



Kings and Copes: Religious Textiles at the Courts of James IV and James V of Scotland

Bess Rhodes



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UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

Abstract: During the early sixteenth century James IV and James V of Scotland built up significant collections of ecclesiastical textiles. Sadly, later conflicts and religious upheavals led to their dispersal and destruction. This article draws on evidence from inventories and financial records to develop an overview of the vestments, altar hangings, and other liturgical textiles which once adorned Scotland’s pre-Reformation royal chapels. It considers the processes by which liturgical textiles were acquired, the types of vestments and church furnishings present at the Stewart court, and the religious and political messages they conveyed. The article argues that both James IV and James V took a keen interest in religious textiles, at times even personally supervising the choice of materials. This monarchical interest arose from a combination of genuine piety intertwined with a shrewd recognition of the propaganda potential of liturgical textiles. Ultimately, items such as copes and altar frontals are an overlooked aspect of the Stewart monarchy’s use of courtly display to project an image of a cultured, pious, and powerful regime.

Keywords: Scotland; religious textiles; vestments; Renaissance; James IV; James V; piety; pre-Reformation

A Lost Collection

In the summer of 1567 the Chapel Royal at Stirling was stripped of its traditional furnishings.¹ At the end of July, Protestant representatives of Scotland’s three estates (then gathered at Stirling for the coronation of the one-year-old James VI), ordered the Earl of Mar to organise “without delay” the “reformatioun and purgatioune” of the Chapel Royal.² Mar implemented the task with enthusiasm, publicly declaring himself “a favourar of godlines”, and diligently “sercheing and seiking” out the chapel’s Catholic “veshellis, vestimentis [and] apparelling,” along with “utheris thingis” associated with “superstition.” The aim of this ecclesiastical decluttering was to create a

¹ The author is grateful to Amy Blakeway and Roger Mason for reading early drafts of this article and to Jacob Baxter for assisting with the bibliography.

² Brown et al., *Records of the Parliaments of Scotland*, 1571/8/16.

space suitable for Protestant worship, where the “word of God mycht be trewlie prechit and his sacramentis richtlie and sinceirlie ministrat.” Yet, in the process of purging the chapel, Mar and his helpers brought about the final phase in the dispersal of the large collection of religious textiles built up by James IV and James V of Scotland a few decades earlier.

Like many Catholic rulers, James IV (r. 1488–1513) and his son James V (r. 1513–1542) spent considerable sums on vestments, altar frontals, and other liturgical textiles. Notably, James IV commissioned a large number of ecclesiastical textiles in the early 1500s, around the time that the Chapel Royal at Stirling was endowed as a collegiate church.³ Meanwhile, in the late 1530s and early 1540s, James V expanded and refurbished the collections of altar hangings and vestments in his chapels at Stirling and Holyrood.⁴ Sadly, these textile treasures have since been lost. Some were probably casualties of the Anglo-Scottish warfare of the 1540s, which saw the burning and looting of Holyrood Palace and Abbey by English forces in 1544.⁵ Many other liturgical objects were purged by Protestant iconoclasts, with particularly intense destruction taking place during the rising of the Lords of the Congregation of 1559 to 1560, and following the deposition of Mary Queen of Scots in 1567 (the context for Mar’s reformation of the Chapel Royal at Stirling). Today no surviving ecclesiastical textiles from the courts of James IV and James V can be confidently located. Indeed, only a handful of religious textiles from pre-Reformation Scotland exist at all—with the most famous examples being the relatively modest linen embroideries of the Fetternear Banner and the Arbroath Abbey chalice veil.⁶

Perhaps because of the paucity of extant artefacts, most modern scholars have paid limited attention to the textiles which adorned Scotland’s pre-Reformation royal chapels and churchmen. At present, the most detailed analyses of the religious textiles of James IV and James V are Charles Rogers’ and F.C. Eeles’ works on the Chapel Royal at Stirling, published in 1882 and 1912.⁷ Yet, extant inventories and financial records provide historians with invaluable insights into what has been lost, revealing the presence at the Stewart court of richly decorated copes, chasubles, and canopies, made from materials such

³ Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal*, xxxi–xxxii. *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland*, 2:61–68, 288–294. Hereafter volumes of the *Treasurer’s Accounts* are abbreviated as TA.

⁴ TA, vol. 7:415, 434–435.

⁵ Bain, *The Hamilton Papers*, vol. 2: 369; McRoberts, “Material Destruction Caused by the Scottish Reformation,” 422.

⁶ McRoberts, “The Fetternear Banner,” 69–86; McRoberts, *Lost Interiors*, 152–153.

⁷ Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal*. Eeles, “The Inventory of the Chapel Royal at Stirling, 1505,” 310–325.

as velvet, taffeta, and cloth of gold. Drawing on the extensive written evidence for these items, this article explores what types of ecclesiastical textiles were owned and commissioned by James IV and James V, and the religious and political messages they conveyed. In so doing, it provides a new dimension to scholarly conversations about ceremonies and material culture at the Stewart court. Recent decades have seen researchers such as Andrea Thomas, Katie Stevenson, Lucinda Dean, and Morvern French emphasising how James IV and his son James V used varied forms of display for political ends, often engaging in creative ways with wider European courtly customs.⁸ Ecclesiastical textiles were an important, but nowadays largely overlooked, part of this programme of purposeful splendour.

Significance of Religious Textiles for James IV and James V

Religious display played a significant role in great occasions at the Stewart court. When James IV welcomed his bride Margaret Tudor to Scotland in August 1503, ecclesiastical textiles were integral to the public festivities. Upon arrival in Edinburgh, Margaret was not merely entertained by mock tournaments and pageants (performances which have attracted much of the attention of modern scholars), she was also greeted by gatherings of the burgh's churchmen.⁹ The English herald John Young, who accompanied Margaret to Scotland, noted how representatives from the Franciscans, the Dominicans, and a “rychly revested” procession from the Collegiate Church of St Giles welcomed their new queen.¹⁰ Further ecclesiastical finery was displayed when Margaret reached Holyrood Abbey, where she was met by the Archbishop of St Andrews, six other bishops, and “many Abbotts” and canons, who were also “richly revested.”¹¹ After ceremonially kissing a relic, James and Margaret went into the abbey church where they knelt before the High Altar upon “two Cuschyons of Cloth of Gold.”¹² The next day, on 8 August 1503, the royal wedding took place in the same abbey church, attended by “rychly arrayd” courtiers and by Scotland's higher clergy “all in Pontificalls” (the vestments and insignia worn by bishops for great services).¹³

⁸ Thomas, *Princelie Majestie*; Stevenson, *Chivalry and Knighthood in Scotland, 1424–1513*; Dean, “Richesse in fassone and in fairness”; French, “Ostentatious By Nature.”

⁹ For instance, Sarah Carpenter's fascinating analysis of the role of performance in the marriage festivities for James IV and Margaret primarily focuses on secular aspects of the occasion. Carpenter, “To the exaltation of noblesse.”

¹⁰ Young, “The Fyancells of Margaret,” 289.

