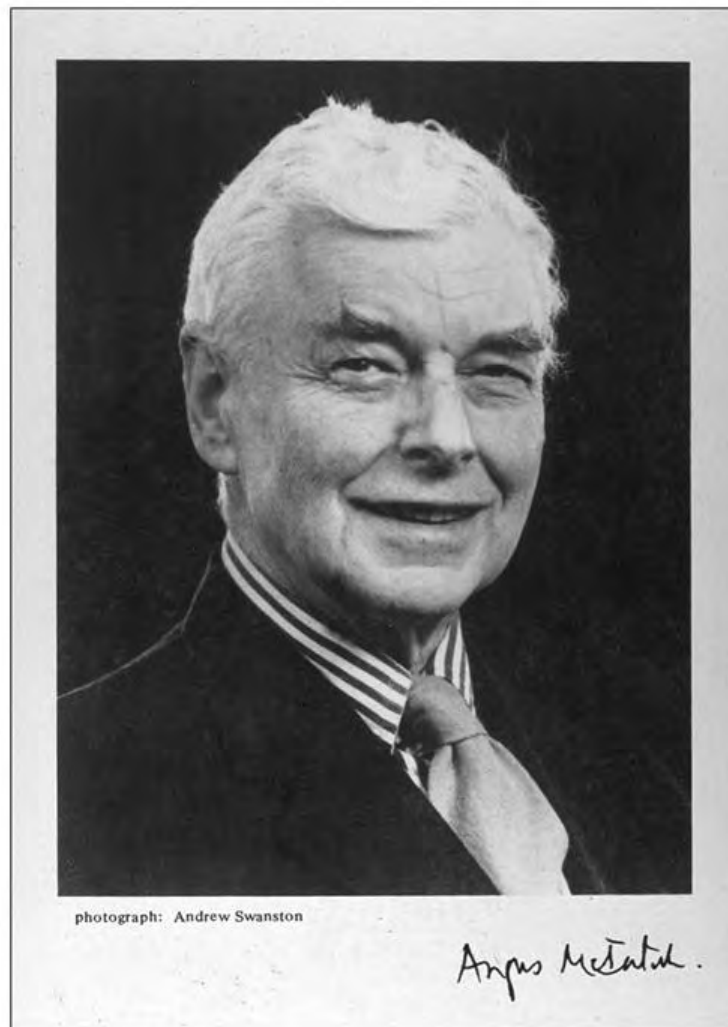


**The Second Angus McIntosh Lecture**  
**Scots as a language of European civilisation**  
(organised by the Scottish Text Society)  
Edinburgh, 22 March 2010  
Dr Caroline Macafee



Photograph by Andrew Swanston, frontispiece, Michael Benskin and M. L. Samuels eds., *So Meny People Longages and Tonges. Philological Essays in Scots and Mediaeval English Presented to Angus McIntosh* (privately published, 1981)

I've taken as my title 'Scots: a language of European civilisation' because when I think of Angus McIntosh, the word that comes most readily to mind is 'civilised'. I remember him as dignified and rather awe-inspiring, but also as courteous and urbane. My contact with him was mainly as an undergraduate, though also from time to time as a colleague after I began my teaching career at the University of Glasgow. But I like best to remember him from my lowly position as one of his undergraduate students, because he was – as everybody who knew him would agree – a person to look up to.

I had the good fortune to go to Edinburgh University during a Golden Age. The numbers of students were low enough that the Honours classes could be taught in small groups by the most distinguished scholars, like Prof. McIntosh, at that time also the Head of the English Language Department. We were able to see something of the scholar at work, to catch a bit of the excitement of new discoveries and developments as they happened. In particular, we were aware of the ongoing work on the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*. Prof. McIntosh would use examples from it to illustrate points that he was making, not just points of fact, but points of methodology and theory, which he was quite happy to expose undergraduates to. There was a feeling that the small steps we were taking into the subject were steps on that same road that leads towards mastery and the opportunity to be part of the invisible college – as 17th century scientists called it – that all of the scholars in a given field belong to.

I did go on to become, in my own small corner, a member of the fraternity of scholars and I owe that to the inspiration of truly great teachers and scholars, Angus McIntosh prominent amongst them. One of the rather wonderful things about our field is that knowledge doesn't become obsolete in it – unlike for instance, medicine or physics, where the work of earlier generations is of purely historical interest. Scholars are still writing – and will go on indefinitely writing – things like, "No one has done more to illuminate this question than Angus McIntosh,"<sup>1</sup> or, "the value of linguistic profiles ... is outlined by Professor McIntosh,"<sup>2</sup> or, "The means ... have been set out in a series of ground-breaking articles."<sup>3</sup> Because, of course, when scholars cite each other's work, it is in the present tense. Angus McIntosh's work is forever, or as long as European civilisation endures, and Angus McIntosh as a scholar is immortal.

People sometimes think of scientific enquiry – and linguistics is a branch of science – as a free-ranging adventure into strange unknown lands – a bit like discovering the source of the Nile perhaps. Maybe occasionally it can be like that, but a lot of the time it's more like extracting precious metal from the ground – you have to sift through many tons of facts to refine some nuggets of understanding. The various fields of academic enquiry are called 'disciplines' for a reason – you have to narrow your focus to just those questions that you can hope to answer in the present state of knowledge, and then you pursue the

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<sup>1</sup> Gillis Kristensson 'On Middle English dialectology' in Michael Benskin and M. L. Samuels eds., *So Meny People Longages and Tonges. Philological Essays in Scots and Mediaeval English Presented to Angus McIntosh* (privately published, 1981) p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Benskin and Margaret Laing 'Translations and Mischsprachen in Middle English manuscripts' *ibid.*, p. 99, fn. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Smith *An Historical Study of English* (London and New York, Routledge, 1996), p. 29.

answer until it gives itself up, exhausted. Even as an undergraduate in those days, I had the sense that this was what was going on around me, and I think that was wonderful.

For this lecture, I also thought the theme of civilisation was appropriate because of Angus McIntosh's war service, first in the Tank Corps and then as a code-breaker at Bletchley. When I was a callow undergrad in the 1970s, the Second World War was, for me, already history. I didn't understand – I probably didn't understand until I became a parent – that Angus's generation had saved Europe from a descent into barbarism. All the comfort and security and freedom that we now enjoy, we owe to them.

It's only when I think about it now that I realise that Angus and his generation purchased the opportunity – not only for themselves, but for those like me who sat at their feet – to explore the riches of knowledge for no other reason than this: that it is civilising. History – the history of language, or any other aspect of history – is a bit like a garden: there might well be useful things in it, but it is also a place to refresh and uplift the spirit. So on this occasion, I invite you to put down the spade and the trowel of scholarship and take a wee dauner, just for the sake of it.



