Chapter 7

The genealogical histories of Gaelic Scotland

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INTRODUCTION: CONTEXTS FOR THE GENRE

‘Gaelic’ genealogical history is a convenient term to use to represent a genre of history writing which flourished between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries in the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*, or Gaelic-speaking area. The genre consists of the histories of the specific clans to which their authors belonged or were connected; it employs English as its normal language, even though the authors were invariably Gaelic speakers; and it draws upon a variety of sources, both written and oral. The corpus is substantial but neglected, and this dictates the scope of my ambition. What follows is a survey which seeks to define, describe and explain the existence of the genre and to open it up to the detailed discussion and analysis it requires and deserves.

Any discussion of these texts must begin by acknowledging that, although they all have something to say about the history of the *Gàidhealtachd* in the medieval or later medieval era, in the form we now possess them they were written down much later. It follows that their treatment of the past can only be evaluated once we have placed them in their own present, broaching questions of authorship, language of composition, approach, sources and motives. The potential worth of such an exercise can swiftly be appreciated if we remind ourselves that, if we exclude formal documents such as the charters of the lords of the Isles,¹ then the indigenous contemporary written sources for the history of the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd* in medieval and later medieval times are sparse, particularly if Gaelic Ireland is invoked as a point of comparison.² In the case of the Gaelic historical tracts we find in Ireland, particularly those prose texts which date from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, and are concerned to glorify a particular kindred, Scotland has none at all.³ In these circumstances the Scottish historian can find some

consolation, not merely in the fact that many of these Irish sources contain Scottish material,⁴ but also in the remarkable outpouring of historical tracts in Gaelic Scotland after the mid-seventeenth century, and in the sources these embody. Interestingly, for all the continued historiographical activity represented by the output of Séathrún Céitinn (Geoffrey Keating, d. 1644?), An Dubhaltach MacFírbhisigh (d. 1671), Dáibhídh Ó Duibhgeannáin (d. 1696), and the 'Four Masters', there seems to be no contemporary Irish parallel to the Scottish genealogical histories.⁵ But comparisons can certainly be made with the earlier Irish prose tracts just mentioned, and not just in terms of a common objective of kindred-glorification. We find 'gross distortions of time-scale as well as the introduction of international folk-motifs' in both the Irish tracts and the Scottish histories.⁶

A central argument to be advanced is that the birth of the genealogical history genre was intimately linked to the death of what are commonly referred to as the learned orders or classes (Gaelic *aos dána*, literally 'folk of gifts') of Gaelic society. These were exclusively male castes dedicated to the pursuit of particular intellectual and artistic activities – poetry, history, law, music and medicine, as well as crafts such as metalwork, woodwork and monumental sculpture – on an hereditary and professional basis. From the thirteenth until the earlier eighteenth century, their patrons and paymasters were the Gaelic ruling elite in both Scotland and Ireland, and one of the benefits which this symbiotic relationship conferred upon the learned orders was the status of nobility. Of greatest social rank and influence were the poets, and we should note that poetry and history – here almost synonymous with genealogy – were very closely allied, to the extent that some learned lineages, and individual members thereof, espoused both disciplines. The poets were largely responsible for the creation of Classical Gaelic (also known as early Modern Irish), the artificial language used by the learned orders in general after c. 1200 as a vehicle for the 'classical tradition' of learning which they fostered.⁷

This classical tradition engendered a subtle and fluid interaction between orality and literacy in the spheres of preservation and transmission, composition and delivery, and education; but it could be argued that it was the spoken word that counted for most, particularly for public, aural consumption.⁸ Pointers lie in the regular employment of dictation in the compilation of Classical Gaelic manuscripts, and in evidence that the act of writing down classical poetry was quite separate from, and subsequent to, the act of composition, so that we might wonder whether all poems had to achieve written status. This last is consistent with the fact that the primary function of the work of the classical poets and genealogists was its oral recitation before an elite audience at crucial points within the life-cycle of this society:

Their work was to hand down to posterity the valorous actions, conquests, battles, skirmishes, marriages and relations of the predecessors by repeating and singing the same at births, baptisms, marriages, feasts and funeralls, so that no people since the curse of the Almighty dissipated the Jews took such care to keep their tribes, cadets and branches, so well and so distinctly separate.⁹

Gaelic high culture, propagated and regulated by the 'closed shop' of the learned orders, on behalf of a lay elite, in an artificial, non-vernacular language, must nevertheless have achieved a wider audience.¹⁰ This may seem an unlikely claim, which moreover needs to be argued for theoretically rather than empirically, given our ignorance of popular culture within Gaelic Scotland in the late medieval era. However, pathways for transmission are easily identifiable. Downward social mobility was a hallmark of late medieval Gaelic society, and personnel within both learned and lay aristocratic lineages who lost status over time must have carried their cultural inheritance with them. The learned orders themselves were hierarchically organized, and the lower rungs of these ladders may have reached or penetrated the realms both of non-aristocratic society, and of vernacular speech. Highland Perthshire provides evidence for the mediating role of itinerants such as chapmen (*pacairean*), and the minstrel bands known as *Clair Sheanchain*, 'as literary receptors and disseminators, operating between the spheres of high and popular culture, and across social classes'.¹¹

Such brief contextualization may begin to explain the relevance of an analysis of a written genre to a book about the spoken word. The bond between the genealogical histories and a classical tradition which was both oral and literate, and which, although elite in origin, experienced wide social dispersal, makes these texts nodal points for the interaction of elite and popular culture, and of the spoken and written word. Deconstructing them can tell us much about the relationships among all these phenomena, and provides an object lesson in the potential complexities these relationships can engender. It will already be clear that classical material could have entered the histories via oral *and* written streams of transmission, and in fact we shall see that various springs may have fed the oral stream. However, we shall also see that classical learning did not constitute the sum total of the orally derived content of the histories, which also potentially embraced the traditions of non-classical groupings from different social levels, as well as fictional narratives. A crucial medium for all this oral information was the oral informant, sometimes named. Their identity and status, the chronological horizons of their knowledge, the likely origins of fictional narratives within the histories, the relationship between oral and written sources, and the question of cultural exchange, will all receive some preliminary attention in this chapter. It should be noted that the term 'lay' is used here to denote the non-classical (rather than non-clerical) component of Gaelic society. The

same is true of 'vernacular', which is applied to both 'low' and 'high' non-classical culture and groupings. Our still severely limited knowledge of the social structure of the seventeenth-century Highlands dictates the employment in discussion of a very rudimentary distinction between aristocratic and non-aristocratic society.

Applying the criteria used below to define the genre, nearly fifty genealogical histories have so far been either securely or provisionally identified.¹² These texts rarely existed in isolation, but commonly spawned a number of variant recensions. This proliferation of manuscripts (for, whether original or variant, it is manuscripts we are dealing with) seems to be fundamental to the purpose and mechanics of the genre. The total number of histories and recensions which survive is at present unknown, but the scale seems impressive enough to suggest that there is a phenomenon at work here.¹³

Yet it is a phenomenon which has been severely unacknowledged and neglected, and this seems all the more curious given that the wider late seventeenth-century context into which it clearly fits, and the other elements which go to make up that context, have indeed been the subject of scholarly recognition and attention. The period saw a pronounced surge in antiquarian, collecting and publishing endeavours in the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd* in respect of literary, ethnographical and linguistic studies. The verse anthology known as the *Fernaig Manuscript* was compiled in Wester Ross c. 1688–93.¹⁴ More significant for us are the fruits of collaboration emanating from a network whose existence is best revealed through the contact between Edward Lhuyd or Lhwyd and many of its members, notably Rev. Iain (John) Beaton. Lhwyd, the great Welsh polymath, Celtic scholar and keeper of the Ashmolean Museum, visited Scotland as part of his 'grand tour' of the Celtic countries undertaken between 1697 and 1701. Beaton, the minister–physician from the Isle of Mull, was his chief Scottish informant.¹⁵ In Kintyre Lhwyd met Eoghan (Hugh) MacLean, schoolmaster at Kilchenzie, who between 1690 and 1698 wrote Gaelic manuscripts containing heroic and romantic tales, poetry and two metrical tracts.¹⁶ Rev. Raibeart (Robert) Kirk saw Bedell's Gaelic Bible, as adapted to Scottish needs, through the press in 1689–90, and completed *The Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Faunes and Fairies* in 1691, and a Gaelic vocabulary in 1702.¹⁷ Kirk was assisted with Bedell's Bible by his friend, Rev. James Kirkwood, who was the ultimate source of the manuscript called *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*, perhaps written by Kirk, which was copied by Lhwyd c. 1699.¹⁸ Beaton commented extensively on this manuscript for Lhwyd,¹⁹ who made his copy from a copy of Kirkwood's manuscript in the possession of Sir Robert Sibbald, president of the Edinburgh Royal College of Physicians, and the first professor of medicine at Edinburgh University. Sibbald corresponded with Beaton about Highland customs, and motivated Màrtainn (Martin) Martin to undertake fieldwork into the natural and human past and present of the Western Isles which

he published in 1703.²⁰ Lhwyd's stimulus also galvanized the antiquarian Rev. Robert Wodrow to seek information from Beaton on Highland history, language and folklore in 1701.²¹ Another to pay homage to Beaton's learning was Rev. Daniel Campbell, who was appointed His Majesty's Historiographer in Scotland in 1700.²²

Since this loose collaborative nexus clearly counted the history of the *Gàidhealtachd* among its preoccupations, we would naturally expect that its activities, and the birth and development of the genealogical history genre, were connected in terms both of root causes and personnel. Such an expectation is enhanced by the fact that some of the genealogical historians had Gaelic literary and linguistic interests. Rev. Seumas (James) Fraser, author of two histories, and a pivotal figure in the evolution of the genre, was also the author of 'Hibernilogia a volum of Irish [i.e. Gaelic] verse', and 'An Irish Dictionary'.²³ Dr Eachann (Hector) MacLean, who wrote a history of his own kindred c. 1734, also made a verse compilation.²⁴ Fraser was tapped by Lhwyd as a potential informant,²⁵ and further research may allow us to draw other genealogical historians into the wider web.

That the genealogical histories should be so neglected within the broader canvas of which they form so integral and conspicuous a part seems doubly odd given that Donald Gregory's *History of the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland from AD 1493 to AD 1625*, first published in 1836, and arguably the *fons et origo* of modern scholarly historical writing on the late medieval *Gàidhealtachd*, drew extensively upon them.²⁶ Two explanations can be offered. Since Gregory wrote, a strong prejudice against these texts has surfaced occasionally within local and mainstream Scottish historical writing.²⁷ Superficially this is easy to understand, for their late date is only the most obvious problem these histories present as sources for the medieval and late medieval *Gàidhealtachd*. Secondly, the sheer scale of the phenomenon, and the consequent labour required to analyse it thoroughly, presents real difficulties. William Matheson's comment, relating to one particular kindred, is generally applicable:

A thoroughgoing criticism of [MacKenzie] traditions should be based upon a detailed study of the various family histories and their recensions, showing how they are related to one another, and possibly to other similar works such as Sir Robert Gordon's *Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland*. This would be a difficult undertaking, not only on account of the great number of MSS., but also because some of the more important of them, believed to be in private hands, would require to be traced.²⁸

The scale of the undertaking is probably the prime reason why usage of the genealogical histories in our era has been restricted to the study of specific texts for specific purposes. Such piecemeal activity has had an impact nevertheless: one senses that the stock of the genealogical histories is now on the

rise, thereby enhancing the need for a general appraisal. The key figure in the process of rehabilitation has been the late William Matheson. His groundbreaking series of studies demonstrates an acute awareness both of the pitfalls these works present to the unwary, and of the folly of ignoring them altogether. In discussing Alexander MacKenzie's *History of the MacKenzies*, essentially a conflation of various MacKenzie genealogical histories, Matheson comments: 'The resulting account of early clan history fails to carry conviction, but it does not follow that the traditions themselves are to be discarded. The need is for a new and more critical approach to them.'²⁹ Noting that these MacKenzie accounts are often in conflict with one another, he adds: 'Contradictions there are, but in a sense they inspire confidence – the confidence that we are dealing with genuine traditions, though considerably distorted and confused. We are thus left with the problem of trying to unravel this tangled skein of traditions with the help of such other sources of information as may be available'.³⁰

Others who have followed in Matheson's footsteps are David Sellar, a feature of whose valuable series of studies of kindred origins has been the fruitful interplay between the genealogical content of genealogical histories and earlier genealogical sources, demonstrating in the process that the former do often contain a reliable genealogical core;³¹ and John Bannerman, whose extensive use of genealogical histories in his contributions to *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands*³² forms the basis of his following summation: 'it is surprising how often the narrative of the Clan Donald historians of the seventeenth century is confirmed by [late medieval] documentary evidence, and this despite the bias inherent in the fact that Hugh MacDonald, the Sleat *seanchaidh*, and the MacMhuirich authors of the *Book of Clanranald* were in the employ of the MacDonalds'.³³ More recently, Steve Boardman has demonstrated that traditional accounts of the Campbell acquisition of Lorn in 1470, preserved in part in manuscript histories of the Stewarts of Appin, and perhaps also the MacLarens of Balquhiddy, are correct in asserting that that takeover was a much murkier affair than the bland character of the contemporary legal documents recording the conveyancing of this lordship would have us believe.³⁴

DEFINING THE GENRE: DATE, AUTHORSHIP, LANGUAGE, SOURCES

I commence an overview of the genre by seeking to define it. 'Gaelic' genealogical histories are works of narrative prose composed in manuscript, typically in English, between the mid-seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Usually they take as their subject the history of a particular kindred, and are written by a member of that kindred, or an affiliate, of high social rank. As Gaels and aristocrats, our authors have certain access to oral, and

likely access to written material in Gaelic. The multilingual competence of our authors enables them to draw upon, and to some degree to seek to synthesise, a range of sources which may include historical works originating in Lowland Scotland, England, continental Europe or the ancient world; documentary evidence, both published and unpublished; oral history in vernacular Gaelic; and material derived from the Classical Gaelic tradition.

