

*Giovanna Guidicini*

*Triumphal Entries and Festivals in Early Modern  
Scotland: Performing Spaces*

Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2020.

ISBN 9782503585413

DR GIOVANNA Guidicini is an architectural historian at the Glasgow School of Art. Her research interests principally focus on the use of space within the urban and extramural environment during civic processions, pageantry and monarchical welcoming celebrations hosted by towns and cities, particularly in early modern Scotland. In this monograph, the latest in the series *European Festival Studies: 1450-1700*, Guidicini places Scottish - or, rather, Edinburgh - triumphal entries within a European context, with each chapter drawing heavily on comparative material from France, Italy, Belgium and, occasionally, England.

*Triumphal Entries* is arranged into eight chapters, containing forty-four sub-headings, guiding the reader though the many complex themes within the book. Chapter 1 is an introductory chapter which begins with an explanation of the use of Braun and Hogenberg's 1582 map as the book's starting point, admitting that it is visually "unsophisticated and disproportioned." The focus of this map is the disproportionate characters in the foreground, and the town depicted is not immediately recognisable as Edinburgh (17). Guidicini contrasts this with the perhaps better known 1647 Gordon of Rothiemay town plan which can be taken as an accurate, proportional representation of early modern Edinburgh (paced out, to scale). Guidicini writes of "civic spaces that were able to transcend their objective and measurable characteristics through the influence of human perceptions and undertakings," that is to say, space itself becomes a theatre or stage as it connects the educated literate members of the audience with narratives of local and national history, genealogy of Scottish Kingship, Greek mythology, and Roman imperialism. Specific points along triumphal routes played their part in creating imagery and scenes whereby "civic space actively performed its own significance" (21).

The following chapters are set out in a combination of spatial, chronological,

and thematic order, taking the reader into and through the burgh of Edinburgh as if one were a guest or spectator to a triumphal entry. Each chapter relates to a staging point on the triumphal route and links that point to a connected theme. For instance, Chapter 5, on the subject of the Butter Tron or weighing station, focuses on the burgh's economic activity and corresponding identity of the burghess class.

Accompanied by many illustrations, this thematic arrangement makes the work easier to follow for those with little or no previous knowledge of Edinburgh. The second chapter (37-64) focuses on extramural space, outwith the town's walls and defences, and how the natural world with its unknown dangers contrasted starkly with the civilised urban world. Royal entries employed the symbolism of literary characters from Greek mythology to underpin the monarch's authority over all their domain. Chapter 3 (71-92) examines the role of the West Port and its customary use in royal entries to Edinburgh (a custom which was, incidentally, carried on even to the Accession Route of 1953, such is its significance). In Chapter 4, 'The Overbow,' the focus is not so much on the street itself, as on an urban space's role as an accepted part of the historical route into the burgh. By accepting prearranged routes with local historical significance Guidicini argues that 'urban spectacles were based not on pageants as self-standing shows, but on the monarch and his close cohort experiencing them as an ordered sequence' (101). Guidicini contrasts continued Scottish acceptance of traditional processional routes with the 'high-handed' approach of several European monarchs, who often demanded alternative routes. Chapter 5 shows that, at the "Butter Tron" (the civic weighing station), the burgh staged a display of its commercial activities, reminding the monarch of the importance of fostering economic prosperity. The sixth chapter is concerned with the 'triptych' (180) of civil, legal, and church buildings in the area around what is now known as Parliament Square and West Parliament Square, being St Giles's High Kirk, the Tolbooth and the Mercat Cross. These structures represented church, civic and royal authority in the burgh, and it is no surprise that they were in such proximity to one another. Here, Guidicini notes that Scottish monarchs were not blind to the political leverage that could be gained from deprivation of civic authority and the removal of either parliament, or the court of session from Edinburgh. Chapters 7 and 8 focus on classical iconography, musical accompaniments to triumphal processions, and the role of artworks in transforming everyday spaces such as the Salt Tron and Netherbow gate into performing spaces.

Unsurprisingly, for a book concerned with 'performing spaces,' this is beautifully illustrated, with forty-five figures and twenty-three plates. These will no doubt be particularly helpful to anyone unfamiliar with Edinburgh's

unique topography. Although in the second chapter – on extramural spaces – it would perhaps have better helped readers unfamiliar with Edinburgh’s history to have used the architect William Edgar’s 1742 or 1765 town plans which clearly display the heavily featured ‘long-gate’ heading WNW from Multer’s Hill, a road leading to Calton burial ground.

No historical work is ever perfect, and the introduction to this otherwise entertaining and informative book is something of an arduous read, with every single sentence being an epic, some as long as sixty words or more. This will, I feel, deter many undergraduates from maintaining an interest in this valuable work. There are one or two inaccuracies too, such as, crediting Alasdair MacDonald with Alan MacDonald’s work, and claiming that James VI’s “reckless” trip to collect his bride followed ominous warnings of witchcraft in Scotland. Recent research has demonstrated that the rumours began in Denmark.

However, overall, this book adds significantly to the underdeveloped narrative of triumphal entries and processions in early modern Scotland, and will no doubt be much sought after by academic libraries.

*Kevin Hall*  
*University of Edinburgh*