

does give Parker's chapter something of a toehold. Also, little by way of interdisciplinary work is proffered, a surprising lacuna given that it would no doubt have further underscored the concern with continuities so elaborately delineated in the introductory essay. Still, what the volume lacks in especially sophisticated or venturesome arguments it makes up for in being lucid and engaging, as well as wide-ranging and full of fresh new sources. Indeed, the steadiness of each contributor's archival work represents precisely the kind of scholarship that has seemed threatened by more tendentious and literary-oriented propositions. In short, the map of early modern Ireland this volume offers is richly textured, highly informative, and skillfully executed.

Ruth E. Mayers. *1659: The Crisis of the Commonwealth*. Woodbridge: Royal Historical Society/Boydell Press, 2004. xii + 306 pp. + 1 illus. \$75.00. Review by JASON PEACEY, HISTORY OF PARLIAMENT TRUST.

Despite perpetual scholarly interest in the English civil wars and interregnum, historians are still able to find periods and episodes where conventional wisdom requires thorough revision, not least because of the prevalence of easy assumptions and lazy statements. Like scholars who have challenged the inevitability of the regicide and of the downfall of Richard Cromwell, Ruth Mayers questions common perceptions regarding England's republican government during the second half of 1659, although in doing so her account bears more than a passing resemblance to revisionist histories of the drift towards civil war in 1642, both for good and bad.

Mayers is undoubtedly right to stress the importance of reconsidering the revived Rump Parliament, which met from May-October 1659, following the collapse of the protectorate. This period is often treated as little more than a Canute-like attempt to stem the inevitable tide of resurgent monarchism, which led to the Restoration of the Stuart dynasty in the spring of 1660. She is unquestionably right to argue that, for this period more than others, there is a danger of accepting the version of events pedalled by the "victors"—the royalists—and in seeking to re-examine the "crisis of the commonwealth" she is more than happy to challenge the work of scholars as eminent as Austin Woolrych, Ronald Hutton, and Steve Pincus.

Mayers' central contention is that, rather than being doomed to failure,

not least by irreconcilable tensions among the commonwealthsmen, the regime actually demonstrated its ability to overcome the difficulties that it faced, and she stresses contemporary evidence of republican strength as a counterweight to claims made by contemporary opponents. Aware that all such sources were biased, she nevertheless claims that the former has tended to be ignored at the expense of the latter, and that, when the Rump's record is considered without the benefit of hindsight, its administrative effectiveness and capacity for coalition-building becomes clear for the first time. In making the case for the republican regime's potential, Mayers examines an impressive range of sources, and she displays a keen awareness of the need to appreciate, and make allowance for, the partiality of these and other pieces of evidence.

The approach adopted is broadly thematic, rather than chronological, and in addition to chapters examining the case against the Rump, and the arguments deployed by his supporters, analysis focuses upon the regime's immediate priorities (including financial stability), its attempt to overcome division and achieve consensus, government of the City of London and of the localities, and policies regarding Britain and the wider world. The final two chapters examine issues surrounding the breakdown of republican authority in the autumn of 1659. Throughout, Mayers argues that the regime quickly proved itself to be efficient and viable; that it made solid, if unspectacular, progress; and that such progress probably ought to be considered remarkable given the circumstances. Central to this argument are claims regarding the diligence, even zeal, on the part of republican MPs and regarding the fact that divisions between civilian and army republicans have been overplayed.

Both contentions rest in part upon Mayers' analysis of parliamentary and conciliar records, in terms of attendance, committee membership, and divisions on particular votes, and her willingness to engage with these difficult sources is particularly welcome. However, while apparently aware of the problems associated with analyzing "the dry bones of institutional evidence" (28), her reading of such material is probably over simplistic, and she arguably places more interpretative weight on such evidence than it will justifiably bear. A second key strength of the book is its engagement with another neglected source, namely the wealth of printed pamphlet literature generated during the period, not least those tracts which defended the republican regime. It is hard to believe that any other scholar has read as widely in this material, although

some might question whether sufficient attention has been paid to the way in which such works were generated, and the possibility that they were not merely biased, but also written at the behest of those whose reputations they endeavoured to enhance.

The danger with a project such as this is that, having charged other historians with presenting a misleading picture of a regime which was doomed to failure, the author reacts not merely with a dispassionate weighing of the evidence, but with a counterblast. For much of the time, Mayers demonstrates an impressive clarity of logic and subtlety of interpretation, but out of an understandable urge to respond to the bias of the regime's opponents, she ultimately appears to privilege the claims of its supporters. In challenging received wisdom her account occasionally becomes somewhat polemical, and there is a danger that one biased view is merely being replaced by another.

Where Mayers' account is most perplexing is at those moments when she seeks to address the degree of division with republican ranks. An extremely interesting demonstration of the extent to which attempts were made to overcome potential divisions develops into a claim regarding the potential for, and even existence of, "consensus," when what are actually being discussed are merely shifting alliances and marriages of political convenience. Like revisionist historians of the outbreak of civil war, who accentuate consensus, Mayers also argues that political breakdown was "a near adventitious consequence of changing circumstances," and of tensions and mistrust between personalities, rather than being the result of more profound tensions (229). Indeed, in another attempt to overturn conventional wisdom, Mayers comes close to blaming the collapse of parliamentary government upon civilian rather than military republicans, and upon one or two grandees in particular. Just as it is hard to agree with the author's claims regarding the extent of agreement within the republican movement in the summer of 1659, so it is difficult to concur that the army's interruption of Parliament's proceedings in the following autumn represented a little local difficulty and a clash of personalities. That it was the regime's contemporary and subsequent enemies who claimed that the republicans were fundamentally divided does not necessarily make it false.

In an atmosphere of scholarship and scholarly publishing which privileges studies of broad time periods and often precludes detailed analysis of a few months, this book is to be welcomed, not least for the clarity of its prose

and argument and the thorough nature of its research. Moreover, there is much to commend the aim of re-examining this short yet key period of English history, as well as the claims regarding the “regenerative capacity of English republicanism,” and of “the fluidity and creative possibilities of this moment” (275). Nevertheless, that irrevocable divisions existed within the ranks of English republicans and could only be set aside for a limited period after the collapse of the protectorate still seems to be the best guide to this phase of the Rump Parliament and the most plausible explanation of its collapse.

Londa Schiebinger and Claudia Swan, eds. *Colonial Botany: Science, Commerce and Politics in the Early Modern World*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005. vi + 346 pp. + 54 illus. \$55.00. Review by LUCIANO BOSCHIERO, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY.

The editors of this volume certainly faced a formidable task selecting papers to comment on the very wide-sweeping topic of botanical studies during the age of exploration and colonization. It is a topic that encounters several political, religious, economic and intellectual issues in a variety of settings and across a large period of time. Schiebinger and Swan do not shy away from attempting to have all these issues represented in this volume. They bring together sixteen short articles about various scientific figures and events, and settle for an aim in their introduction which reflects the wide scope of the topic: “It is our thesis that early modern botany both facilitated and profited from colonialism and long-distance trade, and that the development of botany and Europe’s commercial and territorial expansion are closely associated developments” (3).

All of the contributing authors comfortably fulfill this general objective by focusing on a variety of case studies. For example, while Andrew J. Lewis examines the relationship between natural historians and private entrepreneurs in early nineteenth-century America, Judith Carey focuses on the technologies and knowledge systems brought to the Americas by enslaved Africans from the Rice Coast mainly during the eighteenth century. Meanwhile, Kapil Raj examines the relationship between south Asian and European traders, especially with regard to an unpublished early eighteenth-century manuscript