

SCOTTISH BACKGROUNDS AND INDIAN EXPERIENCES IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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I

This article investigates the motivations behind the East India Company's (hereafter EIC or the Company) *ryotwari* system, developed by a group of Scotsmen in the Madras Presidency during the 1790s.¹ It is principally concerned with the extent to which their early lives in Scotland helped to inform and shape their thinking on tenure and revenue in the Baramahal and Salem. This system of tenure was subsequently championed by Thomas Munro, latterly the Governor of the Madras Presidency, under whom it became one of the main tenurial arrangements in Southern British India. Martha McLaren has already considered Munro and his administrative work in its entirety, concluding that ideas with roots in the Scottish Enlightenment were the principal influence on his work.² She proposes that Munro, and two other prominent Scots, Montstuart Elphinstone and John Malcolm, operated in what McLaren calls a 'Scottish school of thought' in the EIC.³ This is an interesting thesis, but due to the wide breadth of material that McLaren covers, one that needs further exploration and analysis of the intricacies of creating colonial policy in order to test whether it is applicable to the *ryotwari* system. The purpose of this paper is to go behind the tenurial system itself and consider the interplay between the background of the collectors and their motivations over the initial eight years that this system was first devised. In doing so, this article seeks an understanding of the process of colonialism, not as 'imperial history writ large', but as a way of unearthing the more nuanced approaches of individuals, which sharpen an understanding of the colonial process.

¹ *Ryots* were the cultivating class in this area of India. There existed a form of tenurial agreement already but the EIC modified this when they captured and began to administer territory in the South.

² M. McLaren, *British India & British Scotland, 1780–1830: Career Building, Empire Building and a Scottish School of Thought on Indian Governance* (Ohio, 2001).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

Tracing closely these lines of connection will give more understanding as to how those involved in the imperial mission contributed to the process of consolidating Britain's hold over India, whatever rank they filled and however faltering the policies or, at times, altruistic their intentions.⁴

It begins by investigating the Scottish heritage of the Baramahal Collectors and the ways in which their micro-histories uncover the circumstances which propelled them into empire and embedded them in some of the contemporary thinking on the EIC's role and purpose in India. It then considers how closely connected their plans for the Baramahal and Salem were to ideas and practices that were popular in the agricultural 'improvement' of Scotland, and turns finally to their motivations for settling with individual cultivators. For both these sections, it also asks what other motivations were present for these collectors by looking at local conditions in the Baramahal as well as Bayly and Wilson's propositions that EIC policy was more reactive than purposeful, with roots in the anxiety felt by vulnerable administrators.⁵ The research of historians of both the Madras and the Bengal presidencies is helpful in considering the alternative influences on the collectors and will be used throughout this article. The short period this article covers (1792–99) is interesting because it pre-dates some of the major debates on reforms in the administration of British India, and the influence of men like Mill. The *ryotwari* system of course was a major part of these debates, as Munro's influence grew in the early 1800s. Motivations for pursuing particular systems of rule were caught up in internal politics as well as career-building strategies.⁶ However, this early period, when the Collectors, other than Read, were still in junior positions and relatively unconnected, illuminates approaches to the establishment of administration where there was little precedent or norms, or even disagreements, to build on.

Alexander Read, Thomas Munro, James Graham and William MacLeod worked together in the Baramahal during the 1790s. However, personal records are only available for three of them. It has been impossible to trace James Graham further than his enrolment as an East India Company officer cadet, which states his Scottish origin.⁷ Alexander Read, who was appointed superintendent of the Baramahal, and had also been Munro and Graham's superior in the intelligence and supply unit during the Third Mysore War, arrived in India in 1772 after receiving a commission as an officer cadet in 1770. Born about 1753, he was the

⁴ R. Travers, 'Imperial Revolutions and Global Repercussions: South Asia and the World, c. 1750–1850', in D. Armitage and S. Subrahmanyam (eds), *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (Basingstoke, 2010), pp. 149–52.

⁵ C. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870* (Cambridge, 1996); J. Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers: Modern Governance in India, 1780–1835* (Basingstoke, 2008)

⁶ See, for example, J. Harrington, *Sir John Malcolm and the Creation of British India* (New York, 2010).

⁷ Oriental and India Office Collections (hereafter OIOC), India Office Records (IOR), Military Entry Records 1753–1861, L/MIL/9/255, f. 288v.

oldest but illegitimate son of a customs sloop officer from Dundee.⁸ Returning to Britain in 1800, only his failing health had persuaded him to leave India, where he spent all of his adult life. However, arriving in London after thirty years in India and finding that the climate did not suit him, he left for Malta, where he died in 1804. He never married but had one son and three daughters by two different women.⁹

Munro was born into a Glasgow merchant family in 1761.¹⁰ A move to the Baramahal and Salem as a sub-collector under Alexander Read provided his first position of substantial authority. However, after ten years as a soldier in South India, working as part of the intelligence and supply unit with Read, in many of his private and public letters he wrote to display his confidence in his work and familiarity with his surroundings'.¹¹ Although fourteen years of Company service, after the Baramahal experiment, led him into serious conflict with other administrators and the Madras Board of Revenue, persistence and good connections paid off and he convinced the Company directors and Board of Control of the rightness of the *ryotwari* system. He was appointed Governor of Madras in 1820 and died in 1827 whilst on a tour of the Presidency.

William MacLeod was the second son of a tacksman from the MacLeod of Skye estates in Glenelg, northwest highlands, born in 1759. The MacLeod clan suffered financial ruin due to the irresponsible spending of their twenty-second chief, Norman (1706–72) in the 1760s.¹² William signed up as an EIC officer cadet in 1779 and arrived in Madras in 1780. Upon his return to Britain in 1813, he settled in Fulham after marrying a Margaret MacKenzie at Inverness. He died in the capital in 1836, and was buried at St Anne's church in Soho where a relative, Roderick MacLeod, was rector. Their only child, a son Colin, emigrated to Australia.¹³

The early careers of these men coincided with the debates over how Company territory should be governed, and indeed, whether it was wise to hold any territory other than their trading posts and factories. These men would have heard of the financial disappointments when the expected windfalls of territorial acquisition did not materialise for shareholders, as well as the criticism of corruption and the private wealth amassed by Hastings and other 'nabobs'.

⁸ D. R. Torrance, *The Reads of Auchenleck, Balmachie, Cairney, Drungeith, Logie, Montpelier, Turfbeg and in India* (Edinburgh, 1985), pp. 18, 32.

⁹ British Library, Additional Manuscripts, Wellesley Papers, Add. MS 13666, Correspondence Relative to Mysore 1799, ff. 86–7.

¹⁰ McLaren, *British India & British Scotland*, p. 16.

¹¹ B. Stein, *Thomas Munro: The Origins of the Colonial State and His Vision of Empire* (Oxford, 1989), p. 358.

¹² D. MacKinnon and A. Morrison, *The Macleods: The Genealogy of a Clan* (Edinburgh, 1969), p. 119; J. Hunter, *Scottish Exodus: Travels Among a Worldwide Clan* (Edinburgh, 2005), p. 17.

¹³ MacKinnon and Morrison, *The MacLeods*, p. 120; OIOC, IOR, Madras Service Army Lists 1771–1846, L/MIL/11/38/21; A. MacKenzie, *History of the MacLeods* (Inverness, 1889), pp. 119–20.

When Cornwallis was appointed Governor General of all British Indian territories in 1786, with him came a new mandate to govern Indian peoples within these territories. After military careers, Read, as head collector, and Munro, MacLeod and Graham as sub-collectors, were appointed by Cornwallis in the newly conquered territories of the Baramahal and Salem and worked together between 1792–99 (between the third and fourth Mysore Wars) to settle the region. When they received their new posting in 1792, these men undertook much investigation of the Mysorian tenures and land tax arrangements, building up knowledge of the different types of cultivators, landowners and types of rent. They were stationed individually in various places throughout the region and over the next eight years they corresponded on the best means of establishing tenures and land tax agreements with the inhabitants, developing what became the '*ryotwari* system', a form of tenancy agreement that the Company made annually and directly with cultivators. Arriving several months before the other collectors and using the Mysorian system to make land tax collections in 1792, Read requested to the Madras Board of Revenue (hereafter the Board or MBOR) that he be allowed more time to find a just settlement before establishing a permanent arrangement.¹⁴ The Board initially agreed to this request because they were happy with the revenue he had collected and an interim five-year lease was set up with village heads, or *patels*, who in turn would create *cowle* agreements (the rent to be paid) with cultivators for individual farms or fields each year. Read asked the board if he could have funds to undertake a survey to establish the exact value of the land, since 'the Natives are so partially and imperfectly informed on Revenue detail, that any general Plan must be the result of much practical experience and information, which none of them possess'.¹⁵ Very quickly, the collectors became disillusioned with the Board's hopes for a permanent settlement, as they surmised that the poverty and oppression they saw in the Baramahal came from the power of *patels* and *poligars* (military chieftains) to extort higher than necessary rent from cultivators, whilst themselves paying little.¹⁶ Thus, the collectors began to participate in and try to control the agreements that were made between village heads and cultivators each year. This led them to believe that only an equalisation of the rent across the population, and contracts made directly with cultivators would bring about increased cultivation, and therefore increased revenue. Individual and secure tenancies would allow the *ryots* their rightful income – no more would be taken from them than was agreed with the Company. They were able to experiment with these ideas during the five-year lease whilst the survey was carried out and began to involve themselves in the *cowle* arrangements, concluding that the government's control of these was

¹⁴ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records: Management, V/27/46/196, Read to the Board, 19 May 1792.

¹⁵ OIOC, IOR, Board of Control General Records, F/4/4/685, Read's 7th Report to the Board of Revenue, 15 Aug. 1794.

