James II.

By Christine McGladdery. Pp. xxii, 306.

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Christine McGladdery's *James II* was originally published in 1990 and eventually came to form the third volume in *The Stewart Dynasty in Scotland* series, edited by Norman MacDougall. Although that monograph was an important contribution to knowledge of mid-fifteenth-century Scotland, it did receive some notable criticism. This largely centred on the author's treatment of James II's conflict with the Douglases and the crown's relationship with the lordship of the Isles, and the limited source base for the reign. James II's tenure as king is nonetheless one of fifteenth-century Scotland's most obscure periods due to a paucity of historical records despite the fact that James II led such an eventful, if brief, life.

For James II's reign, one is often reliant on contemporary sources of limited or fragmentary scope (such as the *Book of Pluscarden* or the 'Auchinleck Chronicle') or indeed later chronicle accounts. The last twenty five years have, however, witnessed major advancements in late medieval Scottish historical studies. Debates over crown-magnate relations (the concept of aristocratic lordship in particular), the development of the urban landscape, and Scotland's links to the continent have contributed greatly to scholarly understanding of the realm as a whole. In this revised edition, Christine McGladdery addresses earlier criticism and skilfully synthesises recent scholarship to offer a deeper view of fifteenth-century Scotland's most elusive king. Though the book retains its original structure, each chapter has been rewritten significantly. The first four chapters revisit the king's minority. Using established source material, coupled with recent research, McGladdery examines how the legacy of James II's predecessors (King Robert III, Robert, duke of Albany, and King James I), created a series of underlying problems for the minority government. The author demonstrates the important role played by local lordship and the three estates in helping the minority government maintain stability and continuity within Scottish politics, thus helping James to assume his personal rule in 1450.

The fifth to the eighth chapters subsequently focus on the adult reign. McGladdery reassesses how James II's dismantling of the Livingston-Douglas hegemony, in many ways, mirrored his father's approach to the Albany Stewarts. This is to suggest that, despite the lack of

source material, the events of his father's reign influenced his own. McGladdery also reconsiders James II's role in the death of William, eighth earl of Douglas. Though opting for the less controversial description 'killing' rather than 'murder' (pp. 115-18, 123), the author suggests that James most likely lost control during the heated exchange with Douglas, resulting in the earl's death. The short-term and long-term repercussions of this action are dealt with in Chapter 6 ('Confrontation and Crisis 1453-1455') in which the author outlines the sheer threat the king perceived in the tripartite Crawford-Douglas-Ross bond which is attested in other sources but for which a text does not survive. The year 1454 (rather than 1452) is identified as the more convincing date for the large MacDonald raid on the Firth of Clyde (pp. 131-2, 159), thus linking that event into the latter stages of the crown's struggle with the Black Douglases. It is also worth noting that the author draws attention to the increasingly important role played by the Campbells of Loch Awe in acting as a buffer against the MacDonalds in the west (p. 198). This began a process which effectively culminated in the dismantling of the lordship of the Isles in the later fifteenth century, implemented by the king's son and grandson, James III and James IV.

Chapter 7 ('Recovery and Compromise 1455-1456') explores James II's efforts to rebuild royal power following the defeat of the Douglases and his attempt to exploit civil strife in England. As the author demonstrates, the cost of victory in the conflict with the Douglases, the unwillingness of the three estates to pursue war with England, and the reluctance of Charles VII of France to send troops to Scotland (p. 186) placed limitations on James's power. Nonetheless, by 1457, the king was in a much stronger position and Chapter 8 ('Consolidation and the Road to War 1457-1460') examines James II's intrigues with both Yorkists and Lancastrians. Moreover, as the author notes, there are hints within the sources that James II may have attempted to draw elements of Gaelic Ireland into his ill-fated Roxburgh campaign, having apparently dispatched the sheriff of Wigtown to negotiate with the O'Neills of Tyrone in early 1460. What lay behind this venture may never be known but it does highlight how Scottish monarchs could look westwards to elicit support against England. The book concludes with a guide both to source material for the reign of James II as well as an outline of changing perceptions (both historiographical and popular) of the king down to recent times.

The book is furnished with an updated bibliography, two maps of fifteenth-century Scotland, one map of the Low Countries, two genealogical tables (of the royal Stewarts and Black Douglases respectively), and a series of images not included in the 1990 edition. Overall,

this is a fine revision of the original study. The book will be immensely useful not only for scholars interested the reign of James II, but for students of late medieval Scotland.

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