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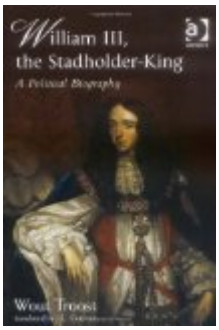

Wouter Troost. *William III, The Stadholder-King: A Political Biography.* Translated by J. C. Grayson. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004. Illustrations, maps. xvii + 361 pp. $120.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-7546-5071-3.

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Published on H-Albion (September, 2010)

Commissioned by Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth (Red Deer College)

This is the first full-length scholarly biography of William III since that of Stephen B. Baxter in 1966 (*William III*), its original version having preceded Tony Claydon's more topically organized *William III: Profiles in Power* (2002) by one year. It follows the current and salutary trend of placing the career of the Stadholder-King and the revolution he made in a European context: indeed, where other recent work refers, hierarchically and Anglo-centrically to "the King-Stadholder," the emphasis of this book is clearly Dutch and European. Thus, the early chapters on the Dutch part of William's career are the strongest, not least because of their extensive use of primary sources. They delineate clearly the history of the House of Orange and its fractious relationship to the Dutch Republic, William's youth and rise to power, the "year of catastrophe" 1672, and the diplomatic game of the 1670s and 80s. These chapters are especially good on the internal machinations of the republic and the external machinations of its diplomats. Perhaps most useful to scholars will be chapter 5, "The Task and the Tools," which explains William's governing style and political strategies, his use of favorites, and his relationship to the States and their armed forces. This chapter seeks to answer the question: "Who was the prince and what did he think he was doing"? Troost's not very surprising response is that his subject sought, above all, to preserve the Dutch Republic by securing a defensible barrier; on a wider level he writes, "I believe that William III was concerned in the first place with the liberties of Europe," that is, the right of its individual states to be free from the threat of French aggrandizement (p. 95). Though William feared universal monarchy, he never spoke of a balance of power.

Subsequent chapters, addressing the Glorious Revolution, the ensuing war with France, and William's rule in England, Scotland, and Ireland are based largely on secondary sources. While the narrative is never less than competent (if a little breathless) and the analysis sound, in the end, they offer little that is new to our understanding of William's second act. In particular, scholars

hoping for illumination of the elusive character of the Stadholder-King may be disappointed. This is very much a political biography, indeed, a diplomatic biography; and Troost's occasional forays into postmortem psychology are not always successful. Take, for example, his attempt to sort out William's problematic sexuality. He begins with a sort of sexual family history that includes the following dubious assertion: "Mary Stuart II's grandfather Charles I had sexual relations with one man and later with one woman" (p. 24). Apart from its probable inaccuracy, it is hard to see what this statement can tell us about the Stadholder-King. This is followed by an account of the evolution, not of William's sexuality, but of Troost's views: "At first I was not convinced that William III had homosexual relationships" (p. 25). Troost changes his mind, not because of any solid evidence, which he agrees is not, so far, available, but because of the frequency of innuendo in political satire. More compelling is Troost's insight that William was not the cold fish he so often appears in contemporary reportage and later biography. Rather, he was an emotional man, as evidenced by his occasional displays of temper, forced by his precarious position in youth and subsequent need for diplomacy to master those emotions with an iron reserve. In this he was not unlike his uncle, Charles II, though the latter chose to mask his true feelings under layers of wit and good humor.

Troost's most important interpretive gambit is his attempt to correct what he sees as the pro-Williamite bias of "the American Baxter" and so many other biographers. In his preface, Troost, relying on secondhand reportage, attributes Baxter's Whiggish, proto-Churchillian view of William to Cold War attitudes and allegiances. Troost attempts a more balanced view, following Mark Thomson, Ragnhild Hatton, and Andrew Lossky, all of whom argue in one way or another against lionizing William III or demonizing Louis XIV. Troost emphasizes their similarities: each thought he was preordained to power by God, each thought he was being perfectly reasonable in his demands on the other, and each undertook aggressive military initiatives for what he claimed was defensive reasons. And each misunderstood the other: "I feel they were wrong. Both of them actually wanted peace, but the false image they had of each other led them to accuse each other of being an obstacle to peace" (p. 98). Troost believes that William III was unreasonably obsessive about the Sun King, maintaining a bellicose posture years after Louis XIV was ready for detente. As a consequence, Europe was subjected to needless tensions, the Dutch treasury was driven to the point of bankruptcy, and an opportunity for peace was lost. When it finally came at the end of the century, it came too late for either monarch to trust the other. In the meantime, William's obsession explains his seizure of the English throne and his subordinate treatment of Scotland, Ireland, and, eventually, even the Netherlands.

