

Mercenaries, Merchants and Monks - a British Miscellany in Central Europe.

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A Review of

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

(Ashgate Press, 2012), ISBN 978-0-7546-6342-3, Hardback, xxii+232pp; £74

This volume is a welcome addition to recent work by British and Irish scholars on migration and support networks in Europe. In his introduction David Worthington states that his objective is to offer a transnational perspective on, what he describes as, ‘the now established New British and Irish histories’ on central Europe and crucially ‘the relationships between and amongst the four national groups of the archipelago within this specific expatriate setting’. His point is that scant attention has been paid to central as opposed to western and northern Europe in showing the transnational nature of contact with visitors from the British Isles.

The book is clearly structured starting with useful definitions of geographical areas helping to clarify, what the author admits is, the amorphous concept of ‘central Europe’. It then provides the reader with the place names given by different nationalities to the same cities and towns; a necessary aid to identifying the locations of the events being described. There follow five thematic chapters covering ‘Commentators and comparisons’; ‘Court and crown’; ‘Cavaliers and Christendom’; ‘Calvinists, “the curious” and commerce’; ‘Catholic colleges and clergy’.

The book ends with a short conclusion, which is part summary and part epilogue, and an extensive bibliography and index. Worthington has chosen to examine the period of the Elizabethan and early Stuart reigns but recognises the arbitrariness of this selection.

Frequently he discusses British and Irish involvement in central European affairs prior to and following his cut off dates beginning with the Irish monastic movement of the sixth century onwards and ending in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Equally the geographical area

of his discussion is occasionally extended to accommodate the extended networks and itinerant habits of many of his protagonists.

With such a large range in time and geography it is inevitable that the book is selective in the degree to which issues are examined. Some subjects have been dealt with more fully than others: for example the crown and court chapter deals extensively with ambassadorial contacts and provides a background to explain the interplay of politics between the courts particularly during the Thirty Years War. It is in dealing with this subject that Worthington's case for transnational perspectives is best argued. However, in the significant section on the Scottish Benedictine monasteries in Southern Germany he concentrates almost exclusively on the obsession of successive abbots with the 'recovery' of the medieval *Schottenstift* in Vienna. Such a variation in approach clearly has its limitations but Worthington's achievement is to cover a great deal of ground while sticking effectively to the remit he set himself which is no mean achievement given the paucity of known evidence describing transnational networks formed by British and Irish nationals in central Europe. He has overcome this deficiency by the eclectic nature of his sources which is perhaps the book's greatest strength. Their value is evident from the first chapter on early participants in the 'grand tour'. His sources range from contemporary publications to extracts from the diaries and journals of various travellers derived from archives in Poland, the Czech Republic and elsewhere on continental Europe as well as Britain and Ireland. Equally, later printed material referenced has been drawn from a wide range of European historiographies and languages. By describing Europeans' views of early tourists as well as giving the travellers' own accounts of the host countries Worthington produces a fresh multi-faceted perspective on this important area of contact. He has taken a similar approach on 'Cavaliers and Christendom' where he discusses the British and Irish participation in military affairs, returning to the theme of the Thirty Years War, and helps the reader gain an insight into the complex

involvement of mercenaries from the British Isles, illustrating how the Scots, Irish and English could act separately for the same and opposing sides as well as occasionally joining forces.

Because of the significant number of people involved and the long duration of their contact one of the most important themes which the book tackles is that of 'Catholic colleges and clergy'. The anti-Catholic laws at home made it necessary for Catholics to set up national colleges abroad to educate young men and train priests. Worthington gives an effective if incomplete account of this complex facet of British and Irish expatriate life. He is forced to concentrate on the work of the regular orders of clergy to the exclusion of secular priests who had no presence in central Europe. The Society of Jesus had almost complete control of higher education, particularly in the Holy Roman Empire. Other teaching orders such as the Benedictines struggled to secure a place in education against Jesuit opposition but the book's emphasis on patterns in central Europe inhibits a fuller discussion of the home nations' relationships with each other and their host communities in this matter. These colleges and clergy belonged to strong networks spread throughout Catholic Europe. Exclusion of dealings with Rome, France and Spain in particular creates an imbalance in understanding the relationships of the communities with each other and their host countries in central Europe. However, this omission does not detract from Worthington's analysis but does strengthen his call for further research.

The author is to be congratulated on this important contribution to an area of British and Irish history which hitherto has been covered only either in partial studies or by works covering broader areas of continental history. Its strength lies in its ability to provide readers new to this subject with an excellent overview and those more experienced with guidance on further reading through its extensive bibliography. In addition to the author's obvious scholarship, his writing style and thematic approach has resulted in a book which is a more enjoyable read

than many academic publications and should ensure its appeal to the general reader.

Unfortunately, its hefty price tag will militate against this. (Website purchase and an e-book format are available at reduced prices.)