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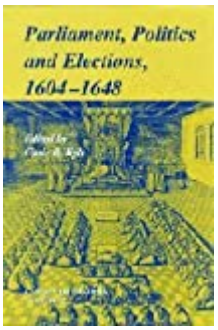

Chris R. Kyle, ed. *Parliament, Politics and Elections, 1604-1648.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. 341 pp. $70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-80214-7.

Graham E. Seel, David L. Smith. *The Early Stuart Kings, 1603-1642.* London and New York: Routledge, 2001. 124 pp. $12.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-415-22400-0.

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Early Stuart Politics for Scholars and Students

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The two books under review here are both about early Stuart politics but otherwise quite different. One is a collection of newly published primary sources which will be of interest to specialists in the field; the other is a short book in a series intended for students in the classroom.

Parliament, Politics and Elections, 1604-1648 is a collection of five original sources printed here as part of the venerable Camden series. (The Camden publications began in the 1830s. For anyone still keeping track, this is volume 17 in the fifth series, now published for the Royal Historical Society by Cambridge University Press.) While the Camden volumes over the years have not exactly been mandatory reading, most researchers in the early Stuart period have found one or more of them indispensable, and this is a worthy addition to the very best of them.

In this present Camden volume, first-rate researchers, most having some experience with the History of Parliament Trust, have expertly edited and introduced five sources that bear on early Stuart parliamentary history. In his introduction to the volume, Chris R. Kyle situates these particular sources within larger debates over parliamentary history that have been raging since the appearance of revisionism on the scene more than three decades ago. Kyle rightly praises the Herculean efforts of the Yale Center for Parliamentary History and the magnificent volumes of sources for the early Stuart Parliaments that it has produced, and he defends these against the criticisms of John Morrill. His own view of the period is anti-revisionist, or post-revisionist. The contents of this volume, however, can be interpreted as supporting both sides in the argument over revisionism.

One announced goal of this volume is to shift the focus away from the traditional sources of London-based high politics, such as the Journals of the House of Commons and diaries of individual members published by the

Yale Center, emphasizing instead "the importance of a wide range of parliamentary material" (p. 1). Ironically the first and largest contribution to the present volume consists of the parliamentary diaries of three MPs for the sessions of 1604 and 1606-1607. As the editor of these diaries, Simon Healy, laudably admits, "these diaries are not as comprehensive as the official Journals, nor do they give as full an account of key speeches as is provided by the diaries of the MPs Robert Bowyer and Sir Robert Harley, which are already in print" (p. 13). Nevertheless, these diaries–tentatively attributed to Sir George Manners, Sir Robert Cotton, and Sir Edward Montagu–"offer three widely differing viewpoints" and "add a considerable number of details" (p. 13).

The second contribution by Brennan Pursell consists of two letters written by the Spanish Ambassador Gondomar in 1621, not to his superiors in Spain but to the Infanta Isabella who ruled the Spanish Netherlands at the time. Pursell provides both the original Spanish and his own English translation. These letters, written against the backdrop of the Thirty Years War, the Parliament of 1621, and mounting pressure on King James to enter the war on behalf of his daughter and son-in-law, are fascinating and illuminating. They reveal how close Gondomar was to the King. And they provide examples of "the secretive, intimate nature of Jacobean diplomacy and its potential for theatricality" (p. 151). Yet these entertaining reports of whispered conversations and Machiavellian maneuvers must "be taken with more than a grain of salt" (p. 152), for we can never be certain how far Gondomar was embellishing his role or being manipulated by James. In Pursell's words, everything that passed between the king and Gondomar, "no matter how secretive, was ultimately subject to a fundamental doubt" (p. 151).

Given his own antipathy to revisionism, it is surprising that the third contribution by Chris R. Kyle does more than the previous two to suggest that revision of the traditional picture is in order. Whereas earlier researchers have relied on committee lists printed in the Commons Journals, Kyle has uncovered thirty-three committee lists for the period 1606-1628 in the House of Lords Record Office which indicate who actually attended committee meetings, revealing a far different picture. Kyle's most prominent finding is the low rate of attendance, indicating "widespread apathy" (p. 181). Even on an issue as inflammatory as purveyance, only three members attended one meeting, a figure that is "startlingly small" (p. 180). Another revisionist conclusion that Kyle reaches is that private bills and "matters of seemingly minor local interest" attracted more attention and attendance than larger national issues (p. 180). Finally, Kyle has discovered that the people who actually attended or dominated committee meetings were not necessarily those we have previously found named as members. At one committee meeting, none of the twelve MPs who attended appeared on the list of members in the Journal. Overall, this picture of apathetic members who appeared to be more interested in local matters than national issues, and the doubt this throws on the reliability of the Journals, will appeal more to revisionists than traditionalists.

The fourth and fifth contributions to this volume are preceded by much longer introductory essays that deserved to be printed as separate articles in journals where they would have been likely to receive the greater attention they deserve.