This is an interesting idea, and a useful corrective to an uncritical assumption that William was a farsighted visionary who saved Europe from absolutism and anticipated modern balance of power politics. But Troost carries his interpretation too far by drawing an equivalence between Louis and William. As he sometimes admits, William can hardly be blamed for distrusting the man who sought to wipe his country off the map in 1672. Troost's own presentation of Louis's motivations vis-a-vis the Netherlands is pretty consistent with the traditional view: he offers no compelling reasons for the War of Devolution, which started the Franco-Dutch crisis, and admits that "I have the impression that..., the winning of glory was sometimes more important than protecting the interests of France" (p. 54). Louis's assault on the Dutch Republic in 1672 was made via secret treaties and backroom deals. Subsequently, the Sun King cast his eye on the Spanish Crown and encouraged the Ottoman Empire to invade the Austrian Habsburgs, in 1675 Louis allied with rebels against that empire and its anointed sovereign, in 1683 and again in 1701 he invaded the Spanish Netherlands, in 1681-84 he invaded Lux-

embourg, in 1685 he seized Orange, and so on. Whatever his motivations, avowed or internal, one can hardly blame the Prince of Orange for seeing his opposite number as a threat to the peace and liberties of Europe. That William was not alone in this view is demonstrated by his successful persuasion of so many of his fellow rulers to join alliance after alliance.

Yet, according to Troost, William's "deep distrust, which had no basis in reality" culminated in what he regards as an overreaction to Louis's moves on the Spanish succession in 1700 (p. 295). In fact, it was not Louis's violation of the partition treaties per se nor his grandson's accession in Spain, but his ensuing actions that provoked the Stadholder-King: William, exasperated with imperial intransigence, initially recognized Philippe of Anjou as king of Spain and offered another partition. Louis's response was to seek a French legal opinion making possible Philippe's eventual accession in France; march into the Spanish Netherlands; impose anti-English and Dutch trade policies; and recognize the exiled son of James II as king of England, Scotland, and Ireland. No wonder the Stadholder-King was joined in his anti-Bourbon delusion by such astute and experienced observers as the Duke of Marlborough, Earl Godolphin, Queen Anne, a Tory Parliament, and most of the crowned heads of Europe!

The book is based mainly on Dutch archival and printed primary sources. One would like to know precisely what Troost examined in the British Library and one wonders why he found nothing to examine in the Pubic Record Office (State Papers?), the Bibliotheque Nationale, or the Archives des Affaires Étrangères. The translation is clear, but there remain some oddities of usage. For example, we are told: "Gaspar Fagel cannot be regarded as a favourite in the strict sense because he was not one of Orange's favourites" (p. 102). Occasionally, as noted above, Troost engages in pure first person speculation, usually prefaced by phrases like "I believe" and "I have the impression." Thus, "It appears probable to me that William III had homosexual relations but managed to keep them well hidden"; or "In spite of all the rumors, I believe Mary of Modena was indeed pregnant" (pp. 25, 189). Sometimes the book is needlessly tendentious: the statement "That failure to react to changes appears to be a typically English phenomenon, for at the beginning of the twenty-first century England is still reluctant to face the challenge of European unity" rings pretty hollow in light of the Dutch refusal to ratify the European Union constitution in 2005 (p. 237). Finally, there is one small error of fact in the chapter on the revolution: Daniel Finch, Earl of Nottingham, is listed as one of the signers of the invitation to invade. More positively, the book is illustrated by well-chosen maps and contemporary Dutch prints, many of which will be new to Anglophone readers.

Troost's book asks questions that should be asked of both the Stadholder-King and his historians. It presents a sound narrative from an interesting perspective. In the end, his interpretation of William III may be more appealing to Dutch scholars anxious to find a scapegoat for their nation's subsequent decline, than to those interested in the development of the European state system or Britain's rise to world power status.

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Citation: R. O. Bucholz. Review of Troost, Wouter. *William III, The Stadholder-King: A Political Biography.* H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. September, 2010.

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