north American readers, necessarily concerned with the history of the Scottish diaspora, may well find Paul Dukes’ collection on The Universities of Aberdeen and Europe a particularly interesting study, though neither Canada nor the United States is mentioned once. Here, in a series of pithily competent essays, is evidence of an age, stretching from the Renaissance of the later fifteenth century to the Enlightenment of the late eighteenth, in which the Scots engaged with a wider world, often migrated, always learned a great deal and invariably prospered.

If the theme of Scottish relations with Europe provides the common link in this volume, then each of the five substantive essays develops a rather different and more specific topic. John Fletcher fittingly begins this contribution to the Quincentennial Studies in the History of the University of Aberdeen with a discussion of the European context to that institution’s foundation by William Elphinstone, bishop of Aberdeen, in 1495. The “last of the medieval universities”, King’s College was, says Fletcher, the product of its founder’s close study of the constitutions and recent histories of many other European universities, including St Andrews, from whose experiences, often fractious, Aberdeen was to benefit in its own successful development. In securing adequate numbers of suitably-qualified entrants, in organising and disciplining the student body, in attracting and retaining eminent faculty, in rendering the institution of advantage to the wider community and in affording the foundling institution sufficient protection from powerful enemies in the state, Elphinstone was to draw upon his knowledge of universities throughout France, England, Italy and the Holy Roman Empire. King’s was therefore truly an institution built on a European model.
James Cameron and George Molland offer matching essays which deal with the first two centuries of the Aberdeen universities as seminaries of higher learning (Marischal College having been established in 1593). The emphasis is upon demonstrating the interconnectedness of Scottish student and academic life and the wider civilization of post-Renaissance Continental Europe. To this effect Cameron discusses the careers of a number of Aberdeen graduates as they pursued scholarship and professional advancement in leading foreign universities. Men from the northeast, like Duncan Liddel, John Johnston, Robert Howie and Gilbert Jack, who studied and later taught at Heidelberg, Rostock, Leiden, Herborn and Helmstedt, were, it seems, major figures in international Protestant education, centrally involved in the intellectual currents of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as well as on intimate terms with the most eminent scholars of the age, including among their teachers and correspondents the great Heinsius, Althusius and Grynaeus. Molland’s study of Liddel in particular provides an opportunity to assess Scotland’s intellectual relations with the Continent by means of a case study. It appears that Liddel’s travels in Germany exposed him to the cosmological theories of Copernicus and Tycho Brahe, and to the medical teachings of Paracelsus, leading the Scot to become embroiled in both controversies.

For a later generation, Dimitry Fedosov and Paul Wood similarly trace the intriguing outlines of Scottish academic ties with the far-flung institutions of the Continent. Fedosov’s piece is especially thought-provoking, revealing the important role of Henry Farquharson, graduate and tutor of Marischal College, in developing Russian mathematics and geometrical teaching under that dynamic moderniser, Peter the Great. Effectively director of Peter’s new School of Mathematics and Navigation in Moscow, Farquharson was a seminal educational influence as Peter set about his most famous achievement, the construction of Russia’s first real navy. Wood’s essay concentrates on the political
reorientation of Aberdonian academics in the eighteenth century. Subtly divided between subversive episcopalian Jacobitism and establishmentarian presbyterian Hanoverianism, academics at King's and Marischal were to an extent now linked as much with England as with Continental Europe. Dutch and French influence of a direct kind clearly declined; few Aberdonian students travelled extensively among the European universities; Edinburgh and Glasgow appeared to take the palms for Enlightenment learning; and yet specific Continental teachings, including fashionable Newtonianism from Holland and Lavoisier's chemistry from France, did impact strongly in the north-east, whilst the locality's own intellectual productions, most notably the common sense philosophy associated with James Beattie and Thomas Reid, were transmitted widely across the rest of Europe, and particularly to Germany. Thus contributing to European civilisation at the end of the eighteenth century as it had been at the start of the sixteenth, Aberdeen ended the early modern period as it had begun, as an educational centre whose influence was enhanced as much by the prodigious talents and ambitions as by the wandering feet of its alumni.

This study, then, confirms that the Scot was ever a citizen of the world; usually cosmopolitan, instinctively expansive, frequently learned, and commonly open to new experiences and new influences. Long before it became possible to head west to Nova Scotia or the Rockies, or south to Australia, he was to be found in the east, in the Netherlands, in Germany, in Poland and in Muscovy. Travelling and settling across the Continent, he was in fact an integral part of the processes of cultural transmission and intellectual development in early modern Europe.

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