¹¹ Young, “The Fyancells of Margaret,” 290.

¹² Young, “The Fyancells of Margaret,” 290.

¹³ Young, “The Fyancells of Margaret,” 293.

The marriage ceremony and nuptial Mass were led by the Archbishop of York and the Archbishop of Glasgow in a church adorned with lavish textiles, including fringed blue and red hangings around the king's chair and luxurious black hangings around the queen's.¹⁴ During the later stages of the Mass “two Prelatts” held a “cloth” above James and Margaret—presumably a reference to the *velatio nuptialis*, a veil of white fabric traditionally held above the bride and groom.¹⁵ Additional religious ceremonies continued throughout succeeding days, including Masses and Evensong conducted by canons from Holyrood Abbey and by clergy from the king's chapel.¹⁶

The “rich” textiles which adorned the clergy and churches of Edinburgh and Holyrood were a key part of the spectacle of James IV's marriage to Margaret, and played a serious diplomatic purpose—namely impressing witnesses with the piety, splendour, and culture of the Scottish court. As Lucinda Dean has noted, “dress was not only a marker by which the prince or king was judged, but also one by which his country could be measured.”¹⁷ This concept applied not just to the clothing of the king and aristocracy, but also to the garments of churchmen. Indeed, John Young specifically commented on how when James IV gathered “all the Prelats” and “many notables Personnes, as wel Ecclesiastiks as Seculers” together in his great chamber, it was “a noble Thyng to se the sayd Chammer so noblyournyshed.”¹⁸

James V similarly deployed the splendour of his clergy at key moments in his reign. When James's second wife, Marie de Guise, was welcomed to Scotland in June 1538, her party was initially received in Fife with a pageant at the gateway to St Andrews Cathedral Priory, before the next day attending an impressive service in the cathedral where “the bishopsis, abbottis, pryouris, monkis, freiris and chanounis regular maid great solemnitie.”¹⁹ Only after these religious ceremonies were over was the new queen entertained with “denner” and “great mirth,” before the next day being taken in procession around all the other “kirkis and colledgis” within “the toun.”²⁰ The combined display of religious and secular splendour appears to have successfully assured James V's new wife of the culture and status of the Scottish kingdom. Reputedly, Marie de Guise remarked that

¹⁴ For further discussion of these hangings see French, “Ostentatious By Nature,” 37–40.

¹⁵ Young, “The Fyancells of Margaret,” 294.

¹⁶ Young, “The Fyancells of Margaret,” 296–300.

¹⁷ Dean, “Richesse in fassone and in fairness,” 378–379.

¹⁸ Young, “The Fyancells of Margaret,” 292.

¹⁹ Mackay, *The Historie and Cronicles of Scotland*, 1:379.

²⁰ Mackay, *The Historie and Cronicles of Scotland*, 1:380.

when she was in France she had been told that Scotland was a “barbarous contrie destitut and woyde of all commoditeis” but now she “saw the contrair.”²¹

High-quality religious textiles were an obvious way to project the wealth and civilization of Scotland on great state occasions. However, they also formed part of the Scottish royal family’s regular public piety and private devotions. Altar hangings and clerical vestments were integral to the conduct of daily worship in the chapels of Stewart palaces. Meanwhile the great feasts of the Christian year saw finely embroidered silks and velvets being carried in processions. Even in challenging circumstances James IV and James V appear to have expected a full complement of liturgical textiles. For instance, when in 1504 James IV embarked on the so-called “Raid of Eskdale” (a joint Anglo-Scottish venture to reimpose government authority in the Borders) he took with him newly made blue taffeta altar hangings and full sets of vestments for a priest, deacon, and sub-deacon.²² Indeed, religious textiles were regarded as such an essential for early sixteenth-century royal households that when James V and Marie de Guise were setting up the nursery for their short-lived eldest son (b. May 1540, d. April 1541), as well as purchasing grey taffeta to hang above the prince’s cradle, they also supplied “towellis to his chapell” and a set of purple velvet vestments decorated with crimson satin crosses.²³ A year later, following the unexpected death of the toddler prince and his baby brother, new hangings of “Frenche blak” were made for “the King and Quenis altar” and to cover the walls of their chapel.²⁴

Both James IV and James V actively participated in decisions about the acquisition of liturgical textiles. Entries in royal accounts indicate that James IV engaged personally with the processes by which vestments and altar hangings were commissioned, with choices about materials and design sometimes being made in his presence. For example, in March 1511, four coverings or “howsouris” (two of white damask, one of purple satin, and another of grey damask) were brought from the royal jewel house “be the kingis command” and “in his presens” given to the royal embroiderers for making into “vestmentis, tabulis, and altar pendis [hangings]” for the chapels at Stirling and Holyrood.²⁵ James IV even occasionally donated his own clothes for restyling into clerical vestments. In 1507 “the Kingis gown of tanne wellus [brown velvet]” was converted into a chasuble (an outer vestment worn by priests for celebrating Mass) and tunicles (worn by sub-deacons at

²¹ Mackay, *The Historie and Cronicles of Scotland*, 1:380.

²² Dunlop, “The Politics of Peace-Keeping”; *TA*, 2:291.

²³ *TA*, 7:396–397, 409–410.

²⁴ *TA*, 8:43.

²⁵ *TA*, 4:532.

Mass).²⁶ These vestments were then decorated with red damask crosses from material “of the Kingis” which “wes bocht in London.”²⁷ The re-use of fabrics such as damask and velvet partly reflected the careful management of luxury goods in a pre-industrial society. Yet the fashioning of ecclesiastical garments from the monarch’s own clothes also served to link the person of the king with objects dedicated to God—an association with benefits for both Crown and Church.

The practice of upcycling royal clothing into religious vestments continued under James V. Shortly before Easter 1540, James had two tunics made from tawny-coloured velvet which had previously been the “lynyng of ane gown of claith of gold of the Kingis.”²⁸ The royal provenance of these tunics was reinforced by their adornment with embroideries of “crounis, names, and thrissillis,” and it is possible that the colour of the vestments also signalled ties between Crown and Church (financial records show that in preparation for “Pasche” that year James V’s second wife, Marie de Guise, ordered a gown lined with tawny taffeta).²⁹ The king sometimes spent considerable sums on these reworked items. For instance, the cost of decorating the tawny velvet tunics with crowns and thistles came to more than £32, work which was undertaken by the royal embroiderer John Young. In comparison, that spring Young was also paid £10 for embroidering a “jornay cote to the Kingis grace of fresit claith of gold and silver” and £2 for “the brodering of an uther cote of fresit claytht of gold, broderit with cordis of silver.”³⁰ Not only was the same elite craftsman employed to create royal and religious dress; it seems that at least some of the ecclesiastical attire entailed more labour.

Despite the stirrings of religious reform at his court, James V demonstrated a commitment to preserving and acquiring ecclesiastical textiles. During his personal rule, James V commissioned numerous religious textiles, both for his own chapels and for places of worship beyond the confines of the royal palaces. In this aspect at least he was like his father. The giving of vestments and altar hangings to religious foundations appears to have been a common form of patronage employed by James IV and James V (although it is a phenomenon which is overlooked by many historians of Stewart piety).³¹ An insight into

²⁶ TA, 3:293.

