

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences



Bruce P. Lenman. *Enlightenment and Change: Scotland 1746-1832*. Second Edition. The New History of Scotland Series. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. 280 pp. \$35.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-7486-2515-4.

Reviewed by Paul Wood (University of Victoria)

Published on H-Albion (March, 2011)

Commissioned by Jeffrey R. Wigelsworth



Scotsmen on the Make

Writing the review of this book has been like meeting an old friend whom you have not seen for many years. When you are first reacquainted, you notice that most of their distinctive physical characteristics and character traits are much the same, but the longer you are in their company you realize that the passage of time has brought with it a host of subtle changes. Moreover, such encounters can also lead to the recognition that you have altered in ways that you were not necessarily aware of. I initially began to work on Scottish matters in the late 1970s and, like many, I turned to T. C. Smout's brilliant survey, *A History of the Scottish People, 1560-1830* (1969), in order to learn the basic outlines of the history of early modern Scotland. In terms of introductory texts, the options were at that point limited and remained so until the Edward Arnold publishing house in London announced the series The New History of Scotland. The book under review appeared in its earliest instantiation in this series in 1981, then entitled *Integration, Enlightenment, and Industrialization: Scotland, 1746-1832*. That a series devoted to the history of Scotland was published by an English firm must have rankled with more than a few Scots, so it was no surprise when Edinburgh University Press took over the series in the 1990s. Bruce P. Lenman's book was soon thereafter republished as *Integration and Enlightenment: Scotland, 1746-1832* (1992).

When *Integration, Enlightenment, and Industrialization* first came out I promptly read it from cover to cover. Not having had occasion to use the book for some time,

reading my review copy of *Enlightenment and Change* has been an instructive experience. The new title is itself significant for it registers not only Scotland's move toward greater political independence but also the global preoccupation with the historical legacy of the intellectual and cultural moment called "the Scottish Enlightenment." Structurally, the text remains much the same as it was in 1981, apart from the addition of a new conclusion dealing specifically with the Enlightenment in Scotland. The body of the text is organized into nine chapters whose titles have changed but whose focus has not. Lenman opens by anatomizing the state of Scottish society in the wake of the Jacobite rising of 1745, and provides basic facts about population growth, urbanization, the reconfiguration of the agricultural and industrial sectors of the economy, and the hierarchical social order. The following chapters delineate the economic and cultural upsurge in Scotland that was so adroitly managed by Archibald Campbell, third Duke of Argyll, prior to his death in 1761; the relatively brief period of domestic prosperity in the 1760s when the Scots reaped the economic and cultural benefits of their successful pursuit of patronage and places in England and the American colonies; the divergent Scottish responses to the American crisis of the 1770s and the emergence of Henry Dundas as a significant political figure at Westminster; Dundas's containment of intellectual and social change through his ruthless manipulation of patronage; the consolidation and eventual self-destruction of Dundas's regime during the years of the French Revolution and its Napoleonic after-

math; the eventual destruction of the old social and political order by the Revolution in agriculture which transformed the Highlands and the rapid industrialization of the Lowland corridor between Glasgow and Edinburgh; the increasingly fractured nature of Scottish society as manifest in the simultaneous emergence of Sir Walter Scott's highly romanticized vision of Scottish identity, the rise of Evangelicalism, and the class consciousness born of the political radicalization of workers in Scotland's burgeoning industrial sector; and the shift of economic and political power in Scotland to the urban captains of industry and commerce whose Whig allies engineered the Reform Act of 1832. Put simply, for Lenman the course of Scottish history in the period 1746 to 1832 can be explained in terms of the fact that profound social and economic change, coupled with the political ineptitude displayed by the ruling elites in Scotland at the turn of the nineteenth century, destroyed the highly effective system of patronage and politics created by the Union of 1707 as well as the cultural formation that system had nurtured.

Line by line comparisons through each of the nine chapters reveal that in *Enlightenment and Change* the author has corrected minor infelicities; tightened his prose; clarified his argument at key points in the text; moved paragraphs between chapters; and incorporated new material, notably on a constellation of topics related to the place of women in eighteenth-century Scottish society and on Gaelic culture and the Highlands. The most extensively revised chapters are those on the Scots and the American Revolution, and the economic transformation of Scotland at the turn of the nineteenth century. Many of these revisions significantly improve the book, but the sniping at Marxist interpretations of Scottish history that have been added strike this reader as a throwback to debates that may have been relevant when the first edition was published but are no longer so. The brisk, no nonsense authorial tone can at times be annoying, and one or two comments in the interpolated material will likely rub some readers the wrong way (pp. 133, 171). Lenman has also jettisoned the bibliographical essay which was such a helpful feature of the first edition, and replaced it with a list of books for further reading organized topically rather than keyed to specific chapters. This particular change is not one for the better. Moreover, it is unfortunate that neither publisher nor author saw fit to provide maps like those found in David Allan's *Scotland in the Eighteenth Century: Union and Enlightenment* (2002), let alone illustrations like those in Smout's *History of the Scottish People*. The lack of maps and illustrations

detracts from the value of *Enlightenment and Change* as an introductory textbook, although the chronological table is a plus.

