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The Darien Scheme and Anglophobia in Scotland

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Abstract

Scottish attempts at financial innovation in the late seventeenth century included the Bank of Scotland and the Darien Scheme. The Bank is still in existence, but the Darien scheme's mission to site a Scottish colony on the isthmus of Darien, Panama, was a disaster. It has often been cited as one of the key reasons for the Union between Scotland and England in 1707, due to its devastating effects on the Scottish economy. Like the South Sea Bubble, the Darien scheme has been thought about in broad terms rather than being considered as an attempt to introduce financial innovation into a mercantilist world. The contemporary pamphlet literature is a record of the public debates of the period. The Scottish pamphlets which are in favour of the scheme largely advertise it as an important element in Scotland's continued survival as an independent state. After its failure, pamphleteers were quick to print Anglophobic tracts claiming an English plot to destroy Scotland's independence. This paper attempts to reconsider the debate. It shows that arguments against the scheme were often as faulty as those in favour of it. Indeed, many of the complaints were waged against the idea of joint-stock companies as being inherently likely to fail or as being in some way immoral. Similar complaints appeared against other joint-stock companies of the period, including the South Sea Company. One of the founders of the Bank of England, William Paterson, was behind the Darien scheme. His original intention was for a British, rather than purely Scottish, undertaking.

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The Darien Scheme was an attempt to plant a Scottish colony on the Isthmus of Panama at Darien.² The *Company of Scotland trading to Africa and the Indies*, popularly known as the Darien Company, was set up by William Paterson in 1695 and two expeditions were sent out in 1698 and 1699. Both left Darien and lives and capital were lost. The collapse of the scheme was widely thought to have been the final blow to the Scottish economy and therefore Scottish independence. The Act of Union followed in 1707. Traditionally, the scheme has been viewed as last attempt for an independent Scotland to compete economically with its neighbours. The English have been blamed for some part in its failure as the English Parliament blocked the subscription issue in London and also in Hamburg. Later, English colonies were forbidden to assist the Scots, whilst at Darien and even after they had left the colony and sought refuge. This paper uses the pamphlet literature to consider contemporary views of the Darien scheme. It separates the two issues of Darien and the Act of Union and considers the complex web of loyalties to religion, nation and monarch which formed the backdrop to the affair. The Scots' faith in God and King William underpinned their belief in Darien. However, the contemporary sources of information regarding Darien were surprisingly accurate in many ways. However, the pamphlet literature, and later the secondary literature's, discussions of ownership and power in Panama obscure the realities of indigenous control in the region. Therefore, the representations of the main indigenous group in Darien, the Kuna, and of Panama itself are distorted. The paper also considers the way in which the Darien scheme has been portrayed subsequently in the secondary literature. Historians tend to place the scheme within a framework of European national competition and development. They portray it as being bound to fail and a straightforward disaster story. However, the settlers' difficulties sprung from a variety of different sources, some unpredictable and outside human agency.

The Darien Company is usually mentioned as one of the factors leading to the Act of Union of 1707. Therefore, its history is somewhat overshadowed by the lasting political and social effects of the Union, and later arguments concerning the importance of 1707 to England, Scotland and the new political construct of Britain. The company's own history has been written several times, but the key reference works are those of George Pratt Insh and John Prebble.³ Their detailed discussions of the various stages in the company's life are useful, but of their time. Their scholarship, and that of subsequent writers, tends to consider Darien as an obviously unworkable scheme. Three main reasons are usually cited. Firstly, Darien was considered as the property of the Spanish Empire. Secondly, Scotland was underdeveloped in terms of its European neighbours and thus could not compete in a mercantilist world. Thirdly, the organisation and the management of the scheme, including the choice of Darien, were faulty. By framing the Darien scheme as a disaster story, the multiplicity of decisions and events are simplified into a linear narrative. The simplified tale serves two main purposes. One is as a footnote in another historical narrative, say that of the Union or Scotland itself. The other is the provision of a classic tale of disaster which might act as a warning against folly or ambition. In this

² This paper was written with the support of the Economic and Social Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship.

³ George Pratt Insh, *The Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies* (London and New York: 1932); John Prebble, *The Darien Disaster* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968).

sense, the story of Darien as disaster fulfils the same purposes as framing the South Sea Bubble of 1720 as an incidence of gambling mania and fraud. The disaster story can also fit into a series of Scottish tragedy narratives such as the romantic retellings of the life of Mary, Queen of Scots, or the 'Forty-Five. The simplifications of the Darien disaster story avoid the discussion of potentially positive outcomes and tend to obscure the contemporary views of the projects. Therefore, our ancestors appear as merely naïve, greedy or just simply less developed than we are.

