

REVIEW

Robert Bruce MacColla MacNial MacIntyre, *Six Millennia, the History of the Gael: The Irish and the Scots Highlanders*, Markham, ON: Stewart Publishing and Printing, 2005. \$34.99/USD, 206 pp. ISBN 1-894183-70-3.

Alexander MacKenzie, *History of the Camerons with Genealogies of the Principal Families of the Name*, Inverness: A&W MacKenzie, 1884: reprint, Markham, ON: Stewart Publishing and Printing, 2005. \$50.00 CDN, 532 pp. ISBN 1-4043088-06.

As the author Robert Bruce shows, the practice of constructing and preserving clan histories is a phenomenon that is often concomitant with one's very Scottishness. A compelling case in point is his *Six Millennia, the History of the Gael: the Irish and the Scots Highlanders*. According to Bruce, in revealing this history, it is hoped that an 'ancient treasure', a rich tradition of oral accounts and stories, will be preserved for posterity. Furthermore, in doing so, he intends to refute many enduring, yet inaccurate perceptions surrounding Gaelic culture. It is suggested by the author that modern, formal historical research has inadequately treated this issue, and that more traditional methods as conveyed in his work will provide a more 'authentic' account of Gaeldom's early history. In the author's words: 'While I cannot speak for all of the ancient and great Clans of the Celts I do know most precisely what my own ancestors, the Eremonian (a branch of Gaeldom originating in Northern Ireland) Royal Line of The Gael, believed, protected, and passed down, at the highest cost.' (p. 42)

Bruce's introduction provides a historic overview of the Gaelic/Celtic peoples of Continental Europe and the Western Isles. This section begins with a treatment of the Druid Order who were more than mere genealogists, but rather 'the "glue"

which held Celtic society together.’ (p. 27) He continues by discussing, among other topics, Celtic origin beliefs, clan organization, spirituality, legal practice (also known as Cain or the Brehon Laws), dress and weaponry, and the power of the ‘spoken word.’

Following this concise introduction to Celtic culture is ‘a translation of the oral history of the Royal Eremonian line of the Gael race.’ (p. 15) This account begins with a traditional account of the creation of the world and proceeds in retelling the history of the Gaels from their origins with Noah of the Old Testament, through the ‘Eremonian line of High Kings and its major derivative branches within Ireland, the Highlands of Scotland, and the Hebrides,’ up to Somerled, the ‘Lord of the Isles.’ (p. 16) Within this history, a variety of issues are addressed, including Druidic belief, Gaeldom’s conversion to Christianity, and the importance of male bloodlines. The epilogue is devoted to answering the main questions posed in Bruce’s foreword, such as the origins of man, the Druidic/Gaelic name for God, and the source of Druidic wisdom.

Although supplemented by translated works such as *Lebhor Ceud Toisech* (The Book of First Beginnings) and *Lebhor Gabalal Eirinn* (The Book of the Taking of Eirinn), the bulk of Bruce’s work is derived from oral tradition, yet written in a highly formalized, antiquated style. Yet, this should not dissuade interested readers, as it is this style that helps make Bruce’s work more convincing, matching the traditional, oral accounts from which it is derived. Furthermore, *Six Millennia* serves as a modern-day example of the manufacturing of family histories, as Bruce’s retelling of Gaelic biblical roots follows the practice of Highland clans centuries prior.¹ Lastly, the book’s appendices - a full translation of The Book of First Beginnings, as well as a brief genealogical and historical interpretation of clan coats of arms - offer deeper insight into much material discussed by the author.

While readers who are expecting a formal historical study may find themselves disappointed by the informal, deeply religious nature of Bruce’s work, this does not mean that *Six Millennia* should be avoided altogether. The tone, imagery and language employed by the author amount to a modern,

written retelling of traditional Gaelic oral history. Within this compilation is a rich array of material that has been carefully preserved by Bruce and his ancestors; it is in such preservation that the true value of this work lay.

The interest in Scottish family history is by no means the exclusive domain of modern-day enthusiasts, as illustrated by the 2005 reprint of Alexander Mackenzie's 1884 work *History of the Camerons, with Genealogies of the Principal Families of the Name*. Derived from articles, papers, and oral accounts, his work discusses the Cameron clan's history from the eleventh to the mid-nineteenth century. Starting with a treatment of the clan's beginnings within the eastern portion of Lochaber, Mackenzie notes the varied opinions pertaining to its original ancestry, whether descended from members of the Danish nobility, or a more 'aboriginal' lineage, as part of older clans (p. 6).

Following his discussion of the clan's origins, Mackenzie examines the twenty-four Cameron chiefs since Angus of the eleventh century, focusing upon marriages, children, and key events during each leader's stewardship. Though varied in depth, his accounts are more detailed from the sixteenth century onward, likely as source materials prove more abundant. Of particular interest is how clan, regional, and national matters influenced and were influenced by each clan leader. For example, John de Cameron is noted as a signatory to the Declaration of Arbroath, while Sir Ewen Cameron was deeply affected by the political crises of the mid-seventeenth century (p. 11, p. 95). The final section of Mackenzie's *History* examines various branches of the Camerons since the eighteenth century, as well as notable figures of that period, such as Dr. Archibald Cameron and General Sir Allan Cameron.

Like many of his contemporaries, Mackenzie's writing style, heavily narrative and filled with lengthy sentences, may prove an obstacle to some modern-day readers. His comprehensive index may, however, be helpful to those seeking information regarding particular individuals and thus wishing to avoid lengthy reading. Mackenzie's lack of consistent references, combined with use of contemporary literature, much of which is not readily available to us today, may make his *History* more of a dead-end than an outlet for further research. This should not dissuade the ambitious

scholar or genealogist, as this reprint of Mackenzie's work is valuable as it not only remains a valuable tool of reference for the detailed study of the Camerons, but that, thanks to Stewart Publishing and Printing, it is also a preserved example of late-nineteenth century historical scholarship.

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¹ For an example of scholarly work focusing on the manufacturing of pedigrees, see David Allan, 'What's in a Name?': Pedigree and Propaganda in Seventeenth-Century Scotland' in *Scottish History: The Power of the Past*, eds. Edward J. Cowan and Richard J. Finlay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002), pp. 147-168.