

NICOLAE IORGA'S OPINION ON EARLY MODERN SCOTLAND

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Abstract: This short study aims to shed some light on Nicolae Iorga's opinions on early modern Scotland expressed in two of his works: *Evoluția ideii de libertate* [The Evolution of the Idea of Freedom] and *Oliver Cromwell. Conferință ținută la Societatea Anglo-Română* [Oliver Cromwell. Conference held at the Anglo-Romanian Society]. While he refers to Scotland in many of his universal history works (as expected, many times in *A History of Anglo-Romanian Relations*), in these two works he actually makes judgements on the importance of Scotland to modern Europe. After making a summary of these judgements I go on to detailing important facts about early modern Scotland, especially emphasizing its role in the 17th century Revolutionary events in Britain, while taking in consideration the approaches exposed in recent scholarly articles on the issue.

Keywords: Nicolae Iorga, Scotland, Presbyterianism, John Knox, James I

“And this Scotland lived, after the demise of Mary Stuart, especially in the northern clans, which were decisive for a time, a biblical life.”
*Nicolae Iorga***

Introduction

Although “The sheer weight of Iorga's writings [...] probably discouraged any Westerner from plowing through this incredible mass to secure an insight into this Romanian historian's contributions,”¹ his works were appreciated by Western scholars of his times and not only,² and furthermore had created the image that “Roumanian writers have facile pens.”³

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** Nicolae Iorga, *Evoluția ideii de libertate* [The Evolution of the Idea of Freedom], Editura Meridiane, București, 1987, p. 241.

¹ Sherman D. Spector, “Review of *The Historical and National Thought of Nicolae Iorga* by William O. Oldson, Columbia University Press, New York, 1973, pp. 135,” in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 80, no. 3, June 1975, p. 688.

² See G. R. C., “Review of *A History of Roumania: Land, People, Civilisation*. – N. Iorga, London: T. Fisher Unwin, Ltd. 1925. pp. xii + 284,” in *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 68, no. 1, July 1926, pp. 81-82; Halil Inalcik, “Review of *Nicolae Iorga: A Romanian Historian of the Ottoman Empire* by Maria Matilda Alexandrescu-Dersca Bulgaru. Bibliotheca Historica Romaniae Studies, no. 40, 1972, pp. 190,” in *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 46, no. 1, March 1974, pp. 110-112; Sherman D. Spector, “Review of *The Historical and*

Included in this “incredible mass” is also his work on *The Evolution of the Idea of Freedom*, where he writes about early modern Britain, as a region where the modern idea of liberty was developed. Referring to the Elizabethan society, he observes how “it was a society in the meaning of the Renaissance, with the liberty of instincts – and that is why many speak about the Renaissance as the liberator of man, because it liberates human instincts, – but taking man out of certain Christian moral norms of the Middle Ages, this does not mean freedom in its most serious and noble meaning.”⁴

The above extract matches Nicolae Iorga’s well-known personality as a traditionalist, being maintained on a different occasion,⁵ and also when referring to English literature. According to Nicolae Iorga, William Shakespeare, who in his masterpieces “almost does not touch the Bible,”⁶ has perfectly described the image of the Elizabethan society in his works. The Romanian scholar links William Shakespeare to the Celtic heritage (quite strong in Scotland we might add) of the British, and “that Celtic blood represents: doubt, distrust, mystery, returning to a once found idea, it represents human compassion, pity, the poetry in «A Midsummer Night’s Dream» and in the tender magnificence of the fate of King Lear.”⁷ In contrast to him, Nicolae Iorga further shows that the later John Milton “lives in the Old Testament, he is a man of the Old Testament,”⁸ which marked the beginning of a different English literature, but not without a similar movement in the political area, in which the Scots were involved as well.

Summary of Nicolae Iorga’s thoughts on the Early Modern Scots

It is very interesting that the prominent Romanian historian further continues his discourse on early modern Britain by introducing the concept of a

Nationalistic Thought of Nicolae Iorga by William O. Oldson, Columbia University Press, New York, 135 pp.,” in *Slavic Review*, vol. 33, no. 4, December 1974, p. 812; Sherman D. Spector, “Review of Nicolae Iorga–Istoric al Bizanțului by Eugen Stănescu (ed.), Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, București, 1971, 250 pp.,” in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 80, no. 4, October 1975, p. 959. Sherman D. Spector, “Review of Nicolas Iorga: L’homme et l’oeuvre. A l’occasion du centieme anniversaire de sa naissance by D. M. Pippidi,” in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 79, no. 1, February 1974, pp. 189-190. Stephen Fischer-Galati, “Review of Nicolae Iorga by Bianca Valota Cavallotti, Guida Editori, Naples, 1977, pp. 312,” in *The American Historical Review*, vol. 85, no. 1, February 1980, p. 164.

