

## Chivalry and Knighthood in Scotland, 1424–1513

**Review Number:**

613

**Publish date:**

Saturday, 30 June, 2007

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**ISBN:**

9781843831921

**Date of Publication:**

2006

**Price:**

£45.00

**Pages:**

240pp.

**Publisher:**

Boydell & Brewer

**Publisher url:**

<http://www.boydell.co.uk/43831929.HTM>

**Place of Publication:**

Woodbridge

**Reviewer:**

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Katie Stevenson, in her *Chivalry and Knighthood in Scotland, 1424–1513*, presents a thorough, scholarly, and informative research monograph. The years 1424 to 1513 carry one from the return to his kingdom of James I, after the long detention in England following his capture as a boy of twelve in 1406, to the death of James IV at Flodden. The four reigns that they cover saw a steady extension (outside the minorities of James II and James III) of the power and authority of the kings of the house of Stewart, largely at the expense of the high nobility. The dramatic interludes in this story—the murder of James I, the undoing of the Douglasses at the 'Black Dinner' of 1440 and after the fight at Arkinholm (1455), and the death of James III at Sauchieburn—have ensured that the period has caught the eye of historians, but no one until Stevenson has much heeded the significance of the royal patronage of knighthood and chivalric culture in the relations of the fifteenth-century kings with their aristocratic subjects. Her study ably demonstrates the relevance of these topics to the story through that time of the Scottish monarchy.

Two powerful opening chapters (2 and 3) focus on knights and knighthood, and Stevenson returns to re-examine her earlier findings on these subjects in her concluding chapter on 'the crown's use of chivalry'. The absence of any clear dividing line below the rank of baron, between noble and non-noble, in Scottish freeholding landed society made knighthood important as an index of high standing, especially for the upwardly mobile. That, and the endurance of feudal bonds and of the forty day military service obligation of knights, gave the status of knight a social significance that was relatively sharper than that which it enjoyed in, say, the English sub-baronial genteel society of knights and esquires. The unpaid service of knights, Stevenson shows, greatly eased for the crown the problem of raising hosts for internal campaigning in

Scotland and on the border. As she also shows, the advancement through royal favour and land grants of knights who had given proof on campaign of their military ability reveals how well the Scottish kings understood the advantage to themselves of nourishing among their knights consciousness of their martial role and pride in it. Although the fifteenth century saw a good deal less fighting on the border than had the preceding age, the eagerness with which so many Scottish knights sought service overseas, especially under the French crown, testifies to the abiding strength of knighthood's military tradition and the lure of martial reputation, which gave it powerful potential as a cohesive force in landed society. The Scottish kings needed to make sure that that cohesive force worked in the crown's interest; in Scotland's highly localized society it could so easily, as Stevenson makes clear, have been exploited to the crown's cost by dissentient magnates, like the Douglases or, later the Stewarts of Albany.

It was generally accepted in European chivalrous circles that dubbing established a bonding relationship between he who thereby conferred knighthood and the recipient, and the Stewart kings clearly saw in the ceremony a useful means toward widening the crown's network of political support. With good reason, therefore, Stevenson devotes the whole of her chapter 3 to 'the bestowal of knighthood and the dubbing ceremony'. James I, probably following what he had learned in his captivity was the English custom, set the pattern of using great court occasions, such as his coronation and the baptism of his children, as opportunities for dubbing en masse; later there were mass dubbings to celebrate the weddings of James II and James IV, and the coronation of James III (and probably also, Stevenson argues, that of James II). Through careful exploration of the individual careers of those created knights on these occasions, and of the continuing royal patronage that many of them enjoyed, she is able to demonstrate illuminatingly the significance of the service and support that their loyalty secured to the crown, and in many other fields besides the traditional military one. Men knighted at the coronation of James I went on to do notable service for him and for James II in administration, in shrieval office for instance and as auditors of royal revenues, in diplomacy, and in offices in the royal household. Stevenson's findings for Scotland here nicely parallel what Fionn Pilbrow has found for England in his study of the English knights of the Bath. In both kingdoms, it is clear, civilian administrative service, always an element in knightly obligation, was becoming visibly more highly appreciated in the fifteenth-century ethos of knighthood.

