
The British Isles in about the year 1100 displayed an amazing variety of kings and individuals or dynasties with royal pretensions. Among the more significant were, apart from the kings of England and the kings of Scots of the line of Kenneth MacAlpin, the Welsh royal princes, the Irish provincial and high kings, the Norwegian kings of Man and the Isles, and the rulers called kings or princes in Argyll, Moray and Galloway.

In his latest book, *Domination and Conquest*, Professor Davies has undertaken an examination of how the kings of England and their followers attempted to bring many of these rulers in Wales, Ireland and Scotland under their authority in the two centuries from 1100 to 1300. As the author puts it in his Preface,

> How one society comes to dominate, exploit and conquer another and how a subject people responds and adapts to the experience of domination are themes of perennial interest in the study of the past, as indeed of the present. (p. ix)

Indeed, the book is a long overdue and assuredly welcome comparative study of both this process of domination and the native reaction to it. Among the more significant points which the work asserts is a reassessment of the role of the military conquest in history, summed up in the oft-cited phrase "war is the catalyst of change." Conquests, writes Professor Davies, "simplify the historian's life and help him to tame an intractable past. In particular they provide him with a ready-made chronology..." (p. 1) Yet, the historian must attempt to go beyond a purely military view of history and domination. Conquests cannot account for the entire process of domination, for they were only one strategy of many. As Professor Davies points out, marriage alliances, munificence, economic ties, the attraction of the English court, friendship, and feudal bonds all had their role to play within the larger context of domination.
Another important point deals with the relations between natives and newcomers in dominated areas. Although the rebellion of William Wallace in Scotland and the Welsh rebellions which plagued Edward I lend credence to the belief that relations were exclusively hostile, hostility was not, in fact, the rule of native-newcomer relations. Marriages and gift-giving softened relations, and it must always be remembered that the social attraction of the Anglo-Norman court, with its wealth, was strong.

Other chapters explore the progressively larger role of the king of England from William I to Edward I in the process of domination; the role of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy, especially in Wales and Ireland; and the process through which domination transmuted into outright conquest by 1305.

Despite its overall excellence, the work is not without its shortcomings. Given the ease with which Professor Davies moves through the corpus of Welsh and Irish material it is somewhat discomfiting that his utilization of the Scottish material is less extensive. One would have liked to see more on Scotland within the pages of the book, but, as Davies himself acknowledges in the preface, the juxtaposition of the Scottish example upon those of Wales and Ireland does present some serious problems:

Scotland was a separate, unitary kingdom whose status was recognized by the kings of England and the rulers of the continent; its institutional and political development in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries placed it in a league altogether different from that of the small native polities of Wales and Ireland. (p. x)

While much hinges upon the problem of the difference of the Scottish experience from that of its Celtic neighbour kingdoms, the dissimilarity should not, perhaps, be overdrawn. Although the Anglo-Normans were "invited" to Scotland by David I, the son of Malcolm III, the peaceful nature of the "Norman Conquest" of
Scotland has been, and continues to be, overemphasized.\(^1\) Scottish society underwent a profound transformation in the twelfth century and native resistance to foreign influence was a prominent, if overlooked, thorn in the side of the Scottish monarchs as the rebellions of 1124, 1130, 1153, 1160, 1164, 1174-85 and numerous others all demonstrate.

This shortcoming in no way detracts from the value of the work. Well-written in Professor Davies' characteristic prose, full of insights and examples, and with a significance going well beyond its chronological and geographical parameters, *Domination and Conquest* should be welcomed by scholars, students, and the interested reader alike.

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One of the most characteristic and enduring institutions of medieval and early modern Europe was kingship. In his latest book, *Monarchs of Scotland*, Stewart Ross has undertaken the daunting task of examining the individuals who ruled and shaped Scotland for nearly a millenium. Taking as his starting point the conviction that, "until the very end of our period...a king or queen was the very pivot of government," (p.9) Ross paints for the reader a portrait sketch of each ruler of Scotland from Kenneth MacAlpin (c.841-859) to the exiled Stewarts of 1689-1807.

In a work which, by its very nature, leans so heavily toward biography, Ross has done an admirable job of bringing together a number of important themes which are crucial to our understanding of Scottish history and which might otherwise have been overlooked. Thus, elements such as Anglo-Scottish relations, the interaction of the crown with the nobility, and the interplay of the crown and the clans all receive due attention and are skillfully interwoven into the


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appropriate places throughout the narrative sketches. Another laudable characteristic is Ross' treatment of the monarchs after the 1603 Union of the Crowns with England. Although the Scottish monarchs of this period were based exclusively in England and were primarily English monarchs, the author nevertheless manages to bring home the implications of these distant rulers for Scotland. Thus, the execution of Charles I in 1649 can be examined in terms of not only its meaning for England (as is usually the case), but also for Scotland.

Unfortunately, the book does not live up to the potential of its subject matter. The specialist or well-informed reader will certainly take exception to some dates; similarly, the historicity of some of the early figures cited in the work, such as Alpin, the alleged father of Kenneth I, must be challenged.\(^1\) In addition, some of the anecdotes which are presented as historical episodes belong rather to the realm of legend.

More serious is the tendency of the author to succumb to several pitfalls which seem to persistently dog the historian of medieval Scotland. At several points it is suggested that the mark of good government is a written government, characterized by the use of sealed writs in large quantities (pp. 49, 55). Such an assessment almost certainly rests too heavily upon comparison with England’s advanced bureaucracy from the late eleventh century onwards, and does not give enough credit to Scotland’s vigorous, pre twelfth-century monarchy.\(^2\) Similarly, Ross falls into the trap of assessing late eleventh and early twelfth-century rulers like Edgar, Alexander and David I as "modernizing" monarchs who were determined that Scotland should no longer appear a "remote and uncultured backwater of northern Europe" (p. 49). Again, such analogies are based far too heavily upon English and continental models of society and monarchy and fail to realize the unique, vibrant, and often perplexing nature of the Celtic societies and kingdoms of Ireland, Wales and Scotland of the twelfth century and beyond.

