

Brian Weiser. *Charles II and the Politics of Access*. Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2003. xii + 208 pp. Review by TY M. REESE, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA.

The English Civil War and subsequent restoration of Charles II to the English throne constitutes a subject of great historical interest, investigation and debate. While Louis XIV and other continental monarchs increased their power through the development of an absolute state, Charles II worked to consolidate and protect his power in a state still divided from the Civil War. Traditionally, historians have utilized this division, and Charles's desire to re-unite England, to argue that he consistently maintained a policy of open access to accomplish this. In his work *Charles II and the Politics of Access*, Brian Weiser successfully challenges this idea of continual access by arguing that Charles II skillfully controlled access for political reasons. The book's main argument, that access was one of the "most effective political implementations" of Charles II's reign is clearly and fully supported, although the limitations of access, and what individuals gained from it, is not always so fully explored.

Weiser's examination begins with the 1651 clash between Charles II and Cromwell and Charles's subsequent experience as an incognito king during his escape to the continent. Weiser postulates, not necessarily convincingly, that this experience as an incognito king proved formative to Charles's attempt to become an accessible monarch. From this introduction, which includes a general treatment of the decline of monarchical access, the book is divided into a series of thematic/narrative chapters that each examines different aspects of access during the reign of Charles II. One device utilized throughout is the division of Charles's reign into different periods where access was either necessary or not. The periods are, with some variations between chapter, from 1660 to 1666, from 1667 to 1673 and from 1674 to 1685. A second and important argument is that over time, Charles went from being a unifying monarch to a party leader.

The book's introduction examines the role of, and changes within, accessibility in medieval and early modern Europe. In the latter period, as the state grew and bureaucracy expanded, accessibility became less practical, causing monarchs to utilize distance to maintain their status. Chapter One explores the "meanings, ideology and symbolism of access" (13) and illustrates how Charles II manipulated and utilized access. Weiser attempts to create a "more nuanced model" of access to replace David Starkey's binary view of participation versus distance. In the end, Weiser's nuanced model involves the fact that neither participation nor distance was a constant; rather, each could serve various political goals, thereby creating a more nuanced interpretation of the original binary relationship. Early in his reign, Charles effectively utilized access to heal divisions by allowing two oppositional lords, the Earl of Holland and the Earl of Essex, to control access. This illustrated that he would not play favorites, but over time, because of political necessity, this changed. The chapter ends with an interesting section on the relationship between sex and access, and how Charles became too accessible, through accounts of his sexual exploits. Chapter Two turns to the relationship between architecture and access. Weiser charts Charles's residences (in 1661 Charles spent 359 days at Whitehall) to explore how issues involving both the length and place of residency corresponded to the rise and fall of access. Chapter Two includes an interesting examination of the construction and reconstruction of space to control access. In this chapter Weiser introduces his periodization of open and restricted access, showing that access was more often controlled than open, although Weiser never makes much of this fact.

The third chapter explores Charles' effective utilization of access as a political tool. Weiser does this by exploring the rise and fall of Clarendon, the Cabal, the issues surrounding the Test Act, and the rise of the Ultra-Royalists from 1674 to 1685. This exploration of high power and access is followed by a chapter concerning local access. Charles attempted to heal the wounds of the Civil War early on, but over time his relationship with local municipalities centered on the continued centralization of power. Rebellion

was a constant fear, and therefore Charles worked hard to control and limit discontent. The rise of the Ultra-Royalists, coupled with the issues surrounding his brother, created greater control over access on all levels. The final chapter explores the relationship between access and trade, especially within the growing struggle between monopoly and free/open trade. Weiser clearly shows that Charles often picked national interest over privilege, also showing the process that mercantile interests utilized to influence the king. When Charles does start to deny access, the anti-monopoly element turned to Parliament as the voice and protector of their interests.

Throughout his work, Weiser demonstrates Charles II's effective utilization of access for political means. Yet his work raises new questions. The first involves the process of properly measuring the political necessity of access. Weiser needs to more clearly explore who was affected by the regulation of access. While he does this both directly and indirectly for local issues and the economy, the reader is left with an understanding of access among only an extremely small segment of English society. If Weiser wants to truly argue the effectiveness of access as a political tool for Charles II he must fully explore its consequences upon a broader segment of English society. A second question involves an examination of those who looked to gain the king's ear versus those who looked to Parliament. While Weiser touches upon this in his final chapter, the reader is left wondering exactly what individuals, beyond the elite, gained from their access to Charles. A final criticism concerns the work's organization, as much of the narrative/factual material that explains the rise and fall of access appears in the latter chapters rather than earlier ones. Because of this, the reader needs to piece together the periodization of access along with making connections between many of the chapters. Weiser has created a work that clearly accomplishes its stated purpose, with very strong chapters on both architecture and economics, yet his work raises questions for further exploration.