¹⁶ *Poligars* were also landholders at that time. They were military chieftains who had risen to power in the political turmoil as the power of the Mughal empire deteriorated.

produce a fairer system. However, the board was still expecting a permanent settlement with a landed class at the end of the five-year lease in 1797, and Read began to delay his reports so he could make a convincing case for the *ryotwari* system despite the decreasing revenue and the collectors' own admission that it was fraught with problems. Yet, so convinced had the collectors become of its necessity for long term 'improvement' of the region, that they argued for adjustments to it rather than a reversion to settlements with *patels* and *poligars*.¹⁷ Their correspondence is filled with an apparently sincere belief that they could free Indian farmers from oppression by tampering with the social structure, whilst at the same time increasing the wealth and agricultural output of the region and revenue for the Company.¹⁸

Read's resignation and the onset of the Fourth Mysore War brought this initial phase of the *ryotwari* experiment to an end. It was extended after the war to different regions where these collectors were stationed, but was abandoned in 1807 before being reintroduced in 1814 when Munro returned to the Madras Presidency after a seven-year furlough. It would be unwise, and indeed impossible, to suggest that these collectors came to the Baramahal with preconceived ideas of how they would manage the region, based exclusively on ideas they had come across in Scotland. The fact that it took several years of investigation of existing tenures, and correspondence between them, to arrive at a coherent plan proves this. However, assumptions of the need to 'improve' agriculture and to give the *ryots* 'property in the soil', so that small farmers could enjoy 'the fruits of their labour' seem never to have been in doubt.¹⁹

II

The early lives of these Scotsmen appear to have been considerably affected by the transformations taking place in Scotland in the latter part of the eighteenth century. They were all motivated by financial difficulties and their positions within their families, which limited their inheritance prospects, to take advantage of the new career opportunities afforded by service in the EIC. The prospect of a fortune or independency led many young Scots, such as the subjects of this article, into empire. Their families were connected enough to find patronage for a cadetship, but not so well connected to secure anything grander than this entry level position. The timing of their India careers meant that although they missed the lucrative private gain associated with early territorial acquisitions, the growing need for administrators, as the Company's role transformed, meant they were able to find promotions and sustain good careers. The changing fortunes of different

¹⁷ Tamil Nadu State Archives (hereafter TNSA), Salem: Baramahal Records, Review, vol. 179–80 (18215–6), 1799.

¹⁸ For the chronology of the *ryotwari* system, see Nilmani Mukherjee's *The Ryotwari System in Madras, 1972–1827* (Calcutta, 1962).

¹⁹ TNSA, Salem: Baramahal Records, Settlement, vol.139 (18175), para. 40.

types of Scottish families give an indication just how necessary these opportunities were.²⁰

As a consequence of his illegitimacy, the young Alexander was nursed by another woman, his mother referred to merely as ‘the St Andrew’s lady’ (with whom his father also had another child). It is not clear where he lived at this stage, although he did write home from India later in life to say that Logie, his father’s small estate near Dundee, was the only place in Britain to which he had any kind of attachment and so it is most likely he was raised there.²¹ The Read family was connected to the larger landowning family, the Wedderburns of Pearsie, by the marriage of Read’s grandfather to Elizabeth Wedderburn of Pearsie. There were also several other Wedderburn-Read marriages in that and the following generation.²² Most pertinently, several members of Read’s immediate and extended family were known Jacobites. The family laird, Sir John Wedderburn of Blackness, was executed in 1746. The Wedderburn house was occupied by government troops, which sent its residents in to hiding. Alexander’s own father was accused of Jacobite sympathies and of allowing a ship to pass with several wanted Jacobites on board but was cleared of any wrongdoing after negotiating a pardon from Admiral Byng in London. Katharine Read, the portrait painter, Alexander’s aunt, spent time abroad in Paris, then Rome, from 1746–53, because it was thought safer for her and her Jacobite friends.²³ However, the post-1745 policy of integrating Jacobite families into Britain seems to have served this extended family well.²⁴ A generation after the rebellion, they were evidently well established in their political, cultural and business connections in London, with several opportunities opening up for the younger men in the EIC. For example, the Webster-Wedderburn merchant house in Leadenhall Street, London, belonged to a relation of Alexander’s and was involved in East India trade, and several of Read’s cousins also found careers in the Company.²⁵

²⁰ J.M. MacKenzie, ‘On Scotland and the Empire’, *The International History Review*, 15, 4 (1993), p. 720; G.J. Bryant, ‘Scots in India in the Eighteenth Century’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 64, 1 (1985), pp. 22–41; T.M. Devine, ‘Scottish Elites and the Indian Empire, 1700–1815’, *Proceedings of the British Academy: Anglo-Scottish Relations, from 1603 to 1900*, 127 (2005), pp. 213–29; A. MacKillop, ‘Europeans, Britons and Scots: Scottish Sojourning Networks and Identities in Asia, c.1700–1815’, in A. McCarthy (ed.), *A Global Clan: Scottish Migrant Networks and Identities since the Eighteenth Century* (London, 2006), pp. 19–47; G.K. McGilvary, *East India patronage and the British state: The Scottish elite and politics in the eighteenth century* (London, 2008); J. Riddy, ‘Warren Hastings: Scotland’s Benefactor?’, in G. Carnall and C. Nicholson (eds), *The Impeachment of Warren Hastings* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 30–57.

²¹ R. Torrance, *The Reads*, pp. 18, 32.

²² A. Wedderburn, *The Wedderburn Book: A History of the Wedderburns in the Counties of Berwick and Forfar, 1296–1896* (n.p., 1898), pp. 174–5, 319.

²³ Torrance, *The Reads*, pp. 14, 82–83; Wedderburn, *Wedderburn Book*, pp. 324, 329.

²⁴ L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707–1837* (London, 1992), p. 119; A. MacKillop, ‘Accessing Empire: Scotland, Europe Britain and the Asia Trade, 1695–c.1750’, *Itinerario*, 29, 3 (2005), p. 20.

²⁵ London Metropolitan Archives, Royal and Sun Alliance Insurance Group Collection, CLC/B/192/F/001/MS11936/409/673600, Webster-Wedderburn Insurance, 2 Jan. 1792.

Devoid of the possibility of inheriting his father's estate, at the age of fourteen Read was sent to London to live with his aunt, Katharine Read.²⁶ Two years later he received his commission as an EIC cadet. No records of his patronage are obtainable, but for him, as with many Scots from connected middle-class families, there could have been several possible routes into the EIC. First, his aunt Katherine was a well-connected woman in her own right, since through her portrait painting she came in to contact with many London notables and even received a commission for the House of Hanover, despite her Jacobite heritage.²⁷ Secondly, the Webster-Wedderburn merchant house would have had several Company clients. They were the agents of the family's friend and MP, George Dempster, through whom it is most likely that Alexander received his cadetship.²⁸ Dempster, MP and Company proprietor, was popular in the Perthshire burghs, and happy to support young men in their careers. His biographers have recorded that his letters are full of patronage requests and grants for constituents, and in turn his constituents were happy to oblige with electoral support. This he needed in 1768 in a bitter fight with his rival for the five Perthshire burghs. This rival, MacKintosh, was also an opponent in the EIC Court of Directors. Dempster was part of Sullivan's faction and MacKintosh part of Clive's. In 1769, Sullivan stood for the last time as a director and it is thought Dempster's support brought over to Sullivan a number of other Scots, which swung the election for him.²⁹ Thus, Dempster would have been owed numerous favours in the Court of Directors. It would not be surprising if two beneficiaries were Alexander Read and his father's cousin Charles Wedderburn, who left for India in 1770 and 1765 respectively, shortly after Dempster first became a proprietor. The family was connected with Dempster to such an extent that Read's father, in his will, appointed him tutor to his children.³⁰ Read's future was determined by the limiting law of entail and the opportunities of the Union. He had to make a living and worked hard to succeed in India. It is clear from family papers and other letters that he kept in close contact with his extended family, particularly Charles Wedderburn, who was about the same age as Read and 'spent thirteen years in India', but who settled in Fife when he inherited the Pearsie estate in 1779.³¹ Despite his illegitimacy and Jacobite heritage, Read had a very successful career in India that afforded him recognition in India House where he was nominated for a medal, and also had

²⁶ Torrance, *The Reads*, p. 32.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²⁸ Wedderburn, *Wedderburn Book*, p. 329; J. Evans, *The Gentleman Usher: The Life and Times of George Dempster (1732–1818), Member of Parliament and Laird of Dunnichen and Skibo* (Barnsley, 2005), p. 114.

²⁹ A. Munro Lang, *A Life of George Dempster: Scottish Member of Parliament of Dunichen (1732–1818)* (Lampeter, 1998), pp. 51–90.

³⁰ Torrance, *The Reads*, p. 20. There are also many letters from George Dempster to Charles Wedderburn in Dundee City Archives (hereafter DCA), Wedderburn of Pearsie Papers, GD 131/Box 6/Bundle 15.

³¹ DCA, Wedderburn of Pearsie Papers, GD 131, Correspondence of Alexander Read and Charles Wedderburn.

enough of a fortune that, after providing for family in his will, he was able to invest in other interests.³²

In his early years in India, Alexander wrote to Charles that 'I find my constitution agrees well with this country. I am always in perfect health and so easy am I in disposition, that daily occurrences which would vex many (perhaps a little extra-duty or other trifles) never concern', and even describes Tanjore like 'one continuous garden' during a war, because he found it so beautiful.³³ In 1788, after eighteen years in India, Read still talked as an ambitious man hoping for fortune and position. In 1791 he told Charles that India was more home than anywhere else.³⁴ In all accounts, Read was portrayed as an upright and honest man. His uncle, William Read, described him as a 'respectable and agreeable fellow' in a letter home to Charles Wedderburn and Read's own letters to the same reveal his disdain for those who indulged in their Indian wealth.³⁵ Furthermore, Munro's father, in correspondence with Munro, assumed that Read must have made good 'pickings' from the Third Mysore War and hoped his son had also accessed this wealth. However, Munro replied that:

Read is no ordinary character; he might, in Mysore, have amassed as much money as he chose, and by fair means too; but he was so far from taking advantage of his situation for this purpose . . . Whatever I might have done had I been left to myself, I could get no pickings under such a master whose conduct is invariably regulated by private honour and public interest . . . The enthusiasm in the pursuit of the National Objects, which seizes other men by fits and starts, is in him constant and uniform; these qualities, joined to an intimate knowledge of the language and manners of the people, and a happy talent for the investigation of everything connected with Revenue, eminently qualify him for the station which he now fills, with so much credit to himself and benefit to the Publick [sic].³⁶

This picture of Read was further confirmed when Munro joked at Read's quirks:

His only happiness is in plodding among [statements and accounts], & were he away from them, he would not know what to do with himself. He carries this passion to such extravagant lengths that I have often thought that he is pleased to find them wrong that he may have the satisfaction of going over them again.³⁷

³² Torrance, *The Reads*, p. 53.

³³ DCA, Wedderburn of Pearsie Papers, GD 131/Box 30, A Read to C Wedderburn, n.d.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 30 Jul. 1788, Jan. 1791, Jun. 1791.

³⁵ DCA, Wedderburn of Pearsie Papers, GD 131/Box 30, A Read to C Wedderburn, 25 Nov. 1773; GD 131/Box 25/Bundle 1, William Read to C Wedderburn, 20 June 1778.

³⁶ Rev. G.R. Gleig (ed.), *The Life of Major General Sir Thomas Munro, Bart* (London, 1830), p. 146; OIOC, European Manuscripts (hereafter Mss Eur), Munro Papers, F 151/141, Munro to his father, 14 Apr. 1793, f. 118v.