Walker argued that modernisation theory underpins much historical writing, whether or not the writers are aware of it themselves. 'Ideas about modernization are so deeply rooted in western culture that they appear to be common sense: "obviously" the world has modernized; "obviously" some societies are more modern than others. Not surprisingly, many historians have assumed that the process began in the *early modern* period and that that period is defined by a conflict between traditional and modern.'⁴ The Darien scheme is usually considered as a belated attempt by Scotland to catch up with the activities of the English joint-stock companies. It was then at the mercy of an even more advanced Spanish empire, and the assistance it received from the Kuna is of little note, or merely pathetically touching. This approach places the Scots in a race for development, behind the English and Spanish, but ahead of the Kuna. It also downplays the role of other factors such as natural disasters, accidents and disease.

The Darien scheme was seen by Insh as being ill-timed relative to other European nations' development. His pamphlet started with the words 'the great movements in the History of Scotland have often been either late or premature; but always conceived in a spirit of high ambition and always entered upon in a spirit of passionate determination'.⁵ Lenman argued that due to mercantilism elsewhere, 'Scotland faced a widespread policy of beggar-my-neighbour against which her smallness hardly permitted effective retaliation'.⁶ These ideas of developmental stages which countries or peoples reach at different times distort our understanding of the power relations in the region. Due to ideas of relative development, it was seen as inconceivable that the Spanish would not settle in pleasant or useful areas. Kuna-held land is portrayed as being 'pestilent and unhealthy' and that is the only reason for a lack of a permanent or sizeable Spanish presence. The Kuna are therefore seen as being pushed into areas which the Spanish have rejected as hinterlands or swamp. Prebble argued that 'the Directors of the Company did not ask themselves why, if Darien were such as paradise, Spain had not already settled there [?]'.⁷ He portrayed the Spanish as the masters of Isthmus with garrisons, forts and towns and said that they were 'wise enough, and had been in America long enough not to waste time and men on the swamps of Darien'.⁸ The Kuna's backwardness or pre-modernity is assumed throughout. Prebble portrayed the Kuna as a childish people. He wrote, 'the round, bright-eyed faces of the Cunas peered at the Directors from the simple framework

⁴ Garthine Walker, 'Modernization', in *Writing Early Modern History*, ed. by Garthine Walker (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005), pp. 25-48 (p. 25).

⁵ George Pratt Insh, *The Darien Scheme* (London: Historical Association, 1947), p. 3.

⁶ Bruce Lenman, *An Economic History of Modern Scotland, 1660-1976* (London: Batsford, 1977), p. 45.

⁷ Prebble, p. 74.

⁸ Prebble, p. 75.

of Wafer's prose [...] He respected their uncomplicated religion.'⁹ Insh's pamphlet of 1947 does not mention the indigenous inhabitants at all. This portrayal of European power ignores both the power of indigenous groups and the impact of natural phenomena upon Europeans. The Spanish were often weakened by epidemic even within their garrisons and forts, which they needed as defensive structures against the attacks of indigenous groups and buccaneers.

Darien is in modern day Panama, between Portobello and Cartagena in Columbia. It was on the fringes of what the early modern Spanish settlers called New Granada. The weakness of Spain under the last of the Habsburg kings and the difficulties of maintaining such a vast empire meant that this area was not subdued by the Spanish. This remained the case even into the nineteenth century. Helg wrote 'in the west [of New Granada] the territory was almost entirely controlled by sovereign Indians [...] an estimated 10,000 Kuna (or Cuna) in the region of the Atrato River and in the Darién [...] indigenous defiance of Spain [...] meant that this region tended to favour Spain's enemies and actively participated in contraband. This was particularly the case with the Kuna in the west and the Wayúu in the east, both of whom had intense commercial relations with the British from Jamaica and the Dutch from Curaçao.'¹⁰ Spanish attempts to settle the area failed. There were several thousand settlers scattered in small villages along the Isthmus in 1712, but their numbers had shrunk to 1,000 in less than 70 years. The Kuna started to attack Spanish settlements in the province of Cartagena itself. Further attempts to push into Kuna land in the 1770s were abandoned in the 1790s. There was no Spanish military presence between the south of the Sinú River and Portobello, including the Atrato River which was the primary means of access to the Chocó gold mines. Even by 1830, a Spanish Viceroy declared, with regard to the Kuna, that 'their subjugation [was] an almost desperate matter'.¹¹

This mosaic of European and indigenous power bases was more in line with the realities of European settlements elsewhere in the Americas. The Spanish had strongholds in certain localities, such as Cartagena and Portobello and control tracts of the continent, as did the French, English and Dutch. There were similarly tracts of land controlled by indigenous groups. In addition, colonisation is often constructed in terms of outright control of regions. What the Scots were proposing could be considered as a trading post on the margins of indigenous land. This would be similar to the European activity on the West African coast. Europeans could have fortified enclaves by were clearly within the jurisdiction of indigenous groups.¹² This reframing of the Scots' scheme allows the Kuna to be viewed as primary actors, just as African tribal groups were during the same period.

