

Adamson, John (Hrsg.): *The English Civil War. Conflicts and Contexts, 1640-49*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2009. ISBN: 978-0-333-98656-1; 344 S.

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The 'Problems in Focus' series had been in existence for well over thirty years. The format has remained the same: a series of essays by specialist, and often very distinguished, authors and an editorial introduction, which tries to place each essay in its wider historical context. The two volumes on The Origins of the English Civil War (ed. Conrad Russell, 1973) and Reactions to the English Civil War (ed. John Morrill, 1982) are still in print, but this is the first devoted to 'the English Civil War' as a whole. There are no dates attached to the title: most essays focus somewhere within the period 1642-1649, but Allan Macinnes starts his study of the 'Scottish Moment' (what others have called the Covenanter Revolution) in 1638. There is relatively little discussion of battles (as opposed to the impact of the war on civilians) and much on politics. For once the Royalists get their fair share of attention. David Scott casts severe doubt on the conventional distinction between 'constitutionalists' and 'absolutists'. Anthony Milton offers a nuanced discussion of the religious face of the Royalist 'party', showing that any identification of Royalism with 'Anglicanism' or 'Laudianism' needs careful qualification. Clive Holmes returns to another familiar dichotomy, that between 'centralism' and 'localism', which (together with the concept of the 'county community') he first discussed almost thirty years ago. He argued then that the dichotomy was a false one: local governors and ordinary citizens were well aware that they lived in a variety of communities, from the parochial to the national. If they had particular concerns, or interests to advance, they would appeal to local magnates or magistrates, or to those with power at the centre. In a sophisticated and thoughtful analysis, he now takes this argument further. Arguments about local office-holding have often less to do with local autonomy than with who was to exercise power. The first civil war was a

nationwide war, with issues which were understood in national terms. Both sides, but especially the Parliamentarians, accepted that far more resources had to be mobilised than would have been possible using the old institutions, but there was room for disagreement about how they should be mobilised and how far the demands of war could be made compatible with traditional conceptions of the rule of law. There was also some polemical mischief-making by opponents of the army in 1647, contrasting 'military rule' to an idealised former local self-government, which never really existed.

The three chapters discussed so far all exhibit features which are common to the collection as a whole. They offer an assessment of the current state of the literature, to which the authors have contributed significantly. In the case of Holmes, the author has also refined (and revised) his earlier views. That said, this is not a self-conscious attempt at 'revisionism'. The work of 'revisionists', such as Russell and Morrill is discussed, of course, but it is worth stressing that Morrill has advanced his ideas and changed his mind on numerous points (as discussed in his book *Revolt in the Provinces*, 1999). (Russell, on the other hand, was consciously trying to turn conventional interpretations on their head.) The 'revisionism' of the 1980s and 1990s grew in part from irritation at a prevailing mode of explanation for the civil war, in social and economic terms, which to young research students and lecturers from the 1970s onwards just did not seem to fit the facts, especially as revealed by local studies. The fullest discussion of these issues is provided in Adamson's introduction, in which (among many other things) he makes the very important point that socio-economic interpretations of the civil war could be applied only to England: they were not remotely appropriate to Scotland or Ireland. Part of the need to rethink the 'English' civil war stemmed from a growing awareness of the interaction between Charles I's three kingdoms. If England seemed docile and stable by the 1630s, Scotland and Ireland were not. They had much more powerful, and militarised, aristocracies, as shown by Jane Ohlmeyer in her chapter on the 'baronial context' of the Irish civil wars.

They also had a fierce sense of national identity: Scots at all levels of society were infuriated by Charles I's blithe assumption that Scotland needed to be 'civilised' by being made more like England. The rising of 1641 showed that the Gaelic Irish felt similarly, and equally deeply. Russell, of course, was very well aware of this - as indeed was S.R. Gardiner a century earlier. In addition, historians like Macinnes have argued that, for Scotland, links with mainland Europe were as meaningful as those with England. Nevertheless, the 'three-kingdoms' approach has greatly enriched our understanding of the 'English' civil war - as well as making the subject even more complicated for students!

The essays in this collection, of necessity, engage with the existing historiography, but they do much more. As shown above, Holmes refined and extended his ideas on 'localism'. In much the same way, Ian Gentles, in his chapter, has significantly developed the arguments in his seminal book, *The New Model Army*. He now sees rank-and-file radicalism as making a more potent contribution to the politicisation of the army in 1647. He also argues that rank-and-file pressure in late 1648 gradually overbore the opposition of the senior officers to putting the king on trial. He doubts whether the Levellers significantly influenced rank-and-file views: soldiers were as capable as London radicals of making up their own minds. This question is addressed from the other side by Phil Baker. He is sceptical about the existence of a Leveller movement, arguing instead, in a sophisticated and original chapter, for a multifarious range of radicalism (radicalisms?), particularly in London. An equally original discussion is offered by Jason Peacey, in a chapter on Parliament and the wider public. MPs were eager to make their views known, but there were also complaints of factionalism and self-interest, most interestingly in the press. Newspapers and pamphlets discussed parliamentary politics with a freedom and insight unparalleled before the nineteenth or even the twentieth century. The mechanisms, or machinations, used to push business through the two Houses were anatomised in all their sordid detail: the fact that more and more business was handled by committees made it possible for those

who controlled them (often a small group) to by-pass the main body of members and peers altogether. This public knowledge of how Parliament worked created a widespread unease and contributed to demands that Parliament should settle with the king on almost any terms.

Collections of essays like this vary in quality. This one is very definitely top of the range, essential reading for both teachers and students.

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