

J. P. Sommerville. *Royalists and Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England 1603-1640*. London: Longman, 1999. xiii + 304 pp. \$31.60, paper, ISBN 978-0-582-32006-2.



Angus Stroud. *Stuart England*. London: Routledge, 1999. x + 220 pp. \$39.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-415-20653-2.



Reviewed by Michael Young

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Johann Sommerville's *Politics and Ideology in England 1603-1640* was an immensely important book when it was first published in 1986. It reappears now in a second edition with a new title, *Royalists and Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England 1603-1640*. Sommerville's main accomplishment was to restore ideological conflict to early Stuart politics. Revisionists (especially Conrad Russell and Kevin Sharpe) had succeeded in establishing the view that there was little ideological disagreement in England prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. In place of the old Whig view of constitutional conflict escalating through the early 1600s and culminating in the Civil War, revisionists painted a picture of harmony and consensus prevailing until war erupted out of the blue.

Revisionists admitted that there was squabbling in the reigns of James I and Charles I about issues like money and foreign policy, but they denied that this was principled conflict. This revisionist "Namierization" of early Stuart politics was wildly successful until Sommerville's first edition arrived.

As Sommerville bluntly stated, "The reality of ideological conflict is a blindingly obvious feature of early Stuart history" (p. 133). To support this contention, Sommerville marshalled evidence from the period that was every bit as encyclopedic as Russell's or Sharpe's. He restored the richness and variety of early Stuart political theory, and he challenged the revisionist interpretation of the Civil War as an unexpected event without

long-term, ideological causes. The revisionists have been on the defensive ever since. Glenn Burgess came to their aid with two books attempting to shore up the revisionist paradigm (*Absolute Monarchy and the Stuart Constitution*, published 1996; *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution : An Introduction to English Political Thought, 1603-1642*, published 1993).

Sommerville's second edition is intended as a rebuttal, though it begins with the six original chapters and conclusion only lightly edited. Gender-specific language has been changed throughout to eliminate the numerous references to "men" and "Englishmen" that still, unfortunately, typify so many British publications. An occasional sentence has been added, removed, or revised (pp. 4, 29, 152, 167) and a factual error corrected (pp. 134, 153). Endnotes have been converted to much more helpful footnotes. Both the footnotes and suggestions for further reading have been greatly expanded.

The real counter-attack in this new edition occurs near the end in 41 new pages entitled "Revisionism Revisited: A Retrospect." This new material should have been numbered and identified as a separate chapter, but instead it is listed in the table of contents along with the rest of the end matter in such a way that it could easily be missed by readers. Anyone who does manage to find this new material is in for a treat. It is a spirited polemic of the sort we have not seen for a while in early Stuart studies.

In Sommerville's judgment, the efforts to "revive revisionism have been unsuccessful, though valiant" (p. 226). He mocks the idea that "everyone rejected absolutism and lived happily together in ideological harmony until shortly before the Civil War" (p. 233). Revisionists claim that "harmony was briefly and unaccountably disrupted in the 1640s, when the English started killing each other" (p. 263). But this "happy harmony never existed" (p. 227). There were genuine absolutists in England who generated genuine opposition. Revi-

sionists deny this by adopting a definition of absolutism so narrow that it applies to only "a few eccentric and marginal clerics" (p. 249). The revisionist definition of absolutist is so narrow that it excludes James I and Jean Bodin. Indeed, given the revisionist definition, Charles I "might have illegally taxed, imprisoned, and even executed the entire population of the country, but he would still not have been an absolutist" (p. 230).

This is a learned, sparkling, and important book. But readers sympathetic to revisionism will not appreciate its tone of ridicule or believe their position has been characterized fairly. And readers of all sympathies might wish that Sommerville had argued with revisionism more broadly rather than indulging in a sometimes esoteric grudge-match with Glenn Burgess. Still, the oddest feature of this second edition is its new title: *Royalists and Patriots*. Perhaps this title was calculated to appeal to a wider audience, but it sets up the sort of simplistic dichotomy (like Anglicans and Puritans) that historians have learned to avoid. Indeed, nowhere in his book does Sommerville discuss the alleged patriots, whoever and whatever they were. There is only one citation in the index under "patriots." The page number is wrong, but it refers to a quote at the front of Sommerville's book taken from Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha*, in which Filmer himself observes that this distinction is "unnatural." A title that suggests the English were divided into two mutually exclusive camps of royalists and patriots appears grossly Whiggish and misrepresents the contents of a book that actually shows how complex English political thought was.

Despite its zippy new title, Sommerville's book remains a scholarly monograph that will appeal more to professors than students. Angus Stroud's *Stuart England* is a quite different book. It is a textbook written intentionally for the classroom. There is some confusion of chronology in the early chapters, and at times Stroud gets ahead of himself, mentioning an event that is not fully

explained until later. Overall, however, Stroud has produced a clearly written and tightly organized exposition of political events that shows he is familiar with current debates in the profession. The glossary and suggestions for further reading are sparse, but the book is enhanced by numerous charts, diagrams, documents, and excerpts from leading historians. Teachers should find the documents and historiographical excerpts especially useful. Stroud has done a good job of selecting, introducing, and asking provocative questions about these items.

Teachers of seventeenth-century Britain now have several textbooks to choose from. Unlike Derek Hirst's text, *England in Conflict*, which ends in 1660, Stroud's text runs all the way through the Glorious Revolution. It is more comparable to Barry Coward's *The Stuart Age*, Mark Kishlansky's *A Monarchy Transformed*, or David L. Smith's recently published *History of the Modern British Isles, 1603-1707*. All these texts are pitched to a higher audience and include more social, cultural, economic, and intellectual history. To varying degrees, they also embrace more of the British Isles. That leaves Stroud's book for teachers who want a shorter text, focusing on English political history, enhanced with useful excerpts from primary and secondary sources, and pitched at a somewhat lower level. It is an excellent book for that niche, narrow though that niche may be.

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