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*Manuscript Circulation and the Invention of Politics in Early Modern England*, by Noah Millstone (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2016; pp. xvi + 358. £74.99).

This stimulating book recovers an important genre of hitherto neglected primary source material and offers a challenging and original interpretation of it. Early Stuart England witnessed a remarkable proliferation of manuscript pamphlets which both reflected and shaped a developing political awareness. Over ten thousand such copies survive out of what was probably a much larger total originally produced. Millstone show how certain characteristic features of early Stuart political thinking emerged in a dynamic relationship with the provision of these manuscript pamphlets, including a desire to differentiate between image and reality, and a wish to uncover treachery and conspiracy. Contemporaries were increasingly sensitive to the power of scribal circulation to influence opinion, and Millstone presents a series of case studies that illustrate how this could be seen as an opportunity but also as a threat.

The book is based on a vast amount of research in manuscript materials, and Millstone has organised his findings very effectively to support a cogent and persuasive argument. Perhaps the most impressive aspect of his book is the way in which he throws new light on some familiar episodes within the high political history of the reigns of James VI and I and Charles I by reconstructing how the circulation of manuscript materials helps to explain why events unfolded as they did. Millstone’s accounts of the disgrace of the Earl of Bristol in the mid-1620s, the attempted impeachment of the Duke of Buckingham in 1626, and the judgements in the Ship Money trial in 1637-8 are especially compelling in this respect.

The provision of scribal texts was both a manifestation of and a catalyst for the distinctively historicist nature of early Stuart political thinking. This was a society that accorded immense intellectual status to antiquaries such as Sir Robert Cotton and John Selden, and there was a widespread desire to discern in contemporary politics the kind of chronological sequences and causal patterns that were found in historical works. Millstone recovers the reading habits of figures like William Drake and Sir Simonds D’Ewes and charts their readiness to detect deception and conspiracy. This in turn prompted a widespread perception that the constitution was under growing threat from evil counsellors who were seeking to draw the early Stuarts – and especially Charles I – away from a collaborative style of government and towards more authoritarian forms of rule. Within this narrative, which found a directly practical application in documents such as the *Grand Remonstrance* of 1641, the core of the danger lay in the Privy Council whereas it was the monarch’s Great Council, Parliament, which afforded the best hopes of detecting and thwarting the conspiracy. As Millstone puts it, ‘only regular Parliaments could stop the decay. … Parliaments were the wicked councillor’s main nemesis, and this was why the councillors pressed for its elimination’ (p. 216).

As a result, intense suspicion of certain prominent councillors became deeply rooted within early Stuart political thinking. Manuscript pamphleteering both encouraged and reflected this trend, and Millstone’s argument thus ‘puts “popular” agitation, pamphleteering, and “high” politics into a reciprocal relationship’ (p. 235). Individuals like Buckingham, and particular policies like Ship Money, were perceived as part of a wider pattern of threat to the established constitution. Conversely, figures such as Laud and Strafford saw themselves as in danger from ‘popular and Puritan spirits in the kingdom at large’ (p. 250). The large amount of scribal material relating to the Ship Money judgements reveals the attempts to rally support on both sides of the debate.

Millstone’s work builds on the existing scholarship on news transmission and political culture in early Stuart England. In particular, his work complements that of Richard Cust on the 1620s and 1630s, and of Jason Peacey on the 1640s and 1650s. Millstone rounds off his discussion with a very persuasive account of the Bishops’ Wars and the opening months of the Long Parliament in which he shows how ‘the pursuit of evil counsellors, the frustration of conspiracy, and the structural reform of the Privy Council’ (p. 302) all represented the furtherance of long-standing areas of concern. These goals culminated in the *Grand Remonstrance* of November 1641. This marks a natural end-point for the book, for although the *Grand Remonstrance* ‘represented a continuation of discourses developed in the 1610s and practices developed in the 1620s’, ‘this time it was different: for unlike earlier remonstrances, and over the protests of many MPs, the *Grand Remonstrance* was printed’ (p. 315).

Millstone has produced a deeply researched and highly sophisticated book that will be of the greatest interest to scholars and students of early seventeenth-century England. He has an admirable capacity to delineate detail without ever losing sight of the broader picture. My one minor reservation is that he often tends to group references together into a single footnote at the end of a paragraph, which can sometimes make it difficult to identify which source is being cited to back up a particular statement. But that is a small caveat beside what is undoubtedly a major scholarly achievement. This is a richly documented book that is both enlightening and enjoyable to read. In guiding us elegantly through the surviving products of early Stuart scribes it whets the appetite for future works from the author’s own pen.

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