²⁷ TA, 3:293.

²⁸ TA, 7:293.

²⁹ TA, 7:292–293.

³⁰ TA, 7:292–293.

³¹ For example, Alasdair MacDonald’s influential article on princely culture under James III and James IV makes no reference to religious textiles, despite commenting on royal patronage of ecclesiastical architecture, painting, and music. MacDonald, “Princely Culture in Scotland under James III and James IV.”

James IV’s wider textile patronage is provided by financial records for the spring and summer of 1506, which reveal that in that year alone the king gave altar hangings to St Nicholas Chapel in Leith, commissioned a red chasuble with a gold cross for the Franciscan friary at Ayr, and donated a cope, chasuble, and two tunics of green “Birge” (or Bruges) satin to the Franciscans at Dumfries.³² Accounts from James V’s reign indicate that in 1534 the king gave the shrine of the Virgin Mary at Loretto near Musselburgh three linen altar cloths and three albs (a simple white linen sleeved vestment, worn either as the main garment or under more elaborate vestments).³³ It is likely that an altar frontal and three satin chasubles made at the same time as the albs were also given to the chapel at Loretto. Significantly, both the frontal and the vestments were embroidered with “the Kingis armes.”³⁴ Liturgical textiles had several obvious advantages as a form of ecclesiastical patronage: they were highly visible, relatively quick to produce, and could communicate a wide range of political and religious messages. The Stewart dynasty’s gifts of ecclesiastical textiles to non-royal religious foundations need more research, and it is beyond the scope of this article to explore the topic in detail. Suffice to say, it seems that both James IV and James V used gifts of liturgical textiles as a means of projecting impressions of monarchical piety and generosity to clergy and congregations well beyond the royal court.

It was, though, in the furnishing of the royal chapels and households that James IV and James V truly indulged their interests in liturgical textiles. Both kings had periods of major spending on the chapels in their palaces, with James IV particularly concentrating on the Chapel Royal at Stirling, whilst James V was more prone to divide his attention between the chapels at Stirling and Holyrood (the residences where his court usually held the great feasts of Easter and Christmas).³⁵ The attention paid to the furnishings of the royal chapels partly reflected their significance as the monarch’s personal places of worship. Yet the chapels were also in some respects still a public space which leading courtiers could access and which were sometimes attended by foreign diplomats. For instance, when the English ambassador Ralph Sadler arrived at the Stewart court in February 1540 he was immediately taken to watch James V attending Mass in the king’s chapel.³⁶ Sadler had to sit through the remainder of the service before the king rose from his prayers and the two men “full gently embraced.” This scene almost certainly took place in the royal chapel at

³² TA, 3:80.

³³ TA, 6:200–201.

³⁴ TA, 6:201; Thomas, “Renaissance culture at the court of James V, 1528–1542,” 63.

³⁵ TA, 7:434–435.

³⁶ Clifford, *The State Papers and Letters of Sir Ralph Sadler*, 19.

Holyrood—for which James V had recently purchased new vestments and altar furnishings (and was in the process of commissioning more).³⁷ Making the reform-sympathising Sadler witness the splendour of the king’s chapel arguably enabled James V to indicate both his affluence and his commitment to traditional Catholic liturgy—a pointed statement given the increasingly divergent religious outlooks of the Tudor and Stewart courts.

James V is sometimes portrayed by historians as observing “conventional rather than convictional piety.”³⁸ In contrast, James IV is often perceived as a conspicuously devout monarch, who was “earnestly dedicated to his faith” (even if also willing to exploit piety’s political potential).³⁹ Yet, both father and son seem to have valued ecclesiastical textiles, and these finely worked sacred fabrics accompanied the families of James IV and James V on their paths through life. They were part of routine observances such as daily prayers and were an integral component in the rituals that marked major milestones from birth to death. Royal christenings, marriages, coronations, and funerals all entailed the use of clerical vestments, altar hangings, and other sacred soft furnishings—small wonder James IV and James V thought these textile treasures mattered.

Acquisition and Production

How, though, did James IV and James V build up their collections of religious textiles? Where did they (and their households) source the items that furnished the chapels and churches, adorned the persons of the clergy, and were carried in processions? As so often with royal treasures, a proportion of the ecclesiastical textiles owned by James IV and James V were inherited. References to old liturgical textiles can be found in several contemporary inventories. Indeed, on occasion items had been around so long that their purpose had become uncertain. The 1505 inventory of the Chapel Royal at Stirling noted the presence of an “old velvet cloth of dun colour, intended, as appears, for the pulpit.”⁴⁰ Other older items were clearly more valued. For instance, in the spring of 1541 payments were made “for mending of ane caip of blew dammes witht sternis [stars] of gold.”⁴¹ This

³⁷ TA, 7:135.

³⁸ Thomas, *Princelie Majestie*, 118. It should perhaps be noted that the view that James V was much less pious than his predecessors has been questioned—see Mason, “Renaissance Monarchy? Stewart Kingship (1469–1542),” 264.

³⁹ Coll-Smith, “Royal Devotion and Cultic Promotion: James IV’s Dedications to Saints,” 112.

⁴⁰ “Item unus antiquus de vellus de ly dwne colore pro ambone ut apparet ordinatus.” Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlvii, 75.

⁴¹ TA, 7:435; Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlv, 73.

may have been one of the blue damask copes embroidered with stars listed in the 1505 Chapel Royal inventory.

Of course, James IV and James V also added to the royal collections, sourcing new liturgical textiles within Scotland and further afield. In comparison to some other forms of ecclesiastical display (such as carved masonry) religious textiles could be transported relatively easily, and items like copes and altar hangings were frequently imported. There is extensive evidence for Scottish religious institutions acquiring liturgical textiles in Continental Europe, sometimes in large quantities. For example, in 1494 the Abbot of Holyrood purchased in Bruges a stand of vestments in white cloth of gold (a stand being a full set of colour co-ordinated vestments for priest, deacon, and sub-deacon), as well as twenty copes made from white damask with blue cloth of gold orphreys (decorative borders or bands).⁴² Similarly, several of the items owned by James IV and James V were made overseas, with some having travelled considerable distances. Notably, the Stirling inventory of 1505 lists a group of green damask vestments, decorated with the arms of the king and queen, which had supposedly come from Dacia (roughly what is now northern Romania), a region which had a tradition of lavishly decorated textiles, incorporating Byzantine and Western styles.⁴³

A proportion of the liturgical textiles from outside Scotland may have been brought to the Stewart court by royal brides. The 1505 Stirling inventory notes that Margaret Tudor had brought north three small silver-gilt candlesticks engraved with “the arms of the King of England.”⁴⁴ The same inventory lists a “new and precious” stand of white damask vestments decorated with the Scottish and English royal arms, and it is possible that these items also originated south of the Border.⁴⁵ Similarly, the November 1542 inventory of James V’s valuables in Edinburgh lists vestments and altar furnishings which had belonged to his first wife Madeleine, including a black velvet covering for the front of an altar embroidered with “ane image of our Lady pietie” and “ane bak of ane altar of the samyne

⁴² McRoberts, *Lost Interiors*, 144–145.

