
*Conflict, Commerce and Franco-Scottish Relations* offers insight into early modern mercantile networks from the perspective of individuals at the forefront of the exchange during the long seventeenth century. Previous assumptions regarding the commercial relationship between France and Scotland after 1560 are dismantled by Talbott’s convincing use of source material and broad socioeconomic methodology. She argues that Franco-Scottish trade continued despite government treaties, commercial legislation, and acts of war. Though her work focuses on the seventeenth century, her arguments imply that the Franco-Scottish association retained its strength long after 1713. Scholars will welcome this book as a helpful addition to the fields of local trading communities and Scotland’s contributions to overseas commercial networks.

This book is divided into two parts, with a final chapter addressing economic activities within the broader context of the New British History. Part I is thematic and introduces the reader to the Franco-Scottish political and commercial relationships. In chapters one through three, Talbott stresses merchant agency by elevating the commercial activities of individuals and highlighting the nuances of local and regional trade disparities. To do so, she elaborates upon the methodology utilized in traditional economic histories that focus on trade between nations, quantitative analysis, and official government action. While not ignoring the merits of macro-level assessments, Talbott builds upon this framework with a qualitative and social approach utilizing merchants’ personal records. Specifically, she investigates the private records of John Clerk, David Wedderburne, and Archibald Hamilton who are purported to be representative of “non-governmentally controlled commercial networks” (p. 36). Putting a face on those involved in
overseas trade demonstrates the common desire to uphold Franco-
Scottish commercial links despite government legislation to the
contrary.

Part II expands upon the themes established in Part I through an exploration of seventeenth-century warfare. Talbott argues against the notion that a General Crisis had a damaging impact on international commercial exchange, particularly between France and Scotland. Chapters four through six outline the strength of merchant communities and the consistencies in trading activities through an examination of specific conflicts. The chapters are chronological and gradually expand geographically, beginning first with the British Civil Wars and Interregnum and then ending with the War of Spanish Succession. Each chapter expounds similar hindrances to trade, including privateering, embargoes, and financial pressures. Merchants evaded government obstacles by prioritizing business relationships over national and religious loyalties. Adapting to the political environment meant using ships from neutral Scandinavian kingdoms and disbursing goods from approved ports. Talbott illustrates commercial consistencies during periods of strife by examining local port records and personal accounts. For example, she correlates a decrease in French ships and an increase in ships from the Low Countries at Leith as evidence of altered, but not declining, commercial activities.

Chapter seven is the culmination of Talbott’s study. It examines regional patterns of trade after 1688. Similar to previous chapters, Talbott dismisses previous scholarly works that utilize national politics to explain the supposed decline of Franco-British commerce. Instead, she emphasizes the independence of each kingdom beyond English governmental constraints by exploring the flourishing trade of the Scots in Bordeaux and Irish in Nantes. Using parish and family records, she demonstrates the intricacies of business, social links, and trade variations at the local level. England was a senior partner in British commercial ventures, but a partner nonetheless.

This book is a persuasive account of the Franco-Scottish commercial relationship during the seventeenth century. The author successfully expands the scope of the bi-lateral approach to economic history with a thorough discussion of regional and
personal materials. This book gives the reader an in-depth understanding of an early modern commercial relationship between the two kingdoms. The evidence Talbott utilizes demonstrates that these commercial bonds were not necessarily limited to France and Scotland, but were more indicative of a much broader informal network. Devoting her attention primarily to France and Scotland gives the reader insight into their commercial relationship, but only provides a partial picture of the nature of commercial activities. The author also assumes a certain understanding of a “network” without providing an explicit definition. Including the theoretical and historiographical background of this concept, and perhaps a visual example from one of the book’s principle merchants, would have been helpful. Overall, this book provides an invaluable addition on the bookshelf of any scholar interested in early modern Scottish social and commercial developments.

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