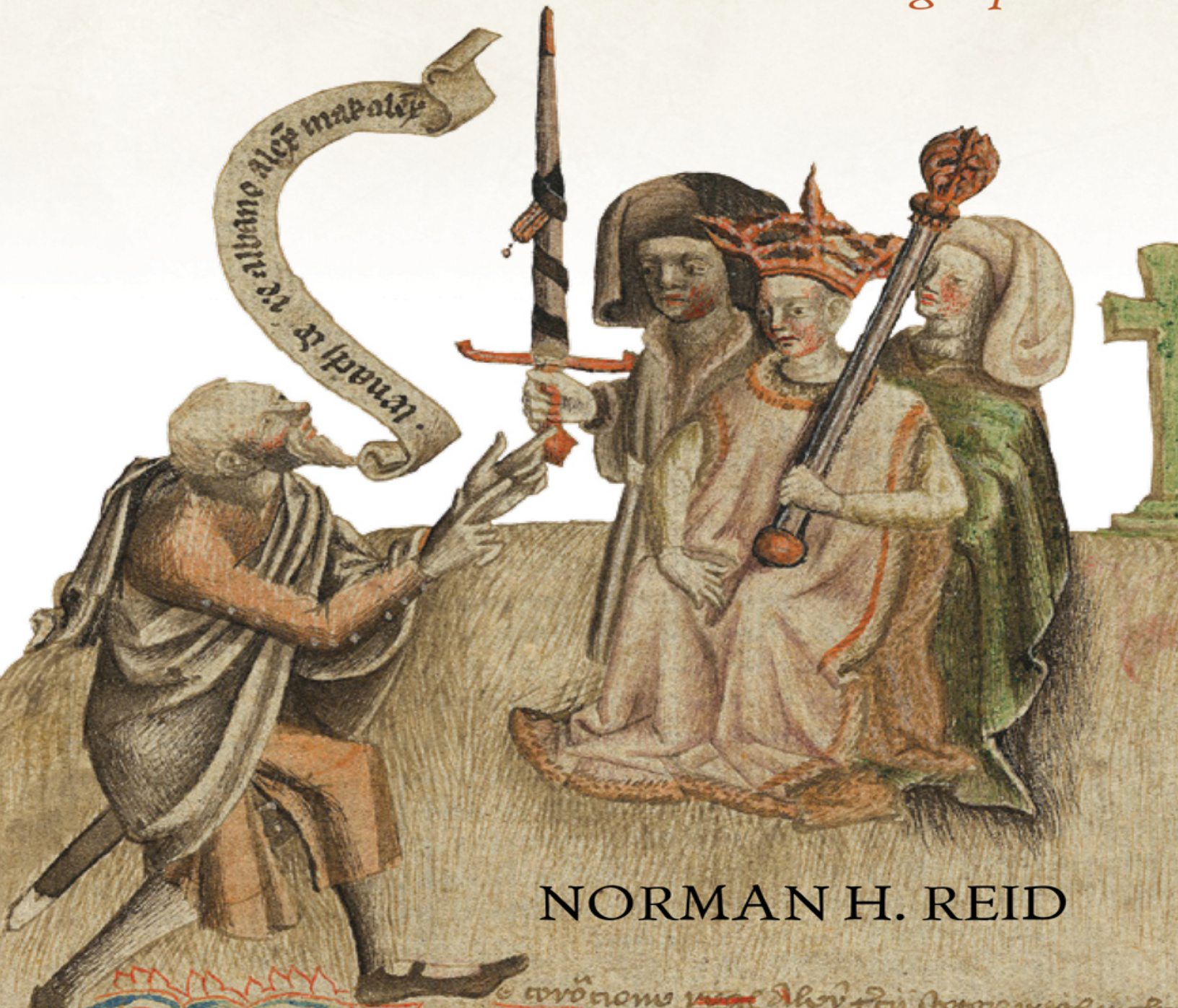




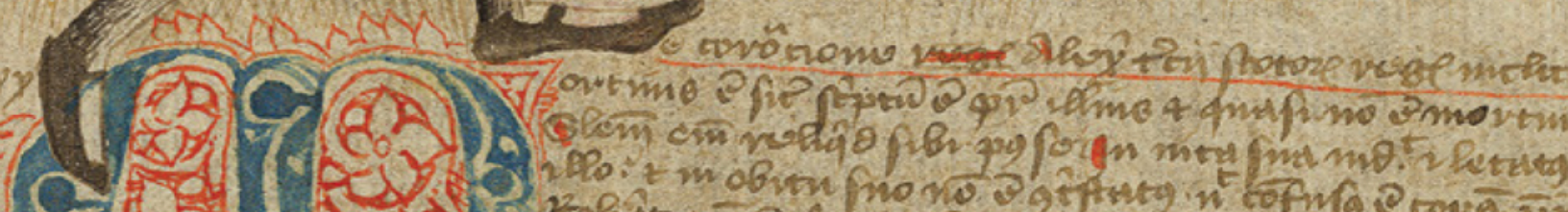
ALEXANDER

III 1249–1286

First Among Equals



NORMAN H. REID

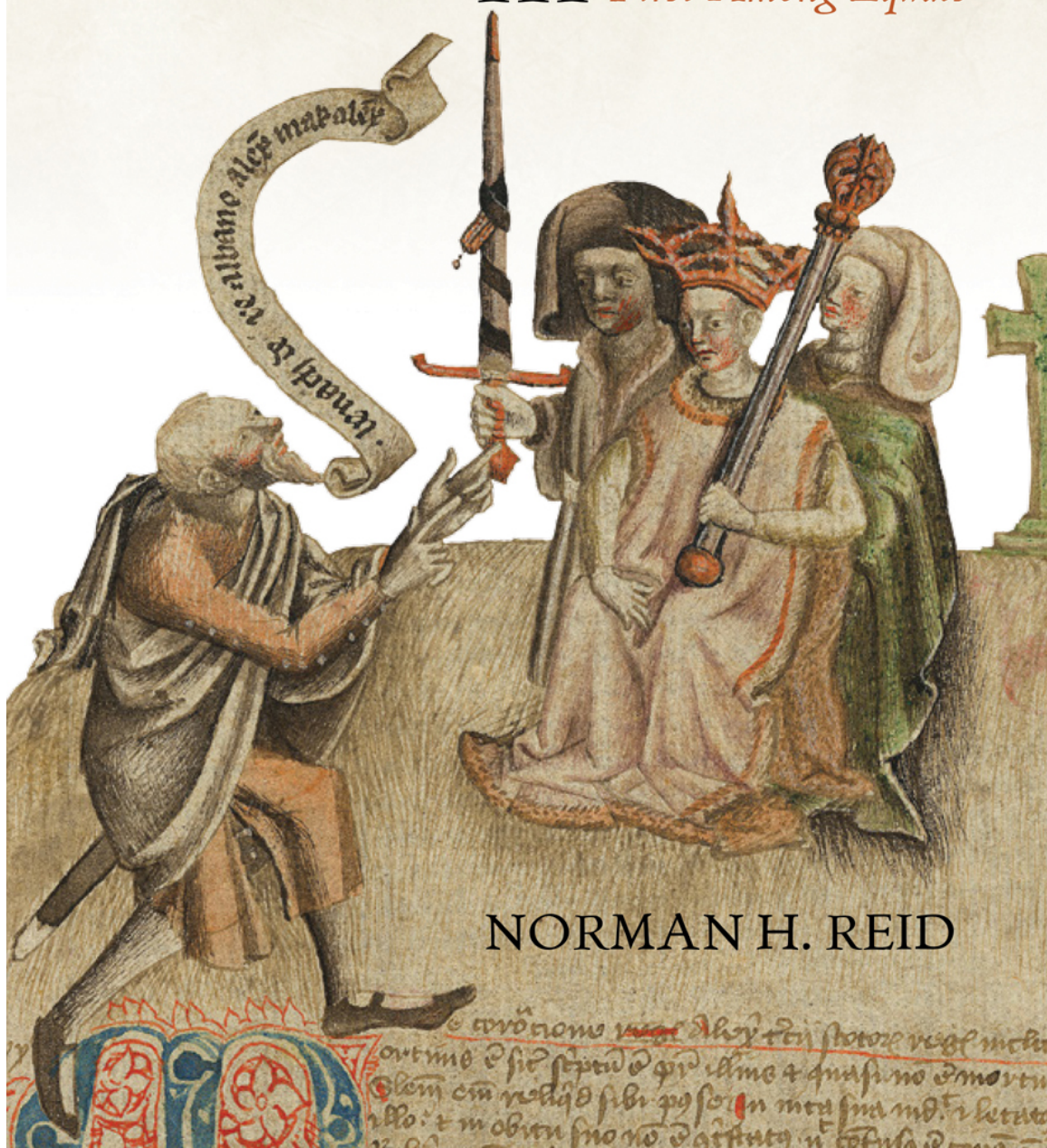




ALEXANDER

III 1249–1286

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Alexander III



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First Among Equals

NORMAN H. REID



First published in Great Britain in 2019 by
John Donald, an imprint of Birlinn Ltd

West Newington House
10 Newington Road
Edinburgh
EH9 1QS

www.birlinn.co.uk

ISBN: 978 1 910900 22 2

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The publishers gratefully acknowledge the support of the
Anderson Dunlop Fund of the Society for Scottish Medieval and
Renaissance Studies towards the publication of this book.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available on request from the British Library

