

**MAJOR (or Mair), JOHN (1470-1550)**, Scottish theological and historical writer, was born at the village of Gleghornie, near North Berwick, Scotland, in the year 1470. He was educated at the school of Haddington, where John Knox was later a pupil. After a short period spent at Cambridge (at God's House, afterwards Christ's College) he entered the university of Paris in 1493, studying successively at the colleges of St Barbe, Montaigu and Navarre, and graduating as master of arts in 1496. Promoted to the doctorate in 1505, he lectured on philosophy at Montaigu College and on theology at Navarre. He visited Scotland in 1515 and returned in 1518, when he was appointed principal regent in the university of Glasgow, John Knox being among the number of those who attended his lectures there. In 1522 he removed to St Andrew's University, where in 1525 George Buchanan was one of his pupils. He returned to the college of Montaigu in 1525, but was once more at St Andrew's in 1531, where he was head of St Salvator's College from 1534 until his death.

Major's voluminous writings may be grouped under (a) logic and philosophy, (b) Scripture commentary, and (c) history. All are in Latin, all appeared between 1503 and 1530, and all were printed at Paris. The first group includes his *Exponabilia* (1503), his commentary on *Petrus Hispanus* (1505-1506), his *Inclitarum artium libri* (1506, &c.), his commentary on *Joannes Dorp* (1504, &c.), his *Insolubilia* (1516, &c.), his introduction to Aristotle's logic (1521, &c.), his commentary on the ethics (1530), and, chief of all, his commentary on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (1509, &c.); the second consists of a commentary on Matthew (1518) and another on the Four Gospels (1529); the last is represented by his famous *Historia Majoris Britanniae tam Angliae quam Scotiae per J. M.* (1521). In political philosophy he maintained the Scotist position, that civil authority was derived from the popular will, but in theology he was a scholastic conservative, though he never failed to show his approbation of Gallicanism and its plea for the reform of ecclesiastical abuses. He has left on record that it was his aim and hope to reconcile realism and nominalism in the interests of theological peace. He had a world-wide reputation as a teacher and writer. Buchanan's severe epigram, perhaps the only unfriendly words in the flood of contemporary praise, may be explained as a protest against the compromise which Major appeared to offer rather than as a personal attack on his teacher. Major takes a more independent attitude in his *History*, which is a remarkable example of historical accuracy and insight. He claims that the historian's chief duty is to write truthfully, and he is careful to show that a theologian may fulfil this condition.

The *History*, on which his fame now rests, was reprinted by Freebairn (Edinburgh, 1740), and was translated in 1892 by Archibald Constable for the Scottish History Society. The latter volume contains a full account of the author by Aeneas J. G. Mackay and a bibliography by Thomas Graves Law.

Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th Edition, Volume 17, Slice 4 "Magnetite" to "Malt"