Strict application of these criteria entails the exclusion of some works which fail to meet them all, although they are clearly related to the genre. I suggest, tentatively, that those texts which fail in part because they were all composed before the mid-seventeenth century can be divided into two broad types. The first are 'remotely related' precursors, which are sometimes exploited as sources by genealogical histories, but which differ from them on grounds of authorship and/or purpose as well as date. The *Ewill Troubles of the Lewes* is concerned with one specific episode, rather than the full span of kindred history.³⁵ *Ane Breve Cronicle of the Earlis of Ross*, the bulk of which predates 1615, has strong ecclesiastical concerns, which probably reflect its authorship, or a phase thereof.³⁶ Sir Robert Gordon's *Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland* also falls on the grounds of date and authorship, and is in any case a work with its own distinctive approach and agenda.³⁷ The second are 'closely related' precursors, which I would subdivide into texts concerning the Campbells, and those concerning other clans. None of these last is known to have survived independently, and hence we know nothing of their sources, but they seem to have been genealogically-based histories of a specific kindred, normally written by a kindred member or affiliate. To this extent they have much in common with the genealogical histories, some of which use them as a ground or source type.³⁸

The Campbell texts are particularly interesting. The *Black Book of Taymouth*, a eulogistic history of the Campbells of Glen Orchy, was commenced in 1598 by William Bowie, a Lowland servitor of that kindred.³⁹ 'Colvin's Genealogy of the Campbells', produced between 1650 and 1660, is not known to have survived independently, but was very influential, acting as a ground for several of the Campbell genealogical histories.⁴⁰ Its author, Alexander Colville, justice depute in Edinburgh from 1607 until 1664, may have completed the first draft of this text c. 1638; and may also be the author of *Information anent the Pedigree of the Noble and Antient House of Lochow* (1634).⁴¹ These works differ from the genealogical histories in their Lowland authorship, but, for the 'Colville texts' at least, access to the Classical Gaelic tradition in its decline, and a willingness to put it in the same frame as documentary and chronicle evidence, provide crucial points of contact which may justify describing them as 'proto-genealogical histories'.⁴²

Moving beyond the mid-seventeenth century, Màrtainn Martin's famous *Description of the Western Islands* is atypical in its subject matter, and is a published work.⁴³ The eighteenth century apparently saw the rise of a Scottish

family history-writing industry, moulded by quasi-professional antiquarians such as George Crawford, William Buchanan of Auchmar and Walter MacFarlane. The texts relating to Highland lineages generated by this movement can be difficult to demarcate from the genealogical histories.⁴⁴ The former tend to be 'scholarly', almost wholly genealogical exercises, reliant upon printed histories and documentary evidence. They lack the genealogical histories' partisan and ideological edge, and the indigenous dimension created by the use of Gaelic classical and vernacular sources. I suspect that their authors usually have no close bond with the lineage concerned.

Vernacular history, or oral tradition in its unadulterated form, whether written down since the eighteenth century or tape-recorded in the twentieth century, fails primarily on the grounds not so much of date as of lack of variety or synthesis of source; it is a constituent of the genealogical histories, and not to be confused with them.⁴⁵ In like manner, there is a clutch of clan histories which we can rule out, partly because they are published works mainly of the later nineteenth century, and partly because their contents do not represent one 'pure' genealogical history, but syntheses of several such accounts, along with other material, such as fresh injections of oral tradition or documentary evidence.⁴⁶

I now propose to comment in more detail on the main criteria of date, authorship, language, content and sources, before exploring the reasons for the birth of the genre. It should be borne in mind that the conclusions which follow may be subject to modification as further genealogical histories are uncovered. In terms of date, the main surge in the writing of these histories is between the mid-seventeenth century and c. 1720; and of this cohort, the bulge is before c. 1705.⁴⁷ Moreover, there is one example of a history written down between 1717 and 1722, but only after a prolonged gestation whose first phase consisted of the absorption and assimilation of oral sources. Alasdair (Alexander) Campbell, the author of the *Craignish History*, was born c. 1670, and 'when but a boy ... listened with a greedy ear to all the traditions, and poems of my countrymen', while one of his key oral informants died in the later 1680s.⁴⁸ Thus, Gaelic genealogical history is more a phenomenon of the later seventeenth than of the earlier eighteenth century; it virtually dies out between 1750 and 1800, undergoes a revival in the 1820s and 1830s, and produces two outlying instances in the 1860s, by the one author.

Under the social dispensation which was breaking down in the *Gàidheal-tachd* by the seventeenth century, we can define the status of our authors, virtually to a man, as that of *daoin' uaisle* (noblemen) or higher. A number of them belonged to the ruling families of kindreds, or of branches of kindreds.⁴⁹ They also form a reasonably representative cross-section of the indigenous elite. Non-professional men – members of the ruling grades, and tacksmen – are the largest single grouping. They are closely followed by clergymen and lawyers, who dominate a professional sector which also

includes representatives of the military and medicine. The MacMhuirichs provide the only clear-cut instance of authorship by members of the learned orders.⁵⁰

Overwhelmingly, the histories are written in English or Scoto-English. A version of one specimen is in Latin,⁵¹ and another is in the Classical Gaelic utilized primarily by the learned orders. Yet it is usually clear that the author was familiar with vernacular Gaelic at least, and sometimes we have specific statements to that effect. Seumas Fraser refers to 'our Irish [Gaelic] language',⁵² and Alasdair Campbell to his 'knowledge ... of our country language, viz. the Irish as it is spoke in Argyleshire'.⁵³ Hence the substantial amount of Gaelic which these texts embody, and, since without exception it is rendered phonetically into an English-based orthography, it may constitute a valuable and untapped source for the study of Scottish Gaelic dialects in the early modern era.

This Gaelic matter can be classified under four headings. That of nomenclature embraces personal names – including *far-ainmean* (by-names) and *sloinnidhean* (pedigrees) – and place-names. The by-names and place-names are frequently tied to narratives of the events which supposedly gave rise to them. Nomenclature also embraces a healthy smattering of technical vocabulary, naturally resorted to where a ready English equivalent did not exist, which again could profitably be siphoned off for study in its own right. A term such as *léine-chrios* ('bodyguard') – used for example to describe the nature of the dependency of the MacRaes upon the MacKenzies⁵⁴ – is well enough known; but what of 'the artery called in Galic *strurossach*', also called 'the master vein in the foot', mentioned in connection with the death of MacDonald of Sleat at the siege of Eilean Donnain c. 1539;⁵⁵ or *airgiod cagainn*, a military levy being claimed in 1649?⁵⁶

Secondly, where the histories contain reported speech, whether it be the statement of an individual, or conversations or exchanges involving more than one party, it is sometimes clear that our authors are following a Gaelic source, probably an oral informant. Often they simply translate or paraphrase this into English,⁵⁷ but on occasion the original is imported in part or in whole directly into the narrative. This is how the *Craignish History* describes the decision taken c. 1400 by Iain Anfhann, 'Weak John', to resign the whole lordship of Lochawe to his brother in exchange for other lands: 'It is told of this John when he declared his choice in presence of a great convention of friends, who were dividing the lands and disputing about the interest of the two brothers said *Togive dur skiggarick ... dar skaggarik bii an laggan beg sho agy fen*, i.e. end your jangling and wrangling I'll content myself with this little valley'.⁵⁸

Thirdly, and clearly linked to our second category, the histories are liberally peppered with sayings or pieces of extempore verse which seem to have lodged themselves with proverbial force within the collective memory.⁵⁹ Here

we remember Màrtainn Martin's observation on the Western Isles that 'the natives are generally ingenious and quick of apprehension ... several of both sexes have a gift of poesy, and are able to form a satire or panegyric *ex tempore*'.⁶⁰ Alasdair Campbell also alludes to 'extemporary rhyming, a thing much in use among the Highlanders',⁶¹ and provides representative instances of rhymes and proverbs in his *Craignish History*. One concerns the early fifteenth century, and a stratagem adopted by Ragnall mac Mhaol-Colum (Ronald son of Malcolm) of the Craignish lineage to put an end to excessively heavy harvest obligations being imposed upon his tenants by the 'Baron MacIgeill':

which gave rise to a byword well known among all the highlanders to this day
which they commonly upbraid the reapers with, when they do not bind as they
cut down,

Buan Ronill vic voal-Callum din Varon Macigeil

Buan un Diu, agus ceangil a marich.

That is to say, You give me such shearing as Ronald the son of Malcolm gave the
Baron Mac Igeill, to witt shearing to day, and binding to morrow.⁶²

Lastly, there is more formal Gaelic poetry.⁶³ A bridge between this and the extempore verse found within the last category perhaps exists in the form of the two quatrains which the *Sleat History* represents as having been composed spontaneously by the Earl of Mar in the aftermath of the battle of Inverlochy in 1431.⁶⁴ A number of fragments of classical verse are caught in the amber of the histories. The *MacLean History* gives 'The Beginning of Mac Vurich's Panegyrick on the MacLeans ...';⁶⁵ the *Sleat History* preserves a quatrain supposedly sung by the Irish harpist Diarmaid Ó Cairbre, in advance of his assassination of his patron Aonghas (Angus) Óg in 1490;⁶⁶ the *MacRae History* has a quatrain from an elegy on the death of MacDonald of Sleat c. 1539;⁶⁷ and, with respect to the death of Ragnall mac Mhaol-Colum c. 1447/48, Alasdair Campbell comments:

I heard ane elegant epitaph made upon him in the Irish language, they say
compoz'd by his own harper, the last stanza of which being all I remember and
is in English much to this purpose,

Many a mournful, or sorrowful, white keirchieft matron is to be seen this
day at Killmolrie, tearing their hair, bewailing the fall of the great Ronald in
the bottom of deep water.⁶⁸

The linguistic flavour, if not the language, of these texts is one factor which justifies our describing them as 'Gaelic'. Another is their content and structure. These are kin-based histories, according a primacy to genealogy which is usually manifest in the titles they bear, even in the case of more ambitious projects such as Seumas Fraser's 'Polichronicon seu Policratica Temporum; many Histories In One, or nearer, The True Genealogy of the

Fraser's', whose preface begins, 'Genealogy and antiquity is the glory of a name or nation.'⁶⁹ Another work which alludes to a wider agenda, the *Craignish History*, commences as follows:

As it is naturall for all men to have a byass or propensity chiefly to that which most nearly concerns themselves, and must own the same if they confess the truth, so I frankly acknowledge that my first desire to look into the abstruse secrets of antiquity, was principally founded on the desire I had of setting the storie of this branch of which I myself am a son in a true light, being a debt I think I indispensibly owe to posterity, which without arrogance or vanity I presume to say, there is not any of the present generation so well instructed to pay.⁷⁰

Another mission statement to centre upon genealogy, although according it a role ostensibly counter to that avowed by Fraser, is that of Lachlann Macintosh of Kinrara, at the outset of his *Macintosh History*: 'For I have not set this task to myself by any means in order to parade the antiquity of the Mackintosh family, or of the honourable lineage from which it has sprung ... [but] that I may make clear to all Mackintoshes and Chattans, ignorant of their origin, the true knowledge of their descent'.⁷¹ Even snippets such as these demonstrate a connection between genealogy and motive, and complexities in the conception of the role of the former, to which we shall return.

Besides content, genealogy also dictates structure. We see this in the pan-Gaelic grand design of the first part of the history in the *Red Book of Clanranald*, which begins with the coming of the Gaels to Ireland in the person of the sons of Míl, c. 1700 BC, and thereafter systematically narrows its focus from the stock which gave rise to Somerled or Somhairle (d. 1164) in Scotland, via the most important division of Somhairle's descendants, Clann Domhnaill, to the branch of the latter, Clann Raghnaill (the Clanranald), which employed those responsible for writing this history. In like manner, the *Sleat History* moves from Somhairle to Clann Domhnaill to the branch of the latter of most concern to the writer, namely Clann Uisdein (the MacDonalds of Sleat). The so-called *Invereshie Book Genealogy* has been dubbed 'virtually a manual on the anatomy of Clan MacPherson', devoting a section apiece to the descendants of the three brothers cited in its title, and within each section dealing first with the ruling lineage, and next with the various branches in the order of their coming into being.⁷² The author of the *MacRae History* takes another approach: 'And here I am to begin the method I mean to follow, in the rest of this Genealogy, which is to treat of all the younger branches of the family first, and then of the eldest, as the root of another generation.'⁷³

Classical Gaelic genealogists used the term *craobhsgaoileadh* 'tree-branching', to describe the depiction of a kindred through the methodical reconstruction of its descent lines, and this is an apt enough visual metaphor

for the genealogical histories. To employ another, genealogy provides the skeleton upon which the histories are hung, and the vertebrae, joints and sinews by which they are articulated; in some cases they consist of little more than the skeleton itself. There are implications to be drawn as to how our historians conceive of history and approach its writing. The stages in a pedigree become the stepping stones by which the past is entered, and from which it is surveyed. By the same token, the kin imperative means that the dead remain embodied in the living; that the past is foreshortened, and made present. Hence the instinctive feeling for kin-based continuity which pervades the *mentalité* of our authors, and their texts. The *Sleat History* concludes its explanation as to how the twelfth century Maurice MacNeill earned the sobriquet *Mac an t-saoir*, 'From that time the posterity of Maurice are called MacIntyres (or Wright's sons) to this day'; treating of the later fourteenth century, it describes how Domhnall, son of Lachlann MacLean, 'got himself possessed of Ardgour, which his posterity enjoy to this day'; in connection with the Battle of Inverlochy in 1431 it mentions Alasdair Carach who 'held the lands of Lochabber, east of Lochy, and whose posterity are yet there'.⁷⁴ Of Gill-Adhamhnain, grandfather of Somhairle (d. 1164), the *Red Book of Clanranald* says, 'it was Gill-Adhamhnain who erected the monastery of Screen in Tireragh in County Sligo in the province of Connachht; and his name is commemorated there'.⁷⁵ Writing in the early eighteenth century of an offshoot of the Campbells of Craignish called Sliochd Thearlaich Dhuibh, who settled at Ardeonaig on south Loch Tay side, and whose origins he puts in the thirteenth century, Alasdair Campbell comments: 'A black and bloody head strong race they were, I have seen some of them, and are yet to be seen in that countrey ... the last famous chieftain ... before he dyed ... had time to send ... his beloved gun, as his last legacie to the house of Craiginsh ... which gun I saw, and had often in my hands ...'.⁷⁶

I come now to consider sources, the use of a range of which I have made fundamental to my definition of the genre of genealogical history. In fact, the range and number of sources drawn upon is on occasion impressive, and there is also some evidence of sophistication with regard to awareness of their comparative value. Both Alasdair Campbell and Seumas Fraser include discussion of sources among their prefatory material, the latter's summation being as follows: 'For me to give in the particulars whence I have derived my information, knowing full well *quantus author tanta fides*, these may be referred to four heads. 1. Manuscripts and charters in our possession. 2. Church records and Records in publick offices. 3. Printed history. 4. Instructions received from the Bards, and nearest neighbours and allies'.⁷⁷

Fraser's analysis is reasonably representative of the genre as a whole, but I would extend it to six source types. The first, corresponding to Fraser's third, consists of printed works – historical, literary, philosophical or religious in substance, often synthetic in approach, and emanating from Lowland

Scotland, England, continental Europe or the ancient world. Staples are the sixteenth-century Scottish historians Hector Boece (c. 1470–1536) and George Buchanan (1506–82),⁷⁸ and the Bible, but it is clear that were a list of all such works to be compiled, it would be extensive. The topic clearly demands investigation in its own right.⁷⁹ For now I simply note that these works are used by our authors as means of contextualization, and this implies an intent to integrate their histories with Scottish and British history. A significant exception, at least as far as its pre-seventeenth-century content is concerned, is the *Red Book of Clanranald*, whose template is primarily pan-Gaelic.