³⁷ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/142, Munro to his father, 10 May 1796, f. 54.

Read's work in this period of territorial acquisition in the Madras Presidency set the bar for collectorships, raising revenue at a time when the Company's finances in Madras were a cause for concern. As Irschick comments, 'his mode of operation and self presentation changed notions about [the Company's] purpose and place in South India.'³⁸ Although respectable by Company standards, this should not be taken to mean he was an entirely benign administrator, and he was not shy of using authoritarian measures to maintain control in the region. For example, the volume *Justice* of the Baramahal Records gives details of some of complaints, cases and sentences passed. The extent of this is hinted at by MacLeod when he requested funds from Read to extend prison space, and Graham mentions public floggings in his review.³⁹

Munro's prospects were also determined by the fluctuating fortunes of empire. His grandfather had set up a business in American trade, but after it was handed on to Munro's father it was bankrupted when the American tobacco trade was ruined by the Revolutionary War. Between 1777 and 1779 Munro worked in a Glasgow West Indies merchant house, but due to financial difficulties in this business also, an EIC cadetship was sought and found for Munro in 1779. He was eighteen when he sailed to India. Originally, he travelled to London to board an East Indiaman as a midshipman, bound for Madras. However, his father at the same time made a business trip to London and managed to secure a military cadetship for him through Laurence Sullivan, who was at that time deputy chairman of the EIC Board of Directors, and with whom he had a slight acquaintance.⁴⁰ Munro left for India in 1780, where two of his brothers had also found careers, hoping that these incomes would support the family who remained at home. He had two other brothers, another of whom also spent a few years in India, and two sisters.⁴¹ In Munro's correspondence with his brothers in India family finances are frequently mentioned as a burden upon them. Munro despaired of his early salary and that he would never make an 'independency' sufficient to return home.⁴² This demonstrates the family's ongoing necessity for income from empire, especially as they had an established middle-class position in Glasgow society to uphold. For example, his father often mentions the notables of Glasgow society who came round to hear Munro's letters with news from India, and their limited finances were clearly an embarrassment.⁴³

³⁸ E. F. Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795–1895* (London, 1994), p. 23.

³⁹ OIOC, IOR, Board's Collections, F/4/67/1481, MacLeod to Read, 13 Jan. 1798; TNSA, BR, Review, vol. 180 (18216), Graham/1481, MacLeod to Read, 1–33.

⁴⁰ Gleig (ed.), *The Life of Sir Thomas Munro*, Munro to his father, 14 Apr. 1793, pp. 11–16; G.K. McGilvary, *Guardian of the East India Company: The Life of Laurence Sullivan* (London, 2006), p. 227.

⁴¹ McLaren, *British India & British Scotland*, p. 16.

⁴² OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 140, Munro to Daniel, n.d., f. 38, F 141, Munro to Sandy, Aug. 1794, ff. 5–6 and to his mother, Aug. 1794, f. 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, F 151/147, his father to Munro, 29 Feb. 1792, f. 115.

Munro studied at the University of Glasgow from 1774 to 1777, a university renowned for its teaching on political economy and moral philosophy. From his letters we know Munro read Adam Smith whilst in India.⁴⁴ His biographer, Gleig, described the young Munro as an avid reader, interested in the philosophy and ideas of government produced by men like Hume, with a particular interest in history. It is clear that his family were all well versed in the intellectual currents of their time and that Munro himself respected the leading figures of the Scottish Enlightenment. The whole family referenced Scottish and other philosophers with easy familiarity, and in his personal and public letters Munro comes across as an intelligent man who connected philosophy to his working life. Some of his most interesting correspondence is with his sister Erskine, who was more politically radical than he and a supporter of Mary Wollstonecraft, Thomas Paine and the French Revolution.⁴⁵ His younger brother James trained as a doctor and with a young, philosophical set of friends enjoyed debate both in Glasgow and India, where he worked for a few years. Munro counselled him against joining the ranks of 'dreaming collegians' and instead advised him to seek life experience.⁴⁶ He described for his mother a typical visit to his younger brother who cannot understand why he, Thomas, would want to work instead of engaging in philosophical conversation. James constantly interrupted him to read an:

excellent paper or a fine character from Hume. I cannot persuade him that I care neither for Physicks [sic] or Divinity and that I am more interested about the state of the old house at Northside [their small estate outside Glasgow] than in that of any University in Europe.

This would eventually lead James to say in the argument

"Did not Hutchison and Smith belong to Glasgow, was not Edinburgh obliged to send there for Black & Cullen, and were not the Hunters educated there." When I find him bringing in these Champions to his assistance I generally quit the field telling him that his friends are of a different stump from Smith and Hume.⁴⁷

Rather than dismissing philosophy, as it is sometimes assumed, it appears that Munro accepted many of the ideas of his native philosophers. However, rather

⁴⁴ Stein, *Thomas Munro*, p. 7; McLaren, *British India & British Scotland*, p. 196.

⁴⁵ Gleig (ed.), *The Life of Sir Thomas Munro*, Munro to his sister Erskine, 5 Mar. 1795, p. 86; OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/141, Munro to his sister Erskine, Aug. 1792, ff. 101–4 and Oct. 1793, ff. 126–7.

⁴⁶ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/139, Munro to his brother James (n.d.), f. 30.

⁴⁷ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/141, Munro to his mother, 31 Dec. 1792, f. 107.

than seeing them as props for idle amusement, he believed they could be applied to his work in India.⁴⁸

For William MacLeod, as the second son, there would have been very little option other than to leave his family home. This he did in 1779, and arrived in Madras in 1780.⁴⁹ Although the circumstances of MacLeod's patronage are unknown, it is worth noting that for highlanders such as he, there could have been several routes into empire. For example, he had already left for India when Norman, the twenty-third head of his clan, issued an order to raise a regiment for the crown in July 1779. It was embodied at Perth in May 1780 and set sail for the Cape of Good Hope in March 1781, but was diverted to India.⁵⁰ This was an attempt to reverse the sinking fortunes of the clan since the previous laird, Chief Norman the twenty-second, although he had fought in India and was reported to have made a substantial amount of money, gambled it away before he returned.⁵¹ He also spent money on fine furnishings for Dunvegan, the family seat in Skye, and on his other properties in St Andrews, where he lived the majority of the time. This had adverse effects on the economy of the clan land and morale of the people, in whom he seems to have invested very little.⁵² After MacLeod's appointment as a head collector in 1800, he remained in the Malabar district until it erupted in rebellion in 1802. His subsequent appointments as a collector were questioned by the Court of Directors in London and he took an enforced furlough in 1805, but returned to India in 1807 and continued to work as an army captain in the East India Company.⁵³

These beginnings provide a picture of how a transforming Scotland shaped the movements of these men. With regard to James Graham, his only available private correspondence is with Munro and two early letters hint at his similar circumstances.⁵⁴ For the others, however, it is clear they had experienced several of the typical changes that befell many families in Scotland at this time and their social class was a determining factor in their formative experiences. Moreover, their Scottish networks continued to be important to them. Their friendships, career networks and alliances were predominantly, although far from exclusively, Scottish. Read corresponded with other Reads, Wedderburns and Beatsons (his cousins) across the Madras Presidency and Scotland.⁵⁵ Many of Munro's private

⁴⁸ M. McLaren, 'From Analysis to Prescription: Scottish Concepts of Asian Despotism in Early Nineteenth-Century British India' *The International History Review*, 15, 3 (1993), p. 485; McLaren, *British India & British Scotland*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ OIOC, IOR, Madras Service Army Lists, 1771–1846, L/MIL/11/38/21, William Macleod, Inf.

⁵⁰ I. F. Grant, *The MacLeods: The History of a Clan, 1200–1956* (Edinburgh, 1981), p. 513.

⁵¹ Hunter, *Scottish Exodus*, p. 17.

⁵² Cannon R.C. MacLeod, *The Book of Dunvegan: Being Documents from the Muniment Room of the MacLeods of MacLeod at Dunvegan Castle, Isle of Skye* (Aberdeen, 1939), pp. 11–26.

⁵³ OIOC, IOR, Madras Service Army Lists 1771–1846, L/MIL/11/38/21, William MacLeod, Inf.

⁵⁴ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/152, Graham to Munro Sep. 1790, f. 24, F 151/163, Graham to Munro, 1792.

and public correspondents were other Scots, and from Glasgow, such as Milliken Craig, an EIC naval captain, who helped the family in Scotland and India to stay in touch.⁵⁶ His agents in London were George Brown & Co, a Glaswegian firm, who also forwarded to him the Glasgow papers at the request of his father.⁵⁷ MacLeod, as noted, when he returned from India found a wife from home, went to a relative's church and was a member of the Highland Society of London.⁵⁸ They also continued to correspond with each other and meet up where possible.

This affirms the well-established picture of Scots operating in associational networks of family and friends when in London and further afield in the British Empire. Furthermore, the relative poverty of middle-class Scots compared with their English counterparts, meant that they grasped the opportunities opened up to them by the political union of Scotland and England in 1707, and the permission for Scots to sit as directors on the East India Company Board.⁵⁹ The networks that were formed around the integration of Scotland into the British polity were key for this group of collectors. The Union was also given a moral centre by the Scottish Whig literati who were able to provide philosophical foundations for the union. They believed the union liberated Scots from a decaying political-economic culture and encouraged young men to take advantage of it. Many Scots developed a dual identity, summed up in concept of 'North Britishness'.⁶⁰ This in turn legitimated a 'North British' character to empire, 'a self-sustaining myth [that] provided an avenue for the socially mobile.'⁶¹ For this group of Baramahal Collectors it is clear their 'Scottishness' was relevant to their experiences, yet their 'Britishness' and support for British rule in India was also crucial for their ambition and success.

The family histories and correspondence of the collectors also provide more specific linkages with the ideas and practices in this age of enlightenment that they carried with them to India. As McLaren comments regarding Munro, Malcolm and Elphinstone, although there is no evidence they plumbed the depth of these Scottish philosophers:

⁵⁵ DCA, Wedderburn of Pearsie Papers, GD 131.

⁵⁶ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/148–152.

⁵⁷ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/142, Munro to Erskine his sister, 25 Sep. 1794, f. 10.

⁵⁸ National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), Highland Society of London, Dep. 268/24 Minute Book of 1802–1808, p. 96.

⁵⁹ See Bryant, 'Scots in India'; C. Kidd, 'North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotisms', *Historical Journal*, 39, 2 (1996), pp. 361–82; MacKillop, 'More Fruitful than the Soil'; MacKillop, 'Accessing Empire'; MacKillop, 'Europeans, Britons and Scots'.

