman or Scotchman, when I say, that we will maintain inviolate that noble union which was consolidated on the plains of Egypt and Syria, where every nation was represented by her hero.” Britishness, in this instance, allowed Mackintosh to assert his belonging to a masculine empire whose tentacles of political, cultural, and socioeconomic power seemed ever reaching.

However, this idea of Britishness was far from being an umbrella that allowed room for other forms of identity and ways of being to coexist. Mackintosh’s performance of a British imperial identity relied upon distancing himself from the Scottish Highlands as a space and a society whose differences, marked as barbaric, threatened his own ambitions to belong more closely to the centers of imperial power. Colin Kidd has argued that the Scottish Whig tradition failed to contribute to an overarching British identity, falling back instead on a definition of “the British” based around the nexus of legal institutions, and moral and economic “improvement,” for which England was the torchbearer. Kidd’s argument is reflected both in Mackintosh’s thought and in his more intimate construction of identity and belonging in relationship to the Highlands. Imagining the world as a concentric circle at the center of which stood London, judged to be the pinnacle of civilization, Mackintosh’s spatial hierarchy brought imperial nationalism and stadial theory closer together than his Scottish enlightenment forebears ever had. Part of a wider trend toward more triumphalist theories of progress in the early nineteenth century, Mackintosh’s conceptualization of progress and civilization had little or no room for cultural or class-based differences, including that of his own family and kin. As a Highland Scot who gained status and a sense of belonging to the center of imperial power in the early nineteenth century, Mackintosh has few contemporaries with whom to make a comparison. Few, if any, early nineteenth-century Highlanders have left behind such extensive documentation of their thoughts and deeds as Mackintosh. Yet, whether representative or not, Mackintosh’s history complicates the picture of Scots and Scottishness in relationship to the British Empire. It illustrates the necessity to distinguish between Highlands and Lowlands, in particular, but also to consider the ways in which differential access to power, even between Scots

130 See, for example, Theodore Koditschek, “The Making of British Nationality,” Victorian Studies 44, no. 3 (2002): 389–98.
131 Proceedings at A General Meeting of the Loyal North Britons, held at the Crown and Anchor, August 8th, 1803; containing a correct copy of the celebrated Speech of James Mackintosh esq. (London, 1803), 18.
132 Colin Kidd, Subverting Scotland’s Past: Scottish Whig Historians and the Creation of an Anglo-British Identity, 1689–c.1830 (Cambridge, 2003), 270–74.
133 Jennifer Pitts, A Turn to Empire: The Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France (Princeton and Oxford, 2005), 240.
134 Charles Grant would be a notable exception and a useful comparison, but the majority of his papers have been lost.
of a similar status, led to different relationships to Scotland, empire, and identity. If some Scots were keen and able to configure a sense of Scottishness because of, or in spite of, their participation in a wider British imperial project, others, such as Mackintosh, were eager to dispense with the markers of difference or to forge new and hybrid identities. Marriage out of Scottish kin networks provided the means of tapping into new avenues of power and resulted in new configurations of belonging, affective communities, spatial imaginaries, and identities. These histories of the reconfiguration of identity—of loss, erasure, and disassociation—represent another angle on the history of people whose origins, ancestry, and heritage pertain to Scotland as a social, political, geographical, and cultural space. They are histories of entanglement that necessarily confuse any contained narrative of nations, peoples, and places, but in their telling they provide further insights into the configuration of identity and its relationship to networks of power.

135 See Angela McCarthy, “Scottish Migrant Ethnic Identities in the British Empire Since the Nineteenth Century,” in Scotland and the British Empire, 118–46.