

12-15-2016

'Rebellious Highlanders': The Reception of Corsica in the Edinburgh Periodical Press, 1730-1800

Rhona Brown
University of Glasgow

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>



Part of the [Journalism Studies Commons](#), and the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brown, Rhona (2016) "'Rebellious Highlanders': The Reception of Corsica in the Edinburgh Periodical Press, 1730-1800," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 41: Iss. 1, 108–128.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol41/iss1/12>

This Article is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in Scottish Literature* by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

**“REBELLIOUS HIGHLANDERS”: THE RECEPTION OF
CORSICA IN THE EDINBURGH PERIODICAL PRESS,
1730-1800**

Rhona Brown

James Boswell (1740-95) visited the enduringly turbulent Mediterranean island of Corsica in the autumn of 1765. The result of his stay was not only his *Account of Corsica, The Journal of a Tour to that Island, and Memoirs of Pascal Paoli* (1768), but also a lifelong friendship with the Corsican independence leader and patriot, Paoli (1725-1807), and an impassioned public campaign of support for the Corsican rebels, which was partly conducted through the British periodical press.¹ The campaigning letters and not-always-accurate accounts published by Boswell in periodicals outlined the situation on the island in an attempt to garner British support for the rebels' cause.² When Boswell arrived, Corsica had been independent under Paoli for ten years, after a long and

¹ For a full account of Boswell's campaigns for Corsica, see Peter Martin, *A Life of James Boswell* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 216-22, and James Boswell, *An Account of Corsica, The Journal of a Tour to that Island, and Memoirs of Pascal Paoli*, ed. James T. Boulton and T.O. McLoughlin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1. I would like also to acknowledge helpful suggestions on this article in draft from *SSL*'s anonymous readers.

² According to F.A. Pottle and Paul Tankard, "some of Boswell's fictitious Corsican reports were apparently taken seriously by later historians... They are not *accurate*, but they read as if they might be: which is (in some ways) just as good – or just as bad." See Paul Tankard (ed.), *Facts and Inventions: Selections from the Journalism of James Boswell* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 2-4, and Frederick A. Pottle, *James Boswell: The Earlier Years, 1740-1769* (London: Heinemann, 1966), 307; 311. For more on Boswell's later journalism, see Lucyle Werkmeister, "Jemmie Boswell and the London Daily Press, 1785-1795," *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 67 (1963): 82-114 and 169-85, also issued as *Jemmie Boswell and the London Daily Press, 1785-1795* (New York: New York Public Library, 1963).

bloody struggle for liberation from Genoese control. By the time his *Account* was published, the island had been sold by the Genoese via a secret treaty to France; the French finally conquered Corsica one year later, in 1769. Although the Corsican situation was re-examined after the French Revolution, and Paoli was allowed to regain a place in government, Corsica remained, and still remains—notwithstanding the short-lived Anglo-Corsican Kingdom of 1794-96—in French hands.³

The eighteenth-century press's depiction of Corsica reveals the ever-changing and ever-violent fate of the island which, thanks to its advantageous position in the Mediterranean Sea, was a valuable acquisition for European powers.⁴ In this construction of Corsica, its people and its cause, Boswell plays a crucial role. As well as exposing what he saw as injustice against Corsican sovereignty, Boswell's support for the island's independence went beyond an exploitation of the emerging British public sphere, which helped Boswell in what Alex Benchimol has termed "the exercise of moral leadership while promoting a vision of national improvement."⁵ Pre-empting the legend that Robert Burns sent carronades to aid the French Revolutionaries, it is known that Boswell was involved in commissioning cannons from the Carron Ironworks in Falkirk which were sent to the Corsican rebels. It is also known that he attended a masquerade at the Shakespeare Jubilee in Stratford-upon-Avon in September 1769 dressed as a Corsican chief, where he composed verses which mournfully described Corsica as "a small nation fail'd."⁶

³ For Boulton and McLoughlin, "Boswell's arguments still prompt questions about the legitimacy of the French presence" (*An Account of Corsica*, lii).

⁴ See Thadd E. Hall, *France and the Eighteenth-Century Corsican Question* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), 5-6.

⁵ Alex Benchimol, "Periodicals and Public Culture," in Murray Pittock, ed., *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Romanticism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 89. By contrast, and enlarging on the construction of the reading public by Jürgen Habermas, Michael Warner suggests that "the public sphere is a principal instance of the forms of embodiment and social relations that are themselves at issue": Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 54.

⁶ Patricia Pierce, *The Great Shakespeare Fraud: The Strange, True Story of William Henry Ireland* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2005), 8-9. See also Tankard, *Facts and Inventions*, 18-34 (p. 32). Verses on seeing Boswell in Corsican dress are printed in Ruddiman's *Weekly Magazine, or Edinburgh Amusement* on 19 October, 2 November and 9 November, 1769.

Boswell encouraged his readers to see parallels between the Corsican present and the Scottish past, and for Murray Pittock this was an act of “fratriotism;” “the imagined transference of national sympathy.”⁷ Accordingly, on the frontispiece of his *Account of Corsica*, Boswell printed a now-renowned passage: “*Non enim propter gloriam, divicias aut honores pugnamus set propter libertatem solummodo quam Nemo bonus nisi simul cum vita amittit*”, from “*Lit. Comit. et Baron. Scotiae. ad. Pap. A.D. 1320.*” His quotation is from the Declaration of Arbroath: “It is in truth not for glory, nor riches, nor honours that we are fighting, but for freedom, for that alone which no honest man gives up but with life itself.” Boswell’s allusion, which is the first quotation of the Declaration beyond political and historical studies of Scotland,⁸ appears to encourage a radical reconceptualisation of Corsica as sharing in the struggles experienced by Scots from the Wars of Independence, through Union to the Jacobite Rebellions. According to James T. Boulton and T.O. McLoughlin, this “evocation of freedom in the Declaration of Arbroath... sets the tone of Boswell’s agenda.”⁹ Certainly, it seems that for Boswell, Scotland and Corsica had much in common. When in his *Account* he writes of Lord Hailes’s allegations of Corsican “barbarity,” he remarks that it is as if Hailes is “writing concerning Scotland in former lawless times... the Highlanders there are a very wild set of men.”¹⁰ When discussing the Corsicans’ use of their landscape for protection, he reflects that, “Had their country been open and accessible, they had been easily subdued by regular troops. It was in good measure owing to her rugged hills, that ancient Scotland preserved her independency.”¹¹ Boswell’s rhetorically efficient and alert conflation of Corsican and Scottish political troubles has, however, a long history in the Scottish periodical press.

