Black on Mackillop and Murdoch, 'Military Governors and Imperial Frontiers, c. 1600-1800: A Study of Scotland and Empires'

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War and Empires: Scottish Contributions

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All too many collections of essays are disjointed and of variable quality. It is therefore a particular pleasure to note that this volume offers high-quality work organized around the coherent theme outlined in the title. The editors between them have already made a major contribution to early-modern Scottish history and this collection should be seen as building on their works. Steve Murdoch, Research Fellow at the Research Institute of Irish and Scottish Studies at the University of Aberdeen, has published Britain, Denmark-Norway and the House of Stuart, 1603-1660: A Diplomatic and Military Analysis (2000), edited Scotland and the Thirty Years' War, 1618-1648 (2001), and co-edited with Mackillop Fighting for Identity: Scottish Military Experience, c. 1550-1900 (2002).[1] A. Mackillop, lecturer in history at Aberdeen, has also written "More fruitful than the Soil": Army, Empire and the Scottish Highlands, 1715-1815 (2001). This collection bridges their geographical and chronological interests by looking for continuities between the politico-military experience of Scots as governors in Europe--for the crowns of Denmark, Sweden, and Russia--with their role as servants of the British crown. From this perspective, the Union of the English and Scottish crowns and, later, Parliaments, and, even more, the eighteenth-century expansion of the British empire, emerge anew in a familiar light, as a source of great opportunity for able Scots. As emerges clearly, however, Scots within the British empire were not a monolithic ethnic block endowed with exactly the same attitudes towards any given issue. Instead, they frequently clashed with each other over policy. These clashes reflected not only different backgrounds and related attitudes, not least on religious topics, but also the dynamic role of the peripheries in the formulation of imperial rule.

The extent to which governors tended to be military men and supportive of the army's role as the institution best suited for regulating the empire's growing diversity ensured that one dimension of the Scottish input into British imperial rule was a suspicion of assemblies and civilian authority. The patronage structures and networking, especially among fellow-Scots, that repeatedly emerge as important in the individual chapters were in large part military in character. This was particularly true of Highlanders. Lowlanders, in contrast, tended to achieve positions of prominence in the civil machinery of the empire. Mackillop's essay on Sir Archibald Campbell of Inverneil, Governor of the Madras Presidency from 1785 until 1789, underlines the paternalistic ethos stemming from
landownership and military background, and sees this as a distinctive Scottish contribution to the character of British empire.

James Glen's attitudes as Governor of South Carolina are set in the context of the Scottish Lowland experience of interaction with Scottish Highland Gaelic culture over the course of the first half of the eighteenth century. Robert Dinwiddie as Governor of Virginia is the topic of another chapter. Douglas Hamilton in his chapter on Robert Melville as Governor of Dominica, Grenada, St. Vincent, and Tobago from 1763 until 1771 argues that Melville's approach was characterized by a mix of Presbyterian upbringing, enlightened education, military service, and metropolitan influence. However, Melville's intransigently Presbyterian attitude to "popery" is shown to have exacerbated tensions.

British imperial expansion also ensured that opportunities elsewhere were less important. Thus, from the 1660s the day of the Scottish governor in Denmark-Norway was over. Earlier, as Alexia Grosjean shows, the locations of their deployment were highly indicative of their value to the Swedish state. Jacobites, however, needed to look to Continental Europe, and the book includes an effective chapter on Field Marshal James Keith in Russian service in the Ukraine and Finland.

Note


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