³ W. Miller, “Review of Studii și documente cu privire la istoria Românilor. IV. Legaturile Prințepatelor Române cu Ardealul de la 1601 la 1699. De N. Iorga. (București: Socecui. 1902.),” in *The English Historical Review*, vol. 18, no. 71, July 1903, p. 578.

⁴ Nicolae Iorga, *Evoluția ideii de libertate*, p. 240.

⁵ Idem, *Oliver Cromwell. Conferință ținută la Societatea Anglo-Română* [Oliver Cromwell. Conference held at the Anglo-Romanian Society], București, 1936, p. 8.

⁶ Idem, *Evoluția ideii de libertate*, p. 240.

⁷ Idem, *Oliver Cromwell...*, pp. 10-11.

⁸ Idem, *Evoluția ideii de libertate*, p. 241.

“*Scottish reaction*, the influence of the North on the Southern England,”⁹ in order to explain the political changes that took place after the reign of Elizabeth I.

The “pedantic James I, son of Mary Stuart, a man bred in a narrow Calvinist environment, a limited and though spirit,”¹⁰ which “instead of thinking of a pleasant literature... thinks before all on how a king should be. The very Greek title of his book... shows that the king must above all be according to the Bible.”¹¹ Also he gives James I the credit that he “deduced this idea of royal autocracy from a system, while Charles understood to apply it according to his fastidious character.”¹²

In regards of Charles I of England, Nicolae Iorga depicts his failure in courting a Spanish princess, which “undoubtedly lays upon a man and upon an era an air of ridicule.”¹³ Then, the French princess he took was not considered a good influence by the “puritans, who would not get along with the Church of England, which was neither protestant, nor did it keep the Roman Catholic mysteries.”¹⁴ Needless to say, her “taste for parties, light and generous spirit, religious indifference, affinity for Catholic pomp, was not allowed in the harsh and northern Scottish England of her father-in-law.”¹⁵ The concept of a “harsh and northern Scottish England” fits the *motto* of the present article, and will receive further attention.

According to the same historian, the Scots needed “somebody frowned, who talks little, always pronouncing the sentence of acquittal or conviction, with God’s scales before, upon which the sins of the world are weighed.”¹⁶ By waging war against Parliament and losing, Charles I was sold by the Scots to the English, as they “proved to have exceptional commercial skills.”¹⁷ It is superfluous to remark that this phrase of Nicolae Iorga has a deeper meaning.

The distinguished Romanian scholar adds that the judgment of the Scots who sold Charles I and that of the English who executed him was the same: “«We do not judge His Grace as humans; but we judge him as good sons of God, as he breaks the rules of the revealed book, the Bible». And that is how this tragedy of Charles I must be understood. And those people did not have any moment of doubt, they did not feel sorry afterwards. They went home pleased, raising a prayer to God for they had voted their King’s death. [...] This is how the Bible introduces a notion of human liberty, protected by God, against human error and gives the image of a republic dominated by something

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ *Idem, Oliver Cromwell...*, p. 8.

¹¹ *Idem, Evoluția ideii de libertate*, p. 241.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 242.

¹³ *Idem, Oliver Cromwell...*, p. 8.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁵ *Idem, Evoluția ideii de libertate*, p. 241.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ *Idem, Oliver Cromwell...*, p. 8.

else than human authority. And, of course, all this contributes to the formation of a free spirit in a society.”¹⁸

Some Considerations

As we know, at the beginning of the early modern times the Kingdom of Scotland found itself allied with its southern neighbor on a religious basis. The Scottish Protestantism was called Presbyterianism (as the leaders of this Church – the *Kirk* – were “men of high consideration and status, the elder of the community”¹⁹), and was preached by John Knox (1505-1572). Knox began preaching the Reformed religion in Scotland²⁰ in 1547 but next year he had to endure being captured and sent to France, to be released only a year later, at – also Reformed – England’s intervention. Having arrived in England he was a preacher at the Court, but with the coming of reign of Bloody Mary (1553-1558) he had to flee to the continent again. Arriving in Jean Calvin’s Geneva in 1554 he first preached for the Calvinist Englishmen in Frankfurt, where he also published a treaty against *The Monstrous Regiment of Women*, mainly directed against Mary Stuart, but also offensive for Elizabeth I of Caterina de Medici. Then, with English help, he returned to Edinburgh, where his fiery eloquence pleased the Scots barons and Elizabeth I. In 1560 the Parliament of Edinburgh abolished Papal authority in Scotland and adopted the Calvinist confession. Seven years later the Presbyterian Church was constituted.²¹