Another less individualized way in which the kings and princes of late-medieval Europe sought to impress their knightly subjects and to cultivate their esteem was through patronage of chivalrous culture and activities, in particular jousting and tourneying. The Scots kings were no exception and Stevenson makes the tournament the subject of her fourth chapter. The sources for Scottish tournaments are not very satisfactory; the native Scottish chroniclers are seldom much forthcoming on the subject, and a good many tourneys have left no mark beyond notes of expenditure in the royal accounts, which Stevenson has carefully combed for references. Since there are substantial gaps in the Treasurer's accounts, there were probably quite a number more than we know about. There is only one indisputable record of a tournament in James I's reign and none for that of James III, the least chivalrous of the fifteenth-century kings; but James II and above all James IV were enthusiastic patrons, and this clearly enhanced their reputation and standing, abroad as well as at home. The challenges to single combat of the Burgundian champions Jaques and Simon Lalaing and Henri de Meriadet, taken up by three Scottish knights (James and Henry Douglas and John Ross of Hawkshead) were fought out before James II at Sterling in 1449, and Chastellain's vivid description of the encounters attests to the reputation for chivalry far beyond Scotland of James and the knights of his court. Under James IV references to tournaments in the records become frequent, and there were some notably lavish events. In 1496 a tournament formed part of the celebrations for the marriage of the English pretender Perkin Warbeck to Lady Catherine Gordon, and both the king himself and Perkin took part in the jousts. In 1503, for James's own marriage to Margaret Tudor there were three days of celebratory jousting. James's tournaments of the Wild Knight in 1507 and of the Wild Knight and the Black Lady in 1508 were theatrically staged with an allegorical literary theme after the fashion of some of the famous continental pas d'armes, and James himself jousted as the Wild Knight. The 1508 event was at his invitation presided over by Bernard Stewart, Sire d'Aubigny, Captain of the King of France's Scottish guards, and veteran of the Spanish crusade and of the Italian wars, a knight with a European reputation in chivalry. In knightly culture, as in other respects too, the court of James IV showed itself impressively cosmopolitan.

Stevenson follows her chapter on tournaments with a chapter (5) on 'kighthood and the display of piety'. The knightly enterprise which most obviously combined chivalry with piety was the crusade, and here Stevenson encounters (and recognizes) a problem at the start of her survey. In the fourteenth century the Scottish crusading record had been impressive; individual Scottish knights fought with distinction against the Moors in Spain, on the Alexandrian crusade of King Peter of Cyprus, and alongside the Teutonic Knights in Lithuania. But the fifteenth century did not offer the same opportunities; with the conversion of Lithuania and the defeat of the Knights at Tannenburg the east European crusading theatre effectively closed down, and there were no major expeditions to the east Mediterranean. The eagerness to go on crusade to the Holy Land that James IV expressed to Pope Julius II seems to have been genuine and serious, but his ambition was still in the future when he fell at Flodden. Stevenson makes the most she can of the scanty evidence relating to Scottish knights of the Hospital, and has interesting comments on the difficulties consequent on the Scottish preceptory at Torpichen being subject to the English Prior of the Hospital. She also presents some extremely interesting information about Scottish knights travelling to the Holy Land, not on crusade but on pilgrimage, and on pilgrimage elsewhere too. Both James III and James IV, she notes, were visitors to native Scottish saintly shrines, as those of Saint Ninian at Whithorn, of Saint Duthac at Tain, and Saint Fillan at Scone. Strictly speaking, it might be argued that she is here moving away from the express focus of her book, on kighthood, toward what Rosenthal called the 'purchase of paradise'. The same could also be said of her discussion of the endowment of collegiate churches by knights and nobles, including some very important foundations, William Sinclair's church at Roslin, Walter Stewart's at Meethven near Perth, and the Douglas foundations at Bothwell and Dalkeith. It does, however, give her an opportunity to take a careful look at the armour and heraldry of the surviving church effigies of founders and patrons. Altogether, her very thorough researches in these areas offer enormously-revealing insights into the religious culture of the secular Scottish aristocracy, in passages which are among the most perceptive in her book.

