

Joachim Frederik von Bassen: A Danish Scholar in Restoration Scotland

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Accepted for publication in *Northern Studies* published by the Scottish Society for Northern Studies.

Scottish scholarship of the seventeenth-century remains sadly understudied. The inhabitants of late humanist Scotland are a chequered crowd of professors and heralds, physicians and ministers, now mostly forgotten and often seemingly insignificant, but as has been argued elsewhere they can nonetheless shed new, often unexpected light on the period as a whole. The older vision of Restoration Scotland, in particular, as an intellectual wasteland has been decisively rejected in the work of Clare Jackson, Esther Mijers, and others, while scholars such as Steve Murdoch and Alexia Grosjean have emphasised the ongoing importance of contacts between Scotland and continental northern Europe during this period.¹ Now, new work not only by these scholars, but by others such as Kathrin Zickermann, Nadine Akkerman, Thomas Brochard, and Steven Reid, to name only a few, is causing our understandings of the intellectual and cultural world of early modern Scots to increase by leaps and bounds.²

Nonetheless, there remains much to be done before we can construct a fully nuanced picture of Scottish intellectual culture at the tipping point from humanism into enlightenment. The present essay aims to make a very small contribution to this larger project by recovering a figure who has not previously been discussed in any study either of Scottish intellectual history or Scottish-Scandinavian contacts: the Danish soldier and scholar Joachim Frederik von Bassen, who wrote his most important surviving work in the vibrant environment of 1680s Edinburgh. It begins by reconstructing what little is known of von Bassen's life, a life which took him across Europe and led him into the houses and libraries of a remarkably diverse group of scholars, aristocrats, and politicians. Then it turns to his principal surviving work, the *Royall Cedar*, a fantastical genealogy of the Scottish royal house, describing its contents and exploring its structure and sources. Investigation reveals that the *Royall Cedar* was much more than a piece of implausible genealogical aggrandisement: it was a rich fiction which blended the Humanist reimagining of Scotland's history with a polymathic range of continental

¹ Clare Jackson, *Restoration Scotland, 1660-1690: Royalist Politics, Religion and Ideas* (Woodbridge, 2003); Esther Mijers, *"News from the Republic of Letters": Scottish Students, Charles Mackie, and the United Provinces, 1650-1750* (Leiden, 2012); Steve Murdoch, *Network North: Scottish Kin, Commercial and Covert Associations in Northern Europe, 1603-1746* (Leiden, 2006); Alexia Grosjean, *An Unofficial Alliance, Scotland and Sweden, 1569-1654* (Leiden, 2003).

² See, for example, Kathrin Zickermann, *Across the German Sea: Early Modern Scottish Connections with the Wider Elbe-Weser Region* (Leiden, 2013), Nadine Akkerman, ed., *Correspondence of Elizabeth Stuart, Queen of Bohemia*, 2 vols. to date (Oxford, 2011-), Thomas Brochard, "The Integration of the Elite and Wider Communities of the Northern Highlands, 1500-1700: Evidence from Visual Culture", *Northern Scotland* 6 (2015): 1-23, and Steven J. Reid and David McOmish, eds., *Neo-Latin Literature and Literary Culture in Early Modern Scotland* (Leiden, 2017).

scholarship and, crucially, with von Bassen's own lived experience, to become a baroque allegory of its author's intellectual biography. By restoring von Bassen and his magnum opus to their appropriate contexts, this article both recovers a remarkable but forgotten scholar and provides one more link in the growing chain of Scottish intellectual history.

Joachim Frederik von Bassen was a product of the long-standing ties between Denmark and Scotland from the moment of his birth.³ Much later in life he would proudly write that "My Grandfather by the mothers syde was borne under the race of Stewarts".⁴ This statement allows his parents to be identified as two figures who make a brief appearance in one of his own genealogical manuscripts: the shadowy "Captain in Danemark, surnamed van Bassan" and his exotically named wife, Boella Rutilia Sinclair.⁵ Von Bassen's Sinclair mother was also from a military family, the daughter of Captain Michael Sinclair of Dalshult, Halland, in the Danish service, who was killed at the siege of Kalmar in 1611, the grandfather whose Northern Isles ancestry von Bassen would later emphasise. He had been born to David Sinclair of Arisdall, Chamberlain of Shetland, by a daughter of the Mowats of Hugoland, making von Bassen not only a scion of the sprawling Sinclair kinship network, but also a cousin of Axel Mowat til Hovland, the immensely rich Danish admiral and owner of the estate of Rosendal.⁶

