

Rumour, Slander and Propaganda in Fifteenth-Century Scottish Politics

Early modernists have recognised the importance of propaganda and public opinion in Scotland after the development of print culture and the Reformation. Consequently, there is an impression that these sixteenth-century developments were new features of political life. Yet, the role of rumour and slander in the political culture of fifteenth-century Scotland has gone unnoticed despite numerous references in the contemporary records. Several acts of political violence throughout the century were followed by attempts by the crown, and its opponents, to present a coherent narrative of events. These competing narratives were the impetus for the development propaganda in fifteenth-century Scotland.

An agreement made on 19 March 1483 attempted to reconcile James III with his brother Alexander Stewart, duke of Albany.¹ Contained within the agreement were various promises and obligations that sought to ease the tensions between the two brothers that came to the fore the previous year when Albany was part of an English invasion force led by Richard, duke of Gloucester. On 22 July 1482, before James could confront the English army in battle, he was arrested by a group of leading nobles who then hanged several royal favourites at Lauder Bridge. The king was imprisoned until 29 September when Albany helped to release James from captivity.² Albany temporarily became the most powerful man in Scotland but was unable to maintain his position, hence the requirement for a written reconciliation between the brothers. Such agreements between Scottish kings and their most powerful subjects was not without precedent. Three decades earlier James II made two bonds with James, ninth earl of Douglas, to pacify the conflict that emerged following the killing of the previous earl by the king.³ Indeed, the importance of written bonds for the good operation of government and society in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Scotland is widely recognised.⁴ James III's

agreement with his younger brother therefore conforms to wider customs and practices employed to resolve disputes. What has not been considered is the wider context of one of the key terms of this agreement: Albany's promise to publicly declare in parliament that a rumour circulating that the king wished to poison him was groundless slander. The rumour that James III wished to poison his younger brother may seem outlandish, but the king's alleged previous crimes gave such accusations a degree of plausible. Another brother, John Stewart, earl of Mar, had been arrested for unknown crimes at some point in late 1479 or early 1480 and died in prison. Although there is frustratingly little contemporary evidence of Mar's life, later chronicler's thought his death to have been caused by 'low-born' favourites, in particular Thomas Cochrane who turned the king against him.⁵ Precisely when such tales were formed is difficult to tell, but their existence points towards James III's poor reputation.

Albany's activities in the years before the 1483 agreement similarly imply a figure of dubious morality. The English army that invaded Scotland in 1482 did so with the intention of making Albany the new king. Worst still, from a Scottish perspective, Albany had abandoned the uniting theme for late medieval Scots which was opposition to any claims English kings had to overlordship. Styling himself 'Alexander IV', Albany swore to perform homage to Edward IV within six months of becoming king.⁶ These were the 'unlawchfull and tresonable ligis and bandis contracts and appoyntments with ye king of England' which Albany was forced to renounce in the indenture with James.⁷ Albany's alliance with Edward IV was a complete *volte-face* from opposing James III's peace policy towards England, even being driven into exile and indicted for treason in 1479 for various crimes including truce breaking, to actively supporting the English crown's long held claims of overlordship.⁸ The careers of both James III and his brother showed they were both unscrupulous characters. Therefore, it was credible that Albany would spread a slanderous rumour that his brother wished to poison him, and that James III was perfectly capable of having a close family member poisoned. Although both

propositions could be true simultaneously, the political uncertainty meant it was difficult to believe which one, if either, was accurate. In short, political upheavals gave space for slanderous rumours to flourish.

The indenture between James III and his brother brings into focus two key features of late medieval Scottish, and indeed European, political culture. First, the emergence of rumours during periods of political crises because of uncertainty in what was happening. Second, the use of parliament as a forum for disseminating an ‘official’ version of events to the kingdom’s political community. Parliament was used on several occasions in the fifteenth century as a forum for publicly declaring rumours and gossip to be false which speaks to its wider role in the kingdom’s politics.⁹ Rumour and slander were recurrent features in many of the political crises of fifteenth-century Scotland but there has thus far been no focused study of them or their role in the political culture of the kingdom. This contrasts sharply with the sixteenth century where historians have recognised the importance of rumour and competing narratives, in the wake of political violence, for the creation of propaganda.¹⁰ In the context of this article, propaganda refers to attempts by groups or individuals to promote their perspective on a particular event or issue in a way that legitimises their actions. Propaganda has been discussed in a Scottish context in relation to chronicle sources, material culture and the use of public ceremonies and display but not its role in forming everyday attitudes.¹¹ This has led to a disconnect between medievalists and early modernists. The pamphleteering that happened after Queen Mary’s flight into England and the start of a civil war in Scotland was, according to Jane Dawson, ‘the first major Scottish propaganda war aimed at swaying a wide spectrum of the political nation’.¹² Yet, fifteenth-century Scotland is furnished with examples of rumours showing competing narratives of recent events and the development of propaganda. The evidence for such rumours comes from a wide range of source, particularly chronicles and parliamentary records rather the more widely circulated pamphlets of the early modern era.

Pamphlets and the printed word, however, were not the only way to disseminate propaganda, particularly in Scotland where printing in the sixteenth century was limited. It was for this reason that Karin Bowie adopted a broader definition of public communication in her recent study of public opinion in early modern Scotland, including oral communication in the form of proclamations, sermons and Gaelic poetry.¹³ These discussions for the sixteenth century, coupled with the lack of sustained analysis on rumour and propaganda in early periods risks creating the assumption that the political unrest after the Reformation was an entirely new phenomenon in Scotland. In contrast, this article shows that the need to develop and disseminate propaganda was a fundamental part of fifteenth-century Scottish political culture.

In bridging this chronological divide, the audience of the rumours and propaganda need to be considered. Bowie's study focused on public opinion which has only been examined in Scotland from the early modern period onwards. Bowie has offered a nuanced discussion of the concept of public opinion as it applies to early modern Scotland, drawing extensively on work across Europe.¹⁴ This article focuses on propaganda rather than public opinion, though the two ideas are interlinked. Propaganda has no value unless it is targeted a group, or groups, of people intent on influencing their thinking or beliefs on a particular issue. Public opinion tends to be focused on the public at large, or 'history from below', whereas many of the cases discussed in this article focus on dialogues between elites. This is not to say that the wider population did not receive propaganda or that they were not conduits for the circulation of rumours. There is no reason to believe that the wider population was politically disengaged or did not talk about high profile politic killings. Indeed, it is reasonable to suppose they did but such discussions did not find their way into the surviving sources. In reality, the precise audience for many of the rumours examined here is not always certain, and varied between incident. In most cases aristocratic, urban and clerical elites were aware of these rumours

through their engagement with parliament and other forms of communications, though towards the end of this article discussions of rumours below the level of the elites is also shown.

This article examines the role of rumour and slander in the politics of fifteenth-century Scotland through an analysis of several political crises in which rumours or slander had a role. A thematic, as opposed to a chronological approach, to these events is adopted to highlight the overarching trends. Although the examples discussed have all been studied before, they have never been brought together for this purpose. This article first considers the importance of rumours and gossip in the study of medieval history and how the Scottish evidence informs such debates. It then examines the use of rumours by the Scottish state in foreign relations; the importance of rumour and slander in three significant political murders; and finally rumours that circulated at a popular level. Taken together this analysis demonstrates how the Scottish state tried to control the spread of such news and that parliament was an important mechanism for achieving such goals which contributes to current understanding of late medieval Scottish political culture in a wider context.

Studying Rumours and Gossip in Medieval Polities

Rumour, gossip and slander are important for understanding how past societies functioned because they provide a window into contemporary concerns, beliefs and preoccupations. For England, Charles Ross demonstrated the importance of rumour and propaganda in the politics of the fifteenth century.¹⁵ This was particularly pronounced during Edward IV's return to the throne in 1471 which marked the start of his second reign. Several propaganda tracts, notably *The Chronicle of the Rebellion in Lincolnshire*, about the rebellion suppressed there in 1470, and *The Arrival in England of Edward IV*, about Edward's return in 1471 after his deposition, were produced and widely circulated as a means of disseminating the Yorkist version of recent events.¹⁶ Rumour, however, does not only relate to the propaganda disseminated by political

elites. Chris Wickham demonstrated the importance of gossip for understanding resistance and peasant life, drawing on a wide range of examples from Italy, Iceland, England and France.¹⁷ Gossip is thus a serious topic for historians to tackle and, by implication, so are the connected practices of rumours and slander. Wickham's focus on peasant resistance, or more broadly popular politics, signals much of the existing discussions of rumour and gossip which could be thought of belonging to 'history from below'. This work has focused on the use of everyday speech as a form of resistance against the state, and how such language articulated commonplace concerns.¹⁸ Moreover, it shows how groups in society defined themselves because gossip was a force for social cohesion and exclusionary for those not included in the network of gossipers. Rumour and gossip have a political dimension, either in the form of promoting propaganda, or the official version of events, or in developing alternative narratives of events. Consequently, they are important for understanding the functioning of politics.

Scotland is an ideal case study for understanding the role of rumour in late medieval politics for several reasons. First, there were several high-profile instances of political violence that would inevitably have triggered much discussion throughout the kingdom. There was no sustained large-scale civil war in Scotland akin to the Wars of the Roses in England, but there were dramatic acts of violence that caught the attention of contemporaries. In the aftermath of such incidents there were competing interpretations or narratives that sought to explain why such violence was either necessary or illegitimate. Second, there is a reasonable body of evidence of the Scottish state trying to address rumours and slander through legislation and public declarations in parliament. This indicates that Scottish royal government tried to keep a close eye on the spread of information and news, although the effectiveness of enforcement mechanisms is impossible to measure. In particular, it shows how the 'official', or 'royal', version of events developed against alternative accounts that were in circulation. Third, that the Scottish evidence allows an exploration of several different types of rumours. As Laura

Slater has recently noted “it has been difficult to draw clear contrasts between ‘elite’ and ‘popular’ political culture in late medieval Europe”.¹⁹ Scotland provides several examples of both rumours circulating from both a ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ perspective. An important point is that while these terms work as convenient short-hand terms, all rumours and slander operated within the same political culture and normative frameworks.

Furthermore, there is well developed historiography for Scotland that has examined the reputations of kings and nobles, that makes the kingdom an ideal case study for understanding rumours. Norman Macdougall’s transformative work on crown-noble relations in fifteenth-century Scotland set the agenda for understanding the development of myths and legends around late medieval Scotland.²⁰ His study of James III skilfully disentangled sixteenth-century chronicle accounts of the reign, with their various embellishments, from the reality found in the fifteenth-century documents.²¹ Macdougall followed this up with his study of James IV which debunked older myths that the king was a naive ‘moonstruck romantic’, arguing that such characterisations that placed too much emphasis on his military blunders at Flodden that caused his death.²² This trend in examining the development of myths about Stewart kings has been a key feature of the Stewart Dynasty in Scotland biography series, all written by Macdougall or his research students.²³ These biographies have been vital for understanding the intricacies of late medieval Scotland getting, as close as the sources permit, to what actually happened. Yet many of the myths and misunderstandings that became embedded within earlier historiographical traditions did not spring out of a vacuum but were the combination of oral traditions and inventions by later chroniclers to suit a wider narrative strategy. Precisely what tales originated from oral traditions is not always easy to identify. Nevertheless, a reasonable assumption is that some were the product of hearsay and everyday conversation.

