

BIRTH ORDER AND ACHIEVEMENT IN
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SCOTLAND¹

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This brief paper represents a backward extension in history of the studies on birth order and eminence. In a recent study of achievement in 18th century Scotland³—Scotland's Golden Age with men like Adam Smith, Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns, James Watt, James Boswell, David Hume, James Mill and numerous others—we also included birth-order data.

We selected our eminent persons among those born between 1685 and 1785 from standard reference works in the history of science, medicine, engineering, art, and so forth. Nobles, military men, and politicians were not included, unless they were also intellectual achievers. The list was then compared with persons also included in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, London, 1885-1901, for eminence in intellectual fields, leaving a sample of 364 men and 11 women.

Birth order could be determined for only 227 individuals (60% of the sample), and only in a limited way, so that we could discriminate only between oldest, middle, and youngest child. The results are shown in Table 1. We see that even then nearly half of the eminent persons were oldest children, confirming the predominance of first-

TABLE 1. BIRTH ORDER OF EMINENT 18TH CENTURY SCOTSMEN (N = 227)

	N	%
oldest child	109	48
middle child	70	31
youngest child	48	21

borns in eminence still generally observed today. This is the more remarkable since the median number of children in these families was 4 to 5.

Of the original sample of 375, the social class could be identified in 339, as follows: 26 (8%) nobility or upper class, 186 (55%) upper middle class, 92 (27%) lower middle class, and 35 (10%) lower class.

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³Unpublished study by the present authors entitled "Intellectual Achievement in an Underdeveloped Area: A Computerized Case Study of Eighteenth Century Scotland."