Little is known of von Bassen's early career. He served in the Danish army, like his father and grandfather, and was still in that service on 10 November 1669 when he was ordered to take over the company of the Irish emigrant Gerret Macodi in the Oplenske Infantry Regiment.⁷ Von Bassen's heart lay elsewhere, however, and by the 1670s his "Inclinatione . . . to Informe my selfe in Genalogies" seems to have superseded his military career.⁸ It was probably about this time that he was in his Mowat cousins' manor of Rosendal, where he came across "Ane old Manuscript written by that worthy & Learned man Wm Tulloch Bishop of Orkney" concerning the genealogies of the Scandinavian and British monarchs. This manuscript, which he copied out "with my owne hand" seems to have been the foundation of his later scholarship.⁹

Von Bassen's archive fever rose to a new pitch sometime afterwards when he was in the service of or otherwise known to Countess Eleonore Katharine of the Palatinate, who gave him free run of her "fair Bibliothek Wherin is Contained many Manuscripts" at Eschwege in Hessen and encouraged him "not to leave the Genalogie of

³ See Steve Murdoch, *Britain, Denmark-Norway and the House of Stuart, 1603-1660: A Diplomatic and Military Analysis* (East Linton, 2000).

⁴ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. 4r.

⁵ Richard Augustine Hay, *Genealogie of the Sainteclaires of Rosshyn* (Edinburgh, 1835), 173.

⁶ Hay, *Sainteclaires*, 173. For Axel Mowat til Hovland (1592-1661), see *Norsk Biografisk Lexikon, s.n.*, Murdoch, *Network North*, 57, and the eulogy by Sir Thomas Urquhart of him as one "in whose judgment and fidelity such trust is reposed, that he is at it were Vice-King of Norway" (Thomas Urquhart, *The Jewel*, ed. R. D. S. Jack and R. J. Lyall [Edinburgh, 1983], 94-95).

⁷ Steve Murdoch and Alexia Grosjean, *Scotland, Scandianvia, and Northern European Biographical Database*, Record ID 316, <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/history/ssne/index.php>, accessed 2 December 2016.

⁸ The quotation comes from the preface to NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. 4r ("May it please your Lordships to know that my Inclinatione ever hath been verry great to Informe my selfe in Genalogies").

⁹ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. 4r.

Scotland uncompleted".¹⁰ Knowledge of this period of his life is chronologically sketchy and based solely on his own subsequent reports, but it appears that sometime after his sojourn at Eschwege and prior to 1681 he lived with the elderly Brabant antiquary Baron Philips van Leefdael (1610-1681), having "the use of his books" and "maintenance in his owne hous" while he perused the baron's "large Bibliothek full of Antient Manuscripts" (van Leefdael was a well-known genealogist and antiquary in his own right and earlier in the century had written a comprehensive *Beschrijving der Meierji van 's-Hertogenbosch*).¹¹

Sometime before 24 November 1682 von Bassen had arrived in Edinburgh. On that date he had a letter from Laureds Anders Lillie in Linden, discussing various genealogical matters.¹² It was there that he began forging what would become an essential network of contacts amongst the antiquaries of Restoration Scotland. Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh, then Lord Advocate, opened his library to von Bassen, but his Danish visitor did not remain long, appearing in London by 18 January 1683 when a comrade from Edinburgh, David Campbell, wrote to him, informing von Bassen that he intended to leave for Denmark and hoped to meet von Bassen in London before his departure.¹³

It was in London that von Bassen met Joseph de Faria (d. 1703), one of the leading Portuguese genealogists of his generation and then Portuguese ambassador to the British court.¹⁴ De Faria introduced him to a world of southern Europe scholarship previously unknown to von Bassen, but he also served an important role as intermediary, encouraging Lord Dumbarton to write a letter in favour of the Dane to James Drummond, 4th Earl of Perth, then Lord Chancellor of Scotland, as well as the Dukes of Hamilton and Queensberry, evidently requesting them to assist von Bassen in his genealogical peregrination.¹⁵ It was through the Lord Chancellor that von Bassen was in turn recommended to William Drummond, Viscount Strathallan, sometime soldier in the Russian service and himself an accomplished genealogist and antiquary as well as von Bassen's "Great freind" who "did greatlie assist me in this worke".¹⁶

¹⁰ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. 4r.

¹¹ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. 4r. See Philips van Leefdael, *Beschrijving der Meierji van 's-Hertogenbosch*, ed. A. F. O. van Sasse van Ysselt ('s-Hertogenbosch, 1918).

¹² NLS Adv. MS 29.2.11, fol. 130r.

¹³ NLS Adv. MS 29.2.11, fol. 125r. For Rosehaugh see NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. 4r.

¹⁴ For De Faria see Antonio Caetano de Sousa, *Historia genealogica de casa real Portuguesa*, 12 vols. (Lisbon, 1714), i. CXLI-CXLIV, and Diego Barbosa Machado, *Bibliotheca Lusitana*, 4 vols. (Lisbon, 1741-1759), ii. 848. He seems not to have published in his lifetime, but composed several substantial genealogical works which remain in manuscript, including *Nobiliario dos reis de Portugal* (BNP Cod. 976), *Titulos de Algumas familias de Portugal* (BNP Cod. 1040), and the substantial two-volume *Ilustração da arvore genealogica da serenissima caza de Bragança* (BNP Cod. 1339-1340).