The new conclusion dealing with "the Enlightenment problem" and the legacy of Scotland's achievements during the long eighteenth century is a serious disappointment, for it does not display the same level of sophisticated analysis that informs the preceding chapters of the book (p. 244). Lenman here covers the same historiographical territory mapped out in Arthur Herman's deservedly popular *How the Scots Invented the Modern World* (2001), but with less success. That the conclusion is such a muddle is puzzling because in chapters 2-5 Lenman does a good job of presenting the key figures and ideas associated with the Scottish Enlightenment, and shows in a persuasive manner how the Enlightenment in Scotland was shaped by the patronage of Scotland's ruling elites, the integration of Scotland within the British Empire, and the economic changes that transformed Scottish society in the period 1746-1832. However, coming back to Lenman's discussion of the Scottish Enlightenment after having worked on the subject myself over the past thirty years I can now more readily identify minor factual mistakes and debatable matters of interpretation.

In terms of minor slips, inter alia, he misdates the publication of David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40); garbles the correct name for the Aberdeen Philosophical Society; completely overlooks the two major philosophical works Francis Hutcheson published in the 1720s; and ignores the fact that when the Royal Society of Edinburgh was founded in 1783 it was not an exclusively scientific body but an institution that embraced two branches of learning, the "Physical" and the "Literary," as the two classes of members were called (pp. 40, 79, 85, 113). Moreover, his characterization of the philosophical significance of Hume's *Treatise* does not give the reader an entirely accurate sense of what was at issue in the debates that ensued between Hume and his Scottish critics (pp. 40-41). For Lenman, Hume's *Treatise* was a "time bomb" that threatened to destroy the emphasis on reason central to the Scottish Enlightenment. But thinkers, like Thomas Reid, acknowledged that reason had its limits and were instead concerned to show that the instinctive beliefs on which human knowledge rested were God-given rather than arbitrary and inexplicable features of human nature, as Hume was taken to imply. That is, Hume and his Scottish critics shared important common ground philosophically, even though Lenman suggests otherwise. Furthermore, it seems to me

that his claim that books on “technical moral and political philosophy” by Scottish authors had only a limited impact on “the consciousness of the polite world in the 1750s” is not borne out by recent research by Mark R. M. Towsey (*Reading the Scottish Enlightenment: Books and Their Readers in Provincial Scotland, 1750-1820* [2010]) and others on books and their readers in the Atlantic world of the eighteenth century (pp. 42-43).

As for “the Enlightenment problem” posed in the new conclusion, Lenman’s discussion is compromised by the fact that he does not provide the reader with a clear definition of either the Enlightenment broadly conceived or the Scottish Enlightenment. Nor does his conclusion systematically address the intense debates over the nature of “the” Enlightenment in Europe or in Scotland that have erupted since 1981. Moreover, his explanation of the intellectual and cultural efflorescence that occurred in eighteenth-century Scotland needs to be supplemented in at least two ways. First, like most other Scottish historians, he seems little interested in the so-called consumer revolution that has attracted the attention of scholars working on England, France, and other regions of Europe in the period. Lenman states that “prosperity generated the revenues required for the enlightened patronage of the arts and learning” (p. 40). While this is true, it is only part of the story. For what the reader needs to be told is how changing patterns of consumption created a marketplace for the material and intellectual products of the Enlightenment. Nor should this marketplace be understood simply in terms of the history of the book, as Lenman seems to imply (pp. 243, 255). Notwithstanding the enormous contribution made by book historians to the social history of the Enlightenment in Scotland and elsewhere, we need to remember that the material culture of the Enlightenment in the Atlantic world included more than books, journals, and newspapers, since it also encompassed telescopes, barometers, orreries, ploughs, and steam engines. While the various print media were key to the circulation of the ideas we identify as enlightened, so too were scientific instruments and technological devices. We should beware of becoming too bookish

in our view of what the Enlightenment was about (for an overly bookish view of the Scottish Enlightenment see Richard B. Sher, *The Enlightenment & the Book: Scottish Authors & Their Publishers in Eighteenth-Century Britain, Ireland, & America* [2006]).

Secondly, there is no mention in Lenman’s book of the emergence of the public sphere in eighteenth-century Scotland. Whereas the notion of the public sphere was perhaps once regarded as somewhat arcane, it has of late entered into the historical mainstream, as can be seen, for example, in T. C. W. Blanning’s excellent survey, *The Culture of Power and the Power of Culture: Old Regime Europe, 1660-1789* (2002). The reasons for the gradual assimilation of the concept are varied, but one of its main attractions is that it provides a framework for thinking about the Enlightenment that integrates otherwise disparate economic, social, political, cultural, and intellectual elements into a coherent whole. And it does pick out a novel feature of the social landscape of early modern Europe which contributed in no small part to the genesis of the Enlightenment. It is therefore unfortunate that Lenman does not directly engage with the literature on the public sphere, because such an engagement would have allowed him to cover key aspects of the Scottish Enlightenment, like the rise of coffee houses and the spread of public lectures which he does not otherwise mention. If we accept that an introductory textbook ought to reflect the current state of the scholarship on which it draws, then it is a weakness of Lenman’s take on the social history of ideas that he is silent about the links between the Scottish Enlightenment, the public sphere, and the consumer revolution.

Even though the new conclusion to *Enlightenment and Change* is problematic for the reasons indicated, the book as a whole can nevertheless be recommended as a sensible guide to the period in which modern Scotland began to take shape. For all of its faults, it remains an illuminating read and I have greatly enjoyed reacquainting myself with Lenman’s deft portrait of an age he knows so well.

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

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

Citation: Paul Wood. Review of Lenman, Bruce P., *Enlightenment and Change: Scotland 1746-1832*. H-Albion, H-Net Reviews. March, 2011.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=31080>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.