⁷ Murray Pittock, *James Boswell* (Aberdeen: AHRC Centre for Irish and Scottish Studies, 2007), 43.

⁸ Moray McLaren, *Corsica Boswell: Paoli, Johnson and Freedom* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1966), 20.

⁹ Boulton and McLoughlin, Introduction to *An Account of Corsica*, xxi.

¹⁰ James Boswell, *An Account of Corsica, The Journal of a Tour to that Island, and Memoirs of Pascal Paoli* (London: Dilly, 1768), 205. Quotations from the *Account* are taken from this first edition, to which commentators and reviewers were responding, rather than the 2006 edition by Boulton and McLoughlin.

¹¹ Boswell, *ibid.*, 39.

The first Scottish report on Corsican politics seems to be in Thomas Ruddiman's *Caledonian Mercury* on 21 July 1730:

It is written from Bastia, the Capital of the Island of Corsica, that they expect there in a little Time from Genoa 8000 men of regular Troops to act with Force against the rebellious Highlanders of that Island, who have rejected all the proposals of Accommodation that have been offered to them.¹²

This early discussion of the Corsican situation sets the tone for much of the debate which will emerge in the Scottish periodical press for the remainder of the eighteenth century. First, it identifies among the key players Thomas and Walter Ruddiman, whose *Caledonian Mercury* (in the Ruddiman family 1729-72), *Edinburgh Magazine* (1757-62) and *Weekly Magazine; or Edinburgh Amusement* (1768-84) provide heavy coverage of Corsican political struggles throughout the century. Second, it identifies the malcontents as "rebellious Highlanders," making quiet but forceful comparisons with recent political upheaval closer to home and providing a foundation on which Boswell would build with rhetorical success in the decades to come.

It is no surprise that initially Thomas, and then his nephew, Walter Ruddiman, would take responsibility for reporting the Corsican narrative. According to Stephen W. Brown, Walter Ruddiman was one of "the major players in Scotland's magazine trade in the 1760s and 1770s," providing publications which offered "the usual magazine fare" alongside journalism and news reporting.¹³ Although Ruddiman would not publish magazines until the 1750s, a key rival was the *Scots Magazine*, first printed in 1739. In the preface to the first issue, the *Scots Magazine's* editor gives the reasons for its foundation. Not only is "the interest of Scotland, abstractly considered... worthy of our most watchful attention," the *Scots Magazine* also endeavours to provide an "impartial view of political disputes" and ensures that "the occurrences of Europe might not be wholly lost, to make room for the low views of private persons; and that the fate of kingdoms might not give place to personal quarrels."¹⁴ Both the *Scots Magazine* and *Weekly Magazine* portray themselves as

¹² *Caledonian Mercury*, 21 July 1730, 8531.

¹³ Stephen W. Brown, "The Market for Murder and Edinburgh's Eighteenth-Century Book Trade," in John Hinks, Catherine Armstrong and Martin Day, eds., *Periodicals and Publishers: The Newspaper Journal Trade, 1750-1914* (London: British Library, 2009), 26.

¹⁴ *The Scots Magazine* 1 (January 1739): ii. Hereafter "SM."

unbiased; as the first issue of the *Weekly Magazine* states, it purports to be a “Register of the Writings and Transactions of the Times.”¹⁵ Both were primarily concerned with Scottish affairs but, as Nigel Leask observes, the *Weekly Magazine* “tilt[ed] at its rival” by claiming itself “a genuinely original CALEDONIAN magazine”, knowing that the *Scots Magazine* “reprinted much of its copy from the London press.”¹⁶ An analysis of their portrayals of Corsican affairs demonstrates that their professed impartiality can be challenged. Indeed, as David Stewart has argued, the creation and reporting style of periodicals such as the *Scots Magazine* and *Weekly Magazine* “suggests an enlightened desire to permit readers to join a political and cultural conversation.”¹⁷

Just as Ruddiman provided early coverage of Corsican affairs in the *Caledonian Mercury*, so too did the *Scots Magazine* immediately report on the subject. In the first issue of the *Scots Magazine*, dated January 1739, it is reported that “Corsica has long furnished a subject of speculation to the politicians of Europe.”¹⁸ The magazine continues over subsequent months to follow the fate of Baron de Neuhoff, erstwhile and short-lived Corsican sovereign, and outlining “French mediation” of the island’s troubles.¹⁹ Corsican politics remains a footnote to European history until the 1750s, when the *Scots Magazine* and Ruddiman’s *Edinburgh Magazine* begin reporting more regularly on latest developments. In the *Scots Magazine* for October 1755, readers are informed that:

The malecontents of Corsica... seem to have formed some new and determined plan of action; for the execution of which they have made choice of Signior Pascal di Paoli di Rostino, an officer of experience... The malecontents give out, that a compleat train of artillery will soon be brought them. ’Tis said, that the government of *Genoa* have desired his Most Christian Majesty to

¹⁵ *Weekly Magazine or Edinburgh Amusement*, 1 (7 July 1768): 1. Hereafter “*WM*.”

¹⁶ Nigel Leask, “‘The Pith o’ Sense, and Pride o’ Worth’: Robert Burns and the *Glasgow Magazine* (1795),” in Alex Benchimol, Rhona Brown and David Shuttleton, eds., *Before Blackwood’s: Scottish Journalism in the Age of Enlightenment* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2015), 76.

