



***Death and the Royal Succession in
Scotland c. 1214–c. 1543.***

By Lucinda H.S. Dean

Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2024

Reviewed by: Emily Wingfield



Death and the Royal Succession in Scotland c. 1214–c. 1543. By Lucinda H.S. Dean. St Andrews Studies in Scottish History. The Boydell Press, 2024. ISBN 978-1-83765-172-6. xviii + 337 pp. £95.

This book does what it says on the tin and a great deal more: in examining the cycle of ritual and ceremony associated with moments of death and succession in medieval Scotland, it encompasses not only funerals and coronations but also royal marriages and births, journeys (both within and outwith the kingdom), and related performances and ceremonies of monarchy including Entries and parliaments. Dean details the “interwoven” nature of “ceremonies that facilitated or marked the transferral, negotiation and renegotiation of royal power within the cycle of dynastic succession” and charts the cycle of “continuity and change in the ongoing dialogue between the monarch and the kingdom” over a significant expanse of time (2): from the death of William I of Scotland (the Lion) in 1214 through to the death of James V in 1542 and accession of his newborn daughter, Mary, Queen of Scots. Her lucid narrative and strong grasp of the key political moments and challenges of this period mean that her book should become required reading for anyone seeking to get to grips with this fascinating period of Scottish history—and for anyone interested in the theatre of late medieval and early modern monarchy.

Dean’s book is organised chronologically, and this works well both for a study of such a long period and for an evaluation of notably context-specific events. Comparisons are made within and across chapters, and events in Scotland are frequently set in a broader insular and European context. Dean regularly reminds her readers of the difficulties presented both by an absence for Scotland of liturgical orders of ceremony for inaugurations, coronations or royal funerals and by the gaps in extant financial records. However, she overcomes these challenges by casting her net more widely and making particular use of narrative sources (such as Scotland’s early fifteenth-century and later sixteenth-century chronicle tradition)—whilst at the same time attending carefully to the influence of their authorship, patronage, and political perspective. A real highlight of this book is the attention paid to surviving examples of material culture, such as seals, swords, crowns and costume, and to the physical spaces of ceremony and ritual. Maps throughout the book, for instance, illustrate the potential routes of the funeral processions for William I, Alexander III, Robert I, II and III, and James II, with accompanying discussion revealing

the importance of when, where, and by whom a deceased king was seen. Similarly helpful supplementary material includes regular genealogical tables and appendices detailing the attendees and officiators at Scottish inaugurations and coronations and expenses incurred during the wedding of James IV of Scotland and Margaret Tudor and in France ahead of James V's wedding to Madeleine of Valois. Of note, too, is Dean's regular referencing and use of much of the very good work being produced by the latest generation of historians of pre-modern Scotland, such as William Hepburn's likening of the late fifteenth- and early sixteenth-century Scottish court and household to immersive theatre, and Morvern French's emphasis on the importance of materiality.

Chapter One documents the death of William I and the reigns of Alexander II and Alexander III, and such a beginning allows Dean to position the more frequently discussed Stewart dynasty in light of Canmore and subsequent Bruce kingships. An especially interesting analysis is offered of the moment the party for William I's funeral met the inauguration party for Alexander II at Perth Bridge. This literal positioning of an heir alongside a deceased monarch made notably visual, and apparently secure, the direction of the oft-challenged dynastic movement.

In Chapter Two, Dean details how central rituals of death and succession were to the period of contested kingship, civil war, and war with England following the death of Alexander III of Scotland and subsequent vying of Bruce and Balliol dynasties for the throne ahead of and during the Wars of Independence. I found especially interesting here Dean's interpretation of how Alexander III—and later Robert I—used overlap with the liturgical calendar, as well as the material (e.g. type of marble), design and positioning of their tombs (at Dunfermline) to emphasise lineage and right to rule. Dean's digging into financial records is also notably revealing. Her detailing of the foodstuffs purchased for David II's wedding to Joan of the Tower, for instance, allows us to see the beginnings of a later culture of heraldic spectacle and her discussion of the volume of wax, weight, and type of candles used for the funeral of Robert I (and later for Madeleine of Valois and James V) creates a striking visual impression.

Chapter Three examines the use of ritual by the first Stewart monarchs (Robert II, Robert III, and James I), each of whose wielding of effective authority was beset by a range of personal and political difficulties. Notable examples include Robert II's continuing construction of an alabaster tomb for David II; Dean expertly places discussion of this material culture in the wider memorial context of England, France, and the Low Countries and follows Boardman in positioning it too alongside Robert's patronage of literature as

part of a broader package of dynastic propaganda. Well-known events from the reign of James I are also viewed from intriguing new angles. Dean thus considers how James I's entry to Edinburgh following his 1424 return to Scotland from English captivity was most probably positioned on Palm Sunday (the day too that his father died) to draw parallels between James and Christ and assert continued lineage.

Although this book ostensibly concentrates on kingship, one of its strengths is the attention paid to the role of Scotland's queens in cycles of death and succession. This is especially the case in Chapter Four, which takes us through the reigns of James II and III. However, it is a recurring feature of other chapters too, such as Chapter Five, in which Dean discusses the significance of Mary of Guise's coronation being delayed until the queen was visibly pregnant. In Chapter Four, Dean considers how Joan Beaufort played a leading role in exploiting details of James I's funeral and James II's succession in the aftermath of her husband's violent murder. One particularly striking example here is the juxtaposition—in terms of timing and location—of the coronation of the young James II in Holyrood (and his parading to Edinburgh Castle) and the visible (and visceral) punishment of those involved in his father's murder.

The book's final chapter adds yet more evidence to our growing awareness of Scotland's ability to match the magnificence of English and European courts during the reigns of James IV and V. Discussion of how conspicuously absent the burial of James III is in modern discussions of the period, and contemporary record, adds too to our knowledge and understanding of the fraught period following his murder at the hands of rebels who had the heir as their figurehead. I found especially arresting in this chapter Dean's reminder of just how critical the display in Aberdeen of a vigorous family tree (as recorded in a poem of William Dunbar) must have seemed to the young Margaret Tudor in the wake of the death of three infant sons.

I borrow Dean's own words in summing up this book's impact: "This study of ceremony offers a new platform for exploring not only Scottish kingship but also the political, social and cultural milieu in which it evolved" (239).

EMILY WINGFIELD

University of Birmingham