

William Kitcher
Hoaxes of History

While researching as a doctoral student at McGill University the Swedish-Danish war of 1643-45 and its ramifications, I came across the definitive work on the subject, "Prior to Westphalia", by the German historian Jurgen Hoffmann, who completed his study in 1771. As one who speaks German fluently, I soon became concerned about some of Hoffmann's usage of language, even given the differences between modern German and the German language of the 18th century. His syntax sometimes struck me as awkward, and there was a lack of detail about some occurrences that struck me as suspicious. I speculated that perhaps a different or later writer had "interpreted" and/or "modernized" Hoffmann's work so I contacted Professor Wilhelm Hetz at the University of Freiburg, who located the original text in their excellent library built in the 1970s. Professor Hetz was a thoroughly amiable warm gentleman in his early sixties, who quickly enthralled me with his diligence, kindness, honesty, and sense of humour. He compared various passages of text that I sent to him with the original, and determined that they were the same. However, he researched further and discovered that the publisher of the text, Elbe Verlag, had not even come into existence until 1884. The "publishing date" of a century before was incorrect and unethical, and so the text was deemed a complete sham. Professor Hetz told me that the physical book itself, however, was a beautifully-bound copy, and an excellent forgery of a typical book of the late 18th century. He commended the designer(s) for the fine work.

I changed my doctoral thesis from European conflicts of the 17th century to hoaxes throughout history, and used Hoffmann's text as the jumping-off point. I discovered three other "historical texts" by Hoffmann, and published by Elbe Verlag – "Peter The Great", "Dutch-Portuguese Conflict in Ceylon, 1609", and "The False Stuart Restoration" – and, with the help of Professor Hetz and his graduate students, determined that these were also hoaxes and had little connection with the actual historical events.

During that time, I was fortunate enough to visit Professor Hetz in Freiburg, and was permitted to study these texts first-hand. "The False Stuart Restoration" was dedicated to "John Wakefield McNab, eminent professor of History at Oxford University" (my translation), a name unknown to Professor Hetz, me, or, as we discovered later, anyone at Oxford. Research on the name of John Wakefield McNab turned up nothing until, by coincidence, I found a book of poetry mis-filed among history books at the Metro Toronto Reference Library. The poetry was by John M. Wakefield, in a re-print by Radius, an imprint of Century Hutchinson Ltd., London, 1988, of a 1758 text "Printed for and Sold by B. Dod, at the Bible and Key in Ave-Mary Lane, near Stationers-Hall, London". (Ave-Mary Lane still exists in London as Ave Maria Lane, near St. Paul's Cathedral.) What is curious about this is that B. Dod normally published Christian texts, and Wakefield's poetry, while clumsy and amateur, is completely salacious and surely designed to appeal to non-Christian people.

Investigation into B. Dod uncovered a birth certificate. Mr. Dod and his wife Hannah had twin sons in 1739, John Wakefield Dod and McNab Dod.

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Clearly, John and McNab had used their father's printing press to produce their "poetry".

The name "McNab Dod" (in its form "McNab Dodsworth") is, of course, well-known to researchers of English history. McNab Dodsworth was a famous (or infamous) hoaxer who wrote a number of bogus historical texts including "The Most Real King Arthur", "The Mythhe of Alfred's Cakes", and "The Crusades of Richard the Coward". McNab Dod died in St. Pauli in Germany in 1801, which gives credence to the view that he and his brother knew Jurgen Hoffmann and contributed to the latter's historical hoaxes. The Dod brothers' rudimentary understanding of German may have been the source of the "awkward" German language usage I cited earlier. The publisher of "Prior to Westphalia", Elbe Verlag, whose existence occurred a century after the text was probably written, was owned by two gentlemen – Erhardt Hoffmann and Michael Dod, "chips off the old block", one might say. Elbe Verlag ceased operations in 1897, possibly due to bankruptcy.

My doctoral thesis was accepted and subsequently published as "Hoaxes of History" by McGill-Queen's University Press. I became a Professor of History at the University of California, Santa Barbara and, in my post-doctoral work, continued to collaborate with Professor Hetz. I was able to visit him several times over the years, and again he charmed me with his helpfulness and wonderful sense of humour, even after his dismissal from the University of Freiburg due to his age.

He and I were able to uncover many other hoaxes and/or forgeries, and we collaborated on several papers and a book, "The Myth of the British Raj". We also succeeded in having a number of books taken out of general circulation and removed from the internet, to be kept only in some museums and reference libraries, and deliberately labelled as hoaxes. Fortunately, they're not taught anymore.

Any other scholars working in the field of history hoaxes are encouraged to contact either Professor Hetz or me.

Professor Hetz continues to publish works in collaboration with other historians, of whom I am unfortunate not to have made acquaintance. I can recommend whole-heartedly the following of Professor Hetz's books: "The Deutsch-9/11 Plot", "How Vladimir Putin Brought Down The Berlin Wall", "The Suicide of JFK", and "Queen Elizabeth I Was A Woman And Other Great British Hoaxes".