

Visualizing the executions of British queens in early modern Europe

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ABSTRACT

The executions of British queens between 1536 and 1587 were sensational news events, both in the British Isles and on the Continent, and were visually represented in woodcuts, engravings and paintings well into the following century. While several of the sources that are examined in this article have been extensively studied by scholars, others remain understudied or ignored, which is surprising in view of the rich interdisciplinary potential of the subject: such visual representations appeared in a broad corpus of literary and historical sources that crossed national boundaries. Visual representations are a critical source for scholars not only on account of their insights into the ways in which artists creatively imagined the executions but because of the role they are likely to have played in disseminating knowledge of these shocking events to audiences both at home and abroad.

Between 1536 and 1587 four British queens were executed for treason: Anne Boleyn and Katherine Howard (the second and fifth wives of Henry VIII, respectively); the so-called ‘nine days queen’, Jane Grey; and Mary, queen of Scots.¹ This article will take as its focus visual representations of the executions of three of the aforementioned queens – Anne Boleyn, Jane Grey and Mary, queen of Scots – in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sources.² The images that will be explored appeared in a wide range of genres including martyrologies, polemical works, broadsides, pamphlets, poems and plays that were produced both in Britain and abroad. While more modern visual depictions of the queens’ deaths – such as Paul Delaroche’s 1833 painting *The Execution of Lady Jane Grey* – have long attracted scholarly and popular interest, early modern images (including engravings, woodcuts and portraits) of the queens’ executions are, in several cases, arguably not as well known. Marguerite Tassi has suggested that ‘early modern images tended to be timely, propagandistic responses to political events, embodying an intricate symbolic web of political, religious, and moral meanings for original viewers.’³ Scholars have long appreciated the power of images in early modern culture, but, regarding the subject at hand, this scholarly attention should be more effectively integrated with analysis of other, traditionally well-studied written sources for the queens’ executions. Indeed, while representations of early modern women’s executions more broadly have been the subject of scholarly enquiry, this has largely been confined to textual and

¹ Although the sovereign state of Great Britain formally came into being only with the 1706 Treaty of Union and subsequent ratification by the 1707 Acts of Union, this article will use the term *British* to encompass the separate kingdoms of England and Scotland.

² For reasons that remain unclear, there do not appear to be extant visual representations of Katherine Howard’s execution from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

³ M. A. Tassi, ‘Martyrdom and memory: Elizabeth Curle’s portrait of Mary, queen of Scots’, in *The Emblematic Queen: Extra-literary Representations of Early Modern Queenship*, ed. D. Barrett-Graves (New York, 2013), pp. 101–33, at p. 116.

written representations rather than visual forms, which this article seeks to redress. How might visual representations of the executions of Anne Boleyn, Jane Grey and Mary, queen of Scots, shed fresh light on early modern perceptions of the women in question, both in terms of their lives and bloody deaths?

The aim of this article is to demonstrate that depictions of the executions of British queens in early modern images testifies to these subjects' significance both at home and abroad, alongside the ways in which this significance was harnessed in response to political, religious and dynastic developments. The article will broadly adopt a chronological approach in its exploration of the images under discussion, commencing in 1587 (the year of Mary, queen of Scots's execution) and concluding with the 1712 reprint of the Dutch playwright Joachim Oudaen's *Iohanna Grey* (which was first published in 1648). To elucidate continental interest in the queens' fates, the article's focus will not be confined to British sources but will also examine Dutch, Flemish, French, German and Italian visual representations. By examining visual representations in a broad corpus of literary and historical sources, this article will demonstrate the rich interdisciplinarity of the subject under discussion.

The executions of Anne Boleyn, Jane Grey and Mary, queen of Scots took place in 1536, 1554 and 1587, respectively. This article will adopt a broadly chronological approach based on the production of the images under discussion, rather than being structured according to the chronology of the executions themselves. This structure has been selected because visual representations of Mary, queen of Scots's execution began appearing from the moment of her death, whereas images of the executions of Anne Boleyn and Jane Grey emerged only a century after their beheadings. There are more extant images representing the execution of Mary, queen of Scots than for either of her decapitated queenly predecessors, which is perhaps unsurprising in view of Mary's status as a figure of continental significance.

The earliest extant visual representation of an execution of any of the queens dates to 1587 and appears in the form of an eyewitness drawing of Mary, queen of Scots's execution (see [Figure 1](#)), which supplemented a written account by Robert Beale, the clerk of the privy council. Following Elizabeth I's decision to have Mary put to death, Beale was tasked with taking the warrant to Fotheringhay Castle and subsequently with reading aloud the sentence of death in the Great Hall of the castle before the execution was carried out. As an eyewitness to the queen's beheading, Beale's ink and pencil drawing, now held at the British Library, provides a critical visual perspective of the event that can be deemed to accurately detail how Mary's execution was carried out.⁴ It presents the queen entering the hall, accompanied by her ladies; then disrobing; and finally, placing her head on the block. The relative sparseness of the drawing can be explained by its aim of providing 'an objective record of the proceedings of official state business.'⁵ While Beale's drawing was intended to supplement the official English narrative of the beheading, there was within months of Mary's execution a proliferation on the Continent of images of her death presenting her as a royal martyr. In June 1587 the English ambassador Edward Stafford reported to Sir Francis Walsingham from Paris that a board had been built in the cloister at the church of St. Severin featuring an image of Mary's execution alongside those of the sufferings of English Catholics, specifically depicting the drawing and quartering of English Jesuits. Stafford explained that 'such resort of people to it and with that fury as since I came into France, I never saw a thing done with that fury nor with that danger of a great emotion as that hath brought; for I think not so few as five thousand people a day come to see it, and some English knave priests that be there, they point with a rod and show every thing; affirm it to be true and aggravate it.'⁶

Written in the year of Mary, queen of Scots's execution, Richard Verstegan's *Theatrum Crudelitatum Hæreticorum nostri temporis* (see [Figure 2](#)), which has been described by John King as 'a Roman Catholic alternative to Foxean history',⁷ is arranged into four main sections, two of which are devoted to England. The first section includes three engravings showing the 'cruelty of schismatics' in England during Henry VIII's reign. The second section features twelve engravings concerning the Huguenot persecution of Catholics in France during the 1560s. The third section has five engravings focused on Calvinist atrocities

⁴ London, British Library, Additional MS. 48027, fol. 650*.

⁵ Tassi, 'Martyrdom and memory', p. 104.

⁶ 'Elizabeth: June 1587', in *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign, 1586–8*, pp. 310–28, *British History Online* <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/cal-state-papers/foreign/vol21/no1/pp310-328>> [accessed 25 Nov. 2025].

⁷ J. N. King, 'Guides to reading Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, lxxviii (2005), 133–50, at p. 145.



Figure 1. Papers and correspondence relating to Mary, Queen of Scots
 Source: British Library, Additional MS. 48027, fol. 650*. © British Library Board.

against Catholics in Belgium and the Low Countries during the early 1570s. The fourth section includes eight engravings depicting the persecution of English and Irish Catholics during Elizabeth I's reign.⁸ The sections are organized in chronological order. The engraving of Mary's execution appears in the fourth and final section of the work. On the left-hand side of the main image, the executioner displays Mary's severed head through the window to the assembled onlookers outside. This detail was presumably based on the French ambassador Guillaume de l'Aubespine's report, which stated that, after beheading the queen, the executioner 'seized the head and held it up in sight of all, and showed it also out of the

⁸ C. Highley, 'Richard Verstegan's book of martyrs', in *John Foxe and His World*, ed. C. Highley and J. N. King (Abingdon, 2017), pp. 183–97, at p. 185.



Figure 2. Richard Verstegan, *Theatrum Crudelitatum Hæreticorum nostri temporis* (Antwerp, 1587).

window to the great crowd that was assembled in the lower yard.⁹ The executioner's act of displaying Mary's head and accompanying cry of 'God save the Queen' was intended to serve as a warning to onlookers of the penalties of committing treason against Elizabeth. This warning was reinforced – according to Robert Wynkfield's report of Mary's execution that was written for his uncle William Cecil,

⁹ *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, Relating to English Affairs, Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, and in Other Libraries of Northern Italy*, ed. H. F. Brown (38 vols., London, 1864–1947), viii. 258.

Lord Burghley – by both the dean of Peterborough’s statement ‘So perish all the Queen’s enemies’ and the earl of Kent’s declaration that ‘Such end happen to all the Queen’s and gospel’s enemies.’¹⁰

According to Paul Arblaster, Verstegan ‘himself designed the plates, which were to influence the late mannerist representation of martyrdom in northern Europe.’¹¹ As Tassi comments, the engravings ‘depicted in emotionally gripping and visually charged rhetoric the persecution and physical tortures of Catholics by Protestants in England, France, and Belgium, with a special emphasis on English martyrs.’¹² The significance of the engravings has additionally been highlighted by Anne Dillon: ‘The visual detail and format of the images were explicit, compelling and sufficiently self-explanatory to ensure understanding without the need for textual literacy.’¹³ Verstegan was at the time of the work’s creation active in Paris, Rome, Rheims and Antwerp, publicizing the torture, persecution and executions of Catholics in England, having fled the realm in 1581 after secretly printing Thomas Alfield’s account of the execution of the English Jesuit priest Edmund Campion.¹⁴

The *Theatrum* was first published in Latin and French, with further editions following in 1588, 1592, 1604 and 1607. No English translation was ever undertaken. This detail explicates the continental significance of, and interest in, Verstegan’s work.¹⁵ Beneath each of the twenty-nine engravings in the *Theatrum* is a six-line verse (the work of the town clerk of Antwerp), with a prose commentary on the facing page.¹⁶ In the verse pertaining to Mary, translated into English, Verstegan declared, ‘In her crown, she once shone from the Scottish shores, / But she shines more brightly in heaven, where a crown / Of blood awaits her, and vindication from the abominable axe.’¹⁷ The employment of motifs of crowns and blood is significant, in that both customarily appeared in early modern martyrologies more generally. It is evident that both the verse and engraving of the execution explicitly presented the queen’s death as a martyrdom for the Catholic faith in an account that called for Mary’s violent, outrageous fate to be avenged and justified an invasion of England to relieve the sufferings of Catholics at the hands of the tyrannical Elizabethan regime. Christopher Highley notes that in the accompanying commentary, Verstegan praised the Scottish queen as ‘the most serene Queen of Scotland, the legitimate heir to the English throne’, a woman of Catholic piety and ‘steadfastness of morals.’¹⁸ He appealed to God to take revenge on Elizabeth, the ‘barbarian tyrant’ who had ordered Mary’s death. This vengeance was to be put ‘into the hands of Catholic princes.’¹⁹

It has been argued that this engraving of the queen’s execution was an identical image to that engraved anonymously in Antwerp in 1587 (which has usually been attributed to Verstegan).²⁰ However, A. G. Petti notes that the Antwerp engraving, which appeared on a broadsheet, includes an oval portrait of Mary wearing mourning robes; two figures appear to the right and left in niches representing Faith and Fortitude, while two angels holding crowns of martyrdom float above with the escutcheons of France and Scotland appearing between them; and below there are two representations of the execution, one of which shows the executioner in the act of striking while the other presents the executioner displaying Mary’s severed head to the spectators.²¹

The engraving to which Petti refers may conceivably have been a version of the 1587 German broadside that was entitled *Marie der Koenigin auss Schotlandt eigentliche Bildtnuss. Auch wie und umb was Ursachen dieselbig auss ihrem Koenigreich, in Engellandt kommen, und alda enthaupst ist worden, the*

¹⁰ *The Trial of Mary Queen of Scots: a Brief History With Documents*, ed. J. E. Lewis (Boston, Mass., 1999), p. 119.

