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The Minority of James V: Scotland in Europe, 1513-1528

Ken Emond

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On 9 September 1513, James IV of Scotland died fighting against the English at the Battle of Flodden. He was succeeded by his one-year-old son, James V, and a fifteen-year-long minority followed. Initially James's mother, Margaret Tudor, acted as regent (1513-1514), but was removed from office after marrying Archibald Douglas, Earl of Angus. The Scottish elite called on James's senior male relation and heir, the Frenchman John Stewart, Duke of Albany, to come to Scotland and serve as regent instead. Albany served as regent between 1515 and 1524, during which time he made two extended trips to France. Margaret, sister to Henry VIII, represented a pro-English policy while Albany represented a pro-French policy. Albany's regency was successful, but when it became apparent in 1524 that he would not be returning to Scotland again, Margaret reclaimed control (1524-1525). Unfortunately, Margaret could no longer count on the support of the English government, as they had decided to back her now-estranged husband instead. Angus kept her son James captive for the next three years, ruling Scotland in his name (1525-1528). Finally, the sixteen-year-old James escaped and seized power himself.
Ken Emond discusses the successes and failures of the regency governments that ruled (or attempted to rule) Scotland during James V's minority. Emond establishes a clear set of criteria that any regent must meet to maintain power and support: provide justice and be seen to do so; distribute patronage to create a broad power base; protect Scotland's interests in the ongoing rivalry between England and France, while avoiding suspicion of being a foreign agent; and, crucially, to maintain possession of the king himself, the source of any minority government's legitimacy.

Emond concludes that the Duke of Albany's first active period as regent (1515-1517) was the most successful of James V's regency governments. Albany "was able to provide the good government—stability, security and justice—that the Scots wanted" (37). He showed himself to be "above the petty disputes over which he claimed authority" (41), reflected in "the number of cases which now came before the council" (70). Respect for Albany among the Scottish elite "gave him a strong hand with which to deal with a constantly hostile English government" (70). Albany's second active period as regent (1521-1522), however, was less successful because he encouraged the Scots to pursue a war with England "which was so clearly perceived to be only in the French interest" (138).

Emond is much more critical of Margaret Tudor's two periods of regency. While stating that it was "perhaps inevitable" that Margaret's first regency would be challenged on the basis of her gender (9), Emond ascribes her initial failure to her decision to marry the Earl of Angus, because it "too closely identif[ied] her with one faction" (20). Only twenty days after the marriage took place, the Scottish council stripped Margaret of her regency. Emond is very critical of Margaret's motivations throughout the book, describing her as having a "selfish character" (116) and a "private ambition to hold the highest authority in Scotland" (156). Emond suggests that Margaret should have been a figurehead without "political ambitions" (282), though other individuals, such as Angus, are not criticised for being personally ambitious. If Emond is criticising Margaret for failing to live up to early modern ideals of queenship, this would be an interesting point to expand on.

Emond ascribes the failure of Margaret's second regency to her "own character and how she exercised power. She was not a shrewd politician and her government was partial and inefficient." She "relied on too narrow an inner circle of advisers" and failed to "build a united support for her government" (197). Margaret decided to base all her policies on excluding her estranged husband, Angus, from influence, rather than building "a national coalition" (189). As a result, Angus, backed by the English government, was able to return to Scotland and win over powerful figures whom Margaret had failed to keep on side.

It is interesting to note, however, that a regency government did not have to meet all Emond's criteria to stay in power. Angus maintained his control over the government through his "control, principally within his own family, of offices of state and patronage," and over "the apparatus of government," rather than distributing patronage to create a broad power base (246). When James escaped, however, it became obvious that Angus had "failed to broaden the base of his administration and to build a coalition of lords with vested interest in the continuance of his government" who might help him to retake control (263).

This book originated as Emond's PhD thesis, submitted in 1988. Although Emond refers to and praises Amy Blakeway's Regency in Sixteenth-Century Scotland (2015), ultimately very little secondary work—new or old—is used, as the book is almost entirely based on extensive primary source research.

The most important source material used in Emond's work is the correspondence catalogued in the Letters and Papers of Henry VIII series; the surviving records of the Scottish government; and various sixteenth-century chronicles. Emond discusses the limitations of the surviving records, which makes it especially difficult to understand the events surrounding one of the

most famous incidents of James V's minority, the "Cleanse the Causeway" skirmish, when the Douglas and Hamilton families fought in Edinburgh High Street in 1520. Chapter 7 is dedicated to describing and assessing the surviving primary sources, which is an incredibly useful resource. Most interesting is Emond's discussion of the chronicle accounts of James V's minority, critiquing their reliability and usefulness.

A new subtitle has been added to Emond's book that was not used in the original dissertation: Scotland in Europe. Despite this, France and England are the only foreign countries that feature in the book to any significant extent. Although France and England's policies towards Scotland and efforts to interfere in Scotland's internal affairs are discussed throughout, Scotland in Europe is an inaccurate reflection of the book's main purpose: namely, to analyse Scotland's internal politics during James V's minority, primarily told from the Scottish perspective. Possibly the subtitle was added to make the book appear more topical, following Scotland's majority vote to remain in the European Union in 2016. For the book to claim such a focus, a broader use of source material from other European countries would be expected; as it stands, Emond relies primarily on the Letters of James V for an international perspective beyond the British Isles.

Emond concludes that the period of James V's minority was significant because the "developing centralisation and autocracy of the royal government" was "curbed by the absence of an adult king." This "caused a renewed reliance on traditional Scottish methods of government, particularly the localisation of control," but also increased self-interest among the Scottish political community (292). Another change was Scotland's increased international significance, which resulted in England and France seeking to ally with (or control) Scotland to undermine one another. Overall, Emond has written an excellent account of James V's minority, wonderfully researched and persuasive in its analysis.

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