Contextualisation of a more localized variety stems from the use our authors make of each other. At least as far as the pronounced surge of activity in the later seventeenth century is concerned, we appear to be dealing with a literary scene whose networks, friendships and rivalries engendered a hothouse, slightly incestuous atmosphere within which genealogical histories were bred almost as a self-perpetuating craze. Alexander Colville's lost 'Genealogy of the Campbells' formed the ground for *Ane Accompt of the Genealogie of the Campbells*; *Ane Accompt* was a source for both the *Craignish History* (which had independent access to Colville) and the *Auchinbreck History*.⁸⁰ Iain MacRae and Seumas Fraser, each the author of two histories, were the ministers of neighbouring parishes – Kirkhill and Dingwall – and close personal friends; Fraser dedicated his history of the Bissets and Frasers of Lovat 'to the Reverend his beloved Brother Master John MacRay parson of Dingwall'.⁸¹ MacRae, or one of those who added to his *MacRae History*, had access to the MacKenzie history by Dr Seòras MacKenzie: Dr Seòras claims to have had six earlier MacKenzie histories available to him.⁸² There was also a MacKenzie–Macintosh connection: Lachlann Macintosh of Kinrara and Murchadh MacKenzie of Ardrross, both authors of Macintosh histories, each possessed copies of the *Applecross MS*, by Iain MacKenzie of Applecross.⁸³

Thirdly, there is widespread use of published and unpublished documentary record. Unpublished material, usually deriving from the archive of the kindred to which the author is affiliated, is on occasion inserted more or less verbatim into the text.⁸⁴ The author of the *Sleat History* clearly had access to the charter chest of the MacDonalds of Sleat,⁸⁵ while Alasdair Campbell informs us: 'after my return to Scotland from studying the Laws abroad in the year 1706, the illustrious hero John present Duke of Argyll ordered me to sett in order and review his archives and charters, and the year following 1707, George Campbell of Craignish my brother now deceast put the same task in my hand as to his papers'.⁸⁶

Some of the histories claim to rely on documentary sources no longer extant. The Matheson history written in 1838 made use of family papers of seventeenth-century provenance apparently now lost.⁸⁷ Seumas Fraser had access to records, including an annalistic compilation, maintained at the Valliscaulian Priory of Beaulieu,⁸⁸ and another chronicle, *Scriptum Bunchriviae*,

'bearing the exact date of the death of all our lords and gentlemen for 200 yeares, for by tradition among us there was a cell at Bunchrive [Bunchrew, near the church of Fernua, near Inverness] of heremits ... which book is now miscarried; the old Cumings at Inverness had it'.⁸⁹ Their preservation of such material clearly adds potential value to the histories concerned, but we need look no further than the alleged forging proclivities of Sir Seòras MacKenzie to be reminded that some records may be lost because they never existed in the first place.⁹⁰

Fourthly, some of our authors draw upon those earlier manuscript works which I have suggested have affinities with the genealogical histories proper. Of the 'distantly related' category of precursor, *The Ewill Trowbles of the Lewes* is used by Iain MacKenzie of Applecross,⁹¹ and Sir Robert Gordon's history was known to Seumas Fraser.⁹² Of the 'closely related' category, the *Red Book of Clanranald* relies heavily upon a presumably earlier text for its pre-Civil Wars content, while both earlier MacKenzie histories are mentioned by Rev. Iain MacRae in the *Ardintoul MS*.⁹³ Lachlann Macintosh made use of 'three old manuscripts', by which 'the antiquity of the [Macintosh] family and their pedigree is testified'. That of Fearchar Macintosh, supposedly to be identified with the chief who was incarcerated in the castles of Edinburgh and Dunbar from 1495 to 1513, covered events down to c. 1496. That of 'a parson of Croy, called sir Andrew MacPhail', came down to c. 1550, and that of 'George Monro of Davachgartie [Davochartie], who sometime dwelt in Connadge [Connage]', dealt more narrowly with four chiefships spanning c. 1496–c. 1550. Lachlann Macintosh goes out of his way to demonstrate that these works 'ought not to be look'd upon as fabulous and untrue', citing instances where their accuracy surpasses that of the late medieval Scottish historians John Mair (c. 1467–1550) and Hector Boece.⁹⁴ Fearchar's narrative was also available to Murchadh MacKenzie of Ardrross, author of another of the Macintosh genealogical histories, the *Ardrross MS*.⁹⁵

Fifthly, and of particular interest from the perspective of this book, a number of our historians indicate their reliance upon oral sources. Sometimes this is a straightforward tapping of an individual for information concerning a specific episode occurring up to a century before,⁹⁶ but other informants provide a more profound and pervasive input. The brief, but consistent, general descriptions applied to them – 'several sensible old men of the last generation'; 'the most intelligent and best informed men yet alive'; 'the oldest and wisest, not only of my own, but of all our neighbours' families' – suggest that we are dealing with individuals whose reputation as oral historians derived from age and acumen.⁹⁷ Further deductions can be made from the more detailed information fortunately provided by two of our authors. In another of his many works, Sir Aeneas MacPherson of Invereshie, born c. 1644,⁹⁸ and writer of the *Invereshie Book Genealogy*, lists

a few of those I hade at divers times the honour to discourse with of the rise and origine of most of the Highland families, as for instance, John Grant of Ballindalloch ... John Grant of Gartinmore, Grigor Grant of Achachiernach, and Sweine Grant of Gartinbeg, amongst the Grants. William McIntoshe of Kyllachie, Hector McIntosh of Connadge, and John McIntosh of Forter ... amongst the McIntoshes. Alexander Fraser, alias McKutcher, among the Frasers, and John McDonald (alias Lame) among the McDonalds, two of the greatest poets and genealogues in the Highlands. Mcpherson of Brecochie, Mcpherson of Phoyness, Thomas Mcpherson of Eterish, and James Mcpherson, grand-uncle to the deceast John Mcpherson of Invereshie, amongst the Mcphersons. John Robertson of Inverchroskie (alias the barron Reid), John Robertson of Faules ... Robertson of Fouet, amongst the Robertsons. Donald Shaw of Dalnafert, John Shaw of Geuslich, and Robert Shaw the Drover, amongst the Shaws. Robert Farquharson of Invercauld and Wardes, William Farquharson of Inverey, and James Farquharson of Camdell, amongst the Farquharsons.⁹⁹

Insofar as individuals among these twenty-two informants have been identified, they are lay-aristocrats, members of the ruling lineages, or of the ruling families of cadet branches, of prominent kindreds in the eastern Highlands; and seem to belong to the first or second generations above Aeneas MacPherson, with dates of birth taking us back at least as far as the last quarter of the sixteenth century.¹⁰⁰

Alasdair Campbell used five principal oral informants for his history of the Campbells of Craignish. Four of these were his own kin, their common ancestor being Alasdair's great-grandfather Ragnall Ruadh, *Am Baran Ruadh* of Barrichbeyan, said to have been born in 1555 and died in 1639. It was in Ragnall Ruadh's time, apparently, that his lineage succeeded to the chiefship of the Campbells of Craignish, the last three representatives of the previous ruling lineage all having died between 1537 and 1546.¹⁰¹ As Alasdair Campbell points out, Ragnall Ruadh's father, Iain, 'who lived to a great age, even untill the said Ronald [Ragnall] was fourty years old, did overtake alive, and having lived within a mile of them after he came to mans age and estate might have conversed as certainly he did with the three last McDugalls of Craiginsh ...'.¹⁰² Alasdair Campbell's fifth informant was a great-great-grandson of the last of this trio.

The typical oral informant of Alasdair Campbell and Aeneas MacPherson is thus revealed as a layman of noble status, whose knowledge of the history of a particular aristocratic lineage stemmed in part from his belonging to it. He is clearly distinct from the *seanchaidh* in its original and technical sense of a historian-cum-genealogist within the professional learned orders,¹⁰³ although his knowledge could well have benefited from the opportunities for contact with such historians which his status would have afforded him, and he – along with the authors of the genealogical histories – might be considered as their successor.¹⁰⁴ He is also distinct from the *seanchaidh* in

its more modern sense of demotic storyteller, although he might be considered the forerunner, and perhaps in some cases was even the actual blood ancestor, of such storytellers.

Aeneas MacPherson and, particularly, Alasdair Campbell, are at pains to emphasize the reliability of these informants, and the reasons for it. MacPherson refers to his twenty-two informants as ‘all of them men of sense and reputation, and most of them so very old that if they were not acquainted with Finlay More [Fionnlagh Mór, head of the Farquharsons, and said to have died at the battle of Pinkie in 1547¹⁰⁵] himself, they were at least personally known to all his children, from whose account (which could not so properly be called tradition as a certain knowledge) ...’.¹⁰⁶ There may be some chronological exaggeration here but, as already noted, some of his informants gave MacPherson access to the oral memory as it existed c. 1600. The information supplied by Alasdair Campbell about the origins of his own informants enables him to demonstrate that he can tap into that memory even further back, in the early sixteenth century, and the era of the previous ruling lineage of the Campbells of Craignish, which had held that position from the early fifteenth century. So it is that his oral evidence can meet the test of the documentary record also available to him, leaving him bullish about the prospects for his history of his use of the two combined:

Parchments are the best genealogists; yet I must say I have been often surprised to find how exactly, what these men abovementioned delivered agreed to a trifle with the records herein cited, and proves what I so justly asserted in the beginning of this introduction that no people have their history so exactly kept by tradition as the Highlanders ... it can be no surprize that as certain an account of their transactions and proceedings might be transmitted by tradition as by wryteing. But I have the last to fortify and support the first, which may make this account next to a demonstration.¹⁰⁷

My sixth source type, material derived from the classical tradition of the learned orders, is also of special relevance, given its reliance upon both the written and the spoken word. Furthermore, it can be argued that access to this tradition, and the extent of dependence upon it, are benchmarks which we can use to define divisions and subdivisions within the overall genre of genealogical history.¹⁰⁸ From a classical perspective, the purest specimen is of course the history in the *Red Book of Clanranald*, the only example produced entirely under the aegis of the learned orders, and hence written in Classical Gaelic. For the MacMhuirich authors, purity extended naturally to their sources. The earlier part of the history, covering events prior to the Wars of the Three Kingdoms in the mid-seventeenth century,¹⁰⁹ draws upon annalistic compilations (relating to the lordship of the Isles and Clann Raghnaill, for the compilation of the latter of which

at least the MacMhuirichs were presumably responsible¹¹⁰), classical poetry, genealogy, and material drawn from the synthetic history of the Gaels. There is no evidence of the use of formal documentary record, and the only trace of an external non-classical source is a measured and apostrophic dismissal of Buchanan.¹¹¹

Possible classical authorship for the *Sleat History* has recently been mooted by John Bannerman, who has suggested that the 'Hugh MacDonald' sometimes associated with the text may have been one and the same as Aodh Beaton, a member of the North Uist branch of a professional kindred primarily associated with the practice of medicine.¹¹² It certainly looks as if the author had access to the classical tradition, for his views on the origins of the Beatons are identical with those given learned expression by this North Uist lineage,¹¹³ while one of his sources is clearly an indigenous chronicle, albeit one whose chronology may mark it out as distinct from that of the MacMhuirichs.¹¹⁴ Nevertheless, these two texts are very different animals. In its broad range of sources, haphazard organization, racy polemicism and unabashed partisanship, the *Sleat History* is much closer to, for example, the *Craignish History*. This points to the authorship of a committed amateur rather than a professional, and Captain Uisdean MacDonald of Paiblesgarry in North Uist, who has also been advanced as a candidate, and who belonged to the ruling lineage of the MacDonalds of Sleat and North Uist (*Clann Uisdein*) whose cause this text so conspicuously champions, surely fits the mould.¹¹⁵

The two major Campbell histories, *Ane Accompt of the Genealogie of the Campbells*, and *The Genealogical and Historicall Account of the Family of Craignish*, make explicit their reliance upon a genealogical core provided by the MacEwen professional lineage. They claim to have had access to this both in its original form, and via Alexander Colville, who 'revised these Genealogies as the McEunes [MacEwens] left them betwixt the years 1650 and 1660 and his Second Edition of them is it that goes by the name of Colvin's Genealogy of the Campbells'.¹¹⁶ *Ane Accompt* was written between 1670 and 1676 by Raibeart Duncanson, minister of Campbeltown, 'assisted by several other good shenachies', and the ninth earl of Argyll.¹¹⁷ If *seanchaidh* here bears its original technical meaning of professional historian,¹¹⁸ then those involved cannot have been members of the by now defunct MacEwen lineage; likely candidates would include members of the MacLachlan learned kindred serving in the ministry in Argyll.¹¹⁹

The most cryptic allusion to the likely use of classical material is Seumas Fraser's citation of 'Instructions received from the Bards' as one of his source categories.¹²⁰ These 'bards' could be from his own locale in the eastern Highlands. But another possibility stems from his friendship with Iain MacRae. In his *MacRae History*, the latter says of the origins of that kindred:

A more particular account might be had from such as conversed with and have known those historians and genealogists, such as Fergus MacRourie, Mildonich MacLean, etc., who were good scholars and acquainted with the manuscripts and records of Ireland, kept for giving an account of the tribes who came from Ireland to Scotland and became heads of families and chiefs of clans ...¹²¹

'Mildonich MacLean' we can identify as Maol-Domhnaich Ó Muirgheasáin,¹²² who died c. 1662 as the head of the prominent lineage of poets and historians which served the MacLeans of Duart and the MacLeods of Dunvegan.¹²³ Iain MacRae also cites him as a source in his MacKenzie history, the *Ardintoul MS*.¹²⁴ 'Fergus MacRourie' is as yet unidentified.¹²⁵ It would appear that Iain MacRae did not have access to the knowledge of these men first-hand, but rather via intermediaries such as 'Sir Allan MacLean of Doward [Duart], who was curious and taught in these things, being at Dingwall in the year 1663 ...'.¹²⁶ MacRae's friend Seumas Fraser could also have profited thereby, and specific evidence to this effect may lie in his knowledge that in his final illness in 1558, Alasdair Fraser of Lovat was attended by Seumas Beaton, of the Beatons of Dervaig.¹²⁷

Whatever use others may have made of their learning, we would expect the Ó Muirgheasáins, perhaps the Beatons, and the lineage (if lineage it is, and distinct from the two just mentioned) represented by 'Fergus MacRourie' and 'Fergus Mackenzie', to be the source of classical material in those genealogical histories which treat of their own patrons. They are doubtless the subject of the following comment in the *MacLean History*:

This family had their shenachies and bards as every family of distinction in the Highlands had. Yet they were so ungratefull to their benefactors or so ignorant as to have left nothing upon record worth noticing preceeding the family's settlement in the island of Mull, or, if they did committ any thing of this kind to writ, it has been lost by the injuries of the times. All that remains is a bare catalogue of names from Gilleann upwards to Inghisteurteamher ... This catalogue was in the custody of Mr John Beaton the last of the shenachies a man pretty well skilled in Irish antiquities. There was also another catalogue agreeing with this exactly in an old genealogical manuscript preserved for a long time in the Laird of Coll's family which is now lost.¹²⁸

Unsympathetic though he was, the author drew upon these genealogies, along with another classical source in the form of a eulogy of the MacLeans by a MacMhuirich.¹²⁹ Finally, the *Bannatyne MS*, dealing with the MacLeods of Dunvegan and Harris, even though apparently written down as late as c. 1830, nevertheless 'contains material said to be derived from the classical tradition'.¹³⁰

We can now offer a summative but provisional model of the written and oral pathways by which classical material came into the genealogical histories. Indebtedness to specific written classical sources is manifest in the

Red Book of Clanranald, the *Sleat History*, Campbell histories and the *MacLean History*; but we should also allow for the possibility that some chains of oral transmission had their origins in written classical exemplars. Identification of oral pathways *per se* is complicated considerably by the probability, broached at the outset, of elements of classical knowledge having undergone widespread social dissemination, presumably by primarily oral means, by the time the genealogical histories came to be written. Hence it may be useful to distinguish between ‘historical’ and ‘immediate’ oral routes. The former would consist of long-standing transmission within learned lineages such as the MacMhuirichs (which Niall MacMhuirich could have drawn upon alongside written sources in the *Red Book of Clanranald*);¹³¹ and classical permeation of vernacular historical traditions, both elite and popular. The latter would refer to specific points of oral interchange in the era of the making of the histories, whether direct – Uisdean MacDonald and the North Uist Beaton – or indirect, via aristocratic intermediaries such as Ailean MacLean of Duart.

