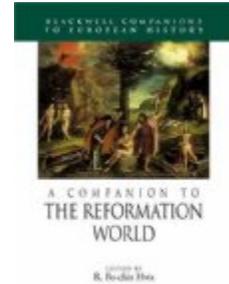


H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

R. Po-chia Hsia, ed. *A Companion to the Reformation World*. Malden and Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2006. xix + 572 pp. \$44.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-4051-4962-4.

Reviewed by Paul Lockhart (Department of History, Wright State University)
Published on H-HRE (March, 2007)



The Reformation World ... or at Least Most of It

A Companion to the Reformation World professes to serve an admirable and useful purpose: to bring together essays, written by leading scholars and incorporating the latest research, into a cogent and cohesive whole, providing specialists and students alike with an up-to-date and broad-ranging survey of the Reformation century. In this sense, the work is a worthy addition to Blackwell's generally solid *Companions to European History* series. The essays included herein collectively live up to the publisher's claim that the collection, capably edited by R. Po-chia Hsia, "examine the Reformation in its broadest possible definition" (quoted on cover). In other regards, however, this volume falls well short of its intended goal.

The sheer number of contributions to the *Companion to the Reformation World*—twenty-nine in all—make it impossible to comment upon each one individually, but the quality of the essays is so uniformly and consistently high that it is not necessary to single out any of them for particular criticism. The work is divided into six unequal parts, each of which considers a major topical or geographical component of the Reformation period. A pair of essays by Euan Cameron and Larissa Taylor assess the religious situation in Europe "On the Eve of the Reformation," evaluating the successes and failures of late medieval heretical movements and the nature of popular piety in the fifteenth century. These topics are too often neglected in survey histories of the Reformation, and the two essays stand out as being among the most interesting in the entire collection. Predictably, the second part deals with the Reformation in the Empire, including German-speaking Switzerland; the third and longest deals with reformation movements—successful and unsuccessful—in Europe beyond the German states. The fourth part, ti-

tled "Catholic Renewal and Confessional Struggles," is an odd mix of essays: on the Jesuits (John O'Malley), female religious orders (Amy E. Leonard), the Inquisition (William Monter), religion and state-building in the Thirty Years' War (Johannes Burkhardt), Iberia in the Counterreformation (José Pedro Paiva), and local confessional conflict in England during the Civil War (Dan Beaver). The fifth part is easily the most innovative, as it considers the impact of the militant piety of the age on the non-European world: in New Spain (Kevin Terraciano), India (Ines G. Županov), China (Po-chia Hsia), and Japan (Michael Cooper). The sixth part is a "catch-all" of sorts for topical essays that do not fit neatly into any of the other five categories, including contributions on witchcraft (James A. Sharpe), Jews (Miriam Bodian), and toleration (Benjamin J. Kaplan).

The essays differ widely in scope and in purpose. Some are more conventional in approach. The essays by Robert Kolb (on Luther and the German states), Tom Scott (on the Peasants' War), and Barbara Diefendorf (on the French Wars of Religion), for example, provide very succinct and readable narrative overviews of their subjects, reflecting the most recent scholarship. Others are more historiographical in focus, surveys of recent trends in the literature rather than surveys of the topic *per se*. O'Malley's essay on the Jesuits and Monter's on the Inquisition are especially noteworthy in this regard.

Yet the *Companion* reads less like what one would expect of such a work—a compilation that serves simultaneously as a survey history and as an introduction to recent scholarship—and more like a conventional anthology: although the essays themselves, taken individually, are of very high quality, the coverage of the volume as a whole is spotty and uneven. Of course, the Reformation

is a gigantic topic, and no one should expect a collection of essays to cover everything or even to endeavor to do so. There are, however, serious and obvious *lacunae*—chronological, topical, and geographical—within this work. The late sixteenth century suffers from neglect here, especially—and inexplicably—for the Holy Roman Empire; there is nothing to bridge the gap between Kolb’s essay on Luther and Burkhardt’s contribution on the Thirty Years’ War, a grave omission. Though “confessional struggles” is, ostensibly, one of the major themes of the work, any analysis of the impact of the Reformation on international relations within Europe is limited to Burkhardt’s essay and Olivier Christin’s discussion of peace-making in Reformation Europe.

The most serious problem, though, is with the geographical coverage of the book. Po-chia Hsia is to be credited for devoting an unusually large amount of space to eastern Europe. The contributions on Hungary (István György Tóth) and on Bohemia and Poland (James R. Palmitessa) are interesting not only because they examine regions that are all too often excluded from the accepted narrative of Reformation Europe, but also because they are so well-done in their own right, exhibiting unusual depth of scholarship in a very compact form. Yet this volume neglects two of the largest and most important Protestant polities of the early modern period: Oldenburg Denmark and Vasa Sweden. Perhaps my comments may appear as special pleading from a Scandina-

vianist, and if so I apologize, but the complete neglect of the Nordic monarchies in this work is more than a bit puzzling. Denmark and Sweden were the only Lutheran kingdoms in Europe; Denmark would play a leading role in “international Protestantism” in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, as Sweden would in the mid-seventeenth century. Although there are significant differences between the two states in the means by which the Reformation progressed, they could easily have been incorporated into a single essay. The fact that two entire essays are devoted to England, while the Scandinavian Reformations do not merit more than a passing mention, reflects the persistent and indefensible exclusion of Baltic Europe from the current mainstream of early modern historiography. Some readers may also find the exclusion of Scotland from the *Companion to the Reformation World* equally objectionable.

Overall, *A Companion to the Reformation World* should prove to be of considerable value to advanced students of the Reformation period; readers should be able to find in it, at the very least, a very readable introduction to recent research and controversies in sixteenth-century historiography. However, the publisher’s claim notwithstanding—that the *Companion* “focus[es] on the workings of religious reform in all areas of Latin Christendom” (quoted on cover)—this collection does not provide a particularly thorough or balanced overview.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-hre>

Citation: Paul Lockhart. Review of Hsia, R. Po-chia, ed., *A Companion to the Reformation World*. H-HRE, H-Net Reviews. March, 2007.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=12934>

Copyright © 2007 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.