¹⁵ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. 4r-v. In light of von Bassen's later Scottish Catholic contacts, it is significant that George Douglas, 1st Earl of Dumbarton (c.1636-1692), was himself a Catholic and sometime colonel of the French *Régiment Ecossais* (James Balfour Paul, ed., *Scots Peerage*, 9 vols. [Edinburgh, 1904-1914], iii. 216-217). As two Catholic peers high in the Scottish government of the 1680s, Dumbarton would have been a logical avenue by which to reach the Lord Chancellor.

¹⁶ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. 4v. William Drummond, 1st Viscount Strathallan (c.1617-1688) had served in the Royalist army during the Civil Wars and subsequently under Tsar Alexis I in Russia. His *Genealogy of the Most Noble and Ancient House of Drummond* was completed in 1681 and dedicated to his kinsman, the same

Von Bassen's ability of making himself welcome in other people's homes continued to serve him well in the mid-1680s when he took up residence with Alexander Erskine, Lord Lyon King of Arms, in the latter's country house at Cambo in Fife.¹⁷ Erskine gave him "the whole use of his books" and they seem also to have entered into a semi-professional partnership judging from a letter of 19 July 1686 written by one J. King, apparently Erskine's secretary, from Cambo to von Bassen in Edinburgh reporting that he had informed Erskine "about that Douglles for writing my Lord pettegrie".¹⁸ The last sighting of von Bassen is in Edinburgh on 12 June 1688, from which he dated the preface to his *Royall Cedar*, a work which he stated he had been compiling for the past eight years.¹⁹ His subsequent life, whether in Scotland or beyond, is unknown.

But this life of travel and scholarship only maps part of von Bassen's intellectual world. Much more can be gained from the list of "those antient histories, Chronicles, And Manuscripts" upon which he claimed the *Royall Cedar* was founded.²⁰ Unsurprisingly, the usual Scottish suspects make their appearance: the *Histories* of John of Fordun, Hector Boece, John Leslie, George Buchanan, and John Spottiswoode (John Mair is conspicuously absent), and these are joined by a selection of English authors which von Bassen could easily have located either in London or Edinburgh: William Camden, John Speed, Raphael Hollinshead, Sylvanus Morgan, Samuel Daniel, William Lambert, William Burton, Ralph Brooke, Henry Spelman, and Sir William Dugdale.

But these characteristic names from the seventeenth-century British antiquarian landscape rub shoulders with less familiar figures. Von Bassen made use of universal genealogies such as Elias Reusner's *Basilikon: Opus genealogicum catholicum* (Frankfurt, 1592) and the more recent *Genealogiae imperatorum, regum, ducum, comitum . . .* (Tübingen, 1658) as well as histories and chronicles such as the Danish historian Arild Huitfeldt's *Danmarks Riges Kronike* (Copenhagen, 1595-1603).²¹ The herald Friedrich Leutholf von Frankenberg also made his appearance, as did the fifteenth-century Burgundian chronicler Olivier de la Marche, and the sixteenth-century historian of Piacenza, Umberto Locati.²² France is well-represented with authors such as Jean du Tillet, probably referring to his *Recueil des Roys de France* (Paris, 1578), but so is the north of

Earl of Perth who would recommend von Bassen to him a few years later (William Drummond, Viscount Strathallan, *Genealogy of the Most Noble and Ancient House of Drummond* [Edinburgh, 1831], 3-6).

¹⁷ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. 4v. Sir Alexander Erskine of Cambo, 2nd Baronet (d. 1727), a Jacobite and member of the dynasty of Erskines which controlled the Lyon Office until the appointment of Alexander Brodie of that ilk as Lord Lyon in 1727. See Francis J. Grant, *Court of the Lord Lyon* (Edinburgh, 1946), 16, and George Seton, *The Law and Practice of Heraldry in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1863), 486-487.

¹⁸ NLS Adv. MS 29.2.11, fol. 131r.

¹⁹ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. 4v.

²⁰ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. 1v.

²¹ Elias Reusner, *Basilikon: Opus genealogicum catholicum* (Frankfurt, 1592); Nicolaus Rittershausen, *Genealogiae imperatorum, regum, ducum, comitum* (Tübingen, 1658), Arild Huitfeldt, *Danmarks Riges Kronike*, 8 vols. (Copenhagen, 1595-1603).

²² Friedrich Leutholf von Frankenberg who later published the *Europäischer Herold* (Leipzig, 1705); Olivier de la Marche, *Mémoires de Messire Olivier de la Marche* (Lyon, 1562); Umberto Locati, *Cronica dell'origine di Piacenza* (Cremona, 1564).