Here, it is necessary to clarify this article’s precise focus which is on the kingdom’s politics. There was wider social, cultural and legal context in which rumour and slander

operated. References to ‘sclandir’ or ‘sklandirit’ can be found in burgh records across Scotland in places as diverse as Aberdeen, Lanark and Peebles.²⁴ They are also found in various records of the church, particularly in correspondence to and from the papacy.²⁵ An act from 1515 stated that anyone falsely accusing someone of theft and robbery should pay £10 compensation for slander.²⁶ Although drawing discrete lines between different fields of history is somewhat artificial, the social, cultural and legal contexts of rumour and slander are complex topics in their own right and are beyond the scope of this article which is focused on the role of rumour and slander in politics.

There are some areas of political life for which surprisingly little can be said about rumours such as the Scottish royal court for which the evidence for rumours is slight. On the English court, Ralph Griffiths has said that ‘to the inquisitive outsider, the [royal] court seemed an inexhaustible storehouse of gossip about the great and the noble.’²⁷ It is not certain that such a claim can be made about the Scottish royal court, despite a growth in studies of the royal household at this time.²⁸ One reason was no doubt that the Scottish court was a smaller affair than many of its European contemporaries. Moreover, there is the question of evidence. Scotland had no official court chroniclers akin to, for instance George Chastellain, who was a permanent salaried member of Philip the Good’s ducal household.²⁹ England similarly had no official court chronicler as such, but a range of chronicles were written by secular clerks who had access to government documents. Chris Given-Wilson has given a wider, and useful, definition of a court chronicler. Rather than needing official patronage, a court chronicler needed ‘to have demonstrable connections with the court and/or the royal administration’. Moreover, the chronicler’s connections with the court needed to influence how the chronicle was written.³⁰ One Scottish chronicler, Walter Bower, fits this more inclusive definition of a court chronicler. Bower was a key figure in the administration of James I and sat in parliament too.³¹ Although his *Scotichronicon* was a universal chronicle tracing the history of the Scottish

people, his final book was about his own time, including James I's reign. The chronicle has been shown as an important source for court culture during the reign.³² Yet, there is no description of any court factionalism or the spreading of rumours amongst the royal household at this time. Although an absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, and it is difficult to imagine that there was no political gossiping at the Scottish royal court. What those rumours were can only be surmised in contrast to many of the incidents discussed below for which there is ample evidence of their existence.

There is also an important distinction to make between rumours for which there is evidence and views that represent the supposition of chroniclers. One relevant Scottish example is the involvement of Walter Stewart, earl of Athol in the assassination of his nephew, James I in 1437. The murder was committed by Robert Graham, a retainer of Athol's grandson Robert Stewart, and a group of lairds and Perth burgesses. Athol did not wield the blade himself but the earl had a hand in directing the conspiracy.³³ There are two contrasting depictions of Athol in these events. The first, from *The Dethe of the Kynge of Scottis*, states Athol desired the crown but downplays his role in the planning of the event with Robert Graham portrayed as the main instigator.³⁴ *The Dethe* survives in a Middle English translation by the Londoner John Shirely, though the original version was a Latin work produced in Scotland.³⁵ A key theme of this text is the right to resist a tyrannical king.³⁶ The text therefore included an account of how Graham 'arose vpp with grett corrage' in parliament and attempted to arrest James I 'in De name De three astattez' a few months before his involvement in his assassination.³⁷ The precise speech is probably a reimagining of the events, based on a general understanding of Graham's actions during his failed attempt to arrest the king. Emphasising the right to resist meant that Athol's conspiratorial involvement in the assassination was downplayed. In short, the constitutional ideas represented by Graham were emphasised more than any person or dynastic ambitions Athol may have had. In contrast, another tradition, found in Walter Bower's *Scotichronion* and

the abridged version of his work known as the *Book of Pluscarden* states that Athol desired the highest position in the kingdom and that the killing was part of long-term ambition to make himself, and his heirs, king.³⁸ Bower was writing a universal chronicle starting at the Creation that placed Scotland's history as a distinct independent country, along within wider biblical and world events. He claims to have intended to stop his chronicle before James I's personal rule began in 1424 but decided to chronicle the reign as way of demonstrating the assassinated king as an ideal ruler.³⁹ Bower's intention to present James as the ideal ruler meant the motivations were reduced to the personal ambitions of Athol rather than the assassination being regarded as tyrannicide.

Despite different interpretations over who was the key conspirator and their motives, Athol's fate is clear enough. Athol suffered a very brutal and public execution being dragged naked across Edinburgh, having a paper crown placed on his head to signify his treason before being beheaded and quartered.⁴⁰ The execution was public, brutal and designed to deter any future acts against future Scottish kings. Indeed, the placement of a paper crown on his head could be interpreted as mocking Athol's kingly pretensions. Bower hints at some discussion of the earl's motives, noting that it was 'commonly said' that Athol believed 'a certain woman fortune-teller that he ought to be crowned with the splendid crown of the kingdom in conditions of the greatest solemnity' once James I had been removed.⁴¹ There is no indication of precisely who was discussing the earl's motives, or how widespread the discussion was. James I's assassination is different from many of the other political killings discussed in this article because there is no corroborating evidence beyond one chronicle to suggest that a rumour was circulating. Therefore, the rumour is more likely to reflect Bower's perspective and narrative strategy of attributing the conspirators' motives to personal interest.

Scotland is an ideal case study for understanding the role of rumours in late medieval political culture, even though there are limitations from the source material. In short, the

sources do not always lend themselves to studying rumours in every topic, such as the royal court, and there is a need to be aware of the narrative strategies and perspectives of chroniclers. Nevertheless, it is clear that that rumours and slanders were taken seriously in fifteenth-century Scotland and recorded across a wide body of evidence. The remainder of this article explores the comparatively well-documented instances in which slanderous rumours were in circulation which became an impetus for the development of propaganda.

Rumour and Foreign Relations

The benefit of propagating, probably false, rumours to those involved in political conflicts in fifteenth-century Scotland is evident in the success of the rebellion against James III in 1488. To return to the example at the start of this article: in 1483 the king's brother agreed to publicly declare any attempt by James to poison him was simply slander. Accusations that James III was a poisoner were particularly pernicious because they contributed to a wider characterisation of the king as man who could not be trusted. Here, it is useful to take on board what Tzafrir Barzilay, and Ruth Mazo Karras have noted in the context of the poisoning of wells: 'since poison is imperceptible until the victim is ill, the threat was perceived as particularly insidious'.⁴² Although this observation was about mass killings where the victims were those who drew from wells, rather than the targeted assassination of an individual, the underlying issue with poisoning as a method of killing remain the same. Poisoning is a form of assassination that lends itself to the creation of rumour because it is secretive, leaves no obvious wounds and can explain either a sudden death or a lengthy illness.⁴³ Secretive killings were particularly abhorrent in late medieval Scotland where 'murder' retained a more restrictive meaning to premeditated killings at night or during a truce or assurance.⁴⁴ That Scottish law regarded poisoning as inherently sinister is suggested by two acts from 1450, the first of which made the bringing of poison into the kingdom by Scotsmen treason punishable by forfeiture of

‘lyf, landis and gudis’ to the king.⁴⁵ The second act prescribed the same punishment, without remission, was for any foreigner brining poison into the realm.⁴⁶ In this context, any allegation that the king would poison his brother was particularly pernicious.

James III’s supposed willingness to poison a close family member was discussed once again after his wife, Margaret of Denmark, died on 14 July 1486. The competing narratives of Queen Margaret’s death are evident in two letters. The first, soon after her death, was from James III to his brother-in-law, king Hans of Denmark, about the queen’s death, her virtuous qualities, and James’ grief. James also noted that any earlier letter he sent could not reach Denmark because of storms, suggesting the queen had been ill for a while before her death.⁴⁷ Yet, those opposed to the king were clearly circulating a different version of the queen’s death. A letter from the Danish king to his nephew James, duke of Rothesay (later James IV), reveals that some had accused John Ramsay, lord Bothwell, of poisoning Queen Margaret. James III is not blamed for the murder but was accused of condoning the killing and allowing Ramsay to remain a favourite at court. Norman Macdougall has suggested this was a ‘piece of black propaganda ... not designed for the Scots, but for the Danes’ to get them to support the rebellion against James III.⁴⁸

The dissemination of this rumour reached far beyond its intended Danish audience, making its way across the continent. A life of the queen written c. 1490-2 by Giovanni Sabadino degli Arenti, from Bologna, reported that ‘it was said that her death resulted from poison’.⁴⁹ The context of this source indicates that, although the story was used by James III’s opponents in their dealings with the Danish king, it had some traction within Scotland too. Such a possibility lies in the fact that Sabadino’s source may well have been a Scotsman studying in Bologna around this time, known as William Baillie. There is no trace in the Scottish sources of Baillie being in Scotland during James III’s reign, though Baillie first appears in the Bologna University’s Register in 1486. Baillie may well have been relating rumours that he heard when

he was in Scotland or rumours from correspondence he had in Scotland around this time.⁵⁰ Both possibilities indicate some rumours within Scotland about the queen's fate. Moreover, Sabadino's account hint at the deterioration of marital relations seem after the king's temporary imprisonment in 1482 and the queen's possible collusion with his brother, Alexander Stewart, duke of Albany when he took over the reins of government. Margaret's supposed 'consent to his arrest' meant that James kept thirty miles away and was unwilling to ever see her again, even though she was pregnant with their third son.⁵¹ Although this is likely an exaggeration, it indicates strained relations which gave credibility to the allegation that James had a role in his wife's death. Precisely how queen Margaret died is not a question that the available sources allow any definitive answer. Yet, the accounts of the possibility that Margaret was poisoned show how rumours that seem to have been circulating within Scotland could be adapted by James III's opponents to smear him. Moreover, the supposedly secretive nature of this assassination which formed the basis of those rumours could only have further tainted the king's image and reinforce earlier suspicions from 1482-3 that he planned to poison his brother. The rumours that James III planned to poison his brother and actually arranged the poisoning of his wife were thus mutually validating.