⁶⁰ Kidd, 'North Britishness', p. 374.

⁶¹ Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World 1780–1830* (London, 1989), p. 136.

they had heard the issues discussed and read some of the books in the way their authors intended: as analyses of social and political organisation and as explanations of principles of economics and morality that would prepare their readers, as Francis Hutcheson put it, for “every honourable office in life.”⁶²

This is a key point in relation to the Baramahal Collectors because their position in society had not given them the status to connect with the high echelons of ‘improvers,’ political economists or moral philosophers. They did not carry on correspondence with these people whilst in India, nor did they become orientalist scholars.⁶³ They were also younger than the figures that dominate the Enlightenment landscape. Yet, Towsey’s research is important in creating a picture of reading habits in eighteenth-century Scotland and has uncovered how deeply reading and discussion of contemporary ideas took hold in Scotland.⁶⁴

As this investigation continues, however, it is important to bear in mind that not all the influences on the collectors were inherited from the metropole. Local conditions in the Baramahal and Salem of course played a role in the development of the *ryotwari* settlement. Some historians are concerned to show how important local conditions were in the formation of settlements in India. For example, Irschick suggests that there was so much confusion in the interaction between Company servants and the local population as new territories were subsumed into British India that the end result of land settlements did not resemble anything that had previously been known in either the colonies or the metropole.⁶⁵ Cultural misunderstandings were inevitable in such an environment. Moreover, for administrators stationed alone, Marshall argues that the British had to cooperate with local rulers to secure their place in India. In other words, empire building was a slow and ongoing process for which there was no grand strategy in the period under study.⁶⁶ The Baramahal Collectors used local accountants and other existing revenue servants, and adopted existing practices, such as hearing petitions in his *cutcherry*⁶⁷ and making themselves available to *ryots*.⁶⁸

Wilson and Bayly have brought to light the extent to which EIC servants relied upon local knowledge and information, and often felt under threat in the alien culture in which they lived. Bayly notes that British respect for Indian political

⁶² McLaren, *British India & British Scotland*, p. 140.

⁶³ Cf. Alexander Dow, who corresponded with Hume and Fergusson. (R. Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (London, 1996), pp. 14–15.)

⁶⁴ M.R.M. Towsey, *Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750–1820* (Leiden, 2010), pp. 164–75, 293.

⁶⁵ Irschick, *Dialogue and History*, pp. 6–11.

⁶⁶ P.J. Marshall, (ed.), *‘A Free though Conquering People’: Eighteenth-Century Britain and its Empire* (Aldershot, 2003); P.J. Marshall, *Problems of Empire: Britain and India, 1757–1813* (London, 1968); P.J. Marshall, *The Making and Unmaking of Empire: Britain, India and America, c. 1750–1783* (Oxford, 2005).

⁶⁷ Revenue office and court of justice. Read visited these in different locations around the district.

⁶⁸ Irschick, *Dialogue and History*, p. 24; National Records of Scotland, Papers of James Cochrane, GD 1/594/2, Alex Read to James Cochrane, 19 Dec. 1797.

cultures and religion was beginning to wane at this time, but that Indian ‘alienness could never be too crudely asserted by a government dependent on an army of subordinate Indian servants.’⁶⁹ This was part of a wider process of separation between the ruler and ruled after 1780 and it was these new Collectors who were part of setting up a new administrative structures which required the systematic gathering of knowledge in order to understand the locale.⁷⁰ Wilson argues that this separation merely served to create a situation in which Company servants found nothing on to which they could ‘fix their understandings’, perpetuating the move towards the ‘domination of strangers’ when separation induced a sense of fear and anxiety.⁷¹

As regards the subjects of this article, it will become clear that they misunderstood key aspects of existing tenurial relationships, despite their relatively sympathetic view of Indian culture. Furthermore, they regarded the situation in their collectorate as chaotic due to the despotism of the Mysore regime. They did not believe that the poverty in the region was a consequence of environmental determinism as proposed by Montesquieu. Scottish Enlightenment figures disputed this theory, with Millar and Ferguson supporting it and Hume disagreeing. Munro followed Hume believing that the poverty of the *ryots* was a result of the arbitrary actions of a despotic government.⁷² This was a typical view expressed regarding the effects of despotism: that the inhabitants had suffered ‘tyrannical exactions’ under the Mysore regime, causing a chaos that moved society further away from property rights in land.⁷³ On the other hand, it does not seem that these men found nothing on which to fix their understandings. Munro was able to say to his mother that some Brahmans are ‘alike Europeans’ in their understanding of politics and finance.⁷⁴ Read, too, showed appreciation for the detail Tipu’s revenue systems even if he believed them to be unfair.⁷⁵ Rather than becoming overwhelmed with confusion, leading to anxiety, they seem to have worked hard at understanding what, in their view, was happening in the region and gave the impression that they knew what would be the best way by which to undo the perceived damage. Munro wrote to his father proclaiming that although the EIC government’s assumption that permanent obligations could be fulfilled by the ‘poor *ryots*’ were ‘foolish’, they (the collectors) knew the

⁶⁹ Bayly, *Empire and Information*, p. 140.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 55–6.

⁷¹ Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers*, p. ix.

⁷² McLaren, *British India & British Scotland*, p. 134; OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/142, Munro to his father, 10 May, 1796, f. 54v.

⁷³ OIOC, IOR, Board of Control General Records, F/4/157/2750, Munro and MacLeod’s Report on the Settlement of Canara, 1800–4, p. 7; OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Management, V/27/46/196, Read to the Board, 24 Nov. 1792, f. 134.

⁷⁴ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/142, Munro to his mother 5 Oct. 1794, f. 14.

⁷⁵ DCA, Wedderburn of Pearsie Papers, GD 131/Box 30, Alexander Read to Charles Wedderburn, Aug. 1794.

region and understood that annual settlements were more appropriate.⁷⁶ Although they did not accept the proposals from Bengal, they did not limit themselves to the local systems either. Even whilst accounting for the false confidence that some administrators used when writing to family or superiors, the action that these collectors took to understand and ‘improve’ their collectorate suggest a confidence in themselves and their ideas, and a purposefulness borne out of the new colonial mandate of the Company. The rest of this article will look at the motivations behind two of components of the tenurial settlement: the survey and the agreements with the *ryots*.

III

During the period between the Battle of Plassey in 1757 and the appointment of Cornwallis as Governor General in 1786, Travers has argued that the Company struggled to transform ‘ideologies of conquest into languages of rule.’⁷⁷ The subjects of this paper were soldiers in the latter part of this struggle and began their role as collectors under Cornwallis, very much part of the expanding cult of nationality and the growing empire of knowledge. The possibility of transforming India through surveys, tax assessments and administration in remote areas was beginning to be accepted.⁷⁸ Bayly has called agricultural ‘improvement’ in eighteenth-century Britain a national hobby, even a badge of patriotism. It was a rallying cry by the aristocracy for supporting the British economy by strengthening its backbone. However, Bayly notes, Scottish Whigs and intellectuals tended to believe the future lay in the hands of ‘prosperous yeoman farmers’ rather than the aristocracy.⁷⁹ Figures such as Adam Smith regarded the nobility as remnants of a feudal age who had ‘frittered away their power in luxury’ and could not be relied upon to invest in improvements that would be beneficial for society as a whole.⁸⁰ For the Baramahal Collectors, whose friends and family were participating in the ‘improvements’ that were part of Scotland’s agricultural transformation, the possibility for similar developments to take place in India without the need for a large landowning class would not have seemed impossible.⁸¹ For example, the Read and Wedderburn connections were present in their efforts at agricultural ‘improvement’. In Scotland, the family was engaged

⁷⁶ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/142, Munro to his father, Sep. 1798, f. 92.

⁷⁷ R. Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth-Century India: The British in Bengal* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 98.

⁷⁸ V. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763–1793* (London, 1964), pp. 782–800; B.S. Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge* (Princeton, 1996), p. 7; N. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain* (London, 2006), p. 242.

⁷⁹ Bayly, *Imperial Meridian*, p. 85.

⁸⁰ N. Phillipson, ‘Adam Smith as Civic Moralist’, in I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds), *Wealth and Virtue: The Shaping of Political Economy in the Scottish Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 192.

⁸¹ A. Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment: A Social History* (London, 1976), p. 6.

in this with George Dempster, an enthusiastic supporter of improvement.⁸² Read's cousin, Alexander Beatson, was a published land surveyor who also served in the Madras army at the same time as Read, and although it is unclear whether they worked together, they kept in touch whilst in India.⁸³ When Beatson returned to Scotland he and his brother, Robert were engaged in improvement and were also friendly with Adam Smith.⁸⁴ Robert Beatson published the first survey of Fife for the Board of Agriculture in 1792.⁸⁵

Once Read was stationed in the Baramahal he reported to his cousin Charles that the commission to manage the conquered territories was unexpected but aroused his ambition, and he was obviously honoured to be corresponding with Lord Cornwallis and receiving recognition for his work. At this early stage in the 'Revenue line,' as it was called, he was most concerned that he was pleasing his superiors and managing to collect a land tax with which they are satisfied, but at the same time he was aware that the work he had embarked on was unlike other revenue settlements and hoped to be able to stay and finish it:

My success has been so essential, and so much to the advantage of my employers, that if government were to remove me now, it would draw a responsibility upon itself, and the longer I hold my situation the more firmly I shall be fixed in it, until I give it up. When that will be, is impossible to say, for I have taken upon me the devising and establishing of a system of revenue very different from any hitherto adopted, and consider the completion of it as a point of honour.⁸⁶

His letters continue on these themes showing him determined to continue with this work. He did not name the *ryotwari* system, although he did write of this 'system of revenue' as unique and commented with great concern that he should stay to finish what he started even though the work was almost too much for his health.⁸⁷ Read appeared to have believed sincerely that he was improving the lives of the people of South India and stated that completing the

⁸² DCA, Wedderburn of Pearsie Papers, GD 131/Box 7/Bundle 3, Papers regarding new mill, 1805, Box 3/Bundle 7, Papers regarding sheep grazing on Catlaw Hill, Box 5/Bundle 19 on barley samples, 1810, Box 10/Bundle 20, Extracts from Strathmore Farming Association, Feb. 1820, Box 25, House plan and grounds plans, 1802, Box 30, A Read to C Wedderburn, Feb 1796; Torrance, *The Reads*, p. 18.

⁸³ OIOC, IOR, Boards of Control General Records, F/4/17/754, Beatson's Appointment as Surveyor of Kistna and Godavari rivers; DCA, Wedderburn of Pearsie Papers, GD 131/Box 25 and loose letters, A Read to C Wedderburn.