¹⁷ David Stewart, “The Death of Maggie Scott: *Blackwood’s*, the *Scots Magazine* and Periodical Eras,” in Benchimol, Brown and Shuttleton, eds., *Before Blackwood’s*, 119.

¹⁸ *SM* 1 (January 1739): 6.

¹⁹ *SM* 1 (February 1739): 95.

send again a body of troops to subdue those rebels, whom they represent has having got to a greater head than ever.²⁰

The tone and content of this account are typical of the *Scots Magazine*'s reporting style. Equal space is given to the Genoese and to the rebels, while qualifications of doubt via repetition of phrases such as "'tis said," demonstrate the difficulty with which an objective account is sought. Three years later, Ruddiman's *Edinburgh Magazine* reports on Corsican struggles from a contrasting perspective. In the issue dated March 1758, readers are offered the following story:

The struggle which has long subsisted between the republic of Genoa and the male-contents of Corsica, has been carried on with great violence and acrimony on both sides... Resolute to shake off the yoke of their old masters, they first put themselves under the protection of the French, and they have courted that of Britain. Their romantic schemes of liberty and independence have driven them to despair, and rendered their island a constant scene of anarchy, murder, and devastation.²¹

The emotive account of the *Edinburgh Magazine*, in which Ruddiman draws attention to the rebels' "romantic schemes," is also typical of the reporting found here and subsequently in Ruddiman's *Weekly Magazine*. If, as Alex Benchimol has argued, the *Scots Magazine* utilised "periodical print as both physical emblem and medium to project a new form of national cultural identity,"²² Ruddiman, as discussed below, envisaged a different type of Scottish identity and a contrasting reporting style, of which his narratives of the Corsican struggle offer a revealing example.

In the 1760s, by which time Corsica had gained independence under Paoli, these contrasting styles come into sharper relief. From 1766, and despite the existence of the Corsican Republic, the *Scots Magazine* files reports on Corsican politics under "Italy," stating that "The Corsicans seem resolved to maintain their independency at all events, in spite of the efforts made by some foreign powers to reconcile them with the republic of Genoa."²³ By 1768, thanks to the publication of Boswell's *Account*, Corsican politics comes to the fore in both the *Scots Magazine* and Ruddiman's new publication, the *Weekly Magazine*. The *Scots*

²⁰ *SM* 17 (October 1755): 492.

²¹ *Edinburgh Magazine*, 2 (March 1758): 84.

²² Alex Benchimol, "For 'the PROSPERITY OF SCOTLAND': Mediating National Improvement in *The Scots Magazine*, 1739-49," *Studies in Scottish Literature* 39:1 (2013), 83: <http://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol39/iss1/10/>.

²³ *SM* 28 (June 1766): 319.

Magazine's review of Boswell's text offers, as is typical of the mode, large swathes of quotation from the *Account*, alongside the reviewer's response to what he sees as Boswell's misplaced idealism. For this reviewer, Boswell was "impelled by a noble, but unusual, spirit of curiosity, to visit the instant state of liberty among the Corsicans,"²⁴ reflecting the fact that the island was "*terra incognita*," that "British travellers were expressly discouraged from visiting."²⁵ Related to this Corsican danger is the fact that in his later journalism, Boswell was, despite charges of naivety, "sufficiently sophisticated to recognize the publicity value of a controversy."²⁶ The *Scots Magazine* reviewer objects to Boswell's "imperfect" information on "the famous King Theodore de Neuhoff, who was one of the worst men, and most impudent impostors, that history can produce" (93), and, while outlining "inaccuracies" in Boswell's language, wishes that "Mr Boswell had been less profuse of his compliments to his friends" (94). It would not be unreasonable to assume that this group of "friends" included Corsican leader, Pasquale Paoli. Having said this, the review demonstrates that Boswell's *Account* is evidence of his wish, in his own words, to see "a people actually fighting for liberty, and forming themselves from a poor inconsiderable oppressed nation, into a flourishing and independent state."²⁷

Contrasting reports on Corsican affairs are printed in the *Scots Magazine* of July 1768. The section on Corsica which is still, after French subjugation of the island, filed under "Italian" news, begins with a report on the "secret treaty" by which Genoa sold Corsica to France, stating that from now, "Corsicans shall be accounted subjects of France."²⁸ This news is immediately followed by an article, "communicated by means of Mr Boswell," which states that the "French, after amusing our nation with fair appearances, had in the end proved entirely deceitful." This letter, with its significant portrayal of Corsican nationhood, states that the rebels are "ready to sacrifice ourselves for liberty and independency" (367).²⁹ It is immediately followed by another communication from Leghorn, in which the rebels remain resolved:

²⁴ *SM* 30 (February 1768): 90.

²⁵ Boulton and McLoughlin, Introduction to *An Account of Corsica*, xviii.

²⁶ Werkmeister, "Jemmie Boswell and the London Daily Press," 85.

²⁷ Boswell, *An Account*, 263.

²⁸ *SM* 30 (July 1768): 367.

²⁹ This letter had also appeared in the *London Magazine, or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer* 37 (July 1768): 386-87.

We have received advice from Corsica, that at the general assembly held at Corte it was resolved to treat all those as enemies who should make any attempts against the liberty of the inhabitants of that kingdom, and to defend with vigour the rights of the country, which have been acquired by the blood of so many citizens... the inhabitants of the island are so highly animated in defence of their liberty, that the very women offer themselves to fight against all those who would endeavour to reduce them under the yoke of the Genoese (368).

The *Scots Magazine's* privileging of the account of the Genoese-French treaty is evidence of their prioritising of "official" proclamations over "the low views of private persons." If "private persons" refer to Corsica as a "nation" and a "country", editorial comment is content with the terminology of "island." While news of the treaty appears first in this issue's miscellany of Corsican news, the final item reports that "the Count de Marbeuff [sic] has caused the Genoese arms to be taken down in Bastia, and those of France to be erected in their place... by which his Majesty takes the title of *King of Corsica*" (368). "Private persons" and their opinions are given print space, but in this case, the proclamations of monarchies and governments hold greater sway on the physical pages of the *Scots Magazine*.