Although Scotland had a wide range of international interests, seeking good relations with France and various other kingdoms, such as Denmark, the key object in foreign policy was to prevent English incursions or claims to overlordship. To advance such objectives, on two occasions, the Scottish state sponsored disinformation campaigns that spread what they must have known to be blatant lies as a means of fermenting political unrest in their southern neighbours. The first instance was the rumour that circulated in the early fifteenth-century that Richard II was still alive and living in Scotland. The key facts about the rumour are relatively straightforward. Richard supposedly escaped imprisonment and ended up working as a kitchen boy for Donald, lord of the Isles where he was recognised. The imposter, often identified as

Thomas Ward of Trumpington, was brought before Robert III where William Serle, an esquire of the real Richard II, who although not the instigator of the rumour, colluded by forging the royal signet and sent letters in the dead king's name.⁵² The Ricardian rumour has long been recognised for its importance for resistance to Henry IV's government, but its importance for understanding the tactics of the Scottish state has sometimes gone unnoticed. For instance, Nigel Saul noted that 'an obscure imposter, Thomas Ward of Trumpington, managed to pass himself off as the real Richard in exile in Scotland'.⁵³ Saul's characterisation of this is problematic because it implies that the Scots really believed Thomas Ward actually was Richard II. This is despite the fact that there is no evidence that anyone in Scotland believed that Ward was Richard II. Robert Bartlett similarly commented that 'a putative Richard II of England was winning recognition in just two years after the king's death in 1400' and that 'Scotland harboured a supposed Richard II', which does not recognise Scottish agency in the creation of this pretender.⁵⁴ Under the governorship of Robert Stewart, duke of Albany, the Scots were more than willing to pay the pseudo-Richard's expenses to maintain the charade.⁵⁵ These payments are evidence of the Scots willing to present Thomas Ward as Richard II, not evidence of a belief that he was Richard II. Similarly, Walter Bower claimed that Richard II died at Stirling Castle in 1419 and was buried at the north altar where the friars preached.⁵⁶ This claim is not evidence that Bower believed that Richard II escaped to Scotland but instead that he repeated the official propaganda about Richard's fate. In reality, the Scots used Ward as a useful symbol to undermine Henry IV's legitimacy.

English governmental records indicate the success of the disinformation campaign which the Scots were more than willing to encourage. It was reported to Henry IV that certain churchmen and laymen within the diocese of Carlisle were saying that Ricard was 'still alive and dwelling in Scotland' and many feared he would invade with Scottish support.⁵⁷ In response, on 9 May 1402, Henry IV instructed the bishop of Carlisle, the earl of

Northumberland and the sheriffs of Cumberland and Westmorland to arrest those spreading rumours about Richard II's survival, presumably to prevent such word spreading out.⁵⁸ Two days later all sheriffs in England were ordered to prevent alehouse gossip.⁵⁹ By 5 June, Henry was clear that the rumour was a Scottish plot. He ordered the sheriff of Kent to make proclamations that no one was to give credit to the 'lying rumour' and that rumours about Richard II's return 'among other lies which in these days are increasingly prevalent' since the renewal of war with Scotland.⁶⁰ When the Percy army wore Richard II's livery badge at the Battle of Shrewsbury in 1403, they were not doing it because of a nostalgic desire for the deposed king to return, but because his livery badge had become an anti-Henry IV symbol.⁶¹ The extent to which Englishmen believed in the rumour is uncertain, though it clearly was 'an improbably successful propaganda war' by the Scots.⁶² Henry IV ultimately survived the Ricardian rumour and successfully faced down several rebellions in this reign. This does not mean that the use of rumour and disinformation as a weapon of war was a failure. Deposing Henry IV for another English king who, most likely, would also be hostile towards Scotland was not the point. Rumours that Richard II remained alive added to the problems of Scotland's bellicose southern neighbour. In this sense, the creation of political chaos and uncertainty was not a means to an end, but an end in itself.

The second instance of the Scots colluding with an imposter to the English crown was when James IV supported Perkin Warbeck, but this was much less successful than the Ricardian rumour. Warbeck pretended to be Richard of York, the younger son of Edward IV, who was probably murdered on the orders of his uncle, Richard III, in 1483. Since no body was discovered or put on display, rumours inevitably circulated about the fate of the two princes.⁶³ Warbeck first emerged at the court of his supposed aunt, Margaret of Burgundy but was supported by a range of Henry VII's enemies in Ireland, France and the Empire before landing in Scotland in 1495.⁶⁴ The whole scheme was an exercise in the spread of false

information: that Warbeck was the legitimate son of Edward IV and therefore the rightful king of England. James IV willingly pretended that Perkin Warbeck was really Richard of York in order to advance his own interests and spent money on presenting Warbeck as a king.⁶⁵ Warbeck was married off to lady Katherine Gordon, a minor member of the Scottish royal family. She was the daughter of George, earl of Huntly and his third wife Elizabeth Hay. Katherine Gordon was perhaps not the most prestigious of royal brides, since she was a distant cousin of James IV, but if Warbeck had managed to depose Henry VII, the marriage would have given the Scottish king potential influence in England.⁶⁶ The enterprise had only limited success. Warbeck left the Scotland in June 1497 two months before a brief five-day invasion of Northumberland in September 1496 that's only achievement was the destruction of some tower houses.⁶⁷

Compared to the Ricardian rumour at the start of the fifteenth century, Scottish collusion in the fiction that Perkin Warbeck was really Richard of York had limited success. In both cases the attraction to the Scots was the nuisance value of both rumours that could help to destabilise England. Although Henry IV was never deposed, the Ricardian rumour was a recurrent problem for him to address. Moreover, the Scots had more agency in the creation and dissemination of the rumours about Richard II's survival. Instead, the imposter 'Richard IV' was not a Scottish invention, with James IV adopting an existing fabrication. Along with rumours about the fate of Margaret of Denmark, the spreading of the Ricardian rumour and support for Perkin Warbeck demonstrates the Scottish crown's ability to engage fully with the European rumour mill of the late fifteenth-century to advance its foreign policy objectives.

Rumour, Slander and Political Killings

In addition to foreign policy, rumours were crucial in the domestic politics of fifteenth-century Scotland. One feature of Scottish political life, like many other states in fifteenth-century

Europe, was the occurrence of several high-profile political killings or assassinations.⁶⁸ Such dramatic killings undoubtedly generated much discussion and speculation which, in times of political turmoil, could be dangerous. On three occasions, a political killing was followed by discussion in parliament at which those in control of government sought to justify their actions and prevent alternative versions of events from being widely discussed. The three occasions were: the death of David, duke of Rothesay in 1401; the stabbing to death of William, eighth earl of Douglas, by James II in 1452; and James III's death after he fled the battle of Sauchieburn in 1488. Here, it should be noted that it is impossible to know exactly what happened in these three events. The relevant sources were all written after the event with an eye on presenting a specific view of the killings to those attending parliament and cannot be regarded a 'neutral' fact.⁶⁹ Yet, an examination of the contemporary evidence surrounding these three killings demonstrates the role of parliament in attempting to limit the spread of rumours about these events.

The first killing was the death of David, duke of Rothesay, in 1401. Rothesay was locked away in Falkland castle and starved to death, eventually succumbing to any lack of sustenance on 25 or 26 March 1402.⁷⁰ The duke had been lieutenant since 1399 when his father was deemed incapable of ruling.⁷¹ As he asserted himself in the governing of the kingdom, Rothesay implicitly challenged many of the interests of his uncle Robert Stewart, duke of Albany, who was a key magnate in royal government too. In response, Albany arranged for the duke's 'arrest' and came to an agreement with Archibald, earl of Douglas, shortly after. The precise details about what happened are uncertain, but two things are known: the duke was moved from St Andrews castle to Falkland castle, wearing rustic robes and on a mule, either as an attempt to hide or humiliate him; and that he died in captivity, presumable because Albany and Douglas agreed the Rothesay needed to die.

Rothsay's death was not a public execution for treason, but a political assassination carried out in private. Like his contemporary, Richard II, he was likely starved to death or poisoned in order that the body showed no wounds.⁷² Bower claimed that Rothsay died either from sickness of starvation.⁷³ Similarly, *Liber Pluscardensis* recorded that Rothsay was 'kept shut in a little vault in the said tower [of Falkland] to the end of his life'.⁷⁴ The nature of the murder left circumstances ripe for speculation. Rumours about the duke's death were clearly circulating in the weeks after his death. In response to such rumours, a general council on 16 May exonerated the two magnates responsible, Robert Stewart, duke of Albany and Archibald, earl of Douglas.⁷⁵ The declaration was made in Robert III's name but, in reality, it presents the view of Albany and Douglas who did not want to be tainted as murderers. Therefore, 'by divine providence and not otherwise it is discerned that he [Rothsay] departed from this life.' It went on to state that:

“and if we have conceived any indignation, anger, rancour or offence against them ... or any person or people participating with or adhering to them in any way, we now annul, remove and wish those things to be considered as nothing in perpetuity, by our own volition.”

It ends by forbidding anyone from slandering Albany, Douglas or any of their adherents. The declaration was designed to be a legal judgement, made in full view of parliament, that emphasised the innocence of Albany and Douglas. By prohibiting anyone from slandering them, the declaration was affirming that any accusations about their involvement in Rothsay's death were false, not just distasteful. However, the propaganda went beyond a declaration of innocence and smeared Rothsay in a manner designed to disincentive further speculation. Rothsay's personal morality was criticised by later chroniclers, including Walter Bower and the anonymous *Dethe of the Kynge of Scottis*.⁷⁶ Albany was praised by Bower for his governing abilities and therefore a cold-blooded political murder did not fit well in a generally positive

depiction of him.⁷⁷ It also suggests that the declaration had some success in curbing slanderous rumours about those responsible for Rothesay's death.

It is also noteworthy that Albany was one of the key individuals responsible for spreading the false information about Richard II still being alive that circulated soon after his exoneration.⁷⁸ Albany's need to develop a clear line of propaganda clearing him of his nephew's murder, may have made him realise the wider value of such rumours for creating political discord which he then applied to foreign relations with England. This is plausible given the circumstances, but the lack of sustained evidence means it can only be a reasonable supposition.

The success of Albany's propaganda is difficult to assess. There was a short-lived cult that emerged around Rothesay which credited him with some miracles, suggesting a limited level of local popularity. Yet, this was nowhere near as extensive as those in England for Simon de Montfort or Thomas of Lancaster.⁷⁹ There are only a few scraps of evidence for the cult around Rothesay, the earliest of which dates to around a generation after Rothesay's death in a papal supplication from the abbot of Lindores. The abbot refers to 'David of happy memory, brother of James King of Scotland' whose 'body is held as holy in those parts on account of the miracles performed there'.⁸⁰ Boardman has noted 'the relatively cautious language employed by the abbot' about Rothesay had not been fully canonised. Such tempered language was understandable since the abbot was writing to pope who was 'the official arbiter of saintly status'.⁸¹ Technically speaking Rothesay was not a saint, but that did not mean he was not thought of as a saint. Indeed, in 1478 William Worcester referred to him as 'Sanctus David' who had died a martyr when he was starved to death.⁸² Although the report was garbled and somewhat confused, it may reflect the high esteem in which some held Rothesay posthumously.

