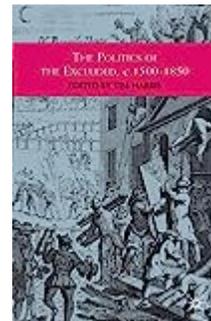


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Tim Harris, ed. *The Politics of the Excluded, c. 1500-1800*. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001. ix + 295 pp. \$42.37 (paper), ISBN 978-0-333-72224-4; \$110.38 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-333-72223-7.



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This is a book where the contributors deal with two major themes: the mechanisms by which ordinary people in early modern England were included or excluded from “popular” and “national” politics, and the sources and methodologies that we need to employ in order to arrive at a better understanding of the extent and character of popular involvement in political undercurrents. The thrust of the volume is that ordinary people possessed and found ways to express political opinions and that, explicitly or implicitly, ordinary people involved themselves in the national or local political process. I found the book as a whole incredibly thought-provoking, though sometimes patchy in quality. The best essay in the volume is by Mark Goldie. His discussion of the four potential participatory models for ordinary people in the society and political processes of early modern England—judicial, dramaturgical, associational, and psephological—is certainly the best and most accessible discussion I have seen. He adds a fifth model, however, arguing that the middling sorts were the cornerstone to local and regional politics (and hence to national political stability) and that they claimed citizenship, a voice and influence by participation in mooting and meeting rather than simply by voting. Some of this is familiar from the work of Jonathan Barry, Henry French, Margaret Hunt, and others, but in terms of an overall argument, this is a very powerful chapter indeed. Steve Hin-

dle, in a thoughtful article, argues that the expansion of the remit of parishes at the same time as the gentry in different parts of the country were absenting themselves from day-to-day local government “created a social and political space in which the village elites came to exercise authority” (p. 126). His chapter explores the nature and scope of participation, which was, he argues, shaped by the socio-economic nature of communities, as pastoral areas allowed more scope for middling participation than cereal-growing areas. This is certainly not my experience of research in early modern communities, but the chapter is nonetheless very well executed and throws up many new leads for systematic and substantial local research. Andy Wood concentrates on protests against the Amicable Grant to Henry VIII in 1525, with a particular focus on unrest in Lavenham, Suffolk, and the Peak communities. He argues, provocatively, that political activism had a distinct regional flavor—stronger in the Peaks than in Suffolk—but that in the end we must throw off recent historiographical trends to see and discuss divisions amongst the common people and once more talk in terms of divisions between rich and poor in a framework of “the enduring authority of patriarchal categories” (p. 74). These are the best of the chapters in the book and read together they actually take us very far. Interestingly, and unusually, my students have found them easy to read as a trio and I have seen excellent results in their

work.

The other chapters are more diverse. Ethan Shagan also focuses on Henry, arguing that rumors allowed popular engagement with national and regional politics. The ways in which rumors circulated and the way in which wordings changed or a particular gloss was put on a rumor tells us much about “protean political culture” (p. 58). Tim Harris, as well as contributing an excellent introduction, argues that Charles II had to learn to both recognize and court popular public opinion as his attempts to control the press and clamp down on public political debate and protest failed. He shows how the supporters of Charles were able to key into widespread popular prejudices against nonconformists, widespread support for the monarchy and the Church, and a deep-seated fear of renewed civil war to rebuild the crumbling authority of the crown. Nicholas Rogers traces the changing nature of street politics from a situation in the mid-eighteenth century where there was “structural reciprocity between crowd and authority” to the “democratic politics of radical mass platform” by the third decade of the nineteenth century (p. 234). Alastair Bellany claims that libels deserve to be treated as an important form of political expression. Using three examples of libels in the 1620s and

1630s, he argues that “libels and other underground genres clearly provided excluded groups of those with dissident opinions with opportunities for active resistance” (pp. 116-17). Patty Seleski tells the story of Eliza Fenning, a servant accused and convicted of the attempted murder of her employers and hanged in 1815. She notes that the case attracted huge press coverage and public demonstrations and seeks to interpret this outpouring as a way by which the public could be reminded that “the distance between reform and revolution was perilously short” (p. 268).

Taken together, I read tensions in approach, analysis, and conclusion between the chapters which are never concretely resolved. As just one example, was popular political culture really as developed and regionally sophisticated as Wood suggests or was it in fact protean as Shagan implies? However, these are minor quibbles. I learned something from this book, not least of which is that, when faced with accessible but complex arguments, my students can be enlivened to undertake their own independent research. It is a credit to Harris that he has managed to bring together essays that achieve this effect as well as making an original contribution to scholarship.

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