¹¹ P. Arblaster, ‘Verstegan [formerly Rowlands], Richard (1548x50–1640), writer and intelligence informant’, *O.D.N.B.* <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-24217?rskey=4dQhgf&result=1>> [accessed 25 Nov. 2025].

¹² Tassi, ‘Martyrdom and memory’, p. 113.

¹³ A. Dillon, *The Construction of Martyrdom in the English Catholic Community, 1535–1603* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 246.

¹⁴ Arblaster, ‘Verstegan [formerly Rowlands], Richard.’

¹⁵ Highley, ‘Richard Verstegan’s book’, p. 185.

¹⁶ Highley, ‘Richard Verstegan’s book’, p. 184.

¹⁷ Translated by J. D. Staines (J. D. Staines, *The Tragic Histories of Mary Queen of Scots, 1560-1690: Rhetoric, Passions and Political Literature* (Farnham, 2009), p. 99).

¹⁸ Highley, ‘Richard Verstegan’s book’, p. 185.

¹⁹ Highley, ‘Richard Verstegan’s book’, p. 185.

²⁰ Dillon, *Construction of Martyrdom*, p. 245.

²¹ A. G. Petti, ‘Richard Verstegan and Catholic martyrologies of the later Elizabethan period’, *British Catholic History*, v (1959), 64–90, at p. 80.



Figure 3. Thomas De Leeuw, *Marie der Koenigin auss Schotlandt eigentliche Bildtnuss. Auch wie und umb was Ursachen dieselbig auss ihrem Koenigreich, in Engellandt kommen, und alda enthaupt ist worden* (Cologne, 1587). Source: National Library of Scotland, RB.L.129. © National Library of Scotland. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) licence.

only two known copies of which are held at the National Library of Scotland and the British Library (see Figure 3).²² The broadside provides a history of the queen's life and describes her struggles with heretics. It includes an oval portrait created by Johann Bussemacher of Mary wearing a crucifix and uses two engravings of the queen's beheading (both before and after her head is severed), in addition to motifs of martyrdom (including a palm branch paired with a crown) to suggest that she died as a Catholic martyr. The royal arms of both France and Scotland appear inside the oval to further explicate the sitter's

²² Thomas De Leeuw, *Marie der Koenigin auss Schotlandt eigentliche Bildtnuss. Auch wie und umb was Ursachen dieselbig auss ihrem Koenigreich, in Engellandt kommen, und alda enthaupt ist worden* (Cologne, 1587).

identification as Mary. It seems evident that the broadside's image was the same as – or, at least, a copy of – the Antwerp engraving from the same year. The martyrological interpretation of Mary's life and death in the broadside – as conveyed both in the images and in the text itself – is unsurprising, in view of the fact that it was printed in the Catholic stronghold of Cologne.²³ The British Library copy includes a Latin epitaph that reiterates the perception of the queen as a martyr.

Other German newsletters and pamphlets circulated in the aftermath of the Scottish queen's beheading, which further testifies to interest outside of the British Isles in an execution that was evidently widely perceived to be both unprecedented and outrageous. An example of this can be seen with the anonymous pamphlet *Execvtion oder Todt Marien Stuarts Koniginnen aus Schotlandt gewesenen Koniginnen zu Frankreich welche Adi 18. Februarii Anno 1587. Stilo Nouo in Engelandt enthauptet worden ist im Schloss Fodrigham in Northamptonoschir* (published in Magdeburg in 1588), which was accompanied by a woodcut of the queen's execution (see Figure 4).²⁴ The victim in the woodcut is further identified as Mary through the inclusion of a crown by the queen's side as she rests her head on the block. The affordability of such pamphlets meant that they could be accessed at all levels of society.²⁵ It can plausibly be speculated that broadsides and pamphlets, as cheap forms of print, would have served as the primary medium through which the executions of British queens were disseminated to audiences both in Britain and on the Continent, although the role of oral cultures in early modern European societies cannot be underestimated in the circulation of such knowledge. Adam Fox notes that early modern England, for example, was characterized by 'the constant buzz of people talking to each other: asking for news, swapping stories, exchanging views'.²⁶

In Italy, as well as Germany, visual and textual representations of Mary's execution emerged in the year of her death. For example, the publisher Francesco Dini's *Vera, E Complita Relazione del Successo della Morte della Christianissima Regina di Scotia* (see Figure 5), published in Florence in 1587, included three different engravings: one depicted Mary kneeling in prayer and contemplating rays of light from the sky against a background of trees and a cathedral; another showed the Last Supper; and another portrayed the coronation of a king, thus presenting the events of the queen's life alongside those of Christ.²⁷ In doing so, Dini explicitly presented Mary's death as a martyrdom through comparison of the events of her life with those of Christ. The execution scene was not itself portrayed in these engravings but their martyrological emphasis would have left readers in no doubt as to Dini's stance on Mary's guilt or innocence. The work was printed in different editions at Genoa, Vico, Milan and Florence.²⁸ It is evident, more broadly, that Catholic accounts of Mary's execution that emerged on the Continent in the immediate aftermath of her death framed it as martyrdom and besought Catholic princes to remove the tyrannical Elizabeth I from the throne – by force, if necessary – to ensure the restoration of the true faith to England.

Two years after Mary's execution, the Scottish Catholic polemicist Adam Blackwood's *Histoire et martyre de la Royne d'Escosse* featured an engraving of the queen's beheading that was based on Verstegan's engraving (see Figure 6). Blackwood's near-identical engraving presents the executioner holding Mary's severed head to onlookers gathered below a window. This 1589 edition of the 1587 book also included Blackwood's *La mort de la Royne d'Escosse*.²⁹ As Tassi notes, three other woodcuts were also included that depicted significant moments prior to the execution: the reading of Mary's death warrant, Mary at prayer with her ladies and Mary being led to execution. The four images were attached as foldouts at the back of the book.³⁰ Blackwood's work enjoyed considerable influence in disseminating a martyrological interpretation of the Scottish queen's death. The *Martyre de la Royne d'Escosse* was first

²³ A. Hagan, 'The martyr queen: Mary in a German broadside', *Mary Queen of Scots Project*, 23 July 2020 <<https://mq.s.glasgow.ac.uk/index.php/2020/07/23/the-martyr-queen-mary-in-a-german-broadside-2/>> [accessed 25 Nov. 2025].

²⁴ *Execvtion oder Todt Marien Stuarts Koniginnen aus Schotlandt gewesenen Koniginnen zu Frankreich welche Adi 18. Februarii Anno 1587. Stilo Nouo in Engelandt enthauptet worden ist im Schloss Fodrigham in Northamptonoschir* (Magdeburg, 1588).

²⁵ K. Shore, 'The execution of Mary, queen of Scots: a European news sensation', Faculty of History, University of Oxford <<https://www.history.ox.ac.uk/the-execution-of-mary-queen-of-scots-a-european-news-sensation>> [accessed 25 Nov. 2025].

²⁶ A. Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in England, 1500–1700* (Oxford, 2000), p. 336.

²⁷ V. Carta, 'From image to word: adaptation and change of Mary Stuart's martyrdom depiction in Bassiano Gatti's *Poema heroico*', *Between*, ii (2012), 1–14, at p. 4.

²⁸ J. Phillips, *Images of a Queen Mary Stuart in Sixteenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley, Calif., 1964), p. 160.

²⁹ Tassi, 'Martyrdom and memory', p. 115.

³⁰ Tassi, 'Martyrdom and memory', p. 115.



Figure 4. *Execvtion oder Todt Marien Stuarts Koniginnen aus Schotlandt gewesenenen Koniginnen zu Frankreich welche Adi 18. Februarii Anno 1587. Stilo Nouo in Engelandt enthauptet worden ist im Schloss Fodrigham in Northamptonoschir* (Magdeburg, 1588).

published anonymously before the end of 1587 and was reprinted five times before the end of 1589. Additionally, Blackwood's *La mort de la Royne d'Escosse* was republished at least four times between 1588 and 1589. According to Jeremy Smith, this latter work 'was a full account of Mary's execution based on reports from Catholic eyewitnesses who had fled to the continent, and became one of the



Figure 5. Francesco Dini, *Vera, E Compita Relazione del Successo della Morte della Christianissima Regina di Scotia* (Florence, 1587).

best-known accounts of Mary's execution.³¹ Alexander Wilkinson goes further to argue that the *La mort de la Royne d'Escosse* 'can best be regarded as the definitive sixteenth-century Catholic account of Mary's

³¹ J. L. Smith, 'Mary queen of Scots as Susanna in Catholic propaganda', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, lxxiii (2010), 209–20, at p. 218.