Europe with figures such as the Swedish nationalist antiquary Jacob Reenhielm figuring prominently.²³

The most intriguing item in von Bassen's bibliography for the *Royall Cedar* is also the first: "William Tulloch the first Bishop of Orkney. And afterwards Bishop of Murray in Scotland". This was the same document which von Bassen had described copying in the House of Rosendal in Norway some years before. Von Bassen's friend Richard Augustine Hay provides further details concerning this manuscript in the process of writing a slighting summary of von Bassen's own work:

A worthy friend of mine named Master Joachim Frederick Van Bassen . . . made use of a manuscript history of Bishop Tallachs, of which there is a copy in the Hosue of Rossandall in Norway, sent there by Mr. Gilbert Mowat, Secretarie to Midleton, in compiling his Genealogies . . .²⁴

It would appear then, that the manuscript which von Bassen had copied had come to Rosendal from a kinsman in Scotland, Gilbert Mowat of Ure, Secretary to the Earl of Middleton. But what *was* this Scottish manuscript in Norway? Its supposed author, William Tulloch, was Bishop of Orkney, 1471-1477, and Bishop of Moray, 1477-1482. He had previously enjoyed an ambassadorial career under James III, being sent to Denmark in 1468 and England in 1471.²⁵ It would not *prima facie*, be impossible for a manuscript work of the bishop's to have remained in the Northern Isles until it was transmitted to Shetlanders abroad in Norway in the mid-seventeenth century, but the absence of any other evidence for William Tulloch's literary composition makes the claim somewhat tenuous.

There is, however, another explanation. William Tulloch was preceded in the Orcadian episcopate by his kinsman Thomas Tulloch and Thomas is known to have compiled the historical and genealogical dossier which now forms part of NRS GD 45/31/1, better known as the Edinburgh copy of the *Historia Norvegie*.²⁶ This contains a copy of the twelfth-century *Historia* itself (fols. 1r-12r), a genealogy of the Earls of Orkney (12v-17v), and a list of the Kings of Norway (18r-v), which collectively could not entirely inaccurately be described as von Bassen did his mysterious source: a "pedegree of the Royall familie of Denmark Norway England Scotland Sweden and Normandie".²⁷ Could von Bassen have seen the Edinburgh manuscript, misunderstood its references to

²³ Jean du Tillet, *Recueil des Roys de France* (Paris, 1578). Reenhielm was a member of the group of Swedish nationalist antiquaries active in Uppsala around Olof Verelius and Olof Rudbeck towards the close of the seventeenth century. The only work he had published by the time von Bassen had begun to write was an edition of *Thorstens Viikings-Sons Saga* (Uppsala, 1680). For the larger context of Reenhielm's circle see William Poole and Kelsey Jackson Williams, "A Swede in Restoration Oxford: Gothic Patriots, Swedish Books, and English Scholars", *Lias* 39 (2012): 1-66.

²⁴ Richard Augustine Hay, *Genealogie of the Hayes of Tweeddale* (Edinburgh, 1835), 10.

²⁵ Robert Keith, *An Historical Catalogue of the Scottish Bishops, Down to the Year 1688*, new ed., ed. M. Russel (Edinburgh, 1824), 145, 222; John Dowden, *The Bishops of Scotland*, ed. J. Maitland Thomson (Glasgow, 1912), 162-163, 261-262.

²⁶ Michael Chesnutt, "The Dalhousie Manuscript of the *Historia Norvegiae*", *Bibliotheca Arnamagnana* 38 (1985): 54-95; *Historia Norvegie*, ed. Inger Ekrem and Lars Boje Mortensen (Copenhagen, 2003), 29, 38.

²⁷ Chesnutt, "Dalhousie Manuscript", 54-95.

Bishop Tulloch, and attributed it to his successor of the same name? In the absence of further evidence, definitive proof is lacking, but it is intriguing that the potential Mowat ownership of the manuscript falls within a gap in its history. In 1554 it had been presented to Thomas Tulloch of Fluris by Robert Reid, the scholarly Bishop of Orkney, and by 1700 it was in the hands of Robert Norie, Bishop of Brechin, but its whereabouts in between are unknown.²⁸ It remains possible that von Bassen may have played an as yet ill-understood key role in the survival and later transmission of this key manuscript of an important medieval historical text.

