

David Worthington. *British and Irish Experiences and Impressions of Central Europe, c. 1560–1688*.

Politics and Culture in Europe, 1650–1750. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012. xxii + 232 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7546-6342-3.

Traditionally, students of British and Irish Continental connections in the early modern period have observed a rather rigid categorization. Merchants, soldiers, clerics, students, intellectuals, and vagabonds have usually been isolated into distinct groups, and further sub-divided according to national origins in the British Isles. This arrangement has yielded some satisfactory results. However, one cannot help forming the impression that these research-driven divisions were somewhat artificial and that the travelers and migrants, despite their social, cultural, religious, ideological, and geographical differences probably held more in common than imposed research categories pretended. Further, one suspects that the experience of travel, with the social, economic, and cultural displacement it inevitably entailed, probably obliged travellers to make the most of their common British origins, whenever that proved convenient.

Methodologically, this book takes a holistic view of relations between the British Isles and Central Europe in the period from 1560 to 1688. The author is unusually sensitive to the cultural and linguistic complexities of the jurisdictions involved, of the archives in question and of the relevant historiographies. He uses the experience of intellectual and geographical displacement as a hermeneutical device to map political and cultural changes in Central Europe. Drawing on travelers' and migrants' accounts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, he

throws into relief both the detail of political change in Poland-Lithuania, for instance, and the role of the British Isles in those changes. However marginal that role might have been, the real object of this book is to reintegrate the histories of the sending and receiving jurisdictions.

Crucial to this is the notion of the *Corpus Christianum*, which Worthington introduces in chapter two and applies punctually throughout. The uninitiated may find the centrality of this notion somewhat surprising, especially in a historiographical context so dominated by confessionalisation, monarchical centralization, and state building. Worthington argues his case well and his account, in this context, of the Stuart monarchy's diplomatic overtures to the Emperor, against the backdrop of Anglo-French and Anglo-Spanish rivalries, is useful. The author draws deftly on the activities and accounts of individuals like Nicholas Donnellan, Theobald Taaffe, and, of course, the un-ignorable Leslie network. The theme of the *Corpus Christianum* is continued in chapter three and is supplemented by examples of military entrepreneurship (86ff). Whether the sources are drawn from the Scots in Polish service, or the English and Irish in imperial service, family connections are at the core of the traveler and migrant experiences. The Gordons, Walshes, Taaffes, and Leslies, to name only the best-known, are examples of the power of family connections in maintaining communities abroad and facilitating their eventual integration into host societies.

In chapters four and five Worthington looks at the activities and accounts of those whom Laurence Brockliss calls "the curious" (127). British frequentation of universities in the region is a striking feature, across the confessional divide(s). Indeed, theology and controversy, although important, did not enjoy a monopoly and the author is careful to present the full range of the activities and contributions of the curious English, Scots, and Irish, including a delightful selection of mavericks (135–42). The final chapter concentrates on the extraordinary experience of the Irish Franciscans in Prague. However, this is carefully balanced by informative sections on the Jesuits and the Benedictines.

Given its geographical range, its archival complexity, and its thematic inclusiveness, the book frustrates somewhat by its rather staccato style, as the author skips rapidly from one account to another. Obviously he could not do all the archives justice, particularly in light of the intimidating linguistic range involved. Quantitative historians will regret the absence of statistics. The present reviewer would have appreciated something more on the material culture of the travelers and their hosts. These are minor quibbles. The book rests on a fresh and challenging methodology. It offers a rich range of individuals and texts, most of which are poorly known. Finally it reminds historians that early modern Europeans held much more in common than traditional historiographies have led us to believe.

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