Noble culture continues as the centre of attention through Stevenson's chapter 6, on 'chivalry in Scottish literature'. She meets here difficulties comparable to those encountered with the crusade. The Scottish

literary achievement of the sixteenth century is deeply impressive, but the subject matter of the very finest works, James I's *Kingis Quair*, Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid*, the best of Gavin Douglas, is tangential to chivalry. The most notable Scottish contribution to the literature of chivalry, Barbour's *Bruce*, belongs to the fourteenth not the fifteenth century. Stevenson devotes generous space, notwithstanding, to a perceptive scrutiny of Barbour's heavily military interpretation of chivalrous values, and justifiably, since his work retained its influence throughout her period. It is a good deal more revealing of knightly attitudes than the Blind Harry's *Schir William Wallace*, written in the 1470s. Also revealing from this point of view are the chronicles, a genre ably discussed with particular attention to Wyntoun and Bower; Stevenson through apt quotation brings out the particular importance and interest for them and their patrons and readers of knightly reputation, for 'manly renown' established through 'douchty deedis'. At the same time she stresses their exemplary intention, to

Schaw how young knyghttis suld be men of were, / With hardy spreit at euery ieoparde

and to teach martial men to maintain the 'morall desciplyne' of their elders' time. At the very end of her period she writes interestingly about the overt signs that she detects of a changing attitude in Dunbar and in Sir David Lindsay's *Squire Meldrum*, of a 'dechivalization' of the knightly ideal through a new emphasis on civil public service in the style of the renaissance administrator-courtier.

From the point of view of knighthood, the most important section in Stevenson's methodical survey of chivalrous literature is that on 'manuals of chivalry', notwithstanding that only one author, Sir Gilbert Hay, comes under consideration. Hay's two translations from the French, of Bouvet's *Arbre de Batailles*, completed in 1387 (as the *Buke of the Law of Armys*) and of a French version of Ramon Lull's thirteenth century *Ordre de Cavalayria*, (as the *Buke of the Ordre of Knychthede*) were commissioned by William Sinclair, earl of Orkney and Chancellor to James II. The martial ambitions of his royal master were probably the reason for Sinclair's anxiety to see these two very influential works made available in Scottish to Scots knighthood, among whom they clearly struck a chord; there is clear evidence of the multiplication of copies and in the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century they seem to have been quite widely read. Hay's translations were very free and he added to the originals where he thought appropriate. Bouvet's book gave him the chance to lay particular stress on the overriding obligation of knights and men at arms to their king, a message with very direct relevance in 1456 in the immediate aftermath of James II's final clash with the Douglases. The *Buke of the Ordre of Knychthede* highlighted what Lull had had to say about the privileged status of knights, and their consequent obligation in honour to work in peace as well as war for the well being of society, in which they should act as 'ledaris and governours'.

The title of Stevenson's concluding chapter, 'the crown's use of chivalry', underlines what have been the principal themes of her book, the relationship between the Scottish kings of the last medieval century and the knighthood of their kingdom, and the interactions of knightly values with the royal style of leadership and government. The quality of the research that has gone into the book is matched by the perception of its analyses; in combination they bring to life the outlook and priorities of the knightly society that gathered round the Scottish kings at court and on campaign, in a period when the assertion of monarchical authority faced crucial tests and overcame them. By opening a fresh line of approach to this story, Stevenson makes a major contribution to the political, social, and cultural history of late-medieval Scotland. The individuality of the Scottish knightly experience and outlook is one of the most interesting features elucidated by this admirable study, and ideas that Stevenson throws out in the process suggest all sorts of potentially illuminating comparisons with contemporary developments in England and Europe. There are many English medievalists who, like myself, are culpably under informed about the independent kingdom that in the middle ages lay beyond England's northern border; Stevenson's book offers us an excellent opportunity for some useful self education.

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