⁴³ Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlvii, 75; Petroviciu et al., “Dyes in some textiles from the Romanian Medieval Art Gallery,” 18–29.

⁴⁴ “Item tria parua candelabra de argento deaurato portantia arma regis Anglie et deportata fuerunt ad partes Scoticanas cum Regina nostra que est filia Regis Anglie.” Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, I, 78.

⁴⁵ “Item una casula due tunice due stole tres manipuli cum ly parrus pro tribus albis et tribus amictibus de dammes albi coloris et habent ly orphus de panno auri et duplicaturam de bucrum rubij coloris et sunt noue et preciose et dicte tunice habent cordas sericas pendentes retro et portant arm Regis abante et regis ac regine filie regis Anglie commixtim retro.” Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlviii, 76.

with the crucyfix brodderit thairupoun.”⁴⁶ Given the brevity of Madeleine’s life in Scotland, it is possible the queen brought these items with her from France, although this is far from certain, not least because of the evidence for high-quality ecclesiastical textiles being produced at the Scottish court by both indigenous and immigrant craftspeople.

Late sixteenth-century Scots remembered how James V encouraged “all kynd of craftismen out of wther countries” to come to Scotland, including (among other crafts) “tepestaris” (tapestry-makers) and “broudistaris” (embroiderers).⁴⁷ Interestingly, financial and legal records suggest that in fact James IV may have had more foreign embroiderers at his court than his son. In December 1500, James IV granted annual pensions to a pair of embroiderers named Nanynek Dierxsoun and Robert Stanele “for thare service to be done to the kingis henes in thare craft of browstary.”⁴⁸ Nannick (as he is often termed in the *Treasurer’s Accounts*) produced a number of ecclesiastical items for James IV, including receiving payment in July 1508 for the making and embroidering of a white cope with “sonnys of quhit gold,” two chaubles of purple velvet, a cope and stand of funeral vestments with orphreys of “fine gold,” three copes and a stand of vestments in red velvet, a cope and stand of vestments in green damask, as well as hangings for the altar for funerals, and a frontal for the high altar.⁴⁹ It has been suggested that Nannick was of Danish origin, although a background in the Low Countries also seems possible.⁵⁰ Certainly, Nannick was involved in transporting ecclesiastical textiles from the Low Countries to Scotland, being paid £60 Scots in November 1504 for bringing two orphreys “of fyne gold, for tunycales...furth of Flandrez.”⁵¹

James IV gave further commissions to a Fleming named John Paulis, who arrived in Scotland in 1512, bringing with him “ane ymage of Sanct Katrin in brodrywerk,” perhaps a speculative piece produced by the embroiderer before entering the Scottish king’s employment.⁵² John Paulis almost certainly worked as part of a team, with James IV’s accounts describing him as the “companyeoun” of the embroiderers Ninian Silver and Raymond Dutchman, as well as making references to “twa broudistaris that wrocht with the Flemynge.”⁵³ The presence of embroiderers from Flanders at the Stewart court reflects both

⁴⁶ Thomson, *A Collection of Inventories and Other Records*, 58.

⁴⁷ Mackay, *The Historie and Cronicles of Scotland*, 1:353–354.

⁴⁸ Livingstone, *Register of the Privy Seal of Scotland*, 1:87.

⁴⁹ TA, 2:290.

⁵⁰ McRoberts, *Lost Interiors*, 47.

⁵¹ TA, 2:292.

⁵² TA, 4:353–354.

⁵³ TA, 4:353, 375, 442.

that region’s famous textile tradition and the strong trading ties between Scotland and the Low Countries, particularly in luxury goods.⁵⁴ Indeed, Flanders clearly served as the source of some of the most magnificent fabrics at James IV’s court. For instance, in 1508 the Scottish king paid more than £866 to Jerome Friscobald in Flanders for 32.5 ells of cloth of gold.⁵⁵ To put this figure in context, in 1512 James paid about £88 for the furnishing and casting of an entire great cannon.⁵⁶

Yet Scotland also had its own tradition of making ecclesiastical textiles. A few Scottish women are recorded as working on liturgical textiles at the courts of James IV and James V. For example, in 1496 James IV paid 9 shillings to an unnamed woman who “sowit the vestiment for the Chapel.”⁵⁷ Meanwhile, in May 1539 a woman named Helen Ros provided James V with a green velvet cover (and matching storage bag of green velvet and red damask) for a “gret” matins book.⁵⁸ In the main, though, it was men who were named as the creators of liturgical textiles at the Stewart court. This may reflect men’s roles as heads of workshops, rather than accurately signifying the gender balance of the teams who worked on religious textiles.

Unsurprisingly, churchmen were sometimes involved in the repair and acquisition of liturgical textiles. In 1498 the priest Sir John Kilgour of Dunblane was paid £5 “for mending of sex arras clathis, and making of ane clath abone the altar of Striuelin.”⁵⁹ During the final years of James IV’s reign, the Dean of Glasgow, Robert Forman, helped source a number of liturgical textiles. In 1512 Forman delivered to the court a chasuble with orphreys, an alb, an amice (a cloth worn around the neck and shoulders), altar towels, an altar pendicle (a type of covering for the altar which functioned a little like a valance), a corporal (a linen cloth on which the bread and wine stood during Mass), a mass book, and an item described as “ane mise belt” (possibly a reference to a cord or sash for securing the alb).⁶⁰ These items were clearly new, as the *Treasurer’s Accounts* refer to the “making and sewing of thaim”—although it seems unlikely that Forman personally sewed the vestments and altar furnishings.

⁵⁴ Fleming and Mason, *Scotland and the Flemish People*; French, “Ostentatious By Nature,” 33–34.

⁵⁵ TA, 4:27.

⁵⁶ TA, 4:278–279.

⁵⁷ TA, 1:302.

⁵⁸ TA, 7:161.

⁵⁹ TA, 1:386.

⁶⁰ TA, 4:358.

James IV appears to have recruited an eclectic mix of people to source and make religious textiles. In contrast, for much of James V’s personal rule, the production of ecclesiastical textiles at the Stewart court was dominated by the Scottish embroiderer John Young. During the late 1530s and early 1540s, John Young received a succession of ecclesiastical commissions, as well as producing some secular clothing for the king. Young appears to have specialised in high-quality items with a lot of decorative detailing. For instance, in the winter of 1541 he received payment for “for twa crucefixis of silk browdery work and twa imageis of our Lady and Sanct Johnne.”⁶¹ Young routinely worked with valuable materials such as cloth of gold, and made several sets of vestments from this fabric.⁶² Considering the quantity of work that Young was producing, it seems likely that he headed up a team of embroiderers. There survives a tantalizing reference from the spring of 1543 regarding a delivery of purple velvet to John Young’s wife for making the cover of a prayer book.⁶³ Sadly, it is unclear whether Young’s spouse was actively involved in producing this item or was simply receiving materials.