Figure 1. Roman Empire 200 A.D. (Bartholomew, *Atlas of the Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 1915, via Wikimedia Commons <http://commons.wikimedia.org>)

Figure 1 shows civilisation, as far as the western world is concerned, in the fifth century A.D. Beyond this are barbarians who think the proper response to a murder is another murder, and who wipe their fingers in their beards. The Angles and Saxons are about to overrun eastern Britain and turn the infrastructure of Roman rule into instant archaeology. However, even while we were still on the continent, we Germanic tribes had had some taste of civilisation. As many of you will remember from First Year English Language, there were some early loans from Latin while the Angles were still on the continent, e.g. *wine*, high on the list of what the Romans did for us. And oddly enough – since it is to this day a revolting northern European habit to cook with animal fat instead

of olive oil – the word *butter* comes to us from Latin, and perhaps Greek before that – though the Mediterranean peoples may only have been transmitting it from further afield. *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) describes its anterior etymology as “perhaps of Scythian or other barbarous origin”.



Figure 2. Part of a Roman hoard from Birnie. Courtesy of the National Museums of Scotland.

Another mark of civilisation that we owe to the Romans is coinage. Those of you who are old enough to remember real money will recall that the abbreviation for pounds, shillings and pence was l.s.d., i.e. *librae, solidi, denarii*. Figure 2 shows a hoard of denarii found a few years ago at Birnie near Elgin, a reminder of how far north the Romans got, even if they didn't manage to establish themselves. Fraser Hunter, the archaeologist in charge of the dig, has suggested that the coins were a bribe to keep the frontier quiet.<sup>4</sup> The locals, of course, had nothing to spend the silver on, this being a barter and pillage economy, so they buried them. Birnie is pretty much at the end of the line of known Roman campsites, though even further west, nine Roman coins were found at Burghead, and isolated Roman coins have turned up in Orkney and in the Outer Hebrides (Figure 3).

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<sup>4</sup> Fraser Hunter *Beyond the Edge of Empire – Caledonians, Picts and Romans* (Rosemarkie: Groam House Museum, 2007) p. 24; 'Finding Roman Treasure', National Museums of Scotland ([http://www.nms.ac.uk/education\\_activities/celts\\_and\\_romans\\_at\\_birnie/finding\\_roman\\_treasure.aspx](http://www.nms.ac.uk/education_activities/celts_and_romans_at_birnie/finding_roman_treasure.aspx)).

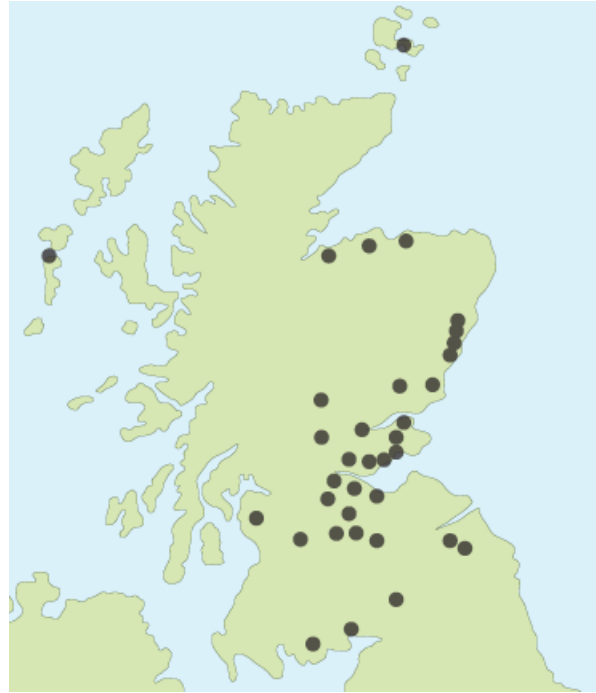


Figure 3. Roman coin finds. Courtesy of the National Museums of Scotland.

It's worth reminding ourselves that Latin is an older language in these islands than Scots or English. It took the Angles till the 12th century to get as far as Elgin, and then only on the coat-tails of the Norman administration – Elgin was chartered as a royal burgh in 1136. The spread of the burghs (Figure 4) is the best surrogate we have for the northward spread of the Anglian language (later, as we know, to evolve into Scots).



Figure 4. Burghs to 1300. From *Atlas of Scottish History to 1707* (1996), Peter McNeill and Hector MacQueen (eds.), Edinburgh: The Scottish Medievalists and Department of Geography, University of Edinburgh.

These were at first Anglian-speaking (and French-speaking) enclaves in Gaelic territory, and it must have been difficult to persuade burgesses to move there. They were enticed with a tax holiday, called a *kirset* – the word is Danish. It appears first in Latin documents – DOST (*A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*) often quotes Latin for the early history of words, since vernacular documents are so thin on the ground until the late 14th c. You’ll see from the DOST citations that you would get *quinque annorum* in Dumbartonshire, but if you were prepared to go as far as Dingwall, you’d get *decem annorum* (Figure 5).

**DSL – DOST Kirset(h, Kyrset, n.** Also: (kersetum, kersecum). [Appar. ON. *kyrseta*. *kyrsæti*, sitting in peace and quiet. freedom from disturbance (as e.g. *hafa kyrsetu*), ODa. *quærsæt(æ)* (12th–14th c.). *quærsæde* (mod. *kværsæde*), the state of, or payment for, exemption from military service, esp. in the phrase, (land lies) *i kværsæde*.] Temporary exemption from payment of dues granted to a new settler in a burgh. — [Concessi etiam burgensibus qui illuc venient ad predictum burgum meum inhabitandum et ibi sedentes et manentes erunt kersecum [*sic*] ... vsque ad terminum quinque annorum completorum; 1222]. Irving *Dumbartonshire* (1920) II. 287. [Rex confirmavit cartam Alexandri II] ... qua Dingwell in Ros burgum fecit, ... concessit etiam burgensibus quod illuc venientes et ibi sedentes et manentes essent kersetum a festo S. Martini anno gratie 1226 usque ad terminum decem annorum complet., et ut quieti essent de tolneis &c. per totam terram de diversis eorum castellis imperpetuum; 1226 (1407-8). *Reg. Scot.* 6. 508/11. De novo

Figure 5. From *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* via *Dictionary of the Scots Language* (<http://www.dsl.ac.uk/dsl/>)

Figure 6 shows the major sources of Older Scots vocabulary (based on a 1 in 40 sample taken some years ago when the dictionary was only published as far as the 8th volume).<sup>5</sup> The element of Latin in Scots tends to be masked by French, its daughter language, since it's often the case that a loanword could come from either, e.g. *civil*, *spirit*, *metal*, *pupil*, to mention only a few.