Themes of relative development and racial supremacy also appear in the pamphlet literature. Written by Europeans for a European (primarily Scottish or English) audience,

⁹ Prebble, p. 73.

¹⁰ Aline Helg, *Liberty and Equality in Caribbean Columbia, 1770-1835* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), pp. 19-20.

¹¹ Helg, pp. 28-30.

¹² See, for example, Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (London: Phoenix, 1997), pp. 183-184.

it addressed questions of legal ownership by European nations. The Scots were ordered to find some land which was 'unsettled' and left Crab Island when they found a Danish ship docked there.¹³ The Danes were considered to have a claim to that land, but the Kuna were not considered to have a claim to Darien. This notion of settlement did not have any relation to the type of settlement, number of inhabitants or length of time they had been there. Rather, only people of European descent could claim land by settlement. The Spanish might claim the entire Americas due to their financing of Columbus' expedition. However, other European nations clearly held colonies due to *force majeure*. The Spanish were obliged to acknowledge this fact as the anonymous author of *Certain Propositions* pointed out.¹⁴ This writer argued that the Spanish never settled at Darien and that settlement must therefore grant right of ownership. These arguments implicitly assumed that the Spanish were powerful and that the Kuna were not. It also frames a debate in terms of settlement and colonisation rather than as the entrepôt which was Paterson's original plan.

Pamphlets also stressed Spanish oppression of indigenous peoples as being a reason for the Kuna's friendliness to non-Spanish Europeans.¹⁵ Pamphleteers discussed indigenous resistance or compliance, but not indigenous power. This reinforced ideas of Spanish power over the whole region. When the Scots arrived at Darien, the Spanish did not attack immediately, and their attempts against the first expedition were not particularly impressive. They were themselves weakened by epidemics and, outside of their strongholds, were precariously settled. They were also hampered by the weakness of the chain of command starting in Madrid. The Spanish king's illness and worries over the succession created problems. The Kuna and Scots co-operated in skirmishes against the Spanish and routed them at the Battle of Toubacanti.¹⁶ The Scots' real difficulties, whilst still at Darien, seemed to come from a lack of provisions and illness. Such difficulties might be expected in the initial phase of any settlement, but the embargo on trading with the English islands contributed to their distress.

The pamphlet literature and the secondary sources diverge over the question of whether Darien was worth settling (by Europeans). Pamphlets supportive of the Darien scheme naturally exaggerated the charms of the Darien site. A pamphlet credited to William Paterson himself claimed that 'The Country is Healthful to a wonder; insomuch that our own Sick, which were many when we Arrived, are now generally cured'.¹⁷ Other writers attempted to lend authenticity by created detailed fictions. For example, readers were informed by one author that indigenous women carried their dead husbands' bones

¹³Insh, George Pratt, (ed.), *Papers relating to the ships and voyages of the Company of Scotland trading to Africa and the Indies, 1696-1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1924), p. 64; p. 73.

¹⁴Anon., *Certain propositions relating to the Scots plantation of Caledonia, and the national address for supporting thereof* (Glasgow, 1700).

¹⁵See for instance, *The History of Caledonia. A gentleman lately arrived, The History of Caledonia, or, The Scots Colony in Darien in the West Indies* (London: John Nutt, 1699).

¹⁶See J. S. Barbour, *A History of William Paterson and the Darien Company* (Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1907), pp. 170-180; pp. 256-264.

¹⁷William Paterson, *An abstract of a letter from a person of eminency and worth in Caledonia to a friend at Boston in New England* (Boston, 1699).

around in a sack for an entire year.¹⁸ Despite such fictions, a surprising amount of the information given in these pamphlets was borne out by events. The Kuna were indeed friendly to the Scots. The variety of wildlife and plant life was also notable. In these descriptions, the pamphlet literature was influenced by the published journal of Lionel Wafer. A former buccaneer, Wafer had written of his experiences when he stayed for two months with the Kuna at Darien.¹⁹ His descriptions of the lush forest, variety of wildlife and the Kuna themselves were not disputed by the Scots who later settled at Darien. Wafer met the directors of the company in Edinburgh.²⁰ He also advised the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations in London, accompanied by his old shipmate, Dampier. The English even considered settling the place themselves.²¹ Its strategic location on the Isthmus and links to gold-bearing areas were positive factors.

