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Politics and War in the Three Stuart Kingdoms, 1637–49

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For my father

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Preface and Acknowledgements

My main purpose in this book is to provide an integrated, or holistic, narrative of events in the three Stuart kingdoms from the outbreak of the Covenanter rebellion to the execution of Charles I. As anyone familiar with recent trends in Stuart historiography will appreciate, my approach is in keeping with the current vogue for treating the Atlantic Archipelago (a convenient if rather grandiose phrase for Britain and Ireland) as the most useful framework for understanding the histories of its component peoples – a body of work known as the ‘New British History’. An integrated analysis seems especially applicable to the closely intertwined histories of the Stuart kingdoms during the 1640s. It may not be able to answer all the questions that we have traditionally asked of the period, but it will certainly provide a new and revealing layer of interpretation to nation-centred histories, and this is surely to be welcomed.

The focus and framework of this book derive simply from the difficulty I encountered trying to make sense of the English Civil War without reference to the conflicts in Scotland and Ireland, and vice versa. There is ample evidence that the relationship between the kingdoms during the 1640s had a major bearing upon the pattern of events in all three. Admittedly, it would be hard to sustain this argument with regard to the kingdoms’ social structures and economies, which appear to have had relatively little impact upon each other. However, it can be sustained in terms of high politics and military affairs – the fields in which most of the headline events of the 1640s occurred. Politics and war constituted

the essential dynamic of 'British' history during the mid-seventeenth century, and must take centre stage in any integrated narrative of the period.

Several other consequences, besides a bias towards political history, flow from taking a holistic approach – the most obvious of which is a concentration on developments in England at the expense of those in Scotland and Ireland. The charge of Anglocentrism is perhaps the most heinous in New British History, and yet it is difficult to see how an integrated account can fail to be anything but Anglocentric. The image favoured by Conrad Russell to illustrate the way the three kingdoms interacted in the mid-seventeenth century is that of billiard balls colliding.¹ But as John Adamson has recently reminded us, in international relations, as in nature, not all balls are of equal size or collide with equal impact.² England was not only the seat of Charles's imperial government, it was also much the most powerful of the three kingdoms. It was inevitable, therefore, that England would exert a greater influence over Scotland and Ireland than the other way round.

To the charge of Anglocentrism can be added that of privileging the histories of ruling elites over those of groups not engaged in the pursuit or exercise of power and removed from the centres of government. This admission is really just another way of saying that a holistic approach favours the political and military over the social and economic; and clearly the exponents of 'British' history must be particularly on their guard against the assumption that political events can be understood independently of the social, economic, and cultural contexts in which they occurred. That said, it is hard to deny that the social and economic structures of all three kingdoms allowed small groups of men to exercise a disproportionately large influence over the lives of their respective communities. Indeed, one of my aims in this book has been to explore how ruling groups in each kingdom, having courted the common people and involved them in the political process to an unprecedented degree in the period 1637–42, were then able to shut up shop and impose their will in harsher and more peremptory fashion than the supposedly tyrannical Charles I would ever have dreamed possible.

The case for focusing on the powerful rather than the powerless becomes stronger still in light of the imbalances between the scholarly canon on each kingdom. Thanks to recent work by Tadhg Ó hAnnracháin, Allan Macinnes, Micheál Ó Siochrú, and John Young, we now have a clearer picture of the structure of high politics in Scotland and Ireland during the 1640s than we possess for Westminster, and certainly for the royalist headquarters in Oxford. As Adamson has rightly

observed, 'it is this world of the "centre" [and he is referring here to Westminster] which currently appears to be the most puzzling and confused: how do the varying monograph accounts of the moments of climacteric – 1642, 1645–7, 1648–9 – relate to one another? How are their differing analyses of the workings of politics during the period to be reconciled?'³ These are some of the questions that this book hopes to address.

Our familiarity with the political landscape at the centres of English power in the 1640s also suffers by comparison with our knowledge of the provincial dimension to the Civil War. Recent studies by John Morrill, Martyn Bennett, and a host of local historians have given us a good understanding of how the English localities experienced and responded to war and the general unpleasantness that accompanied it. As for Scotland and Ireland, much more research is needed on the local impact of the upheavals there before we can attempt an authoritative history of the Stuart peoples (as distinct from the Stuart kingdoms) in the mid-seventeenth century. But this is a huge task in itself, and not one that I feel qualified to undertake.

My final excuses relate to the book's somewhat idiosyncratic time-frame. Perhaps the most logical period for a holistic account to address is that covered by the 'wars of the three kingdoms', or roughly 1637–53. My reason for cutting the story short at the regicide is partly practical – Ronald Hutton's contribution to this series, *The British Republic*, takes up the running from 1649 – but also because I feel that there was a significant change in political direction in all three kingdoms in the six months from September 1648. A starting date of 1637 and the outbreak of the Covenanter rebellion is more readily comprehensible, although in fact the opening chapter takes all of early Stuart history in its stride. It covers some of the ground explored by Ann Hughes's preceding volume in the series, *The Causes of the English Civil War*, but with greater emphasis on developments in Scotland and Ireland.

My debts to colleagues and friends in writing this book are numerous. I am grateful to John Adamson, Lloyd Bowen, Ian Gentles, Sean Kelsey, Patrick Little, John Morrill, Jason Peacey, Stephen Roberts, David Smith, and Arthur Williamson for reading and commenting on part or all of the first draft; to my colleagues on the 1640–60 section at the History of Parliament Trust for helping me to make sense of the 1640s; and to directors of the History, past and present, for having given me the opportunity to make a living from an obsession. My thanks are also due to Robert Armstrong, Phil Baker, Alexia Grosjean, Ann Hughes, Chris Kyle,

Keith Lindley, Allan Macinnes, Steve Murdoch, Elliot Vernon, Scott Wheeler, and John Young for making free with their advice, research, and unpublished work. I am especially indebted to John Adamson for allowing me to read chapters from his forthcoming book *The Noble Revolt* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson). On those occasions where I cite his work but provide no endnote, it is to this book I am referring. On a more personal note, I would like to thank Steve Parks for his unfailing generosity; Claire Cross for having inspired me as an undergraduate; and Andrew and Frances for their help with the maps. Among those of my friends not vitally interested in Stuart history but who had to put up with this book anyway, I am particularly grateful to Monique Morris, Michael Orme, Yasmin Rafiq, Gizelle Rahman, James Smith, and Alison and John Tyzack. Finally, I would like to thank my father, to whom this book is dedicated, for having got me this far.

Map 1 England and Wales, Autumn 1643 (adapted from Martyn Bennett, *The English Civil War*, London: Longman, 1995, p. 48).

Map 2 Scotland (adapted from David L. Smith, *A History of the Modern British Isles, 1603–1707*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1998, p. 13).

Map 3 Ireland, Summer 1643 (adapted from Martyn Bennett, *The Civil Wars in Britain and Ireland, 1638–1651* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).