This *Kirk* was organized based on John Knox’s *Book of Discipline*, who was succeeded by Andrew Melville in 1572, and then followed a period of turmoil corresponding to conflicts between the authority of the Presbyters (faithful to the doctrine of Knox) and that of the Episcopal Church (which in turn accepted Bishops in its organization, claiming Divine legacy through the Holy Apostles). The greatest promoter of Episcopatism was James VI of Scotland (1566-1625) and I of England (1603-1625), who even restored this confession between 1584 and 1592. It seems that he was about to win the conflict with the *Kirk*, until a major riot started in Edinburgh following a preaching against him.²² Following the riot’s end he used this event as an excuse to solicit the prerogative of naming priests in the towns of Scotland. A compromise was reached with the *Kirk* organizing a committee to advice the

¹⁸ Idem, *Evoluția ideii de libertate*, pp. 242-243.

¹⁹ Camil Mureșan, *Revoluția burgheză din Anglia* [The Burgeoise Revolution in England], Editura Științifică, București, 1964, p. 35.

²⁰ See Jane E. A. Dawson, *Scotland Reformed 1488-1587*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2007, passim. Elizabethanne Boran, Crawford Gribben, *Enforcing Reformation in Ireland and Scotland 1550-1700*, Burlington, Ashgate Publishing Company, 2006, passim.

²¹ Charles-Arnold Baker, *The Companion to British History*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 768.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 1115.

King in this issue, but it was rather the King who influenced it. In the same year James VI Stuart persuaded the *Kirk* to allow the naming of three bishops in the Parliament, thus managing to conjoin the Church with the State.²³

To the south, in England, Presbyterianism was perceived through hostility and persecution,²⁴ as it differed from Anglicanism,²⁵ but the fact that it also opposed Roman-Catholicism provided moment of unity between the two Protestant religions.²⁶ Coincidentally, both these confession had been proclaimed in 1559, when the Parliament in London adopted the Act of Uniformity. This was one of the rare moments when Queen Elizabeth I of England sent a fleet to Edinburgh, while an English army joined Knox's followers at Leith against the Roman-Catholic Mary of Guise (the Queen of James V of Scotland and regent for Mary Stuart).²⁷ But *Gloriana* was also cautious, as she wanted to avoid a rebellion of the traditionalist and Roman-Catholic Northumberland under the guidance of Mary Stuart.²⁸

James VI played the same cards in his relations to Elizabeth I, maybe because he personally hated weapons and war (his motto was “*Beati Pacifici*”).²⁹ He did not take the 1586 alliance with England very seriously (it brought him 4,000£ annually), was not moved by the execution of his mother Mary Stuart Queen of Scots in 1587, and at the failed invasion of the *Spanish Armada* allowed some Scots Roman-Catholic barons to join the invading fleet.³⁰

In March 1603 he gladly received the news of the demise of Queen Elizabeth I, knowing that her throne³¹ was waiting for him now.³² According to

²³ Peter & Fiona Sommerset Fry, *The History of Scotland*, Routledge Press, London, 1982, p. 162.

²⁴ Anthony Fletcher (ed.), *Religion, Culture and Society in Early Modern Britain: Essays in honour of Patrick Collinson*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994, p. 210 and the following.

²⁵ See Karl Gunther, “The Origins of English Puritanism,” in *History Compass* vol. 4, no. 2, 2006, pp. 235-240.

²⁶ Especially see Steve Murdoch, “Scotland, Europe and the English ‘Missing Link’,” in *History Compass* vol. 5, no. 3, 2007, pp. 890-913; John M. MacKenzie, “Irish, Scottish, Welsh and English Worlds? A Four-Nation Approach to the History of the British Empire,” in *History Compass* vol. 6, no. 5, 2008, pp. 1244-1263; and last year's study by Keith Robbins, “The ‘British Space’: World-Empire-Continent-Nation-Region-Locality: A Historiographical Problem,” in *History Compass* vol. 7, no. 1, 2009, pp. 66-94.

²⁷ G. M. Trevelyan, *Istoria ilustrată a Angliei* [Illustrated History of England], Editura Științifică, București, 1975, p. 384.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 385.