The secondary literature tends to view the Darien site as unhealthy and discarded by the Spanish. (This idea has already been challenged earlier in the paper.) The motif of Darien as innately unhealthy is reused frequently. The lush vegetation and wildlife is portrayed as being supported by rotting and decaying matter and much is made of the high levels of rainfall.²² The settlers' illnesses and deaths are supposed to have been due to the choice of site.²³ However, the recorded deaths from fluxes and fevers do not give sufficient detail to analyse whether these diseases came from contact with indigenous people, insects such as mosquitos or from local water sources. The settlers may have brought their illnesses with them. They had survived a long Atlantic journey and were likely to have been suffering from deficiencies in their diet. It is also not clear how robust they were to begin with, given Scotland's poor harvests. 1200 men and some boys and women left with the first expedition. Four died at Madeira of 'flux'. 36 died between Madeira and Darien. 28 died from illness and four were drowned during the two months at Darien.²⁴ By contemporary standards, especially of long sea crossings, these figures are low. The company printed the lists of deaths and the company secretary, Mackenzie, wrote 'it is a great and general Mercy that of so many as went crowded in Five Ships, upon so long and tedious a voyage as they had, so few are dead'.²⁵ In fact, more deaths occurred when ships were lost in hurricanes or when the Scots abandoned Darien for the English colonies and were refused support.²⁶ Darien may have been no more 'pestilential' than nearby Carthage which was then in the grip of epidemic. It should also be

¹⁸ Anon., *A letter, giving a description of the Isthmus of Darien (where the Scot's colonie is settled;) from a gentleman who lives there at present. With an account of the fertility of the soil, the quality of the air, the manners of the inhabitants, and the nature of the plants, and animals. &c. And a particular mapp of the Isthmus, and entrance to the river of Darien* (Edinburgh: John Mackie and James Wardlaw, 1699).

¹⁹ Prebble, pp. 65-67.

²⁰ Prebble, p. 107.

²¹ Inch, *Documents*, pp. 48-50.

²² See Prebble, p. 76.

²³ Prebble's comments regarding the site are noted above.

²⁴ Prebble, p. 128. Barbour, pp. 87-89.

²⁵ Barbour, p. 90.

²⁶ Two ships were lost with all hands off Florida. Prebble, p. 335. A letter from the Lt. Governor of New York dated 7 August 1699 asks permission to trade with refugees from the colony. The letter mentions that of c. 300 men who left with the ship from the English Caribbean, 103 had been thrown overboard on the journey to New York. They were not suffering from any 'contagious distemper' but from 'pure famine and fatigue'. Reprinted in Inch, *Documents*, p. 117.

remembered that Scotland itself can be described as inhospitable. Its poor harvests and cold and rainy climate also held problems for the Scots. However, Darien's 'pestilential' nature is used as a metaphor for the folly of the whole scheme. The Scots' behaviour needs to be discussed in context. They may have been escaping from famine, rather than to dreams of gold. They barely had time to recover from the Atlantic crossing and to gain food supplies which would allow them to truly settle the area, although some buildings and a fort were erected.

The story of folly is elaborated in other ways in the secondary literature. Prebble argued that the trade goods were ill-chosen, particularly with reference to Wafer's warnings about the heavy rainfall in Darien.²⁷ A contemporary, Walter Herries, had claimed that the company had sent 'Scotch hats, a great quantity; English bibles, 1500; periwigs, 4000, some long, some short; campaigns, Spanish bobs and natural ones'. Prebble noted that the number was probably exaggerated, and they were probably for the settlers' use rather than trade goods. He pointed out that Macauley had been caught out by Herries' account. (Herries was a deserter from the first expedition and motivated to be critical of it to justify his own actions.)²⁸ The cargoes included a great many types of armaments and ammunition. They also included cloth, clothing, cooking utensils, crockery and tobacco pipes. After listing the cargoes' contents in detail, Prebble began a new paragraph with the words 'And combs.' The Directors' decision to order tens of thousands of combs was due to 'Lionel Wafer's idyllic picture of the Cuna Indians, combing long hair with their fingers'.²⁹ The Kuna's nose ornaments or choice of clothing marked them as less developed, whilst the Scots use of wigs, uniforms and badges marked them as being foolishly ill-adapted to their surroundings. At least, the directors saw the Kuna as worthy of consideration as trading partners. The bibles and wigs they bought for the settlers' own use were essential items within their society, and would have appeared in other European settlements. The practice of emblazoning uniforms or other items with company arms was also a contemporary practice. The Royal African Company even had a chalice engraved with its arms.³⁰