Von Bassen's omnivorous reading fed into several works of antiquarian and genealogical scholarship, of which only one, *The Royall Cedar*, survives. We know, however, that at least three others once existed. The herald Alexander Nisbet referred to "van Basson . . . his Armories", seemingly the work he elsewhere identified as "his Manuscript, in the Lawyers Library" and which was probably an armorial, or volume of heraldic bearings.²⁹ More certainly, as late as 1886 a manuscript by von Bassen entitled the *Theatre of Europe, wherein is contained the XVI. Ancestors of every particular Family, of Emperour, King, Prince, Duke, and other great Person of Quality in Europe* was in the possession of the herald George Edward Cokayne, who published the page relating to the Duke of Monmouth.³⁰ Cokayne's account of the manuscript states that it was dated at London, 16 June 1684, and was dedicated to Anna, Princess of Denmark, who had, allegedly, bestowed "great and manifold favours" on von Bassen when she was in Scotland and he was "a Stranger there in great sickness".³¹ The page published by Cokayne suggests that this work was organised, as its title indicates, as a series of *seize quartiers*, the sixteen probative quarters of nobility required for many senior political and ecclesiastical posts on the continent, but which were less common in Britain. The only remarkable aspect of the published set is their impressively detailed knowledge of the Welsh ancestry of Charles II's mistress Lucy Walters.³² The present whereabouts of this manuscript are unknown.

Most intriguing, from the viewpoint of von Bassen's own life and Northern Isles connections, is a small genealogical tract on the cadet branches of the family of Sinclair which von Bassen's friend Richard Augustine Hay copied into his manuscript history of that family with the stern caveat that:

²⁸ An inscription on the fly-leaf records that "this buk pertenis to Thomas Tulloch of Fluris be the gift of his maisteir Robert Beschop of Orkney anno 1554" ("Extracts from a Manuscript Volume of Chronicles", in *Bannatyne Miscellany* [Edinburgh, 1855], iii. 27). Robert Norrie's ownership was noted by James Wallace, *An Account of the Islands of Orkney* (London, 1700), 121.

²⁹ Alexander Nisbet, *A System of Heraldry*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh, 1722-1742), i. 62, 193.

³⁰ G[eorge] E[dward] C[okayne], "Seize Quartiers of James, Duke of Monmouth", *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica* 4 (1886): 264-265. The manuscript had previously been in the collection of Lord Farnham and was amongst the items from his library sold at Sotheby's in 1869 ("Henry Maxwell, Lord Farnham, K.P.", *Herald and Genealogist* 6 [1871]: 639).

³¹ Cokayne, "Seize Quartiers", 264.

³² Cokayne, "Seize Quartiers", 265.

The foregoing Pedegrees . . . with what follows, require a particular examine, being framed by one Van Bassan, a Dane, who understood not our printed histories, and had not knowledge enough of our manuscripts and charters.³³

Von Bassen's Sinclair pedigrees include the southern family of Herdmanston, but are principally focused on various Orcadian and Shetland Sinclairs, especially those (such as von Bassen's own maternal family, the Sinclairs of House) who had connections to Denmark and Norway.³⁴ They are lacking in dates and seem to have been largely, if not entirely, the product of oral tradition.

While these texts shed occasional rays of light on his career, our knowledge of von Bassen and his scholarship derives principally from his magnum opus, *The royall Cedar Which was planted in Albione Anno Mundi 3641*. This remarkable scribal publication survives in four copies, one each in the British Library, Edinburgh University Library, Glasgow University Library, and the National Library of Scotland, probably the surviving moiety of eight copies, each of which would have been presented to one of its eight aristocratic dedicatees.³⁵ Each is in folio and contains seventy-eight leaves or thereabouts. Von Bassen's choice of dedicatees leaves his politics in little doubt: James Drummond, Earl of Perth, William Hamilton, Duke of Hamilton, George Gordon, Duke of Gordon, George Mackenzie, Viscount Tarbat, William Drummond, Viscount Strathallan, Alexander Erskine of Cambo, Lord Lyon King of Arms, Sir Magnus Prince, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and Sir William Sharp of Scotsraig, make for an imposing royalist, often Catholic or Episcopalian, list of patrons.³⁶ Facing the first page of the dedication is a cartouche within which is written "God save King James the Seavent of Great Brittain, And his young sone prince James Who was borne the 10th day of June 1688 And baptised upon the 11 day of the samyne Moneth".³⁷ Von Bassen's royalist, Stewart credentials are in no doubt.

The text itself is a sprawling narrative genealogy of the Scottish royal house, divided into four parts plus appendices and sub-sections. The first part begins with Gathelus ("Gattellus" in von Bassen's erratic spelling) and Scota, the second commences with the legendary founder-king Fergus mac Ferchard, and the third marks the supposed third-century CE conversion of the Scots to Christianity under Donald I.³⁸ The fourth part concludes this division of the Scottish past by beginning with "the noble famileis of the Stewarts" and tracing them from their origins through to James VII and II.³⁹ A final ten leaves sketch out female and cadet branches of the Stewarts, those "who are

³³ Hay, *Sainteclaires*, 173.

³⁴ Hay, *Sainteclaires*, 171-175.

³⁵ British Library Add MS 15620; Edinburgh UL MS E2013.43; University of Glasgow Library MS Hunter 48 (T.2.6); NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5. There is also a later scribal copy by the antiquary Robert Mylne at NLS Adv. MS 34.3.15, although there is no reason to suppose, with the NLS catalogue, that it is necessarily a copy of Adv. MS 34.2.5 rather than of another copy of the manuscript. The surviving manuscripts appear to be identical in content and for the purposes of this article I have taken my readings from NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5.