In the *Weekly Magazine*, news, or "History" in *Magazine* nomenclature, is similarly filed by nation. Here however, Corsican news, whether the island is officially Corsican, Genoese or French, appears under "Corsica." Ruddiman's editorial decision is politically significant in itself, but is made more so when considered in the context of *Magazine* debates. As well as singling out "Corsican" affairs, Ruddiman retains separate news sections for "Scotland" and "England" despite their shared Britishness. This demarcation was not universally popular with the *Magazine's* readership. A letter from "Somebody," printed on 6 May 1773, reflects "upon the happy effects of the union of the sister kingdoms of England and Scotland": by this development, "old names, as well as old animosities" are "abolished." Accordingly, "Somebody" asserts that Ruddiman "cannot be authorised" to "publish weekly intelligence from *England* and *Scotland*. These two abolished vocables belong not to our British tongue." "Somebody" finishes by beseeching that, "In place of *England*, *Scotland*, say, write, publish, *South Britain*, *North Britain*."³⁰ Despite printing the letter, Ruddiman makes no such amendment:

³⁰ *WM* 20 (6 May 1773): 173.

Scottish, English and Corsican affairs remain individualised on the pages of the *Weekly Magazine*. If the *Scots Magazine* favours “official” accounts of political developments for the sake of impartiality, this editorial evidence demonstrates that the *Weekly Magazine*’s focus was equally on “unofficial” accounts and local concerns.

Consequently, in the *Weekly Magazine* of 7 July 1768, Corsican news retains its affective tone. The “brave islanders” are here depicted as having “maintained the struggle for their liberties for half a century past,” while the Genoese, “their oppressors,” “have attempted every method to reduce them, but in vain.”³¹ The *Weekly Magazine* then prints the treaty outlining the sale of Corsica from Genoa to France in the following number, dated 14 July.³² Also published in this issue is the letter, simultaneously published by the *Scots Magazine*, which states that “the very women” are prepared to fight for Corsican liberty. The issue dated 21 July reports on the strength of the Corsican force, with details of high losses in French troops and Paoli’s pronouncement: “the Corsicans will defend their liberty to the last drop of their blood.”³³

The *Weekly Magazine* of 28 July continues to privilege Paoli’s voice. Its printing of Paoli’s speech, given at a general meeting of the states of Corsica, emphasises the island’s changing fortunes in which “The object of peace, so greatly desired, seems to fly us more and more.”³⁴ The *Magazine* publishes, in full, the revived “oath sworn to by Paoli and his adherents, on the French assisting the Genoese against the Corsicans in 1764”:

We have sworn, and we call upon God to witness, that we will all of us sooner die, than enter into any negotiation with the republic of Genoa, or return under its yoke. If the powers of Europe, and the French in particular, withhold their compassion from an unhappy people, and should arm themselves against us, and contrive our total destruction, we will repel by force; we will fight like desperate men, determined either to conquer or die, till, our strength being quite exhausted, our arms fall out of our hands; and when we have no strength to take them up again; when all the resources of our courage shall be exhausted, our despair shall furnish us with the last, which shall be to imitate the famous example of the Saguntines, by rushing voluntarily into the fire,

³¹ *WM* 1 (7 July 1768): 29.

³² *WM* 1 (14 July 1768): 60.

³³ *WM* 1 (21 July 1768): 90.

³⁴ *WM* 1 (28 July 1768): 123.

rather than submit ourselves and our posterity to the unsupportable yoke of Genoese tyranny and slavery (123-24).³⁵

It is clear that this rhetoric retained its “romance” for the *Weekly Magazine*’s editor: in the following issue, dated 4 August 1768, a letter from Leghorn announces that “to a man, they will spend the last drop of their blood, in defence of their island and liberties. This is the language of the Corsican Gazettes. With such resolutions and Roman spirits, what cannot a brave people do?”³⁶ By this point, in the *Weekly Magazine* at least, the Corsicans and, in time, Pasquale Paoli, are classical heroes, clinging with valiant determination to their “romantic” schemes of liberty. Paoli’s desire for Corsicans to imitate the actions of the natives during the Siege of Saguntum and the correspondent’s emphasis on the islanders’ “Roman spirits” illustrates the *Weekly Magazine*’s political position on Corsican affairs. Indeed, in the *Magazine* of 18 August 1768, the Corsican leader is “The brave Paschal de Paoli”, who on “being sometime asked how long he would hold out, should the French assist the Genoese in an expedition to Corsica, replied, ‘till death—for that life was not worth keeping.’”³⁷ In the same number, it is reported that the “British Ambassador” “could not be surprised should a fleet and army be sent thither, with a view of rescuing those brave islanders from the shackles forging them” (214). The *Weekly Magazine*’s stance might well have been influenced by Boswell’s *Account* in which, according to Boulton and McLoughlin, Paoli “acquires universal standing, linked with Roman history and literature and England’s translation of that” and where “Boswell, like the midwife, brings him to life for the English-speaking world.”³⁸ By extension, Corsican heroism is, in their shared construction, to be rewarded by Britain.

The *Scots Magazine* of September 1768 preserves its self-proclaimed stance of impartiality by focusing on statistics of battle from French letters, which state that “many dead bodies were found in the fields of battle, [which] were discovered to be women in mens apparel.”³⁹ In the same issue, and in contrast to the *Weekly Magazine*’s portrayal of Paoli as a classical hero, *Scots Magazine* readers are informed that “Paoli, and

³⁵ Paoli’s speech had also appeared in the *Universal Magazine of Knowledge and Pleasure* 43:296 (July 1768): 52-53.

³⁶ *WM* 1 (4 August 1768): 155.

³⁷ *WM* 1 (18 August 1768): 213.

³⁸ Boulton and McLoughlin, Introduction to *An Account of Corsica*, xlii; xlv.