There are several aspects of the processes by which religious textiles were created and sourced for James IV and James V which remain uncertain. Nevertheless, some points can be made with confidence. Firstly, the early sixteenth-century Stewart court was evidently aware of wider European trends in ecclesiastical textiles. Both James IV and James V owned a number of imported liturgical textiles, and at times foreign embroiderers were encouraged to settle in Scotland. Secondly, there was also home-grown expertise. Particularly during the reign of James V, Scottish embroiderers were undertaking elaborate and large-scale ecclesiastical commissions. Sadly, the loss of the objects these skilled embroiderers produced limits our awareness of the state of textile art in Renaissance Scotland, as well as restricting our knowledge of pre-Reformation royal piety.

Types, Colours, and Materials

Fortunately, evidence from inventories and from the *Treasurer’s Accounts* provide clues as to the types of ecclesiastical textiles commissioned by James IV and James V. These varied considerably in purpose and elaboration. Although it is tempting to focus on richly decorated copes and chasubles, it is important to remember that, like most churches, the chapels of James IV and James V had numerous relatively plain linen items. Indeed, white

⁶¹ TA, 8:43.

⁶² TA, 7:145, 188.

⁶³ TA, 8:173.

altar cloths (often termed “towellis” in contemporary sources) and albs were among the religious textiles most frequently purchased by pre-Reformation Scottish monarchs. Both albs and altar cloths were often acquired in bulk orders. In May 1505 James IV bought 150 ells of “Bertane lynyn” (linen from Brittany) to be made into twelve albs and fifteen “towales for altaris.”⁶⁴ Similarly, in May 1541 James V paid for 129 ells of “blachet bertane claytht to be albis and towellis to the chapell in Striveling.”⁶⁵ These linen items were regularly used and underwent repeated laundering.⁶⁶ Part of their purpose was to protect the harder-to-clean silks and velvets, although the white also symbolised purity.⁶⁷ Linens were sometimes not included in the inventories of valuables which recorded silk and velvet liturgical textiles. Nevertheless, they were still holy objects which were consecrated before use. For instance, in 1505 James IV made a payment to the sacristan of the Chapel Royal, Master David Trail, for carrying “albes and towales fra Edinburgh to Dunblane to hallow.”⁶⁸

Whilst albs were typically white, the outer vestments, such as chasubles, tunicles, and copes, were usually made from luxurious coloured fabrics. Pre-Reformation Scotland did not have set colours for the different seasons and festivals of the church.⁶⁹ Instead the colours used probably reflected the preferences of a church’s clerics and donors, although blue already had an association with the Virgin Mary.⁷⁰ The 1505 inventory of the Chapel Royal at Stirling records vestments in black, blue, red, dun, green, white, and purple.⁷¹ Of these colours, red, blue, white, and black seem to have been most commonly used for James IV’s vestments—with the black ones probably being for services for the dead. Certainly, a 1561 inventory of Mary Queen of Scots’ vestments notes the existence of “thrie black weluouss [velvet] caipis for the mort.”⁷² It should be noted that some of the vestments categorised in 1505 as “red” or “white” appear to have been cloth of gold on a red or white base. As well as cloth of gold, a variety of other luxury materials were used. Vestments made from velvet, satin, taffeta, and damask all occur in James IV’s inventories and accounts. James V appears to have mostly commissioned vestments in similar colours and materials as his father, although he did innovate occasionally. For instance, in 1540 he

⁶⁴ TA, 3:79.

⁶⁵ TA, 7:434.

⁶⁶ TA, 3:148.

⁶⁷ Thibodeau, *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum of William Durand of Mende*, 30.

⁶⁸ TA, 3:148.

⁶⁹ McRoberts, *Lost Interiors*, 172.

⁷⁰ Macfarlane, “The Divine Office and the Mass,” 19.

⁷¹ Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlv–xlvi, 72–76.

⁷² Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, lix.

ordered the making of tunics and “ane vestment” in tawny velvet.⁷³ In 1533, James similarly ordered that four ells of “tanny camlot” (i.e. tawny coloured camlet—an expensive imported fabric probably made from a mix of silk and angora) should be made into a chasuble for the chapel at a tournament.⁷⁴ Tawny (a yellowish brown) was a colour frequently used in Stewart liveries.⁷⁵ It was also a hue James V favoured more generally—having amongst other items hats, horse-trappings, and a close-stool made from tawny coloured fabric.⁷⁶

In 1540 James V commissioned John Young to make for the royal chapel “ane stand of claith of gold” vestments.⁷⁷ As noted above, a “stand”, or matching set of vestments, usually indicated the full complement of outer vestments for priest, deacon, and sub-deacon in the same colour and materials (so a chasuble, dalmatic, and tunic, with relevant accessories).⁷⁸ For example, the early sixteenth-century inventory of Crail Collegiate Church describes “ane stand of greyne welnot” consisting of “ane caype, ane chesable, twa tunykillis, with abbis, stolis, and fannonis [another term for a maniple—a strip of cloth worn by priests over one arm during Mass].”⁷⁹ These matching sets of vestments (which often also included copes for one or more of the clerics) appear to have been regarded as the most desirable arrangement for High Mass. In 1505 the Chapel Royal at Stirling seems to have had full stands of vestments in black, blue, red, dun, green, and white.⁸⁰

Copes were usually the most valued and expensive vestments. These semi-circular cloaks required large amounts of material and were often richly decorated. In 1505 three of Stirling Chapel’s “new and valuable” copes of black velvet were apparently embroidered with the king’s arms, whilst one was also “sewed with threads of gold after the manner of glistening stars.”⁸¹ Such a design echoed contemporary Continental fashion, and there survives from the Burgundian court a late fifteenth-century black velvet mourning cope decorated with coats of arms and golden radiating flames.⁸² Another cope in the Scottish

⁷³ TA, 7:293.

⁷⁴ TA, 6:93.

⁷⁵ Westerhof Nyman, “Livery and Dule,” 65.

⁷⁶ TA, 7:286, 295, 310.

⁷⁷ TA, 7:415.

⁷⁸ McRoberts, *Lost Interiors*, 143.

⁷⁹ Rogers, *Register of the Collegiate Church of Crail*, 64.

⁸⁰ Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlv–xlviii, 72–76.

⁸¹ “Item tres cape de ly vellus eciam nigri coloris noue et preciose portantes arma domini Regis de quibus una earum est consuta cum filis aureis ad modum stellarum splendencium.” Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlv, 73.

⁸² Synge, *Art of Embroidery: History of Style and Technique*, 58.