The difficulties inherent in seeking to separate classical ‘high’ vernacular from ‘low’ vernacular elements within the genealogical histories are exemplified if we turn finally to a type of material whose influence and presence is highly visible within them. This is fictional or quasi-fictional narrative; put most simply, story. Serious study of this material would be a considerable undertaking in its own right, and cannot be attempted here.¹³² In terms of potential range, it spans both the learned and vernacular, and written and oral, worlds of late medieval Gaeldom, and embraces overlapping and related categories such as historical legend, supernatural legend (including migratory legend, explaining the origin of a particular local [place] name or feature), international tales, hero tales based on the cycles of early Gaelic literature, and the romantic hero tales created in the medieval and early modern eras in Ireland and Scotland.¹³³ A scholar versed in these fields, and suitably armed with the Aarne–Thompson classification of international tales, and Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, would undoubtedly reap a rich harvest from the genealogical histories, the fruits of which could profitably be compared to the corpus of written Gaelic medieval and early modern tales, to the late medieval Irish historical tracts already mentioned,¹³⁴ and to Gaelic oral tradition recorded in the modern era.¹³⁵

Research of this order would certainly benefit folklore studies, but without necessarily pinpointing precisely for us how such material came into the genealogical histories. Was its origin classical or vernacular, or both? If there was a vernacular contribution, did it come from social strata below the aristocratic? These are two questions worth asking, even if answering them all too rapidly becomes an exercise in trapping quicksilver. With regard to the first, non-classical informants might seem the most likely avenue, and apparently in favour of this is the fact that fictional narrative plays a negligible

role in the history in the *Red Book of Clanranald*.¹³⁶ But to conclude that the more classically oriented a history, the weaker the influence of fictional narrative, and that the latter thus goes hand in hand with vernacular input, would be premature.¹³⁷ The responsibilities of professional historians were not confined to the recording of the 'hard' history of their patrons' lineages in genealogy, annal or prose, but also included the preservation, creation and telling of tales, for the purposes of courtly entertainment. To judge by the intermingling of such material within classical manuscripts, and indeed within classical poetry, no rigid line of demarcation seems to have been observed between the two functions, or, presumably, the personnel who fulfilled them.¹³⁸ Heroic narratives were a resource to be quarried in order to provide role models for the lineage, and cast a virtuous light upon its deeds. In any case, given the likely wider dissemination of such narratives, it becomes very difficult to seek to assign instances of them in the histories to either a 'vernacular' or 'classical' origin. As hinted at in the *MacRae History*, the informants known to have been tapped by the authors of the genealogical histories were probably as well versed in the classical tradition, including its fictional narrative component, as they were in the inherited histories of their own noble lineages.¹³⁹

With regard to the second question, does the role of these same informants make it unnecessary to posit a distinct, non-aristocratic source of vernacular input? Yet we have already noted the influence of what we dubbed the 'collective memory' on the Gaelic linguistic dimension of these texts.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, it is difficult to conceive that historical and quasi-historical tales concerning the ruling lineages were *not* circulating at lower social levels in medieval and late medieval times; these could be regarded as the precursors of what have been called the 'historical legends' relating to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which constitute a prominent strand in modern Scottish Gaelic oral tradition as collected from the eighteenth century onwards.¹⁴¹ In fact, the histories provide clear pointers both to the circulation of such tales, and their own use of them. Iain MacRae relates two 'vulgar tradition[s]', concerning early MacRae history, both of which he is at pains to reject.¹⁴² In treating of Gill-Adhamhnain, grandfather of Somhairle, in the *Red Book of Clanranald*, Niall MacMhuirich interjects: 'if it were to my purpose I could recall when I was in that territory [Co. Sligo]; and the tradition of the local people is kept alive, especially amongst the descendants of Gill-Adhamhnain, in those parts'.¹⁴³ Seventeenth-century Sligo oral tradition may thus explain the folktale-influenced treatment of Gille-Brighde and Somhairle, son and grandson of Gill-Adhamhnain, in the *Red Book of Clanranald*.¹⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the authors of the histories may have accessed 'popular' material of this order not only first-hand, but also via the mediating role of their aristocratic oral informants. Thus, the latter could have acted as vital

points of contact and exchange, not only between the classical and the vernacular, and literate and oral, worlds, but also between 'high' and 'low' vernacular tradition. They were well placed to receive, say, the fictional narrative component of the classical tradition, through the written or spoken word; to transmit this orally, along with the histories of their own lineages, to lower vernacular levels; and either to recycle this material once it had been the subject of popular treatment or to pick up original material of this type which was circulating independently, in its own right, at the popular level. In terms of our conception of how the genealogical histories were made, such an hypothesis would mean that the credit for assimilating the different elements of native tradition, and then synthesizing this with printed and documentary sources, need not automatically lie with the authors. Oral informants could have played a dynamic role in the first stage of this process, with some 'authors' cast as the passive reporters or 'collectors' of the indigenous tradition of late medieval Gaelic Scotland.¹⁴⁵

CAUSATION: COMMON FACTORS

We come now to the motives for writing these histories. While acknowledging that these must have varied over the two centuries of the genre's existence, the primary issue for us is what gave it birth in the second half of the seventeenth century, given that this also proved to be the most active phase in its life-cycle.

Our perspective must be European. The valuable parallel researches of David Allan, focusing mainly on Lowland Scotland, reveal that there, as in England, France and the Dutch Republic, there was a seventeenth-century craze for lineage-centred genealogical history. In France, for example, two printed and two manuscript works of this kind were produced in the 1550s: the respective figures for the 1630s are 27 and 14. A pan-European explanation for this surge in activity would see such texts as defence mechanisms by which the traditional aristocracy sought to stave off the dangers rising up around it. The first of these was biological. Significantly accelerating extinction rates have been detected among, for example, England's noble families in the seventeenth century. In these circumstances, detailed genealogical tracts could function as quasi-legal texts, as 'entails writ large', by which succession could be ensured even if the main line failed. Allied to this, if a family's right to a particular title or estate had been controversially acquired, leaving open the possibility of a legal challenge at a later date, the genealogical tract could be used to legitimize retrospectively the act of acquisition. A second danger was economic pressure, leading to endemic debt or bankruptcy. In these circumstances, the role of the genealogical tract

would be consolatory, providing ‘an honourable fig-leaf in times of advancing financial nakedness’.¹⁴⁶

Lack of research means that we cannot say whether the biological imperative applied to the Lowland Scottish scenario. But economic pressure certainly did, and to this we can add other, peculiarly local, factors. One was the changing nature of the Lowland Scottish elite, because of the ‘rise of the middling sort’ and the significant growth of the Scottish peerage in the first half of the seventeenth century.¹⁴⁷ Genealogy was a way for the old aristocracy to assert that it was still there, the new aristocracy to assert that it had arrived. After the Union of the Crowns in 1603, monarchical absenteeism and the loss of the Scottish court doubtless magnified these internal insecurities and rivalries, as the Scottish elite was pitched into competition for places and preference with the English nobility. The genealogical tract, like architecture and horticulture, may have become a means of competitive display, of impressing an English audience, of cutting a dash on a British stage.¹⁴⁸ Finally, Michael Lynch has pointed to these texts as one manifestation of a ‘cult of honour’ in seventeenth-century Scotland. This was inspired partly by the scramble for status among nobles old and new, and partly by a ‘new patriotism’ which, after 1660, found expression in the desire of nobility and the middling sort to forget their Covenanting pasts, and focus their loyalty anew on the crown.¹⁴⁹

Several of these trends are visible in the contemporary Scottish *Gàidhealtachd*, and form likely reasons for the birth of the genealogical history genre there. Most obviously, a clutch of factors – legislation tying punitive financial sanctions to the heads of clans which failed to keep the peace, requiring annual appearances by chiefs before the Privy Council, and the education of the children of the Hebridean elite in the Lowlands; the concomitant rise of absenteeism in the south, and of conspicuous consumption on the southern model; and the fiscal demands and physical destruction which flowed from military action during the Covenanting, Cromwellian and Restoration eras – combined to induce a state of widespread and chronic indebtedness among the upper echelons of many kindreds.¹⁵⁰ Again, in Gaelic Scotland a pre-existing means of expressing a ‘new patriotism’ centred on the crown was *rioghalachd*, the literary topos rehearsing loyalty to the true line of the kings of Scots, and which operated irrespective of the vicissitudes of current political circumstance.¹⁵¹ *Rioghalachd*, primarily associated with poetry, saturates the genealogical histories. For Covenanting kindreds like the Campbells and the Frasers; for the MacKenzies, whose Civil War record was one of vacillation, and for the Macintoshes, who had remained neutral,¹⁵² the need to re-emphasize loyalty to the crown after 1660 was especially acute, and may explain both the prominence of the theme within the texts produced on their behalf between the Restoration and 1680, and the distortion of earlier events to suit.¹⁵³ Yet the fact that a text like the *Sleat History*, emanating from a

Royalist kindred, is nevertheless absolutely fixated upon demonstrating historical MacDonald loyalty to the Scottish crown, suggests that a stimulus other than the immediate political past, and to be discussed shortly, was also at work.

As with Lowland Scotland, lack of research means we cannot advance accelerating extinction rates as a spur to the writing of the genealogical histories. Even so, there is no doubting their quasi-legal status and function; and this we can link to the prominence of lawyers among our authors, which is in turn symptomatic of the extent to which members of the Highland aristocracy embraced the law as a profession in the seventeenth century.¹⁵⁴ The key here is the significantly more powerful grip which Scots law came to exert over the Highlands during that century, squeezing out the distinctive, indigenous legal and customary practices with which it had previously co-existed.¹⁵⁵ For us, the most important shifts concerned the related issues of land-tenure and marriage practice. Relevant expertise was provided by Edinburgh-based lawyers, often of indigenous origin, who also acted as the agents of the Gaelic elite in its dealings with the government.¹⁵⁶ Within this increasingly pervasive legal climate, engendered in part by state *diktat*, the elite found itself under pressure, first articulated by Parliament in 1597, to demonstrate acceptable title to its lands.¹⁵⁷ If such title did not exist,¹⁵⁸ there was a role for the genealogical histories as ‘surrogate charters’. More than this, and whether independent evidence of title existed or not, history could conveniently be rewritten within these texts in order to make them compatible with the principles of Scots law.

Thus, nothing said in the genealogical histories concerning the occupation of, and succession to, land, can be taken at face value.¹⁵⁹ They commonly assert that the right of a ruling lineage to its territories is based upon continuous possession from time immemorial, in one direct and unbroken descent in the male line, governed by primogeniture. According to Seumas Fraser in the Preface to his Fraser history, ‘we have a *vitum dominium*, a right conveyed to us by our ancesters, for 400 yeares preceeding anno 1650 bypast, and, *jure prisco*, now ancient posesors here in the North of Scotland, and tearmed Frasers of Lovat, by an uninterrupted succesion from father to sone, never falling to a daughter or collaterall line dureing the aforesaid space ...’.¹⁶⁰ MacKenzie tracts similarly claim that the clan was rooted in Kintail virtually from birth, whereas William Matheson has shown that it was probably displaced between the mid-fourteenth and later fifteenth centuries.¹⁶¹

The emphasis upon primogeniture must derive from the fact that, as John Bannerman has demonstrated, the system of tanistry, which allowed for succession by collateral males, survived in the west Highlands among territorial kindreds until at least the mid-sixteenth century.¹⁶² Even if we assume that it had ceased to be operative elsewhere in the *Gàidhealtachd* by this

point, it was presumably once in more general or universal use. Bannerman noted the failure of the genealogical historians to acknowledge occurrences of tanistry for what they were, and ascribed this to later generations' ignorance of it.¹⁶³ This may be true for some histories, particularly those written towards the end of the lifetime of the genre. But given that tanistry definitely survived into the seventeenth century among professional kindreds,¹⁶⁴ it could equally be that, in some of our earlier texts at least, genealogical historians were responding to their own age by seeking to elide tanistry from the record, in order to elevate primogeniture as the historical norm.¹⁶⁵ Whether acting knowingly or not, they could resort to various stratagems to do so.¹⁶⁶ They could simply overlook cases of collateral succession, or incorporate them into the direct line, whose length and antiquity would thereby conveniently be extended.¹⁶⁷ Between the earlier fifteenth and the mid-sixteenth century it is clear that tanistry was active in determining the succession to the chiefship of the MacLeods of Dunvegan.¹⁶⁸ The *Bannatyne MS* presents the period as an aberration, commencing with the usurpation of the chiefship by an ambitious uncle, and ending with the restoration of the 'rightful' lineage – of which the author happened to be a descendant – by general acclamation following two clan assemblies. Particularly interesting is the *Sleat History's* claim that Iain MacLain of Ardnamurchan, who succeeded his uncle, cheated his uncle's sons out of their patrimony. What was probably an unexceptional case of tanistry becomes another cudgel with which to beat an individual whom the Sleat historian is concerned to portray in the worst light possible.¹⁶⁹ Finally, let us note that the genealogical histories' desire to turn primogeniture into a Holy Grail assumed forms other than the expunging of tanistry. Primogeniture could act as a facade concealing disputes over the chiefship among different lineages within a kindred; and as a reason for splicing together the potentially very different traditions of the origin of a kindred without seeking to reconcile them. *Ane Accompt of the Genealogie of the Campbells* 'valiantly attempt[s] to incorporate the British, the Gaelic and the Norman tradition of ancestry into one direct male line descent',¹⁷⁰ significantly lengthening the Campbell pedigree in the process.

CAUSATION: LOCAL FACTORS

The topos of *rioghalachd*, and the issue of succession, are indications that, as we would expect, Scottish Gaelic participation in what was a European phenomenon assumed its own distinctive form and flavour. This extends to causation *per se*. The fact that the genealogical histories come on stream later than genealogical activity elsewhere might be explained in terms of simple time-lag, yet the relatively clear-cut manner in which they do so in the mid-seventeenth century, and notably after c. 1660, suggests that a specific

trigger is at work. I believe this to have been not so much the Restoration, as the demise of the pursuit of history and genealogy by the learned professional classes. In a development which paralleled the emergence of vernacular from the shadow of classical verse, the new historiography rose from the rubble of the learned tradition, as another manifestation of the tectonic shift from medievalism to modernism taking place in the Scottish *Gàidhealtachd* in the seventeenth century.