There is also evidence to suggest that while Albany's propaganda successfully cleared him of any wrongdoing in the minds of contemporaries, it did not entirely smear Rothesay.

Andrew Wyntoun's description of Rothesay's death is fleeting and does not repeat Albany's propaganda. On Rothesay's death, Wyntoun simply noted that he 'Yauld his saule til his Creatoure'⁸³ which reflects the parliamentary declaration that Rothesay 'departed from this life' by divine provenance. Wyntoun's patron seems to have been Sir John Wemyss from Fife who as himself connected to Albany. This connection explains some of the pro-Albany bias in the chronicle⁸⁴ and may explain why the account is vague about the cause of Rothesay's death. Yet, Wyntoun did not repeat any of the probable smears that Albany had circulated about Rothesay. Instead, Rothesay is presented as 'Suete, wertous, yong, and faire' as well as 'Honest, habill, and avenand' and 'A seymly persone in statute'.⁸⁵ Such an image jars with reckless and morally deviant image of the duke that was circulated to justify his killing.

Wyntoun was out of step with other chronicles who repeated Albany's smears against his nephew but nevertheless accepted Albany's culpability. One chronicler noted that Robert III had chastised his son ordering Albany 'to chasty him' but, after Rothesay was arrested and placed in Falkland Castle, Albany 'hungerit [starved] him to deid'.⁸⁶ Similarly, the short chronicle known as *La Vraie Cronique d'Escoce* dating just after the death of Mary of Guelders in December 1463, which attempted to reconcile conflicting accounts of Scottish history, is instructive.⁸⁷ According to *La Vraie Cronique d'Escoce*, Robert III had been informed of his eldest son's worrying behaviour and therefore, with the encouragement of the duke of Albany and earl of Athol, ordered Albany to seize Rothesay and bring him to him. However, 'Albany exceeded his instructions' by imprisoning Rothesay and then having him 'cruelly put to death'.⁸⁸ The reference to Athol being in cahoots with his elder brother Albany is clearly a later invention and evidence of the successful propaganda campaign against him after his execution for plotting James I's death in 1437. Athol's inclusion in this episode helps build on a broader picture of a man with long-term ambitions for the crown him, eliminating his fellow kin over several decades.⁸⁹ At the heart of *La Vraie Cronique d'Escoce's* account

is an attempt to reconcile two common understandings about Rothesay's death: his reckless lifestyle and the fact that Albany was behind the killing.

Boardman has noted that 'even within the fifteenth-century chronicle tradition based on Bower's work, then, there was obvious accommodation with a narrative that portrayed Rothesay as a prince maliciously and unjustly slain by his uncle'.⁹⁰ The discussion here about Rothesay's death adds a further dimension to Boardman's observation. It is clear that soon after Rothesay's death, rumours circulated about his fate, some of which held the duke of Albany and the earl of Douglas responsible. To counter such rumours, the general council of 1402 was used to push Albany's version of events and exonerate him from the taint of murder. After this, an image of Rothesay was presented which emphasised his immorality and recklessness which found its way into the chronicle tradition of Walter Bower. Despite these posthumous smears against Rothesay's character, Albany's guilt was accepted in many chronicle traditions. The reason this happened is that the both the smears against Rothesay to justify at least his imprisonment, and Albany's guilt must have been in circulation, presumably because they were not contradictory.

The second example is the killing of William, eighth earl of Douglas, at the hands of James II on 25 February 1452. The incident which has been extensively studied but the key events can be briefly summarised.⁹¹ William, earl of Douglas, had supposedly been given a safe conduct and was under the king's protection before travelling to Stirling Castle, where James II stabbed him to death after the earl's refusal to break a tripartite bond with Alexander Lindsay, earl of Crawford and John, lord of the Isles. In retaliation, the murdered earl's family, led by his brother James, now ninth earl, sacked Stirling on 17 March 1452. At the parliament of June 1452 that year, a declaration was made concerning the killing a few months earlier. The tenor of the declaration focused on the damage being done to the king's character. It claimed that 'some of his enemies and rebels outwith and within his realm denigrate his good

reputation and rashly dare to slander him' by stating that he had killed the earl when he was under safe conduct. The purpose of the inquest that led to the declaration was therefore to ensure 'that justice and a better impression and a good reputation may be enjoyed concerning which are facts and which fictitious slanders'.⁹²

The extent to which the king's reputation was diminished across the kingdom is uncertain, but it is clear that the victim's family tried to influence public debate on the matter. When James, ninth earl of Douglas, sacked the town of Stirling on 17 March he legitimised his actions by carrying the safe conduct with the king's seal that was displayed as he 'spekand richt sclanderfully of the king'.⁹³ Precisely what the earl said, or more likely shouted, about the king is not stated. The earl's actions were a form of propaganda aimed at the townsmen of Stirling, and presumably the wider political community, because the public display of the document was intended to put across his version of events. A reasonable guess would be Douglas family accused the king of pre-meditated murder under protection, which James II could only have regarded as slanderous. The fact that a public declaration was made in parliament justifying the king's actions suggests that there was some wider public discourse about the killing of the earl of Douglas. In reaction to the king's exoneration, the Douglas family formally renounced their allegiance to the king in a letter affixed to the door of the house parliament sat.⁹⁴ The letter was perhaps not as well-known to contemporaries as the attack on Stirling a few months earlier, but it is difficult to imagine that such an important development in the clash between the crown and its richest subjects did not become common knowledge. Michael Brown has noted that 'in June 1452, the estates in parliament did not speak as the sole voice of the community'.⁹⁵ Clearly there were competing versions of the conflict between the crown and the Douglasses at this point. As Roland Tanner has noted the declaration 'was not simply a royal whitewash of events, but an attempt to deal with this whispering campaign'.⁹⁶ Royal propaganda sought to discredit the Douglas version of the killing of their kinsman by designating it as a slanderous rumour.

When contrasted to similar killings elsewhere, the events surrounding the death of the earl of Douglas come into sharper focus. Amy Blakeway has shown there was ‘a violent propaganda war’ in the aftermath of Regent Moray’s assassination in 1570 which was a vital component of the civil war of that time.⁹⁷ Similar dynamics can be seen in the aftermath of the earl of Douglas’ death more and a century earlier, albeit with those engaged in the propaganda war not having the benefit of the printing press available in the sixteenth century. The aftermath of Moray’s assassination illuminates the longer-term history of the use of propaganda in the wake of political violence in Scotland. Yet, the clearest parallel is not from Scotland, but from France a few decades earlier in aftermath of the assassination in 1407 of Louis, duke of Orléans at the instigation of John the Fearless duke of Burgundy, which Emily Hutchison has illuminated in three interlocking studies.⁹⁸ Hutchison noted that for Orléans kin ‘it was sustained [and public] mourning that their party a political voice’.⁹⁹ Yet, Burgundian propaganda was more successful because it appealed to a wider section of French society, compared to Orleanist/Armagnac propaganda which centred on personal grievances. Burgundy publicly justified the assassination as tyrannicide on 8 March 1408 at Paris before the king, queen, dauphin, princes of the royal blood, scholars from the university of Paris and important Parisians.¹⁰⁰ Orléans reputation (*fama*) was damaged by this Burgundian propaganda and was, in effect, a ‘second murder’ because ‘reputation was something of substance. Like any body, reputation was a thing that could be disfigured, a thing that could be attached, harmed and even slain’.¹⁰¹ This is a pertinent comparison to the events in Scotland in 1452 because it shows how staged events in front of a political community were important for justifying political killings. In Scotland, the Douglas family did not make public displays of mourning in the ways that the duke of Orléans did, but their focus was on the righteousness of their cause in avenging the death of their kinsman. It was this personal grievance that must have formed the basis of the letter attached to the door of parliament. Precisely who would have read the letter is uncertain,

but the intention must have been that fellow nobles attending parliament would become aware of the Douglas perspective on the killing with the hope that they would be sympathetic to the new earl's reaction to his brother's death. Moreover, for both assassinations, the identity of those responsible was well-known, although John the Fearless had not actually wielded the knife, like James II had. Speculation therefore must have focused on the motives of those responsible. To counteract such speculation, propaganda was therefore developed that emphasised the crimes of the victims in order to justify the killings.

In contrast to the very public killing of William, earl of Douglas, the death of James III happened in relative secrecy. This meant that the death was not justified as an act of tyrannicide and speculation centred around the identity of the assailants. James was killed after he fled the battle on 11 June Sauchieburn 1488. All chronicle accounts of the battle are much later making it impossible to be certain about the precise details of the battle.¹⁰² Three things, however, are clear: the rebels had the upper hand in the fighting; at some point the king realised his army was defeated and fled; and that the king was killed after he fled the battle, apparently with few witnesses. The earliest reference to James III's death is found in a journal compiled by Henry VII's agent in Dublin which simply noted for 18 July 1488, around five weeks after Sauchieburn, that 'The said Sir Ric heryng that the co[mm]on voice was in the citie of Develyn and all the contr[ey] th[er]aboute that the kynge of Scott[es] was dede.'¹⁰³ The account shows that news of the king's death travelled but little else. It does not mention a battle and does not speculate about how he died. Yet, the nature of James III's death made it ripe for later speculation and rumour. In the sixteenth century such legends found their way into various accounts of the killing. Adam Abell, Bishop Lesley and Giovanni Ferreri note how the king was killed by certain men near a mill at Bannockburn, while later chroniclers, Pitscottie and Buchanan identified specific assailants.¹⁰⁴ The veracity of such tales is not relevant here. The key point is that the differing versions indicate a level of widespread uncertainty about what

happened. Such uncertainty is found in near-contemporary royal sources which are opaque when describing James III's fate, indicating the new regime's desire to manage the story. The rhetoric was strikingly similar to that used to justify the death of the earl of Douglas in 1452. Soon after the battle, the new regime's official version was stated at parliament:

'oure soverane lordis faider happinnit to be slane and utheris diverse his baronis and liegis, wes aluterly in thar defalt and colourit dyssate done be him and his peruerst counsale diverse times befor the said field.'

Moreover, James IV and everyone who fought with him were 'innocent, quhyt and fre of the saidis slauchteris feilde.'¹⁰⁵ In short, the late king died after the battle but those on James IV's side were innocent of any wrongdoing.

