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Keith M. Brown, Roland J. Tanner, eds. *Parliament and Politics in Scotland, 1235-1560.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004. xii + 242 pp. $75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7486-1485-1.

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Scotland: A Parliament and a Parliamentary History of its Own

The Scottish Parliament Project was established in 1997, hot on the heels of the legislation that restored to the kingdom a modern version of its own representative assembly. Located at the University of St. Andrews, the Project brings together a range of scholars, all engaged in studying some aspect of the history and development of the three estates in the period between roughly 1230 and 1707. This volume, one of a series, is the first major published work to come out of the project. Its ten essays cover the period leading up to, and including, the convening of one of the most famous of all meetings of the estates, the Reformation parliament of 1560.

In a rigorous and far-ranging introduction, Keith Brown and Roland Tanner lay out the several themes that inform the essays in the volume. The first, they argue, saw a relationship between the Scottish crown and parliament that, far from being static, was constantly in a state of flux. If, after 1286, the three estates "never suffered from prolonged periods of royal overbearance" (p. 14), neither were there many occasions when parliament was able, unfettered, to shape the royal will. In this sense, the Scottish assembly was from the outset a living, changeable body, its constitutional role fixed only insofar as few kings were foolish enough to rule without it. As early as the reign of Robert I, the *de facto* right of the estates to influence the crown's policies had been widely acknowledged by members of the political community; by 1445, the assembly had achieved *de jure* recognition as well. Another theme that runs through the collection is the unique nature of the Scots parliament. From their inception, the estates both reflected and aimed to resolve problems, needs and aspirations peculiar to the northern kingdom. In other words, parliament was not the poor cousin of a more illustrious, sophisticated and powerful English institution, as scholars have often claimed. Finally, Brown and Tanner introduce a third theme, also repeated in several of the essays that follow, which interprets the term "parliament" itself much more broadly than is customary. "Assembly," "general council," "estates": all are interchangeable in the Scottish context. "Parliament" did not exist as a body distinct from the council in the minds of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century officials; neither, Brown and Tanner argue, should it in the interpretation of historians. In adopting this stance, these scholars and their fellow contributors deliberately

reject the tendency to reify the institution that has been such a long-standing feature of English parliamentary history.

Brown and Tanner are more than justified in stressing the distinct characteristics of the Scottish parliament. In most states in western Europe, representative assemblies were born of a struggle between monarchs and their subjects for control of tax revenues; in some, too, they acquired additional importance when they became the chief venues for litigation among high born subjects. Although the estates similarly came to secure an important voice in the conduct of financial and judicial business in Scotland, their genesis was the crisis that followed the death, in 1286, of King Alexander III and the beginning of the struggle for independence from England. As Alison McQueen argues to good effect, the concerns of the earliest genuinely representative assemblies in the realm were simple but pressing: how to govern a kingless kingdom. For a precious few years, moreover, John Balliol and the political community used parliament in effective fashion "as a focus for government and [for] re-establishing royal control over the kingdom" (p. 38).

Robert I learned quickly just how valuable this function of the estates might prove. Roland Tanner portrays a Robert Bruce who, to my knowledge, has never been seen in public: a ruthless man, a master thief of the seals that magnates used to authenticate their acts, and a skillful manipulator of parliament "as a cog in the Bruce propaganda machine" (p. 61). Although Tanner does not say so clearly, Robert I's "hijacking" of the language of consensus left an enduring, and not altogether positive, legacy. The consequences of Bruce's manipulation of the estates are the subject of the essays written by Michael Penman and Stephen Boardman. Like his father, David II was able to manage and direct parliament, but with much greater difficulty. The personal and political troubles that beset the later fourteenth-century kings might seriously have altered the balance of power between crown and parliament; in fact, until recently, scholars wrote about the politics of the early Stewart period as a time of bitter struggle between a weak crown and its over-mighty magnates. For Boardman, however, extant evidence does not support such a view. "There is little indication," he writes, "that late fourteenth-century Scots recognized any natural political fault line between the interests of the crown and the welfare of the wider community" (p. 119). Both, moreover, found common cause in prosecuting war against England.

If, by the year 1400, the political community had come to exert a powerful influence on Scottish politics, representative assemblies had yet to win *de jure* recognition of their right to govern in partnership with the crown. Although their reigns were marked by dramatically different circumstances, the behavior of James I, James II, and James III had a cumulative impact on the growing sense of the importance of parliament in regulating the policies and the conduct of the king. Michael Brown explores these themes in a comprehensive review of the years 1406 through 1455. Norman Macdougall examines the very different relationship of James IV with the three estates. The experiences of his predecessors, he argues, taught James that "a parliamentary session could be as dangerous for an unpopular king as a mustering of the Scottish army" (p. 146). James neatly avoided confrontation and effectively silenced the voice of the third estate (which had been instrumental in staging his father's fall from grace) by strictly controlling meetings of the great council, and by steering a wide variety of extrajudicial business to unusually large sessions of the lords of council.

James IV, however, was an exceptionally astute ruler, and already by the middle years of the fifteenth century the estates had secured a constitutional place in the governance of the realm. Although they unfolded in very different ways, the long minorities of James V and Mary, studied here in essays by Ken Emond and Pamela Ritchie, served both to emphasize the dangers of factionalism and to underscore the importance of parliament as a legitimizing force for those who sought to rule in the name of their young charges. Keith Brown also explores the claim by the estates to a lawful share of government in the final essay in the volume. In his "anatomy" of the Reformation parliament, he offers several novel arguments concerning the importance of barons of middling rank to the success of the reforming faction. Although they had long been shut out of meetings of the Lords of the Articles, an overwhelming number of barons attended the sessions of 1560 and ultimately ensured the victory of the Protestants. For Brown, a more astonishing aspect of the events of 1560 was the willingness of the reformers to "make up constitutional arrangements" as and when circumstances dictated.

Collections of essays often disappoint, their editors unable to ensure strong thematic cohesion or to maintain a consistent quality of writing among contributors. This volume is a notable exception. Several of the authors clearly faced daunting challenges in attempting to make sense of scanty record materials, yet none of their essays is any less compelling or satisfying than those which are

based on ample sources. The book is an auspicious beginning to the three-volume series, and a testament to the strength of the research effort that the Scottish Parliament Project was designed to support.

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