²⁹ Adrian Nicolescu, *Istoria civilizației britanice, Volumul II, Secolul al XVII-lea: 1603-1714* [The History of the British Civilization, Volume II, the XVIIth Century: 1603-1714], Editura Institutul European, Iași, 2001, p. 13.

³⁰ Peter & Fiona Sommerset Fry, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

³¹ There is also the question of the Scottish, English and British identities, which were confused in the early modern age. For example, during spring 1605 Lord Chancellor Ellesmere was advised in a letter from Sir Francis Bacon to support the publishing of a

G. M. Trevelyan, the only good thing he brought was the personal union with Scotland,³³ while parliamentary, legislative or religious union were still far off, as the Scots did not forget the humiliations they had to suffer on behalf of their southern neighbors,³⁴ who in turn considered them backward and even barbarian.³⁵

Scotland now loses the presence of its King, who becomes far richer and powerful than all the Scots nobles or the *Kirk*. In an arrogant matter, he is recorded to have told his English subject that he governs Scotland only by the stroke of his pen,³⁶ with the obvious allusion that they should follow example.

Regarding religion, James I pondered on changing the Scots Church according to the Anglican Church,³⁷ thus offering the *Kirk* a new reason of discontent.³⁸ In the same forgetfulness, he managed to return to Scotland only in 1617, which was also his last time there. His son Charles I would also visit Scotland only once, in 1633, for the event of his coronation at Holyrood Palace, on which occasion he offended the Presbyterians by allowing himself to be anointed with holy oil (considered a Catholic superstition).³⁹

Unlike his father, he did not know Scottish Gaelic or the way of life in Scotland: poverty, his people's reliance in their clan, kin and relatives in the Highlands as well as in the Lowlands, the smallness of towns, which were considered villages by the English, and the extensive decentralization because of the natural obstacles and poverty.⁴⁰

Although the Scots enjoy a popular image of clansmen warriors clad in tartan, this icon has little in common with the realities of the early merchants of the *Covenanters* in the Lowlands, with the famous philosophers of St. Andrews

history of Britain, concerning both peoples, but he himself understood that the letter was “touching the Story of England.” (Pauline Croft, “The Reign of James VI and I: the Birth of Britain,” in *History Compass* no. 1, 2003, p. 2). Concerning his accession, James I had to fend off rival claims to the throne, namely the claim of Lady Arbella Stuart (his cousin) and that of the Spanish Infanta, Isabella. Arbella was unmarried and Isabella did not have any children, so the English – namely by the Secretary of State Sir Robert Cecil – preferred James, who already had three children. Upon his crowning he styled his title “King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, Defender of Faith.” A crucial element he introduced was the United Kingdom flag (Union Jack), which was flown by the navy (*Ibidem*, pp. 2-3). Also see Arthur Williamson, “Scotland and the Rise of Civic Culture, 1550-1650,” in *History Compass* vol. 4, no. 1, 2006, pp. 91-123.

³² Rosalind Mitchinson, *A History of Scotland*, Routledge Publishing, London, 2002, p. 123.

³³ G.M.Trevelyan, *op. cit.*, p. 440.

³⁴ Peter & Fiona Sommerset Fry, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

³⁵ G.M.Trevelyan, *op. cit.*, p. 440 and the following.

³⁶ Peter & Fiona Sommerset Fry, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

³⁷ Stoica Lascu, *Introducere in Istoria Modernă Universală* [Introduction to Universal Modern History], Constanța, p. 8.

³⁸ Peter & Fiona Sommerset Fry, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 169-170.

⁴⁰ Rosalind Mitchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 124-125.

University or in general with the whole Scottish urban culture.⁴¹ Regarding the Scots clans, Duncan Forbes of Culloden famously describes them as a group of people sharing the same name and kinship, and each clan also consisting of other subordinate branches, each of them with its own chief, but all of them owning loyalty to the supreme clan chief.⁴² So, in clan organization, the most important persons were not the relatives of the supreme chief, but the lesser chiefs. Also, in order to avoid confusion, clan members were not called after their family name. For example, in clan Grant, only the chief was called Chief Grant or Laird Grant, his vassals were also called Grant and then followed the name of their property. Thus, in official documents they appeared as John Grant of Sheuglie, although in everyday life Sheughlie alone would have been used. In some cases, in order to distinguish between father and son, their military rank was also included in the name.⁴³

Even though this great Scots nobility could access Charles I's court, and a few chiefs were indeed present there, the King did not seek to cultivate his relationship with them. Also he never attended trials in Edinburgh, and did not take part in Exchequer sessions, where he could have improved his administration of Scotland.⁴⁴

