

Miles Kerr-Peterson. *A Protestant Lord in James VI's Scotland: George Keith, fifth Earl of Marischal (1554–1623)*. Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2019. xvi + 237 pp. + 8 illus. \$99.00. Review by RENÉE A. BRICKER, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH GEORGIA.

A sketch of common stereotypes of sixteenth-century Scottish nobility portrayed them as especially violent, rebellious, and poor. However, this biography of George Keith, Fifth Earl of Marischal, rejects such mages. It builds on the significant and transformative work by such scholars as Jenny Wormald, Keith Brown, and Charles McKean who have collectively challenged worn stereotypes of Scottish nobility. Instead of the wayward, one-dimensional Scottish nobleman, Miles Kerr-Peterson shows us, to great effect, an utterly ordinary nobleman. Indeed, it his unexceptional behavior, Kerr-Peterson says, that makes him ideal to examine the functions of the Scottish nobility. In doing so, we gain a more textured and tangible picture of the sober administration of the corporate body of an inherited earldom. The goals of this study are twofold: first, through a case study of Marischal, to try to understand how an earldom was managed during the personal rule of Scotland's James VI, a period characterized by Protestant stability. Secondly, to answer questions of how any of that may fit into, and tell us, of "broader trends" in Scottish nobility at this time (1).

Chapter 1 provides background of the heritable Marischal earldom that traced its origins in Scotland possibly either to the Norman invasion or earlier to the Germanic Chatti who, defeated by the Romans, subsequently fled to Scotland (13). Following an exposition of the Keith family genealogy, we learn that the office of earl marischal was once for the king's farrier, developed into the overseer of chivalric courts, then finally by the sixteenth century became a ceremonial role. Of particular importance was the close connection between that office and the monarch.

The Keith family navigated the uncertain religio-political waters of the period between James IV's death, through the regency of Mary of Guise, the Reformation Parliament in 1561, and the deposition and abdication of Queen Mary in 1568. Young man George Keith travelled the continent with his brother, William; together they were educated by Theodore Beza at whose house they stayed while in Ge-

neva. This was also where William died during a confrontation with Spanish bandits (24). Less than two years after his return to Scotland, George inherited the earldom of Marischal and with it a respectable legacy of land and allies (29).

Chapter Two is divided into three sections that detail the three feuds that defined the period from 1582–95 for the earl. Two of these were with the earl of Huntly, punctuated by one with chancellor Maitland, from 1589–91, over the marriage mission to Denmark where Marischal, at significant expense, married Princess Anna as James VI's proxy. Finally a reprisal feud with Huntly lasted from 1591–95.

The conflict with Maitland was connected, Kerr-Peterson says, with James' overall plan to limit the power of the nobility, something the earls Huntly and Bothwell interpreted to mean the elimination of nobles. Moreover, Marischal, humiliated and discredited with James VI, seemed to be an embodiment of everything wrong about Maitland, according to Kerr-Peterson (54). In 1589, Huntly and Bothwell replied to a perceived overreach by chancellor Maitland with the Brig O'Dee rebellion, an assassination plot aimed at the chancellor (58). Though it failed, the effort and its aftermath show the dynamics of shifting power relations between the nobles and their monarch. Queen Anna, James' Danish bride, intervened on Marischal's behalf. Kerr-Peterson calls this "tantalising" because it raises questions about why she would get involved and what the nature of the bond was between her and Marischal (59).

The Earl, Kerr-Peterson reminds us, provides us with an example that nobles employed means besides violence to secure themselves. A durable balance was negotiated between kin that included marital alliances, assassination and its attempt, a fall from favor and its restoration. Throughout Marischal deftly managed his position and diversified his centers of power and influence in Scotland's north-east

Turning from the feuds that occupied nearly thirteen years, chapter 3 is concerned with Marischal's roles at the central and local governmental levels. Of particular interest were his relationship with King James I, his positions on the privy council, and in the Scottish Parliament, itself especially important to the nobility after the Union. Further, the impact of the Union on the Scottish privy council included a reshaping, in 1610, that reduced its membership. While its

impact on the Scottish nobility is well-covered ground, in the broad sense, this close study yields insight to experiences on the ground, so to speak. For example, Marischal attendance at privy council increased when James first left for England yet sharply declined after the council's reduction to thirty-five, though he was one of them. It may be idiosyncratic. It may also be symptomatic of a larger trend. Kerr-Peterson rejects the "binary of preference between public and private" (90), instead, positing that the decline in attendance was due less to preference for the private life than to a view that public participation in central government was unnecessary. He and his family were secure enough in wealth and land that it was not worth his time. Moreover, Kerr-Peterson suggests the same might also be true of other noblemen. If so, then that might be indicative of something more, perhaps economical, fomenting during this period.