Similarly, the secondary literature stresses the consumption of alcohol as another sign of folly. This may reflect normative judgements regarding abstinence from alcohol. Barbour criticised the allowances of 'strong liquors' and wrote that it was 'pleasing to note that Paterson himself was an abstainer'.³¹ The consumption of alcohol should again be considered with regard to contemporary practice. It was one way in which waterborne diseases could be avoided. This was important prior to the public health initiatives which effectively wiped out typhoid and cholera in Britain. In addition, contemporary notions of 'strong' liquor may not be comparable to modern spirits. However, if the settlers were indeed reliant on alcohol, they were less likely to be affected by the nature of the water supplies around Darien. This may be an example of prudence rather than self-indulgence.

²⁷ Prebble, p. 77.

²⁸ Prebble, p. 97. Insh wrote that Herries was a 'prejudiced and most untrustworthy authority'. Insh, *Darien Scheme*, p. 17.

²⁹ Prebble, p. 98.

³⁰ *Minutes of the Court of Assistants of the Royal African Company*, held at PRO Kew: T70.89, 27 November 1716.

³¹ Barbour, pp. 97-98.

One point of interest is that the first settlers had no idea of the intended location of their settlement. The pamphlets were published after the first voyage had taken place, as its destination had been kept secret until the captains opened their orders at Madeira.³² This was to prevent English intervention in the sailing of the fleet and to stop them claiming right of settlement ahead of the Scots. Both Pratt Insh and Prebble noted that the opposition of the English parliament tended to originate from concerns about the Darien Company's remit. Its original name implied that it would contest the monopolies of English joint-stock companies, such as the East India Company. 'The Company is referred to sometimes as "our African Company", sometimes as "our Indian Company"; by English politicians and merchants it is called significantly "The Scotch East India Company"; its official title was "The Company of Scotland Trading to Africa and the Indies".'³³ Therefore, the first subscribers and the first colonists were investing in a company whose exact nature was unknown to them. This makes their investment decision all the more remarkable. Between February and August 1696, nearly 1,500 Scots pledged £400,000 Sterling to the Darien Company. Jones argued that both the sum and the speed with which it was pledged distinguish the Darien scheme from its contemporaries. When this is set against the backdrop of Scotland's domestic circumstances (blocks on trade, bad harvests and loss of men in war) then Jones found that 'the Company's ambition and accomplishment are similarly astounding'.³⁴ The settlers may have been motivated merely to escape unemployment and poor harvests. However, the investors must clearly have been investing out of surplus funds. Both investors and settlers would have also needed to be patient as such a venture would need time for long sea journey and for the colony to establish itself. Their motivations need to be considered further.

Patriotism might be one reason to participate in a scheme which was supposed to promote Scotland's trade. The subscription list for the first £400,000 was printed by Andrew Anderson in Edinburgh in 1696.³⁵ Its frontispiece stated that it is a 'Perfect List of the Several Persons Residenters in Scotland'. Not everyone resident in Scotland is a Scot. However, the importance of stating Scottish residence would be intended to encourage Scots patriots to invest. This should be seen as largely a marketing ploy in 1696, as the attempts to raise money on the English and continental markets followed. Jones has found evidence that William's blocking tactics were not entirely effective. Scotland had had a run of poor harvests, necessitating the outflow of specie to pay for grain imports. The Bank of Scotland was also taking in subscriptions when the Darien Company was forced out of the London market and wished to raise capital in Edinburgh. Yet, this squeeze on liquid assets did not result in higher interest rates. Therefore, Jones argues, that there must have been a flow of funds from abroad. Furthermore, he notes that William could stop the company from setting up books in London but could not stop

³² Prebble argued that English spies had found out the intended location from sailors in Hamburg. Prebble, p. 94. It is not clear how these sailors would know what the captains did not.

³³ Insh, *Darien Scheme*, p. 11.

³⁴ W. Douglas Jones, "'The Bold Adventurers': A Quantitative Analysis of the Darien Subscription List (1696)", *Scottish Economic and Social History*, 21, 1 (2001) 22-42 (p. 22).