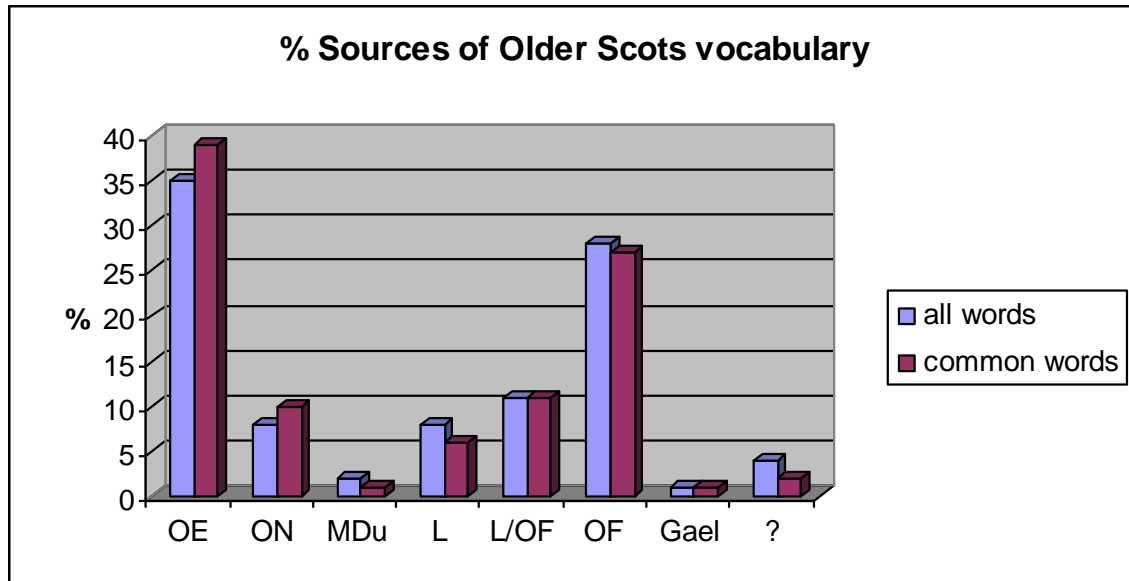
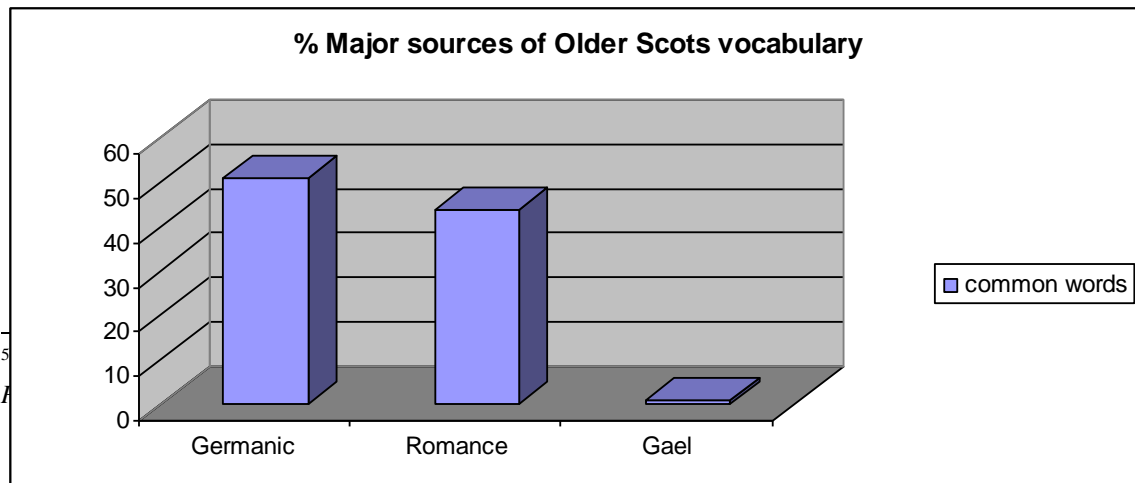


Figure 6. Percentage sources of Older Scots vocabulary, based on a 1/40 sample of DOST up to 'Schake'.

If we simplify the picture into language families (Figure 7), we can see that the contribution of Latin and French comes surprisingly close to the size of the Germanic contribution, even when we exclude less frequent words (those printed in smaller print in DOST). This isn't to say, of course, that the better-assimilated Romance words were all in everyday use, but taking the language as the dictionary presents it, across all written registers, we have to acknowledge that Scots, like English, is a massively Romance language, as far as its vocabulary is concerned.



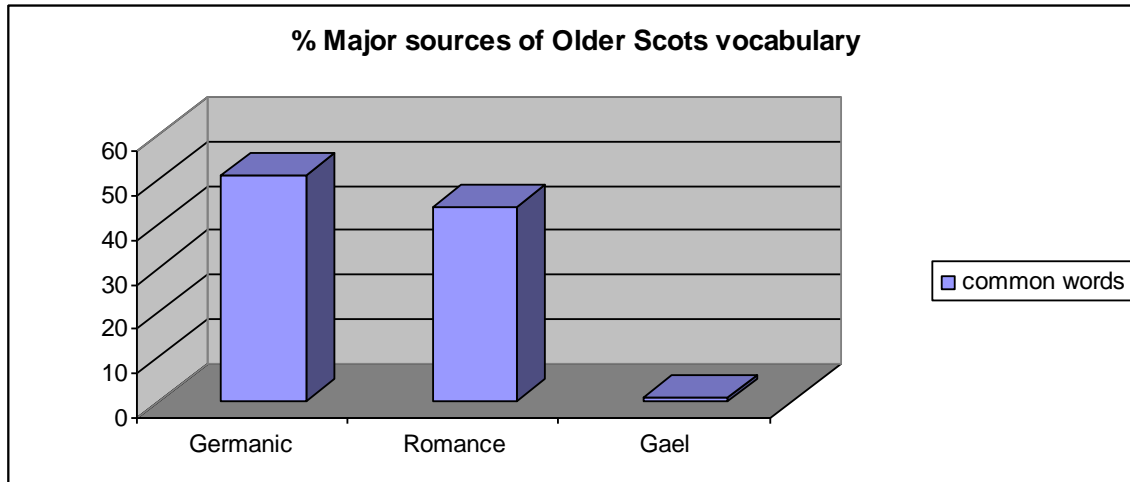


Figure 7. Percentage sources of Older Scots vocabulary by main language families, common words only, based on a 1/40 sample of DOST up to 'Schake'.

There have been a number of studies of Scots vocabulary from the point of view of the contribution of individual languages, but I would suggest that the French contribution is ripe for re-examination. There is a very interesting book on this subject, Francisque Michel's *A Critical Enquiry into the Scottish Language with the view of illustrating the Rise and Progress of Civilisation in Scotland*,<sup>6</sup> a work of great breadth and erudition, but done without the benefit of the OED, never mind DOST. Its etymologies are sometimes ingenious. I'm sure I don't have to tell this audience that ingenuity is not a virtue in a lexicographer.

