

Siobhan – podcast info

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Title: The end of the Auld Alliance? Franco-Scottish relations, 1560-1713

Abstract:

Siobhan Talbott's podcast discusses the relationship between Scotland and France during the long seventeenth century. It asks whether claims that the centuries-old 'Auld Alliance' ended in 1560 are valid, and considers the ways in which it continued throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, particularly in the commercial sphere, despite the political conflict that characterised the period.

Steve Murdoch (SM) I'm joined today by Siobhan Talbott of the University of St Andrews. Siobhan's research interests focus on the relationship between Scotland and France in the long seventeenth century, particularly from a commercial angle. Hello, Siobhan.

ST: Hi!

SM: Can I first ask you where your interest in Scottish History came from?

ST: Well, as I'm sure you can tell, I'm English, not Scottish, so it might seem strange to some people that my research interests lie in Scottish History. My interest in the field came about when I was an undergraduate student at the University of St Andrews, and I had the opportunity to work on Scottish history in the early modern period. During my masters' year, also at the University of St Andrews, I began to consider Scotland's relations with Europe, particularly with France.

SM: What was it about Scotland's relationship with France that interested you?

ST: I wanted to question whether Scotland's relationship with France changed during the seventeenth century, and I began to use the commercial relationship in order to do this during my doctoral research.

SM: Was there anything in particular that you wanted to challenge?

ST: Many people have heard about the ‘Auld Alliance’ between Scotland and France. This allegiance was consolidated in the mediaeval period. The alliance was based on a mutual distrust of England, so that if either country faced an attack from England, the other country would assist. The treaty was therefore intended to act as a deterrent to England against aggression towards either country. However, my research has demonstrated that assumptions about this alliance, in both the academic and wider communities, are often skewed.

SM: What is it that you have specifically challenged about this relationship?

ST: The origins of the Auld Alliance are largely clear, but the other end of it is not. It’s usually thought that the Auld Alliance officially ended in 1560. In this year, Scotland was declared Protestant, whereas France remained officially Catholic. Also in this year, the Treaty of Edinburgh was drawn up, expelling French troops from Scotland – and it is this document that is usually considered to mark the formal ending of the Auld Alliance.

SM: It sounds to me like those are pretty compelling reasons why the Auld Alliance might have come to an end?

ST: ☺ Yes, and indeed many scholars have come to the same conclusions. However, my research has shown that not only did remnants of this special relationship continue throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, there was no provision until as late as the twentieth century for the formal revocation of the Auld Alliance.

SM: The Twentieth Century?!

ST: Yes! No evidence has yet been uncovered suggesting that the Auld Alliance was formally dissolved in the early modern period. Although the relationship inevitably changed over time, some element of it remained in force until the twentieth century – for example, all Scots were still also French citizens until that right was revoked by the French government in 1903, and it was not until 1906 that Westminster formally dissolved the Scottish side of the Alliance. In June 1942, during the Second World

War, Charles de Gaulle talked of the alliance between Scotland and France as “the oldest in the world”, and said that “there were always men of Scotland to fight side by side with men of France”.

**SM: Are there other ways that we can see that the Alliance didn't end in 1560?**

ST: The Treaty of Edinburgh, as I've already said, held that French troops should be expelled from Scotland, but it made no provision either to end the 'Auld Alliance'. Furthermore, the removal of French troops from Scotland was not absolute, as a small French garrison was permitted to remain in the Castle of Dunbar.

1560 has also been seen as the moment that Scotland began to move closer to England. This has, however, largely been based on the knowledge that Scotland and England would later be united in the Union of Crowns of 1603 and the Union of Parliaments in 1707 – creating 'Great Britain' as we know it today. But Scotland's relationship with France remained strong – for example, in 1560 Mary Queen of Scots was still the French dowager queen following her marriage to Francis II of France. It wasn't a case of France OR England following 1560.

**SM: How did this translate into relations between Scotland and France?**

ST: Throughout the seventeenth century, both Scotland and France sought to reaffirm their special relationship. This in itself contradicts many assumptions made about the Alliance – in particular that France was the superior partner, and that Scotland had always gained more from this alliance than she had contributed to it. In all of these requests, reference was made to the 'ancient alliance' or 'ancient privileges' between Scotland and France.

**SM: What were the 'ancient privileges' that were reaffirmed?**

ST: This is one of the crucial points of my research. While the Auld Alliance was never formally dissolved, it has also proved difficult to find evidence that the Auld Alliance was formally reiterated along the lines it had existed before 1560. But this relationship had always been largely based on perception, and references to the 'ancient alliance' were used largely as rhetoric, with the specific terms of the alliance

not being laid out.

Before the Alliance was established in 1295, there had already been several occasions when the French or Scots had stepped in to act for the other against aggression from England. This continued to be true after 1560. On many occasions throughout the seventeenth and into the eighteenth century, both French and Scottish merchants assumed that special privileges applied to them, even if these were not in writing.

SM: You've talked largely about the official, or political, relationship between Scotland and France. In what ways did this continuing relationship manifest itself in any practical terms?