Figure 6. Adam Blackwood, *Histoire et martyre de la Roynne d'Escoce* (Paris, 1589).

execution to appear in French.³² Engravings and woodcuts more broadly played an important role 'in establishing Mary's iconographical fixity across Europe' for, as Steven Reid argues, 'cheap to produce and easy to adapt, these images could be sold as standalone single broadsheets, or inserted as illustrations in larger works, and were accessible to a much wider range of purchasers than elite paintings' and 'the sheer volume of engravings and woodcuts of Mary quickly outpaced the limited production and circulation of painted portraits.'³³

German interest in Mary's execution seems to have persisted well into the following century. Johann Leypold's three-quarter length engraving of the queen (see Figure 7), for example, appears in the Würzburg edition of the Scottish Roman Catholic priest George Conn's *Vita Mariae Stuartae* (1624) – which has been described by Derek Taylor as 'the earliest printed full biography of the last-Scottish born Catholic ruler of the country'³⁴ – and again represents Mary within an oval frame, with a crucifix in one hand and an axe in the other.³⁵ She appears dressed in an embroidered gown with fur-trim and a wide ruff, a cap and long veil on her head, a cloak about her shoulders, with her various arms at the corners; and thus this image can be regarded as an example of what Reid refers to as increasingly elaborate engravings that presented Mary with items of worship (including crucifixes) alongside objects from her execution.³⁶ Conn's work appeared in two editions, the larger of which was that produced in Würzburg; Ronald Santangeli speculates that the inclusion of the martyrological print in this edition may indicate the Würzburg edition's propagandist purpose.³⁷ Political considerations during the early decades of the seventeenth century may have dictated both Conn's interpretation of Mary's life and character and the accompanying inclusion of Leypold's engraving. Upon becoming pope, Urban VIII expressed a desire for James VI of Scotland and I of England and his heir (the future Charles I) to convert to Catholicism, with Conn himself requesting that the pope show favour to Mary's descendants in the

³² A. S. Wilkinson, *Mary Queen of Scots and French Public Opinion, 1542–1600* (Houndmills, 2004), p. 136.

³³ S. J. Reid, 'Introduction – the afterlife of Mary, queen of Scots: themes and paradigms', in *The Afterlife of Mary, Queen of Scots*, ed. S. J. Reid (Edinburgh, 2024), pp. 1–33, at p. 15.

³⁴ D. Taylor, 'Neither agent nor spy: the printed works of George Conn, papal emissary to the court of Henrietta Maria' (unpublished University at Buffalo, State University of New York, Ph.D. thesis, 2021), p. 15.

³⁵ London, British Museum, no. 1890,0415.153.

³⁶ Reid, 'Afterlife of Mary, queen of Scots', p. 17.

³⁷ R. Santangeli, *Mary Queen of Scots: the First Biography: With the Life and Times of Its Author, George Con* (Leiden, 2023), p. 140.

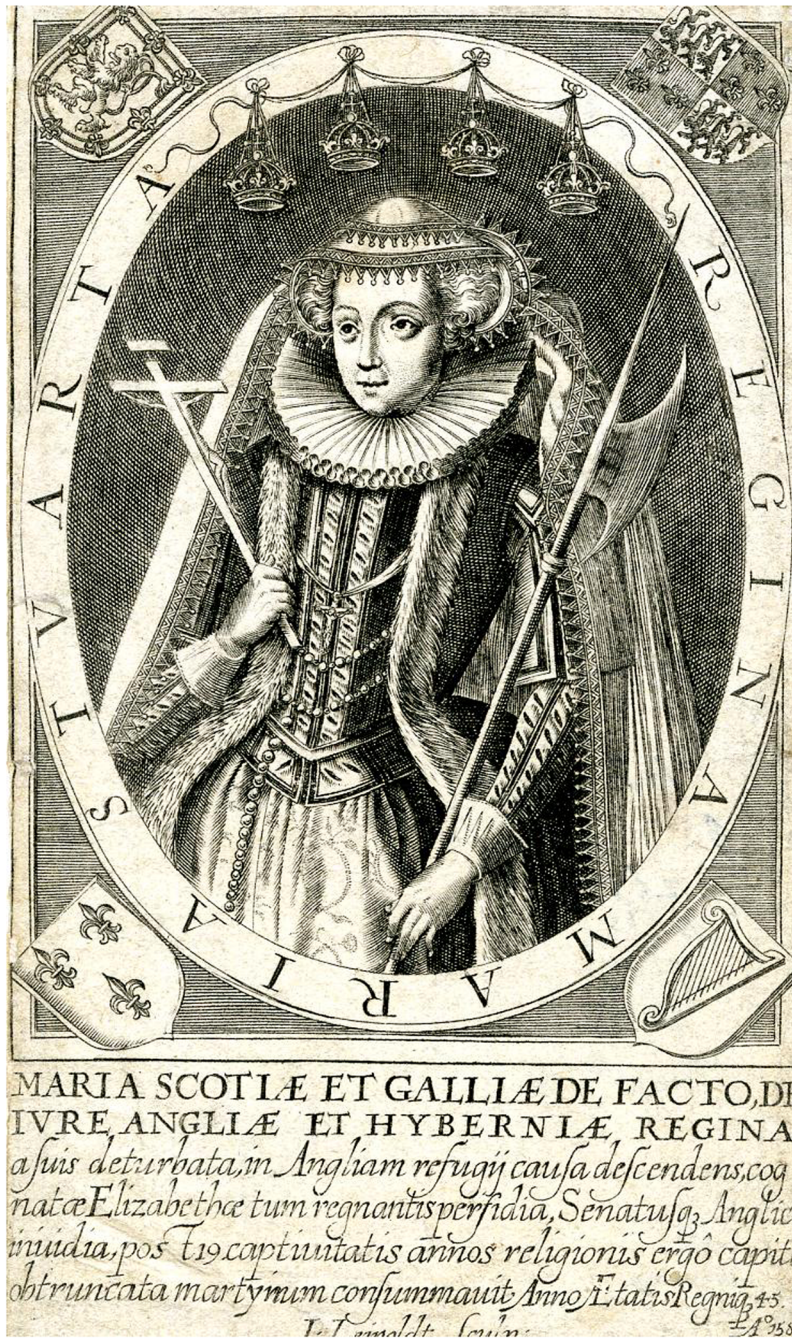


Figure 7. Source: © The trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

hope that they would eventually embrace the Catholic faith.³⁸ Leybold was an engraver who was active in Cologne between 1600 and 1620; thus, this engraving was created some years before the publication of the *Vita Mariæ Stuartæ*. Other copies of the print are held in the British Museum.

³⁸ Santangeli, *First Biography*, pp. 116, 120, 155.

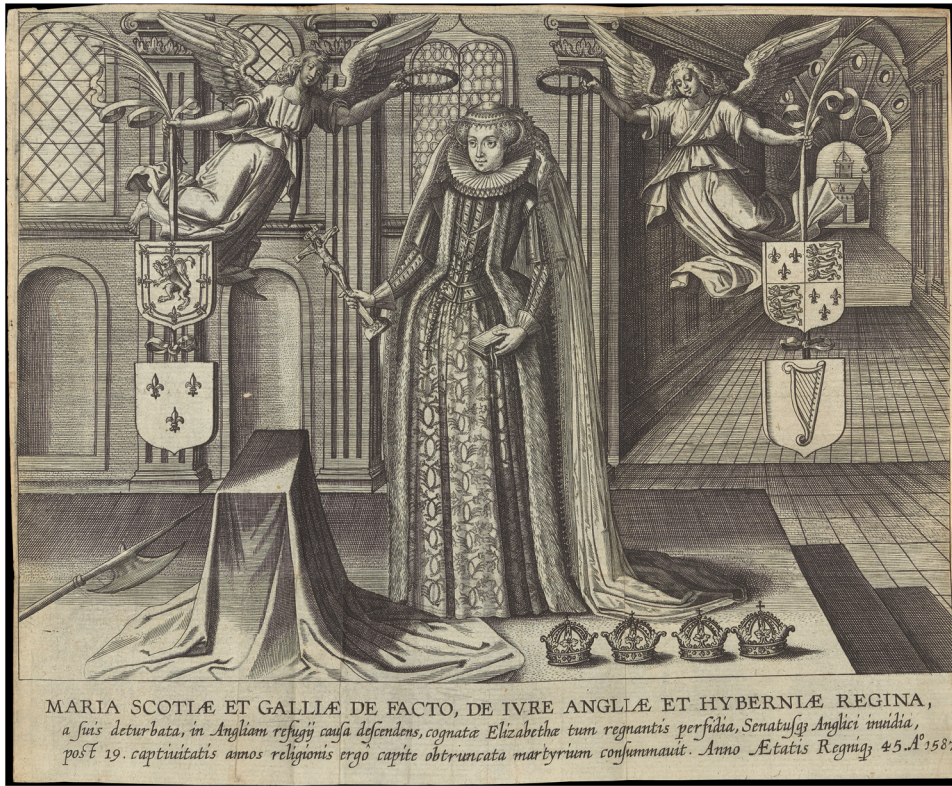


Figure 8. Source: © British Museum.

The Latin text accompanying Leypold's engraving was identical to that in a Flemish engraving produced in the year of Mary's execution (see Figure 8), which translates as:

Mary, de facto Queen of Scotland and France, de iure Queen of England and Ireland, driven out by her own people and going to England to take refuge there, after 19 years of captivity [was] decapitated by reason of the perfidy of her cousin Elizabeth then reigning and the hatred of the English Parliament because of her religion, and attained martyrdom. At the age of 45 and after 45 years of reign.³⁹

The Flemish engraving has been attributed to the Wierix brothers, who created a number of engravings depicting the Scottish queen.⁴⁰ This engraving also appears on the folding plate frontispiece of the Sion College Library copy of Robert Turner's *Maria Stvarta, Regina Scotiæ, Dotaria Franciæ, Hæres Angliæ et Hyberniæ, Martyr Ecclesiæ, Innocens à cæde Darleana* (published in 1588 under the pseudonym Oberto Barnestapolio) and portrays the martyred queen of Scots with a heavenly crown alongside a row of four earthly crowns.⁴¹ Turner was an English Roman Catholic priest of Scottish descent and an associate of the Jesuit priest and martyr Edmund Campion.⁴² He was at the English College, Douai at the same time as Campion, becoming professor of rhetoric at the college and subsequently being ordained to the priesthood before eventually becoming rector of the University of Ingolstadt.⁴³ *Maria Stvarta* was subsequently translated into French and this translation included the following description of the execution (here provided in English):

³⁹ Santangeli, *First Biography*, p. 159.

⁴⁰ British Museum, no. 1864,0611.422.

⁴¹ Robert Turner, *Maria Stvarta, Regina Scotiæ, Dotaria Franciæ, Hæres Angliæ et Hyberniæ, Martyr Ecclesiæ, Innocens à cæde Darleana* (Ingolstadt, 1588).

⁴² P. E. B. Harris, 'Turner, Robert (d. 1599), Roman Catholic priest', *O.D.N.B.* <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/display/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-27861?rskey=c580Xo&result=6>> [accessed 26 Nov. 2025].

⁴³ Harris, 'Turner, Robert'.

the blood ran from the body and flowed in great streams, crying to God and to men for vengeance for such a cruel, such a barbaric, such a tyrannic carnage. Under the same blow of this ax fell this day that majesty of all the Kings of the earth; with the same sword fell the head of this Queen and the grandeur of all the Princes of the world. In short this single blow confused the fate of Emperors with the people.⁴⁴

The translation of the work into French and its republication in 1627⁴⁵ both clearly demonstrate continuing interest in Mary's execution on the Continent and the durability of the martyrological tradition in representations of the queen's death. The martyrological framework of the image is evident from the appearance of two angels that hover over Mary's head, holding laurel wreaths over her alongside palm fronds on which appear her various arms. As in Leypold's engraving, the Flemish image juxtaposes items representing Mary's Catholic faith – including a crucifix in one of the queen's hands and a prayer book in the other – with the instruments of her death, namely a covered block and an axe lying to one side.