James III's fate formed the basis of propaganda connected with a rebellion the following year, led by those disillusioned with the settlement made by the victors of Sauchieburn.¹⁰⁶ The propaganda was strikingly different from that of the Douglas family a generation earlier. Rather than appeal to personal grievance centred on a victim's kinsmen, rebel propaganda in 1489 appealed to the public good that would come from exacting justice on those who had committed regicide. For instance, Alexander, lord Forbes, carried what he claimed to have been the dead king's bloodied shirt around Aberdeen calling for the crime to be avenged.¹⁰⁷ The item in question is unlikely to have been the dead king's shirt but, since shirts and blood were relatively easy to obtain, a substitute could easily have been produced and used as a dramatic reminder to those watching of the recent crime of regicide. The account is almost a century later but may have been based on credible local information or legend.¹⁰⁸ At a meeting on 12 September 1489 of the 'aldirman ballieis consale and communitte' of Aberdeen along with 'diuers lordis and baronnis' compiled a list of complaints about the new regime including the misuse of the king's treasure, the extraction of ransoms for those taken at Sauchieburn and the administration of justice. The first complaint, and by implication the most

important, was that ‘the tresonable and vile personis’ who killed James III had not been identified or punished.¹⁰⁹ An almost identical set of complaints were made in an apologia produced by John Stewart, earl of Lennox, after the battle of Tillymoss. Although produced after the rebellion, the key aims represent the aims of the rebellion and suggests a level of coordination in the propaganda employed by the rebels.¹¹⁰ The apologia took the form a piece of loyal advice to the king addressing the complaints to ‘our souerane Lord the King and his trew consell, for the honour, weilfair and prospertie of his Heiness and successione, and for the common gud of the realm’. It states that James III ‘wes cruelly slayne be vile and treasonable personis’ who had yet punished. The lack of justice was ‘to the perpetuall defamacion of our souerane lord, and his haile realm.’¹¹¹ Revenge against those who responsible for James III’s death was not the only, or even primary, motive of the rebellions which centred on the new regime’s use of royal finances and patronage.¹¹² Nevertheless, the rebels clearly believed it was beneficial to keep James III’s fate as a live issue and for people to speculate about the precise events. It also enabled them to position themselves as loyal subjects, trying to exact justice against those who had committed regicide. There is a wider point here: the secretive way in which the king died left much scope of wider speculation and rumour about what exactly happened.

The issue of James III’s fate re-emerged in 1492 when a ‘comand and avertissymnt’ of parliament promised 100 merks of land to anyone who revealed the identity of the late king’s killer. Furthermore, if one of the perpetrators came forward, they would be pardoned. These measures were intended ‘for the eschewin and cissing of the hevy murmour and voce of the peple of the ded and slauchter’ of late king.¹¹³ James IV’s sincerity in this act can be questioned, although he clearly felt guilt for his part in his father’s death, wearing an iron belt as penance.¹¹⁴ The act points towards wider discussion and speculation about James III’s fate at Sauchieburn. Norman Macdougall argued that the act “was clearly not to quell the ‘hevy murmour’ of the

national at large, but rather intended as a concession to those members of the Articles who had championed James III's cause both before and after his death". In this respect the act was 'a gesture ... to silence complaints.'¹¹⁵ There is a lot to be said in favour of this interpretation. The fate of the former king was an obvious wrongdoing that anyone critical of James IV's government could raise. By seeking to identify the killers, James IV was able to claim that he was taking steps to punish his father's killers. Yet, there is little basis to argue that there was no 'hevy murmour' about James III's death within the population as a whole. Indeed, the differing sixteenth-century accounts may well reflect different oral traditions and legends that developed from rumours and speculation from the time. Either way, the act of 1492 shows again the importance of quelling rumours for the fifteenth-century Scottish state.

The discussion of rumours and political killings is important for understanding the role of parliament in the formation and dissemination of royal propaganda. Parliament was, amongst other things, a public forum where elites from across the kingdom would gather. It therefore afforded an opportunity to inform a wide group of individuals about the official version of recent crises. This helps to further our understanding of the nature of Scottish political culture in the fifteenth century. There is no evidence from fifteenth-century Scotland of political pamphleteering or the circulation of official chronicles like those sponsored by Edward IV in 1470 and 1471 respectively.¹¹⁶ Instead, the dissemination of propaganda in Scotland seems to have been predominantly oral. Given the imperative of ensuring that the official version was widely known and understood, it is reasonable to assume that the discussions in 1401, 1452, 1488 and 1492 were read out for all to hear. For other parts of Europe, speech acts have been seen as important in the meeting of parliaments and the instances discussed in this section are an example of this wider importance.¹¹⁷ The purpose of such declarations must have been to ensure that the official version of the deaths of Rothesey, Douglas and James III respectively became known, and accepted, within the kingdom's

political community. There is a wider point here: the secretive way in which Rothesay and James III died, and the chaotic way that Douglas was killed in 1452, left much scope of wider speculation and rumour about what exactly happened.

This conclusion, however, should not be regarded as a return to an older historiographical tradition which saw the Scottish parliament as a defective institution that simply went along with the wishes of the regime.¹¹⁸ Such misinterpretations have been conclusively debunked.¹¹⁹ The Scottish parliament operated within the normative frameworks that were recognisable in parliaments and estates across Europe in which meetings were a dialogue between ruler and subjects, normally over key issues of the granting of taxation, the waging of war and the maintenance of justice.¹²⁰ The fact that James I was forced to lock the yield from a tax granted in 1431 in a chest with four keys, each held by a separate auditor and parliament's refusal to go along with James III's scheme to take the county of Saintonge but instead remain in Scotland to administer justice are taken as examples of the Scottish parliament's strength.¹²¹ Yet, such discussions were about future actions, whereas the declarations about deaths were retrospective. Alexander Grant has suggested that 'the acceptance of the *fait accompli*: recognise what has happened and do not cause more trouble' was 'the cardinal political principal behind political activity'.¹²² The aftermath of deaths of Rothesay, Douglas and James III were examples of this principal in action. There was some fuss made then, but they were comparatively low level.

Popular Rumours

The final area to consider is the role of rumour and popular politics. Popular engagement with political events has been viewed as central for understanding politics in their fullest form in other European states but there has been only limited discussion of this for Scotland.¹²³ More recent work has started to place burghs more firmly within the politics of the kingdom, though

the extent to which burgh elites can be described as ‘popular’ is uncertain since such discussions refer to wealthy individuals.¹²⁴ On two occasions, fifteenth-century kings wanted to address widespread discussion about their financial policies. The first was James I who required large sums of cash to pay his ransom in England.¹²⁵ At the first parliament of his personal rule a tax was levied throughout the kingdom, which was a rare occurrence at this point. The king’s financial policies and use of money have been discussed extensively.¹²⁶ Here, the key point is that those taxes were subject to much discussion throughout the kingdom and that the crown tried to temper these discussions. This is most evident in an act from 1425 which stated that:

“all tayltellaris and lesingmakaris and tellaris of thaim the quhilk may engennyr dyscorcord be tuix the kyng and his pepill, quhar evir thai may be gottin, sall be challangit be thaim that poware hass and tyne lyff and gudis to the kyng”¹²⁷

Punishment, in the form of losing ‘lyff and gudis’ was severe, though there are no examples from the fifteenth century of individuals being executed for sedition in Scotland. The act was reiterated during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and expanded to include printed works.¹²⁸ Early modern acts have been regarded as responding ‘to the increasing circulation of political arguments.’¹²⁹ While political discourse may have become more widespread during the early modern period, it was also a regular feature of late medieval Scotland. Exactly who was spreading such tales is not stated in the act, but the wider context suggests that it was discussions about taxation. The two near-contemporary narratives of James I’s reign both indicate general unease with the king’s taxation policies. *The Dethe of the Kynge of Scottis* noted, in rather general terms, that the king’s taxes meant ‘Pat Be commenez of his lande secretelie clepyd hym a tyrant.’¹³⁰ Similarly, Bower noted that a tax levied in 1424 for the king’s ransom raised 14,000 marks in the first year but yields were down in the second year because people complained they had been impoverished.¹³¹ The two very different chronicles

were produced independently of each other with no evidence of collusion or access to each other's work.¹³² It is reasonable to assume that James I's policy of taxation was a hot topic for everyday rumour and discussion, especially since medieval Scots rarely experience royal taxation. The act about the 'learis and tellaris of thaim' must have been focused on wider discussion about the crown's financial policies.

The 1425 act had some precedent in an earlier act from December 1318 which ordered that anyone inventing 'tales or rumours by which a source of discord shall be able to arise between the lord king and his people' be arrested until the king dealt with them.¹³³ The 1318 legislation targeted anyone who opposed, or spoke ill of, Robert I's claim to the Scottish crown. Robert I's brother and recognised heir, Edward Bruce had been killed a few weeks earlier in Ireland leaving the childless king in a vulnerable position. Such rumours and plotting came to the fore two years later with the uncovering of the Soullis conspiracy and the execution of plotters at the parliament of 1320.¹³⁴ Although the 1425 act had some precedents in this legislation, the context in which the two acts were passed differed. By 1425, the legitimacy of the Stewart dynasty within Scotland was not questioned, even if James I's financial policies were causing concern. Therefore, the 1425 act was more about everyday rumours circulating about the king's actions rather than the 1318 act which was more focused on dynastic security and aristocratic plotting. In short, the rumours circulating in 1425 were not about the legitimacy of James I's claim to be king, but how he exercised the office.

Concerns about the crown's financial policies are evident in the late 1460s during the minority of James III when Boyds had seized the reins of government. An act from the 1468 parliament referred to the 'grete romour that is past becaus of diversiteis of payment with[in the realme throu] the takking in of the rentis'. To eschew such rumours, it was ordered that money should have the same value through the realm by returning the value of coins to those levels before the October 1467 parliament.¹³⁵ The act sought to address rumours, whose origins

were likely in the value of coins used when taking rents, but this was part of a wider economic problem. In 1466 parliament permitted the minting of £3000 Scots, of cooper coins, ‘countande to the silver’ into farthings. There were several restrictions on the use of this money. The coins were only to permit the kingdom’s poor to purchase necessities only to be in circulation of a limited time and only to the value of 12d in the pound.¹³⁶ The ‘black money’ was debased coins caused in part by a lack of bullion. ‘Black money’ was issued twice in the reign: the late 1460s and the early 1480s and was one cause of the dissatisfaction with James III that led to the Lauder Bridge crisis.¹³⁷ The extent to which the issuing of such money could cause confusion is evident in a case before the burgh court in Aberdeen, brought by two merchants from Danzig who, during a previous visit, had been paid in debased coins.¹³⁸ A series of measures were introduced at that 1467 parliament to stabilise prices and currency, including setting the value of various foreign coins and that the minting of ‘black pennies’ was prohibited on pain of death.¹³⁹ The references to rumours in the parliamentary sources is only to the debasement from the late 1460s, yet the extent to which the debasement during the 1480s found itself in later narratives of that crisis indicates that rumours about the quality of the coinage persisted throughout the reign. The legislation in 1467 is evidence is rumour circulating about the quality of coinage and more general economic concerns that originated when rents were collected.