The learned orders in Scotland took a long time to die, between c. 1600 and c. 1750, and various milestones could be pointed out along the way.¹⁷¹ But there is clear evidence linking the extinction of specific learned lineages with the birth of the genealogical history genre in the central decades of the seventeenth century.¹⁷² The interface is at its clearest with the hereditary poets and historians to the Campbells, the MacEwens, who were squeezed into oblivion between 1627 and 1656.¹⁷³ As we have seen, the same time frame saw the production of what we have referred to as the Campbell proto-genealogical histories. The author of the earliest of these, the *Information* of 1634, clearly had access to manuscripts maintained by the MacEwens, but lacked the linguistic expertise to exploit them.¹⁷⁴ If the author were Alexander Colville, then by the 1650s he had found a means of circumventing this difficulty, for we have already noted the indebtedness of 'Colvin's Genealogy of the Campbells' to the MacEwens' written legacy.¹⁷⁵ The title of *Ollamh Muileach*, held by both the supreme poet and the supreme physician to the head of the MacLeans of Duart, fell into disuse on the death of Maol-Dòmhnach Ó Muirgheasáin c. 1662; as we have seen, it was in 1663 that Iain MacRae, author of two histories, tapped into Ó Muirgheasáin's knowledge as relayed to him by Sir Ailean MacLean of Duart.¹⁷⁶ Iain Beaton, last incumbent of the office of principal physician, died in 1657.¹⁷⁷ It was between 1660 and 1670 that Gille-Críost Beaton set down a group of Beaton pedigrees, partly in order to assert the orthodox classical view of the origin of his kindred.¹⁷⁸ Here, as with the history in the *Red Book of Clanranald*,¹⁷⁹ there is a real sense of representatives of the learned orders setting down their knowledge as a legacy, with deliberation, finality, and, perhaps, an almost millenarian urgency.¹⁸⁰

There was, and perhaps still is, a tendency to see the withering of the classical tradition as inseparable from the death of a Gaelic polity, and to mourn it accordingly.¹⁸¹ But in terms of cultural organization and expression, and notwithstanding the obvious indebtedness of vernacular to classical forms, the waning of the hegemony of the learned orders possessed a 'democratising', liberating and energising dimension. This was true for historiography as for poetry, and most obviously manifest in the sheer level of activity in these genres in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.¹⁸² Moreover, the accumulated knowledge of the classical tradition was now ripe for reinterpretation and manipulation according to new criteria

and desires. In the case of the Beaton pedigrees, the *Red Book of Clanranald*, and the *Black Book of Clanranald*, classical literati retained control of their legacy long enough to set it down as it stood, and on their own terms. In the case of the collaboration between Iain Beaton, and Edward Lhwyd and his 'circle', we see the interface of the classical tradition and the world of post-Renaissance scholarship.¹⁸³ The genealogical histories represent an indigenous 'spin' on the classical tradition, but are innovative in their use of other languages and sources, including vernacular oral historians who now, perhaps for the first time, achieve formal prominence and credibility.

However, innovation was not necessarily synonymous with respect for historical truth. Granted, objective accuracy had hardly been a *sine qua non* for the classical historians, who had developed the manufacture and manipulation of pedigrees in particular into a fine art. Nevertheless, the genealogical histories give centre stage to beliefs which went beyond the boundaries of acceptability as these were understood by practitioners of the classical tradition. Thus, and interestingly, they help to demarcate what these boundaries were.

I give two examples which both relate to kindred origins.¹⁸⁴ Early seventeenth-century evidence already cited suggests that classical literati explicitly rejected a Geraldine descent for the MacKenzies.¹⁸⁵ It follows that this myth was not created by the first earl of Cromartie or any of the other post-1660 MacKenzie genealogical historians, as has hitherto been assumed; but to a man they accept it, and present Colin (Fitz)Gerald, the wholly fictitious Norman-Irish saviour of King Alexander III, as the starting-point of the lineage.¹⁸⁶ We saw that genealogical histories of the Campbells assert that they are Britons (i.e. Welsh, descending from King Arthur) *and* Norman *and* Gaelic (via the Fenian hero, Diarmaid Ó Duibhne). Classical sources, whether poetic or genealogical, and whether the products of a Campbell milieu or not, are virtually unanimous in ignoring the last two theories in favour of the first.¹⁸⁷ Given that some of these sources must emanate from the MacEwens, I see no reason to believe that the 'ancient books of the learned' maintained by them (which have not survived independently) would have departed from the classical orthodoxy. I suggest, then, that it was at a stage during, or subsequent to, the demise of the MacEwens that the 'Norman' and 'Gaelic' strands were grafted on to a MacEwen, 'British', core.¹⁸⁸ Indeed, the accretions can readily be stripped away to reveal that core, which proves to be perfectly consistent with older, classical genealogical tradition.¹⁸⁹ Hence, to speak of a 'MacEwen-Colville' account of Campbell origins runs the risk of eliding the real gap which may exist between these two elements.¹⁹⁰

The waning of the learned orders stemmed from their loss of patronage during the seventeenth century, as the elite of Gaelic Scotland became steadily assimilated into the Scottish and British aristocracy. This latter phenomenon demanded fresh expression and validation, in an appropriate idiom and

language. Thus, it could be argued that the genealogical history genre, a cultural tool already well established in Lowland Scotland and England, was adapted within Gaelic Scotland to fill a cultural vacuum created by the reorientation of the elite, and to meet ideological needs flowing therefrom. We can bolster this argument in two ways. First, there is the intimacy of the bond sometimes evident between these works and the heads of the lineages concerned. The authors were often reasonably close blood relations of the chief.¹⁹¹ In some instances they dedicate their histories to him, broaching the possibility that these were commissioned.¹⁹² Gilleasbuig, ninth earl of Argyll, played an active part in the production of the first major Campbell history.¹⁹³ Secondly, there are the linked questions of language, audience and purpose. The overwhelming choice of English or Scoto-English, rather than Gaelic, as the medium for the histories, makes sense if the target audience embraced points south. To this we must conjoin comments David Allan makes in his analysis of the broader genre of family history concerning 'the enthusiastic multiplication of existing texts ... [and the] circulation of manuscripts, possibly to an interested elite audience'.¹⁹⁴ The Gaelic genealogical histories regularly exist in multiple copies, although further work would be required to show how many of these were of an early date, and how wide a circulation they achieved.¹⁹⁵ Extended circulation would be absolutely consistent with the need to validate membership of a Scottish and British aristocracy through the assertion of 'Norman' or 'British' origins, as Campbell and MacKenzie histories do; or through the assertion of a common origin with a kin-group of southern Scotland, as the *Macintosh History* does.¹⁹⁶

The genealogical histories did not address this wider world in a spirit of unequivocal amity and brotherhood. For some authors, the existence of a potential southern audience meant an opportunity to settle old historiographical scores. This was very much a minority voice, located predictably at that end of the genealogical history spectrum most heavily influenced by the classical tradition. It may be invidious to cite the *Red Book of Clanranald* as a case in point, since Niall MacMhuirich did not forsake the classical language to which he was born and bred, implying a different primary audience, and distinctive motives.¹⁹⁷ Even so, his stated aim in writing the 'Civil Wars' section of this history may suggest the hope that knowledge of it would be carried beyond the Gaelic world: 'what induced me to write even this much was, when I saw that those who treated of the affairs of the time have made no mention at all of the Gael, the men who did all the service'.¹⁹⁸ No such ambiguities attach to the *Sleat History*, which constantly berates Boece, Buchanan, and other 'partial pickers of Scottish chronology and history', for their negative portrayal of the Gaels, particularly the accusation of disloyalty to the crown.¹⁹⁹ Although nowhere else do we find this reactive and corrective reflex so explicitly paraded, it very likely underpinned the emphasis on *rioghalachd* so prevalent across all the genealogical histories.

A final distinctive cause needs discussion, and again its roots lie in the key seventeenth-century theme of assimilation of the indigenous elite. A strain of kin-competitiveness – genealogy as an assertion of the superiority of one lineage *vis-à-vis* others – runs through the genre. There was nothing new about the mechanism within or without the Gaelic world, but now it probably gained in urgency and influence for two reasons. One was the wider Scottish and British stage upon which the elite wished to preen its plumage. The other was the fading of other mechanisms, including military ones, by which superiority had traditionally been asserted, during a century which saw the eclipse of inter-clan warfare and increasing recourse to Scots law as a means of fomenting, pursuing and resolving disputes.²⁰⁰

The best exemplar is again the *Sleat History*, which deals pejoratively with the MacDougalls, MacRuairies (both of whom shared a common origin with the MacDonalds; the MacRuairies are ignored entirely) and the MacLeans; and with other MacDonald branches such as those of Ardnamurchan and Glen Garry, this last because it had the temerity to dispute the right of the Sleat branch to the headship of Clann Domhnaill as a whole come the late-seventeenth century.²⁰¹ The author of the *Craignish History* describes his branch of the Campbells as ‘the oldest of all the Legittimat cadets now extant of that ancient Stock the Knights of Lochow, now Dukes of Argyll’.²⁰² The *MacLean History* deals at length with the rival claims of the branches of Duart and Lochbuie to headship of the clan.²⁰³ Fierce kin-competitiveness, coupled with authorial animosities, fuelled the clutch of histories from the eastern Highlands relating to the Clan Chattan confederation, and to the Farquharsons.²⁰⁴ Such activity bears the distinct odour of something stronger and less connected to reality than mere antiquarianism, and foreshadows the historiographical dead-end which is the popular clan history of modern times.²⁰⁵

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has sought to demonstrate the inappropriateness of models which regard orality and literacy as invariable opposites, and synonymous with ‘popular’ and ‘elite’ respectively, to understanding the culture of late medieval and early modern Gaelic Scotland in general, and the genealogical histories in particular. Consider the web of sources and pathways at whose centre these texts lie. Material from the classical, ‘high’ vernacular and ‘low’ vernacular traditions, which provided the bulk of the indigenous content, could all have reached the histories by a range of oral routes, both ‘historical’ and ‘immediate’. The ‘historical’ interconnectedness of these traditions makes it very difficult to say with which of them some of the material in the histories originated: all three, as we saw, could have contributed to the fictional narrative

component of these texts. On the written side of the equation, the classical tradition was again available to the genealogical histories, either through direct use of manuscripts or through oral chains of transmission which began with manuscripts. To this we can add the use of documentary record, of printed works, and of each other. The resultant amalgam was overwhelmingly given written expression in languages other than Gaelic. At those points in the narrative where oral or written Gaelic sources were drawn upon, the governing language was used either to represent them phonetically (this applies whether the source was in classical or vernacular Gaelic), sometimes with accompanying translation; or to translate or paraphrase them. Gaelic oral narrative is preserved, not merely in written form, but in another language.

The mechanics of composition are revealed most clearly in the *Craignish History*. Alasdair Campbell began with a Gaelic oral infrastructure, assimilated from boyhood onwards: rhymes and proverbs, exemplifying the 'collective memory'; the traditions of a clutch of elite vernacular historians whom he was actively seeking out by the 1680s at least; a classical elegy, heard and barely remembered. Onto this he grafted the fruits of his labours in the Argyll and Craignish charter chests in 1706 and 1707, a sprinkling of printed works, and the written classical tradition of the MacEwens, both first-hand and as mediated by Colville and Duncanson. The whole, written up in English between 1717 and 1722, was in part for Campbell a means of demonstrating the equal legitimacy of his oral and written evidence.

The process of cultural exchange within late medieval and early modern Gaelic Scotland should not be envisaged as a straightforward circle linking all relevant parties. We can readily argue for transmission outwards and downwards from the classical tradition; but we have encountered evidence suggesting that wherever and as long as that tradition remained active and healthy, it resisted penetration by views originating outwith itself which it considered erroneous or unorthodox. The dynamos who powered the cycle that did exist, and who linked it to the classical tradition, were, we have argued, elite vernacular historians. In them the three indigenous historical traditions met; among them were the aristocratic oral informants utilized by authors of the genealogical histories, and most of the authors themselves; and the descriptor *seanchaidh* came to be applied to them individually, in recognition of their risen status, as the professional historians previously so styled died out along with the classical tradition.²⁰⁶

Did the genealogical histories represent a 'new historiography', articulated by the 'new *seanchaidh*'? The logic of our argument insists that they are not automatically entitled to be viewed as the most thoroughgoing commixture thus far of the elite and popular cultures of Gaelic Scotland. Just such a commixture may have constituted the oral repertoires of generations of elite vernacular historians prior to the mid-seventeenth century. Whether this had

taken written form before then is a question fraught with imponderables. Even if, as is possible, future research were to demonstrate that the apparent catalyst for the genealogical histories, the demise of the classical tradition, had taken place in some areas of Gaelic Scotland prior to c. 1600, we are still faced with the almost complete absence of written histories from this period, including the known 'close precursors' to the genealogical histories. But if we allow that these precursors may have given written expression to these oral repertoires, then any definition of the newness of the genealogical histories must narrow still further. There are four relevant aspects: status, scale, scope and purpose. The general collapse of the classical tradition in the seventeenth century left the grouping to which our authors and their oral informants belonged high and dry as the *de facto* new historical elite of Gaelic Scotland. In their authorship and content – and profusion – the genealogical histories were formal written confirmation of this new reality. Almost certainly, their synthesizing of the indigenous historical traditions with particular categories of written material – notably printed works of external origin – resulted in a new fusion which is consistent with the primary purpose of the genre, the need of the ruling elite of Gaelic Scotland for new history.

A future research agenda would begin with the identification and publication of more genealogical histories. Of those already known, a number remain unpublished. Existing editions do not always satisfactorily take into account the 'multi-manuscript' phenomenon referred to above, or the integrity of their primary text.²⁰⁷

Once authoritative texts have been established, they can be sifted to isolate the sources they embody. Our preliminary discussion of these gives some sense of the fruits they would yield. Enough has already been said concerning the potential benefits to be derived by scholars of Gaelic lexicography, linguistics, poetry and folklore. A definitive listing of the printed works which the genealogical histories draw upon would help to delineate the intellectual horizons of post-Renaissance Gaelic Scotland, and thus its cultural 'modernity' or 'conservatism' in a European context. Study of these works might also reveal whether they acted as models as well as sources for the genre.

Source analysis of the histories faces its most vital challenge in seeking to separate out the respective contributions of the three indigenous historical traditions. The problem is least pronounced with elements of classical content such as genealogy, classical poetry and annalistic evidence. The annalistic component of the *Red Book of Clanranald* and the *Sleat History* is clearly visible, for example, and needs to be investigated in the light of other evidence, from within and without the genealogical history genre, for the existence of such a source or sources, with Iona as one likely place of compilation.²⁰⁸ The 'low' vernacular tradition reveals itself in the 'vulgar tradition' twice invoked in the *MacRae History*; perhaps also in the seam of rhymes and proverbial

sayings, and in non-classical theories of clan origins. The 'high' vernacular tradition is likely to prove hardest of all to isolate in its own terms, given its central recycling role, but this is a task well worth taking seriously given the indications that it embodies the oral memory of aristocratic lineages as it existed at least as far back as *c.* 1500.

