

David Stevenson. *Scotland's Last Royal Wedding: The Marriage of James VI and Anne of Denmark*. Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers, 1997. xviii + 158 Pp. Paperback £ 14.95. ISBN 0-85976-451-6

When in 1603 Queen Elizabeth I of England died, her great-nephew James (1566-1625), since 1567 king of Scotland, left Edinburgh for London, to become King James I of Great Britain (as well as of Ireland, and, in political pretence, of France). This Union of the Crowns meant the beginning of the end for the independent traditions of kingship in Scotland. In 1589 James VI married Anne of Denmark, and the two themes of marriage and kingship dominate the present volume.

The merit of David Stevenson's book is to make easily accessible a hitherto neglected Danish account of the nuptials and the subsequent festivities. A translation (by Peter Graves) of this anonymous Danish source makes up one third of the book. To this narrative Stevenson provides a lengthy introduction (pp. 1-76), notes, a select bibliography and index. A preface, list of abbreviations and conventions, and maps of the relevant parts of Scotland and southern Scandinavia precede the introductory chapters. Sixteen photographs are included, showing many of the principal personages and places. Although the book is primarily directed at readers interested in Scottish history, it will also appeal to students of the cultural history of Denmark in the Renaissance.

From at least the time of the Vikings, Scotland and Scandinavia had

been closely involved with each other. The diocese of the Isles belonged, administratively, to Trondheim (Nidaros). In 1469 James III married Margaret of Denmark, daughter of Christian I, and the Danish failure to redeem the dowry pledge meant that Orkney and Shetland passed into the possession of the Scottish crown, there to remain. Trading links with Scandinavia and the Baltic were of considerable importance to the Scottish economy. The Protestant faith of the Danish royal house was an added reason for James VI to seek an alliance there.

With the Earl Marischal standing in as his proxy, James and Anne were married, in a civil ceremony, in Kronborg Castle in August 1589. Thereafter, however, storms prevented the fleet bearing Anne to Scotland from getting further than southern Norway. Frustrated, and keen to play the role of romantic lover, James himself sailed for Norway in late October, and eventually met up with his wife at Oslo on 19 November. Four days later they were married again, this time in a church ceremony. One notable aspect of James VI's expedition (which Stevenson does not mention) is that the king contracted frostbite in his right index-finger, which had — to the monarch's astonishment — to be cured by immersion in a bowl of snow: this story has credibility, since it is reported by the royalist John Barclay, in his *Icon Animorum* of 1614 (pp. 178-180). In late December James and Anne set off in sledges for Copenhagen. After a delay at the Swedish frontier town of Bohus, the royal party reached Elsinore on 21 January. There followed a round of engagements in Denmark, including hunting expeditions, a visit to Tycho Brahe (in Uranienborg), a theological discussion with Niels Hemmingsen (at Roskilde), and finally attendance (at Kronborg) at the marriage of Anne's sister Elizabeth to Duke Henry of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel (19 April 1590). Two days later James and Anne departed for Scotland, arriving on 1 May. On Sunday 17 May a coronation ceremony was held for Anne at Holyrood Abbey (outside the jurisdiction of Edinburgh), and on Tuesday Anne made her *entrée joyeuse* to the Scottish capital. The Danish envoys left one week later, and got back to Kronborg on 4 June.

The wedding journey was James's only excursion abroad (England excepted), and it is for David Stevenson the main point of interest: hence the title of the book. The title, however, is potentially misleading,

if it is taken as implying a royal marriage *in Scotland*. It would perhaps have been better if Stevenson had drawn a clearer line between the marriages (and subsequent adventures in Denmark), and the coronation and royal entry (in Scotland). Although Stevenson is concerned with the ending of good old Scottish traditions, this subtext is open to question. Which other Scottish sovereigns had gone overseas to claim their brides? Only James V springs to mind, who married Madeleine of France at Paris on 1 January 1537.