A full discussion of popular opinion and popular politics is not possible here, but the two examples cited in this section show how the crown sought to use legislation to prevent rumours spreading. This was a similar tactic to dealing with aristocratic opponents. The evidence is slight, but there is enough to indicate that rumours were part of Scottish political life in the fifteenth century on all social levels.

Conclusion

This examination of rumours and slander has demonstrated their role key role in many of the political crises in fifteenth-century Scotland. The wide body of evidence examined here illustrates how the official narrative of rather uncertain events was developed and disseminated, with alternative versions of events reduced to ‘slander’ or ‘rumour’. This leads back to the agreement between James III and his brother Albany discussed at the start of this article. The agreement between the brothers conformed to a wider pattern of trying to resolve disputes peacefully. Albany’s agreement to publicly declare in parliament that the king did not seek to have him poisoned, and that such rumours were slanderous tapped into what, by that time, was a key feature of fifteenth-century Scottish politics. Describing narratives that challenged the ‘royal’ version of events as ‘rumour’ or ‘slander’ was a key feature of royal propaganda after several violent crown-noble clashes. Why this was the case requires explanation.

For England, Charles Ross noted that ‘the use of propaganda was largely a response by governments to the circulation of seditious rumours, especially in times of political unease.’ This was in the context of a growth of literary and the increased importance of the written word, which led to ‘a growing awareness, both by government and its opponents, of the importance of influencing popular opinion within the realm’.¹⁴⁰ Similar dynamics are evident in fifteenth-century Scotland but more episodic because political crises tended to be briefer affairs in Scotland than in England at this time. Indeed, the extent to which violence characterised fifteenth-century Scottish politics is uncertain. Scotland has been viewed as a kingdom where, compared to England or France, political crises did not escalate into long drawn-out civil wars, but there were several instances of dramatic political violence which have been the focus of this article. In all likelihood, Scotland was probably not significantly more or less turbulent than elsewhere.¹⁴¹ One feature common across all of the incidents discussed in this article is the initial uncertainty about what actually happened. When discussing early Tudor England, C.S.L David noted that we cannot assume politicians ‘acted with a reasonably informed and

coherent knowledge of recent political history'.¹⁴² Indeed, in periods of crisis and confusion, it would have been difficult for contemporaries to garner a coherent understanding about 'what happened.' In fifteenth-century Scotland, propaganda was developed in response to such crises to provide a coherent narrative of recent events. Such practices were particularly evident in the parliamentary declarations which sought to present coherent narratives to the wider political community because it legitimised the violent removal of opponents.

In contrast to keeping rumours in check about violent acts in Scotland, the spreading of disinformation in England was a tactic employed by on two occasions by Scottish kings and guardians, with differing degrees of success. On both occasions this was after acts of regicide (Richard II and Edward V), where there was uncertainty about precisely what happened. This gave scope for rumours to flourish. A key figure who brought both strands together was Robert Stewart, duke of Albany, whose hand can be seen in a parliamentary declaration that David, duke of Rothesay, died of natural causes and the spreading in England of rumours that Richard II was still alive. In this respect, Albany should be viewed as an archetypal example of a fifteenth-century statesman whose understanding of the power of rumour to achieve political objectives. Underlying this is an apparent contrast between the use of rumours in domestic and foreign politics. In domestic Scottish politics narratives were controlled, and propaganda developed, to combat slanderous rumours and speculation. Such objectives stand in stark contrast to the support for imposters to the English crown where the objective was to ensure confusion, wild speculation and the spread of rumours. Although these are two opposite objectives, they share an underlying acknowledgement within the Scottish polity that rumours were a potent weapon for achieving political objectives.

Rumours were fundamental to political life in Scotland as they were many parts of later medieval Europe. This was before the arrival of the printing press to Scotland and the religious conflicts of the sixteenth century which thus far have received more attention. Some fifteenth-

century rumours no doubt became local folklore and legend that were recorded by many sixteenth-century writers and formed the initial historical reputation for many figures from fifteenth-century Scotland. This article has demonstrated the range of ways they became embroiled in the politics of the kingdom, particularly in the development of royal propaganda, or the official version of events. It is important to note that there is not a single explanation for their role in medieval politics. Nevertheless, one recurrent feature is that rumours were prominent after events where establishing a coherent narrative was difficult. Fifteenth-century Scottish kings and governors recognised the importance of rumour, both for curbing them domestically and spreading them abroad. In many ways, rumours helped to shape the politics of fifteenth-century Scotland.

I would like to thank the two anonymous peer reviewers for their comments and suggestion which greatly improved this article.

¹ All references to this indenture in this paragraph, and the next one, relate to National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh, SP13/19.

² The best account of these events is found in Norman Macdougall, *James III*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh, 2009), 187-225.

³ Michael Brown, 'The Lanark Bond' in *Kings, Lords and Men in Scotland and Britain, 1300-1625*, eds. Steve Boardman and Julian Goodacre (Edinburgh, 2014), 245.

⁴ For a book length study see: Jenny Wormald, *Lords and Men in Scotland: Bonds of Manrent, 1442-1603* (Edinburgh, 1985). See also: Stephen I. Boardman, 'Politics and the Feud in Late Medieval Scotland', (University of St. Andrews PhD thesis, 1989), 2-158; Michael Brown, 'The Great Rupture: Lordship and Politics in North-East Scotland (1435-1452)', *Northern Scotland*, v (2014), 1-25; Brown, 'The Lanark Bond', 227-45; Michael Brown, "'The Downcasting of the House of Dupplin': Burghs, Lordship and Politics in Fifteenth-Century Scotland" in *Kingship, Lordship and Sanctity in Medieval Britain*, eds. Steve Boardman and David Ditchburn (Woodbridge, 2022), 212-30; Alison Cathcart, *Kinship and Clientage: Highland Clanship, 1451-1609* (Leiden, 2006), 119-28; Jane E. A Dawson, 'Bonding, Religious Allegiance and Covenanting' in *Kings, Lords and Men in Scotland and Britain, 1300-1625*, eds. Steve Boardman and Julian Goodacre (Edinburgh, 2014), 155-72; Anna

Groundwater, “‘We Bund and Olbleiss Us Never More to Querrell’: Bonds, Private Obligations and Public Justice in the Reign of James VI” in *Kings, Lords and Men in Scotland and Britain, 1300-1625*, eds. Steve Boardman and Julian Goodacre (Edinburgh, 2014), 173-92; Julian Goodacre, ‘The Ainslie Bond’ in *Kings, Lords and Men in Scotland and Britain, 1300-1625*, eds. Steve Boardman and Julian Goodacre (Edinburgh, 2014), 301-19.

⁵ Macdougall, *James III*, 150-2, 164-5. See also Norman Macdougall, “‘It is I, the Earle of Mar’”: In search of Thomas Cochrane’ in *People and Power in Scotland*, eds. Roger Mason and Norman Macdougall (Edinburgh, 1992), 28-49.

⁶ *Feodera, conventions, litterae, et cujuscunque generis acta publica inter reges Anglie et alios quosvis imperatores, reges, pontifices, principes, vel communitates (1101-1654)*, ed. Thomas Rymer 20 vols. (London, 1704-45), xii, 172-3.

⁷ National Records of Scotland, Edinburgh, SP13/19

⁸ *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707* [Hereafter *RPS*], eds. Keith M. Brown et. al. (St Andrews, 2007-2022), 1479/10/7 [Date accessed: 22 November 2022 and for all subsequent references to this site]. For Albany’s career in Scotland before his exile see: Macdougall, *James III*, 73, 91-4, 91-2, 114, 121-2, 129, 157-8, 178.

⁹ For the importance of parliament at this time see Roland Tanner, *The Late Medieval Scottish Parliament: Politics and the Three Estates, 1424-1488* (East Linton, 2001).

¹⁰ Michael Bath and Malcolm Jones, “‘Placardes and Bills and Ticquettis of Defamation’: Queen Mary, the Mermaid and the Hare”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute*, 78 (2015), 223-46; Amy Blakeway, ‘The Response to Regent Moray’s Assassination’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 88 (2009), 9-33.

¹¹ Stephen Boardman, “Chronicle Propaganda in Fourteenth-Century Scotland: Robert the Stewart, John of Fordun and the ‘The Anonymous Chronicle’”, *Scottish Historical Review*, 76 (1997), 23-43; Katie Stevenson, *Power and Propaganda: Scotland, 1306-1488* (Edinburgh, 2014), 182-214.

¹² Jane E. A. Dawson, *Scotland Reformed, 1488-1587* (Edinburgh, 2007), 270-1.

¹³ Karin Bowie, *Public Opinion in Early Modern Scotland, c. 1560-1707* (Cambridge, 2020), 137-84.

¹⁴ Bowie, *Public Opinion in Early Modern Scotland*, 1-20. See also Karin Bowie and Alasdair Raffe, ‘Politics, People and Extra-Institutional Participation in Scotland, c.1603-1712’, *Journal of British Studies*, 56 (2017), 797-815.

¹⁵ Charles Ross, ‘Rumour, Propaganda and Public Opinion during the Wars of the Roses’ in *Patronage, The Crown and the Provinces in Later Medieval England*, eds. Ralph A. Griffiths (Gloucester, 1981), 15-32.

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¹⁶ Ross, ‘Rumour, Propaganda and Public Opinion’, 24.

¹⁷ Chris Wickham ‘Gossip and Resistance among the Medieval Peasantry’, *Past and Present*, no. 160 (1998), 3-24.

¹⁸ *The Voices of the People in Late Medieval Europe. Communication and Popular Politics*, eds. Jan Dumolyn, Jelle Haemers, Hipolito Rafael Oliva Herrer and Vincent Challet (Turnhout, 2014); Jan Dumolyn, “‘Criers and Shouters’: The Discourse on Radical Urban Rebellion in Late Medieval Flanders”, *Journal of Social History* (2008), 111-35; Jan Dumolyn and Jelle Haemers, “‘A Bad Chicken was Brooding’: Subversive Speech in Late Medieval Flanders”, *Past and Present*, 214 (2021), 45-86; Helen Lacey, ‘The voices of royal subjects? Political speech in the judicial and governmental records of fourteenth-century England’, *Anales de Universidad de Alicante. Historia Medieval*, 19 (2016), 241-68; Helen Lacey, ‘Defaming the King: Reporting disloyal speech in fourteenth-century England’ in *Monarchy, State and Political Culture in England, 1300-1500*, eds. Gwilym Dodd and Craig Taylor (Woodbridge, 2019), 90-109; Simon Walker, ‘Rumour, Sedition and Popular Protest in the Reign of Henry IV’, *Past and Present*, 166 (2000), 31-65.