³⁶ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. [v]r-v.

³⁷ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. [iv]v.

³⁸ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, pp. 2 (Gathelus and Scota), 6 (Fergus), 25 (Donald I).

³⁹ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, p. 97.

descended of the Royall blood & are not proper to be forgott”, and a somewhat surprising appendix provides a brief account of “the most antient name of Menzies”, which Perthshire family is stated to have been descended from Douroderigon de Menesias, “a noble portugise”.⁴⁰

In its overall structure, von Bassen’s genealogy conforms to the myth of the “Ancient Monarchy” gradually developed over the course of the later middle ages and Renaissances by generations of Scottish historians.⁴¹ Gathelus and Scota spawn the Milesian conquerors of Ireland and they in turn produce the first king of Scotland, Fergus mac Ferchard, who is a contemporary of Alexander the Great. Thereafter, a dizzying array of monarchs follows one another in rapid succession with myth and misunderstanding gradually shading into a confused account of the Dalriadan kings before finally reaching some approximation to Scottish medieval history as it is now understood about the ninth century CE. This vision of the Scottish past was already under attack when von Bassen was writing – indeed, his patron George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh played a leading role in its defense during the 1680s – but it was not until Thomas Innes’s systematic investigation of the sources of the myth in 1729 that it finally became exploded for good.⁴²

Thus, von Bassen was neither original nor eccentric in his list of a hundred-odd ancient Scottish kings. The unusual nature of the *Royall Cedar* comes from another source. Von Bassen signposts his contribution to the Scottish genealogical tradition in his preface, writing that:

I have read the most noble and reall authors of Genalogie in Europe And never found so great fault in any of them As in those of Scotland. Their ommitting the names of the Kings daughters And their Mariages.⁴³

It was this absence of a fully fleshed out pedigree in the works of Scotland’s medieval and humanist historians which von Bassen intended to make good. And so he did. Each generation of the Ancient Monarchy is duly apportioned appropriate wives, daughters, and younger sons unknown to any previous scholar. As an example, taken at random, of this miraculous multiplication, we might consider the family of King Ambirkelethus, grandson of Eugenius V. This king, von Bassen wrote, married first Argantilla, daughter of Arthur Odven, “one of the Antient progenitores of the Campbells”. After her untimely death ambassadors were sent “for a most beautiful and high borne princess”, Hermentrude, daughter of Sigisbert II, “Duke and Superior of Almanian And heir of E of ffrankin” by his wife Lutberg, daughter of the Duke of Swabia, “of whom descended the Hapsburgs lyne who afterwards became Romish

⁴⁰ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, pp. 147-148.

⁴¹ For the Ancient Monarchy mythos see William Matthews, “The Egyptians in Scotland: The Political History of a Myth”, *Viator* 1 (1971): 289-306; Roger A. Mason, “Scotching the Brut: History and National Myth in Sixteenth-Century Scotland”, in *Scotland and England*, ed. Roger A. Mason (Edinburgh, 1987), 60-84; William Ferguson, *The Identity of the Scottish Nation: An Historic Quest* (Edinburgh, 1998), *passim*.

⁴² Ferguson, *Identity of the Scottish Nation*, 157-169; Colin Kidd, “Antiquarianism, Religion, and the Scottish Enlightenment”, *Innes Review* 46 (1995): 139-154.

⁴³ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, fol. [vi]r.

Emperours". By this second illustrious marriage King Ambirkelethus had two children, a son Euegnius, and a daughter Glismota who married Theodan VI, "called prince Boiorum A brave warrior".⁴⁴

Elsewhere we may note King Alpinus who married first Prisella, daughter and heir of Erick, "the Last sovereigne Lord of Brade Albione", by which marriage Breadalbane was obtained by the crown of Scotland. Secondly he married Edghita, daughter of Rechnburne, Earl of Warwick, and had, amongst other issue, a daughter Geslilda who married Lopez, "A Ritch and Mightie Lord of Biskaia".⁴⁵ These examples of marriages with half-mythical, half-historical continental rulers could be easily multiplied.

Von Bassen was also alert to the origins of Scottish noble families. Ancient Grahams, Douglas', MacDonalDs, and others make their regular appearance, and so to do various royal younger sons, identified as founders of this or that noble house. Some, such as the MacGregors, the Murrays, and the Campbells, are perhaps predictable, but others such as "Thereus the Younger", ancestor of the small Catholic lairds, the Tyries of Drumkilbo, are rather less expected.⁴⁶

After this scintillating beginning, the section of the *Royall Cedar* dedicated to the Stewarts seems tame, if not dull, in comparison. The closer he voyages towards the present day, the more purely factual von Bassen's genealogies become, while the near-contemporary account of agnatic and distaff Stewart kinsfolk is little more than the textual version of any of the lengthy printed royal family trees which would have been in circulation at the time.