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\(^1\) A good remedy is A.P. Smyth, Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000. (Edinburgh, 1984). See chapter 6 for the problems associated with Kenneth MacAlpin.

Another shortcoming is the tendency, often associated with the biographical genre, to form judgements and characterizations of monarchs. Thus, David I becomes a "hero" (p. 55); monarchs like Robert II and Robert III are characterized as inept (pp. 80-83); and James I becomes a "harsh and acquisitive monarch" (p. 89). Despite this, Ross does not, interestingly enough, accept many of the popular characterizations which have given monarchs like John Balliol and David II such black reputations. Balliol, it is recognized, was "caught between the twin wheels of an ambitious and distinguished soldier, and the disloyalty of many powerful subjects." This being the case, "his cause was well-nigh hopeless from the start" (p. 71). Similarly, the assessment of David II illustrates that he "had the ill luck to come into his inheritance at the age of five and to rule at the same time as Edward III, one of the most able and distinguished of the Plantagenets" (p. 77). Despite this double handicap, "in the end [he] showed that he could serve his country well" (p. 78).

If there is one thing that this book really lacks — and which seriously detracts from it — it is an understanding that monarchy, like all institutions, is not static but rather dynamic. Although there are hints at this, at the concept of the changing nature of the Scottish monarchy from a Celtic kingship to a feudal kingship modelled on an Anglo-Norman example to a national monarchy, they are not largely followed through. Though, for instance, Constantine I (c. 863-877) is described as a "typical ninth-century warrior king," (p. 23) there is no discussion of the attributes of this type of kingship, and, indeed, the statement appears in someting of a vacuum. Similarly, the concept of succession by primogeniture is also briefly hinted at (p. 21), but the reader gains little insight on how this concept, vigorously applied by twelfth century rulers like David I, helped to transform the essentially Celtic monarchy of MacBeth and Malcolm III into the feudal monarchy of William the Lion and the two Alexanders. In similar fashion the important concept of the "Community of the Realm", so crucial to our understanding of the kingship of Robert Bruce and his successors and to the shaping of the Wars of Independence, is not examined at all.3

3 On the Community of the Realm, the seminal work is G.W.S. Barrow, Robert Bruce and the Community of the Realm of Scotland, 3nd ed. (Edinburgh, 1988).
Entertainingly written and lavishly illustrated with ample photographs, maps and genealogical tables, *Monarchs of Scotland* would be an adequate starting point for anyone interested in an overview of the Scottish monarchs. But the serious reader, interested perhaps in Scottish kingship and all the problems surrounding it as well as the individual kings, should consult the volumes of the New History of Scotland or the Edinburgh History of Scotland for more scholarly insights.

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Ballads are often associated with the Borders, or since the appearance of David Buchan's pioneering study *The Ballad and the Folk* (1972), with Aberdeenshire. Because ballads are generally assumed (wrongly) to be about a world that has vanished few would associate the ballad matrix with industrial Renfrewshire during the second two decades of the 19th century, a period of economic decline and political unrest, when William Motherwell collected some 22 texts from Agnes Lyle of Kilbarchan.

William B. McCarthy investigates the oral-formulaic theories of Albert Lord with application to Scottish balladry. The question is, how do informants memorise or recreate ballads? The answer is given in the introduction; singers utilise formulas and themes to recreate the ballad anew at each performance. This useful discussion of competing hypotheses concludes that oral–formulaic should be modified to oral theory, a more accommodating and less restrictive term.

The author investigates Motherwell’s techniques and his attitude towards his informants. Part Two devotes three chapters to analysis of the ballads of Agnes Lyle. Part Three examines leitmotifs in Agnes’ repertory, in order to discover something of contemporary concerns and predilections. What clearly emerges is the connection between Love and Death, between marriages and funerals. Agnes
Lyle’s sample reflects the political and class tensions of the weaving community against the backdrop of the Radical War of 1820 and the heinous persecution inspired by the English authorities.

Much wider investigation of the context — the matrix if you will — is required before all of McCarthy’s suggestions can be accepted but he offers illuminating insights and potentially fruitful avenues for future research. The ballads have been somewhat ignored of late, notably by historians who are currently very nervous about literary sources — let alone oral sources — of any kind. McCarthy should make them rethink their evidential options.

Robert Burns devoted a large chunk of the last nine years of his life to collecting material for James Johnson’s *Scots Musical Museum*. He personally edited or revised over two hundred traditional songs and in the process became himself part of the folk tradition. This reprint with an excellent introduction by Donald Low is timely.

Unfortunately the facsimile of the 1853 edition has some problems of reproduction being almost unreadable in places. More care should have been taken in this respect. However the volumes are reasonably priced and they provide an accessible context for Burns’ songs. Johnson was unusual in providing music as well as words. Indeed a McCarthy type investigation of the corpus could shed much light on popular attitudes during the second half of the 18th century. The collection demonstrates that the creation of the kailyard tradition, for which Sir Walter Scott is often unfairly blamed, was well underway during the lifetime of Burns.

An appendix reprints Burns’ own annotations on a number of the songs. The *Museum* represents the greatest collection of Scottish songs ever made — six hundred in all. This publication is a goldmine for Scottish cultural historians and is essential reading for all Robert Burns fans.

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