⁸⁴ Donald Winch, 'Smith, Adam (bap. 1723, d. 1790)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, Oct. 2007, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25767>, accessed 3 Apr. 2012; McLaren, *British India & British Scotland*, p. 195.

⁸⁵ R. Beatson, *A General View of Agriculture of the County of Fife, With Observations on the Means of its Improvement* (Edinburgh, 1792).

⁸⁶ DCA, Wedderburn of Pearsie Papers, GD 131/Box 30, A Read to C Wedderburn, Aug. 1794.

⁸⁷ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/141, Munro to his father, 14 Apr. 1793, f. 119; Irschick, *Dialogue and History*, p. 25.

settlement would make him 'completely happy'. He relayed to Charles that he was anxious 'to pursue in my endeavours,' and because they affected 'the welfare of probably a million of people, the consequences to myself ought not to be any consideration.'⁸⁸ Read told Cornwallis, as the latter's governor-generalship came to an end in 1793, that he was honoured by the favourable mention Cornwallis made of him to the directors in London and that although he never imagined being happy as a revenue collector, with all that he had attempted to 'increase the happiness and welfare of the people, and Revenue for government' he felt his role had been valuable and was 'only sorry' he could not have accomplished more by the time of Cornwallis's departure.⁸⁹

Arrangements, one of the volumes of the Baramahal Records collated by Read, is a collection of instructions, reports and exhortations that related to the survey and its writing up, the first of its kind in Company territory. In this volume, Read clearly laid out his purpose in undertaking his 'study of the people' and his hopes for its scope and usefulness. As a foundation for 'improvement', Read believed a survey based on metropolitan methods was crucial. He assumed that the fields and villages of the region 'probably have never been thoroughly examined before unless by private individuals and certainly have never been all formed into a proper system of revenue management.' In an exhortation at the end of the same letter to his assistants he set out his aim explicitly:

As just hinted and as all the registers and reports will more fully indicate, my plan is not confined to a revenue survey of the country but meant to comprehend all the knowledge it is possible to acquire of its geography, populations, stock, agriculture, manufactures and trade, the distinctions among its inhabitants, their various customs, prejudices and conditions of life. In short, it is not merely my aim to ascertain the extent of private and public revenue, but in imitation of our Board of Agriculture – 'to examine the sources of public prosperity, and devise means of promoting the improvement of the people founded on a Statistical Survey or a Minute and careful enquiry in to the actual state of every district, & the circumstances of its inhabitants' . . . attempting everything that is possible in an undertaking which may bring so much benefit to thousands and satisfaction to our employers.⁹⁰

The quote Read cites here is taken directly from the plans for a survey of England by Britain's, then new, Board of Agriculture. Established in 1793, the Board of Agriculture was the labour of love of Sir John Sinclair, Highland estate owner and

⁸⁸ DCA, Wedderburn of Pearsie Papers, GD 131/Box 30, A Read to C Wedderburn, 20 Sep. 1794.

⁸⁹ TNSA, Salem: Baramahal Records, Arrangements 159 (18195), Vol. I, Read to Cornwallis, 20 Feb. 1794.

⁹⁰ TNSA, Salem: Baramahal Records, Arrangements, 160 (18196), Read to his Assistants, 10 Apr. 1797, p. 13.

MP, who also pioneered the first *Statistical Account of Scotland* in 1790, indicating that Read kept up to date with contemporary writings on improvement, perhaps via Robert Beatson who had written the Survey on Fife for the Board of Agriculture.⁹¹ Moreover, the Collectors survey methods, as McLaren has noted, followed ‘innovations based on contemporary theory’ in Scotland. Read and Munro in particular devoted much time to discussing how this survey would be carried out and at what value different types of soil should be rated.⁹² Read was convinced that assessing cultivation capacity based on soil type was necessary to effect a fair settlement, and this relied on a scientific survey of every field. In the end, this led to higher taxation than the *ryots* could afford, but at the beginning of the Baramahal experiment it was thought these contemporary metropolitan ideas on agriculture would lead to a vast increase in cultivation and therefore ‘improvement’.⁹³

Although the other collectors found Read’s methods onerous, this pursuit of grander aims in the EIC’s new territories, rather than solely revenue collection, was something that they were committed to in principle. In an indication of this commitment, Munro wrote to his father, describing their work as the ‘pursuit of the National Objects’:

If I thought you had anything to say with Mr Dundas, or any of the Directors, I would have sent you a comparative statement of the management of Read, and a Madras Civilian, or rather Dubash, and, I would, without any exaggeration, have made it clear, that the Civilian would never have collected the amount of Tippoos schedule for the Publick.

Tho’ with the assistance of the Dubashes intrigues, and exertions, the Inhabitants might have paid more than they now do, which is about double the schedule, with this difference, Read’s Revenue sits easy on the people, because it is regulated by the Value of their Lands; whereas the Dubashes, tho’ less, would have been in the highest degree oppressive – because it would not have been raised by a fair assessment, but by arbitrary exaction from every Person who was reported to have money.⁹⁴

There are several interesting points to note about this passage. First, it is ‘National Objects’ to which Munro regarded their work as contributing, rather than simply the Company’s profits. He singled out Dundas as the primary person to whom he would like this information to be relayed. At the time Munro wrote this, Dundas was President of the Board of Control, the governmental body that oversaw

⁹¹ Sir J. Sinclair, *The Statistical Account of Scotland. Drawn up from the communications of the Ministers of the different parishes* (Edinburgh, 1791); R. Beatson, *General View of the Agriculture of the county of Fife*.

⁹² McLaren, *British India & British Scotland*, pp. 197–8; OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Land Rent, V/27/46/200, pp. 2–5, 47–52, 65.

⁹³ Mukherjee, N., *The Ryotwari System*, p. 372.

⁹⁴ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/141, Munro to his father, 14 Apr. 1793, f. 119.

the political, civil and military functions of the EIC. With this connection to British governance established, Munro also distanced Read's work from Asian despotism and Company intrigues. The *Dubashes* were the interpreters for, and thus *de facto* middlemen between, EIC servants in Madras town and the Indian population. Widely regarded as corrupt and self-serving, Munro assumed they would place undue burdens on farmers, and would also siphon off the extra revenue for themselves. Not only that, but it would be an arbitrary amount, based on what they regarded as the utmost that could be squeezed from the farmers. The 'Madras Civilian' is also criticised since he hands over this responsibility to a corrupt *Dubash*. In contrast, Read returned more to the 'Publick' (i.e. Company government). A picture is painted for those at home of honest, fair, hardworking collectors who strive to uphold British standards of justice and 'improve' the Indian systems. Moreover, Munro's references to Read are not merely deference to a superior. They signify a general assumption about Read in the Company that he was upright and hardworking.

For Munro, although he grew up in a city and was not personally connected to agricultural improvers, he was well versed in the ideas of the leading philosophers and, as noted earlier, regarded them as useful for life and work. He comments of the *Wealth of Nations* that, for example:

Glasgow merchants were as proud of the book as if they had written it themselves; . . . some of them said it was no wonder Adam Smith had written such a book, as he had the advantage of their society, in which the same doctrines were circulated with the punch every day.⁹⁵

He was clearly familiar with contemporary ideas, and was a voracious reader who liked to keep up with current affairs.⁹⁶ Describing the work he, Read, MacLeod and Graham were carrying out, Munro almost quoted directly from the *Wealth of Nations* in a letter to his brother Daniel and placed in quotation marks that the government need not worry about the revenue settlement they are establishing because '[an] equal quantity of labour will always yield the same produce.'⁹⁷ These words closely resemble text from the *Wealth of Nations*, that is, 'the produce of equal quantities of labour being always the same or very nearly the same, it can be more exactly suited to the effectual demand.'⁹⁸ Smith proposed that the same amount of labour will produce the same amount of produce, and will satisfy demand if profit is worth it for the labourers and manufacturers or

⁹⁵ McLaren, *British India & British Scotland*, p. 23.

⁹⁶ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, Mss Eur/F151/147, to Munro from his father, 29 Feb. 1792, f. 115.

⁹⁷ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, Mss Eur/F151/139, Munro to his brother Daniel (n.d.), f. 37v. This corresponds with Smith's ideas set out in Book I, Chapter 7 of the *Wealth of Nations*. Unfortunately, the final pages of Munro's letter to his brother are missing and the description he gives his brother of *ryotwari* ends after the quote above.

⁹⁸ A. Smith, *An Enquiry in to the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (London, 1776), p. 88.

farmers. However, he does specify that this will not be the case for husbandry since other factors have a bearing on the amount of produce. For Munro's point in this letter, however, this is not so relevant and he explained to his brother that even if the *ryots* changed their fields annually for new or waste land, they would still have the same capacity to exert the same amount of labour, so revenue for the Company would not suffer.⁹⁹

MacLeod's connection to agricultural improvement was much more personal. Due to the lack of leadership shown by Norman, the twenty-second clan chief, the clan elite, who wished to retain the honour of the family's past, provided him with business advice and made offers to cover the aforementioned debts. The business papers of Dunvegan from 1767–72 are largely concerned with debts to be paid, problems such as church ministers complaining that their stipends had not been paid, and misery for tenants as crops failed and rent increased by £200. Norman was counselled against selling off different parts of the clan land (although in the end had to) and was beseeched by tenants to sell his house in St Andrews and come and live among his people. At this time many tenants emigrated to America because of the hardship they suffered, despite the best efforts of the clan elite to encourage them to remain on the estates. Their next chief, Norman the twenty-third (1772–1801), Norman the twenty-second's grandson, was a much more liberal and earnest man. One of the earliest pieces of advice received by young Norman, who had grown up in Edinburgh, was that the abuses of his grandfather were caused by his desire to live among men of greater fortunes than his own and he was advised to go and live with his people in Skye, which he did. He also began improvements to increase the revenue of the estates. Forests were felled to sell wood, and the British Fishery Society was invited to inspect for the purpose of building villages and fishing ports. William's father and other tacksmen offered to pay more rent in order to meet the debts of the clan. And, although advice was given against the following, Harris and Glenelg were sold in 1779 and 1811, respectively.¹⁰⁰ At this time, a significant proportion of men left to join the army.¹⁰¹ Despite attempts to resuscitate family finances and find employment for tenants, Norman's correspondence displays a pessimism that he would ever be able to overcome the debts of his family and emerge from 'poverty or obscurity'.¹⁰²

Throughout the Baramahal Records, MacLeod showed an interest in the idea of joint securities for whole villages within the *ryotwari* system. For example, MacLeod wrote to Read that in one instance he had seen names drawn out of a hat by Brahmans to share out their rent-free land equally, the shares being based on soil quality. He suggested these type of shares be used in taxable villages to equalise rents. Thus, MacLeod continued, equal rents and regular

⁹⁹ OIOC, Mss Eur, Munro Papers, F 151/139, Munro to his brother Daniel (n.d.), f. 37v.