Chapel Royal was of white damask and embroidered “with golden threads like the shining sun,” whilst other copes of blue damask had hoods of cloth of gold, as well as golden embroidery.⁸³ The financial records of both James IV and James V indicate that copes were much less frequently commissioned than chasubles and tunics: instead existing copes often underwent repairs. For example, in the spring of 1541 James V’s treasurer paid out 44 shillings for “mending of ane caip of claytht of gold.”⁸⁴ Because of their high value even relatively old copes were retained. Significantly, the inventory of items given up by the Keeper of the Chapel Royal at Stirling in 1562 begins by listing “twa auld caippis of blew dames droppit with floure delice of gold with the foirbrestis maid in histories.”⁸⁵ These old copes decorated with fleur-de-lis (a symbol of the Virgin as well as of France) were presumably survivals from the vestment collection of James V, and perhaps even dated back to the time of James IV or earlier.

Ideally, the vestments worn by the clergy co-ordinated with the altar furnishings used at the same service. For instance, the black velvet cope with golden stars mentioned above had a matching pendicle for the high altar in the Chapel Royal.⁸⁶ The altar was the most holy part of the church and was believed to represent Christ—as such its coverings were of great significance.⁸⁷ The medieval liturgical author Guillaume Durand of Mende (commonly known as Durandus) advised that the altar should have upon it “white linens” representing both the humility of the Saviour and “the pure heart when it is adorned with good works.”⁸⁸ The linen cloth was typically placed upon silks and other decorative coverings, which Durandus claimed denoted both the saints and the “virtues with which the soul is furnished.”⁸⁹ The more elaborate altar coverings would have been visible hanging at the front, with the linen cloth lying on top of the altar, as is the pattern in many churches to this day.

The frontal, or antepend, which hung down across the whole front of the altar, was typically made of luxurious fabrics and often edged with a fringe. For instance, in September 1505 James IV paid for the making of a velvet frontal, edged with fringes which

⁸³ “Item una capa de dammes albi coloris cum filis aureis consuta ad modum solis splendentis et ly orphus de panno auri.” Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlv–xlvi, 73–76.

⁸⁴ TA, 7:435.

⁸⁵ Robertson, *Inventaires de la Roynie Descosse Douairiere de France*, 59.

⁸⁶ Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlv, 73.

⁸⁷ Thibodeau, *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, 21.

⁸⁸ Thibodeau, *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, 30.

⁸⁹ Thibodeau, *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, 30.

“wer the Kingis auin,” for the high altar at Holyrood.⁹⁰ At the top of the frontal there was often a pendicle, or superfrontal, which hung down like a valance at the front of the altar. James IV and James V appear to have favoured richly decorated pendicles. For instance, the 1505 inventory of the Chapel Royal included a pendicle of blue damask, embroidered with images of God the Father, the Virgin Mary, and several angels. This pendicle was also adorned with numerous pearls.⁹¹ James V likewise commissioned elaborate pendicles from his favoured ecclesiastical embroiderer John Young.⁹²

Of course there were times when such elaboration was not appropriate—notably during the fast of Lent. In 1505, James IV paid for “Holland” or plain linen cloth to make “antependis and frontales of the altaris in Lenterane in the Halyrudhous.”⁹³ At the same time he also purchased “Bertane claith, to be the vail in the chapel of Halyrudhous agane Lenterane.”⁹⁴ The tradition of concealing the altar during Lent with a great veil hanging the height of the church was long established in Scotland. For example, in the mid-fourteenth century Prior William de Lothian ordered for St Andrews Cathedral “a great veil for the church that was hung during Lent between the altar and the choir.”⁹⁵ The sobriety of the décor during Lent almost certainly made the splendour of Easter (or “Pasch” as it was usually termed in Scots) even more impactful. At Easter king and court had new clothes, and the finest church furnishings were transported to where the monarch was celebrating the most important feast in the Christian year.⁹⁶ For instance, in March 1505, the sacristan of the Chapel Royal had to oversee the “cariage of the chapell graith [furnishings] fra Strivelin to Edinburgh agane Pasch.”⁹⁷

Although ecclesiastical textiles were most frequently seen within churches, their use was not restricted to sacred interiors. Processions and other forms of outdoor religious ceremonies were an important part of holy days like Easter and Corpus Christi, as well as royal celebrations like marriages and civic entries. The 1505 inventory of the Chapel Royal contains reminders of some of the additional liturgical textiles used for these festivals, listing a piece of red cloth of gold that was used to “honour the Eucharist” when it was

⁹⁰ TA, 3:64.

⁹¹ Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlv, 74.

⁹² TA, 7:434.

⁹³ TA, 2:293–294.

⁹⁴ TA, 2:293–294.

⁹⁵ Watt, *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower in Latin and English*, vol. 3: 400–401.

⁹⁶ There are numerous entries in financial records relating to new clothes for Pasch. See, for instance, TA, 4:242.

⁹⁷ TA, 3:131.

“carried with out the church” as well as the four red wooden staves that held this canopy “aloft.”⁹⁸ The custom of bearing a canopy above the consecrated bread in processions on feast days such as Corpus Christi was common to a number of European courts. For instance, Henry VIII of England owned a “Canapie of crimsen vellet with the holy goste in a rich Sonne with beames borderid abowt with the Kinges armes...to bare ouer the Sacramente.”⁹⁹ On such occasions the splendid vestments worn and carried by the king’s clergy were seen by audiences beyond the monarch and leading courtiers. The very portability of religious textiles meant that they could be used to project religious and secular messages well beyond the walls of royal chapels.

Symbolism and Iconography

Ecclesiastical textiles at the Stewart court were decorated with a variety of sacred and secular motifs, often with several layers of meaning. The medieval canonist Durandus explained how:

Whatever belongs to the liturgical offices, objects, and furnishings of the Church is full of signs of the divine and the sacred mysteries, and each of them overflows with a celestial sweetness when it is encountered by a diligent observer...¹⁰⁰

Durandus’ *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* had a wide circulation in pre-Reformation Scotland.¹⁰¹ Indeed, in February 1503 James IV purchased a copy for the Franciscan friary at Stirling.¹⁰² For “diligent observers,” amongst whom we should probably count James IV and James V, the visual spectacle of ecclesiastical textiles was enhanced and given greater meaning by these items’ religious and political symbolism. Today, the deeper meanings of early sixteenth-century liturgical textiles can at times be hard to decipher. This issue is compounded when (as is the case with the Stewart court) we are reliant on descriptions of the designs, rather than being able to study the objects themselves. Nevertheless, inventories and financial records do provide significant clues about the decoration and

⁹⁸ “Item unus pannus preciosus de auro rubij coloris ad honorem eucharistie ordinatus quando deportatur extra ecclesiam et habet pannum lineum ad eius conseruacionem. Item quatuor haste lignie rubij coloris ad portandum in alto dictum pannum super eucharistiam.” Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlvii, 74.

⁹⁹ Starkey, *The Inventory of King Henry VIII: The Transcript*, 173.

¹⁰⁰ Thibodeau, *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, 1.

¹⁰¹ Holmes, *Sacred Signs in Reformation Scotland*, 52–58, 223–224.

¹⁰² TA, 2:359.

intended messages of the vestments and chapel furnishings owned by James IV and James V.