The inclusion of a crucifix in several engravings of Mary's execution is unsurprising, in view of the significant role it played in the queen's preparations for death both before and on the scaffold. The imperial ambassador Bernardino de Mendoza, for example, reported that on the eve of her execution Mary 'remained all night in prayer, with a crucifix in her hand, consoling her servants who were with her with the greatest bravery and firmness.'⁴⁶ On the scaffold, the queen consciously positioned herself in the final moments of her life as a Catholic martyr who was willing to shed her blood in defence of her faith, a statement that was visually proclaimed through her adornment of an *Agnus dei* about her neck alongside a crucifix in one of her hands and at her girdle a pair of beads, with a golden cross at the end, and a Latin book of prayers in her other hand. An account in the British Library states that when the dean of Peterborough offered prayers in English on the scaffold, 'shee havinge a crucifix betwixt hir handes prayed much lowder in the Lattine' and subsequently prayed 'that shee hoped only to be saved by the bloude of Jesus Christ, at the foote of whose picture presented on the crucifix she would willingly shed hir bloude.'⁴⁷

While Reid has noted the proliferation of head-and-shoulder images featuring Mary's execution during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries,⁴⁸ full-length representations also circulated on the Continent, an example of which is Gilles Rousselet's 1647 engraving (see Figure 9) that was created to illustrate the Jesuit priest Pierre le Moyne's poem *La Gallerie des Femmes Fortes*. This poem celebrates ancient, modern and Old Testament heroines and was dedicated to Anne of Austria, widow of Louis XIII, who was serving as regent of France at the time of the engraving's creation. This full-length image includes a scene of Mary's execution in the background on the left, alongside a church façade in the background on the right, and incorporates the iconography of martyrdom including the presentation of a heavenly crown to Mary by two angels, who hover above her. The caption accompanying the image explicitly frames the queen's beheading as martyrdom and alludes to the constancy of her death. Other full-length representations of Mary's execution include two versions of the Sheffield portrait type, which are held in the Blairs Museum Collection in Aberdeenshire (see Figure 10) and in the Royal Collection Trust at the Palace of Holyroodhouse (see Figure 11), respectively.

The Blairs Museum portrait was produced between 1604 and 1618, having been commissioned by Elizabeth Curle, one of Mary's ladies-in-waiting who accompanied her to the scaffold. Both Elizabeth and her fellow lady-in-waiting Jane Kennedy appear on the right-hand side of the painting. The Blairs Museum portrait describes the queen as the 'first parent and founder, while she lived, of the Scots College' at Paris, having provided contributions for it while imprisoned via her agent Archbishop James Beaton.⁴⁹ In contrast with the engravings and woodcuts discussed in this article, the Blairs Museum and Royal Collection Trust portraits were produced for private and wealthy patrons. In the depiction of the

⁴⁴ Translated in Staines, *Tragic Histories*, p. 98.

⁴⁵ Staines, *Tragic Histories*, p. 202 n. 53.

⁴⁶ *Calendar of Letters and State Papers relating to English Affairs Preserved in, or Originally Belonging to, the Archives of Simancas*, ed. M. A. S. Hume (4 vols., London, 1892–9), iv. 35.

⁴⁷ Brit. Libr., Cotton Julius F VI, fol. 256v.

⁴⁸ Reid, 'Afterlife of Mary, queen of Scots', p. 17.

⁴⁹ S. Reid, 'The Catholic afterlife of Mary queen of Scots, part 1: early images of a martyr', *Mary Queen of Scots Project*, 8 Feb. 2021 <<https://mq.s.glasgow.ac.uk/index.php/2021/02/08/the-catholic-afterlife-of-mary-queen-of-scots-part-1-early-images-of-a-martyr/>> [accessed 27 Nov. 2025].



Figure 9. Pierre le Moyné, *La Galerie des Femmes Fortes* (Paris, 1647).

execution in the painting, the royal arms of Scotland appear above in red, gold and blue. On the panel, there are three Latin inscriptions; at the top right corner, the inscription lists the queen's titles and claims to the thrones of England and Ireland alongside a brief account of her history in England. It notes that she was imprisoned for nineteen years as a result of Elizabeth's perfidy and the cruelty of the English parliament, while also stating that she suffered 'the dreadful sentence of decapitation', which was performed at the hands of a 'vile and abject executioner'.⁵⁰ The Latin inscription under the execution scene translates as 'In the presence of the commissioner and ministers of Queen Elizabeth, the

⁵⁰ Tassi, 'Martyrdom and memory', p. 107.



Figure 10. Source: © Memorial portrait of Mary Queen of Scots. Reproduced by permission of the Scottish Catholic Heritage Collections Trust.

executioner strikes with his axe the most august queen, the daughter, wife, and mother of kings, and after a first and second blow, by which she was savagely wounded, at the third cuts off her head'.⁵¹ An inscription below Mary states that, on the scaffold, she 'with unconquered but pious mind, reproaches

⁵¹ Tassi, 'Martyrdom and memory', p. 107.



Figure 11. Source: © Royal Collection Enterprises Limited 2025 | Royal Collection Trust.

tyranny and perfidy, professes the Catholic faith, and publicly and plainly vows that she always was and is a daughter of the Roman Church.⁵²

⁵² Tassi, 'Martyrdom and memory', p. 107.



Figure 12. Source: © National Galleries of Scotland.

The use of colour clearly identifies the queen's execution as a martyrdom, namely the red in both her upper-body petticoat (red being the liturgical colour of martyrdom in the Catholic Church) and in the stream of blood that flows from two gashes in Mary's neck down onto the scaffold.⁵³ The detail of the vivid redness is striking in view of John Staines's contention that Mary's blood functions as 'the crowning image in Catholic martyr texts'.⁵⁴ Produced between two and three decades after the execution, the two portraits demonstrate a desire to refute the narrative of treason perpetuated by the queen's enemies and instead reframe Mary's execution as martyrdom.

At around the same time as the Blairs Museum and Royal Collection Trust oil on canvas portraits were produced, the anonymous watercolour *The Execution of Mary, Queen of Scots, 1542–1587* (c.1613), now held in the National Galleries of Scotland (see Figure 12), was painted. This was made for a Dutch magistrate who compiled an album in 1613 of historical prints and drawings. The execution itself occupies the centre of the painting while, on the far left, a scene appears in which the queen's clothes are burned to prevent supporters of her cause from keeping them as relics, thus mirroring the historical events. Unlike the Blairs Museum and Royal Collection Trust portraits, however, the National Galleries of Scotland watercolour arguably does not present Mary's execution in martyrological or overtly propagandistic terms.

From the 1630s onwards visual representations of the Scottish queen's death also appeared in printed poems and plays, in addition to martyrologies, polemical works, broadsides and pamphlets. An example of a poem that features an engraving of Mary's execution is the Hieronymite monk Bassiano Gatti's *Maria regina di Scotia* (1633), a 'Heroic poem' in sixteen cantos that was dedicated to Pope Urban VIII

⁵³ Tassi, 'Martyrdom and memory', p. 123.

⁵⁴ Staines, *Tragic Histories*, p. 99.

and was influenced by Conn's 1624 biography (see Figure 13).⁵⁵ The image that introduces Gatti's work is an engraving by Agostino Parisini, who was active in Bologna during the seventeenth century.⁵⁶ The engraving incorrectly depicts the beheading taking place outside and while it does present the executioner using an axe to decapitate Mary, rather than a sword, it erroneously portrays the queen being executed in the French manner, without a block. As with several of the visual representations of Mary's execution that have been examined in this article, Parisini's engraving depicts an angel offering the queen a crown to suggest that, through martyring herself for her faith, Mary will exchange her earthly crown for a heavenly one.

Six years later, the French playwright Charles Regnault's *Marie Stuard Reyne d'Ecosse Tragedie* (1639) includes an image of Mary's execution alongside the title page (see Figure 14).⁵⁷ Similarly to the 1648 edition of *Iohanna Grey* (which will be discussed later), the engraving of the Scottish queen's death does not appear to depict her execution in martyrological terms, although it diverges from Joachim Oudaen's print by presenting members of the audience in more personalized terms, some of whom appear to experience notable discomfort. Several figures in the foreground are knelt in prayer, which is in keeping with the play's sympathetic view of Mary as both pious and guiltless. As in Verstegan's engraving, the engraving of Mary's execution that accompanies Regnault's play includes a scene on the right-hand side in which the executioner displays her severed head through a window to the onlookers gathered outside, which, as has been noted, may have been based on l'Aubespine's report. *Marie Stuard* was one of three French language plays on the subject of Mary written during the seventeenth century.⁵⁸ The play was performed for the first time in 1637 before being printed in 1639⁵⁹ and, according to Stefano Villani, takes many liberties with historical facts.⁶⁰ It was subsequently republished three times before 1641, with numerous modifications.⁶¹

The engraving of Mary's execution that appears in the Dominican Girolamo Ercolani's *La reggia delle vedove sacre* (1663; see Figure 15) erroneously features the executioner holding a sword and, as in Parisini's engraving, the queen is comforted by two angelic figures.⁶² As this article will go on to show, Ercolani's engraving was not the only image that presents an inaccurate version of an execution – for example, in the use of the incorrect instrument or in the victim's style of clothing – but it can be suggested that such portrayals were less concerned with offering an accurate depiction than with the didactic potential of their representations. Ilaria Andreoli argues that Ercolani's collection of female biographies depicted his subjects in saintly terms and was accompanied by full-page portraits, with the work being intended for an upper-class audience.⁶³ More broadly, the publication of the *La reggia delle vedove sacre* in 1663 clearly demonstrates continuing Italian interest in Mary well into the following century after her execution, a phenomenon that has been studied by Villani.⁶⁴ Villani's findings illuminate the myriad ways in which Italian authors, in particular, engaged with the Scottish queen's life and death during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in changing political and religious contexts. It is also evident, however, as this article noted earlier, that interest in Mary continued to be expressed within the German context.

As an example of this, the German Baroque playwright August von Haugwitz's *Schuldige Unschuld/ Oder Maria Stuarda* ('Guilty Innocence or Mary Stuart') published in 1683, was accompanied by an

⁵⁵ Bassiano Gatti, *Maria regina di Scotia poema heroico del P. prior D. Bassiano Gatti monaco di S. Girolamo alla Santità di N.S. Urbano VIII* (Bologna, 1633).