³⁹ *SM* 30 (September 1768): 492.

most of the other chiefs, are secretly in the interest of France, and they make a resistance only for form's sake" (492). Furthermore, a letter from Paris, dated 16 September, states that "those who think justly, must allow, that it is better to be the subjects of a great King, than the slaves of Paoli" (493).⁴⁰ In this section of the *Scots Magazine*, Paoli is presented with suspicion, while the powers of France and Genoa are known quantities.

The simultaneously published *Weekly Magazine* of 8 September 1768 maintains support for the "brave Corsicans", who are "struggling hard for liberty."⁴¹ Its following issue reports on an anecdote also covered by the *Scots Magazine*, but with a distinctive twist: while the *Scots Magazine* presents the account of finding the bodies of women in the battlefield without further comment, the *Weekly Magazine* reports the news thus: "many dead bodies were found in the field of battle, which were found to be women in men's apparel: - a very affecting scene!"⁴² The addition of this emotive effusion is evidence of the magazines' contrasting strategies when reporting on Corsican affairs. Both are engaged with the humanity of war, and both strive for impartiality. However, Ruddiman's editorial insertions demonstrate a more emotional engagement with events and a concern for the vulnerable people caught up in rebellion: in a subsequent issue, his readers are informed that, in the confusion of reports of various Corsican battles, "we only know in general, that among the Corsicans there were 200 dead, forty of whom were women and children, and about fifty women and young lads are taken prisoners."⁴³ The rhetorical choices made in this account emphasise the victims' youth and, implicitly, the brutality of war and the crushing of "romantic" rebels.

The *Weekly Magazine* meanwhile adheres to its portrayal of Paoli as classical, enlightened hero in accordance with the Boswellian construction. Indeed, in his memoir of Paoli Boswell was, according to Peter Adam Thrasher, "lion-hunting... with the object of bagging a hero of the Enlightenment."⁴⁴ For Boulton and McLoughlin, however, "Paoli was more than just another social scalp. He symbolised the fighting spirit of a nation on the brink, as Boswell thought, of achieving its

⁴⁰ This letter is also published by the *WM* on 6 October 1768.

⁴¹ *WM* 1 (8 September 1768): 314.

⁴² *WM* 1 (15 September 1768): 342.

⁴³ *WM* 1 (22 September 1768): 376.

⁴⁴ Peter Adam Thrasher, *Pasquale Paoli: An Enlightened Hero 1725-1807* (London: Constable, 1970), 99.

independence.”⁴⁵ The *Weekly Magazine* would appear to conform to the latter view. In the *Magazine* dated 17 November 1768, Paoli is described as “our illustrious general,” who “shewed conduct equal to his uncommon fortitude... which becomes the commander of a nation,” while the Corsicans are “brave, but oppressed.”⁴⁶ Hero-worship of Paoli extends to his island, which is here granted the appellation of “nation,” despite its new-found status as French. More revealingly, in the *Weekly Magazine* of 24 November, Paoli is a humanitarian leader possessed of uncommon benevolence and even-handedness. While one letter states that “Paoli treats the prisoners [of war] with humanity, and has released the principal officers on their parole,”⁴⁷ readers are also informed of his unpretentiousness and generosity:

The chief Paoli has given proofs of his disinterestedness with regard to the booty in silver taken from the French at Borgo, by ordering it to be melted and coined into money and distributed to the officers and soldiers who partook in the victory (249).

As Paoli is persistently depicted as a leader who is more interested in the welfare of his people than in his own position of power, the *Weekly Magazine* repeatedly prints anecdotes of his character which conform to this image. While the *Scots Magazine* speculates that Paoli is in fact “in the interest of France,” the *Weekly Magazine* depicts him as a people’s hero, as this account from the issue of 1 December 1768 demonstrates:

At a late assembly of the Corsicans, there appeared in the hall a kind of throne, which seemed not to please one of the chiefs and on asking for whom the throne was destined? Paoli answered, *that it was intended to place thereon the statue of LIBERTY.*⁴⁸

The links between American and Corsican struggles for liberty would be made soon enough, with commentators claiming Paoli to be influential on the motivations of the American Revolution. Even at this point, Ruddiman’s editorial practice was often to place Corsican news next to “history” from America.⁴⁹

While the *Scots Magazine* remains quiet on Corsican affairs in the ensuing months, the *Weekly Magazine* continues its engagement with the

⁴⁵ Boulton and McLoughlin, Introduction, xxxi.

⁴⁶ *WM* 2 (17 November 1768): 213.

⁴⁷ *WM* 2 (24 November 1768): 248.

⁴⁸ *WM* 2 (1 December 1768): 279.

⁴⁹ For the reception of Paoli by American revolutionaries, see Richard B. Morris, *The Emerging Nations and the American Revolution* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1970), 77.

island by printing accounts culled from correspondence and the London papers on a weekly basis. By the end of 1768, Corsica makes its way into the *Weekly Magazine*'s poetry section, via an unsigned poem entitled "Corsica; an ODE."⁵⁰ This piece by Edward Burnaby Greene had already been reviewed in the *Monthly Review*, *Critical Review*, *Gentleman's Magazine*, *Universal Museum* and *Political Register* towards the end of 1768,⁵¹ while a letter from Boswell of 1 April 1769 congratulates Greene for his "elegant Ode on Corsica, in which you do so much justice to the brave Islanders and their illustrious Chief."⁵² The poem, which advises the Corsicans to "avaunt" the "inglorious name" of "REBEL" (l.1) and to "spurn" "haughty Genoa's rude controul" (l.4), depicts "Freedom" as a "heav'n-born right" (l.11) and France as "Their fiend Oppression," "the trait'rous Gaul" (l.17). Here begins a new strategy in the periodicals' depiction of Corsican affairs: the wish for Britain to intervene in the upheaval from an anti-French position. While France is the oppressive tyrant, Britain is asked to:

Pity an injur'd infant land,
 Britain, 'tis thine with fost'ring hand
 To swell the buds of glory, thine
 To bid the treasur'd mental mine
 Luxuriant burst to view;
 Congenial radiance marks the state –
 The paths, which gave thee to be great,
 Her vigorous steps pursue (ll.61-68).