The recorded decorations on Stewart liturgical textiles generally fall into one of the following categories: heraldic devices, religious symbols, and images borrowed from the natural world. Nature was a common inspiration for late medieval decorative art, and some of the motifs on vestments and altar hangings associated with James IV and James V appear to have borrowed from the appearance of plants. In part this reflected a general appreciation of the beauties of nature and God’s creation. However, some nature-inspired designs probably had additional religious and secular associations. The 1505 inventory of the Chapel Royal at Stirling records a stand of red satin vestments “wrought with threads of gold like the branches of trees.”¹⁰³ Curving branches can be found on several extant late medieval vestments, frequently as part of a so-called Tree of Jesse (essentially a depiction of Christ’s family tree).¹⁰⁴ For example, the Victoria and Albert Museum has a fourteenth-century red silk Tree of Jesse cope which is covered with the twisting branches of a golden vine.¹⁰⁵ Interestingly, the only surviving cope from the collection of Henry VII of England (who was of course James IV’s father-in-law) is also made from red and gold fabric, with embroidery representing the twisting branches of a Tudor rose.¹⁰⁶ Unfortunately, it is not clear from the 1505 Stirling inventory what (if any) extra layers of meaning the golden branches on James IV’s red vestments may have held.

Celestial bodies were a common form of decoration on the liturgical textiles used in the chapels of James IV and James V. Several of the vestments and altar hangings were embroidered with gold stars.¹⁰⁷ For instance, in July 1503 James IV made a payment to the embroiderer Nannick for creating “ane gret caip of the mortstand with sternys [stars] of gold on it.”¹⁰⁸ Such celestial symbols hinted at the glories of Heaven, with James IV’s favoured poet William Dunbar describing how Christ holds state:

Abone the radius hevin etheriall,

¹⁰³ This group of vestments are described as: “Item due cape vna casula due tunice vna stola unus manipulus cum ly parrus pro una alba et vno amictu de satene rubij coloris contexta cum filis aureis ad modum ramorum arborum.” Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlvi–xlvi, 74.

¹⁰⁴ Morgan, “Embroidered Textiles in the Service of the Church”, 29–30.

¹⁰⁵ Victoria and Albert Museum, Cope, Accession Number 175-1889, accessed February 2024, <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O121306/cope-unknown/>.

¹⁰⁶ Monnas, “New Documents for the Vestments of Henry VII at Stonyhurst College,” 345–349.

¹⁰⁷ Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlv, 73.

¹⁰⁸ TA, 2:290.

The court of steris, the cours of sone and mone
The potent Prince of joy imperiall...¹⁰⁹

Other textiles at the Chapel Royal in Stirling were adorned “with golden threads sewed like the rays of the sun.”¹¹⁰ Indeed, in the summer of 1503 Nannick undertook work on “ane quhit caip with sonnys of quhit gold,” and a cope of this style is later recorded in the 1505 Stirling inventory.¹¹¹ At least some of the items decorated with suns were honouring the Virgin Mary. For instance, a blue damask pendicle for the high altar in the Chapel Royal at Stirling was embroidered with golden suns and “a very beautiful salutation of Our Lady.”¹¹² This linking of golden suns with the mother of Christ may reflect the medieval Catholic tradition of representing Mary as “clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet”—iconography which was based upon a description from Revelation 12:1 of a wondrous woman who will appear in this fashion at the Apocalypse.¹¹³

Unsurprisingly, given the prevalence of Marian devotion in pre-Reformation Scotland, symbols and images of the Virgin Mary adorned several religious textiles at the Stewart court. The 1505 inventory lists the blue damask altar pendicle discussed above, as well as another blue pendicle with embroideries of the Virgin and God the Father.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, in 1541, James V commissioned silk embroideries of the Virgin Mary from John Young.¹¹⁵ The large number of other blue and gold vestments held at Stirling may likewise reflect devotion to the mother of Christ—indeed the royal chapel there was dedicated to the Virgin Mary and St Michael.¹¹⁶ Both James IV and James V are also known to have invested in Marian images. Shortly after marrying, James IV gave Margaret Tudor a golden “ymage of Our Lady,” whilst James V commissioned a statue of the Virgin Mary in 1533.¹¹⁷ From a royal perspective, Mary’s role as Queen of Heaven had potentially useful

¹⁰⁹ Small, *The Poems of William Dunbar*, 2:324.

¹¹⁰ “Item primis due cape de dammes blodij seu celestis coloris cum filis aureis consute ad modum radiorum solis...” Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlv, 73.

¹¹¹ TA, 2:290; Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlviii.

¹¹² “Item unum pendiculum pro summo altari de dammes blodij coloris cum filis aureis consutum ad modum radiorum solis portans pulcherime salutacionem nostre domine.” Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlvi, 73–74.

¹¹³ Getty Museum Collection, catalogue entry for “The Crowned Virgin and Child as ‘The Apocalyptic Woman Clothed in the Sun’: 2003.49,” accessed February 2024, <https://www.getty.edu/art/collection/object/1095R5#full-artwork-details>.

¹¹⁴ Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlvi.

¹¹⁵ TA, 8:43.

¹¹⁶ Elliott, “The Carver Choir-Book,” 356.

¹¹⁷ TA, 2:217; TA, 6:93.

implications, and there was a long tradition in Scotland of associating earthly queens with the Virgin Mary.¹¹⁸ In the words of Sir David Lindsay (who among other roles served as Lord Lyon King of Arms to James V) the Virgin Mary was “Quene of Quenis,” whilst her son was “Christe, our kyng.”¹¹⁹

Symbols associated with Christ, and the wider Trinity of God the Father and the Holy Spirit, were widely used on Stewart liturgical textiles—indeed they were even more popular than Marian imagery. The 1505 inventory of the Chapel Royal records a pendicle of blue taffeta embroidered with a gold crucifix, a pendicle of blue velvet with an “image of the Holy Trinity wrought in gold,” and a black velvet cloth embroidered with the words “His Mercy is over all His works.”¹²⁰ The prevalence of symbols relating to Jesus and the Trinity partly relates to wider religious trends. The fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries saw an increase in Christocentric piety in Scotland, which was reflected in the growing popularity of celebrations such as Corpus Christi, and devotion to cults of the Holy Rood, the Holy Blood, the Holy Name, and the Holy Saviour.¹²¹

Yet there was also a deliberate intertwining of symbols of heavenly and earthly kingship. In 1541, James V commissioned from the embroiderer John Young a red damask altar pendicle embroidered with “thre Jesus wrocht witht crown of thorn, thre names of Jacobus quintus, witht the Kingis armes and crown abone the heid, and twa unicorns berand the samin.”¹²² The sanctity of Christ’s name and the king’s, and the crowns of the Passion and Scotland, were represented as strikingly alike. As in so many aspects of pre-Reformation life, the iconography of ecclesiastical textiles integrated the sacred and the secular. The mixing of royal and religious symbols was repeatedly employed by both James V and his father. In 1539, James V commissioned (probably for his chapel at Holyrood) a chasuble of purple velvet, decorated with red damask crosses, and embroidered with “the Kingis armes and twa lettres.”¹²³ Meanwhile, James IV owned an altar frontal of cloth of

¹¹⁸ Fitch, “Mothers and Their Sons: Mary and Jesus in Scotland, 1450–1560.”

