REVIEW

Alexander D. Campbell. *The Life and Works of Robert Baillie (1602-1662): Politics, Religion and Record-Keeping in the British Civil Wars*. St. Andrews Studies in Scottish History. Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2017. Pp. 259. ISBN: 978-1-78327-184-9. USD \$120.00.

Who was Robert Baillie? Was he the moderate, even reluctant, Covenanter revealed in his voluminous private correspondence, who claimed to love bishops and constantly urged moderation on his fellow Covenanters? Was he the vitriolic polemicist whose printed propaganda was a major contributor to the downfall of Archbishop Laud in 1640? Was he the university theologian who published learned treatises on reformed theology during his time at Glasgow University? Was he the humble and conscientious country minister of Kilwinning who refused to leave for greener pastures in Edinburgh because it would break the hearts of his parishioners? Indeed, Baillie is such a cypher that in the decades after his death Scots on both sides of the periodic religious divides that erupted in Scotland claimed him as their own. Thomas Ruddiman, an Episcopalian, claimed in 1747 that Baillie was the only Covenanter conscientious enough not to get caught up in the wave of radical anti-episcopal sentiment that became prevalent after the Glasgow Assembly of 1638. A century later, during the Disruption, secessionist minister Thomas M'Crie saw Baillie as a fellow traveler, praising the recent publication of Baillie's *Letters and Journals* by David Laing as a potential "antidote" to the "numerous misrepresentations" coming from "Jacobite and deeply prejudiced pens" (226).

Baillie, of course, was all of these things, but the question remains – how did a country minister, who was indifferent to the Perth Articles, had no particular opposition to bishops, and disapproved of resistance theories espoused by Buchanan and the like become a leading Covenanter? In this important monograph Alexander Campbell argues that Baillie’s main objective in siding with the Covenanters was creating “peace and unity” in the Scottish church. He despised the innovations brought in by Charles I and William Laud and hoped to create a church that could unify Scotland (and eventually England) in Calvinist orthodoxy, one that would eliminate the need for conventicles. Campbell’s main objective is to provide a more nuanced portrait of Baillie, one that reveals him to be a complex and “dynamic” thinker whose intellectual milieu went beyond the disruptions and disputes taking place in Britain during the tumultuous 1640s and 1650s, and who was connected to the latest ideas from abroad. Baillie, Campbell argues, reveals that Covenanting was a big tent movement, where a moderate voice like Baillie’s could have influence.

This is an ambitious work that takes on topics ranging from intellectual life in pre-Enlightenment Scotland, the historiography of the Covenanting period, and the very nature of historical biography writing itself. It is organized thematically, with chapters covering Baillie’s intellectual development, and his ideas on the power of monarchy, Presbyterianism, reformed theology, the Five Articles of Perth and other contemporary ecclesiastical controversies, biblical exegesis, and his extensive archives and personal writings. Throughout the book, Campbell provides a close reading and analysis of Baillie’s writings and compares and contrasts them with contemporary thinkers in both England and Scotland as well as the European Continent.

This book sheds light on a significant figure of the Covenanting period, one who left an extensive archive of letters and papers for historians to analyze. Indeed, it is entirely possible that this archive has caused historians to attribute influence to him that is out of proportion to what it actually was, something that could have been more clearly addressed in the book. However, it is a point well taken that while Baillie is often a prominent feature of histories of the Covenanting period due to his large surviving archive, not much is known about his life. This book certainly rectifies that problem as it is deeply researched, well written, and thorough, yet Baillie remains a somewhat elusive figure. As Campbell shows, writing a historical biography of an early modern is not without its challenges, and the “real” Baillie might be impossible to fully know.

While the book is a deep-dive into Baillie’s mind, it is also more than that – it is an important contribution to the historiography of the Covenanting period and it provides a deeper understanding of Scottish theology in the seventeenth century. Scholars of the Covenanting period will find the book useful, as will anyone interested in the challenges of writing biographies of early modern figures.

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