¹⁰⁰ MacLeod, *The Book of Dunvegan*, pp. 8–10, 13–15, 98.

¹⁰¹ Grant, *The MacLeods*, p. 510.

¹⁰² Norman MacLeod, 23rd chief, quoted in Hunter, *Scottish Exodus*, p. 115.

tenancy agreements would extend stable proprietary rights to as many as possible, removing the power of *patels* to decide on tenures and share of the rent for villagers.¹⁰³ This perhaps indicates sympathy with rural village life and living by precarious agricultural means. Where an individual settlement with government, to a progressive mind, would remove the oppression of an irresponsible and uncompassionate traditional leader, some form of security would ensure villagers were not alone in meeting their rental demands during difficult times. In his home region he had experienced the combination of high rents, crop failure, cattle death and little compassion from the clan chief.¹⁰⁴ He regularly engaged Read on the need for improvements such as wells, dams and irrigation systems, but did not seem to comment much upon the plans for an entire system. His later surveys in subsequent postings were commended, as was his work in establishing roads and markets.¹⁰⁵

This desire to make a contribution to improvement seems to have been something that stayed with these men in later life. Read was concerned in his retirement to do something useful and asked his cousin Charles: 'Inform me how you think I may become a useful member of the community at large.' Charles' response was to advise him to buy land and invest in improvements. However, Read must have decided against this and instead left money for the building of a school in Pembrokeshire, focussed on maths and science, where his friend, Charles Francis Greville, was carrying out improvements to the town of Milford Haven, his family home. Greville had been a contemporary of Read's in the EIC and his plans matched Read's desire to be useful with his money, and hint at his interest in scientific understanding.¹⁰⁶

When resident in London, MacLeod was active in the Highland Society of London, of which many of his Scottish EIC connections were also members, and which interested itself in the improvement of the region.¹⁰⁷ In his home region William's elder brother, Donald, took over the tack from their father in 1793 and did well financially by introducing sheep walks in the area. He was obviously interested in this kind of farming as his knowledge of sheep was commented upon by James Hogg in his 'Tour of the Highlands in 1803.'¹⁰⁸ Donald also managed the Rattagan farm, next to Glenelg, which belonged to William who had bought

¹⁰³ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Property, V/27/46/199, MacLeod to Read 18 Sept. 1793.

¹⁰⁴ About one-third of the clan's cattle were lost in the winter of 1771–2 causing widespread misery, see MacKenzie, *History of the MacLeods*, p. 154.

¹⁰⁵ OIOC, IOR, Madras Service Army Lists 1771–1846, L/MIL/11/38/21, William MacLeod, Inf.

¹⁰⁶ DCA, Wedderburn of Pearsie Papers, GD 131/Box 30, Letter from A Read to C Wedderburn, 20 Sep. 1794; National Library of Wales, Hamilton and Greville Collection, GB 0210 HAMLLE/103–4, Read's will and affidavit 1803–4.

¹⁰⁷ NLS, Highland Society of London, Dep. 268/24 Minute Book of 1802–1808, p. 96.

¹⁰⁸ J. Hogg, *A Tour in the Highlands in 1803: A Series of Letters by James Hogg, The Ettrick Shepherd, Addressed to Sir Walter Scott, Bart* (Paisley, 1888), pp. 56–7.

it on a furlough from India in 1801. The location may have been sentimental but it is clear that William did not intend to settle there and that it was used commercially; typical of investments made by East India men. His life, when he returned to Britain, seems to have revolved around London and the Scottish and EIC networks there, yet with a stake in the improvement of the highlands.¹⁰⁹

Graham's experience of, or exposure to, improvement in his early life is impossible to know, and his correspondence with Read gives little indication of any motivations other than the conditions he perceived in the Baramahal. His lack of enthusiasm for the volume of work involved in Read's information-gathering to create a 'system' is mentioned.¹¹⁰ His contributions were minimal until he completed a review for Read in 1797 and forwarded some of his other papers, which were collated in the volume *Review*.¹¹¹ In these he made clear that his aims were the alleviation of poverty for the *ryots*, but that the way in which this might best be accomplished had changed over the years they had been in the Baramahal. In 1794, his reports to Read stated his preference for releasing the *ryots* from oppression by removing all intermediate renters. However, at the time of his review in 1797 he acknowledged that village heads would make a lease system more secure as they were able to organise the resources of a village to cover unforeseen circumstances. Moreover, since the collectors had established regulations which released the *ryots* for oppression, they could more effectively reinstate village heads in the 'background' which, Graham argued, was better for 'improvement.' He also mentioned several times his concerns over the *ryots*' habit of migrating and was keen to devise regulations that might help them to trust the EIC government.¹¹² Although concerned with 'improvement', he appears to have been less focused on a system of management and more influenced by local conditions than the other collectors.

It is clear that, despite their differences, these men believed that the accumulation of knowledge and fact was important for governance, yet still operated in a familiar style.¹¹³ Despite twenty years of soldiering in Read's case, and ten in the case of the other collectors, they quickly and easily adopted the 'language of rule' and the tone of 'improvers' in the Baramahal.¹¹⁴ Yet, is it possible to say that this apparent confidence in 'improvement' was the main motivation for their settlement plans? Their particular experiences in Scotland gave them the language, tools and methods to carry it out but part of their sense of the need to do this came from a frustration that they could not find out revenue information from village heads or accountants. For the Baramahal

¹⁰⁹ MacKinnon and Morrison, *The MacLeods*, Section 3, p. 120.

¹¹⁰ TNSA, Salem: Baramahal Records, Arrangements 159 (18195), Vol. II, Graham to Read, n.d., p. 151.

¹¹¹ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Review, V/27//46/208.

¹¹² TNSA, Salem: Baramahal Records, Review (18216), vol. 180, Graham to Read, Appendix 23, 1794, pp. 156–66, and 14 Aug. 1797, pp. 458–83.

¹¹³ Cohn, *Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge*; Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers*, p. 34.

¹¹⁴ Travers, *Ideology and Empire*, p. 98.

collectors, the way in which cultivators hid the amount or value of crops was an issue. They thought it an administrative problem in the management of their districts and there is a clear sense that the real reasons were not understood at first.¹¹⁵ Wilson has argued that many Indian administrative practices were so poorly understood by British administrators that their policies were primarily motivated by the ‘anxious detachment’ that this created. This led, in many cases, to reactive policies, and often created more rigid policy for the Indian population as the Company moved to establish authority in new territories.¹¹⁶ In this case, cultivators were used to being taxed an average amount for larger areas of land and entering into negotiations with village headmen and revenue servants rather than fixed amounts for each field. Thus, the collectors’ aspiration to determine exact amounts of produce for each field was regarded with suspicion. Read’s survey was much more detailed than traditional land assessment and although the collectors spoke of an equalisation of rent, their methods of calculation served to raise the amount of rent which most cultivators paid to government.¹¹⁷ It seems that the collectors found it necessary to impose their metropolitan ideas upon a culture they did not understand, assuming that it would ‘improve’ in the same way. Their learning and experiences from Scotland gave them principles and examples to fall back on. Combined with a greater sense of purpose within the Company for governing India, an opportunity was opened up for them to pursue this new imperial mission.

IV

At the heart of *ryotwari* was the agreement with the individual cultivator, made possible by the knowledge of cultivation and produce through the survey. This was, arguably, primarily based on the Collectors inherited ideas of what was best for progress. When Read, MacLeod, Munro and Graham were sent to the Baramahal region, the introduction of the permanent settlement to the Bengal Presidency was imminent and the Madras Board of Revenue expected these collectors to establish the same kind of settlement with wealthy inhabitants or landowners. Although the collectors used the *zamindar* terminology initially, they quickly dropped it after they began their investigations, claiming that it was only intermediate renters, such as *patels* and *poligars*, who traditionally made the revenue settlement with government and collected rent from the *ryots*. They believed these people had risen in power under Tipu Sultan, the previous Mughal ruler in Mysore, and were acting unjustly in their duties, oppressing the *ryots* by extorting high rents and maintaining for themselves tracts of rent-free or gifted land. Therefore, according to the collectors, making tenurial agreements directly with cultivators and equalising the rent across the country would be a better and fairer arrangement. Read told the board that ‘for two centuries

¹¹⁵ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Management, V/27/46/196, Graham to Read, Oct. 1794.

¹¹⁶ Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers*, pp. 70, 74, 109–10.

¹¹⁷ Mukherjee, *The Ryotwari System*, pp. 65–97.

back intermediate renters have invariably been the instruments of speculation and oppression, on which account the more farms the better for the poorer class of inhabitants.¹¹⁸ This settlement, the collectors believed, would remove this injustice and uncertainty from the *ryots*. They agreed amongst themselves that in this region the position of village headman was not hereditary; rather, it was simply an office with certain privileges. Read commented that:

The station of the *patel* or village renter is in most countries considered hereditary, but in these it is not so. Though displacing them is a hardship, it is not looked upon as an act of injustice, and it is often done as a punishment or for incapacity.¹¹⁹

Although stripping away the higher castes' privileges would 'legally deprive some of their present advantages from inequality of rent' it would thereby relieve 'the others of half their present burthen.'¹²⁰ This strategy applied equally to *poligars* whom the collectors regarded as too powerful in their landed power and abusive to the *ryots*. Although they accepted that some *poligar* land was hereditary, they believed many had become overly ambitious during the conflicts since Hyder Ali's rule and that this needed to be curbed.¹²¹ Read admitted that his strategy of equalising rent, which appears to have included taking back for government the rent-free land of *patels* and then redistributing it to *ryots* for cultivation could be seen as either a 'violent encroachment of the private, or the legal recovery of the public property'. As the board were interested in maintaining social order, they expressed alarm at this plan but Read explained it as a 'struggle between right and policy.'¹²²

A desire to extend an understanding of the value of secure property to the cultivating class is a recurring theme in the *Baramahal Records*. In this poverty-stricken region the collectors regarded it as the best method for allowing cultivators the opportunity to be released from oppression. As Munro said of his revenue settlement in 1794, 'no way seemed so likely to put an effectual stop to these practices as the descending lower in to detail and fixing the rent of every individual.'¹²³ Read told the Board that the 'avowed object of my management is conferring on the inhabitants a property in land.'¹²⁴ By the 'smallness of farms' this would be extended to 'as many of them as possible' but this would serve no end

¹¹⁸ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Management, V/27/46/196, Read to the Board, 24 Nov. 1792, p. 134.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., Read, 'Sketch of revenue management in countries north of the Caveri under the Gentu, the Moorish and the Honourable Company Government,' 24 Nov. 1792, p. 139.