¹¹⁹ Hamer, *The Works of Sir David Lindsay of the Mount*, 1:366.

¹²⁰ The Latin description of the embroidery on the blue pendicle describes it as bearing “ymaginem Sancte Trinitatis in auro contextam.” The Latin description for the black velvet cloth reads: “Item unus paruus et longus pannus de vellus nigri coloris super quem consuta sunt cum filis aureis hec uerba—Misericordia eius super omnia opera eius.” Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlv–xlvi, 73–74.

¹²¹ Oram, “Holy Blood Devotion in Later Medieval Scotland,” 565.

¹²² TA, 7:434.

¹²³ TA, 7:135.

gold “bearing the arms of the king and divers other arms, and certain images of saints.”¹²⁴ Such items were in line with trends at other Northern European courts. For example, the coverings for Henry VIII of England’s altar at Windsor Castle included two cloths of purple velvet, decorated with “a lardge Trynitie and the passion...Havinge also the kinges Armes & garter vppon thupper clothe.”¹²⁵

The liturgical textiles owned by James IV and James V were decorated with symbols which would have been comprehensible to elites from across Western Christendom—something that was presumably intentional. It has been claimed that James IV sought to bring a Scottish dimension to the performance of the liturgy.¹²⁶ Certainly, he actively supported the production of the new Aberdeen breviary (which sought to replace the Sarum rite in Scotland), and in 1507 explained how it was desirable to have “mess bukis, manualis, matyne bukis and portuis bukis efter our awin Scottis use.”¹²⁷ However, the symbols embroidered on ecclesiastical textiles commissioned by James IV and James V largely conformed to wider European traditions. Apart from the use of heraldic devices such as thistles and unicorns, there was little that was distinctively Scottish about the iconography of Stewart religious textiles—instead, altar hangings and vestments were adorned with symbols of the suffering of Christ, of the virtue of the Virgin Mary, and of earthly and heavenly kingship. Rather than stressing Scottish exceptionalism, these sacred textiles demonstrated the Stewart court’s understanding of an international Catholic visual culture.

Conclusion

Modern scholars have increasingly highlighted the “exuberant and cosmopolitan” courts created by James V and his father.¹²⁸ Marriage festivities, coronations, royal entries, and tournaments have been presented as part of a lively Stewart visual culture. Yet before the Reformation, liturgical textiles were present at all these events. Even seemingly secular activities such as tournaments incorporated religious display. For instance, when preparing for a tournament in the early spring of 1533, James V commissioned altar

¹²⁴“Item vnum paruum frontale preciosum de auro et cum filis aureis pendentibus portans arma Regis et diuersa alia arma et certas ymagines sanctorum et habet in se multas margaritas ad eius decorum.” Rogers, *History of the Chapel Royal of Scotland*, xlvii, 74–75.

¹²⁵ Starkey, *The Inventory of King Henry VIII*, 320.

¹²⁶ Coll-Smith, “Royal Devotion and Cultic Promotion,” 114–115.

¹²⁷ M. Livingstone, *The Register of the Privy Seal of Scotland*, 1:223.

¹²⁸ Thomas, *Princelie Majestie*, 225.

coverings and tawny coloured vestments for the “chapell of the barras” which stood beside the jousting enclosure.¹²⁹

Ecclesiastical textiles need to play a much greater role in our understanding of Stewart court life. The past decade has seen valuable new studies of secular dress at the sixteenth-century Scottish court.¹³⁰ In contrast, the ways in which pre-Reformation Stewart rulers used religious textiles to pursue their earthly and heavenly aims remains relatively unresearched. Yet the textiles of the royal chapels probably equalled, or even surpassed, the splendour of the clothing of James IV and James V, and likewise formed a measure by which contemporaries assessed the king, his court and country. Exquisite vestments and church furnishings demonstrated to diplomats, courtiers, and the wider public the wealth and cultural connections of the Scottish royal family.

Yet these sacred satins, velvets, damasks, and linens also held considerable spiritual significance. The religious meaning of these items was of course part of their political power and indicated to faithful onlookers a closeness between the Stewart monarchs and the King of Heaven—a message James IV and James V skilfully exploited. However, we should not disregard the extent to which sincere piety may have driven royal investment in copes, canopies, chasubles, and altar coverings. It is perfectly conceivable that James IV and James V genuinely wished for the finest textiles they could find to be dedicated to the service of God. Certainly, both father and son appear to have cared about the conduct of worship. Indeed, in the spring of 1541, James V passed legislation ordering church leaders to ensure that “every kirk” in the kingdom underwent “reparatioune and reparaling” for “the honour of God almychtie, the blissit sacrament and divine service.”¹³¹ It was perhaps no coincidence that as this act was being passed by Parliament the king was himself engaged in further adorning the interiors of his chapels.

Unfortunately for the development of Scottish religious needlework, the reign of James V was in many ways a final flowering in the Stewart court’s acquisition of Catholic liturgical textiles. Following James’s death in 1542, and the unexpected accession of his baby daughter Mary, the Stewart kingdom was plunged into crisis. For nearly twenty years Scotland lacked a resident adult monarch. The country also suffered from successive phases of warfare and associated economic turmoil, leaving fewer resources for new luxury goods, whether religious or secular. The return of Mary Queen of Scots to her homeland in

¹²⁹ TA, 6:93.

¹³⁰ For instance, Westerhof Nyman, “Livery and Dule”; or Schuessler Bond, *Dressing the Scottish Court, 1543–1553*.

¹³¹ Brown et al., *Records of the Parliaments of Scotland, 1540/12/58*.

1561 initiated something of a revival at the Stewart court, but by then the religious situation had been transformed, and lavish ecclesiastical textiles were condemned by many Scots as idolatry. The changed public attitudes to elaborate liturgical dress may have been impressed upon Mary in September 1561, at the moment in which she entered the Scottish capital as an adult for the first time. Whereas previous royal entries had been celebrated with processions of clergy adorned in their finest vestments, according to some accounts Mary's welcome to Edinburgh included the burning of a wooden image "of a priest in his ornaments reddie to say mass."¹³²

The Reformation profoundly altered how liturgical textiles were perceived by many Scots, and contributed to the deliberate dispersal of the collections gathered by James IV and James V. Yet, despite the loss of the physical objects, we should not lose sight of the significance that vestments and altar hangings held for Stewart rulers before the upheavals of the mid-sixteenth century. Copes and chasubles, canopies and pendicles were items kings cared about and which reflected the Stewart monarchy's aspirations both for this world and the next. In pre-Reformation Scotland the public image of the ruler was not just projected through parliaments and proclamations, but was also communicated by the work of royal embroiderers, skilfully stitching onto silks and velvets divine and human messages.¹³³

¹³² Pitcairn, *Historical Memoirs*, 57.

¹³³ For a recent discussion of the varied ways in which James V deployed parliament see Blakeway, *Parliament and Convention in the Personal Rule of James V of Scotland, 1528–1542*.

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