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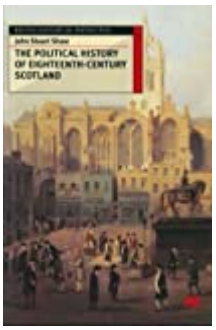

John Stuart Shaw. *The Political History of Eighteenth-Century Scotland.* New York and Basingstoke, UK: St. Martin's Press, 1999. vii + 151 pp. $39.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-333-59586-2.

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The Coming of Age of Eighteenth-Century Scottish Political History

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The British History in Perspective series published by St Martin's Press (Macmillan) is a collection of short and incisive textbooks aimed particularly at undergraduates. John Stuart Shaw's new book, published as part of this series, surveys the political history of eighteenth-century Scotland in an accessible and lively manner. It is grounded in a wide knowledge of the manuscript sources, as befits the work of a senior figure at the National Archives of Scotland in Edinburgh. It is only relatively recently that one could have envisaged such a survey being possible, given the neglect of post-Union Scottish political history which prevailed until the late 1960s. This book may perhaps be said, therefore, to mark the coming of age of its subject. Shaw builds upon his own earlier work [1] as well as upon that of many other scholars, such as William Ferguson, Patrick Riley, Alexander Murdoch, Richard Sher, Ronald Sunter, Richard Scott, David Brown, John Brims and Michael Fry.

This volume is not so much a synthesis, however, as a stimulating discussion of various issues that arise from the vantage-point thus gained. Shaw begins by questioning the assumption that the 1707 Union was achieved only via the particularly base venality of early eighteenth-century Scottish politicians. He does this by investigating some of the benefits received by individuals as a result of the Union. He freely admits that the figures he uses are open to revision, but his findings are fascinating. The beneficiaries he examines are the Darien stockholders, those who were owed money from the public purse and the recipients of other awards. They include both MPs and non-MPs, so that the benefits of union are shown to have ranged from the fabulous rewards which are well known (notably the 20,000 secretly passed to the Duke of Queensberry for distribution to those who might be persuaded to vote in favour of union, but of which he kept 12,325) to the payment of small pensions and salaries which had been owed for years by the Scottish government to ordinary people outside Parliament, such as widows and soldiers. His point, and it seems a fair one, is that corrupt MPs were not the only people to gain directly and swiftly from the passage of the Act of Union. Many much less powerful people also benefitted.

Shaw moves on from here to consider the place of Scottish politics within the Union and the governance of Scotland. He argues that Scottish MPs, contrary to traditional assumptions, were no more self-interested and uninterested in party politics than English MPs were in the period before 1760. (One might also argue that they were no less involved in party politics than many English MPs thereafter.) The reasons for the marginalization of Scotland in British politics are considered, the complex narrative of political manoeuvring and intrigue between 1707 and 1725 is told, and the careers of the most successful Scottish "managers" are examined –John, second Duke of Argyll; his younger brother Archibald, third Duke of Argyll; and Henry Dundas, whose career at the heart of Westminster politics signalled the political acceptance of the Scots. In his chapter on Jacobitism Shaw is less interested in the threat that it posed to the Hanoverian regime than in why Scottish Jacobitism was so much more committed and active than English Jacobitism, dwelling particularly on the grievances of Scottish episcopalians after the presbyterian religious settlement of 1690. Finally, there is a chapter on the containment of other challenges to the ruling elite, posed by the non-erastian Scottish church, crowd riots and disturbances, and the popular radicalism of the 1790s. The book ends, somewhat abruptly, with the briefest of postscripts to mark the end of the eighteenth century with the death of William Pitt in 1801.

There is much to inform in this book, and there is a certain amount to provoke, too, which one suspects is intentional on the part of the author and which is likely to make this a useful textbook for students. For instance, because this is a short book, Shaw has had to be selective both between and within the subjects he considers, choosing, for example, to examine the financial aspects of the 1707 Union rather than the ideological divisions it engendered. It is difficult, however, to see how the chronological coverage he adopts is justified. Most of the book is concerned with the pre-1760 period. It rests largely on the story of the second and third Dukes of Argyll, which certainly makes grasping the difficult narrative of this period rather easier, but which leaves the post-1760s rather scantily clad, despite Shaw's recognition of Dundas's achievements.

One might also question Shaw's decision to concentrate quite so heavily on politics "from above." It is undeniable, as he says in the preface, that this "reflects the realities of power and influence in the eighteenth century," even more so in Scotland than in England. It is also fair to claim that this book provides a useful historical background for "those whose preference is the study of emerging popular politics" (p. vii). In fact, Shaw is less than fair to his own coverage in this defence: he does acknowledge non-establishment politics, particularly in his chapter on the Jacobites, and also in the final chapter, although here he is as much concerned with the government's response to extra-parliamentary politics as with those involved. Nevertheless, there will certainly be those, as he recognises, who will wish that he had found a little more room for the development of electoral politics and of the emergence of the politics of "the people below," based on the work of such historians as Kenneth Logue, Christopher Whatley, John Brims and E.W. MacFarland. Surely this is one of the distinguishing features of the later eighteenth century in Scottish politics, and it may be thought that it therefore deserved a little more attention.

None the less, Shaw's book is to be welcomed precisely because it is (courteously) provocative and because it tries to deal with problems rather than being concerned merely to deliver a narrative for those unfamiliar with the period. It is also pleasing in its demonstration that eighteenth-century Scottish political history has now entered its majority so that such lively texts can now be produced.[2] There is still a great deal to be discovered, but Shaw's generous acknowledgement of other scholars' work celebrates the fact that a sophisticated political history of eighteenth-century Scotland is now being written.

Notes

[1]. John Stuart Shaw, *The Management of Scottish Society 1707-1764* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983).

[2]. See also Michael Fry's essay "Politics," in *Modern Scottish History, 1707 to the Present*, vol. 1, *1707-1850*, ed. A. Cooke, I. Donnachie, A. MacSween and C.A. Whatley (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1998), pp. 43-62.

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