Although the Seven Years' War ended five years earlier, the rhetoric of Greene's poem demonstrates that British involvement in Corsican affairs would not only benefit the islanders, but directly oppose the French in occupation. Although the *Weekly Magazine* offers no comment on the poem, the *Monthly Review*'s account of Greene's ode, printed in November 1768, describes it as "designed to rouse and animate Britain to exert her strength for the defence of Corsica, against the 'trait'rous Gaul,' —the common foe of FREEDOM."⁵³ By the end of 1768 Corsica has become an instrument in British anti-French rhetoric. Indeed, in the

⁵⁰ *WM* 2 (8 December 1768): 305.

⁵¹ See Antonia Forster, *Index to Book Reviews in England, 1749-74* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), 74.

⁵² Richard C. Cole, Peter S. Baker, Rachel McClellan and James J. Caudel, eds., *The General Correspondence of James Boswell, 1766-69*, vol. 2 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 161.

⁵³ *The Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, 39 (November 1768): 401.

Weekly Magazine of 22 December, Paoli describes the French as having “with one hand held out amicable treaties, and with the other encouraged private treaties and assassinations.”⁵⁴

As the new year dawns, the *Weekly Magazine* reports that “every thing [in Corsica] is in a state of profound peace”⁵⁵ and that “Paoli has now a number of Scots Highlanders in his pay” (91). In addition, the *Weekly Magazine* reprints Boswell’s “Memorial for a Contribution in behalf of the Brave Corsicans,” which had appeared in the *London Magazine* and, as discussed in fuller detail below, in the *Scots Magazine* in December 1768,⁵⁶ and in which the “true lover of liberty” is asked to contribute aid to “a people free in the regions which slaves only inhabit.”⁵⁷ This by now special relationship with Scotland, enabled by Boswell and others through paper wars and practical assistance, is followed by an account of English aid. Whereas the Scots provided cannons, English manufacturers make their own contribution to the Corsican war effort:

Our best commission is not yet mentioned—four thousand scalping knives nine inches long. The Italian motto to be wrote on them I forget; in English the words are, *For the enemies of freemen*. Offer the contract for them to _____ at Birmingham. How the Monsieurs tupees will be razed next spring! (92).

Corsica again constitutes a means of financial gain for larger powers and a site for anti-French sentiment.

The *Weekly Magazine* continues over the ensuing months by emphasising foreign assistance of Corsica, including “a handsome sum of money from Rome,”⁵⁸ as if encouraging Britain to make an incursion therein. Alongside this political rhetoric is the development of a powerful mythology of Pasquale Paoli. In the *Magazine* of 30 March 1769, a letter from the island remarks that “We are at a loss which to admire most in the course of this action, the consummate conduct of our general or the astonishing courage of our soldiers.”⁵⁹ In the same issue, Ruddiman shows an awareness of political journalistic spin when he contrasts French and Corsican accounts of recent losses:

⁵⁴ *WM* 2 (22 December 1768): 378-79.

⁵⁵ *WM* 3 (19 January 1769): 90.

⁵⁶ *London Magazine* 37 (December 1768): 655-57.

⁵⁷ *WM* 3 (5 January 1769): 13-15 (pp. 13, 14).

⁵⁸ *WM* 3 (23 March 1769): 366.

⁵⁹ *WM* 3 (30 March 1769): 409.

The French pretend that the Corsicans, in the late affair of Barbaggio, had between two and three hundred killed, and six or seven made prisoners, amongst whom were 45 officers. But, according to the Corsican account, their loss, in killed, wounded, and prisoners, did not amount to above 200 men; and that of the French was not less considerable (409).

In this instance, the *Weekly Magazine* dismisses French “pretence” and privileges the Corsican account. This support continues in the subsequent issue, when it is reported that the “king of Prussia has sent a medal of his own person to gen. Paoli, with an eulogium, in which he makes that general greater than all the heroes of antiquity.”⁶⁰ The Corsican struggle for freedom is presented as just, while their leader is a classical hero, famed for fair-mindedness and noble motivation. This journalistic confidence is dashed, however, in the *Weekly Magazine* of 22 June 1769, with the news that the “fate of Corsica is unhappily decided in favour of the French”:

We are heartily sorry, that we are now obliged to reverse the picture.—After these glorious struggles for liberty and independence, maintained with a spirit that would do honour to ancient Greece or Rome, these brave islanders have been at last subdued, not so much, it is said, by the force of French arms as French gold, and false brethren.⁶¹

This account is implicitly but highly reminiscent of poetic representations of the British Union, particularly illustrated in the rhetoric of Allan Ramsay, Robert Fergusson (both of whose work was published by Ruddiman), and Robert Burns. While Ramsay, in his poem to the memory of Archibald Pitcairne, observes “a Pool of Boyling Gold,/On which did float, those who their Country Sold” (ll.33-34),⁶² so too does Burns’s narrator, some twenty years later, denounce the “parcel of rogues” by whom Scotland is “bought and sold for English gold.” Just as Scotland was seen to have been betrayed by “false brethren” for financial gain, so too is Corsica betrayed by the irresistible allure of “French gold.” Ruddiman bemoans this change in the islanders’ fortunes in the following issue, where it is “imputed to the treachery of their principal chiefs, who, instead of defending the places committed to their care, basely delivered

⁶⁰ *WM* 4 (6 April 1769): 25.

⁶¹ *WM* 4 (22 June 1769): 377.