ST: Scots had been present in the French military since the fifteenth century, acting as the French King's personal bodyguard. After 1560, French troops continued to be brought into Scotland and Scottish troops continued to be levied for France, still acting as the king's guard and receiving the same rate of pay as before 1560.

Scots also had a history of attending French academic institutions throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and this practice continued into the seventeenth century. Although France has been seen as a secure destination for Catholic Scots who were exiled from Scotland following the Reformation, both Catholic and Protestant Scots registered at a variety of institutions in France, and did not always register at institutions that shared their religious affiliation.

SM: So in these spheres, the Franco-Scottish relationship continued. Your research focuses specifically on the commercial side of things, though?

ST: Yes, throughout the course of my research I've examined the ongoing commercial links between France and Scotland and made several observations, both about the continuation of trading links, and about the ways in which Scottish and French merchants continued to pursue them, specifically during the domestic and international conflicts of the century.

SM: What sort of goods were exchanged?

ST: Wine, salt and fish are the commodities that have always been highlighted as the key goods that passed between France and Scotland. But although these commodities were very important, there was actually a much wider variety of goods traded, including a surprising amount of expensive, luxury items. These included luxury cloths and silks, syrup and toffee, books and book-bindings, musical instruments and even diamonds. One Scottish merchant was thanked by a customer in Scotland for sending her ‘a prettie cap, brave big gooseberries and good bigg pears’. Another Scottish merchant sent a knife to Lord Lothian which was described as ‘a knife for cutting the corns on the feet.’

SM: I’d like to turn now to the part of your research that questions the effect of conflict on this commercial relationship. Could you elaborate on that?

ST: Yes, of course. There were a lot of wars during the seventeenth century, including civil wars in both Britain and France, and also international wars in which Scotland and France were both involved, usually as enemies. All of this conflict has been seen as damaging to commerce. This is for several reasons – declarations of war often included economic sanctions, or the closing of certain ports or trading routes. Taxes were often raised, both to finance the war effort and to damage the economy of enemies, and merchants and their ships were pressed into service, for example being used to transport soldiers and arms.

SM: So the Franco-Scottish relationship suffered in these ways?

ST: Yes, in some ways. In both Scotland and France, civil war caused problems with the exchange of goods and information. Many towns were left without merchants because men were needed to fight in the wars. Despite this, however, patterns of trade suggest that the overseas relations of both countries, and the Franco-Scottish relationship in particular, remained largely healthy. Personal merchants’ records show that although they retained an interest in the wars at home, they were more concerned with pursuing their own business, or with personal or family matters.

SM: Would international conflict not have had more of a detrimental effect, if Scotland and France were on opposing sides? Particularly if, as you have already

mentioned, declarations of war often contained economic embargoes.

ST: Yes absolutely, and in the international arena we might expect there to have been a more notable effect on commerce. Again, merchants were enlisted for national service, which was unpopular. Scottish towns could be fined for each man they failed to provide for the Royal Navy. In 1665 many seamen in Aberdeen had deliberately absented themselves to avoid the call for service, and the town failed to raise the 14 men it was obliged to. As an incentive, the town council issued the threat of withdrawing brewing privileges from the wives of these men!

However, despite the wars affecting some elements of merchants' activities, Scottish merchants were especially resourceful, and found many ways of continuing to pursue overseas trade despite the embargoes. They used foreign vessels from neutral countries, or involved themselves in attempts to have commercial embargoes lifted. In both 1627 and 1628, while Britain and France were at war, Charles I tried to prevent the import and sale of French goods, including wine, but merchants protested so fiercely that the embargoes were temporarily relaxed. On some occasion, the monarch was swayed by his own desire for French wine – by January 1629 the ban on importing French wine had been re-implemented, and a consignment of French wines brought into Leith was rightfully arrested. However, this was later released - probably as the merchants involved mentioned that the wine involved was to provide for the visit of the monarch.

SM: So merchants were pretty clever in some of the methods they used?

ST: Absolutely, and covert methods were often used to continue trading. But there was also plenty of commercial activity pursued right out in the open. This becomes particularly obvious in the later wars of the period. For example, during the War of the Spanish Succession at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Queen Anne consistently provided passes for merchants to go to France and trade, even while her own prohibition on such activity was in force. She perhaps realised that if the prohibitions were upheld, the country might suffer. Commerce was often openly conducted with the knowledge and even the assistance of authorities, and it is clear that Scotland continued to be favoured by France. Many passports were granted to

Scottish ships by French ports and a few to Irish, but often not to English. During the War of the Spanish Succession, France accorded the Scots 'favoured-nation' status in the conflict, despite them being officially at war! This status included commercial privileges, and throughout the conflict Scottish ships were ignored by French privateers, while English and Irish ships were captured.

SM: So not all merchants' tactics were covert?

ST: No, not at all. While some clandestine tactics were adopted, many merchants traded openly with their 'enemy', and often with governmental or monarchical support. The monarchy and government of both France and Britain seem to have been complicit in what were contraband trading ventures during the later wars of the seventeenth century. The Scottish merchants involved were not necessarily rogue, but permission of both French and British authorities and ensured that they obtained the correct paperwork.

SM: Siobhan, we're out of time. Thank you very much for sharing your research with us today.

ST: My pleasure!