The particular interest of the Danish alliance of James VI is actually not so much the marriage, but more the coronation ceremony. This was staged in an elaborate manner the like of which Scotland had never before seen: James himself, his mother (Mary Queen of Scots), and his grandfather (James V), had been accorded merely the token coronation appropriate to minors. The bizarre ceremony of 1590 even included anointing the queen with oil, and this must surely be the only such Presbyterian coronation in British history. It is not surprising that James did not risk such ritual in St Giles' Church, in the heart of Edinburgh. If this event is a piece of Scottish tradition, then it is of the recently invented sort, which today one might rather associate with Hollywood than with Holyrood.

The royal entry made by Anne is most interesting. Although Scottish royal entries are known to follow the same general pattern, we have very few texts of the speeches made on those occasions. For example, from the entry of the Catholic Mary Stewart to her partly Protestant capital in 1561 only one short speech survives. With the entry of Anne in 1590, however, we now have detailed texts of what the allegorical figures declaimed in their respective pageants. Admittedly, we have to read these speeches at two removes, in modern English translation from the Danish account, but the value remains substantial.

Unfortunately, Stevenson seems insufficiently at home with this material — mistakenly declaring, for example, that Michael Lynch's article on the baptism of James VI relates to a royal entry (p. 133). This is not the only disturbing element. Stevenson mentions that James, at Uranienborg, left a Latin inscription in one of Brahe's books: 'The Lion's wrath is noble / Spare the conquered and overthrow the haughty.' (p. 51). The feeble translation aside, Stevenson seems to be

unaware that this maxim was hardly unknown in late-medieval Scotland, since it appears in poems by Robert Henryson and William Dunbar. On another page (p. 116) the pageant displaying the Scottish and Danish genealogy of James and Anne is described; this had a man, representing Christian I, sleeping at the bottom of the family tree. Stevenson ignores the obvious parallel, common in medieval and Renaissance art, with the tree of Jesse, with all its further range of religious connotation. In his notes at this point (p. 146), Stevenson worries about a painting of Bacchus in the expenditure accounts of this pageant, and makes the improbable speculation that this god might be a 'cheeky allusion to the notorious drinking habits of Danes'.

Stevenson holds no truck with the deference traditionally accorded royalty, and this is reflected in his demotic style. The following are examples: 'honour demanded that one made a fuss if someone chopped one's mother's head off' (p. 8, referring to the decollation of Mary Queen of Scots); 'Hang on to what you've got, and prevent anyone looking into how you got it, was the prevailing sentiment.' (pp. 68-9); 'Already in Scotland [Anne] had shown herself to be a big spender ...' (p. 75). On the medal struck to commemorate the marriage the author passes the acerbic remark: 'Trashy royal memorabilia is nothing new.' (caption to photograph 11). Spelling is a regular casualty throughout the book, as for example: 'He couldn't get Anne to change her mind, but he did persuade her to accept freedom to practice [sic] her religion quietly, discretely [sic], with the small coterie of court Catholics.' (p. 67). If it were worth the trouble, one could list a stream of errors of spelling and grammar. Annotations are on occasion superfluous — as when 'Joan, countess of Orkney' (p. 104) is elucidated as 'Joan, countess of Orkney' (p. 142). Worse still are crudities of thought, as for example: 'It is of course all a matter of definition, and it is all too easy to label anyone not rampantly heterosexual as homosexual.' (p. 12); 'However briefly, James does seem to have been in love, though with a girl he had never met. Sadly, perhaps that was the only circumstance in which he could ever love one.' (p. 29); 'Primed by his own Calvinist chaplains, he had doubtless expected to be faced by unacceptable idolatry in Lutheran Denmark.' (p. 50). In such places academic discrimination is thrown to the winds.

In spite of such rampant blemishes, this book does advance our knowledge of the cultural contact between Scotland and Denmark during the Renaissance. Sadly, it does not deserve more than two cheers.

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