⁶² F.W. Freeman and Alexander Law, “Allan Ramsay’s First Published Poem: The Poem to the Memory of Dr. Archibald Pitcairne,” *Bibliothek* 9:7 (1979): 153-60.

them into the hands of the French. *Sic transit Gloria Corsicae!*⁶³ In the same number, readers are informed of the following incident:

A French corporal, with two grenadiers, passing through a little village called Capua, near Corte, were booed and called names by some children that were playing in the street; which exasperated the rascals so, that they killed and wounded several of the harmless infants with their bayonets. The cries soon brought the mothers to their assistance, and in the fray one of the French soldiers was killed on the spot, and another dangerously wounded, who, with the inhuman corporal, was obliged to fly with great precipitation from the fury of the enraged women (409).

With the French subjugation of Corsica come pointedly visceral anecdotes, such as this, of the atrocities of war and colonisation.

While Paoli is obliged to seek refuge in the mountains, the *Weekly Magazine* maintains its construction of him as classical hero. In the issue dated 13 July 1769, a correspondent remarks on Paoli as “a man of the most engaging aspect I ever saw, and so affable, that his eyes invite one to talk freely to him.”⁶⁴ The following *Magazine* gives a transcription of Paoli’s mournful speech, in which he bemoans the fact that Corsica is “reduced to the utmost extremity,” thanks to “the effects of gold alone!”⁶⁵ Although “our once happy constitution is overthrown,” Paoli insists that the struggle continues:

Let us then lose no time, but either force our way, sword in hand, through the ranks of our enemies, and in a distant land wait for happier times to avenge our country’s wrongs, or terminate our honourable career, our short remains of life, by dying gloriously, as we have lived (88).

Paoli’s heroism is accordingly commemorated in the *Weekly Magazine* of 27 July, in a poem entitled “To Pascal Paoli,” by a regular *Magazine* poet, known as “J.W.” The poem begins with a negative allusion to John Dryden’s “Alexander’s Feast; or, The Power of Music” (1697) by dismissing poets who “sing of Philip’s warlike son” (l.1): for “J.W.,” these military victories were solely based on “ambition, and the lust of fame, / To gain that bloody sound *a hero’s name*” (ll.11-12). Predictably, Paoli’s heroism is of a different stamp and signals, for this poet, a change in the way in which heroic deeds should be understood:

⁶³ *WM* 4 (29 June 1769): 409.

⁶⁴ *WM* 5 (13 July 1769): 59.

⁶⁵ *WM* 5 (20 July 1769): 88.

No longer be such crimson honours worn,
 Blasted their laurels, and their ensigns torn:
 True fame and glory must from *virtue* rise,
 And raise the mortal to the starry skies (ll.17-20).

In Paoli's person, the poet argues, "you find the patriot, hero, and the man" (l.28) that is able to subdue "*Gallic foes*" (l.46) through enlightened, familiar yet formidable heroism:

Such, great Paoli, thou may'st justly claim,
 Such are thy honours, such thy trophy'd fame:
 A bleeding people all look up to thee,
 To thee, the *guardian* of their *liberty*!
Friend, father, general, all in thee combine;
 All, all attend to aid thy grand design (ll.33-38).

The poem ends with a tribute to Paoli, who is portrayed as valuing "*freedom* dearer than his *blood*" (l.58), a depiction reminiscent of toasts drunk to Paoli by his British and American supporters.⁶⁶ Paoli's enlightened and virtuous heroism is thus set in stone by the *Weekly Magazine's* political rhetoric and mythology. Today, Paoli is known in Corsica as the father of the country, or "u Babbu di a Patria."⁶⁷

The *Scots Magazine* revives its interest in Corsica in August 1769, where its news is still filed under "Italy." By this point, much of the intelligence published is from the French perspective, such as the news that "the inhabitants of the pieve of Niolo, a fierce and unconquerable people, have revolted, and killed an abundance of the French; but that the Count de Vaux had sent there a detachment, which has reduced them to subjection, and that several of them have been conducted prisoners to Bastia."⁶⁸ The enduringly resistant occupants of the Niolo (the last "unconquerable" Corsican assemblage) are here vanquished by the French. In the following account, gathered from letters from Paris, it is reported that the Count de Vaux, the French General, "is taking every method to make the island an advantageous acquisition to the court of France." To achieve this, "several persons well skilled in agriculture" have been sent from Provence to "civilise" the land, while the account ends with a "calculation" of French gains: "57 pieves, or ecclesiastical districts, 10 jurisdictions, 26,336 houses with chimneys, 32,322 men able

⁶⁶ See Morris, *The Emergent Nations and the American Revolution*, 77. See also n.a., *The Toastmaster, or Treasury of Sentiment* (London: C. Daly, 1841), 137.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., the biography of Paoli at <http://www.pgp-web.com/cn/?p=2064>, accessed 5 August 2015.

⁶⁸ *SM* 31 (August 1769): 441.

to bear arms, and 130,680 souls in all" (441). This portrayal of the French colonial enterprise contrasts with that of the *Weekly Magazine*. While this author's emphasis is on colonial advances and the "civilising" impulse, the *Weekly Magazine's* portrayal of the slaying of "infants" by French soldiers reveals the other side of the colonial coin in Corsica.

Thanks to French subjugation of the island and Paoli's exile in Britain, there are but few references to Corsican affairs in the ensuing months. Although there is surprisingly little engagement in the Scottish press with Paoli's stay on British shores, an "authentic account of General PAOLI's tour to Scotland, Autumn 1771" is printed in the *Scots Magazine* of September of that year.⁶⁹ This piece, which had been previously printed in the *London Magazine* for September is, according to Paul Tankard, the work of Boswell himself.⁷⁰ The account begins:

The illustrious Corsican chief was all along resolved, since he arrived in Great Britain, to make a tour to Scotland, and visit James Boswell, Esq; who was the first gentleman of this country who visited Corsica, and whose writings made the brave Islanders and their General be properly known, and esteemed, over Europe (481).