⁵⁶ Carta, 'From image to word', p. 5.

⁵⁷ Charles Regnault, *Marie Stuard Reyne d'Ecosse Tragedie* (Paris, 1639).

⁵⁸ F. Battista, 'Staging English affairs in early modern Italy: history, politics, drama' (unpublished City University of New York Ph.D. thesis, 2019), p. 79 n. 84. The others being Antoine du Montchrestien's *Tragédie de la reine d'Écosse* (1601) and Edmé Boursault's *Marie Stuard, Reine d'Écosse: Tragedie* (1683).

⁵⁹ Federico Della Valle, *The Queen of Scots / La Regina di Scotia*, trans. F. Battista (Toronto, 2023), p. 27.

⁶⁰ S. Villani, 'From Mary queen of Scots to the Scottish capuchins: Scotland as a symbol of protestant persecution in seventeenth-century Italian literature', *Innes Review*, lxiv (2013), 100–19, at p. 114.

⁶¹ F. Sprogis, 'L'Angleterre et l'Écosse au miroir de la fureur: L'Écossaise d'Antoine de Montchrestien et Marie Stuard de Charles Regnault', *Sillages critiques*, xxxi (2021), doi.org/10.4000/sillagescritiques.11700.

⁶² Girolamo Ercolani, *La reggia delle vedove sacre* (Padua, 1663).

⁶³ I. Andreoli, 'Review: illustrated sacred books in Italy, 1550–1700', *Print Quarterly*, xxxii (2015), 83–7, at p. 85.

⁶⁴ Villani, 'From Mary queen of Scots to the Scottish capuchins'.



Figure 13. Bassiano Gatti, *Maria regina di Scotia poema heroico del P. prior D. Bassiano Gatti monaco di S. Girolamo alla Santità di N.S. Urbano VIII* (Bologna, 1633).



Figure 14. Charles Regnault, *Marie Stuard Reyne d'Ecosse Tragedie* (Paris, 1639).

anonymously created frontispiece portraying Mary's beheading (see Figure 16).⁶⁵ The play presents the queen as a martyr and as a figure of Christian stoicism who wishes for her death to be witnessed as an affirmation of her faith.⁶⁶ In representing Mary in these terms, Haugwitz's play indicates that the Scottish

⁶⁵ The image appears in C. Zittel, 'The poetological frontispiece in 17th-century German poetry', in *Gateways to the Book: Frontispieces and Title Pages in Early Modern Europe*, ed. G. Bertram, N. Büttner and C. Zittel (Leiden, 2021), pp. 151–234, at p. 213.

⁶⁶ R. Robertson, 'From martyr to vampire: the figure of Mary Stuart in drama from Vondel to Swinburne', in *Who Is This Schiller Now? Essays on His Reception and Significance*, ed. J. L. High, N. Martin and N. Oellers (Rochester, N.Y., 2011), pp. 321–40, at p. 323.

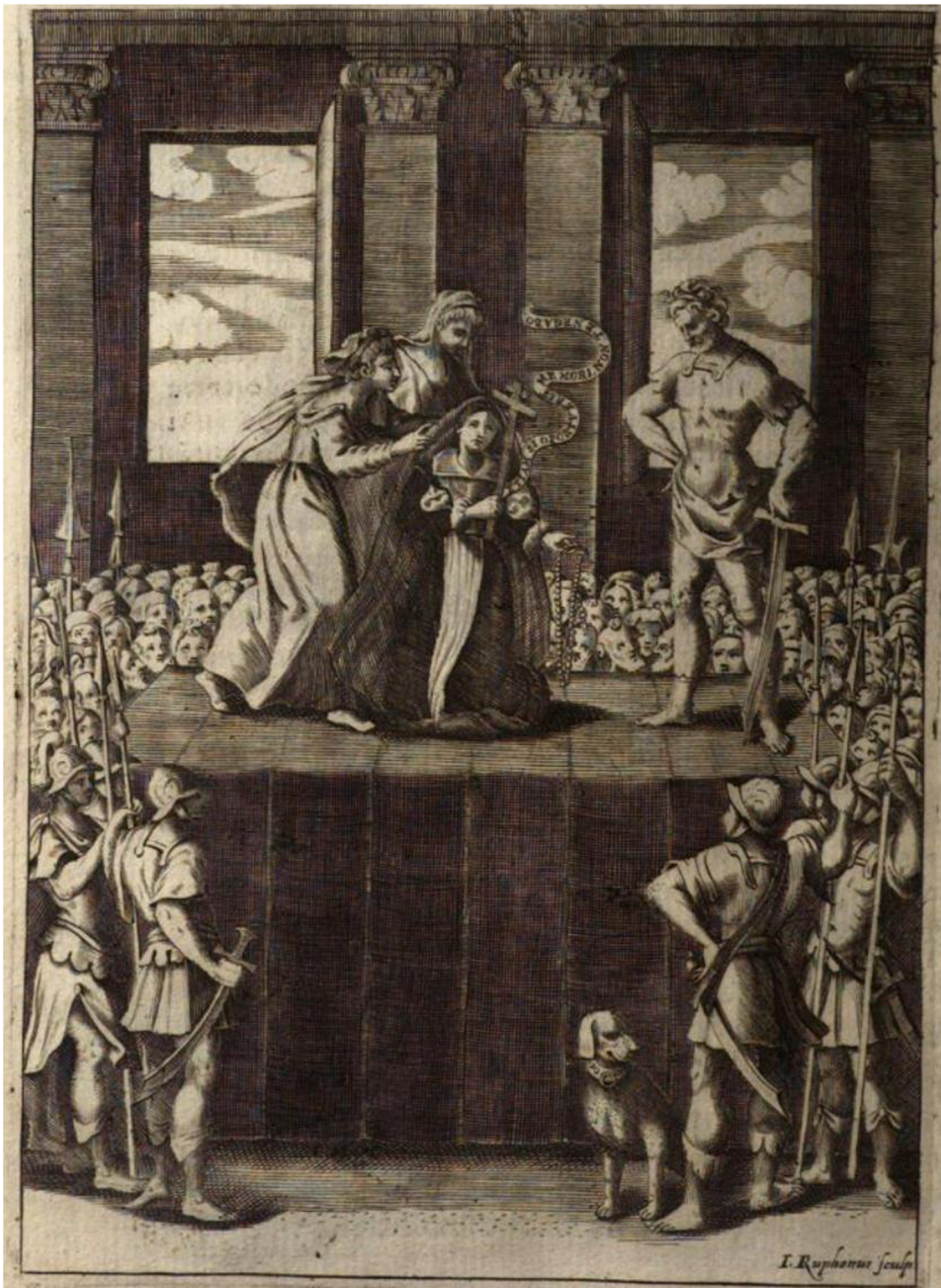


Figure 15. Girolamo Ercolani, *La reggia delle vedove sacre* (Padua, 1663).

queen's execution continued to be interpreted within a martyrological framework in continental Catholic circles well into the late seventeenth century. This mode of representation probably also continued to enjoy currency as a result of the execution of Mary's grandson, Charles I, in 1649. Haugwitz's play can be viewed as an example of the German *Trauerspiele* that were composed during the seventeenth century, a series of plays that typically feature martyr heroes, an example of which is Andreas Gryphius's tragedy about Mary's grandson, *Ermordete Majestät. Oder Carolus Stuardus König*



Figure 16. August von Haugwitz, *Schuldige Unschuld / Oder Maria Stuarda* (Dresden, 1683).

von Groß Britannien (1657, 1663).⁶⁷ Early modern works could, and did, draw parallels between the executions of Charles and Mary, and striking similarities can be discerned in seventeenth-century visual representations of the deaths of both monarchs. Thus, the frontispiece to the spiritual autobiography *Eikon Basilike*, which emerged only days after Charles's execution, depicted the king holding a crown of thorns, while contemplating his heavenly crown; similarly, as this article has already noted, the folding

⁶⁷ See, among others, G. Gillespie, 'Introduction', in *German Theater Before 1750: Sachs, Gryphius, Schlegel, and Others*, ed. G. Gillespie (New York, 1992), pp. xi–3; A. Menhennet, *The Historical Experience in German Drama: From Gryphius to Brecht* (Rochester, N.Y., 2003); and N. Nykrog, 'Officials on the scaffold: Lutheran martyrdom in Andreas Gryphius' *Catharina von Georgien*', *Religions*, xiii (2022), 1–16.

plate frontispiece of the Sion College Library copy of Turner's *Maria Stuarta* presented Mary with a heavenly crown alongside a row of four earthly crowns.⁶⁸

Having examined visual representations of Mary, queen of Scots's execution that emerged in the course of a century after her death, this article will now turn its attention to images of the executions of the English queens, Anne Boleyn and Jane Grey. Scholars have long acknowledged the power of woodcuts in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, commonly known as his *Book of Martyrs*. Peter Sherlock, for example, asserts that 'his narrative histories of the Marian martyrs, published with dramatic images, helped to create a new, independent, and anti-papal English identity'.⁶⁹ The number of woodcuts included in the work increased from fifty-three in 1563 to over 150 in 1570, which is significant since, as Andrew Hiscock remarks, the work was 'the preeminent vehicle in English for celebrating the martyrs of the Reformed faith'.⁷⁰ Both the 'Kalendar of Martyrs' (which featured a list of sixteenth-century reformers burned at the stake and was included in the editions of 1563 and 1583) and the woodcut images functioned as memorial devices.⁷¹

Foxe depicted both Anne Boleyn and Jane Grey as models of Protestant virtue but, while he devoted considerable attention to Jane's final days, as demonstrated by the inclusion of her theological debate with Abbot John Feckenham alongside the insertion of prayers and letters written shortly by Jane before her execution, in addition to reporting the manner of Jane's performance on the scaffold, scholars have pointed by contrast to Foxe's hesitation to discuss Anne's execution in any detail. Thomas Freeman notes that Foxe refused to discuss the charges brought against her and, in the first edition, he 'passed over the matter in silence'.⁷² Instead, as Retha Warnicke suggests, the martyrologist merely noted that God had proven the queen's innocence by permitting her daughter, Elizabeth, to inherit the throne in 1558.⁷³ The controversial executions of both Anne Boleyn and Jane Grey – particularly at the time of writing – coupled with their condemnations for treason, as opposed to heresy (a conviction for which resulted in death by burning), could perhaps account for the absence of images of either woman's execution in the *Acts and Monuments*, although such visual representations can be located in later editions of the work, including the Wesleyan preacher Martin Madan's 1761 abridgement *The Book of Martyrs*.⁷⁴

More generally, the execution of Anne Boleyn does not appear to have been a particularly popular subject for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century engravers and artists. An exception to this can be seen in an anonymous print that appears in an unidentified book held in the British Museum that dates between 1650 and 1699 (see Figure 17), which depicts three scenes from the reign of Henry VIII including his marriage to Anne (1533), her execution (1536) and the siege of Boulogne (1544).⁷⁵ The illustration incorrectly depicts the queen being executed with an axe, rather than a sword, and is extremely undetailed in nature, failing to include either Anne's ladies or the audience, for example. A somewhat more accurate visual representation of Anne's death can be seen in the Dutch illustrator Jan Luyken's print (see Figure 18), dating from 1664 to 1712, also in the British Museum, which presents the queen being executed with the correct instrument and includes a group of onlookers, some of whom appear to show distress.⁷⁶

In contrast with the proliferation of images representing the execution of Mary, queen of Scots, however, early modern visual representations of Anne Boleyn's beheading are few and far between. The

⁶⁸ T. S. Freeman, '“Imitatio Christi with a vengeance”: the politicisation of martyrdom in early-modern England', in *Martyrs and Martyrdom in England, c. 1400–1700*, ed. T. S. Freeman and T. F. Mayer (Woodbridge, 2007), pp. 35–70. See also E. Skerpan Wheeler, 'Eikon Basilike and the rhetoric of self-representation', in *The Royal Image: Representations of Charles I*, ed. T. N. Corns (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 122–41.