Jason Peacey has edited the fourth contribution, consisting of parts of a notebook kept by Sir Edward Dering relevant to his defeat in the Kent elections for the Short Parliament in 1640. This seemingly obscure document has significant implications for larger debates about how political or adversarial the contests for parliamentary seats were becoming in the early Stuart period. Peacey disagrees with earlier interpretations of the Dering notebook by Derek Hirst and Mark Kishlansky. He argues that there has been a "subtle misunderstanding of the nature of the document itself, and its value" (p. 238). Kishlansky in particular offered "a somewhat misleading interpretation" of Dering's notes and "underestimated the degree to which issues of national as well as local concern were impinging on the county election" (pp. 242, 250). Kishlansky's misinterpretation sprang from his "mistaken belief that the Dering list was prepared in the aftermath of the election [for the Short Parliament], or in preparation for the election to the Long Parliament" (p. 250). By contrast, Peacey believes that the portion of the notebook in question was composed before the elections for the Short Parliament as part of Dering's abortive effort to win the seat. Viewed this way, Dering's notes provide evidence "of the energy which figures such as Dering were prepared to expend in securing election, the effort which they were prepared to put into an election 'campaign,' and the methods by which support could be garnered" (p. 251). Contrary to Kishlansky's well-known thesis about parliamentary selection, Dering did not expect the election "to be 'fixed' in advance by a consensual decision by the county elite." Rather, he expected a bona fide contest between political rivals, "and this meant that voters had to be both polled and canvassed" (p. 251).

The fifth and final component, edited by David Scott,

comes from the Hull letters, which are "the largest surviving cache of pre-Reform municipal correspondence anywhere in England" (p. 274). From this trove of over 1,300 letters, Scott has selected one set of 130 written by a Hull MP, Peregrine Pelham, and the town's recorder, Francis Thorpe, during 1644-1648. This "rich vein of correspondence" reveals how Pelham and Thorpe advanced the town's interests amid the political machinations of London (p. 274). The picture that emerges from these letters will be remarkably familiar to the modern reader. Money and business interests, rather than lofty constitutional issues, dominated the political activities of Pelham and Thorpe. The two men acted as lobbyists, using cash and gifts to sway votes in favor of their merchant friends back home in Hull. In one of his letters, Pelham alluded to an annual expenditure of 500 pounds. Scott observes that this amount was "roughly the equivalent of half a million pounds today" and that "it is hard to avoid the conclusion that this was a slush fund that Pelham used to treat or bribe other MPs in return for services rendered" (p. 279). There were also generous distributions of "Hull ale" as gifts to the town's "friends" in London, which was a "euphemism for bribed Parliament-men" (p. 280). The corporation of Hull merchants displayed a consistent "determination to pursue its own advantage regardless of the public interest" even during the heated politics of the Civil War. On occasion, the town's "private interest politicking" predominated even so far as "potentially jeopardising the entire parliamentarian cause" (p. 283). Thus this volume concludes with a selection that dramatically supports the revisionist view that petty politics overshadowed constitutional conflict. J. H. Hexter disapprovingly called this approach the "Namierization" of early Stuart politics, yet this selection from the Hull letters appears to show that even in the heart of the Civil War, lofty constitutional issues were trumped by crass self-interest.

In contrast to the Camden volume of fresh scholarship, the second book under review here, *The Early Stuart Kings, 1603-1642* by Graham E. Seel and David L. Smith, is a synthesis of existing scholarship intended for classroom use. It is part of a Questions and Analysis series which dictates the distinctive format of the book. Each chapter begins with a very brief narrative of events only one or two pages long. This brief narrative is followed by a longer analysis of two issues or questions that historians currently debate relevant to the narrative. At the end of each chapter there are also short selections from relevant documents. The goal of this format is not to inculcate facts but to give students practice writing about historiographical controversies. Each chapter includes sets of questions suitable for students to address in essays, employing what they have learned from the foregoing analyses and bringing to bear the appropriate documents. There is even one "worked answer" for each chapter, serving as a model to show students how to construct a good essay.

For example, chapter 4 on "Buckingham and Foreign Policy, 1618-1628," starts with one page of narrative followed by the analysis of two issues: first, "Assess the extent to which the Duke of Buckingham worsened relations between the early Stuart kings and their subjects," and second, "Compare and contrast the foreign policy of James VI and I and Charles I during the period 1618-1630" (pp. 49, 56). Each of these analyses is followed by questions for students to address. Next there are excerpts from relevant documents with another set of pertinent questions and a "worked answer."

Seel and Smith are solid scholars, and they have made the best of this format, ably addressing the big issues of the period, citing the key authors and literature, and selecting telling documents. In the end, the value of the book will depend entirely on whether teachers and students find this format useful. The back cover of the book states that it is intended for "students aiming to achieve the top grades in history," and British students might very well find what they need here to achieve top grades. To this particular reviewer, however, the talents of Seel and Smith seemed regrettably constrained by the format of the series. The narratives seemed too brief for students to make sense of them, and the analyses that followed might not encourage students to think afresh as much as parrot current debates in the profession. The terribly compressed narratives at the outset of each chapter forced Seel and Smith to import a lot of narrative into the analytical sections. Furthermore, the second analytical section of each chapter required them to repeat much of the narrative already contained in the first analytical section, only this time from a different point of view. I found this repetitive and confusing. There was also repetition from chapter to chapter, as, for example, when the chapter on foreign policy from 1618 to 1628 (or is it 1630?) was followed, not by a chapter on the Personal Rule, but by yet another chapter covering the period 1625-1629, this time emphasizing the Crown's relations with Parliament, which of course is difficult to separate from the subject of foreign policy which was already discussed in the previous chapter.

For all these reasons, I think the book is most suitable

for students who already have a reasonably good grasp of the narrative and are ready to move on to read and write about current arguments among historians over the correct interpretation of that narrative. For these students, Seel and Smith have provided expert guidance and helpful exercises.

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