

12-15-2019

Archibald Pitcairne's Liturgical Year

Kelsey Jackson Williams
University of Stirling

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



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

Recommended Citation

Williams, Kelsey Jackson (2019) "Archibald Pitcairne's Liturgical Year," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 45: Iss. 2, 7–14.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol45/iss2/3>

This Symposium 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 dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

ARCHIBALD PITCAIRNE'S LITURGICAL YEAR

Kelsey Jackson Williams

It might at first seem odd to respond to Crawford Gribben's seminal 2006 essay on the marginalisation of Calvinism in Scottish literary studies by exploring the religious thought of a heterodox Episcopalian. After all, surely Archibald Pitcairne is an archetypal example of Hugh MacDiarmid's adage that "our poets and our clergy have always been at variance"?¹ Robert Wodrow's claim that "I hear Dr Pitcairn and several others doe meet very regularly evry Lord's Day, and read the Scripture in order to lampoon and ridicule it" is one of the more memorable pieces of gossip attached to the fiery, hard-drinking Jacobite physician.²

In recent years, the implications of Pitcairne's "atheism" or, more accurately, his unorthodox approach to the religion of the age, have been extensively explored, culminating in Michael Hunter's rediscovery and publication in 2016 of the atheistical tract *Pitcairneana*.³ The tract placed the good doctor firmly in the canon of Jonathan Israel's "Radical Enlightenment," echoing the language of more famous works such as the notorious *Traité des trois imposteurs*.

Since Hunter's article, however, Alasdair Raffé has significantly qualified the image of "Pitcairne the Atheist." Raffé's major 2017 intervention in the historiography argued "that Pitcairne was not an atheist, but rather a heterodox Christian," and he portrayed Pitcairne as a religious man who "preferred a simplified religion, founded on reason, to

¹ Hugh MacDiarmid, in his *A Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1940), xiv-xv, quoted by C. R. A. Gribben, "The Literary Cultures of the Scottish Reformation," *Review of English Studies*, 57 (2006): 64-82 (69).

² Robert Wodrow, *Analecta, or Materials for a History of Remarkable Providences; Mostly Relating to Scotch Ministers and Christians* [Maitland Club, 60, 1-4], 4 vols (Edinburgh: for the Maitland Club, 1842-1843), I: 322-323.

³ Michael Hunter, "*Pitcairneana*: An Atheist Text by Archibald Pitcairne," *Historical Journal*, 59 (2016): 595-621.

the doctrinal complexities upheld by priests.”⁴ Raffe’s argument, far more extensive than that made here, was based on close reading of two of Pitcairne’s earlier works, the *Solutio problematic de historicis; seu, inventoribus* (1688) and the *Epistola Archimedis ad Regem Gelonem* (1706), both of which contain clear hints of Early Enlightenment freethinking. The present essay does not challenge the arguments made by Raffe, but explores the religious, rather than the heterodox, side of his formulation. Taking Gribben’s work as a starting point, it suggests that heterodoxy may not be the only lens through which to understand Pitcairne and that an increased attention to the minutiae of Scottish religious experience may bear fruit in the study even of one of Scotland’s most famous freethinkers.

This argument can be made with reference, not to Pitcairne’s essays, but to his poetry. While lip service is regularly given to Pitcairne as one of the major—if not *the* major—Scottish Latin poet of the eighteenth century, critical studies of his work are few and far between, even after the 2009 publication of a magnificent edition and translation by John and Winifred MacQueen.⁵ The reason for this dearth had already been observed in 1739 by Sir John Clerk of Penicuik who contributed a biography of Pitcairne to the English edition of Bayle’s *Dictionnaire*. In that work, Penicuik observed that Pitcairne’s “poetry has been accused of obscurity, which indeed he affected in many of his pieces on a political account.... many poems both antient and modern founded on private history fall under the imputation of obscurity.”⁶ More often than not Pitcairne’s work is both

⁴ Alasdair Raffe, “Archibald Pitcairne and Scottish Heterodoxy, c.1688-1713,” *Historical Journal*, 60 (2017): 633-657 (637), and cf. also MacQueen and MacQueen, n. 5 below, 29-34.