⁶⁹ P. Sherlock, 'The reformation of memory in early modern Europe', in *Memory: Histories, Theories, Debates*, ed. S. Radstone and B. Schwarz (New York, 2010), pp. 30–41, at p. 33.

⁷⁰ A. Hiscock, *Reading Memory in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 93.

⁷¹ Hiscock, *Reading Memory*, p. 93.

⁷² T. S. Freeman, 'Research, rumour and propaganda: Anne Boleyn in Foxe's "Book of Martyrs"', *Historical Journal*, xxxviii (1995), 797–819, at p. 816.

⁷³ R. M. Warnicke, *The Rise and Fall of Anne Boleyn: Family Politics at the Court of Henry VIII* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 1.

⁷⁴ The image can be viewed at 'File:The Death of Lady Jane Grey 1761 Foxe.jpg', *Wikimedia Commons* <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Death_of_Lady_Jane_Grey_1761_Foxe.jpg> [accessed 27 Nov. 2025].

⁷⁵ British Museum, no. 1871,0812.232.

⁷⁶ British Museum, no. 1872,1012.5138.



Figure 17. Source: © The trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

sheer quantity of images of Mary, queen of Scots's execution has, understandably, attracted extensive scholarly interest, whereas visual representations of the executions of both Anne Boleyn and Jane Grey produced during the early modern period have been neglected in existing historiography.⁷⁷ Neither of the illustrations of Anne's execution represented her death in martyrological terms, which further

⁷⁷ E.g., Smith, 'Mary queen of Scots as Susanna'; Tassi, 'Martyrdom and memory'; and J. L. Smith, 'The Sheffield portrait types, their Catholic purposes, and Mary queen of Scots's tomb', *British Catholic History*, xxxiii (2016), 71–90. By contrast, scholarly study of visual representations of Anne and Jane more broadly has largely been confined to their respective portraiture. Anne's downfall and execution have been extensively studied by scholars and her afterlives in the centuries since her death have also been the subject of recent scholarship. Neither strand, however, examines early modern visual representations of the beheading, perhaps because, as is suggested here, of the scarcity of extant images.



Figure 18. Source: © The trustees of the British Museum. Shared under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0) licence.

distinguishes them from the proliferation of images of Mary's death that explicitly utilized the iconography of martyrdom to subvert the official verdict of the Scottish queen's guilt of treason.

Similarly with Anne Boleyn's death, early modern visual representations of Jane Grey's execution are limited in number compared with the quantity of images of Mary, queen of Scots's beheading, but a small woodcut depicting Jane's end appears at the top of the anonymous broadside *A conference between the Lady Jane Grey and F. Fecknam a Romish priest*, written in 1688, which erroneously represents Jane

being beheaded with a sword, rather than an axe (see Figure 19).⁷⁸ A crown rests on the scaffold to highlight her royal status and, perhaps, her martyrdom, if it can be interpreted to suggest a heavenly crown. This broadside was published six years after the anonymous *History of the life, bloody reign and death of Queen Mary*, whose frontispiece features three woodcuts, including a woodcut of the executions of Jane and her husband (see Figure 20), thus suggesting a broader interest in Jane's career during the 1680s.⁷⁹ The 'spate of Jane Grey publications' at this time, Edith Snook argues, largely resulted from 'the succession conflicts of the late Stuart court.'⁸⁰ It is striking that early modern visual representations of the executions of Anne Boleyn and Jane Grey largely refrained from presenting them in explicitly martyrological terms, in direct contrast with images of Mary, queen of Scots's beheading produced on the Continent that utilized both Catholic iconography and motifs of martyrdom to present the queen as the innocent, persecuted and saintly victim of the ungodly English regime. Additionally, it can be speculated that the Blairs Museum portrait (and the Royal Collection Trust version), for example, might have been viewed by Catholics as being on a par with devotional images.⁸¹ The commissioning of the portrait took place in a culture that actively made use of relics to aid in the preservation of (English) Catholic identity at a time of persecution.⁸²

Whether such images of Mary's execution were created with the aim of veneration cannot, of course, be known with certainty but it is striking that they were produced on the Continent at a time when the veneration of images and relics was regarded by Catholics as legitimate and, as Alexandra Walsham notes, in a post-Tridentine context in which 'Catholic renewal was increasingly accompanied by enthusiastic endorsement of material devotion.'⁸³ The quasi-devotional nature of at least some images of Mary's execution, as typified with the Blairs Museum portrait, may also account for the relative scarcity of visual representations within a Protestant context of the deaths of Anne Boleyn and Jane Grey, particularly along martyrological lines, in view of the reformed belief that the practice of venerating images was idolatrous.

Nine years after Regnault's tragedy about Mary, queen of Scots, the Dutch playwright Joachim Oudaen's *Iohanna Grey, off Gemartelde Onnoselheyt* ('Johanna Grey, or Martyred Innocence'), published in 1648, features an engraving of Jane Grey's execution on its title page (see Figure 21).⁸⁴ It was written as an anti-Catholic response to Joost van den Vondel's *Maria Stuarta of Gemartelde majesteit* ('Mary Stuart or Martyred Majesty', 1646).⁸⁵ In contrast with the highly stylized visual representations of Mary's execution, which utilize Catholic iconography to present the queen as a royal martyr, the engraving of Jane's execution is notable for its simplicity. The faces of Jane, the executioner and those in the crowd are conspicuous by their lack of detail; it is difficult to ascertain whether the onlookers observe Jane's death with pity, compassion or indifference, and her execution is not represented in martyrological terms.

While the scene omits the bloody details of execution by decapitation, its inclusion on the title page is of importance. Scholars have pointed to the power of images in early modern texts, including martyrologies – namely in their explicit visual detail – in portraying the torture, persecution and executions of true believers.⁸⁶ *Iohanna Grey* presents Jane as being regarded sympathetically by the

⁷⁸ *A conference between the Lady Jane Grey and F. Fecknam a Romish priest, concerning the blessed sacrament; whilst she was prisoner in the Tower of London, and was beheaded on the Green there, Feb. 12. 1554. Together with her behaviour and last speech and prayers at her suffering* (n.p., 1688).

⁷⁹ *The History of the life, bloody reign and death of Queen Mary, eldest daughter to H.8. containing a true account of her birth, education, coronation and marriage, the beheading the Lady Jane Gray and her husband, the Dukes of Northumberland and Suffolk, &c., with their speeches at their execution, the several imprisonments of Queen Elizabeth, and her remarkable speeches and behaviour in her confinements: Wyatt's rebellion, the siege and taking of Calais by the French, &c.: also, an account of the martyrs that suffer'd death during her most cruel reign ... : illustrated with pictures of the most considerable passages, engraven on copper plates* (London, 1682).

⁸⁰ E. Snook, 'Jane Grey, "manful" combat, and the female reader in early modern England', *Renaissance and Reformation*, xxxii (2009), 47–81, at p. 66.

⁸¹ Tassi, 'Martyrdom and memory', p. 115.

⁸² See J. E. Kelly, 'Creating an English Catholic identity: relics, martyrs and English women religious in counter-reformation Europe', in *Early Modern English Catholicism: Identity, Memory and Counter-Reformation*, ed. J. E. Kelly and S. Royal (Leiden, 2016), pp. 41–60, at p. 41.

⁸³ A. Walsham, 'Material culture', in *The Oxford History of British and Irish Catholicism, i: Endings and New Beginnings, 1530–1640*, ed. J. E. Kelly and J. McCafferty (Oxford, 2023), pp. 164–84, at p. 171.

⁸⁴ Joachim Oudaen, *Iohanna Grey, off Gemartelde Onnoselheyt. Treur-spel* (Rottendam, 1648).

⁸⁵ E. K. Grootes and M. A. Schenkeveld-Van der Dussen, 'The Dutch revolt and the golden age, 1560–1700', in *A Literary History of the Low Countries*, ed. T. Hermans (Rochester, N.Y., 2009), pp. 153–293, at p. 223.

⁸⁶ Petti, 'Richard Verstegan and Catholic martyrologies'.



A Conference between the Lady Jane Grey and F. Fecknam a Romish Priest, concerning the Blessed Sacrament; whilst she was Prisoner in the Tower of LONDON, and was beheaded on the Green there, Feb. 12. 1554. Together with her Behaviour and last Speech and Prayers at her Suffering.

DURING the languishing Sickness of K. Edward the Sixth, a Marriage was contracted between the Lord Guildford Dudley, eldest Son to the Duke of Northumberland, and the Lady Jane, the Daughter of the Duke of Suffolk, whose Mother being then alive, was Daughter to Mary, K. Henry the Eighth's second Wife, who was first Married to the French Kings, and afterward to Charles Duke of Suffolk.

This Marriage being finished, and the King growing every day more sick than other, so that he seemed past recovery, the Duke of Northumberland being ambitious to advance his Family, persuaded the King in his weakness, that the Crown might be left to the Lady Jane, the eldest Daughter, whose Reasons he prevailed with this sick King, that by his last Will he excluded both his Sisters, and left the Crown to the Lady Jane.