At first, it is tempting to suppose that the entire work is a vast genealogical *jeux d'esprit*, a fantastical creation stemming entirely from von Bassen's own mind. Closer examination, however, reveals a more complex picture. The Scottish princess who married a lord of Biscay in the ninth century seems eminently risible, but she also appears in a Basque legend recorded in Lope García de Salazar's fifteenth-century *Bienandanzas e Fortunas*; the origins of the MacGregors find their parallel in a manuscript from the collections of von Bassen's contemporary, the Fife genealogist George Martine of Clermont; and elsewhere there appear echoes which could only have originated from the *Heimskringla* and Einhard's *Life of Charlemagne*.⁴⁷ A reference to a supposed daughter of King Gregory the Great who married "Lodovicke Earle of ffrustanberrie [*i.e.*, Fürstenberg] . . . progenitor of the noble princes of ffrustanberrie of quhom was the Late bishop of Strasburrie" suggests a familiarity with that bishop's lavish antiquarian-genealogical work, the *Monumenta Paderbornensia*.⁴⁸ While von Bassen was undoubtedly

⁴⁴ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, pp. 50-51.

⁴⁵ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, p. 61.

⁴⁶ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, p. 11.

⁴⁷ Lope García de Salazar, *Las bienandanzas e fortunas* (Bilbao, 1955). The account of MacGregor origins at NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, p. 66, is almost identical to that published in Robert Douglas, *Baronage of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1798), 493, allegedly from a manuscript in the collection of George Martine of Clermont. An echo ultimately deriving from the *Heimskringla* appears at NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, p. 50, and one from Einhard on p. 49.

⁴⁸ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, p. 66. See Ferdinand von Fürstenberg, Prince-Bishop of Paderborn, *Monumenta Paderbornensia* (Paderborn, 1669).

inventing much of what he wrote, he was doing so in the context of a deeply intertextual and learned game, one which drew on a host of medieval and modern sources to give validity to its moves.

Also key to von Bassen's re-envisioning of Scottish history are the royal house's relations with Denmark-Norway. King Metellanus, we are told, married Flaviana, daughter of Frode III, King of Denmark – a half-mythical figure taken from Saxo Grammaticus – Donald, the son of Carassus, is raised by Sigurd, King of Denmark, the Danish general “Field Marshal Prince Grahame” the Great (predictably ancestor of the Grahams) helps Fergus II reclaim his throne, banished Scots regularly fly into exile in Norway, Denmark, and Sweden, Eugenius VI marries a daughter of Halfdann hinn mildi, King of Vestfold, Ethus the Swift marries a daughter of Harald Fairhair, and on and on it goes.⁴⁹ Von Bassen was projecting his own experience as a Scoto-Dane onto the distant past, just as his own friendship with a Portuguese scholar and his sojourns in Germany, Brabant, and London all reappear transmuted into ancient Iberian, German, Brabantish, and Saxon personages within the pages of his work.

The *Royall Cedar* was much more than mere fantasy, but rather an intellectual or spiritual biography, couched as a genealogy, a rich fiction which incorporated von Bassen's wide-ranging reading, but also his own lived experience across Europe. This descendant of “William de Monte Alto”, a Douglas cadet who came out of Italy and was ancestor of the Mowats as von Bassen wrote, carefully and eruditely wove his own life's narrative of travel and transience into the existing narrative of the Scottish Ancient Monarchy, creating a remarkable work somewhere in the hazy borderlands between fiction and fantasy, a text which reshaped his new (yet ancestral) home into an image of himself.⁵⁰

But what von Bassen had achieved was not entirely new. Genealogical myth and fantasy were mainstays of the early modern intellectual world. Some, like Queen Elizabeth's descent from King Arthur, were rooted in older myths while others, such as Emperor Maximilian I's descent from the Roman *gens Anicii*, were the product of the Renaissance, new words to an old tune.⁵¹ Von Bassen would have known of at least some of these, such as early modern Denmark's happy adoption of the long line of mythical and semi-historical ancient kings named in the work of the twelfth-century historian Saxo Grammaticus.⁵²

What sets von Bassen apart is the level of his invention. His was much more than mere wishful thinking linking one historical figure to another; it was wholesale

⁴⁹ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, pp. 17 (Metellanus), 31 (Donald), 39 (Field Marshal Graham), 50 (Eugenius VI), 65 (Ethus).

⁵⁰ NLS Adv. MS 34.2.5, p. 63. Even this Italian Douglas was not cut from whole cloth but was rather grandson of one “William Douglas” in the time of Charlemagne, no doubt the mythical “Gulielmo Conte di Douglas” whose supposed peregrinations in Italy were discussed in a correspondence between Marc Antonio Scoto, Conte d'Agazano, and William Douglas, 1st Marquess of Douglas in the 1620s (Sir William Fraser, *The Douglas Book*, 4 vols. [Edinburgh, 1885], iv. 291-299).