So we might say that the *form* of the language reflects its wide European roots, and in particular its rootedness in the civilised Mediterranean as well as in the barbarous north. We can also see in the *content* of the language the participation of Scotland in European culture. Here, of course, I can only give a few examples and be very selective. I'm going to leave aside the arts and the institutions and concentrate on trade. The vocabularies of coinage and fabrics are particularly interesting, and with the dictionaries online, it's very easy now to pull out areas of lexis by searching the definitions ('senses') and you can be fairly sure that you've got a large proportion of the material, so that generalisations are possible. This online incarnation of the dictionaries would have delighted Angus McIntosh. It was Angus who secured backing for DOST, together with *The Scottish National Dictionary*, from the four ancient Scottish universities back in the 1950s, and he worked mightily in their support. We can imagine also the hearty welcome he would have given to the *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary*, the brain child of his colleague at Glasgow, Prof. Michael Samuels, now brought to fruition by Prof. Christian Kay.

Going back to coins, the denarius was the ancestor of the silver penny, and in Medieval Europe (up till the 14th century in Scotland) this was the only coin actually minted. Other

<sup>6</sup> Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1882.



amounts were what is called money of account – denominations used in prices and calculations but not actually in circulation as coins – rather like guineas, which stopped being minted as coins in 1813 but were used for expressing prices right up until decimalisation (and are still sometimes used in auctioning livestock). There was no shilling coin in Scotland, for instance, until after the Union of the Crowns.

The *mark* or *merk* was a Germanic measure, originally a weight of precious metals. The mark, as a monetary value, was widely used as money of account. There never was a mark coin in England. In Scotland, however, it was intermittently minted as a coin from the late 16th century on. Derived from *mark* is the *markland*, a piece of land with an annual rental value of one mark (except in the Northern Isles where it seems to refer to land with an original purchase value of a mark). It is really a quite remarkable testimony to the conservatism of pre-industrial societies that the mark survived alongside the pound, since it didn't have a neat relationship with it – the mark was reckoned to be worth 13/4d (two thirds of the pound).

However, Scottish merchants were well used to dealing with currency conversions. For one thing, English money circulated freely in Scotland, but after 1367, when Scotland left the “sterling area”, the Scottish and English currencies weren't at parity.<sup>7</sup> By the time of the Union, the Scottish currency was worth one twelfth of the English. This is usually seen as an embarrassing admission of Scotland's poverty, but looking at the plight of Greece and the other poorer countries within the Eurozone at the present time, it could well be seen as an expression of national sovereignty, since there are times when devaluation of the currency is the only way to protect the economy.

Through overseas trade, Scottish merchants were naturally familiar with the coinage of many countries, but even within Scotland, anybody receiving a cash payment was likely to find that the bag contained a large proportion of coins from the Low Countries and France. Having limited natural sources of gold or silver, Scotland was chronically short of coins, or specie, to use the technical term, throughout most of its history as an independent country, and was rather lax about allowing foreign coins to circulate (as opposed to melting them down and reminting them). However, the mints did test foreign coin issues to establish the rate of exchange:

Forasmuch as there hath bein of late imported into this kingdome great numbers of these dollors commonly called leg dollors haveing the impression of a man in armes with one leg and a shield containing a coat of armes covering the other leg upon the one syd, which does usually passe at the rate of fiftie eight shillings Scotts money and seing that upon tryeall of the intrinseck ... value thereof they are found to fall short of the forsaid rate and that in the Vnited Provinces where the saids dollors are coyned thy passe only at the rate of crose dollors, therefor ... the Kings majesty ... doeth declare that ... the true ... pryce at which the forsaid leg dollors ought to passe ... is fiftie six shillings Scotts money; 1670 Cochran-Patrick *Coinage* (DOST s.v. Leg-dollo(u)r).

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<sup>7</sup> Ranald Nicholson ‘Scottish monetary problems in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries’ in D. M. Metcalf, ed., *Coinage in Medieval Scotland (1100–1600)*. *The Second Oxford Symposium on Coinage and Monetary History* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 45, 1977), pp. 103–114.

(It's interesting to note that although this text is written in English, it uses the Older Scots plural forms *said*s and *forsaid*s. Plural forms of adjectives were a feature of legal writing in Older Scots. It was mainly French adjectives that were treated in this way, but there was a small group of native words that inflected as well, and with *said* and *forsaid* the practice continues in formal documents into the 18th century, along with a few other Scottish features that bespeak a national tradition.<sup>8</sup>)

Going back to Michel (1882), just to show the extent to which he was working in the dark – and just to remind ourselves of the immense benefit to scholarship of these major reference works, the dictionaries, thesauri, sound archives and atlases – Michel asserts (quite confidently) that the leg dollar is a Manx coin,<sup>9</sup> from the three-legged symbol (the triskelion) of the Isle of Man. A good guess, and merely that.

Originally, of course, coins were measured quantities of precious metal, stamped in the name of the king as a warrant that they contained full weight (at least at the point when they entered circulation). There was always a temptation to quantitative easing of the coinage, so some issues were known to contain more precious metal than others, despite having the same face value. People were perhaps quite sensitive to the particular coin issues that they were dealing with; there are certainly large number of names for coins based on individual designs, e.g. the *bonnet-piece* or *bonnet groat* (with James V wearing a bonnet), the *sword dollar*, the *ridar*, the *rose noble*, the *unicorn* and the *potence crown* (with a *potence* or gibbet on it). The name *miln-rynd* was applied to various coins, including a Spanish one, with a representation of a mill-rind on them. A mill-rind (Figure 8) is a piece of iron that separates upper and nether millstones, so that they have a degree of movement against each other.



Figure 8: the mill-rind as a heraldic device (from [http://www.library.nd.edu/rarebooks/digital\\_projects/heraldry/charges/misc.shtml](http://www.library.nd.edu/rarebooks/digital_projects/heraldry/charges/misc.shtml))

There was also the *nonsunt*, a coin of Mary Queen of Scots during her brief time as consort of Francis II and Queen of France (1559-1560), with the words *Iam non sunt duo sed una caro* (Wherefore they are no more twain but one flesh, Matthew xix. 6). You can just imagine hearing the joke for the twentieth time: “Look, this coin says on it ‘I am nonsunt’.”

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<sup>8</sup> Caroline Macafee and †A. J. Aitken ‘A History of Scots to 1700’ in *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* vol. XII (2002, also <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/dsl/index.html>).

<sup>9</sup> *Op. cit.* p. 125.

