



*The King Over the Water:
A Complete
History of the Jacobites*

Desmond Seward

Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2019

Review by: Georgia Vullings



The King Over the Water: A Complete History of the Jacobites. By Desmond Seward. Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2019. ISBN 978-1-78027-606-9. xxvi + 406 pp. £25.

Desmond Seward's latest monograph contributes a comprehensive history of the Jacobites and Jacobitism to an already replete field. It is the latest of Seward's publications on a range of historical themes, from medieval Kings and Queens to Napoleon. Covering the period from the accession of James VII & II in 1685 to the death of his last grandson, Cardinal Henry, Duke of York (or Henry IX to Jacobites) in 1807, *The King Over the Water* provides a modern chronological telling of support for the exiled Stuarts in the long eighteenth century. Dealing with an ever popular historical subject, a publication of this nature is overdue. While it cannot claim to make any significant contribution to the scholarship of the field, for an interested reader new to the history of the Jacobites it is an invaluable starting point. Bringing together an extensive bibliography of primary sources and existing Jacobite scholarship, Seward's offering is well researched, and being aimed at the general reader, it is certainly entertaining, easy to follow, and enlivens the history. Nicely illustrated with maps, portraits, and a beautifully coloured image of the meeting of James VII & II and Louis XIV at Versailles as the cover, this is also an attractive book.

The King Over the Water is an ambitious piece of research and writing that aims to present a "complete" history of Jacobitism. It does succeed in covering a full chronology, and largely manages to include experiences and activities of Jacobites in England, Scotland, and Ireland with equal weight. The narrative largely focuses on the activities surrounding Jacobite plots, and the key individuals involved in them. The first part of the book presents a nuanced explanation of the reasons for William of Orange's invasion, and the eventual exile of James and his court. It addresses the religious, parliamentary, and familial politics that brought about the downfall of James, placing them within a longer historical context. This is an important contribution to the information available to the general reader that explains the origins of Jacobitism, as well as the reasons for supporting the Jacobite claim. The narrative also goes towards redressing the imbalance in popular understanding of Jacobitism by giving the 1745 rising equal weight amongst the others, and discussing how support for the exiled Stuarts survived, and was acted upon, until 1759 at least. For those inclined towards military history, this book makes a detailed account of the events and strategies of the battles of the Jacobite risings, which are accompanied by maps for comprehension.

In its claim to 'completeness,' Seward's work does provide the reader with a good understanding of Jacobitism as a continuously active movement beyond certain well known flashpoints: 1688, 1715, and 1745 in particular. It

addresses the motives for support for the Stuarts across the century, showing how these changed over the period, depending on broader contexts such as the politics of the Hanoverian regime, and the priorities, whether political, religious, or economic, of individuals. Seward also discusses the European political dimension to support for the Stuarts from other nations such as Sweden and France. Some examples of a popular Jacobitism are presented through printed Jacobite ballads; for the most part, however, Seward's discussion concerns the Jacobitism of elite individuals. Overall, from this text the reader gains an understanding not only of the history of significant events in the Jacobite risings and how the plots came about, but also the underlying reasons as to why people were willing to risk their life in opposing first William III and then the early Georgian monarchies. Taking the chronology, briefly, up to the death of Cardinal Henry, Duke of York, and beyond to nineteenth-century Jacobite revival emphasises that the story of Jacobitism did not end abruptly with Culloden in 1746, and more satisfactorily completes the history of the exiled Stuart dynasty.

For those interested in the exiled Stuarts themselves, there is contextual detail of the family and their court, especially with reference to the marriage of James Francis Edward Stuart (James VIII & III to his supporters) to Princess Maria Clementina Sobieska in 1719, the births of Princes Charles and Henry, and the court of Charles Edward Stuart from 1766. The court in exile is also mentioned in the context of British noblemen who visited the exiled Stuarts in person and were persuaded to return home with plots for another rising. Through this narrative the reader can glean some brief idea of what the Stuart courts in exile were like, and the court's role in achieving a restoration. More could have been made, however, of recent scholarship on the exiled court itself, such as Edward Corp's *The Stuarts in Italy, 1719-1766* (2011).

The chronological structure of the book—although certainly the most sensible choice for a text of this size and with the intended audience in mind—does detract from some of the broader themes of Jacobitism. It excludes Jacobites who do not fit easily into a chronological narrative shaped by certain events: women and the everyday politics of Jacobitism in particular are missing from the history. There is also little room for work on Jacobites living in exile on the continent. Incorporation here of work on the material culture of Jacobitism, such as Murray Pittock's *Material Culture and Sedition, 1688-1760* (2013), would have provided the reader with an introduction to the social aspects of Jacobitism, and support for the Stuarts beyond parliamentary and military endeavours. The more discerning reader might also take issue with the sparsity of reference to sources of information in places, and at times the narrative within chapters is not tied together as smoothly as could be

hoped. However, in a text intended to introduce the general reader to the Jacobite story, these faults may be forgiven.

Overall, Seward's *The King Over the Water* certainly fills a gap for the general readership of Jacobite history. Engagingly written, this ambitious text is a valuable resource for anyone looking for a comprehensive introduction to Jacobitism.

GEORGLA VULLINGHS

University of Edinburgh