To this Will, by the power and fear of the Duke of Northumberland, all the Kings Council, the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, with almost all the Judges and Lawyers of this Realm, except only Justice Hales of Kent, a Man favouring the True Religion, and also an upright Judge, as any hath been known in this Kingdom did assent.

While after K. Edward's death, and the Lady Jane was persuaded to take the Crown upon her, it was told her by the Duke of Northumberland, that he had declared her for his next Successor to the Crown Legals, and that this Declaration was approved by all the Lords of the Council, most of the Peers, and all the Judges of the Law, which they had by the Subscription of their names, and all their seals and confirmations by Letters Patent under the Great Seal of England: And that the Lord Mayor and Aldermen of London, and some of the Principal Citizens had been present, to witness the solemnity of the fidelity of the City.

That there was nothing wanting, but her graceful acceptance of that high Dignity which God Almighty, the Father of Mercies, had bestowed upon her, and that therefore she should cheerfully take upon her the Name, Title, and Office of Queen of England, France, and Ireland, with all the Privileges and Preeminences to the same belonging; receiving at the same time the kiss of peace from the whole Court, and the rest of the Kingdom, which shortly was to be paid to her by the rest of the Kingdom.

There was not much difference in age between this young Lady and King Edward, but in Learning and Knowledge she was superior to him; Iaving the happiness to be instructed by one Master Elmer, a learned and Vertuous Man; which being joynd with an excellent Wit of her own, made her much to be admired.

When the Lady Mary heard her Brother was dead, being then at Hampton in Hertfordshire, she sent a Letter to the Lords of the Council, wherein she claimed the Crown as due to her by Birth, by Act of Parliament, and by the Last Will of King Henry 8. Whereunto the Lords answer'd, That according to the last Will of K. Edward the Lady Jane was Proclaimed Queen, and that by the Divorce of Q. Katharine she was made justly Illegitimate, and incapable of the Crown.

The Lady Mary was much perplexed at this Letter, and in hearing that the Lady Jane had been proclaimed Queen in London, and some other principal Cities and Towns; she thereupon retired her self to Framingham Castle in Suffolk, where she retired to her many, both of that County and Norfolk, and being guarded with her power, she was thought the Duke of Northumberland and all his Adherents, and was seized in the Kingdom.

When the Lords of the Council heard how the Country came to the Lady Mary, they also proclaimed her Queen in London and the Duke of Suffolk being then in the Tower, with his Daughter Q. Jane, the Lords seized upon the Tower, and commanded the Duke to surrender himself a Prisoner; who submitted accordingly, and presently went to his Daughters Chambers, and told her, that he must not now see any of his Royal Ceremonies any longer, but must be contented to return to her former private Conversation. To which with a feigned Countenance he answered, Sir, I desire like the Kings other Subjects to have my share of the duty due of Obedience to your Majesty, which I have ever since done, and offered violence to my self, and I do nothing, and so obeying the motions of my Sovereign, I have never sought to do any thing that is contrary to your Majesty's commandments, if in least I find a fault can be saved by a willing reformation and ingenious acknowledgement.

Thus continued the Lady Jane with her Husband the Lord Guildford Dudley Prisoner, for about five Months after Q. Mary came to London, and were then both arraigned and condemned at Guild-Hall for Treason, and then returned back to the Tower. While after there was one Rev. Father, sent to the Lady Jane, with whom she had the following Conference.

F. Fecknam, Madam, I lament your heavy case, and yet I doubt not but that you bear out this sorrow with a constant and patient mind.

L. Jane. You are welcome unto me, if your coming be to give Christian Exhortation; and also my heavy Case, I thank God I do so little lament in, that I rather account it a more manifest Declaration of the favour of God, than ever he shewed to me before; and therefore this is no cause why either you or others which bear me good-will, should lament or be grieved for this my Case; since it is profitable to my Souls Health.

F. Fecknam. I am now sent to you from the Queen and her Council, to instruct you in the True Doctrine of the Right Faith, though I have no great confidence in you, that I hoped shall have lived next to labour much with you hereafter.

L. Jane. Sir, I heartily thank the Queens Highness, who is not unkindful of her humble Subject; and I hope like unto you will do your Duty both truly and faithfully there, according as you are sent.

F. Fecknam. What is then required of a Christian Man?

L. Jane. That he should believe in God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; Three Persons in one God.

F. Fecknam. What is there nothing else to be required or looked for in a Christian, but to believe in God?

L. Jane. Yes, we must love him with all our soul, and with all our mind, and our Neighbour as our self.

F. Fecknam. Why then Faith, as St. Paul saith, only justifieth.

L. Jane. Yes, Faith, if I have all Faith without Love, is nothing.

F. Fecknam. How then do we love our Neighbour?

L. Jane. That's true, for how can I love him whom I trust not? Or how can I trust him whom I love not? Faith and Love go both together, and yet Love is comprehended in Faith.

F. Fecknam. How should we love our Neighbour?

L. Jane. To love our Neighbour is to feed the hungry, to cloath the naked, and to give drink to the thirsty, and to do to him as we would do to our selves.

F. Fecknam. Why then is necessary unto Salvation to do good works also, and is not sufficient only to believe?

L. Jane. I deny that, and affirm, That Faith only saveth; but it is for this reason, that when it is followed with good works, it doth good works; yet we may not say that they profit to Salvation: For where there is Faith, we are not separated from works, and Faith only in Christ will live out.

F. Fecknam. How Sacraments are they?

L. Jane. Two, one the Sacrament of Baptism, and the other the Sacrament of the Lords Supper.

F. Fecknam. By what Scriptures find you that?

L. Jane. Will you will take of that Baptism, but what is signified by your two Sacraments?

L. Jane. By the Sacrament of Baptism I am washed with Water, and regenerated by the Spirit; and that washing is a token to me, that I am a Child of God: The Sacrament of the Lords Supper offered unto me, is a true token and testimony that I am by the Blood of Christ which he shed for me upon the Cross, made partaker of his Everlasting Kingdom.

F. Fecknam. What do you receive in that Sacrament? Do you not receive the very Body and Blood of Christ?

L. Jane. No truly, I do not believe so; I think that as the Supper is neither receive flesh nor blood, but Bread and Wine, and when it is broken, it is not broken, but the Body of Christ was broken, and his Blood shed on the Cross; and with this Bread and Wine I receive the benefits that come by the breaking of his Body, and shedding of his Blood on the Cross.

F. Fecknam. How do you receive it, and how do you receive it?

L. Jane. I receive it by Faith, and the Spirit, and the Word, but he never the more either of them; but he is not broken, but the Body of Christ was broken, and his Blood shed on the Cross; and with this Bread and Wine I receive the benefits that come by the breaking of his Body, and shedding of his Blood on the Cross.

F. Fecknam. How do you receive it, and how do you receive it?

L. Jane. I receive it by Faith, and the Spirit, and the Word, but he never the more either of them; but he is not broken, but the Body of Christ was broken, and his Blood shed on the Cross; and with this Bread and Wine I receive the benefits that come by the breaking of his Body, and shedding of his Blood on the Cross.

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F. Fecknam. How do you receive it, and how do you receive it?

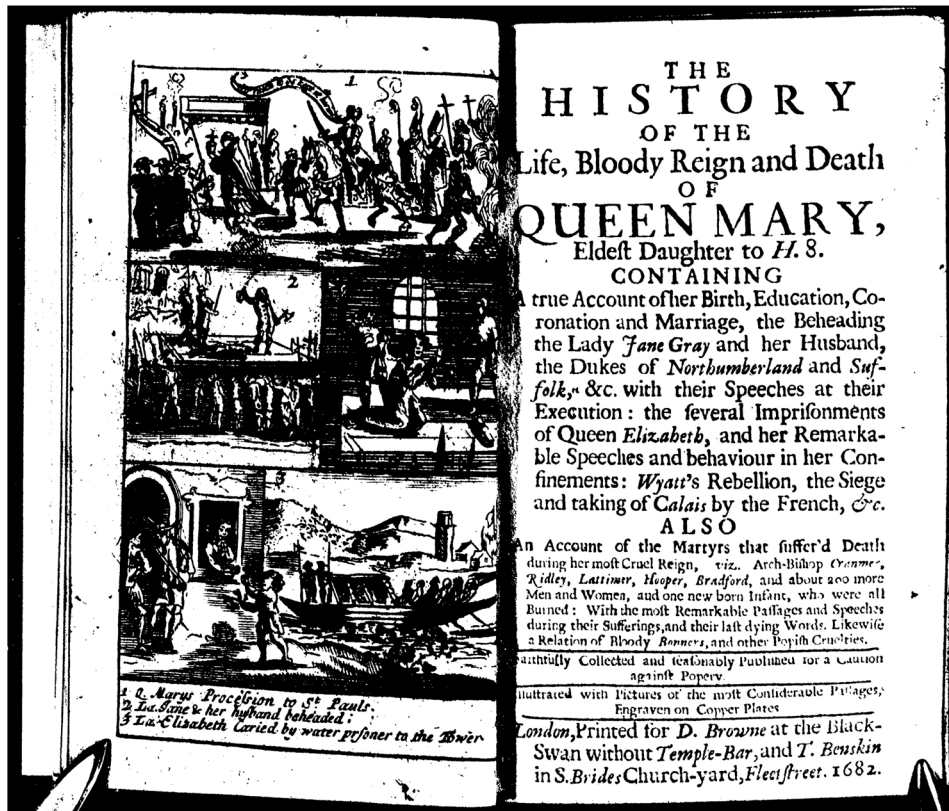
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Figure 19. A conference between the Lady Jane Grey and F. Fecknam a Romish priest, concerning the blessed sacrament; whilst she was prisoner in the Tower of London, and was beheaded on the Green there, Feb. 12. 1554. Together with her behaviour and last speech and prayers at her suffering (n.p., 1688).

audience observing her execution, members of whom stand by with tears in their eyes.⁸⁷ The emphasis in the text on the onlookers' tears is starkly contrasted with the seeming lack of emotion exhibited by the audience within the engraving. The frontispiece is accompanied by a quotation from Book XIII of

⁸⁷ Oudaen, Iohanna Grey, sig. H3r.

