



*Loyalty to the Monarchy in Late
Medieval and Early Modern
Britain, c.1400-1688*

**Matthew Ward and
Matthew Hefferan (eds.)**
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This volume showcases “valuable work on the theme of loyalty” from different disciplinary perspectives and approaches (6). The editors provide a conceptual introduction noting, correctly, that while the topic of loyalty is almost invariably “brought up” in the social and especially the political history of the period 1400–1688, volumes “devoted to the concept are harder to find” (4–5). Thus, this book is intended as “a first foray into the malleable concept of loyalty” to monarchy, consciously “collecting” some of the “most recent work that is being done” on both “theory and reality,” and laudably committed to platforming work from those newly emerging voices (7–9). The volume asks three core questions: how did monarchy “encourage” loyalty? How did subjects “express” or promote their loyalty? And finally, what happens to these appeals to, and manifestations of, loyalty when relations between crown and subjects “break down” in times of “secular and religious turbulence?” (7). Arranged chronologically, each chapter addresses at least one of these questions, guiding the reader through key moments of instability and change in British royal history across this period.

Emma Levitt’s chapter opens the first section with an articulate discussion of how Edward IV fostered loyalty to promote stability after his seizure(s) of the crown, “to unify” followers and former opponents behind his reign, and to rebuild monarchical “prestige” (15–16). He employed chivalric ideas to create bonds of friendship through “hegemonic masculine” camaraderie in the tiltyard, while cultivating the Order of the Garter as a relatively cheap and effective means of patronage via “status-based favour” (16–18, 26–27). Exploring the question of monarchy-led inspiration and the definition of loyalty, Levitt also raises interesting possibilities for future work on the spatial dynamics of power within the functioning of monarchy.

Two significant takeaways from Levitt’s chapter relate to ideas that recur throughout the volume: loyalty as ritualised performance, and the place of individual psychology and emotion. The first is raised by several other chapters; in the public and participatory celebrations of the Restoration and the coronation of Charles II mentioned by Edward Legon and John Ruston Pagan, respectively, or the carefully constructed modes of communicating loyalty through print as in the chapters of Valerie Schutte on book dedications and James Harris on “Loyal Addresses.” Most similar is Janet Dickinson’s consideration of Elizabeth I, another monarch who consolidated their position by managing a demographically divided political class. By placing her own “person” within the patronage networks at court that rewarded dedicated participation with solidity of position, Elizabeth created a coterie of ministers of “remarkable” longevity, for whom loyalty as “obligation, service and duty” became “an essential part of their own identities,” affording her stability and security (149). Like Levitt, Dickinson demonstrates that linking concepts of personal honour to service and duty to the crown enabled the monarchy to make

“membership of the honour community” central to elite identity and success, and, crucially, “contingent upon loyalty to the monarch” (162).

Aside from the homosocial bonding Levitt discusses, personal feelings binding subjects and monarchs are less prominently addressed. Several chapters consider the place of pragmatism and personal interest in a subject’s decision to exhibit loyalty, but only Michael A. Heimos’s chapter on loyalty in common law directly refers to the “thought-emotion” involved in allegiance. Though skating over the broader history of emotions, Heimos offers a different and pertinent perspective. He explores the legal definitions of subjecthood in the period, as well as revealing a proto-nationalist sentiment rooted in—and underpinning—loyalty to an individual monarch. Other contributors, like Harris, Dickinson, and Pagan, reference ideas of nostalgic sentiment and inherited loyalty as motivational in later loyalty campaigns, but they do not fully scrutinise the abstract emotional attachment of subjects to monarchs.

Those contributions exploring concepts of loyalty through lenses of enacted, potential, or perceived “disloyalty” do hint at the role of emotion in subject–monarch relations, addressing the effect of political and religious turmoil on feelings toward particular monarchs, from estrangement to outrage. Pagan’s chapter on loyalism in Charles II’s Virginia concludes that George III’s ultimate loss of the colony was the culmination of “tensions” with the British monarchy, dating back to a realisation that Charles “regarded them as second-class Englishmen” whose rights to “fair” taxation and good government were not taken seriously (266). Legon’s excellent analysis of dissenting voices during Charles II’s coronation festivities argues that such feelings did not merely reflect general disappointment in the Restoration’s tainted promises. The coronation was “an inflection point” that stoked controversy and actively “alienated” people from across a broad ideological spectrum, all of whom felt it “was not ‘theirs’” (247).

Callum Watson’s analysis of the late fifteenth-century narrative poem, *The Wallace*, is the first to address the crucial difference between loyalty to the idea or institution of monarchy, and loyalty to an individual monarch. Watson argues that it is “understandable” to seek resolution of internal political conflict by distinguishing “between the office and person of the king”; subjects “cling to established values” by defining their primary “national” duty to the ideals of “proper kingship,” rather than to a disappointing or unreliable individual (48, 53). While *The Wallace* uses a historical narrative to articulate theories of accountable rulership in response to dissatisfaction with contemporary policy, Jamie Gianoutsos examines the classical narratives used by puritans to critique their King more directly: by painting Charles I as a “tyrant” in the mould of Nero. Gianoutsos argues that although they saved their worst ire for the King’s advisers, puritan preachers’ “discourses of tyranny” essentially “laid the groundwork for Englishmen to imagine their government as tyrannical” and thus to imagine a higher and truer layer of allegiance, of greater significance than that to a particular “earthly” king (185).

The volume’s final section provides a neat collection of perspectives around the theme of loyalty specifically to Stuart monarchs and monarchy under duress. Surprisingly, Andrew Lind’s is the sole chapter directly concerned with open civil war in the mid-

seventeenth century, though both Legon and Harris consider its public implications and referential currency following the Restoration. Historiography of *English* civil war royalism, Lind observes, has come to see the cavaliers as more “ideologically and socially diffuse” than the homogenous block previously envisioned (214). Lind tackles the relatively neglected context of Scottish royalism, scholarship of which was previously more focused on the unique “impact” of the Covenants on policy and allegiance in Scotland but has increasingly uncovered “the discord and ideological heterogeneity of the Scottish Royalist camp” (213). In examining “what united” them, Lind explores the essence of what “Royalism” meant. He also interrogates whether this meaning was uniquely “Scottish” or instead part of a broader island-wide sense of loyalty to the Crown at this time (213–215). His conclusion that the Royalists were most united in adhering to and defending a “moral code” built upon an idea of fundamental legal structures represented by monarchy not only aligns with recent work on English royalism, but also many of the concepts of loyalty found elsewhere in this text (227–228).

Lind’s chapter highlights one complexity of this volume’s chronological context: the establishment of a single British monarchy after 1603. There are English and Scottish case studies, but most reflection on the British context comes from those addressing Scottish angles, and only Heimos directly confronts this aspect of changing loyalties to the crown. Pagan’s chapter on Virginia adds a welcome imperial dimension, and Harris’s chapter offers some discussion of Wales, but the introduction could have addressed the topic more fully. Indeed generally, more editorial material would have helped draw together the contributors’ different perspectives, which vary significantly in scope. It would have been particularly helpful to have greater editorial contextualisation of the more specialised or localised case studies by Schutte, Simon Lambe, and Richard Bullock, against the wider themes raised throughout the collection.

Overall, this is a fascinating and thought-provoking study of a topic that warrants much closer attention. The volume is an ambitious project that showcases a lot of fresh and developing work, and certainly makes a good case for collaborative (or at least multivalent) approaches to crucial underlying concepts in the field. It will hopefully be both a precursor to further development from its contributors and an inspirational framework for future research emerging from its readers.

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