He did not try to understand his ancestral land, where the *Kirk* was rather the representative body of the nation, through its synods and covenants. In 1635 King Charles I issued a series of indications for the *Kirk* without bothering to call a general convent. More so, he went on with his father's (wisely) abandoned project of a new Scottish Liturgy. The ensuing Liturgy of 1637, as it would be known, was certainly not the English Book of Common Prayer, nor Archbishop Laud's Liturgy, the later at least being written after consulting the – few and unwanted – Scots Bishops.⁴⁵

Thus, this Liturgy of 1637 – which did not have the approval of a Presbyterian Covenant – was to be read in all the churches, imposing changes in religion upon all Scots, a hard to accept fact. In the St. Giles Cathedral the bishop had not even finished reading two pages that the riot began. Jenny Geddes, a Scots woman, is especially remembered for allegedly having projected her stool at the Bishop of St. Giles, after loudly complaining of his saying Mass.⁴⁶ The – luckier – Bishop Whitford of Brechin managed to finish the

⁴¹ Murray G.H. Pittock, *The Jacobite Cult*, in Edward J. Cowan (coord.), Richard J. Finlay (coord.), „Scottish History: The Power of the Past,” Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2002, pp. 191-192.

⁴² Stuart Reid, *Highland clansman 1689-1746*, Osprey Publishing, p. 3.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 5.

⁴⁴ Rosalind Mitchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 124-125.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 146-147.

⁴⁶ Peter & Fiona Sommerset Fry, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

lecture only with two loaded pistols by his side⁴⁷ (*sic!*). Scotland did not suffer so much distress since the days of William Wallace and Robert the Bruce.⁴⁸

In an apparent similarity with the events that would take place four years later at Westminster, the King was confronted by the General Assembly of the *Kirk* at Glasgow. Even though outlawed, the Assembly abolished the Scottish Bishopsrics and restored the Presbyterian order in the *Kirk* through a *Covenant*, which the people signed in an outcry against the policies of Charles I.⁴⁹

Their main leader was the Puritan Earl of Argyll, Chief of the Campbell's, the most widespread and influent clan of the Highlands.⁵⁰ He benefited the military experience of the Scots Diaspora, which had formed the bravest Protestant regiments on the continent under Gustav Adolphus and other renowned commanders. The Scots that returned home from Europe assembled under the military leadership of Alexander Leslie. Thus, in his ancestral Scotland, Charles I was opposed by a considerable force, which he could not check without the endowment of Westminster.

This conflict is remembered in historiography as the Bishops' Wars, with two phases: one in 1639 and the second in 1640. In 1639 James Graham Marquis of Montrose defeats the English⁵¹ and truce is made by the Treaty of Berwick, where Charles I temporarily yields to the *Kirk's* demands. The second phase of the Bishops' Wars begins in 1640 with Earl Strafford's (the King's favorite statesman) efforts for creating a new army. To this, Montrose responds by marching his Scots Cavalry to Northumberland and Durham, which he decides to keep as a guarantee until the King's acceptance of the *Covenant* and his paying of the sum decided by the Treaty of Ripon (1640).

To this threat, Charles I responds by calling the *Long Parliament*,⁵² thus opening the way for the *English Civil Wars*, which further weakened his position that he finally had to accept the Presbyterian confession of the *Kirk* and furthermore, award more liberty to the Parliament of Edinburgh (including the cause of government responsibility before it).⁵³

Epilogue

In a way, one could argue that the outburst of Jenny Geddes, a Scots woman “of the Bible” (as Nicolae Iorga would say) ultimately lead to the execution of Charles I on 30th January 1649. Of course, this assertion must be

⁴⁷ Rosalind Mitchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 147.

⁴⁸ G. M. Trevelyan, *op. cit.*, p. 459.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem.*

⁵⁰ *Ibidem.*

⁵¹ Angela Anderson, *Războaiele civile 1640-1649* [The Civil Wars 1640-1649], Editura All Educational, București, 2002, p. 7.

⁵² G.M. Trevelyan, *op. cit.*, p. 460.

⁵³ Peter & Fiona Sommerset Fry, *op. cit.*, pp. 172-173.

understood in a metaphorical way, as referring to the entire Early Modern Scotland, as a land which did not give up its principles to a recognized, lawful King. But this must not be understood in the meaning that the unification of 1603 brought doom to England, as it was the very enduring legacy of James I that “allowed the rebuilding of the British tripartite monarchy after 1660,” even making the reign of James I “as arguably the most crucial in British history.”⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Apud Pauline Croft, *op. cit.*, p. 11.