¹⁹ Laura Slater, ‘Rumour and reputation management in fourteenth-century England: Isabella of France in text and image’, *Journal of Medieval History*, 47 (2021), 257-92.

²⁰ Norman Macdougall, ‘The Sources: A Reappraisal of the Legend’ in *Scottish Society in the Fifteenth Century* ed. J.M Brown (London, 1977), 10-32. For the significance of Macdougall’s work see the introduction to his festschrift: Michael Brown, ‘Introduction’ in *Scottish Kingship, 1306-1542*, eds. Michael Brown and Roland Tanner (Edinburgh, 2008), 1-19.

²¹ Macdougall, *James III*, especially xiii-xx, 359-69 which deals with the king’s developing reputation.

²² Norman Macdougall, *James IV* (East Linton, 1997).

²³ Stephen I. Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings, Robert II and Robert III, 1371-1406* (East Linton, 1996), 302-14; Michael Brown, *James I* (East Linton, 1994), 1-8; Jamie Cameron, *James V: The Personal Rule, 1528-1542* (East Linton, 1998), 17-24; Ken Edmond, *The Minority of James V: Scotland and Europe, 1513-1528* (Edinburgh, 2019), 238-53; Christine McGladdery, *James II*, revised edition (Edinburgh, 2015), 235-53; Michael A. Penman, *David II* (East Linton, 2004), 1-14, 428-42.

²⁴ *Aberdeen Registers Online: 1398-1511*, < <https://sar.abdn.ac.uk/#homepage> >, ARO-4-0-0194-04; ARO-5-0428-06; ARO-6-0036-01, ARO-6-0289-07, ARO-6-0755-09, ARO-7-0213-04, ARO-7-0859-02, ARO-7-0859-03 [accessed 9 August 2022]; *Extracts from the Records of the Royal Burgh of Lanark with Charters and*

Documents Relating to the Burgh, A.D. 1150-1722 (Glasgow, 1892), 2; *Charters and Documents relating to the Burgh of Peebles with Extracts from the Records of the Burgh, A.D. 1165-1710* (Edinburgh, 1872), 167.

²⁵ *Calendar of Papal Registers Relating to Great Britain and Ireland. Volume 4: 1362-1404*, ed. W.H Bliss and J.A Twemlow (London, 1902), 42.

²⁶ *RPS*, A1515/7/3.

²⁷ Ralph Griffiths, 'The King's Court during the Wars of the Roses: Continuities in an Age of Discontinuities' in *Princes, Patronage and the Nobility: The Court at the Beginning of the Modern Ages*, ed. Adolf von Birke (London and Oxford, 1990), 52.

²⁸ William Rendall Hepburn, 'The Household of James IV, 1488-1513', (University of Glasgow PhD thesis, 2013); Nicola A. Scott, 'The Court and Household of James I of Scotland, 1424-37' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Stirling, 2007).

²⁹ Graeme Small, *George Chastelain and the Shaping of Valois Burgundy* (Woodbridge, 1997).

³⁰ Chris Given-Wilson, 'Official and Semi-Official History in the Later Middle Ages: The English Evidence in Context', *The Medieval Chronicle*, 5 (2008), 2.

³¹ On Bower's career see: D.E.R Watt 'Bower [Bowmaker], Walter', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, < <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/3045>>; For contemporary references to him at parliament see *RPS*, 1424/31, 1431/10/2, 1432/3/1, 1432/10/1, 1435/2.

³² Katie Stevenson, "'Recreations to refresh the spirits of his followers': Walter Bower's revelations on cultural pursuits at James I of Scotland's court", *Recherches anglaises et nord-américaines*, 40 (2007), 9-23.

³³ Michael H. Brown, "'The Old Serpent and Ancient of Evils Days': Walter, Earl of Athol and the Death of James I", *Scottish Historical Review*, 71 (1992), 23-45.

³⁴ *Death and Dissent: The Dethe of the Kynge of Scotis and Warkworth's Chronicle*, ed. Lister M. Matheson, (Woodbridge, 1999), 31-3.

³⁵ *Death and Dissent*, 20-1.

³⁶ Michael H. Brown, "'I have thus slain a tyrant': the Dethe of the Kynge of Scotis and the right to resist in early fifteenth-century Scotland", *Innes Review*, 47 (1996), 24-44; Lynn Kilgannon, 'Communal Authority, Counsel and Resistance in the Reign of James I: A Conceptual Approach', *Scottish Historical Review*, 100 (2021), 1-24; Roland Tanner, "'I arrest you, sir, in the name of the three astattes in perlement': the Scottish Parliament and resistance to the Crown in the fifteenth century" in *Social Attitudes and Political Structures in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Tim Thornton (Stroud, 2000), 101-17. 37

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³⁷ *Death and Dissent*, 29.

³⁸ Walter Bower, *Scotichronicon*, D.E.R Watt et al (eds.), 9 vols. (Aberdeen, 1987-98), viii, 300-1, 330-1; *Liber Pluscardensis*, ed. Felix J. H. Skene (Edinburgh: Willian Paterson, 1880), 289 memorably refers to Athol as ‘that old serpent of evil days’ and states that he desired the crown.

³⁹ Bower, *Scotichronicon*, viii, 146-7; Michael Brown, “‘Vile Times’: Walter Bower’s Last Book and the Minority of James II’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 79 (2000), 165-88.

⁴⁰ *Death and Dissent*, 49; *Liber Pluscardensis*, 290-1. Bower, however, includes no account of the Athol’s capture and execution.

⁴¹ Bower, *Scotichronicon*, viii, 330-1

⁴² Tzafirir Barzilay , and Ruth Mazo Karras, *Poisoned Wells: Accusations, Persecution, and Minorities in Medieval Europe, 1321-1422* (Philadelphia, 2022), 1.

⁴³ For the use of poisoning as a method of assassination see Matthew Lubin, ‘Poisoning as a means of state assassination in early modern Venice’ in *Medieval and Early Modern Murder: Legal, Literary and Historical Contexts*, ed. Larissa Tracy (Woodbridge, 2018), 227-53.

⁴⁴ Jackson W. Armstrong, ‘The Justice Ayers in Border Sheriffdoms, 1493-1498’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 92 (2013), 25-8; Alexander Grant, ‘Murder Will Out: Kingship, Kinship and Killing in Medieval Scotland’ in *Kings, Lords and Men in Scotland and Britain, 1300-1625*, eds. Steve Boardman and Julian Goodacre (Edinburgh, 2014), 222-4.

⁴⁵ *RPS*, 1450/5/2.

⁴⁶ *RPS*, 1450/5/3.

⁴⁷ Macdougall, *James III*, 305 citing Edinburgh University Library, Laing MS. IIII, 322.

⁴⁸ Macdougall, *James III*, 328, citing Danske Rigsarkiv, Copenhagen, Skotland, A.I, I.

⁴⁹ S.B. Chandler, ‘An Italian Life of Margaret, Queen of James III’, *Scottish Historical Review*, 32 (1957), 57.

⁵⁰ Chandler, ‘An Italian Life of Margaret, Queen of James III’, 53-4.

⁵¹ Chandler, ‘An Italian Life of Margaret, Queen of James III’, 55-6.

⁵² Chris Given-Wilson, *Henry IV* (London, 2016), 204-5, 209-10, 221-3; Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (London, 1997), 426-7; Philip Morgan, ‘Henry IV and the Shadow of Richard II’ in *Crown, Government and People in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Rowena E. Archer (Stroud, 1995), 1-32; Walker, ‘Rumour, Sedition and Popular Protest’, 31-65.

⁵³ Saul, *Richard II*, 427.

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- ⁵⁴ Robert Bartlett, *Royal Blood: Dynastic Politics in Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 2020), 366, 369.
- ⁵⁵ *The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland, vol. 4, 1406-1436*, ed. George Burnett, (Edinburgh, 1880), 71, 213, 239, 289.
- ⁵⁶ Bower, *Scotichronicon*, viii, 114-15.
- ⁵⁷ *Calendar of Documents Relating to Scotland preserved in Her Majesty's Public Record Office. Vol4: A.D. 1357-1509, Addenda 1221-1435* (Edinburgh, 1888), 126 (no. 604).
- ⁵⁸ *Calendar of Patent Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office, Henry IV, Vol II: 1401-1405* (London, 1905), 125.
- ⁵⁹ *CPR, 1401-1405*, 126-9.
- ⁶⁰ *Calendar of Close Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office, 1399-1402, Henry IV, Vol. I* (London, 1927), 570.
- ⁶¹ Gordon McKelvie, *Bastard Feudalism, English Society and the Law: The Statutes of Livery, 1390-1520* (Woodbridge, 2020), 26.
- ⁶² Chris Given-Wilson, *Henry IV* (London, 2016), 205.
- ⁶³ Much has been written about the fate of Edward IV's two children, a lot of which is rather speculative or based on idiosyncratic interpretations of the primary sources. The two best discussions of the 'Princes in the Tower' are Michael Hicks, *Richard III: The Self-Made King* (London, 2019), 279-84; Charles Ross, *Richard III* (Berkeley, 1981), 96-104, 233-4.
- ⁶⁴ For an outline of the Warbeck conspiracy see Ian Arthurson, *The Perkin Warbeck Conspiracy, 1491-1499* (Stroud, 1994). For a focus on the Scottish context see Macdougall, *James IV*, 117-38.
- ⁶⁵ *Accounts of the High Treasurer of Scotland: Volume 1, 1473-1498*, ed. Thomas Dickson (Edinburgh, 1877), 242, 256, 259, 262-4, 267, 293-4, 299-300; *The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland, vol. 10, 1488-1496*, ed. George Burnett, (Edinburgh, 1887), 576-7.
- ⁶⁶ Gordon McKelvie, 'Henry VII's Letter to Carlisle in 1498: His Concerns about Retaining in a Border Fortress', *Northern History*, 54 (2017), 163; Katie Stevenson, 'Chivalry, British Sovereignty and Dynastic Politics: Undercurrents of Antagonism in Tudor–Stewart Relations, c. 1490–c. 1513', *Historical Research*, 86 (2013), 603-4.
- ⁶⁷ Macdougall, *James IV*, 136-41.
- ⁶⁸ This article consciously avoids describing these killings as 'murders' which at this point in Scottish law had a more restricted meaning than simply a pre-meditated homicide: Grant, 'Murder Will Out', 222-6.

⁶⁹ Alexander Grant, 'The death of John Comyn: what was going on?', *Scottish Historical Review*, 86 (2007), 177-8 makes a similar point in relation to the sources about Robert Bruce's killing of John Comyn in 1306.