Sources are inseparable from reliability. Although this issue requires separate and detailed examination, the degree to which the genealogical histories do seem to be dependent on earlier historiographical strata bolsters the interim assessment of their value offered at the outset. Likewise, the preliminary discussion of the identity and motives of their authors offered here means that we can make due compensation for the biases inherent in their treatment of relations with the crown and with other kindreds, of land tenure and succession, and of marriage and legitimacy. Self-evidently, the histories' employment of the written word conferred no magic veracity upon their sources, oral or otherwise, but instead laid them open to fresh or further manipulation.

Further investigation of the authors is needed before we can fully appreciate the nature of their relationships with each other (especially the 'circle' which seems to have existed in the vital first phase of the genre's existence), with the indigenous ruling elite, with the origins of modern Gaelic scholarship and antiquarianism, and with broader intellectual currents such as post-Restoration Episcopalian culture, and Scots law. A more considered understanding of their *mentalité* will enable us to refine the explanation of their motives offered here.

Yet I would submit that the core motive may remain the desire for homogeneity. The broader geographical resonance of the genre was entirely appropriate, for the chosen medium matched the message. However distinctive the flavour imparted to the genealogical histories by features such as their use of indigenous (especially classical) sources, they are ultimately pleas on the part of the elite of Gaelic Scotland to be regarded as indistinguishable from their Lowland Scottish and English counterparts in matters such as origins, antiquity, landholding and loyalism.²⁰⁹ As such, they take their place beside all the other proofs of the fundamental shift in the identity of that elite taking place in the course of the seventeenth century, a process arguably instigated and certainly encouraged by state action, but which developed its own dynamic and momentum.

NOTES

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- 1 *Acts of the Lords of the Isles, 1336–1493*, ed. J. Munro and R. W. Munro (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society [hereafter SHS], 1986).
- 2 The source categories are four. The first is poetry. If we confine ourselves to compositions in the literary dialect, Classical Common Gaelic, rather than in the vernacular, then Katherine Simms has estimated a surviving corpus for Ireland of 2,000 plus, of which perhaps 1,000 predate 1566: K. Simms, *From Kings to Warlords: the Changing Political Structure of Gaelic Ireland in the Later Middle Ages* (Bury St Edmunds: Boydell Press, 1987), 4. For Scotland Derick Thomson estimates around 160 items in total, of which roughly 86 can be dated between c. 1450 and c. 1550: D. S. Thomson, *An Introduction to Gaelic Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 20. In terms of genealogy, the main elements in the Scottish corpus are MS 1467 (National Library of Scotland, *Advocates' MS* 72.1.1; Martin MacGregor, 'Genealogies of the Clans: Contributions to the Study of MS 1467', *Innes Review*, 51 (2000), 131–46); Archdeacon Domhnall (Donald) Munro's MacDonald pedigrees, in *Monro's Western Isles of Scotland and Genealogies of the Clans 1549*, ed. R. W. Munro (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1961), 89–94; the 'Kilbride' MS, in *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis* (Edinburgh: Iona Club, 1847), 360–1; the collection of Beaton pedigrees written down between 1660 and 1670, in J. W. M. Bannerman, *The Beatons: a Medical Kindred in the Classical Gaelic Tradition* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1986), 5–44; and material in the *Black Book of Clanranald*, in A. Cameron, *Reliquiae Celticae*, ed. A. MacBain and J. Kennedy, 2 vols (Inverness: Northern Chronicle Office, 1892–94), II. 145, 300–4, 307–9. This is dwarfed by the great late medieval Irish compilations – the Ó Cianáin manuscript of the mid-fourteenth century, and the later Books of Uí Mhaine, Ballymote and Lecan; see Simms, *From Kings to Warlords*, 6–7. If we focus upon the non-poetic and non-genealogical component of the contents of Classical Gaelic manuscripts – religious and medical material, for example – then Scotland is better off, see D. MacKinnon, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Gaelic Manuscripts* (Edinburgh: Constable, 1912); but the disparity reasserts itself with annalistic compilations, for Gaelic Scotland has only crumbs to set against works like the *Annals of Ulster*: Simms, *From Kings to Warlords*, 3. Known survivors are a text emanating from Easter Ross (*The Calendar of Fearn*, ed. R. J. Adam (Edinburgh: SHS, 1991); and two related texts from western Perthshire, the Chronicle of the Book of the Dean of Lismore and the Chronicle of Fortingall, for discussion of which see M. D. W. MacGregor, 'A Political History of the MacGregors before 1571', unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 1989), 15–17. None of these is in Gaelic.
- 3 Simms, *From Kings to Warlords*, 7–8; and see *ibid.*, 2–3, for her comments on the statements of the 'rights' of kings, another source-type lacking in Scotland.
- 4 Cf. Nollaig Ó Muraíle, 'Irish Genealogical Collections: the Scottish Dimension', in Ronald Black, William Gillies and Roibeard Ó Maolaláigh (eds), *Celtic*

- Connections: Proceedings of the Tenth International Congress of Celtic Studies*, 2 vols (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1999), I. 251–64.
- 5 Brian Ó Cuív, 'The Irish Language in the Early Modern Period', in T. W. Moody, F. X. Martin and F. J. Byrne (eds), *A New History of Ireland*, 9 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976–) III. 509–45, esp. 531–2, 534–5, 538–9. The corrective tone, range of native sources and knowledge of foreign authors displayed in Keating's *Fora feasa ar Éirinn*, along with the wide circulation the work achieved in manuscript form, are characteristics it shares with the Scottish genealogical histories; see *ibid.*, 531. One history surviving only in part concerns that branch of the Scottish MacDonalds which came to possess the Glens of Antrim, and spawned the MacDonalds of Antrim. It seems to fit the Scottish rather than the Irish historiographical context: Archibald MacDonald, 'A Fragment of an Irish MS. History of the MacDonalds of Antrim', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness* [hereafter TGST], 37 (1934–36), 262–84.
 - 6 Simms, *From Kings to Warlords*, 8.
 - 7 See in general Derick S. Thomson, 'Gaelic Learned Orders and Literati in Medieval Scotland', *Scottish Studies*, 12 (1968), 57–78.
 - 8 Katharine Simms, 'Literacy and the Irish Bards', in H. Pryce (ed.), *Literacy in Medieval Celtic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 238–58, at pp. 248–52; W. Gillies, 'Gaelic: the Classical Tradition', in Cairns Craig (general ed.), *The History of Scottish Literature*, 4 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1987–88) I. 245–61, at 250–1.
 - 9 'The Genealogical and Historical Account of the Family of Craignish', ed. Herbert Campbell, in *Miscellany of the Scottish History Society* (Edinburgh: SHS, 1893–), IV. 190.
 - 10 See also John MacInnes, 'Gaelic Poetry and Historical Tradition', in *The Middle Ages in the Highlands* (Inverness: Inverness Field Club, 1981), 142–63, at p. 146, 156; John MacInnes, 'The Panegyric Code in Gaelic Poetry and its Historical Background', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 50 (1976–78), 435–98, at pp. 444–5, 461; Derick S. Thomson (ed.), *The Companion to Gaelic Scotland* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 280; Dòmhnall Eairrdsidh Dòmhnallach, 'Trì ginealaichean de sgeulachd', in William Gillies (ed.), *Gaelic and Scotland: Alba agus a' Ghàidhlig* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 185–221, at pp. 185–7.
 - 11 Martin MacGregor, '"Surely One of the Greatest Poems Ever Made in Britain": the Lament for Griogair Ruadh MacGregor of Glen Strae and its Historical Background', in Edward J. Cowan and Douglas Gifford (eds), *The Polar Twins* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1999), 114–53, at p. 136.
 - 12 I intend to publish a provisional checklist of these texts in a forthcoming article in *Scottish Gaelic Studies*. This article is referred to below as MacGregor, 'Provisional Checklist'.
 - 13 William Matheson, 'Traditions of the MacKenzies', *TGSI*, 39–40 (1942–50), 193–228, at p. 224, n. 4; see below, p. 222.
 - 14 *Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, 71–2.
 - 15 *Ibid.*, 149–50; Bannerman, *Beatons*, 130–3. Another to whom Lhwyd appealed for information was Cailean (Colin) Campbell, minister of Ardchattan in Argyll: *A Collection of Highland Rites and Customs*, ed. J. L. Campbell (Cambridge: The Folklore Society, 1975), 1. Cf. Colm Ó Baoill, 'Gaelic Manuscripts in the Colin Campbell Collection', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 14 (1983–86), 83–99.

- 16 J. L. Campbell and Derick Thomson, *Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands 1699–1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), xvii–xviii, 10.
- 17 *Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, 145; *Highland Rites and Customes*, 5.
- 18 *Highland Rites and Customes*, 3–6.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 7–8.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 3; Bannerman, *Beatons*, 132–3; Martin Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland circa 1695* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 1994), 13.
- 21 Bannerman, *Beatons*, 132–3; *Highland Rites and Customes*, 1–2.
- 22 Bannerman, *Beatons*, 132.
- 23 *Chronicles of the Frasers: the Wardlaw Manuscript, 916–1674*, ed. W. MacKay (Edinburgh: SHS, 1905), xlv–xlv.
- 24 *Bàrdachd Chloinn Ghill-Eathain: Eachann Bacach and Other Maclean Poets*, ed. Colm Ó Baoill (Edinburgh: Scottish Gaelic Texts Society [hereafter SGTS], 1979), xviii–xix, xxx; Nicholas Maclean-Bristol, *Warriors and Priests: the History of the Clan MacLean, 1300–1570* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1995), 158–9.
- 25 *Highland Rites and Customes*, I, 11–13.
- 26 D. Gregory, *The History of the Western Highlands and Islands of Scotland from AD 1493 to AD 1625* (Glasgow: Thomas D. Morison, 1881).
- 27 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV, 177, 185; A. A. M. Duncan and A. L. Brown, ‘Argyll and the Isles in the Earlier Middle Ages’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 90 (1956–57), 192–220, at p. 195 and n. 1.
- 28 Matheson, ‘MacKenzies’, 224, n. 4.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 193.
- 30 *Ibid.*, 195.
- 31 See especially W. D. H. Sellar, ‘The Earliest Campbells – Norman, Briton or Gael?’, *Scottish Studies*, 17 (1973), 109–25.
- 32 K. A. Steer and J. W. M. Bannerman, *Late Medieval Monumental Sculpture in the West Highlands* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1977), 97–163, 201–13, 215.
- 33 J. W. M. Bannerman, ‘The Lordship of the Isles’, in J. M. Brown (ed.), *Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 209–40, at 210. See p. 212, this volume, for reservations about Hugh MacDonald’s status as a MacDonald ‘employee’.
- 34 Steve Boardman, ‘The Tale of Leper John and the Campbell Acquisition of Lorn’, in E. J. Cowan and R. Andrew McDonald (eds), *Alba: Celtic Scotland in the Middle Ages* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), 219–47. For other recent or ongoing studies of particular genealogical histories, see Alan G. Macpherson, ‘An Old Highland Genealogy and the Evolution of a Scottish Clan’, *Scottish Studies*, 10 (1966), 1–43; W. Gillies, ‘The Clanranald Histories: Authorship and Purpose’, in G. Evans, B. Martin and J. Wooding (eds), *Proceedings of the First Australian Conference of Celtic Studies* (forthcoming) my thanks to Prof. Gillies for giving me access to this article; W. Gillies, ‘Oral and Written Sources and Effects in the Clanranald Histories’, in D. Scheunemann (ed.), *Orality, Literacy and Modern Media* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1996), 27–43; W. Gillies, ‘Sources of the Books of Clanranald’, *Études celtiques*, 29 (1992), part 2, 459–60 (abstract).
- 35 See MacGregor, ‘Provisional Checklist’, section Ic(3).
- 36 *Ibid.*, section Ic(1).
- 37 *Ibid.*, section Ic(2); David Allan, ‘“What’s in a Name?”: Pedigree and Propaganda in Seventeenth-century Scotland’, in E. J. Cowan and R. J. Finlay (eds), *Scottish*

- History: the Power of the Past* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), 147–67. My thanks to Dr Allan for allowing me to consult this article prior to its publication.
- 38 See p. 209, this volume, and MacGregor, ‘Provisial Checklist’, sections Ia and III.
 - 39 MacGregor, ‘Provisional Checklist’, section Ib(1); MacGregor, ‘MacGregors’, 255.
 - 40 MacGregor, ‘Provisional Checklist’, section Ib(3).
 - 41 Ibid., section Ib(2). I owe these points to David Sellar.
 - 42 See also pp. 212, 220f., this volume. Note in particular the remarks by the author of the *Information* on the sources available to him, commencing with Classical Gaelic genealogies: ‘But because the names before [the Middle Ages] are so Irish like, and hard to be both written and pronounced, and are more fit to be read in conference then committed to write, I shall content myself to inform your Lo[r]dship] of the last and surest actions of that house, which may be proven by either evidents or chronicles’: Archibald Campbell, *Records of Argyll* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1885), 4. He makes use of George Buchanan, Hector Boece and Henricus Stephanus; various documents, one of them at least from the charter chest of the earls of Argyll (ibid., 7); and, perhaps, oral evidence.
 - 43 Martin’s book might more naturally belong with works of topographical reportage of the *Gàidhealtachd* such as Archdeacon Domhnall Munro’s famous account of 1549 (above, n. 2), *Ane Descriptione of Certaine Pairts of the Highlands of Scotland*, apparently composed c. 1644; see *Geographical Collections relating to Scotland made by Walter MacFarlane*, ed. Arthur Mitchell, 3 vols [Edinburgh: SHS, 1906–8] II. 144–92; for the date see ibid., xxxi, xlv; and the *Description of the Lewis* written by Iain Morison of Bragar between 1678 and 1688 in ibid., 210–15; *An Clàrsair Dall: the Songs of Roderick Morison and his Music*, ed. William Matheson (Edinburgh: SGTS, 1970), 207.
 - 44 Examples of texts of this type which I have excluded are ‘MacNaughtan of that Ilk’, in *Highland Papers*, ed. J. R. N. MacPhail, 4 vols (Edinburgh: SHS, 1914–34) I. 104–13, and ‘Memoirs or a Memorial of the Antient and Honourable Family of Robertson of Strowan’, in *Genealogical Collections Concerning Families in Scotland Made by Walter MacFarlane*, ed. James Toshach Clark, 2 vols (Edinburgh: SHS, 1900), II. 311–15. Some texts which I have included, notably MacGregor, ‘Provisional Checklist’, section II (19, 21), are very marginal cases, and should perhaps be excluded also.
 - 45 Although the sources of the *Morison MS* (MacGregor, ‘Provisional Checklist’, section II (22)) require further analysis, its reliance upon oral tradition may be such as to render its categorization as a genealogical history, as defined here, doubtful.
 - 46 See for example the comments on the late nineteenth-century history of the Stewarts of Appin in Boardman, ‘The Tale of Leper John’, 219–20. We might describe these works as ‘phase two’ genealogical histories; at least two texts which I have classified as genealogical histories (MacGregor, ‘Provisional Checklist’, section II(24, 26)), have potential affinities with them, and may be transitional. The earliest of these ‘phase two’ histories may be ‘a Seneachie’, *An Historical and Genealogical Account of the Clan MacLean* (London and Edinburgh: Smith, Elder & Co., 1838). For other later nineteenth-century MacLean histories, see Nicholas Maclean-Bristol, ‘The Macleans from 1560–1707: a Re-appraisal’, in *The Seventeenth Century in the Highlands* (Inverness: Inverness

