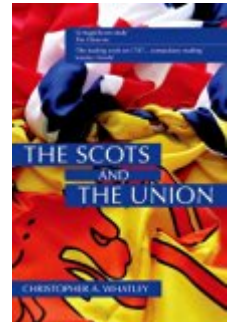


Christopher A. Whatley. *The Scots and the Union*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007. xv + 424 pp. + 16 pp. of plates \$30.00, paper, ISBN 978-0-7486-3470-5.



Reviewed by Alan H. Singer

Published on H-Nationalism (May, 2008)

One of Eric Hobsbawm's most memorable statements is that "no serious historian of nations and nationalism can be a committed political nationalist," because "nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so." [1] Christopher A. Whatley and his research assistant, Derek J. Patrick, support Hobsbawm's dictum in an expansive exploration of Scottish motives for uniting with England. Whatley argues that since the 1960s, historians under the sway of nationalism have concluded that the Union was the result of the nefarious machinations of politicians who supported and negotiated the 1707 treaty. He maintains that these scholars too quickly subscribe to Robert Burns's suggestion that a "parcel of rogues" sold their nation for "English gold." [2] Burns aside, Whatley believes that the historiography of the Union has been wrongly influenced by a single, questionable source, George Lockhart of Carnwath's *Memoirs* of 1714, who, in an appendix, charged that supporting politicians were bribed. Whatley concedes that some did receive money but only after announcing that they were already in favor of the Union. Whatley makes extensive use of a wide variety of sources, which

leads him to a very different conclusion as to why the treaty was ratified. Personal diaries, burgh and church archives, and most important, parliamentary voting records and speeches suggest that supporters of the Union were, in actuality, looking out for the long-term interests of Scotland. Pro-Unionists were convinced that a favorable treaty would institute free trade and protect Presbyterian Protestantism by creating a British alliance against the French Catholic and Jacobite threats. Ultimately, expanded manufacturing and trade, along with the political principles which emanated from the Glorious Revolution, were at the heart of the Union. With this volume, Whatley has achieved an important revision of what has been, for too long, an unsatisfactory, politically motivated account.

In the initial chapter, Whatley lays out the main issues that concern both the historiography of the Union and the primary reasons why he believes that supporting politicians were, in actuality, men of "principle" (p. 29) and "far-sighted" (p. 24). Whatley sees irony in the fact that those scholars who have "at least empathized with polit-

ical nationalism" are doing a disservice to their cause, because, by following Lockhart's lead, they have "nurtured an inferiorist interpretation of Scotland's history, and presented us with a picture of a nation whose leaders were scoundrels and which was helplessly manipulated by England in England's interest" (p. 25). We are reminded that Lockhart himself was a Jacobite, a group who Whatley correctly labels as "agents of an exiled dynasty" (p. 46). For Whatley, the supporting politicians were striving for the nation's betterment by applying persistence and principle. They were defined as "pragmatic, mainly lay Presbyterians" who were attracted to a "Britain united in defense of Protestantism against the threat of the absolutist monarchy of Catholic France" (p. 37). This is significant because it goes a long way in supporting Linda Colley's influential thesis that Protestantism was the glue that held Great Britain together. Whatley's proposal affords us with a convincing explanation as to why so many Scots, after the Union, were willing to join the British military and take part in its colonial administration. In this chapter, he also discusses the other main reason for the support for the Union: the promise of expanded trade. Although he expounds on this point in much greater detail later, Whatley argues that for many, free trade was actually the "sole advantage" of the treaty (p. 43). The longest article of the Union treaty was, in fact, concerned with the "communication of trade" with England and her colonies" (p. 43).

Next, Whatley focuses on the economic and political roots that led to the Union. Here, he addresses the state of Scotland in the decades before 1707 and its political consequences. He paints a picture of a nation that was suffering from economic underdevelopment and that was carefully watching the dynamic economies centered in London and Amsterdam with envy. Whatley also considers the connections that already existed before the formal Union. During the course of the seventeenth century, a growing number of Scots served in the English military. By the end of the

period, there was, in fact, a disproportionate number in the Royal Navy and Army. He further notes that the idea of a closer union was regularly considered by all English rulers in the seventeenth century. Whatley points to the fact that on the continent, the creation of composite monarchies contributed to the reduction of independent political units. An even closer relationship between Scotland and England would not have been out of the ordinary.

The economic lag and the already established connections with the English at the end of the seventeenth century were the driving forces in helping convince many that the Union was in their nation's best interest. Although he refrains from identifying a coherent, developing Scottish capitalist class, Whatley does see a group of landowners who were tearing down the remnants of feudalism in the countryside, and cosmopolitan elite in Glasgow and Edinburgh who saw benefits in joining with Europe's most dynamic economy. He discusses a revolution in building in the Lowlands, which focused on creating new country seats along classical lines. As an illustration of this phenomenon, Whatley asserts that "gun turrets became gazebos" (p. 105). Furthermore, Glasgow and Edinburgh became attractive places of "consumption, learning and civility, and leisure," with an increase in the number of people employed in the luxury trades (p. 112). Most significant, these economically progressive elites, according to Whatley, recognized a negative trade imbalance. The Scots had few goods for international sale, while at the same time they had "an almost insatiable and clearly growing demand" for imported finer goods (p. 124). This led them to believe that expanded native manufacturing and colonial enterprise was becoming necessary.