⁵¹ For this tradition see Marie Tanner, *The Last Descendant of Aeneas: The Hapsburgs and the Mythic Image of the Emperor* (New Haven, CT and London, 1993), and Roberto Bizzocchi, *Genealogie incredibili: Scritti di storia nell'Europa moderna*, new edn. (Bologna, 2009).

⁵² The *editio princeps* of Saxo was published at Paris in 1514 (*Danorum regum heroumque historiae*) and several more recent editions in both Latin and Danish were available by von Bassen's time.

creation and reimagining of the past. In that respect he was not so very different from a slightly later explorer of Scottish history, the Benedictine monk Marianus Brockie.⁵³ Brockie's *Monasticon Scoticanum* contained within it not just an elaborate account of the pre-Reformation monastic tradition of Scotland, but also documents setting out what that tradition might or should have been: forged charters obtained from shadowy Edinburgh sources which in Brockie's autograph manuscript still bear traces of careful composition and hesitation between words and phrases as he laboured to produce the perfect medieval text.⁵⁴ Von Bassen was a Brockie in a generation which had not yet fixed upon contemporary documents as the litmus test for historical truth.

Nonetheless, von Bassen was living in the midst of that shift. Jean Mabillon had published his seminal *De re diplomatica* in 1681 and already Scots were eagerly adapting this new tradition of historical scholarship to their own use, carefully examining, weighing, and interpreting medieval manuscripts to rewrite their history.⁵⁵ In this respect von Bassen can be compared to his friend and younger contemporary Richard Augustine Hay (1661-1736), then in Edinburgh and agitating for the establishment of a community of canons regular at Holyrood during the newly lenient reign of James VII and II.⁵⁶ Hay had been educated at the Scots College in Paris and the Collège de Navarre, where he imbibed the latest in diplomatic scholarship. Much of his life was spent collecting, copying, and analysing medieval Scottish charters, from whence he produced genealogical texts which represented the new tradition in Scottish historiography, histories of the Hays and of von Bassen's own maternal kinsmen the Sinclairs which summarily dispensed with old traditions in favour of the newfound truth of the archive.⁵⁷

Hay was a pioneer, though, and it is important when contextualising von Bassen to understand the larger evolution of genealogical scholarship taking in place in Scotland. Manuscript genealogies of families or of the royal house were a regular preoccupation of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century scholars and aristocrats. Generally, they tended to follow the same structure von Bassen himself used: a narrative arranged chronologically with separate sections covering each head of the house, his marriages and issue. As with von Bassen, they were a mixture of genealogy, history, and composite biography depending on the tastes of the author and while they often referred in a vague way to print or archival authorities, much as von Bassen himself did, they were rarely precise in their handling of evidence. It was only in von Bassen's own generation that this began to change and the weight of carefully located and quoted archival proof grew ever greater.

Von Bassen could hardly compete in an environment which was becoming ever more receptive to scholarship like that of Hay. This, together with his dedication of the *Royall Cedar* to future Jacobites such as the Earl of Perth, may suggest why it sank from the historiographical record without trace. Beautifully sculpted as it was, his work was

⁵³ For whom see *ODNB*, *s.n.*, and the contrasting perspectives offered by Henry Docherty, "The Brockie Forgeries", *Innes Review* 16 (1965): 79-127, and Mark Dilworth, "The Brockie Forgeries", *Innes Review* 16 (1965): 220-221.

⁵⁴ Docherty, "Brockie Forgeries", 97-115.

⁵⁵ Jean Mabillon, *De re diplomatica* (Paris, 1681).

⁵⁶ *ODNB*, *s.n.*; Anthony Ross, "Some Scottish Catholic Historians", *Innes Review* 1 (1950): 5-21.

⁵⁷ Hay's genealogical manuscripts are principally in NLS Adv. MS 34.1.9 and have been partially printed in *Sainteclaires* and *Hayes*.

firmly planted within the humanist tradition of scholarly invention, while even as invention it was not couched in a language apt to appeal to his and subsequent generations. This does not, however, mean that we should ignore von Bassen or that his work is inconsequential. He stands out as a remarkable figure, both for his geographical and intellectual peregrinations and for the way in which he transformed those into a unique and spectacular piece of fictional scholarship. The *Royall Cedar* encourages us to reconsider what scholarship meant in the era of late humanism: something both archivally-based, but also creative, the product of long research amongst books and manuscripts, but also of one's own life and experiences. Even if we reject it as fraud or fantasy, it remains perhaps the last moment in which the long-held and dearly cherished myth of the Ancient Monarchy was newly reaffirmed and rearticulated. It seems only appropriate that this was in 1688, when both von Bassen's brand of scholarship and James VII and II's brand of monarchy were about to begin their long slide towards oblivion.