- Field Club, 1986), 70–88, at p. 70. See also John H. J. Stewart and Duncan Stewart, *The Stewarts of Appin* (Edinburgh, 1880); A. & A. MacDonald, *The Clan Donald*, 3 vols (Inverness: Northern Counties Publishing Company, 1896–1904); Angus MacKay, *The Book of MacKay* (Edinburgh: Norman Macleod, 1906); Alexander MacKenzie, *History of the Clan Mackenzie with Genealogies of the Principal Families* (Inverness: A. and W. MacKenzie, 1879); *History of the Mathesons: with Genealogies of the Various Families*, 2nd edn, edited, largely re-written and added to by Alexander MacBain (Stirling: Eneas MacKay, 1900). Between 1881 and 1898, MacKenzie also published histories of the Camerons, Chisolms, Frasers, MacLeods, MacDonalds and lords of the Isles, MacDonalds of Glengarry, MacDonalds of Clanranald, and Munros.
- 47 MacGregor, ‘Provisional Checklist’, section II, within which the histories are listed in approximate chronological order.
 - 48 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 179, 183–4, 187, 191.
 - 49 Three MacKenzie authors of MacKenzie histories – Iain Molach of Applecross, Sir Seòras (George) of Rosehaugh, and Sir Seòras, first earl of Cromartie – were all great-grandsons of Cailean, the chief of the kindred who died in 1594, while Cromartie was also brother-in-law of the contemporary chief: *The Scots Peerage*, ed. J. Balfour Paul, 9 vols (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1904–14), III. 69–75; VII. 500–5; MacFarlane, *Gen. Coll.*, I. 98–100; *Highland Papers*, II. 68. Lachlann Macintosh of Kinrara was uncle and tutor of the contemporary Macintosh chief (Macpherson, ‘Genealogy’, 41, n. 31). Captain Uisdean (Hugh) MacDonald, the likely author of the *Sleat History*, was nephew of the head of his kindred, Sir Seumas MacDonald of Sleat (see above p. 212); and William Matheson, ‘Notes on North Uist Families’, *TGSI*, 52 (1980–82), 318–72, at pp. 323–4 and n. 29.
 - 50 The compiler of MacGregor, ‘Provisional Checklist’, section II (22), Domhnall Morison, a teacher and latterly a cooper, may have descended from the MacGille-Mhoire lineage of lawmen in Lewis. His Gaelic sobriquet, Domhnall Bàn Sgoileir (Fair Donald, the scholar), confirms his erudition: F. W. L. Thomas, ‘Traditions of the MacAulays of Lewis’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* [hereafter *PSAS*], 14 (1879–80), 363–431, at pp. 385–6; *An Clàrsair Dall*, xxxiii.
 - 51 MacGregor, ‘Provisional Checklist’, section II (9).
 - 52 *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 2.
 - 53 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 187–8.
 - 54 *Ibid.*, 214: ‘Lena Chreash vic Kennich’ (*léine-chrios MhicCoinnich*).
 - 55 *Highland Papers*, I. 215–16.
 - 56 *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 339: ‘argid cagging, cheawing mony’. Cf. William Matheson, ‘Traditions of the Mathesons’, *TGSI*, 42 (1953–59), 153–81, at p. 163, and 177, n. 35; William Fraser, *The Earls of Cromartie*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable, 1876), II. 468: ‘creach vachtin [*? mhacaoimh*], the young mans hership’.
 - 57 E.g. *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 243.
 - 58 *Ibid.*, 220–1; cf. *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 112.
 - 59 *Ibid.*, 113, 138, 175, 222.
 - 60 Martin, *Western Islands*, 95; cf. *ibid.*, 241.
 - 61 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 217.
 - 62 *Ibid.*, 227–8; cf. *ibid.*, 217. For an impromptu verse preserved in the *Bannatyne*

- MS, see William Matheson, 'Aonghus nan Aoir: a Case of Mistaken Identity', *Scottish Studies*, 21 (1977), 105–8, at pp. 106–7.
- 63 See also *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 40, 41.
- 64 *Highland Papers*, I. 42–3. Derick Thomson has suggested that these are 'the earliest surviving example we have in Scottish Gaelic of a strophic metre which is probably to be linked to the *ochtfhoclach* metre which has a much more ancient origin' ('The McLagan MSS in Glasgow University Library: a Survey', *TGSI*, 58 (1992–94), 406–24, at 417–18, 424, n. 26). It should be noted that the versions in the McLagan MSS, on which he bases his text and analysis, could be as much as a century later than those in the *Sleat History*, and lack the contextualization afforded by the latter.
- 65 MacFarlane, *Gen. Coll.*, I. 119, 142; *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 9 (1961), 90–1.
- 66 *Highland Papers*, I. 52, where the harpist's forename is Art.
- 67 *Ibid.*, I. 216, 239.
- 68 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 228.
- 69 *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 1.
- 70 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 187.
- 71 MacFarlane, *Gen. Coll.*, I. 145.
- 72 Macpherson, 'Genealogy', 6–7.
- 73 *Highland Papers*, I. 210.
- 74 *Ibid.*, I. 7, 27, 40.
- 75 *Reliquiae Celticae*, II. 152–3; Gillies, 'The Clanranald Histories'.
- 76 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 208. Cf. *ibid.*, 205, 215; Macpherson, 'Genealogy', 13.
- 77 *Chronicles of the Frasers*, II. xx–xxi; *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 187–93.
- 78 *Highland Papers*, I. 10; II. 73, 75.
- 79 See p. 225 this volume.
- 80 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 190–1; *Highland Papers*, IV. 59.
- 81 *Highland Papers*, I. 196.
- 82 *Ibid.*, II. 199; *West Highland Notes and Queries*, series 2, no. 16 (April 1997), 26. MacRae died in 1704 and MacKenzie in 1725, the year given in the dedication of his history. If the attribution of the *MacRae History* to Iain MacRae is correct, then either he had access to an early version of MacKenzie's history, or a redactor of MacRae's original text (which has not survived) made use of MacKenzie post c. 1725. The version printed in *Highland Papers*, I. 198–239, comes down to c. 1785 (*ibid.*, 203, n. 1, 230, 236).
- 83 *Highland Papers*, II. 2–3.
- 84 See MacFarlane, *Gen. Coll.*, I. 198–200; *Highland Papers*, I. 206–8; *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 98–9, 108–9, 130–1, 144, 151–5, 193–6, 197–9.
- 85 *Highland Papers*, I. 59, 63–4 and cf. *ibid.*, 31.
- 86 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 191.
- 87 Matheson, 'Mathesons', 153.
- 88 *Chronicles of the Frasers*, xx, 3, 79, 115.
- 89 *Ibid.*, xvi, xx, 3, 128. Presumably *Scriptum Bunchriviae* is distinct from the 'manuscript of Fern' and the 'Abbacy book of Fern' also mentioned by Fraser (*ibid.*, 115, 120). The former may correspond to the extant *Calendar of Fearn* (*Calendar of Fearn*, 24, 92). The latter may correspond, or be related to, a text on the abbots of Fearn, apparently lost and apparently written by Master Thomas Ross in the later sixteenth century: *ibid.*, 22, n. 20.
- 90 *Highland Papers*, II. 3; Matheson, 'MacKenzies', 200. See above pp. 212, 225

and nn. 110, 208, for other lost annalistic compilations of which traces survive in the genealogical histories.

- 91 *Highland Papers*, II. 264.
- 92 *Chronicles of the Frasers*, xx.
- 93 Gillies, 'The Clanranald Histories'; Matheson, 'MacKenzies', 226, n. 51.
- 94 My thanks to Jean Munro for giving me access to her forthcoming edition of the English, and apparently original, text of Macintosh of Kinrara's history, from which these phrases are taken. Cf. MacFarlane, *Gen. Coll.*, I. 148–50.
- 95 Macpherson, 'Genealogy', 34.
- 96 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 243. Cf. Archibald MacDonald, 'Fragment of a MacKenzie MS.', *TGSI*, 36 (1931–33), 187–212, at 205.
- 97 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 191; Maclean-Bristol, 'The Macleans', 70; *The Loyall Dissuasive and other papers concerning the affairs of Clan Chattan: by Sir Aeneas Macpherson, Knight of Invereshie 1691–1705*, ed. A. D. Murdoch (Edinburgh: SHS, 1902), 219.
- 98 *Ibid.*, 4, and n. 1.
- 99 *Ibid.*, 219–21. MacPherson's intention, revealed in this same passage, to use these oral sources as the basis of a 'larger tractat of more use and value', may refer to the *Invereshie Book Genealogy*.
- 100 *Ibid.*, editor's notes; Macpherson, 'Genealogy', 4.
- 101 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 191–3, 240–2; *Collectanea de Rebus Albanicis*, 197–8.
- 102 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 193. The Campbells of Craignish used the subsidiary surname *MacDubhghaill*, 'MacDougall'.
- 103 The surnames of the informants described by MacPherson as 'two of the greatest poets and genealogues in the Highlands', suggest they were of non-professional origin. The editor's equation of 'John McDonald (alias Lame)' with the well-known poet Iain Lom is questionable.
- 104 See n. 118.
- 105 *Loyall Dissuasive*, 231.
- 106 *Ibid.*, 221.
- 107 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 193.
- 108 See pp. 221f.
- 109 *Reliquiae Celticae*, II. 148–75. Cf. p. 209.
- 110 For evidence of the existence of these chronicles, see *ibid.*, 155–63 (the 'Lordship' or 'Iona' Chronicle', for which see also p. 225 and n. 208); *ibid.*, 166–73, esp. 166–9 (the 'Clann Raghnaill Chronicle').
- 111 *Ibid.*, 170–1. For valuable discussion of the authorship, sources and – from a Classical Gaelic perspective – innovative approach of the *Red Book of Clanranald*, see Gillies, 'The Clanranald Histories'.
- 112 Bannerman, *Beaton's*, 17–20.
- 113 See MacGregor, 'Provisional Checklist'.
- 114 See *Highland Papers*, I. 14, 17, 23, 27, 28, 34, 49, 63. But see Gillies, 'The Clanranald Histories', for the suggestion that dates given in the earlier sections of the *Red Book of Clanranald* may be based on erroneous interpretations of roman numerals.
- 115 See n. 49; Matheson, 'North Uist Families', 323–4, and 363, n. 29; William Matheson, 'Hugh MacDonald's Manuscript', *Notes and Queries of the Society of West Highland and Island Historical Research*, 21 (August 1983), 16–17. He was known to Màrtainn Martin, with whom the identification of the author of the

- Sleat History* as someone named Hugh MacDonald apparently began; Martin, *Western Islands*, 17–18, 250.
- 116 See n. 42; MacGregor, 'Provisional Checklist' *Highland Papers*, II. 74; *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 190–1. On Alexander Colville or Colvin, see Sellar, 'Campbells', 112.
- 117 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 191; Sellar, 'Campbells', 113.
- 118 Genealogical histories of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries continue to use the word in this sense (*Highland Papers*, II. 73; MacFarlane, *Gen. Coll.*, I. 118; *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 190). But for the argument that in the later seventeenth century we see *seanchaidh* developing the new meaning of 'aristocratic lay-historian', see p. 224, and MacGregor, 'Provisional Checklist'.
- 119 J. W. M. Bannerman, 'The MacLachlans of Kilbride and Their Manuscripts', *Scottish Studies*, 21 (1977), 1–34, at p. 13. These MacLachlan clergymen must have been well known to Duncanson, who was himself a prominent minister within the Synod of Argyll from 1658 until 1661. For his career, see *Minutes of the Synod of Argyll, 1639–1661*, ed. Duncan C. MacTavish, 2 vols (Edinburgh: SHS, 1943–44), I. vii–viii; for his own competence in Gaelic, and his role in the Synod's projects to publish religious material in the language, which also involved these MacLachlans, see *ibid.*, II. 177, 198, 224.
- 120 See p. 207.
- 121 *Highland Papers*, I. 198–9.
- 122 Bannerman, *Beatons*, 19, gives this as an instance of a servitor being identified by the surname of his employer; Matheson, 'MacKenzies', 227, n. 68, noting that elsewhere MacRae calls Maol-Domhnaich *MacEoin* (i.e. *mac Eoin*, his patronymic), suggests that *MacLean* 'may be a copyist's error for MacEan'.
- 123 *Ibid.*; Bannerman, *Beatons*, 34–5; 50, n. 296.
- 124 Matheson, 'MacKenzies', 227, n. 68.
- 125 *Bàrdachd Chloinn Ghill-Eathain*, 171–3. It has been suggested (Matheson, 'MacKenzies', 226–7, n. 68) that he may have been a Beaton. If so, he may have belonged to the branch based at Dervaig in Mull, among whom *Ruairi* recurs as a forename (Bannerman, *Beatons*, 49–54, esp. 52–3). For the demonstrably close links of the head of these Beatons with contemporary Ó Muirgheasáins and MacMhuirichs in the early seventeenth century, see *ibid.*, 50–1. One key piece of evidence, the implications of which cannot be discussed here, has hitherto been overlooked. The *Ardintoul MS*, describing the visit of the MacKenzie Chief Coinneach to the court of MacLean of Duart in the early seventeenth century, mentions 'Fergus Mackenzie McLean's genealogist who told them that they were not descended of the Geraldts but of the Kings of Ireland, as the most of the clans of the west and south west parts of Scotland were ...' ('Fragment of a MacKenzie MS', 204–5).
- 126 *Highland Papers*, I. 199.
- 127 *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 145–6.
- 128 MacFarlane, *Gen. Coll.*, I. 118–19.
- 129 *Ibid.*, 119–21, 142; *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 9 (1961), 90–1.
- 130 *An Clàrsair Dall*, xxxiv–xxxv; Matheson, 'Aonghus nan Aoir', 106; Bannerman, 'Lordship', 225, n. 64. It has been suggested that the *Bannatyne MS* is in part based on earlier written sources: William Matheson, 'The Morrisons of Ness', *TGSI*, 50 (1976–78), 60–80, at p. 75, perhaps including an annalistic compilation (cf. Steer and Bannerman, *Monumental Sculpture*, 97–100), but the matter requires more detailed investigation.