Whatley continues with a concentration on the connection of a variety of crises in the 1690s and their psychological impact on the Scottish people. He identifies four main problems faced in Scotland during the decade: harvest failures; the

economic difficulties accrued during the Nine Years' War, most specifically the loss of the French market; the establishment of protective tariffs in overseas countries; and the disaster of the Darien scheme. He emphasizes that while England faced similar problems, it was able to remain relatively stable. Scotland, unlike England, lacked the state apparatus to deal with the difficulties. The failure of the Darien scheme was, according to Whatley, the "final straw" (p. 166). All hope for a Scottish commercial empire was focused on the plan for a colony on the Isthmus of Panama. Whatley is reluctant to commit to an examination of the actual reasons that the project failed, but he does suggest that William III was unwilling to alienate the Spanish after the Treaty of Ryswick. This explains why he denied any material support for the faltering colonists. Whatley effectively ties those who were involved in the Darien scheme with pro-Unionists. For them, after the debacle and a short period in the opposition, Union was the only way to recover "the national interest" (pp. 168-169).

The chapters that follow examine the politics leading to the ratification of the Union treaty. Whatley argues that historians have too often neglected Anglo-Scottish relations between the collapse of Darien in 1699 and 1707. He believes that this has greatly contributed to the neglected economic explanation for why the politicians moved toward favoring the Union. The economic problems of the 1690s were not resolved, and the desire for free trade and other commercial concessions were advanced by the Scots as bargaining concessions. Whatley points to the Earl of Cromartie as one who saw Union as the "only remedy" for most of Scotland's problems (p. 198). Cromartie's biography superbly bolsters Whatley's main thesis. He was an advocate of Scottish enterprise abroad, including Darien. Cromartie was also involved with abortive plans for manufacturing glass and linen as well as for establishing a herring fishery. He conducted estate improvement in the north. This example of an aspiring al-

beit frustrated capitalist fits Whatley's pro-Unionist profile well.

Whatley ultimately demonstrates that in the period immediately leading up to the Union, the commissioners who negotiated the treaty drove a hard and principled bargain with the English. Firstly, the commissioners succeeded in playing on English fears caused by the fact that the Scots had not formally agreed to the Hanoverian Succession. In 1705, the English punished the Scots' tardiness by instituting the Aliens Act, which would have severely restricted cross-border trade. Scottish commissioners successfully convinced the English to drop the legislation before negotiations were to begin. Most significant, Scottish negotiators were able to preserve their legal and religious institutions. They secured the Scottish legal system, its General Assembly and the Convention of Royal Burghs. Perhaps more important, they managed to protect the primacy of the Presbyterian Church. Whatley also emphasizes that the commissioners achieved their crucial goal; they won access to "full freedom and intercourse of Trade and Navigation within the ... United Kingdom and Plantations thereunto belonging" (p. 253).

It should also be noted that in this book, Whatley certainly does not present an entire Scottish nation who willingly gave themselves over to the English. There were important interests who fought against the Union. The Jacobites maintained resistance because they obviously still held out for a Stuart restoration. "Extreme" Presbyterians, as Whatley coined the leaders of the Kirk and their supporters, opposed "any accommodation with an un-covenanted nation" (p. 274). There was also apparent opposition from the larger public. Popular hostility manifested itself in the form of noisy protests, but Whatley convincingly suggests that this was part of an "orchestrated campaign by the country party" (p. 281). Whatley does concede that in the decades following the Union, popular anger became much more serious. Indeed, at

times, such as during the protests against the Malt Tax of 1725, Scotland had become "virtually un-governable" (p. 345). Whatley presents a vivid illustration of a post-Union class war by stating "in the case of the Galloway revolt, cause and effect were linked directly: with the market in England for black cattle now secured, landowners were anxious to increase their stocks and sales, with little regard for the people below" (p. 346).

The timing of the publication of this book is fascinating. Not only does it coincide with the tercentenary of the Act of Union, but it also comes at a time when Scottish nationalism seems to have reached its apogee. The Scottish National Party has become the largest political party in the recently devolved parliament in Edinburgh and prime minister, Gordon Brown, a native of Scotland, has been vigorously promoting the concept of "Britishness" on both sides of the border. Recent political events suggest that Whatley's work will become extremely contentious. This volume, however, should not be considered as polemic. Whatley's conclusions are derived from meticulous scholarship and should reset the historiography of Scotland and Great Britain regardless of its political implications.

Notes

[1]. Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12.

[2]. Robert Burns, "Such a Parcel of Rogues in a Nation" (1791).

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Citation: Alan H. Singer. Review of Whatley, Christopher A. *The Scots and the Union*. H-Nationalism, H-Net Reviews. May, 2008.

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