It was a long time before people felt enough trust in government to accept a currency that had only nominal value. The Chinese experimented with paper money as early as the 13th century, but they had to abandon that, and ended up importing vast amounts of the silver that the Spanish brought back from the New World.<sup>10</sup> People expected money to be not just a medium of exchange, but a store of value. This is the assumption that lies behind Burns' lines, "The rank is but the guinea's stamp / The Man's the gowd for a' that."<sup>11</sup> It's an odd thing when you stop to think about it: all that fuss over metals with little or no use value. You can't build a house with gold, you can't light a fire with it, you can't eat it – a point that American Indians made very graphically when they (reportedly) poured it down the throats of the conquistadores (Figure 9).



Figure 9. Propaganda piece by Theodor de Bry, *Great Voyages*, Part IV, 1594, from [faculty.smu.edu/bakewell/BAKEWELL/period.html](http://faculty.smu.edu/bakewell/BAKEWELL/period.html).

Early attempts to introduce coins of merely nominal value in Europe were badly received. This was seen on the level of international exchange. Whereas foreign currency in silver or gold was acceptable, copper was a different matter. Copper was known as *black money*, in contrast to silver or *white money*. To complicate matters, silver was alloyed with copper in various degrees. Coins made of this alloy, billon, passed as white money if they had a high enough proportion of silver. But there came a point when billon coins were rejected. DOST quotes an Act of Parliament of 1469:

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<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz *The Great Divergence. China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>11</sup> 'Song – For a' that and a' that'.

That thair be na deneris of Frans, mailȝis, cortis, mytis, nor nain vthir conterfetis of blac mone tane in payment in this realme, bot Oure Souerance lordis awne blac mone strikkin & prentit be his cunȝouris.

(s.v. Mailȝe, n.<sup>2</sup>)

Murray comments on this Act:<sup>12</sup>

The particular coins of other realms which were named in 1469, as black money which was not to be current in Scotland, were ... of base billon. The French deniers were then about 8% silver, while the mailles were baser, and the mites of Flanders were still worse, at 2% silver in 1466.

(*Denier*, incidentally is from Latin *denarius*. Twelve of them made a French *sol* from *solidus*. *Sol* later became *sou*.) As Murray explains, while it might seem pointless to include such small proportions of silver at all, the silver content tends to become concentrated at the surface.

Using billon and copper opened the door to fake coinage:

Importing false coins called tinklers; 1599 *Reg. Privy C.* VI 849

Ane great part of the almus gevin to the pure is fals cunȝie, callit tinklaris; 1599 *Stirling Kirk S. in Misc. Maitl. C.* I. 133.  
(DOST s.v. Tinklar)

These fakes came into Scotland both from France and from the Low Countries, but it appears that the town of Mechelen or Mechlin (now in Belgium), in particular, was notorious in the 1560s and 1570s for counterfeiting small coins.<sup>13</sup> One might well ask: why Mechlin? If you've heard of Mechlin at all, it's probably as a centre of lacemaking. But that came later. Under the regency of Margaret of Austria, Mechlin had prospered, but she died in 1530, the Protestant Reformation got underway, and by the 1560s the Netherlands were embroiled in a religious war of independence from the Hapsburgs. So it rather looks as if the burghers of Mechlin were used to better times and turned to counterfeiting to maintain their lifestyle.

Even in domestic transactions, people didn't want to be left holding black money. James III minted copper farthings in 1466 but these were used only as small change – like Cooperative tokens – and nobody was obliged to accept them in quantity. However, there was a crisis in 1482 over black money. It is now accepted that this was a copper penny, though it's almost always just referred to as “the black money”, but also once in the written record as “Couchrinis plak” (DOST s.v. Plak). The plak was another coin that was also first minted by James III (on the model of the Dutch plak), so this may be the

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<sup>12</sup> Joan E. L. Murray ‘The Black Money of James III’ in D. M. Metcalf, ed. *Coinage in Medieval Scotland (1100–1600)*. *The Second Oxford Symposium on Coinage and Monetary History* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports, 45, 1977), p. 115.

<sup>13</sup> DOST s.v. Mauchlyne<sup>2</sup>.

source of the confusion. The actual James III plack has been exonerated, as it was made of a half-decent billon.<sup>14</sup> So some revision may be required to the DOST entry for *plak* if the identification of *Cochrane's plack* as a copper penny is accepted. Cochrane's name was still mud nearly two centuries after the crisis: "sa bass money as the lyke wes never sen Cochranis dayis".<sup>15</sup>

Merchants who had signed contracts before the black money came in insisted on payment in the money current at the time of contract. The black money caused problems for tradesmen, who bought wholesale using silver but then had to accept copper when they sold retail. In Aberdeen in 1482 a set of ordinances was enacted to prevent retailers, including fleshers, brewers and bakers, from going on strike and refusing to furnish the town with their goods.<sup>16</sup> In the same year, 1482, the black money was recognised as a toxic asset and was *cryit down*, that is devalued by proclamation. There was much litigation by those who had accepted substantial payments in copper during the brief time that it was current as "usual money of Scotland". *Siller* in Scots continued to be synonymous with *money*.

The debauchery of the coinage reminds us that trade depends on relationships of trust, underpinned by law and order – which might serve as a definition of civilisation – and as such it's vulnerable to disruption by catastrophes and war. Trade is the aggregate of very many movements of people and goods, very many face to face interactions, often far from home. The romance of far-away places is evident in the names of fabrics. For instance, *silk* comes into the Scandinavian languages and Old English from Latin *sericum* via a Slavonic source. We are no doubt hearing an echo of old trade routes. The secret of silk, which the Chinese kept for as much as three thousand years, reached Byzantium around 550. The Slavonic element in the word's history suggests the old Viking trade route from Byzantium through Kiev.

Many types of cloth are named after the places where they were made, e.g.:

- *dornik* (named after Dornik, also called Tournai) was a linen cloth, used especially for tablecloths, etc.;
- *luke* could refer to Luyck (that is Liège) but – in the sort of coincidence that lexicographers get accustomed to – it could also be Lucca in Italy, and both of these centres produced velvet and silk;
- *Mauchlyne blak* (from Mechlin) was a type of expensive black cloth used for hose – this is what the good burghers of Mechlin were doing before they took up counterfeiting;
- *lawn* (from Laon) is, as in English, a fine linen;
- *drapdeberry* is a woollen cloth from Berry;
- *Rowan claith* is any kind of material from Rouen;

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<sup>14</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 115–130; Elizabeth Gemmill and Nicholas Mayhew *Changing Values in Medieval Scotland* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 125 fn. 70.

<sup>15</sup> Murray *ibid.*, p. 116, quoting R. W. Cochran-Patrick, *Records of the Coinage of Scotland I* (1874, p. 106). Thomas or Robert Cochrane is commonly identified as one of James III's favourites.

<sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Gemmill and Nicholas Mayhew *Changing Values in Medieval Scotland* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 46.

- *Paris black* was used for gowns.

Numerous types of cloth were imported from particular places in England, including *Lincoln green*, and *March-blak* from the Welsh Marches. The word *lemistar*, from Leominster (pronounced /lɛmstər/), evidently became lexicalised as a type of cloth, so that we have *lemistar* from Mechlin.

It's noticeable that several of these fabric manufactories seem to have specialised in certain dye colours. At this time dyeing wasn't as simple as choosing a colour and tipping a packet of it into a tub of hot water. Different chemical processes were involved in obtaining different colours. *Crammasy*, for instance, was a red colour, or material dyed that colour, as in Hugh MacDiarmid's line, "Mars is braw in cramasie".<sup>17</sup> It's the same word as English *kermes*, a type of beetle found around the Mediterranean from which a red dye was extracted. *Scarlet* was earlier a type of cloth, a fine wool, but since the best cloth deserved the best dye, it was most often dyed with kermes and by the 14th century *scarlet* was a colour word. (A similar semantic process was followed by *tartan* which became the name of the pattern but was originally French *tiretaine*, a type of cloth with a wool weft on a cotton or linen warp.)

Perhaps more surprising than the reds is the variety of expensive black materials in the dictionary record in the first half of the 16th century, including *Mauchlyne blak*, *Paris black*, *March-blak*, *lemistar* and *Mauchlynis blak lemistar*. This isn't just coincidence. It's difficult even now to produce a deep, fast black colour. The main ingredients used at this time were oak galls and ferrous sulphate (confusingly known as copperas, because of its green colour, like oxidised copper). The iron in the ferrous sulphate unfortunately attacks the fibres over time, so that these sumptuous materials haven't survived till the present. Another essential ingredient was alum, a mineral refined from various other kinds of sulphate deposits. Alum became particularly difficult to obtain in the late 15th and 16th centuries, driving up the cost and therefore the desirability of black fabrics. There are some beautiful black garments in royal portraits of this period, for instance in a portrait of Mary Queen of Scots by an unknown hand in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. The main source of alum was the Near East – until Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453. When deposits were eventually found in Europe they were in the Papal States, so when Henry VIII was excommunicated in 1533, England was cut off from supplies.<sup>18</sup> (Our old friends, the Protestant burghers of Mechlin, would have been in difficulties as well – perhaps another reason why they went off the rails.) England eventually developed its own alum industry in the 17th century, which is sometimes described as the beginning of large-scale chemical industry in Britain.

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<sup>17</sup> 'The bonnie broukit bairn'.

<sup>18</sup> Philip Ball *Bright Earth. The Invention of Colour* (London: Viking, 2001).



Figure 10. Old Scottish weights and measures. Courtesy of Perth Museum and Art Gallery.

Another extremely interesting area of vocabulary is weights and measures (Figure 10). This is an area of Byzantine complexity, with competing systems reflecting native versus continental traditions, and a separate tradition in Orkney and Shetland that was largely, of course, Scandinavian.

The *anker*, a measure of wine and spirits and a barrel of a certain size (from Dutch and German *anker*, of uncertain origin) comes up frequently on School of Scottish Studies tapes from the Highlands, with reference to illicitly distilled whisky. The word fell out of use in English in the 19th century. It was a measure of wine and spirits, and also a barrel of that size. The *anker* was used all round the Baltic, so this no doubt reflects Scottish trade with the cities of the Hanseatic League. Another Baltic measure was the *lispund* (from MLG *lispunt* ‘Livonian pound’), formerly used in Orkney and Shetland to weigh butter and oil. (Livonia was a territory occupying part of what is now Latvia.)

In the Older Scots period, there were numerous specialised measures for particular commodities, and the same measure could be a different amount depending on the commodity, for instance you needed twice as much barley as oats to give the same measures. The sort of context in which that equivalence would be meaningful would, of course, be the payment of rentals or taxes.

Even more confusing is change over time in the amount designated by a given measure. This arises from the ‘baker’s dozen’ phenomenon. It was customary with all sorts of measures to add a certain amount, or to give a heaped rather than a level measure, to make sure the quantity wouldn’t fall short, through spillage in the process of measuring the commodity out, or through spoilage. There was for instance the *long hundred*, which was 120, so a *maise* of herring, nominally 500, was actually 600, and then you were expected to add another handful to that.<sup>19</sup> There was even a completely different, and larger, water measure for goods transported by water, to cover the buyer against the increased risk of loss or spoilage in transit.

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<sup>19</sup> Sources used in *The Concise Scots Dictionary* suggest a figure of up to 615.

Over time the customary allowances were incorporated by statute into the standard measures. In particular, the forpet, the dry measure for commodities such as grain, expanded from 19¼ pints to 22½ in the course of a few centuries, as the heaped forpet was standardised by creating a new level forpet that allowed for the extra gained by heaping – but soon another allowance would be demanded on top of the standard measure. This has made it extremely difficult for historians in this area, and the solution to the mystery was quite a triumph of detective work. To some extent the phenomenon was driven, as I mentioned, by customers demanding an assurance of full measure, but the recent work of Connor and Simpson<sup>20</sup> reveals something more sinister: that the pressure to inflate the standard measures came from landowners and tax gatherers. It was, in effect, a stealth tax.

Scotland is at the outer margins of Western civilisation. Things were slow to reach us here, e.g. printing. Even Norway had printing before Scotland did.<sup>21</sup> And one of the biggest threats to civilisation seems not to have impacted on us at all: the Tartars.



Figure 11. The Mongol Empire at the time of Genghis Khan's death in 1227. Map by Michael Postmann, via Wikimedia Commons, *op. cit.*

It's always interesting to speculate how things might have turned out if history had taken a different course. Suppose there had *been* no European civilisation? Back in the 13th century, Western Europe had a very narrow escape. Figure 11 shows the extent of the Mongol empire in 1227. Recent genetic research across the southern part of that map has identified a Y chromosome type that pretty much coincides with the empire.<sup>22</sup> It points to a single man – possibly also brothers and cousins – but let's assume it's a single man, and let's call him Ghengis Khan – who was the ancestor of 8% of the men in this part of the world. The paternity of those 16 million men (0.5% of the population of the world) could only be settled definitely if the grave of Genghis Khan were to be found and his DNA examined. This is unlikely to happen – not only was the burial site erased, but every

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<sup>20</sup> R. D. Connor and A. D. C. Simpson, ed. A. D. Morrison-Low *Weights and Measures in Scotland. A European Perspective* (Edinburgh and East Linton: National Museums of Scotland and Tuckwell Press, 2004).