³⁵ Reprinted in Barbour, Appendix F.

investors sending their money northwards.³⁶ As a patriotic investment, it might be supposed to attract money from the Scots Diaspora.

One of Jones' arguments is that the support of the elite signalled to other potential investors that the scheme had high-level support. 'Perhaps more than William Paterson's genius or credibility, it was the overwhelming support of wealthy and influential Scots that spurred investor confidence'.³⁷ Jones noted that this conspicuous support would then mean that some Scottish noblemen would be obliged to make an investment in order to maintain their political position.³⁸ Another sub-group of investors may have been motivated to invest for similarly self-promoting reasons. Jones argued that as 36 soldiers and sailors have their names in the subscription books, they were perhaps hoping for preferment to the colonies.³⁹ They make up only a small part of the issue and it may be that the Scots Diaspora was more important. However, if English and continental money was coming into Edinburgh then a purely patriotic explanation is not plausible. Perhaps, the blocking tactics of the East India Company merely served to publicise the issue and make it seem worth investing in. William's objections relating to the scheme were not then truly apparent.

William had stated that he was 'ill-served in Scotland'.⁴⁰ In 1695, The Bill for the settlement of a Scottish plantation was overshadowed by the Inquiry into the Massacre of Glencoe.⁴¹ The Act incorporating what was later known as the Darien Company received Royal Assent from Lord Tweeddale, not William himself. William was, as ever, engaged in war on the continent.⁴² His remark, which seemed to refer to the Glencoe Inquiry, did not necessarily imply that he was hostile towards Scotland itself or towards the Darien Company. (The first expedition even included men who had been involved in the Glencoe massacre.⁴³) William had been supplied with money and men from Scotland for his wars. Scotland's objections to English dominance did not imply a lack of loyalty to William. William's role as a defender of Protestantism had turned many Scots from the male Stuart Kings, even though they were of Scottish descent. One of the foremost opponents of the Union was Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, called 'The Patriot'. Yet he had been one of a number of political refugees who had clustered around William of Orange during the reign of James II. Fletcher returned from exile in William's entourage.⁴⁴

William's obtuse and curt remarks gave no indication of his later actions. The English Parliament's attempts to block subscriptions can be seen as a reaction to the wording of the company charter. William's later decision to block aid to the settlers even after they had quit their colony is harder to explain. Insh quoted William's words to the Scottish Parliament in 1700. William wrote, "It is truly our regrate that we could not agree to the

³⁶ Jones, pp. 37-38.

³⁷ Jones, p. 24.

³⁸ Jones, p. 29.

³⁹ Jones, p. 32.

⁴⁰ Prebble, pp. 48-49.

⁴¹ Prebble, p. 23.

⁴² Prebble, p. 28.

⁴³ Prebble, p. 103.

⁴⁴ Scott, Paul H. Scott, *Defoe in Edinburgh and other Papers* (East Lothian: Tuckwell, 1995), pp. 29-30.

asserting of the right of the companies colony in Darien and you may be very confident if it had not been for invincible reasons, the pressing desires of all our ministers with the inclination of our good subjects therein concerned had undoubtedly prevailed. But since we were and are fully satisfied that our yielding in that matter had infallibly disturbed the general peace of Christendom ... and that now the state of the affaire is quite altered, we doubt not but you will rest satisfied with these plain reasons'.⁴⁵ Even if William wished to reassure Spain, his restrictions seem too harsh. Also, it is not clear whether the appeasement of the ailing Spanish king was ultimately that important. The War of the Spanish Succession was not averted by it.

Perhaps surprisingly, given his subsequent conduct, contemporary Scots could be strongly loyal to William III. Their devotion to the King of England did not preclude hatred of the English themselves. An example is the *Darian Song* pamphlet written by 'a Lady of Honour'.⁴⁶ William is presented almost as if he is only King of Scotland and that England is an enemy both to him and to the Scottish nation.

King WILLIAM did Encourage us,
 against the *English* will.
His Words is like a Statly Oak,
 Will neither Bow nor Break;
We'll venture Life and Fortune both,
 For *Scotland* and his sake

The obstacles put in the way of gathering subscriptions from shareholders were considered to be the fault of the English rather than of the King. Andrew Fletcher described the company's attempts to raise money in London being thwarted by 'the Measures taken in the Parliament of *England*'. He then went on to describe the company's subscription in Hamburg being similarly undermined, writing that 'the *English* Ministers there, did, under Pretence of a special Warrant from His Majesty, put a Stop thereunto [...]' The King himself was described as showing his favour to the scheme.⁴⁷ This faith was to go unrewarded. Later pamphlets considered William's dual roles as King of England and King of Scotland to analyse whether his actions were legitimate in denying aid to the colonists.⁴⁸

William's role as a defender of the Protestant faith made his behaviour harder to justify. Some believed that success of the venture was assured if God was with the colonists. The dour letter of support from the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland makes that clear.