⁵ Archibald Pitcairne, *The Latin Poems*, ed. and trans. John and Winifred MacQueen [MRTS, vol. 39; *Bibliotheca Latinitatis Novae*, 7] (Tempe, AZ: Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2009), which offers Pitcairne’s Latin text and the MacQueens’ English translation on facing pages; quotations in either language are cited below in the text as *LP*. John MacQueen has also recently edited Pitcairne’s play *The Phanaticks* [STS, 5th ser., 10] (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society [Woodbridge: Boydell], 2012), and a shorter sketch that he has attributed to Pitcairne, *Tollerators and Con-Tollerators* (Columbia, SC: Scottish Poetry Reprints, 2015).

⁶ Pierre Bayle, ed., [English ed., Thomas Birch], *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical*, 10 vols (London: J. Bettenham, 1734-41), 8: 421. Clerk’s authorship is identified by Hunter, 599.

politically coded and dependent upon the knowledge possessed by his coterie of friends, making successful modern elucidation no easy matter.

Nonetheless, Pitcairne's poetry allows us access to aspects of his life and thought not seen in his prose works. In the last year and a half of his life, he composed a remarkable series of poems extending from May 29, 1712, to May 29, 1713 (he died on October 23 of the latter year) which require us to reassess the role of religion, especially Episcopal religion, in Pitcairne's life. Collectively these poems follow the liturgical and political year, building on and harking back to one another in a tessellation of allusive statements which culminate in Pitcairne's announcement of his devotion to Christ, the Episcopal church, and the exiled king James. While some of these poems have been examined individually elsewhere, it is their form as a cycle tied to the church year which offers a clearer insight into Pitcairne's belief.⁷

The first in the series, headed *In Maji vigesimam nonam, Ann MDCCII*, exists in three slightly variant versions, all playing on the conjunction of May 29, the anniversary of the 1660 Restoration, with the Feast of the Ascension for that year:

Hac CHRISTUS voluit patrio se reddere coelo,
Hac **Carolus** regno rusus adesse suo.⁸

The second variant, titled "*In Maii XXIX, sive Juni X*," goes a step further by linking the day with its Gregorian equivalent, June 10, the birth of James VIII and III, and using the two dates as allegories for the Stuart monarchs:

Grampia gaudebis cum Maio Junius haeres
Numina prisca Tibi, tempora grata dabit (*LP*, no. 104b, ll. 5-6).

"*Grampia*" (*i.e.*, Scotland) is firmly reminded that "you will rejoice when June" (James), "heir to May" (Charles II), "restores you your ancient divinities and happy times."

This playful and allusive fantasy, based on the happy conjunction of holidays which occurred in 1712, was elaborated in a poem, "*Ad Junium*," composed in the following month. Like "*In Maii XXIX*," it exists in two variant forms. In the opening lines, the first vocalises the assent of July and August (Caesar and Augustus) to June (once again James) becoming

⁷ See Raffe's discussion (Raffe, 655) of the Christmas Day poem (*LP*, no. 109), also discussed below.

⁸ "On this day Christ willed his Ascension to his Father's heaven, and the Restoration of Charles to his kingdom": Pitcairne, *Latin Poems*, ed. MacQueen and MacQueen, no. 104a, ll. 1-2). Quotations below from this edition (Pitcairne's Latin and the MacQueens' facing English translation) are in the text as *LP*.

“King over the months” (*Regem mensibus*,” *LP*, nos. 105(a): in the second version “king over the years” and “the glory of the months”), and both versions then bid farewell to, or proclaim the disappearance of, September and November, so that the year can pass in a single June:

Nunc abeant, abeant Septembres atque Novembres,
Et nobis annus Junius unus eat (*LP*, 105(b), ll. 3-4).

