



Hugh Dunthorne, *Britain and the Dutch Revolt, 1560-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, xxv + 264 pp., ISBN 978 0 521 83747 7).

This study of British involvement in the Dutch Revolt and the early Republic is both concise and important. In six chapters and 250 pages, Dunthorne, emeritus senior lecturer at the University of Swansea, offers a fascinating and compelling analysis of British involvement in the Revolt, and the consequences this had at both sides of the channel.

Dunthorne starts the book by examining the ‘extraordinary volume’ of texts and talk about the Revolt and its consequences that circulated in the British Isles from the start of the Revolt. A first chapter surveys the British newsprints, pamphlets, and *corantos* about the situation in the Netherlands. Some of these were published at the behest of the Netherlandish rebels themselves, but there is also evidence for sponsorship by British Calvinists who sympathized with the rebel cause, and for an active role for printers, who helped create a market for material that chimed with their own political and religious outlook. The second chapter discusses the remarkable number of histories of the Revolt that were read by and produced for a British readership. Dunthorne shows that, despite the Puritan background of many of those involved, most of these histories had a secular slant, focusing on the iniquities of the evil advisers of King Philip II, the vices of the Spanish, and eventually also on those of the King himself, very much like in the Netherlands itself. Dunthorne shows that elite libraries virtually all contained pamphlets and/or histories in English, Latin or Italian that related to the Revolt. In such accounts, the conflict was situated very much in its international context, much as modern historians of the Revolt rediscovered it should be in the late twentieth century.

British authors were initially wary of condoning political resistance to Kings, but nevertheless appreciated the sort of society that the Revolt produced, one in which they believed there was a great commitment to the common good, and an extraordinary willingness to pay taxes. Dunthorne argues that this was not limited to the elites; many of more modest status were acquainted with events from the Low Countries, through ballads and plays, the re-enactment of battles in the exercise yards of civic militias, and also through visual media such as prints and medals. By the mid-seventeenth century, it was histories of the Revolt that furnished the English rebels with some of the arguments that they required in their own rebellion against King Charles I.

The interest in, and knowledge of, the Revolt, was both cause and effect of the presence of many British soldiers in the Low Countries. Around 5 percent of Habsburg soldiers in the Netherlands came from the British Isles, mostly from Ireland; in the armies of the Republic it was rarely less than 10 percent, and more like 30 percent in the 1580s. We used to think of mercenaries as wholly uninterested in ideology and religion, yet recent research has prompted a rethink. Many of those who served in the Netherlands, did so in the belief that they were fighting a ‘just war’ fought ‘for the truth of religion’. Dunthorne also emphasizes how much they learned in this theatre of war. Veterans of the Dutch wars took not only knowledge of new military drills, disciplinary practices, siegeworks and military hospitals back with them, their combat experience also proved very important in the Civil Wars of the 1640s.

Chapter 4 shows how merchants from the British Isles also tried to learn of the Dutch Republic. Initially they explained its success with reference to the war and the adversity experienced by the Dutch; later explanations focused on the uncompromising geography that had forced the Dutch to look towards other means of earning a living. It was not lost on the British observers that merchants had a great deal of political influence in the Republic – and some argued that this was something to emulate.

In the sphere of religion, which is discussed in chapter 6, Dunthorne surveys the role of the Low Countries as a safe haven for religious dissidents from the British Isles. The Catholic community relied a great deal on their monastic houses and colleges in the Southern Netherlands. Protestant non-conformists sought refuge in the Dutch Republic, and their preachers found platforms in the British community by serving as army chaplains or in the English and Scottish churches in the Republic. Yet conversely, it was the Dutch and Walloon ‘stranger churches’, which also served as a ‘Trojan horse’ in bringing Reformed worship to England. Emigré congregations developed and spread ‘ideas of covenant and of democratic participation’, that Dunthorne argues were very important. In his final chapter, he brings together the evidence for the political influence of the contacts with the Low Countries, not in any constitutional sense, but in furnishing ideas, and practical solutions, which to many seemed worth adopting in Britain. It was these arguments and precedents from the Netherlands which were echoed by parliamentarians, both in the Civil Wars and during and after the Glorious Revolution. An epilogue to the book shows how in learning, too, contacts were intense and influence profound.

Some of the evidence that Dunthorne has cited and analysed is quite well-known, of course; yet he is the first to bring it all together and analyse it in conjunction, while also adding much fascinating evidence of his own. It is the great virtue of this book that it shows how the various spheres of influence interconnected, and to highlight the importance of the Revolt in making that possible. Yet this study not only fills what has been a glaring gap

in our knowledge, but also arrives in good time to contribute to the growing interest in, and discussion of, transnational politics, religion and culture in the early modern period. Of course scholars have long been aware of the links between Calvinist activists in England and Scotland, Bohemia and Hungary and France and the Low Countries. Calvinist rulers showed little solidarity with their coreligionists, yet when we look at Reformation Europe from the bottom up, there is good evidence for a great deal of transnational interest and commitment of the type that Dunthorne has described for the British Isles.

This is important, not only because it shows us that early modern horizons were much broader than is often assumed, but also because it alerts us to the political significance of the 'foreign' in early modern politics. An interest in foreign news and history, frequent preaching about and fundraising for suffering co-religionists abroad, and willingness to fight in foreign armies, were often also an implicit but forceful way of expressing views about what the rulers of one's own polity should or should not be doing. By using other countries as a 'mirror' of what might befall them, early modern Europeans were so able to offer critiques of their own ruling elites. This was probably as true for the Dutch, as it was for the English, Scottish and Irish people discussed in this book; new projects by Michiel van Groesen, Helmer Helmers and David de Boer, are likely to teach us a great deal more about this in years to come.

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