- 131 On another aspect of orality in the *Red Book of Clanranald*, Niall MacMhuirich's use of eyewitness testimony from aristocrats involved in the Montrose campaigns during the Civil Wars, see Gillies, 'The Clanranald Histories'.
- 132 See for example n. 135; the narratives in the *Bannatyne MS* concerning Coinneach Odhar, and the 'Fairy Cup' and *Bratach Shith* or 'Fairy Flag' linked to the MacLeods of Dunvegan; Matheson, 'MacKenzies', 220–3; *Highland Papers*, I. 58; *Chronicles of the Frasers*, 233. Cf. Juliette Wood, 'Folkloric Patterns in Scottish Chronicles', in Sally Mapstone and Juliette Wood (eds), *The Rose and the Thistle: Essays on the Culture of Late Medieval and Renaissance Scotland* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), 116–35; R. Dorson, 'Introduction: Folklore and Traditional History' and 'Sources for the Traditional History of the Scottish Highlands and Western Islands', *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 8 (1971–72), 79–81, 145–84; A. J. Bruford, 'Problems in Cataloguing Scottish Supernatural and Historical Legends', *Journal of the Folklore Institute*, 16 (1979), 155–66; John MacInnes, 'Clan Sagas and Historical Legends', *TGSI*, 57 (1990–92), 377–94.
- 133 *Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, 148–9, 280–2, 283–5.
- 134 See pp. 196–7, this volume.
- 135 Thus, what the *Sleat History* has to say about the origins of the Macintyres (*Clann an t-Saoir*), the earl of Mar and the battle of Inverlochy in 1431, and fratricidal conflict within the ruling MacDonald lineage in North Uist, c. 1500–1600, could all be compared with recordings made this century: *Highland Papers* I. 7, 39–43, 65–72; School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh Sound Archive 1952/125/4; 1971/175 B11; A. J. Bruford and D. A. MacDonald (eds), *Scottish Traditional Tales* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1994), 422–6, 484–5.
- 136 The exception is the treatment of Gille-Brighde and his son Somerled (*Somhairle*), on which see above p. 215.
- 137 Note the influence of folktale upon the late medieval Irish historical tracts, produced under classical auspices (p. 197).
- 138 This may be more true of Scotland than of Ireland: Gillies, 'The Clanranald Histories'.
- 139 See the passage quoted here at p. 213.
- 140 See p. 204.
- 141 *Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, 148.
- 142 *Highland Papers*, I. 203–4, 204–5.
- 143 *Reliquiae Celticae*, II. 659; translated in Gillies, 'The Clanranald Histories'.
- 144 *Reliquiae Celticae*, II. 154–5.
- 145 This is not to deny an active role to authors such as Aeneas MacPherson and Alasdair Campbell, who were clearly assiduous in their pursuit of oral informants, and active assimilators of native tradition; see pp. 209–11.
- 146 Allan, "What's in A Name?".
- 147 Michael Lynch, *Scotland: A New History* (London: Century, 1991), 247–56.
- 148 *Ibid.*, 257 ff.; Allan, "What's in A Name?".
- 149 Lynch, *Scotland*, 261–2.
- 150 Allan I. MacInnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1996), 72–4, and chs 4 and 5, esp. 91–2, 96–7, 104–8, 110–12, 126–8; Jean Munro, 'When Island Chiefs came to Town', *Notes and Queries of the Society of West Highland and Island Historical Research*, 19 (December 1982), 11–19.
- 151 MacInnes, 'Gaelic Poetry', 147; MacInnes, 'Panegyric Code', 437.

- 152 Macinnes, *Clanship*, 94–8.
- 153 For the MacKenzie historians' 'concerted effort to conceal the fact that the early record of the clan was one of rebellion against the Crown', see Matheson, 'MacKenzies', 193–5, 201, 212, 214.
- 154 Douglas A. Watt, 'Chiefs, Lawyers and Debt: a Study of the Relationship between Highland Elite and Legal Profession in Scotland c. 1550 to 1700', unpublished PhD dissertation (University of Edinburgh, 1998); Alick Morrison, 'The Accounts of a Doer: Alexander MacLeod the "Advocat"', *TGSI*, 50 (1976–78), 97–172, at pp. 97–8. It is particularly striking that the Campbell ruling lineage should have turned first to Alexander Colville (above, p. 202) to revise the genealogies of the MacEwens.
- 155 Note particularly the demise of the active practice of Gaelic law by the indigenous lawmen, or *brithseamhain*, a process complete by c. 1600 at the very latest: *An Clàrsair Dall*, 187; Matheson, 'Morrison of Ness', 60–80; John Bannerman, 'The Scots Language and the Kin-based Society', in Derick S. Thomson (ed.), *Gaelic and Scots in Harmony* (Glasgow: Department of Celtic, University of Glasgow, 1989), 1–19, at pp. 12–14; and the adoption of primogeniture alone as the system of succession among territorial kindreds after 1600: Bannerman, *Beatons*, 86–7.
- 156 Munro, 'Island Chiefs', 11–19; Macinnes, *Clanship*, 71, 73.
- 157 *The Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, ed. T. Thomson and C. Innes, 12 vols (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1814–75), IV (1593–1625): 138–9.
- 158 For instances of the destruction of Highland charter-chests before c. 1600, see *Acts of the Lords of the Isles*, lxxix.
- 159 For reasons of space, the discussion which follows deals solely with land tenure. The histories' response to the distinctive nature of marriage custom in the late medieval *Gàidhealtachd* – secular marriage and divorce, concubinage, and the lack of distinction between legitimate and illegitimate offspring which flowed from these – requires separate and detailed analysis. I merely note here the use of illegitimacy as a device to explain away the failure of an individual to succeed to the chiefship, when primogeniture apparently entitled him to do so (Matheson, 'MacKenzies', 210); or to stigmatize certain lineages and individuals, notably Dubhghall, progenitor of the MacDougalls of Lorn, and Iain MacIain of Ardnamurchan; see pp. 219, 223 and *Highland Papers*, I, 11–13, 15–16, 60; Macpherson, 'Genealogy', 35–6. Cf. also *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV, 218–19, 231–2.
- 160 *Chronicles of the Frasers*, I.
- 161 Matheson, 'MacKenzies', 200–1, 208–14.
- 162 Steer and Bannerman, *Monumental Sculpture*, 99–100, 113, 114, 127, 132–3, 148.
- 163 *Ibid.*, 99–100, 127.
- 164 Bannerman, *Beatons*, 86–7.
- 165 For a very likely eighteenth-century instance of the deliberate misrepresentation of tanistry for legal motives, occurring outwith the genealogical history genre, see *ibid.*, 31–2. For evidence that the succession to the chiefship of the MacKenzies in the later middle ages 'was not as regular as the seventeenth-century historians would have us believe', see Matheson, 'Mathesons', 160, 178–9, and Matheson, 'MacKenzies', 210–13. The succession to the chiefship of the MacKenzies and the Mathesons would bear re-examination in the light of what we now know of the survival of tanistry in the late medieval *Gàidhealtachd*.
- 166 See also n. 159.

- 167 For a possible instance of the latter tactic, see Matheson, 'Mathesons', 164–6.
- 168 Steer and Bannerman, *Monumental Sculpture*, 99–100.
- 169 Ibid., 113, and cf. 127. For a very similar use of the misrepresentation of tanistry as an offensive weapon in one of the 'Campbell precursors' to the genealogical histories, see *The Black Book of Taymouth*, ed. Cosmo Innes (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1855), 12, 64.
- 170 Sellar, 'Campbells', 115.
- 171 Bannerman, *Beatons*, 120–33; D. S. Thomson, 'The MacMhuirich Bardic Family', *TGSI*, 43 (1963), 276–304, at p. 301; Thomson, *Introduction to Gaelic Poetry*, 20; W. Gillies, 'Some Aspects of Campbell History', *TGSI*, 50 (1976–78), 256–95, at pp. 261, 280.
- 172 Note also Watson's perceptive observation that 'the poet selected to be honoured by Charles II at his Restoration in 1660 as his Gaelic poet laureate was not MacMhuirich nor any trained professional bard, but the self-trained poet John MacDonald [Iain Lom]': W. J. Watson, 'Classic Gaelic Poetry of Panegyric in Scotland', *TGSI*, 29 (1914–19), 194–217, at p. 216. Màrtainn Martin, writing between c. 1695 and 1703, dates the decline in the status of the classical poets to 'within these forty years': Martin, *Western Islands*, 176.
- 173 Bannerman, 'MacLachlans of Kilbride', 17; *Argyll Synod*, II. 15, 141; W. J. Watson, 'Unpublished Gaelic Poetry – IV., V.', *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 3 (1931), 139–59, at pp. 152–9.
- 174 Campbell, *Records of Argyll*, 3–4; above, n. 42.
- 175 See 212.
- 176 See p. 213, and cf. *Companion to Gaelic Scotland*, 4.
- 177 Bannerman, *Beatons*, 35, 121. For the demise of the Ó Conchobhair medical lineage which served the MacDougalls of Dunollie c. 1672, see *ibid.*, 148.
- 178 Ibid., 3–5, 7–11, 18–20. For parallel instances of conscious Beaton antiquarianism, both associated with Iain Beaton (d. 1657), see *ibid.*, 29, 111.
- 179 Niall MacMhuirich brings this history down to 1686, although he copied the pre-Montrose Wars sections from another source or sources: Gillies, 'The Clanranald Histories'.
- 180 See *ibid.*
- 181 Osborn Bergin, *Irish Bardic Poetry* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1970), 22; Gillies, 'Gaelic: the Classical Tradition', 260.
- 182 For the apparent blossoming of vernacular poetry between c. 1645 and c. 1725, see A. Maclean Sinclair, 'The Gaelic Bards and the Collectors of their Works', *TGSI*, 24 (1899–1901), 259–77, at 264–5.
- 183 See pp. 199–200. Note also 'the herbal garden established in Edinburgh c. 1670 by Dr later Sir Robert Sibbald and Dr Andrew Balfour, founders of the Royal College of Physicians in 1681', and modelled on that maintained by the lineage of Beaton physicians based at Pennycross, Isle of Mull (Bannerman, *Beatons*, 92).
- 184 See also W. F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland: A History of Ancient Albyn*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1886–90), III. 346–59.
- 185 See n. 125, where the same descent for the MacLeans is also rejected. For the (late?) classical belief that these clans had a common, but non-Geraldine, origin, see Matheson, 'MacKenzies', 217.
- 186 Ibid., 193, 195, 205–6, 212, 214; Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, III. 351–4; Jean Munro, 'Mackenzie Manuscript Histories', *West Highland Notes and Queries*, series 2, no. 19 (March 1999), 12–17, at p. 12.

- 187 Gillies, 'Campbell History', 279–81; Sellar, 'Campbells', 118. Further evidence for the 'integrity' of the classical tradition *vis-à-vis* the genealogical histories lies in its reservations concerning the persona of King Arthur; see MacGregor, 'Provisional Checklist'.
- 188 Ibid. As with the notion of a Geraldine origin for the MacKenzies and MacLeans, belief in 'Norman' and 'Gaelic' origins for the Campbells probably both pre-existed the genealogical histories, but only achieved mainstream acceptance within them: Steer and Bannerman, *Monumental Sculpture*, 140, 211; William Gillies, 'Heroes and Ancestors', in Bo Almqvist, Séamas Ó Catháin and Pádraig Ó Héalaí (eds), *The Heroic Process: Form, Function and Fantasy in Folk Epic* (Dublin: Glendale Press, 1987), 57–74, at pp. 61–3.
- 189 Sellar, 'Campbells', 119.
- 190 Ibid., 113, 117–19; MacGregor, 'Provisional Checklist'.
- 191 See n. 49.
- 192 *Chronicles of the Frasers*, xlv, 24–8; *West Highland Notes and Queries*, series 2, no. 16 (April 1997), 26; MacFarlane, *Gen. Coll.*, I. 144–6; cf. Macpherson, 'Genealogy', 41, n. 31. One of the Campbell 'precursors' to the genealogical histories, *The Black Book of Taymouth*, was dedicated by William Bowie to his patron Donnchadh Dubh, Chief of the Glen Orchy Campbells, in 1598. In the 1630s these same Campbells commissioned a series of paintings of the kings and queens of Scotland, and of their own ancestors, as well as a great genealogy board: *Black Book of Taymouth*, 253–4; xxviii, 75, 77–8.
- 193 Cf. p. 213, for the involvement of Sir Ailean MacLean of Duart, although not, apparently, with respect to the history of his own kindred.
- 194 Allan, "What's in A Name?".
- 195 One copy of *Ane Accompt of the Genealogie of the Campbells* was 'given by the ... late Earl Archibald [Campbell, d. 1685] to his daughter Lady Anne the present Countess of Murray' (*Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 191). Perhaps marriage was one occasion for the copying and circulation of genealogical histories. See also MacFarlane, *Gen. Coll.*, I. vii–viii, 145; Macpherson, 'Genealogy', 5, 41, n. 32; *West Highland Notes and Queries*, series 2, no. 16 (April 1997), 26; *Highland Papers*, I. 197 and II. 3, 70–1; Graeme M. MacKenzie, 'The Rarest Decision Recorded in History: the Battle of the Clans in 1396', *TGSI*, 59 (1994–96), 420–87, at pp. 429–31.
- 196 For the Macintosh claim to descend from the earls of Fife, see MacFarlane, *Gen. Coll.*, I. 148, 150–2, 153 ff., and Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, III. 356–9. On the seventeenth-century fashion for claiming common ancestry for kindreds on either side of the Highland line, see Bannerman, *Beatons*, 3–5.
- 197 For discussion see Gillies, 'The Clanranald Histories'. There is no evidence that Niall's work was translated into English.
- 198 *Reliquiae Celticae*, II. 202–3.
- 199 *Highland Papers*, I. 10–11, and passim. Note also the *Sleat History*'s rejection of new-fangled ideas on Beaton origins: MacGregor, 'Provisional Checklist'.
- 200 Macinnes, *Clanship*, 37–46.
- 201 *Highland Papers*, I. 11–13, 15, 23, 59–60, 63–5; Steer and Bannerman, *Monumental Sculpture*, 113.
- 202 *Misc. Scot. Hist. Soc.*, IV. 191.
- 203 MacFarlane, *Gen. Coll.*, I. 122–5.
- 204 Macpherson, 'Genealogy', 3, 7, 30–1; *Loyall Dissuasive*, 218–41.

- 205 For the same motive at work in the nineteenth-century *Bannatyne MS*, see p. 219.
- 206 See pp. 210–12; MacGregor, ‘Provisional Checklist’.
- 207 The editor of the *Chronicles of the Frasers* omits all sections dealing with ‘England, the Popes, France, Germany, and almost every Continental state ... and many pages have thus been discarded’ p. xx.
- 208 See pp. 211–12, and n. 110; Matheson, ‘MacKenzies’, 208, 217, and 226–7, n. 68. Iona was of course the customary place of burial for the ruling grades of kindreds within the MacDonald lordship of the Isles down to c. 1500.
- 209 Cf. pp. 207–8 for the integrating intent behind the genealogical historians’ use of printed works such as Hector Boece, George Buchanan and William Camden.