Why hope for November to disappear? The next poem, “*IV. Nov. M.DCC.XII.*,” alternatively titled “*Ad Calvini Discipulos*,” figures November 4, the birthday of William of Orange, as an “accursed” day, surpassing January 30 (the execution of Charles I) and achieving what November 5 (the Gunpowder Plot) could not:

Quod non quinta dies potuit patrare Novembris,
Aut fors non voluit quinta patrare dies,
Vos voluit, vos quarta dies sclerata Novembris
Ter decuma Jani proditione prior (*LP*, no. 106).

To a 21st century reader, even a 21st century episcopalian or anglican, these largely political poems may seem a far cry from any religious calendar, but each of the dates commemorated here was marked in the early 18th century Book of Common Prayer as a special event, feast or fast, with its own liturgy or prayers. Pitcairne was writing in 1712, following the successful appeal in March 1711 by a Scottish episcopalian clergyman against prosecution for using the prayer book and a passage of the Toleration Act of March 1712 “to prevent the disturbing those of the Episcopal Communion in the Exercise of their Religious Worship and in the Use of the Liturgy of the Church of England.”⁹

As Tristram Clarke has shown, rather than using the 1637 Scottish liturgy, Scottish episcopalians in 1712 were using the 1662 Book of Common Prayer; Greenshields and others raised funds to provide copies free to Scottish bishops and congregations, initially shipped north and then from May 1712 printed in Edinburgh by Robert Freebairn (Clarke, 60-63).¹⁰

⁹ See Tristram Clarke, “Politics and Prayer Books: the Book of Common Prayer in Scotland c. 1705-1714,” *Transactions of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society*, 6.2 (1993): 57-70 (59-60).

¹⁰ Clarke records that by February 1713 Freebairn printed 6,500 copies, 4,000 for free distribution and 2,500 for sale to individuals, and the other Queen’s Printer in Scotland, James Watson was also printing a duodecimo English prayerbook. The solitary reprint at this time of the 1637 *Book of Common Prayer ... for use of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh: James Watson, 1712) was promoted as chiefly of

Following modification after the Revolution of 1688, the Book of Common Prayer provided special services on May 29, for the Restoration (“Thanksgiving to Almighty God, for having put an end to the great Rebellion, by the Restitution of the King and Royal Family and the Restauration of the Government after many years Interruption”); on November 5, for Gun-Powder Treason (“Thanksgiving ... for the Happy Deliverance of King James I and the Three Estates of the Realm, from the most Traiterous and Bloody intended Massacre by Gun-powder; and also for the Happy Arrival of His present Majesty [i.e. William of Orange]”); and on January 30, for the Martyrdom of the blessed King Charles I (“A Form of Prayer with Fasting ... to Implore the Mercy of God, That neither the Guilt of that Sacred and Innocent Blood, nor those other Sins, by which God was provoked to deliver both us and our King into the Hands of cruel and unreasonable Men, may at any time hereafter be visited upon Us, or Our Posterity”).¹¹ All three services had originally been established under Stuart monarchs, Gun-Powder Treason by Parliament in January 1605/1606, and the services for Charles I and for the Restoration in 1661. After the Revolution of 1688, two (the Martyrdom and Restoration) were reauthorized by Queen Mary, in October 1692, but the third, on November 5, had been reauthorized two years earlier, by William of Orange, in October 1690, who enjoined thanksgiving, not only for the safety of James VI and I from Gun-Powder Treason, but for his own disembarkation on the beach at Torbay, making an annual liturgical event that was both anti-Papist and anti-Jacobite.¹²

One marked difference between the presbyterians and episcopalians was in the celebration of saints’ days. Pitcairne’s next poem, “*Die XXX Novembris*,” for St. Andrew’s Day, allowed the same intertwining of

historical interest, despite its later significance in Scottish Episcopalian liturgy and identity.