⁴⁵ Quoted in Insh, *Darien Scheme*, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Lady of honour, *The golden island, or, the Darian song in commendation in all concerned in that noble enterprize of the valiant Scots* (London: John Reid, 1699).

⁴⁷ Andrew Fletcher, *A short and impartial view of the manner and occasion of the Scots colony's coming away from Darien* (Edinburgh, 1699).

⁴⁸ George Ridpath, *Scotland's Grievances relating to Darien etc., humbly offered to the consideration of the Parliament* (1700).

‘...The Lord is with You, while You are with him; and if you seek Him, he will be found of you: But if you forsake Him, He will forsake you: and all your foreward Expectations and Blooming hopes shall be Blasted and Wither, and you Colony laid Desolate, your Names, instead of Honour and Renown, shall be branded with Infamy, Hissing and Scorn, and your Blessings turn’d unto Curses, and the Lord shall Pluck you up, and not Plant you, and shall separate you unto Evil, after he had said, he would do you Good.’

It is easy to forget that for many Scots hellfire was real and spiritual gains were far more important than material ones. The pamphlet exhorted the colonists to ‘[...]consider with Astonishment, with Gratitude, with relenting Sorrow and Shame, how many hundred of Leagues they have been carried safe, through the Vast Abyss, when there was but the thickness of a Plank betwixt them and Death, and consequently between them and Hell [...]’. Stressed throughout is the importance of a scheme which promoted the Protestant religion and recommended actual fighting as well as a moral fight against Catholicism. It argued that ‘[...] the most eminent of Saints, Recorded in the Holy Scriptures, have been most Couragious Warriours, and the best of Souldiers.’

Even after all their trials, the members of the expeditions were vilified for their desertion of the colony. A letter from the Directors called the departure from Darien of the first expedition, ‘a shameful and dishonourable abandonment’.⁴⁹ Alexander Stobo, a minister, wrote of his fellow colonists, ‘they were ripe, they must be cut down by the sickle of His wrath’.⁵⁰ If it was believed to be God’s judgement upon them, then their own sin, rather than illness and hurricanes, were the ultimate cause. This idea of human weakness has changed from sin to folly in subsequent histories. However, the common thread of human agency over a variety of different circumstances remains. The religious faith with which groups explained their world or helped to support their actions is often dismissed as irrational or irrelevant. Again, theories of modernisation posit a world which is increasingly secular and in which superstitions are placed contrary to rationality. The themes of rationality and folly appear repeatedly in such disaster stories as the Darien and the South Sea. The decision of investors to put their trust in the company, without knowing the nature of the resulting settlement may appear naïve. It may be considered to be blind patriotism. However, it may be that religious motivations and faith in God’s mercy had more of a role than has been previously understood. The bibles which the settlers took with them were not redundant trade goods. Their presence onboard necessitated the sacrifice of other supplies, including food and water.

The Scottish General Assembly was consumed by the crusade against Catholic Spain, but there was also a strong current of Anglophobia in Scotland which set Protestant England up as an enemy. This sentiment was reciprocated, partly due to national tensions and partly due to factions within Protestantism itself. These ideas were reinforced by one another as Presbyterians held sway in Scotland and Episcopalians in England. The author of *‘Caledonia, or, The pedlar turn’d merchant’* accused the entire Scots nation of being

⁴⁹ Reprinted in Barbour, p. 157.

⁵⁰ Prebble, p. 307.

dishonest. This dishonesty was clearly linked to attacks on Scottish Presbyterianism. William Paterson was cast in the role of Scots preacher.

‘This Paterson saw, their Pastor and Guide,
Who resolve’d such a Frolick had seiz’d ‘em;
And flinging his Texts, and his Sermons aside,
Left his Flocks to be damn’d if it pleas’d em.’