The Corsican wars having ostensibly passed, Paoli is treated in this piece as an exhibit to be toured around Scotland from Peter Ramsay's inn at Edinburgh, through various stately homes including "Dudingston, the seat of Lord Abercorn" and "Prestonfield, the seat of Alexander Dick" (481). In this description, which prefigures Boswell's own account of his travels in Scotland with Samuel Johnson,⁷¹ Boswell leads his Corsican friend to landmarks where the parallels between Corsican and Scottish political struggles are emphasised:

They stopped to breakfast at Linlithgow, and viewed there the ruins of an ancient palace of the Kings of Scotland. They then proceeded on the Falkirk road, and viewed the great canal of communication between the eastern and western seas, which is without question one of the greatest works in modern times. They then viewed the iron-works at Carron, which are carried on at so prodigious an expence, and have diffused such opulence, and

⁶⁹ SM 33 (September 1771): 481-82.

⁷⁰ Tankard, ed., *Facts and Inventions*, 34-41.

⁷¹ Many critics have compared Boswell's *Account of Corsica* and his memoir of Paoli to his *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) and his *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1787). See, e.g., Boulton and McLoughlin, Introduction to *Account of Corsica*, xxxiii-iv.

such a spirit of improvement, in that part of the country. General Paoli had a peculiar pleasure in viewing the forge where were formed the cannon and warlike stores, which a society of gentlemen in Scotland sent to the aid of the brave Corsicans (481).

Here, Paoli and Boswell engage in acts of memorialisation for lost Scottish and Corsican independence. These acts of memory, however sentimental, are nevertheless glazed with optimism: the depiction of Scotland as the home of enlightened “opulence” and “improvement” demonstrates something of stadial history and the evolution of the nation from oppressed rebellion to “the greatest works in modern times.” Paoli continues to Boswell’s home at Auchinleck, Ayrshire, and receives the freedom of Dumbarton and Glasgow, where the people’s attention was “fixed on whom they knew to be a real great man” (482). The special relationship between Boswell and Paoli is emphasised with the detail that “the General slept under the roof of his ever-grateful friend” (482), just as Scotland’s special relationship with Corsica is accentuated throughout the article. In this regard, the *Scots Magazine* refers to its own coverage of the donation of cannons to Corsica in December 1768:

Last autumn a society of gentlemen in Scotland sent to the brave Corsicans the following ordnance, made at Carron, viz. Ten 9 pounders, six 18 pounders, two 24 pounders, and two 32 pounders, with about one hundred charges to each gun, partly grape shot. This ordnance was put aboard the *Mary*, Capt. Hamilton... This instance of generosity and public spirit does great honour to *Scotland*, and proves, that the true love of liberty exists there as much as in any country. It is with pleasure that we record it in the *Scots Magazine*.⁷²

In the same number, Boswell’s “Memorial in behalf of the Corsicans” is republished, in which he urges Britain to assist Corsica in the fight against the French: “Surely our benevolence is never refused to the distressed; and shall we refuse it to those whose distress is occasioned by their bravely defending their liberties?” (626).⁷³ The Corsicans would, however, wait some time for British aid. In the issue for December 1790,

⁷² *SM* 30 (December 1768): 667-68.

⁷³ Although Boswell’s ambition to be involved in Corsican-British diplomacy failed, he was nevertheless engaged in “secret negotiations” on the island’s behalf: see Thomas L. Curley, “Boswell’s Liberty-Loving *Account of Corsica* and the Art of Travel Literature,” in Greg Clingham, ed., *New Light on James Boswell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 92.

Boswell proudly states that “General Paoli, whose public and private virtues, and particularly whose noble exertions in favour of the liberty of Corsica, have merited universal admiration, has been lately re-established by his countrymen in his dignity of General of the national troops.”⁷⁴ This re-establishment, according to Paoli, was impossible “had not the happy Revolution that has taken place in the French monarchy averted the fatal blow” (626). Britain finally intervened in 1794, creating the short-lived Anglo-Corsican Kingdom and placing Corsica as, according to a report in the *Edinburgh Magazine, or Literary Miscellany* for August 1794, “happily united to the Crown of Great Britain.”⁷⁵ At this point, the *Scots Magazine* states, Corsican freedom “comes from men who have rejected, with horror, the poisonous and counterfeit liberty of France... His Majesty has acquired a crown; those who bestow it have acquired liberty.”⁷⁶ Britain withdrew from Corsica in 1796 and the island returned to French rule, where it has remained.

Although James Boswell fuelled public interest in Corsica through shrewdly drawn parallels between the Corsican present and the Scottish past, and although he brought the island’s cause to wide recognition in the British and Scottish public spheres, Corsica is a constant preoccupation in the Scottish periodical press of the latter half of the eighteenth century, even when those stories are culled from the London papers. The Scottish press demonstrates the evolution of Corsica’s depiction from a rebellious and rough island to the home of enlightened liberty and neoclassical heroism. In the pages of Ruddiman’s *Weekly Magazine*, Corsica becomes a place of “brave” but “unfortunate” freedom-fighters and a heroic, virtuous leader. The *Scots Magazine*, though less emotive in its reportage, is also engaged with the humanity of Corsican conflicts, and of Paoli himself. Readers of eighteenth-century Scottish periodicals experience the Corsican story as though turning the pages of a historical novel, with its distant location, twists, turns and surprises, all the while wishing to assist its fight for liberty. Even if Boswell was unsuccessful in his diplomatic ambitions, and even if his predictions of imminent Corsican independence were frustrated, Corsica proved pivotal in his career: it initiated his enduring interest in the travelogue, while his memoir of Paoli provided rehearsal space for his life of Johnson. In turn, Boswell is integral to the understanding of Corsica in

⁷⁴ *SM* 52 (December 1790): 625.

⁷⁵ *The Edinburgh Magazine, or Literary Miscellany* (August 1794): 121.

⁷⁶ *SM* 56 (August 1794): 491.

Scotland and Britain more widely, but the periodical press also played its part. While reporting on Corsican struggles, the magazines and newspapers simultaneously reveal enlightened Scottish virtue and sympathy. Perhaps more importantly, they also reveal the beginnings of political journalism in Scotland, utilising a language which both colludes with and speaks out against the colonial enterprise in eighteenth-century Europe.

University of Glasgow