<sup>21</sup> Angus Mackay with David Ditchburn, eds. *Atlas of Medieval Europe* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>22</sup> Tatiana Zerjal et al. 'The genetic legacy of the Mongols' in *American Journal of Human Genetics* 72 (2003) pp. 717–721.



living thing, man or beast, that encountered the cortège on the way back from what is now North-western China was hunted down and killed.<sup>23</sup>

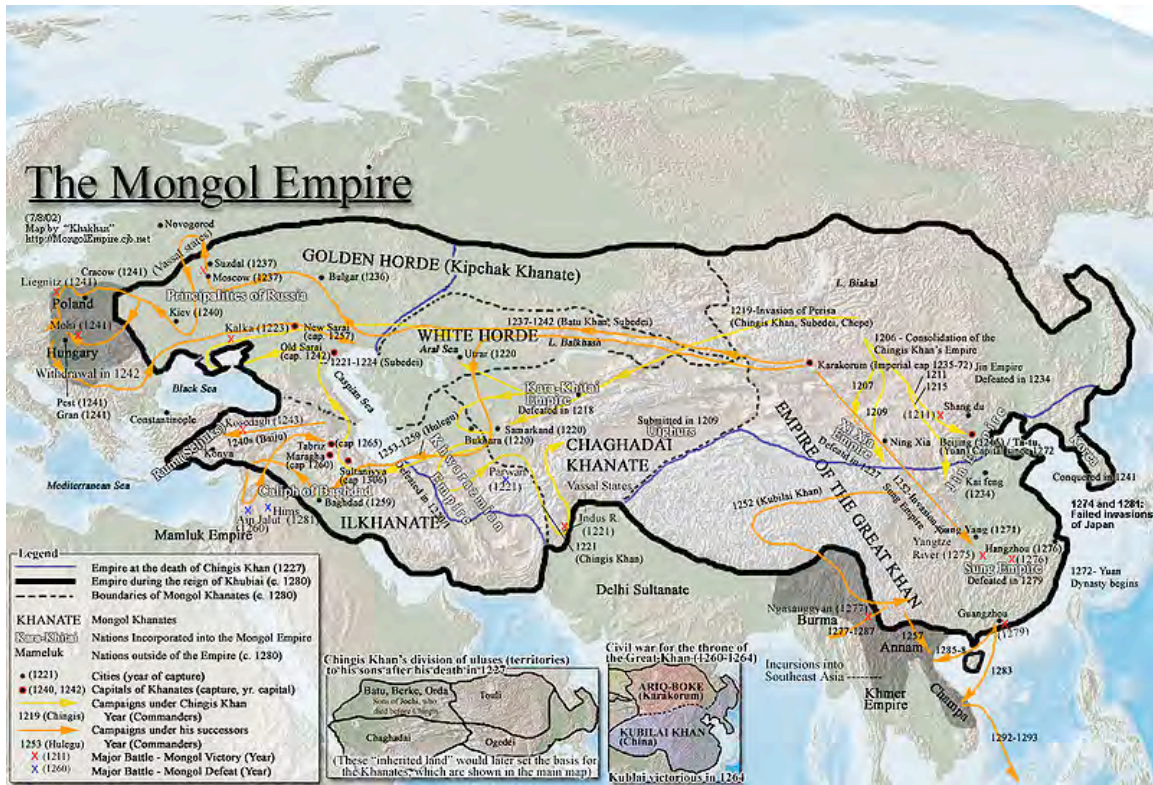


Figure 12. The Mongol Empire at its greatest extent. Unidentified source via Wikimedia Commons, *op. cit.*

By 1241, Batu Khan, the grandson of Genghis Khan, had fed a large part of the population of Hungary to the wolves and was pasturing his horses on its plains, while he planned his next move westwards (Figure 12). But then his uncle, the reigning Khan of Khans, died, and he went back to Mongolia to take part in the election of the successor. We tend not to appreciate what it was we escaped. At that distance from home, the Mongols weren't interested in taking territory and holding it. They just killed everybody and galloped off with the loot. J. R. R. Tolkien, who tried to construct a kind of mythology for Western Europe, had the Tartars in mind, I believe, when he created the orcs in *The Lord of the Rings* (Figure 13). (I feel justified in mentioning LOTR, as it is said that Tolkien began working on his Middle England fantasy when Angus McIntosh hammered him at tennis and he was laid up with an injured ankle.) People imagined at the time that the Mongol hordes came from Tartarus, or Hell, and changed their name from *Tatar* to *Tartar* accordingly.

<sup>23</sup> Robert Marshall *Storm from the East. From Genghis Khan to Khubilai Khan* (London: Penguin Books and BBC Books, 1994) p. 49.



Figure 13. Tartar cannibals, from a MS of Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, via Wikipedia Commons, , *op. cit.*

It could be argued that the legions of the Tartars are what made the difference between Western Europe, which went on to lead the world into a new age of science and rationalism, and the Near East. Before the Mongols, for instance, the Islamic world was the leader in the production of glass; afterwards they produced virtually none until the technology was reintroduced from Venice in the later 18th century.<sup>24</sup> And glass – especially in the form of lenses and laboratory equipment – is a technology essential to the advancement of science. As for China, it managed to domesticate its Mongol rulers and thereafter concentrated on government micro-management and feeding its population, and as far as possible ignored the ghosts and devils outside its borders.

But what if the Tartars had devastated Western Europe instead of Northern China? Would it have been China rather than Europe that began the Industrial Revolution? From Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, we learn that in the 17th century China already had a double-acting cylinder engine – what this signifies is that China had the basic technology of the steam engine; it was widely used to power bellows.<sup>25</sup> However, most historians agree that having coal and iron reserves together in the same place was the crucial factor in the Industrial Revolution, allowing the harnessing of steam power on a large scale. This juxtaposition existed in Northern China.<sup>26</sup> But, crucially, Northern China was devastated and depopulated by the Mongols, and the centre of gravity of the Chinese empire shifted southwards before anything came of this industrial potential.

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<sup>24</sup> Alan Macfarlane and Gerry Martin *The Glass Bathyscape. How Glass Changed the World* (London: Profile Books, 2003) pp. 103–104.

<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz *The Great Divergence. China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2000) p. 62.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 62 ff.

In our reverse scenario, the British Isles play the part of Japan. The Mongols were a mounted fighting force. Would they have bothered trying to conquer the British Isles? They did attempt to invade Japan, once they had the resources of China at their disposal, under Kublai Khan. The Japanese were saved – in a manner reminiscent of the scattering of the Spanish Armada – by a typhoon, which destroyed the invasion fleet. They named the typhoon *kamikaze* – the original ‘divine wind’.

So, assuming we escaped invasion, with Western Europe under Mongol sway we might have been the last bastion of Christendom. Like Japan, we might have found that the logic of geography dictated the unification of the islands under the strongest military power sooner or later. But Scots wouldn’t have been eclipsed by English, since there would have been no Protestant Reformation, and Latin would have maintained its dominant position over both English and Scots. There would have been no Age of Exploration – at least not from the European point of departure. It would have been the Chinese who discovered and annexed the New World.