Typeset by Biblichor Ltd, Edinburgh
Printed in Malta by Gutenberg Press

For Elspeth

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Acknowledgements

Although it appears under my name, this book has been a collective effort. Research and publications by many others have informed and shaped it, and I hope that their inclusion in the footnotes and Bibliography will suffice to acknowledge their contribution. In particular, a number of friends and colleagues have generously shared their knowledge and advice, have tholed my ignorance in patiently answering enquiries, and have engaged in stimulating and informative discussion and debate: in alphabetical order, Alan Borthwick, Dauvit Broun, Rory Cox, Barbara Crawford, Althea Davies, Lucy Dean, Mark Elliot, Liz Ewan, Chris Given-Wilson, Daryl Green, Mathew Hammond, Claire Hawes, Bill Hyland, Chris Jones, Cynthia Neville, Richard Oram, Anne Rutten (and other denizens of the Strathmartine Centre, including Muriel Watson and the bottomless coffee-pot), Simon Taylor, and Rob Wilson are all owed my sincere thanks. I am especially indebted to my auld frien Dauvit Broun for his careful reading of drafts of the first two chapters, and for his detailed and insightful comments. For the plates, I offer my thanks to staff of Westminster Abbey Library, Historic Environment Scotland, National Galleries Scotland, National Records of Scotland, the State Archives of Belgium in Namur, the Library of

Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and particularly to the Photographic Collections team in the Special Collections Division of the University of St Andrews Library; and for financial support towards the cost of the plates I am grateful for a generous grant from the Anderson Dunlop Fund of the Society for Scottish Medieval and Renaissance Studies. Gillbert Márkus and Thomas Clancy kindly gave permission to quote from (pp. 248–49), and to reproduce in full (Appendix 2), Gilbert’s fine translation of Princess Margaret’s wedding hymn. To those I have inadvertently missed from the list, I offer my apologies. The remaining mistakes, omissions and infelicities are, of course, my own responsibility alone.

Hugh Andrew, on behalf of the publisher Birlinn, has consistently pressed me for this book over a period of two decades or more, and I have greatly appreciated his tenacity, encouragement and patience (as well as his own welcome contributions to the historical debate); the lunches and drams were good too. Beyond Hugh, the team at Birlinn/John Donald, particularly Mairi Sutherland, have displayed a winning combination of understanding, efficiency and effective communication, and have produced a book of excellent quality.

Elsbeth, my wife, has shared, and at times restored, my enthusiasm and belief in this project. More, she has accepted my mental and physical absence from family life to a degree that was probably unreasonable to expect. Her contribution is greater still, since she has read the whole text several times, has used her skilled editorial pen to help mould it into acceptable prose and, with dogged humour, has persistently challenged me to explain myself more effectively. Without her contribution this would have been a

much poorer work, and is it therefore to her that it is fondly dedicated.

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Introduction

In January 1986 the annual Conference of Scottish Medieval Historical Research was on the theme of Alexander III, to commemorate the 700th anniversary of his death. Three of the papers from that conference, with the addition of several more commissioned for the purpose, were published in 1990, in a volume entitled *Scotland in the Reign of Alexander III*. The essays served both to illuminate aspects of the history of Scotland in that period and to highlight the fact that the lack of a coherent study of the reign remained a significant *lacuna* in the historiography of medieval Scotland. For long recognised as a reign of major importance, it was remarkable that no serious published treatment of Alexander III had been undertaken. This book aims to fill that glaring omission.

Since 1990, both understanding and interpretation of the period have been immeasurably improved by the labours of a multitude of historians, many of whom appear in the Bibliography and Acknowledgements to this book. As a result, my own ideas about the reign and its significance have changed markedly since I first wrote about it in the 1980s, and this is far from the book I might have written then.

In my original essay on the historiography of the reign I overconfidently stated that 'the primary importance of Alexander's reign lies in its position at a watershed of Scotland's history; a grasp of the true nature of this settled period is of vital importance to our understanding of the full significance of what followed'. In Chapter 10, I now dispute that statement. The view of the kingdom on the brink of calamity is certainly valuable, but the reign has much more to offer. Now, the key point must be that Alexander III lived at the end of a long period in which Scotland's government and society underwent profound change. That process of change has been studied in great depth, but it is perhaps only in the last few years that its true nature has been recognised, as sources which were previously underused, or misunderstood, have been mined to add further understanding to the picture created through the meticulous analysis of documentary record undertaken by such champions of Scottish medieval studies as the late Professors Geoffrey Barrow and Archie Duncan. What Alexander's reign can tell us is therefore fundamental to the nature of Scottish kingship, government and society; certainly, it offers us a useful portrait of the kingdom in a stable and prosperous condition before the decline which followed dynastic crisis at the end of the thirteenth century, but, more importantly, it provides a window on the character of Scottish kingship and society which allows us to reinterpret the events not only of this reign, but also of other periods, both before and after.

This is not, and could not be, a biography. Rather, it is a deliberately monarchocentric study of kingship as revealed by the conduct of one reign. It is not possible to understand the fruits of twelfth- and thirteenth-century development-without a grasp of the foundations upon which it was built.



Plate 15. Morton castle.

Photograph by the author



Plate 16. Castle Tioram, Eilean Tioram, Loch Moidart. aerial view.

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Plate 17. Sketch of Lochindorb Castle, by W.D. Simpson.

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Plate 18. The inauguration of Alexander III, from a fifteenth-century manuscript of Bower's *Scotichronicon*.

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