One line of *Caledonia* considered that Paterson was planning ‘The Deceivers to Cheat and Deceive.’⁵¹ However, the rhetoric of folly and fraud was often levelled at financial market undertakings in the early modern period. Pamphleteers applied the same criticisms to other joint-stock ventures and to a range of stock-jobbing activity.⁵² Macauley wrote that Paterson was not ‘a mere visionary or a mere swindler’.⁵³ In reality, Paterson was a founder of the Bank of England and had even gone out to the colony to make a new life there. Paterson was also in favour of the political union of England and Scotland, and had been influential in London. Daniel Defoe owed his release from a debtors’ prison in London to the intervention of William Paterson.⁵⁴

The events of the Union tended to crystallise the Darien scheme as a story of the Scots against the English. Economic distress was not the sole factor behind the decision of the Scottish Parliament to vote itself out of existence. Scott argued that the theory that Scotland had joined the Union in order to gain access to a wider market was constructed c. 1850. He argued that it was the implicit threat of invasion from England and bribery which were the real causes. Scotland was granted the ‘Equivalent’ which was a sum of money of just over £39,000 to compensate it for taking on a share of the English National Debt and to compensate Darien shareholders with interest. This sum was to be paid out of customs and duties on Scottish trade to England.⁵⁵ Leading Jacobite, Lockhart, noted that the Equivalent was basically a bribe to some out of Scottish monies. ‘Was there any reparation made for the barbarous treatment Scotland received from her neighbours of England and the ruin of her colony of which they were the principal cause’.⁵⁶ It may be that England has been blamed for this, but England itself was only a pawn in a Dutchman’s wars against Louis XIV. The English East India Company had been alarmed by incursions into its monopoly, but the Scots had chosen an area unclaimed by any English Company.

A curious melding of Scottish nationalism and British identity occurred in Georgia in North America. The strategic location of the Altamaha Bluff was protected by Fort King George which was later abandoned. It was then decided by the British that it should be resettled and Highland soldiers were mooted as ideal settlers, due to their hardiness. The

⁵¹ Anon., *Caledonia or the Pedlar turn’d Merchant: a Tragi-Comedy As it was Acted by His Majesty’s Subjects of Scotland in the King of Spain’s Province of Darien* (London, 1700).

⁵² See for instance the pamphlets of Archibald Hutcheson or Daniel Defoe.

⁵³ Thomas Babington, Lord Macauley, *The History of England* (London: Penguin, 1968) p. 510.

⁵⁴ Scott, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Scott, pp. 23-24.

⁵⁶ Lockhart of Carnwath, ‘*Scotland’s Ruine*’: *Lockhart of Carnwath’s Memoirs of the Union*, ed. by Daniel Szechi (Aberdeen: Association for Scottish Literary Studies, 1995), p. 172.

recruits were then allowed to name the settlement, which they 'desired' to be called Darien.⁵⁷ The British authorities appear to have allowed this. Presumably they saw no implied reproach or slur to the name of King William. It is curious that when apportioning blame, the Scots tended to choose the English rather than William. Perhaps, this was initially to protect themselves from accusations of Jacobite sympathies or was part of an existing Anglophobic stance. It may also be that English bribes over the Union have led to impression that Darien was deliberately sabotaged as part of a plot to weaken Scotland. Again, this is a version of the disaster story which also gives a great deal of power to human agents. The importance of a range of factors, from hurricanes to the Kuna, is again disregarded. It is tempting to wonder what would have happened to the colony if they had managed to outlast William, who died in 1702. Furthermore, it is interesting to wonder if the War of the Spanish Succession would also have favoured the colony's survival as Spanish ships and men were required elsewhere.

Sectarianism within the Protestant church itself and anti-Scots sentiment tend to have subsided in modern Britain. In Scotland, sectarianism between Catholic and Protestant and also Anglophobia remain very much alive. The survival of one set of prejudices and the decline of another obscures contemporary views of the Darien scheme. They can be partially reconstructed from the pamphlet literature of the period. Scots tended to view the Darien colony not only as an attempt to maintain Scotland's economic independence, but also as part of a wider Protestant struggle. Indeed, King William's status as a defender of Protestantism had won the loyalty of many Scots away from the male Catholic Stuart line. The Presbyterians were unable to predict that William would undermine the colony's chances. Their Anglophobia meant that they blamed the English Parliament for setbacks rather than William. The Scots could have positioned themselves as middlemen acting as agents for the Kuna, who were the real power in the Darien region. Discussions of European charter or ownership ignore the Kuna. Later modernisation theories of development similarly sideline them. Such theories are also deterministic regarding the inevitable failure of the company. Therefore, the variety of different possible outcomes and factors are simplified so that the history becomes a disaster tale. It is repeated as a caution or appears as a footnote in histories of the Union.

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⁵⁷ Bessie Lewis, *They called their town Darien* (Darien, GA: Darien News, 1975), p. 3-11.

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