

Brendan Simms, Torsten Riotte, eds. *The Hanoverian Dimension in British History, 1714-1837*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. xi + 337 pp. \$79.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-84222-8.



Andrew C. Thompson. *Britain, Hanover and the Protestant Interest: 1688-1756*. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2006. 256 pp. \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-84383-241-6.



Reviewed by G. M. Ditchfield (Department of History, University of Kent, Canterbury)

Published on H-Albion (January, 2008)

Britain and Hanover under the Georges

One of the most interesting recent developments in the approach of historians to eighteenth-century Great Britain has been the appreciation of the full significance of the personal union (1714-1837) between Britain and Hanover. Until a few years ago, published research on the subject in English was confined to the work of a small number of scholars, notably Jeremy Black, Uriel Dann, and G. C. Gibbs, together with an older and valuable article by K. L. Ellis.[1] There was also the valuable and unduly neglected Ph.D. thesis of the legal historian I. B. Campbell on the international relations be-

tween Britain and the electorate.[2] Otherwise, historians of eighteenth-century Britain who looked overseas at all tended to fix their gaze in a westward, rather than an eastward, direction. The two books reviewed here represent a necessary process of correction to this state of affairs. Taking as his starting point the revolution of 1688-89 in the British Isles and placing it in the context of the advance of the Counter-Reformation on the Continent, Andrew C. Thompson argues convincingly that confessional allegiance remained crucial to European politics and in particular to the post-1688 regimes in

Britain. Equipped with a thorough grasp of German primary sources, he shows that the first two Georges and their Whig ministers retained a commitment to the electorate of Hanover for religious, as well as for dynastic, strategic, and commercial reasons. Thompson illustrates his case by analyzing a series of chronological episodes, including the religious conflict in the Palatinate of the Rhine in the early 1720s, the expulsion of the Salzburgers in 1730-31, and the complex question of British neutrality during the War of the Polish Succession in the mid-1730s. He finds that a consistent theme of British policy was the support of the "Protestant interest" in Europe, which included persecuted Protestant minorities in Catholic states, and that Hanover's status in the Holy Roman Empire provided the means for and underlined the necessity of the promotion of that interest. The case is well made, and Thompson concludes that the rise of Prussia from the 1740s placed the Protestant interest in a new, and perhaps lesser, order of consequence in British priorities. Possibly, he could have taken more account of the implications for the "Protestant interest" of the successive wars between Hanover's Catholic ally Austria and the Ottoman Empire. Possibly, too, he might have distinguished more sharply between the court and the country Whig position over continental engagements; the latter perception was markedly more isolationist than the former. But the book as a whole provides an important service to scholarship by its integration of Hanover and by its contribution to the reintegration of religion into the historiography of eighteenth-century Britain.

Thompson is also a contributor to the collection of thirteen essays on various aspects of the Anglo-Hanoverian connection edited by Brendan Simms and Torsten Rott. Here, he supplements his previous work by suggesting that George III, for all his much-trumpeted British birth, was far from neglectful of Hanover and its Protestant identity. This theme is taken much further in the valuable essay by Rott, in which he emphasizes George III's sustained interest in the economic restoration of Hanover after the Seven Years' War and in the maintenance of political stability (against Austrian attempts to undermine it) within the Holy Roman Empire. Simms shows that the elder William Pitt's outlook was more consistently continental and pro-Hanover than his oppositional rhetoric of the 1740s might have implied. But, his anti-Hanover speeches boxed him into a position whereby the king thought him unreliable as a minister with responsibility for Hanoverian relations. Pitt's resignation in 1761 over his failure to persuade his colleagues to launch a pre-emptive strike against Spain neatly pre-

served his "patriot credentials," when Germany was the real source of the quarrel (p. 34). H. M. Scott illustrates the French dimension to the role of Hanover in the periods immediately before and during the Seven Years' War, pointing out that an invasion of Hanover was logistically a far more hazardous undertaking for France than British ministers believed. Richard Harding's essay reinforces the strategic importance of Hanover to Britain even at the height of naval successes between 1759 and 1763. The more specialist chapters of the volume are provided by Black (Horace Walpole and Hanover), Christopher D. Thompson (the Hanoverian dimension to British politics in the early nineteenth century), Mijndert Bertram (the end of the dynastic union), and Thomas Biskup (the University of Göttingen). There are more wide-ranging contributions from Clarissa Campbell Orr, who offers a substantial analysis of the dynastic ramifications of the union; Bob Harris, who explores Hanover and the public sphere; and Nicholas B. Harding, who contributes an interesting piece on Hanover and British republicanism—although for this latter purpose "British" in effect means "English." The volume has five genealogical tables, but unfortunately, it lacks the maps that enhance Thompson's book.

Scott's essay quotes observations by Philip Yorke, Lord Hardwicke, in 1743 and Robert Stewart, Viscount Castlereagh, in 1815 to the effect that on balance the personal union had worked to Hanover's disadvantage (p. 276). If this were the belief of leading British statesmen, one might reasonably ask whether elite, and for that matter nonelite, opinion in Hanover held a similar view. For example, did Hanover deplore the uninterrupted absence of its ruler between 1755 and 1821? Did the experience of occupation during the Napoleonic Wars affect the Hanoverian view of the British connection? These two books are, quite appropriately, devoted mainly to the personal union as it affected Britain. A further stage for published work in English on this subject might take the form of a study of the union as perceived over this century and a quarter by Hanover and its inhabitants.

Notes

- [1]. Jeremy Black, *British Foreign Policy in the Age of Walpole* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, Ltd., 1985), chap. 2; Uriel Dann, *Hanover and Great Britain, 1740-1760: Diplomacy and Survival* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991); G. C. Gibbs, "Britain and the Alliance of Hanover, April 1725-February 1726," *English Historical Review* 73 (1958): 404-430; and K. L. Ellis, "The Administrative Connections between Britain and Hanover," *Jour-*

nal of the Society of Archivists 3 (1965-69): 546-565.

[2]. I. B. Campbell, "The International and Legal Re-

lations between Great Britain and Hanover, 1714-1837," (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge University, 1965).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-albion>

Citation: G. M. Ditchfield. Review of Simms, Brendan; Riotte, Torsten, eds., *The Hanoverian Dimension in British History, 1714-1837* and Thompson, Andrew C., *Britain, Hanover and the Protestant Interest: 1688-1756*. H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. January, 2008.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=14075>

Copyright © 2008 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.org.