¹¹ See, e.g., *The Book of Common Prayer ... According to the Use of the Church of England* (Edinburgh: Printed by Mr. Robert Freebairn, Printer to the Queen’s most Excellent Majesty, 1713), items 26, 27, 28, unpaginated, (Sg. Gg3r et seq.).

¹² Resentment at the Whig hijacking of Stuart commemoration reverberated a hundred years later, in Robert Burns’s letter in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*, November 22, 1788, denouncing a sermon the “harsh, abusive” comments on the Stuarts made in a sermon on November 5, 1788, by the Revd. Joseph Kirkpatrick, of Dunscore: see Nigel Leask, ed., *Commonplace Books, Tour Journals, and Miscellaneous Prose* [Oxford Edition of the Works of Robert Burns, 1] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 287-289, 410; Roy, *Letters*, I: 332-335.

religion and politics, directly addressing Andrew as “thrice-holy Patron of the Scots”:

*Andraea, vixti Jacobo semper Amicus,
Atque Caledoniis semper Amicus eras,
Rursus nos visas Scotis ter Sancte Patrone,
Visas Jacobo sed reduunte redux.
Ille fidem officii, non religione malorum,
Officiis nostris & peitate probet (LP, no. 108).*

Pitcairne characterises Andrew as “always James's friend,” the apostle, but also the monarch, and as “always a friend to the Caledonians,” and he begs Andrew to “return with the restoration of James” (“*Jacobo sed redeunte redux*”). Because the saint is specifically associated with “our rites and our piety” (“*officiis nostris & pietate*”), a lightly veiled reference to episcopacy or even the prayer book, Andrew stands as a cipher, not for Scottish Christianity as a whole, but for the disestablished Episcopal Church.

A key point in this cycle is reached with the poem “Die XXV. Decembris,” which celebrates both Christmas Day and Pitcairne's own birthday (LP, no. 109). The presbyterian ban on celebrating Christmas, along with other church festivals or holy days, in the First Book of Discipline (1560), had been reaffirmed by the Scottish parliament in 1690, so the poem's focus is explicitly unpresbyterian.¹³ Christ, “ruler of men, son of God” (“*hominum Rector, Filius ipse Dei*”), is praised for blessing those mortals who followed the divine commandments. Pitcairne's own pared-down religious preferences come through in his emphasis on the Golden Rule and on rendering to Caesar that which is Caesar's, but the theistic, Christocentric nature of the poem, concluding with the declaration that Pitcairne “has worshipped you, does worship you, and will worship you” (“*te coluit, te colit, atque colet*”) remains paramount.

In January of the new year, Pitcairne returned to his calendrical preoccupations, wishing in “*Ad Januarium*” for June, i.e., the month of the Jacobite king's birth, rather than the month of “Janus's murders,” i.e., the execution of Charles I (LP, no. 112). A happier note was sounded in one of the longest poems in the sequence, “*Ad Jesum Christum Dei Filium*” (LP 110). This is the only poem not explicitly dated in the title, and it might appear from its opening line to be another Christmas poem, but its reference to Christ having left Earth (l. 7) and its publication by Robert

¹³ Cf. also Pitcairne's poem to George Heriot, whose will provided an feast on his birthday, asking “Why is it the annual custom for the Sons of Knox to celebrate your birthday, blessed Heriot, when they don't celebrate Christ's?” (answer: “Because you gave money to Scots ministers, and Christ didn't”) (LP, 112).

Freebairn in the first week of April 1713 both point to it being written for Easter (which in 1713 fell on April 5).¹⁴ The link between St Andrew and the episcopal church is here made explicit and the presbyterians—whom "*Usinulca*" ("Calvinus") produced—are branded as "Pharisees under a different name" (ll. 2-3). Whether for Christmas or Easter, the poem affords Pitcairne another opportunity to denounce those disciples of Knox, "who rejoice that they are permitted to insult a festal day" (l. 8), and to pray to Christ to send back Andrew and James, "who under Your guidance will confound the Knoxians":

Andream nobis Tu Jacobumque remitte,

Qui Te, Cnoxiacis, auspice, verba dabunt (LP, no. 110, ll. 11-12).

