



*James VI and I, Collected Essays by
Jenny Wormald.*

**Miles Kerr-Peterson and Diarmaid
MacCulloch (eds.)**

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James VI and I, Collected Essays by Jenny Wormald. Edited by Miles Kerr-Peterson and foreword by Diarmaid MacCulloch. Birlinn: Edinburgh, 2021. ISBN 978 1 910900 25 3. xx + 506 pp. £100.

If you have encountered early modern Scottish history in an academic setting in the last forty years, it is very likely that you have already heard of, and read works by, the late Jenny Wormald (1942-2015). In memory of the prolific historian, *James VI & I, Collected Essays by Jenny Wormald* brings together a large and varied selection of Wormald's work on James VI & I (1566-1625). She challenged pre-existing scholarship on early modern Scotland and England and re-examined James VI & I's kingships. Wormald's assessment of James was more sympathetic than those that came before her, seeking to challenge an entrenched Anglo-centric narrative and demonstrate James's many successes as king.

Edited by Miles Kerr-Peterson with a foreword by Diarmaid MacCulloch, the publication reproduces Wormald's essays as they were originally published, which "inevitably entails repetition" (4) but with the hope that this allows "the general reader to acquire the best picture of how Wormald understood James's reign" (3). The volume is split into six main parts and includes a substantial notes section with further readings. Kerr-Peterson and MacCulloch chose to organise the chapters so that they are "presented, broadly speaking, in chronological and thematic order" (4), allowing the events of James's life to be followed as if the work was a biography. As Wormald never completed a biography on James, this aims to present readers with a "sympathetic and scholarly exploration of James's life and reign" (2). The substantial introduction offers further biographical details and contextualises James's reigns, providing grounding for the later chapters.

As Kerr-Peterson and MacCulloch hoped, the strength of the work is that it enables the reader to trace Wormald's arguments, and to understand them within the broader context of both her scholarship and the historiographical debates present during her career. This is particularly well demonstrated in Part Two which reproduces Wormald's 1973 article "Scottish politics 1567-1625." This work encouraged an academic response from Maurice Lee in 1977, which is included in the appendix of the volume. Wormald later responded to Lee with her rebuttal "James VI: New Men for Old?" in 1978. This response is placed immediately after Wormald's initial article within the book, thus visually demonstrating the link between the two and further clarifying some of Wormald's key arguments from the previous chapter. This highlights one of the successes of the volume—that Wormald's own scholarly developments and the context within which she was writing can be clearly examined. However, it also suggests a potential improvement for the publication; to continue the demonstration of historiographical developments around James's kingships, the publication could have brought in copies of other scholarly work, to which Wormald was responding. Further, this collection could have contained responses to Wormald from more recent scholars to highlight not only the importance and influence of Wormald's own

concepts and arguments, but also to demonstrate the current debates and direction of the field. Arguably, this has been attempted by the provision of the substantial further reading section, but to place some of these works alongside Wormald's could have created a sense of continued historiographical development and highlighted the reality—that interest in James VI & I is very much alive.

By reproducing the articles exactly as they were, and without including recent scholarship in conversation with Wormald's original work, this publication can at times feel dated, inaccessible, or dismissive. Wormald, while acknowledging James's sexuality, argues that "whatever the sexual attractions, the main point is that James never allowed his personal feelings to dictate his political ones" (50). This implies that James was able to separate the political and the personal, a stark binary which more recent scholarship would argue is largely unknown in the lives of early modern European monarchs. Royal appointments were, in themselves, political, and the influence of personal relationships with a person in power cannot be so simplistically denied. In other senses Wormald's work still feels refreshing and rallying; this same chapter does, for example, highlight the role of James's wife Anna of Denmark (1574-1619) in the rise of George Villiers (1592-1628) and calls for Anna's agency to be further examined (50–51). At times, Wormald's comments and assessments rely heavily on pre-assumed knowledge but, in some cases, this may be a reflection of the original form of the writings, being that they were all individual pieces, tailored to specific spaces and publication types. This may, though, still form a barrier to the wider audience to which Kerr-Peterson and MacCulloch hoped the book would appeal.

Despite these potential limitations, *James VI & I, Collected Essays by Jenny Wormald* provides a valuable joint home for these essays, in celebration of a remarkable scholar to whom the field owes much. Whilst Wormald's work is firmly established within the academic circles of early modern Scottish, English, and British historians, it can be seen that there is still significant work to be done to take the themes and complexities found in this edition and translate these into public spaces. Wormald's overturning of the traditional narrative surrounding James VI & I remains relevant, as various writers, fictional works, films, and heritage sites continue to incorrectly frame the king only as James I and to depict him simplistically. James's place as the first King of Scotland, England, Ireland, and Wales has been long used in the discourse of nation building and the creation of a British national identity, which has erased his Scottish kingship and placed the Stuarts firmly within an Anglocentric narrative. Whilst there have been continued attempts to challenge this public narrative, for example with the planning of exhibitions such as "Bright Star: The Art and Life of James VI & I," an oversimplification of James's kingships remains, which Wormald's work substantially challenged, and continues to challenge through this edited collection of her works.

The individual publications which have been brought together to form *James VI & I, Collected Essays by Jenny Wormald* have long been staple readings in undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses and for any scholar concerned with early modern Scottish,

English, and British history, and will continue to be so. The collection therefore connects an impressive selection of Wormald's life's work through which past historiographical developments can be clearly traced, whilst also providing readers a space to reassess their own understanding of James VI & I.

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