¹²⁰ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Land Rent, V/27/46/200, Read to the Board, Jun. 1793, p. 8.

¹²¹ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Management, V/27/46/196, Read to the Board, Sketch of revenue management in countries north of the Caveri under the Gentu, the Moorish, and the Honourable Company's Government, 24 Nov. 1792, pp. 137–9.

¹²² OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records: Land Rent, V/27/46/200, Read to MacLeod, 20 Mar. 1798, p. 137.

¹²³ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Management, V/27/46/196, Munro to Read, 31 Jul. 1794.

¹²⁴ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Land Rent, V/27/46/200, Read to the Board, 30 Dec. 1795, p. 69.

‘unless a property in produce be likewise fixed in their minds as an immutable truth.’ In other words, with secure property and equal rents, they could grow their produce, sell it and enjoy the income from it, secure that no other charges would be extracted from them by revenue accountants or government. Rent in this system was not to be ‘set at the highest end of produce but a medium in case of failure [of crops].’¹²⁵ This, the collectors believed, would encourage industriousness and improvement in agriculture. Their belief was that the smaller the farms were ‘the profits of farming (the main incitement to industry) [would be] extended to the greater number [and] might raise the bulk of inhabitants from extreme indigence to comfort.’ In this same letter to the board, Read acknowledged that this would be difficult due to the poverty of the *ryots* but concluded that large farms would keep the *ryots* ‘in dependency’ whereas small farms would allow the tenantry to feel secure under government, and with no ‘other demand upon him, must surely feel his independence, and every incitement to industry.’¹²⁶ MacLeod believed that the decrease in revenue income for government that had been seen under Tipu resulted from ‘the husbandman not being secure in his property nor in the enjoyment of the fruits of his labour, [so] had no incitement to exert industry.’¹²⁷ These collectors believed they could change this, whilst bringing in more revenue for the Company. Munro concluded a letter to Read enthusiastically:

There is no reason to regret that farms are small, – it is better on every account, and for the general wealth. It does not produce men of great fortunes and overgrown possessions, but it lessens the number of poor, and raises up a crowd of men of small, but independent property, who, when they are certain that they will themselves enjoy the benefit of every extraordinary exertion of their labour, work with a spirit of activity which would in vain be expected from the tenants or servants of great landholders.

If they succeeded in creating these favourable conditions, the collectors believed that:

There would probably in time be no country in the world which could boast of such a numerous race of substantial middling farmers, whose condition though inferior to that of British landholders, would certainly be preferable to that of the great bulk of the tenantry.¹²⁸

Their views appear to be consistent with those of eighteenth-century Scottish political economists and improvers who had looked ahead to the economic

¹²⁵ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Management, V/27/46/196, Read, ‘Sketch of revenue management in countries north of the caveri’, p. 139.

¹²⁶ OIOC, Baramahal Records: Land Rent, V/27/46/200, Read to the Madras Board of Revenue, Jun. 1793, p. 17.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, MacLeod’s comments on Read’s Fifth Report to the Board, 18 Sep. 1793, p. 62.

¹²⁸ Munro to Read, 5 Sept. 1797, in A.J. Arbuthnot (ed.), *Major General Sir Thomas Munro* (London, 1881), pp. 35–7.

betterment of Scotland and dismissed the communal agriculture of the highland clan system and clanspeople themselves, particularly after the 1745 Jacobite rebellion, as backward and barbarous; it was a system which did not allow for the development of private property and personal reward for work.¹²⁹ The Collectors did not necessarily apply consistent Scottish Enlightenment theories to their work, but used principles that helped them see a way to improvement. For example, Beatson's survey of Fife contained a narrative account of the county and focused, towards the end, on the agriculture improvements that were taking place and identified the most important principles to which to adhere. These were fairly standard thoughts in Scotland at the time and some stand out in relation to Read's work in Baramahal. Beatson advised in his survey that a farm's size should not exceed the amount of stock a farmer has to invest in it and concluded that small farms were usually better. Small farms were also helpful because they increased the population by encouraging people to remain in the region and make a living.¹³⁰ This was another issue with which the Baramahal collectors had to contend. They wanted *ryots* to stay in the region, or return, after the wars, leading to more cultivation and more revenue.¹³¹

Furthermore, Munro believed that there should be a remission on the *ryots'* land tax in the early years of the settlement to allow for improvements, following the maxims of Hume and Smith that it is better to keep tax low initially and raise it if necessary, for instance, in times of war. For Hume:

Every person if possible ought to enjoy the fruits of his labours, in a full possession of all the necessaries, and many of the conveniences of life. No-one can doubt, but such an equality is most suitable to human nature, and diminishes much less from the happiness of the rich as it adds to that of the poor. It also augments the power of the state and makes any extraordinary taxes or impositions to be paid with much more cheerfulness.¹³²

Smith cautioned that usually a landlord would take as much as he could, leaving only enough for the tenant to subsist. However, rent should not be 'at all proportioned to what the landlord may have laid upon the improvement of the land, or what he can afford to take; but to what the farmer can afford to give.'¹³³ When discussing the detail of the *ryotwari* settlement, Munro told Read that although he agreed with him as superior, he wanted to 'let fly one volley as a politician' and argued '[r]evenue ought not to be all that the subject can pay but

¹²⁹ A. Macinnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart* (East Linton, 1996), p. 205; C. Withers, *Gaelic Scotland: The Transformation of a Cultural Region* (London, 1988), p. 96.

¹³⁰ R. Beatson, *General View of the Agriculture of the county of Fife*, p. 24.

¹³¹ OIOC, IOR, Board of Control General Collections, F/4/3/631A, Graham to Read, 29 June 1792; OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Management, V/27/46/196, Graham to Read, 22 Oct. 1794, p. 222.

¹³² D. Hume, *Political Discourses* (Edinburgh, 1752), p. 18.

¹³³ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, p. 225.

only what the necessities of the state require.’¹³⁴ Stein has connected this to the policy of Philip Francis in Bengal, who cited Montesquieu as the promulgator of this idea.¹³⁵ However, since it was also part of the writing of Munro’s champions, it is possible that this was his primary influence. Furthermore, Smith laid out in his theories of rent and improvement that rent would increase as produce increased. Munro and Read’s insistence to the Board of Revenue that this would be the result of their settlement never wavered.¹³⁶

The frequent references in the *Baramahal Records* to the hope that *ryots* would enjoy the ‘fruits of their labour,’ because they had a ‘property in the soil,’ echo Smith’s proposition that this was the ‘natural state of things’. What was even better for the national wealth, according to Smith, was that over time some people would acquire more land, and a class of labourers would be formed who must work for subsistence.¹³⁷ Munro argued in 1797 that this would happen naturally in South India if they could create the right conditions.¹³⁸ Along with Smith, these EIC men seem to have believed that ‘nothing tends so much to corrupt and enervate and debase the mind as dependency and nothing gives such noble and generous notions of probity as freedom and independency.’¹³⁹ As noted, observation of highland lairds led eighteenth-century improvers in Scotland to have little faith that they would invest in improvement. Nor were they predisposed to see aristocratic landlords as the promulgators of improvement. They favoured small proprietors, or at least lengthy and secure individual leases for this class, and believed that this was an important step in the progression of civilisation towards commercialism.¹⁴⁰ Munro concurred that it would not:

produce men of great fortunes and overgrown possessions, but . . . lessens the number of poor, and raises up a crowd of men of small, but independent property, who, when they are certain that they will themselves enjoy the benefit of every extraordinary exertion of their labour, work with a spirit of activity which would in vain be expected from the tenants or servants of great landholders.¹⁴¹

These ‘men of great fortunes and overgrown possessions’ were also criticised by Smith and Fergusson for their love of luxury and lack of interest in the prosperity of the country as a whole. Unlike the later Victorian period, when racially divisive doctrines were present in British thinking and East India Company policy, the Baramahal collectors, again in keeping with Scottish philosophical ideas, believed

¹³⁴ Stein, *Thomas Munro*, Munro to Read, 31 Jul. 1794, p. 48.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹³⁶ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, pp. 392–3.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹³⁸ Munro to Read, 18 Jul. 1797, in Arbuthnot (ed.), *Major General Sir Thomas Munro*, p. 22.

¹³⁹ N. Phillipson, ‘Adam Smith as Civic Moraliser’, p. 188.

¹⁴⁰ Chitnis, *The Scottish Enlightenment*, p. 102.

¹⁴¹ Arbuthnot, *Sir Thomas Munro*, p. 36.

that Indians were capable of moving through the stages of civilisation as outlined by the philosophical historians of Scotland. It was merely wealth that was holding them back, rather than a deficiency of mental or moral capacity.¹⁴² This allowed the collectors to believe that, given the right conditions, the cultivators in their region would naturally work towards the most important objective of the *ryotwari* system, a prosperous middling class of small proprietors, whose individual wealth stimulated the wealth of the whole country.¹⁴³

However, if this settlement is considered in light of Wilson's proposal, that as a result of anxiety one way the Company sought to establish authority was to 'govern the power of proprietors' in Bengal through the Permanent Settlement, it is possible to see parallels in the Baramahal.¹⁴⁴ Through the *ryotwari* settlement the collectors sought to curb the power of *patels* and *poligars* by reducing the land they controlled, particularly the *poligars*, because they viewed them as a threat to the Company's or, perhaps more aptly, Britain's authority in the region. In this unstable political environment, it was possible the *poligars* could muster enough troops to attack the Company under their own strength, or side with Tipu (the Company's enemy in this region) in a future conflict. But they also regarded the light taxation which both groups enjoyed as an abuse of their position. The equalisation of the rent substantially reduced the power and privileges of headmen by using the same leases that were introduced for *ryots*.¹⁴⁵ They wished to draw them in to the new land settlements, making them an object of improvement, but at the same time if they would not meet EIC personnel to discuss terms they would be imprisoned.

This treatment of *poligars* appears contradictory when compared with the benevolent language used in the tenurial settlements. To this end, Munro's style of leadership has been scrutinised by several historians and he has been cast variously as a romantic, utilitarian and authoritarian ruler.¹⁴⁶ McLaren, although she also disputes these labels, believes that his romantic or sympathetic views of India, as well as his belief in strong militaristic authority, can be held together within the framework of conjectural history used by Scottish historians in the eighteenth century.¹⁴⁷ This, McLaren argues, allowed him to see Indian rulers as despotic, and make use of Sultanistic or despotic methods of government, without regarding Indians as inherently 'other' or incapable of progress, but merely at a different stage on the path to civilisation. It was not paternalistic, utilitarian or simply pragmatic but a method of approaching questions of government and progress with which

¹⁴² Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers*, p. 139.