The cycle concludes with two poems focused on May 29, 1713, a year to the day from the sequence's commencement. One is untitled and more occasional in its nature, responding to Henry Sacheverell's Restoration Day sermon to parliament.¹⁵ Pitcairne exhorted Sacheverell to remember not just May 29 (the Restoration of Charles II), but also June 10 (the birth of James), for which the Book of Common Prayer provided no special commemoration. June/James is personified as a figure who will "make you remember May, and make us happy, and restore the Golden Age to his peoples"—James VIII and III in his most messianic Jacobite dress:

Qui memorem Maii faciet Te, nosque beabit,

Et reddet Populis aurea Secla suis (LP, no. 113, ll. 3-4).

The carefully crafted conclusion to the sequence, "*MARGARITA REGINA et DIVA SCOTORUM*," is a poem addressed in its title to St. Margaret, but in the text to the day itself, May 29/June 10:

Sacra Dies olim Marti Carolque fuisti,

Arbitraque Europae, Brittonibusque Salus.

Saturnus genuit Te rursus Secla daturam

Aurea, quae reddet Junius Ille meus.

Ille meus Sacer est Qui Marti Mercurioque,

Arbiter, Europe, Qui Tibi Magnus erit (LP, no. 114).

The day is reminded of its history, and in the concluding lines Pitcairne looks to "that June of mine," ("*Junius Ille meus*," i.e., King James) "who, as arbitrator between Mars and Mercury, will be great for you, Europa."

The feast day for St. Margaret of Scotland, had only been set as June 10 quite recently, in 1693, in honour of James VIII and III's birth. St.

¹⁴ See Freebairn's account book, NLS MS 763, fol. 22v.

¹⁵ Henry Sacheverell, *A Sermon Preach'd before the Honourable House of Commons, at St. Margaret's Westminster, on Friday, May 29. 1713* (London: Henry Clement, 1713).

Margaret, a symbol of Scottish Catholicism for exiled Catholics during the Reformation, seems a surprisingly pro-Catholic allusion for the Episcopalian Pitcairne, emphasizing the normative value he placed on the rhythms of the Christian year.¹⁶

This cycle of poems has understandably been overlooked. Its beauty lies in well-turned phrases and political double entendres that do not easily translate from the Latin to English and, to echo Clerk of Penicuik, its intentional opacity is forbidding to the casual reader. When examined in more detail, however, its character as an elaborately wrought reflection on Pitcairne's faith and politics becomes evident. The days of the calendar are anthropomorphised and blended with the central figures of June/King James, St. Andrew/the Episcopal Church, and Christ himself, figures who perform an elaborate dance across the year, bringing both spiritual and political salvation with them and turning May 29/June 10 into a second Easter which could, potentially at least, herald a new era for Scotland.

The significance of these poems can only be explicated with reference to the Scottish Episcopal tradition, with its emphasis on the liturgical year and its close bond to the royal house.¹⁷ If we read Pitcairne only as a freethinker, a proto-Enlightenment, somehow inherently "modern," figure, we miss the Pitcairne who meditated on the cabalistic meanings of the Christian year and used its feasts and red-letter days as a framework within which to reaffirm his own commitment to a disestablished church and an exiled king. If we marginalise the theological mentality which allowed a scholar of Pitcairne's standing to think nonetheless in fundamentally Christocentric terms, we risk marginalising a central but still all too undervalued aspect of early modern Scotland's intellectual landscape.

University of Stirling

¹⁶ For the post-Reformation exile cult of St Margaret, see Mark Dilworth, "Jesuits and Jacobites: the *cultus* of St Margaret," *Innes Review*, 47 (1996): 169-180.

¹⁷ For more on this tradition see Kelsey Jackson Williams, *The First Scottish Enlightenment: Rebels, Priests, and History* (Oxford, 2020).