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Figure 20. *The History of the life, bloody reign and death of Queen Mary, eldest daughter to H. 8. containing a true account of her birth, education, coronation and marriage, the beheading the Lady Jane Gray and her husband, the Dukes of Northumberland and Suffolk, &c., with their speeches at their execution, the several imprisonments of Queen Elizabeth, and her remarkable speeches and behaviour in her confinements: Wyatt's rebellion, the siege and taking of Calais by the French, &c.: also, an account of the martyrs that suffer'd death during her most cruel reign ... : illustrated with pictures of the most considerable passages, engraven on copper plates* (London, 1682).

the Roman poet Ovid's *Metamorphoses*: 'at te, quia foemina, rebar / a ferro tutam: cecidisti & foemina ferro'.⁸⁸ An edition of *Johanna Grey* published in 1712 features an image that more explicitly conveys the play's representation of the fallen queen as a martyr, by depicting the palm fronds of martyrdom alongside the executioner's axe (see Figure 22).⁸⁹ Like the 1648 edition, the 1712 version includes the quotation from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which derives from the Trojan queen Hecuba's lament for her daughter, Polyxena, who was sacrificed at the foot of the Greek warrior Achilles' grave as punishment for betraying him to her brothers Paris and Deiphobus. The inclusion of loosed shackles on the frontispiece in conjunction with the quotation can be argued to establish a parallel between the declaration of Ovid's Polyxena that she would prefer to die as a sacrifice to Achilles than to be taken into slavery and Oudaen's Jane, who chooses death rather than recant and embrace the Catholic faith. The loosed shackles and the quotation both function to suggest that, like Polyxena, Jane's death constitutes a sacrifice, which both women willingly accept rather than submitting to slavery (in Jane's case, the metaphorical and theological slavery that she will endure if forced to renounce her faith for Catholicism). This willingness to submit to death is further conveyed in the unshaken, fearless

⁸⁸ This can be translated as 'Because you were a woman, I thought you safe from the sword: yet, a woman, you have died by the sword.' I would like to thank Dr. Joe Grimwade for sharing his thoughts on the quotation's significance.

⁸⁹ J. Oudaen, *Toneel-Poëzy, behelzende Johanna Grey, Konradyn, 't Verworpen Huis van Eli, en Servetus vyfde bedryf* (Amsterdam, 1712).

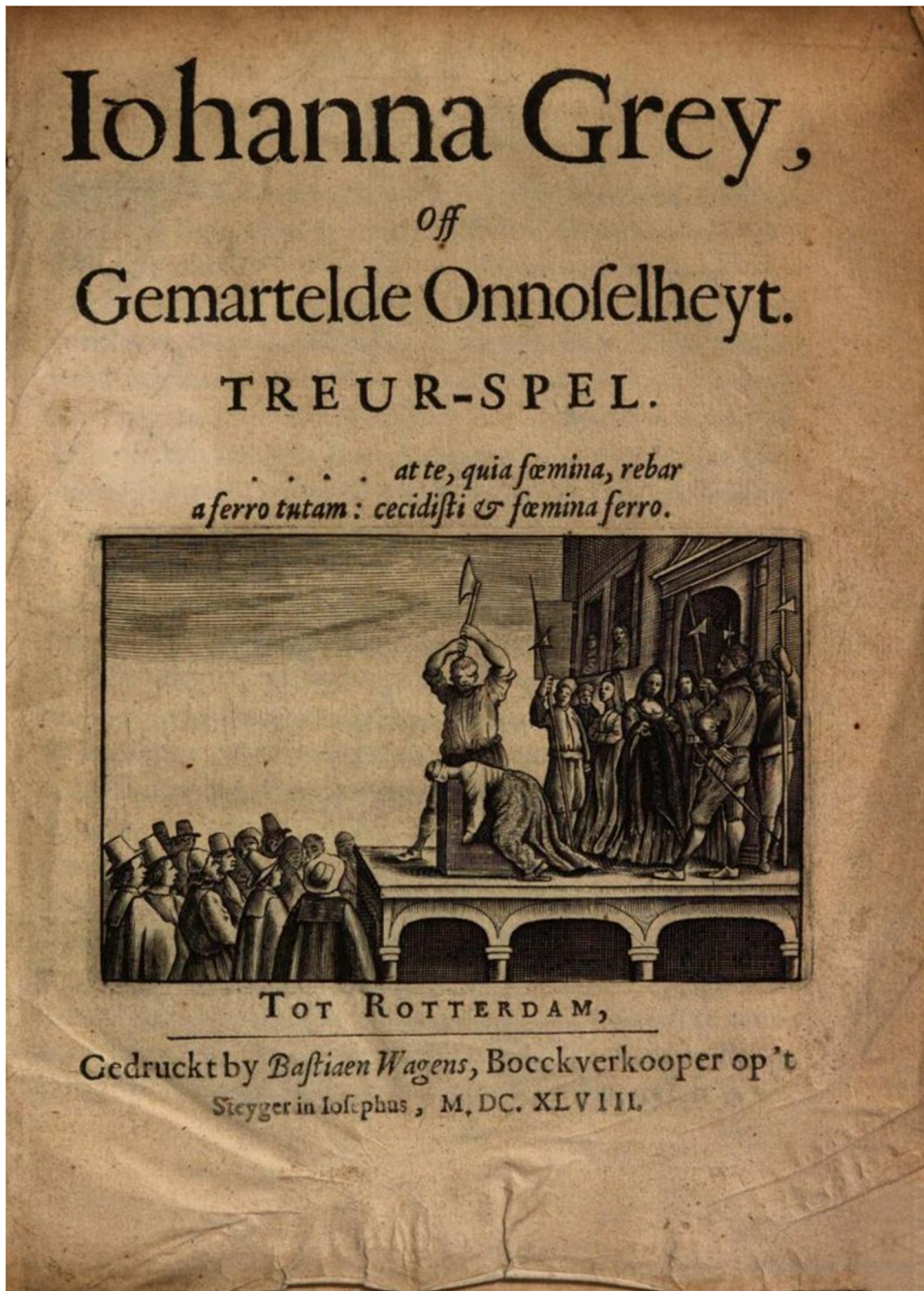


Figure 21. Joachim Oudaen, *Iohanna Grey, off Gemartelde Onnoselheyt. Treur-spel* (Rottendam, 1648).

appearances of both women in their final moments, as represented by Ovid and Oudaen. The play represents Jane's execution as an act of martyrdom that will permit her to experience endless joy in heaven, where she will be adorned with a crown of glory. It can be speculated that the broken regalia depicted on the frontispiece represents Jane's willingness to surrender her earthly crown in the confidence that she will shortly attain a heavenly one, an impression that is strengthened with the inclusion of palm fronds of martyrdom. The placement of the axe on the frontispiece is striking, in that it directly faces the gruesome sight of Jane's bleeding head. This detail can effectively be contextualized



Figure 22. J. Oudaen, *Toneel-Poëzy, behelzende Johanna Grey, Konradyn, 't Verworpen Huis van Eli, en Servetus vyfde bedryf* (Amsterdam, 1712).

with consideration of both Ovid's quotation and the beginning of the play, which describes the persecution of Protestants during Mary I's reign, in which (as is claimed) eight hundred people were burned at the stake for their beliefs.⁹⁰ Like Polyxena, Jane cannot escape her cruel punishment by virtue of being a woman, a detail confirmed in the introduction of the play, which notes that both Jane and

⁹⁰ Oudaen, *Johanna Grey*, sig. A2v.

her husband were publicly executed with an axe. The detail of Mary's persecution of Protestants, coupled with the representation of Jane's bleeding head, have the effect of reinforcing the emphasis on both Jane's status as a martyr and her cousin's role as a vengeful and merciless tyrant.

*

This article has demonstrated that the executions of British queens were depicted in a wide range of early modern images, including woodcuts, engravings and portraits. The production of such images, both in Britain and on the Continent, testifies to the widespread interest with which the executions were regarded during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is evident, however, that such images were not necessarily concerned with representing the executions accurately: the setting, instrument of execution and costume of the victim, for example, could reflect particular national traditions rather than those of sixteenth-century England or they could represent specific choices made with religious, political or emotional motivations in mind. The intended audience for each image was undoubtedly determined, at least in part, by genre: the propagandistic representations of Mary, queen of Scots's execution in the engravings by Verstegan and Blackwood, for example, were conceivably aimed at a broader audience than that intended for the commemorative paintings of the same subject, despite sharing similar aims (and similar, Catholic, sympathies). Additionally, woodcuts in pamphlets and broadsides were available to a wider social strata and, as has been noted, may have served as a primary medium through which knowledge of the executions was disseminated both in Britain and on the Continent. By examining the corpus of sources within a comparative framework, important conclusions can be reached. It can broadly be argued that visual representations of Mary, queen of Scots's execution – especially those produced in continental Catholic circles and which can be deemed to have been quasi-devotional in nature – presented her death in martyrological terms in ways that were not applicable to her decapitated predecessors: Anne Boleyn and Jane Grey.⁹¹ It is also clear that Mary, queen of Scots's execution attracted greater interest from engravers, artists and painters primarily because, as Tassi succinctly notes, 'no image was more significant, exemplary, and *usable* for Catholic Europe's religio-political ends than that of the Scottish queen's execution'.⁹²

Visual representations of the executions are a critical source for scholars not only because they provide insights into how these sensational events were creatively interpreted by artists but also because of the role they may have played in disseminating knowledge both at home and abroad: while portraits such as that commissioned by Elizabeth Curle were produced for private and wealthy patrons, engravings and woodcuts in pamphlets and martyrologies were intended to be viewed across the social spectrum and could thus be highly influential in the shaping of communal memory. There are undoubtedly limitations to the utility of images for scholars: their provenance, context of creation and authorship, for example, are not always known, nor is it always possible to gauge how audiences responded to them. Several of the sources that have been examined in this article have been the subject of scholarly enquiry. Additionally, early modern scholars of visual culture have long recognized that the woodcuts that accompany John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* constitute one of its 'most distinctive and memorable features',⁹³ although, as this article has noted, these woodcuts did not represent the executions of Anne Boleyn and Jane Grey. Conversely, other images from the early modern period that represent the executions of British queens, explored in this article, have been neglected. This is both unfortunate and surprising, in view of the fact that clearly the lives and deaths of the three women continued to be topical well into the century after their beheadings, both in Britain and on the Continent. The strike of the executioner's axe (or, in Anne Boleyn's case, the sword) may have ended the earthly lives of the queens that have formed the focus of this article but, as the investigation of early modern images here demonstrates, their legacies continued to live on.

⁹¹ As this article has demonstrated, however, visual representations of Jane Grey's execution – albeit not to the same extent as images of Mary's death – could, and did, employ the iconography of martyrdom to present her triumph over death and physical suffering, confident in the knowledge that she will wear a heavenly crown.

⁹² Tassi, 'Martyrdom and memory', p. 113.

⁹³ J. N. King, 'The world of John Foxe: an introduction', in Highley and King, *John Foxe*, pp. 1–10, at p. 9. See also M. Rankin, 'John Day's production of woodcut prints from John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*', *The Library*, xxiii (2022), 25–46.

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99(1) 46–76

<https://doi.org/10.1093/hisres/htaf024>

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