This would have changed the course of history so completely that it’s rather trivial to consider the implications for the Scots language, but let’s do it anyway. It’s really the effect on English that makes the difference, because it’s not just that Scots got smaller as important functions were transferred to English at the close of the Older Scots period. English itself got so very much bigger. It has been estimated that 15% of the modern English vocabulary dates from the century between 1520 and 1620.<sup>27</sup> Nevalainen, as a little exercise, looks at words that came into English in the year 1604. These include *addiction, hallucinate, idiosyncrasy, chocolate, chinchilla, polder* and *leprechaun*.<sup>28</sup> The Age of Exploration gave English a number of loan words from Spanish and from a range of exotic languages, but this was only part of the expansion of things to talk about, as the world of knowledge grew like a jigsaw in the making. *The Historical Thesaurus* shows, for instance, the emergence of terminology for the telescope in the early 17th c. (Figure 14).

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<sup>27</sup> T. Finkenstaedt, D. Wolff et al. *Ordered Profusion. Studies in Dictionaries and the English Lexicon* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1973).

<sup>28</sup> Terttu Nevalainen *An Introduction to Early Modern English* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006) p. 51.

### Results for category 01.03.07.08.01. . - Instrument for distant vision

<u>Heading</u>	<u>Word</u>		
Instrument for distant vision	glass	n	1613
Instrument for distant vision	prospect-glass	n	1617
Instrument for distant vision	prospective glass	n	1626
Instrument for distant vision	prospective	n	a 1635
Instrument for distant vision	prospect	n	1639
Instrument for distant vision	spying-glass	n	1682
Instrument for distant vision	spy-glass	n	1706
(.telescope)	trunk	n	1610
(.telescope)	trunk-glass	n	1613
(.telescope)	trunk-spectacle	n	1613
(.telescope)	<b>telescope</b>	n	1648
(.telescope)	optic tube	n	1651
(.telescope)	tube	n	1651

Figure 14. Telescope (highlighting editorial), in the category 'Instrument for distant vision', *Historical Thesaurus of the Oxford English Dictionary*  
<http://libra.englant.arts.gla.ac.uk/historicalthesaurus/aboutproject.html>

As Francis Bacon said in his *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (*Advancement of Learning*, 1605, addressed to James VI, translated 1733):

... this proficiencie in navigation and discoveries may plant also an expectation of further proficiencie and augmentation of all sciences ... as if the openness and through-passage of the world and the increase of knowledge were appointed to be in the same ages ... (p.76)

Unfortunately for Scots, it was precisely during this age of augmentation that the language lost its independence. Henceforth the contributions that Scotsmen made to the lexicon of science were contributions to English – and indeed to what Fishman calls an 'econo-technical lingua franca', a shared scientific and technological vocabulary with only minor differences in a wide range of languages.<sup>29</sup> For instance, the following is a list of some results for *telescope* (as translated by Google):

Croatian, Czech, Danish, German, Malay, Norwegian, Polish, Russian: **teleskop**

Dutch: **telescoop**

Filipino: **teleskopyo**

French: **télescope**

Greek: **τῆλεσκοπίο**

Hungarian: **teleszkópja**

<sup>29</sup> Joshua Fishman 'Bilingual education, language planning and English', *English World-Wide* 1 (1980) p. 11–24.

Irish: **teileascóp**

Italian, Spanish: **telescopio**

Welsh: **telesgop**

This puts into perspective the lack of a distinctive Scots word for ‘telescope’. It was to demonstrate that the Scots, as a people, had not ceased to contribute neologisms to English that David Murison added as an Appendix to the SND ‘A list of scientific terms with Scottish connections’, which includes e.g. *colloid*, *Brownian motion*, *neon*, *penicillin*, geological terms like *Allanite*, botanical terms like *Forsythia*, and names of fossils like *Lanarkopterus*.

I don’t personally think that we can now reinvent Scots as a modern standard language on a par with English and French, or even with – say – Dutch or Finnish. But I do believe it’s vital for us to carry forward a knowledge of Scots as part of our history, and to retain the ability to read the texts of the past – to pronounce Rabbie Burns correctly, for instance, and to keep the makars in print – which is, of course, a major function of the Scottish Text Society, who organised this lecture. I am glad to have had the privilege of completing John Law’s modernised reading text of Gavin Douglas’ *Eneados*.<sup>30</sup> John’s sudden death a few weeks before this lecture was given was a great loss to the Scots language movement.

I’m very pleased also that I’ve been able to work on the Tobar and Dualchais (<http://www.tobarandualchais.co.uk/>) project, making the School of Scottish Studies sound collections available online. As Dick Gaughan said in an obituary for Hamish Henderson:

He was our most important collector of folksongs yet the bulk of his work was for a University department and so lies in an archive, unseen and unheard by most of the public.<sup>31</sup>

Angus McIntosh had an important role in founding the School of Scottish Studies, and I’m sure he would have been delighted that modern technology is making that archive available to be heard anywhere in the world. As Jack Aitken said in Angus’s Festschrift, *So Meny People Longages and Tonges*, a leading characteristic of Angus McIntosh was

self-effacement, or, put more simply, unselfishness – a willingness to subordinate his personal aggrandisement to the most effective furtherance of his subject. He has devoted [himself] massively ... to making possible glorious scholarly productions by others.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *The XIII buiks o Eneados o the famous poet Virgil translait by Gavin Douglas and modrenised by John Law* (e-book, Scots Language Centre, 2010, <http://www.scotslanguage.com/articles/view/2216>).

<sup>31</sup> Gaughan, Dick ‘Links in the chain: Hamish Henderson (1919-2002)’ <http://www.dickgaughan.co.uk/chain/hamish-henderson.html> (originally published in *The Herald* as ‘Hamish Henderson: a personal appreciation’)

<sup>32</sup> A. J. Aitken ‘Angus McIntosh and Scottish Studies’ in Michael Benskin and M. L. Samuels eds., *So Meny People Longages and Tonges. Philological Essays in Scots and Mediaeval English Presented to Angus McIntosh* (privately published, 1981), p. xxv.

In acknowledging this, we don't forget, of course, his own glorious scholarly productions. As a member of the audience said to me recently, Angus McIntosh really should have received a knighthood.

To conclude then: without our history, we would be in the uncivilised state that Hobbes described in *Leviathan*, with “no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society”.<sup>33</sup> A sense of the past speaking to the present, immanent in the present, traceable in the present, is something that I took from Angus McIntosh's teaching, for which I am very grateful.

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<sup>33</sup> 1651, ch. XIII.