Chapters 4 and 5 undertake the difficult task of investigating the family ties and disputes that also comprised the earldom. The complexity and difficulties of defining dispute, feud, and bloodfeud are examined through the prism of Marischal's activity defending the borders of his earldom. Conflicts were about boundaries that encompassed land, but also "jurisdiction and authority" (91). Though he had recourse to violence, Marischal relied upon the law and lawyers, even at his own expense, rather than the armaments he clearly had at his disposal at Dunnottar Castle. His family was trickier business.

Outside the earl's immediate family, Kerr-Peterson runs into the wall of scarcity of sources. Nonetheless, individual families offer a micro-view from which general features may be discerned. The earl had children from two marriages and, though he forged solid marriages for his two daughters, and endeavored to secure the futures of his sons, friction asserted itself. Kerr-Peterson wisely observes the limitations of the historian who may examine the macroscopic trajectory of the nobility, in this case, yet it remains far more difficult to account for human emotion (116).

Chapter 6 focuses on Kirk patronage on the role in Marischal who maintained his personal standing as a steadfast Protestant even though he had murdered a kinsman and had two episodes of adultery that resulted in the births of two sons (118–9). The relationship between the Kirk and the nobility was paradoxical: while support and patron-

age by the nobles was desirable, the Kirks were an independent lot that resisted what was seen, at times, as misplaced interference. This was further complicated by the traditional assumption of nobility that church property and benefices were rightfully their own. The Reformation Parliament exacerbated this somewhat.

Instead of undertaking the role of patron and caretaker of the parishes within his earldom, Marischal cheerfully confiscated church property he viewed as rightfully belonging to him. He was not alone or exceptional in this. Yet, he also appropriated church property and benefices to benefit education, as in the effort to secure a parish for his son's tutor. The interaction between the earl and the eleven parishes within his boundaries is usefully presented in a table that records the monetary value of each and the variety of patronage (128). As Kerr-Peterson quips, “the Earls Marischal were Protestant nobles, not noble Protestants” (150).

The briefest, chapter 7, surveys the earl’s economic activity to conclude that Marischal was interested in the financial well-being of his earldom. If the community benefitted that was a “welcome consequence” rather than the point (166). Not unlike other Scottish noblemen, the earl constructed two harbors and the towns, Peterhead and Stonehaven, to support them, as well as developing the necessary infrastructure.

It seems best to conclude with the development for which the earl is best known, Marischal College. Though “well-studied,” it remains unexplored in the context of “Scottish lordship and patronage” (167) and is the subject of chapter 8. Officially chartered in 1594, the college stands at the center of modern Aberdeen. Kerr-Peterson, argues that the college was successful in part because the earl took a “hands-off approach.” The Town Council, ministry, and college were allowed their own decisions about its administration without his interference. Indeed, the earl may best be understood “initially [as] first among equals,” later coming to see himself as its “sole proprietor.” This is in keeping with his understanding of his own role as a nobleman (168). The college’s founding itself fits within the wider turn in Reformation thought toward education for grooming men to occupy ministerial or government roles as “godly magistrates” (169).

Though largely occupying a background position, Marischal took umbrage at the King's aborted effort to send a commission to the college in 1616, maintaining that such a course was meddling (184). Though off to a stumbling start financially, the college merged with King's College in the nineteenth century to form the current University of Aberdeen.

This book first saw light as a dissertation to remedy what Kerr-Peterson identifies as an often lop-sided historiography of the Scottish nobility in northeast Scotland that has tended to regard them as conservative, Catholic and unruly. This work is an excellent expansion of, and complement to, scholarship by Jenny Wormald and Keith Brown, for example, that demonstrates the longer trends of the nobility following the Union and the religious reform movements before it. Scrutiny of this individual nobleman, George Keith, fifth earl of Marischal, exemplifies the continuity, rather than change, among the Scottish nobility through the tempestuous years of Protestant Reformation and its aftermath.

This book will be essential for scholars of the period's nobility for the corrective it provides to a somewhat imbalanced historiography. Advanced students, whether upper level undergraduate or graduate, will find it both useful and engaging. Ancillary materials include Keith family privy council and parliament attendance tables, maps of the Scottish northeast, and twelve appendices of genealogical charts.