⁷⁰ The discussion of events here summarises the expert analysis in Stephen Boardman, 'The Man who would be King: The Lieutenancy and Death of David, Duke of Rothesay, 1378-1402' in *People and Power in Scotland*, eds. Roger Mason and Norman Macdougall (Edinburgh, 1992), 16-38.

⁷¹ *RPS*, 1399/1/3.

⁷² On Richard II's death see Saul, *Richard II*, 424-6.

⁷³ Bower, *Scotichronicon*, viii, 38-9.

⁷⁴ *Liber Pluscardensis*, 258.

⁷⁵ *RPS*, 1402/5/1.

⁷⁶ *Death and Dissent*, 23-4; Bower, *Scotichronicon*, viii, 38-9; *Liber Pluscardensis*, 257-8.

⁷⁷ Bower, *Scotichronicon*, viii, 132-5.

⁷⁸ See above.

⁷⁹ Steve Boardman, 'A Saintly Sinner? The 'Martyrdom' of David, duke of Rothesay' in Steve Boardman and Eila Williamson, eds., *The Cult of Saints and the Virgin Mary in Medieval Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2010), 87-104. There is no evidence that Rothesay was regarded as a saint or that there was any attempt to have him canonised.

⁸⁰ *Calendar of Scottish Supplications to Rome, 1423-1428*, ed. Anne I. Dunlop (Edinburgh, 1956) 167.

⁸¹ Boardman, 'A Saintly Sinner?', 88.

⁸² *William Worcestre: Itineraries*, ed. John H. Harvey (Oxford, 1969), 6-9. See also Boardman, 'A Saintly Sinner?', 89.

⁸³ Andrew of Wyntoun, *The Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland*, 3 vols., ed. David Laing (Edinburgh, 1872-9), iii, 82.

⁸⁴ Boardman, *Early Stewart Kings*, 272; C. Edington, 'Wyntoun, Andrew', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, <doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30164>.

⁸⁵ Wyntoun, *Orygynale Cronykil*, iii, 82.

⁸⁶ *Short Scottish Prose Chronicles*, eds. Dan Embree, Edward Donald Kennedy and Kathleen Daly (Woodbridge, 2012), 223.

⁸⁷ *Short Scottish Prose Chronicles*, 27-8.

⁸⁸ *Short Scottish Prose Chronicles*, 107-8.

⁸⁹ Brown, 'That Old Serpent and Ancient of Evil Days' 403-5.

⁹⁰ Boardman, ‘A Saintly Sinner?’, 94, fn. 26.

⁹¹ This summary of these events is drawn from: Michael Brown, *The Black Douglases: War and Lordship in Late Medieval Scotland, 1300–1455* (East Linton, 1998), 291-308; Michael Brown, ‘Public Authority and Factional Conflict: Crown, Parliament and Polity, 1424-1455’ in *The History of the Scottish Parliament Volume 1: Parliament and Politics in Scotland (1235-1560)*, eds. Keith Brown and Roland Tanner (Edinburgh, 2004), 123-44; McGladdery, *James II*, 111-19, 121-41; Tanner, *Late Medieval Scottish Parliament*, 136-8.

⁹² *RPS*, 1452/6/1.

⁹³ ‘The Auchinleck Chronicle’ in McGladdery, *James II*, 265. It is likely that the ninth earl was shouting things about the king, given the nature of the attack.

⁹⁴ ‘The Auchinleck Chronicle’ in McGladdery, *James II*, 266.

⁹⁵ Brown, ‘Public Authority and Factional Conflict’, 124.

⁹⁶ Tanner, *Late Medieval Scottish Parliament*, 137.

⁹⁷ Blakeway, ‘Response to the Regent Moray’s Assassination’, 33.

⁹⁸ Emily J. Hutchison, ‘Winning Hearts and Minds in Early Fifteenth-Century France: Burgundian Propaganda in Perspective’, *French Historical Studies*, 35 (2012), 3-30; Emily J. Hutchison, ‘The Politics of Grief in the Outbreak of Civil War in France, 1407-1413’, *Speculum*, 91 (2016), 422-52; Emily J. Hutchison, “Defamation, a Murder More Foul?: The ‘Second Murder’ of Louis, Duke of Orleans (d. 1407)” in *Medieval and Early Modern Murder: Legal, Literacy and Historical Contexts*, ed. Larissa Tracy (Woodbridge, 2018), 254-80.

⁹⁹ Hutchison, ‘Politics of Grief’, 424.

¹⁰⁰ Hutchison, ‘Politics of Grief’, 424.

¹⁰¹ Hutchison, “‘Second Murder’ of Louis of Orleans”, 259.

¹⁰² On the battle and the various accounts of it see: Macdougall, *James III*, 346-7.

¹⁰³ British Library, Cotton Titus B XI, part 2, fol. 284. I am grateful to Dr Sean Cunningham for sharing this reference with me.

¹⁰⁴ Macdougall, *James III*, 348-9.

¹⁰⁵ *RPS*, 1488/10/51.

¹⁰⁶ Macdougall, *James IV*, 59-76.

¹⁰⁷ George Buchanan, *The History and Chronicles of Scotland*, ed. trans. J. Aikman (Glasgow and Edinburgh, 1827-9), ii, 225.

¹⁰⁸ Macdougall, *James IV*, 64.

¹⁰⁹ *Aberdeen Registers*, ARO-7-0137-01.

¹¹⁰ Macdougall, *James IV*, 70.

¹¹¹ William Fraser, *The Lennox. Volume 2: Muniments* (Edinburgh, 1874) 128-31.

¹¹² For reactions against the financial policies of James IV more generally see Steve Boardman, 'Royal Finance and Regional Rebellion in the Reign of James IV' in *Sixteenth-Century Scotland*, eds. Julian Goodare and Alasdair A. MacDonald (Leiden, 2008), 15-42.

¹¹³ *RPS*, 1492/2/9.

¹¹⁴ Macdougall, *James IV*, 53; *Accounts of the High Treasurer of Scotland: Volume 3, 1506-1507*, ed. Thomas Dickson (Edinburgh, 1877), 250.

¹¹⁵ Macdougall, *James IV*, 92-3.

¹¹⁶ Given-Wilson, 'Official and Semi-Official History', 1-16 Ross, 'Rumour, Propaganda and Public Opinion', 24. On political pamphleteering more generally see Gwilym Dodd, 'Was Thomas Favent a political pamphleteer? Faction and politics in later fourteenth-century London', *Journal of Medieval History*, 37 (2011), 397-418; Clement Oliver, *Parliament and Political Pamphleteering in Fourteenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, 2010).

¹¹⁷ Jörg Feuchter and Johannes Helmuth, 'Oratory and representation: the rhetorical culture of political assemblies, 1300-1600', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation*, 29 (2009), 53-66; Jan Dumolyn and Graeme Small, 'Speech Acts and Political Communication in the Estates General of Valois and Habsburg Burgundy, c. 1370-1530' in *Political Representation: Communities, Ideas and Institutions in Europe (c. 1200 -c. 1690)*, eds. Mario Damen, Jelle Haemers & Alastair J. Mann (Leiden, 2018), 240-66.

¹¹⁸ Robert S. Rait, *The Parliaments of Scotland* (Glasgow, 1924).

¹¹⁹ The key work in this respect is Tanner, *Late Medieval Scottish Parliament*.

¹²⁰ Peter Hoppenbrouwers, 'Assemblies of Estates and Parliamentarism in Late Medieval Europe' in *Political Representation: Communities, Ideas and Institutions in Europe (c. 1200 -c. 1690)*, eds. Mario Damen, Jelle Haemers & Alastair J. Mann (Leiden, 2018), 19-53.

¹²¹ *RPS*, 1425/3/23; *RPS*, 1473/74-18; Tanner, *Late Medieval Scottish Parliaments* has these examples on the blurb.

¹²² Alexander Grant, 'Crown and Nobility in Late Medieval Britain' in *Scotland and England: 1286-1815*, ed. Roger Mason (Edinburgh, 1987), 45.

¹²³ Popular politics in late medieval Scotland is briefly covered in Alexander Grant, *Independence and Nationhood: Scotland 1306-1469* (Edinburgh, 1984), 84-8; Stevenson, *Power and Propaganda*, 170-3.

¹²⁴ Brown, ‘Burghs, Lordship and Politics’, 212-30; Claire Hawes, ‘The urban community in fifteenth-century Scotland: language, law and political practice’, *Urban History*, 44 (2017), 365-80

¹²⁵ Brown, *James I*, 44, 48-9.

¹²⁶ It is discussed throughout Brown *James I*.

¹²⁷ *RPS*, 1425/3/23.

¹²⁸ James I’s act was explicitly named in re-issues and expansions in 1458 (*RPS*, 1458/3/23) and 1594 (*RPS*, 1594/4/26).

¹²⁹ Bowie, *Public Opinion in Early Modern Scotland*, 143; Alister Mann, *Scottish Book Trade 150-1720: Prince Commerce and Print Control in Early Modern Scotland* (East Linton, 2000), 164.

¹³⁰ *Death and Dissent*, 28.

¹³¹ Bower, *Scotichronicon*, viii, 240-1.

¹³² Boardman, ‘Saintly Sinner?’, 90-1.

¹³³ *RPS*, 1318/23.

¹³⁴ A.A.M Duncan, ‘The War of the Scots, 1306-23’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 2 (1992), 129; Michael Penman, ‘“A fell coniuracioun again Robert the douchty king”: The Soules Conspiracy of 1318-1320’, *Innes Review*, 50 (1999), 25-57.

¹³⁵ *RPS*, 1468/4.

¹³⁶ *RPS*, 1466/41

¹³⁷ Macdougall, *James III*, 73, 87, 150, 183-7, 298.

¹³⁸ William Hepburn, ‘Black Money in Aberdeen (1489)’, <https://aberdeenregisters.org/2016/07/08/black-money-in-aberdeen-1488/#fn-346-7> [accessed 9 August 2022].

¹³⁹ *RPS*, 1467/10/10-11.

¹⁴⁰ Ross, ‘Rumour, propaganda and public opinion’, 15.

¹⁴¹ John Watts, *Making of Polities: Europe 1300-1500* (Oxford 2009), 327 described Scottish kingship as ‘low pressured’ and more like kingship in northern and eastern Europe than western Europe in the later Middle Ages. Given the recurrent episodes of crisis this seems to downplay the extent of political violence in the kingdom, even if there was no equivalent to the Wars of the Roses. See also Grant, ‘Crown and Nobility’ 43-68 which emphasises the comparative stability in Scotland and Michael H. Brown, ‘Scotland Tamed? Kings and Magnates in Late Medieval Scotland: A Review of Recent Work’, *Innes Review*, 45 (1994), 120-46 which places a greater emphasis on conflict.

¹⁴² C.S.L. Davis, 'Information, disinformation and political knowledge under Henry VII and Henry VIII' *Historical Research*, 85 (2012), 252.