¹⁴³ Arbuthnot, *Sir Thomas Munro*, Munro to Read, 18 July 1797, p. 22.

¹⁴⁴ Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers*, p. 108.

¹⁴⁵ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Land Rent, V/27/46/200, Read to the Board, Jun. 1793.

¹⁴⁶ Beaglehole, *Thomas Munro*, pp. 121–39; Gleig, *The Life of Sir Thomas Munro; Arbuthnot, Sir Thomas Munro*; Stein, *Thomas Munro*, pp. 18, 25–6, 352–3; E. Stokes, *The English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford, 1959).

¹⁴⁷ Stein, *ibid.*, p. 4.

he was familiar.¹⁴⁸ However, it is also possible that this was simply a product of the inherent contradiction in colonial rule manifested in the Baramahal: the struggle to impose authority on an alien population clashing with the 'burden of responsibility' felt towards poorer subjects.

The collectors mention *patels*, *poligars* and *tahsildars* quite frequently as an upper strata of society, and it seems that under them, and for some time previously, *ryots* had had some established tenurial rights. However, this structure was regarded by the collectors as having multiple problems, outlined above, and was based on alternative concepts of ownership. Despite their solution of secure individual tenancies and equal rents, when Read asked his subordinates to review their work in 1797 Graham answered that '[i]t has already appeared that the removal of the head farmers from their material place in the scale of society, has been attended with pernicious effects to the country, by depriving the needy and helpless rayets of their usual assistance.' His conclusion was that '[w]e may now I conceive, with more safety, restore them a portion of their farms & in consequence, still, however, keep . . . a vigilant eye over their actions and incessantly urg[e] them to improvement of their farms.' This demonstrates that the policy initially had a reactionary element to curtail the 'power of the proprietors.'¹⁴⁹

Another example Wilson gives of the anxiety that led to more rigid policies is of the check that was effectively put on peasant mobility through the permanent settlement in Bengal.¹⁵⁰ Freedom of movement was a widely used strategy for ensuring peasants and farmers could leave unhelpful arrangements or negotiate better terms with landowners. Once again, however, a certain amount of anxiety was present in the Company's response to migration. In the Baramahal, Graham understood the motives of migration to be from 'suspicion or caprice' and the collectors discuss how to halt migration through 'fair' leases which would encourage *ryots* to remain in one area and lead to increased cultivation. The collectors settled on annual leases because this, they hoped, would encourage even poor *ryots* to engage in agreements without fear of locking themselves in to perpetual debt.¹⁵¹

This discussion of anxiety brings local conditions to the fore again and it is also important to consider the agency that was given to population in the process of settlement. Trautmann has noted that Munro (and thus Read, Macleod and Graham) gathered most of their information from farmers, local accountants, village heads and local Brahmans. They did not spend time reading ancient legal codes or talking to the higher castes of scholarly Brahmans in the larger towns, or the regional princes, a method which seems to have been more the case in

¹⁴⁸ McLaren, *British India & British Scotland*, p. 136.

¹⁴⁹ TNSA, Salem: Baramahal Records, Review, 180 (18216), Graham to Read, 4 Aug. 1797, pp. 483–5; Wilson, *The Domination of Strangers*, p. 108.

¹⁵⁰ Wilson, *ibid*, p. 114.

¹⁵¹ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Management, IOR/V/27/46/196, Graham to Read, 22 Oct. 1794, p. 222.

Bengal and in the eastern Madras Presidency undertaken by men who developed the *zamindar* and village settlements.¹⁵² The Baramahal collectors mistrusted the *poligars*; thus, within the *ryotwari* settlement the cultivators and lower ranks of inhabitants (although not the lowest) were allowed more agency than was the case elsewhere and this may account to some degree for the nature of the settlement. Local conditions and concerns for stability played a role, but it is clear that these collectors developed a settlement that did not assume the need for a large landowning class. Given their socio-economic origins, this is perhaps not surprising.

Despite their plan to create individual rents, the poverty and customs of the region were such that the collectors felt resigned to some form of communal payment system, both because it was a style of rental agreement that already existed in the districts, and because non-payment by individuals was a threat to income that the Board of Revenue would not entertain. MacLeod surmised that:

there would not be, in my opinion, the smallest chance of defalcations, if the tenants of each village were made jointly and severally responsible for their rents: which at once forms them in to a corporation dependent upon each other and mutually interested in a general prosperity.¹⁵³

Nevertheless, he wrote to Read, this check of joint responsibility should be used 'as seldom as possible' so that it encouraged mutual assistance but did not mean the 'industrious should be obliged to contribute towards the indolent or spend thrift', and certainly not if the causes of non-payment were disingenuous.¹⁵⁴ Read, although he said he was willing to use this method where 'absolutely necessary, under the present inequalities', ventured to the Board that it was 'subversive of the true idea I wish [the *ryots*] to have of property, and of the hope that every man should entertain of enjoying the fruits of his own labour.'¹⁵⁵

The above actions clearly point to some anxiety and confusion in understanding of cultural practices on the part of the collectors. They formed opinions about the oppressive nature of the Mysore regime and sought ways to return to a more just past, as was typical of those Company administrators who, as Irschick comments, bought in to the myths of the Hindu past.¹⁵⁶ Whilst some saw only enslavement and despotism, others saw an ancient constitution,

¹⁵² T. Trautmann, 'Riot over Ryotwar', in T. Trautmann (ed.), *The Madras School of Orientalism: Producing Knowledge in Colonial South India* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 329–30.

¹⁵³ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Property, IOR/V/27/46/199, MacLeod to Read, 18 Sep. 1793, p. 31; OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Land Rent, IOR/V/27/46/200 MacLeod's Remarks or Read's Fifth Report to Board, p. 64.

¹⁵⁴ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Balances, IOR/V/27/46/202, MacLeod to Read, 16 Nov. 1796, p. 33.

¹⁵⁵ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Land Rent, IOR/V/27/46/200, Read to Board, Jun. 1793, p. 8.

¹⁵⁶ Irschick, *Dialogue and History*, pp. 71–2.

albeit despotic, and legal code.¹⁵⁷ Munro patronised Hindu religious institutions and actively sought to use Hindu customs in his subsequent administrative work.¹⁵⁸ How far the Collectors' conclusions were a factual or a misinterpreted understanding of the Baramahal is hard to determine, since many other collectors had different ideas about South Indian forms of social organisation.¹⁵⁹ These frustrations and anxieties, however, found expression in a purposeful plan for 'improvement' rather than disjointed reactive decisions. The proposed settlements would be fair and would result in increased cultivation, and therefore increased wealth of the inhabitants.¹⁶⁰ Annual leases would allow *ryots* to 'throw up' or take on as much land as they could and in time gradations of large and small farmers would naturally develop based on the fair foundations of this system.¹⁶¹ This displays a confidence that the metropolitan theories of improvement, modified to fit the present state of South India, would be best placed to overcome the poverty and difficulties they found in the region. But their correspondence also highlights the lack of true understanding regarding the cultural practices that the collectors observed. Instead, it shows that certain assumptions about what would be beneficial for the country reflected concepts that were part of their experiences in Scotland and their intellectual heritage.

V

This article has attempted to draw connections between the early lives of Read, MacLeod, Graham and Munro and their work in the Baramahal in order to explore the viability of a 'Scottish school of thought' present in EIC governance. It has sought to do this whilst taking account of local conditions and possible anxieties that fed in to their colonial policies. The subjects of this article were the first Company personnel to create a settlement in this particular region, and the Company's expanding mandate was a key factor in allowing them to pursue their vision of 'improvement'. Their admiration of Cornwallis and interest in the national objects indicate this. As the first to create a settlement in this region, they had a certain freedom in their work and, they hoped, the opportunity to make their mark on EIC policy, furthering their careers and the hope of an independency. Mukherjee, in his detailed history of the *ryotwari* system says that the idea was forced on Read by the 'logic of facts' and it is clear that local conditions played a significant role in the Collectors' thinking.¹⁶² They

¹⁵⁷ Jane Rendall identifies these differences even within Scottish 'orientalists' in the Company. (J. Rendall, 'Scottish Orientalism: From Robertson to James Mill', *The Historical Journal*, 25, 1 (1992), pp. 43–69.)

¹⁵⁸ McLaren, 'From Analysis to Prescription', p. 482.

¹⁵⁹ Trautmann, 'Riot over Ryotwar', pp. 310–32.

¹⁶⁰ OIOC, IOR, Baramahal Records, Management, IOR/V/27/46/196, Graham to Read, 22 Oct. 1794, p. 222.

¹⁶¹ Arbuthnot, *Sir Thomas Munro*, Munro to Read, 18 Jul. 1797, p. 22.

¹⁶² Mukherjee, *The Ryotwari System*, p. 10.

took several years in deliberating exactly how a settlement could be made with *ryots*. They studied existing tenurial and accounting papers, and entered a dialogic process with Indian revenue servants and cultivators as to what the nature of the settlements had been under both the Mysore regime and previously.¹⁶³

Yet, the evidence points to the introduction of several new ideas which were consciously chosen to fit with the aim of extending property rights to more inhabitants. Moreover, instead of following the Board's wishes to make permanent settlements with the closest equivalent to *zamindars*, they began to make purposeful changes to the local tenurial arrangements in the opposite direction. It would be impossible to infer that the *ryotwari* settlement in the 1790s was the well worked out vision of Indian administration that Munro continued to develop during his next posting. Nevertheless, the correspondence of the Scotsmen and Read's reports to the Madras Board of Revenue show a real belief that they could take the small farm or village system of the Baramahal and Salem and employ concepts with which they were familiar to 'improve' agriculture and the lives of those they now governed. Furthermore, they frequently met with opposition to their policies and used violent forms of punishment or imprisonment to instil compliance. This suggests a certain amount of anxiety in maintaining control, but also that they were confident enough in their sense of imperial mission to employ unpopular ideas to achieve their own ends. Yet, despite this real and structural violence they held a relatively sympathetic view of Indian society and assumed it was not only possible, but desirable, that Indian farmers would want to work with them towards the goals of agricultural 'improvement'. Whilst admitting of other influences, their lived experiences, personal connections and familiarity with certain Scottish intellectual ideas that were popular in their lifetime acted as the main motivations for organising their thoughts and their administrative policies. Cross-cultural misunderstandings and the unavoidable need for a guiding framework led them to fall back on ideas and practices with which they were familiar.

¹⁶³ Irschick, *Dialogue and History*, pp. 6–11.