

Dear Reader,

I thoroughly enjoyed creating this image of Mary, Queen of Scots for the author of *The Queen's Almoner, Tonya Ulynn Brown*. She and I share a passion for two queens who happened to grow up at the glittering French court, only to return to a devastating fate on their native shores of the British Isles. However, their deaths should not define them.

What gives women from the past agency is to recognize fully their achievements more so than their treatment at the hands of ruthless individuals. As Dr. Owen Emmerson, Historian and assistant curator at Hever Castle has said, with Anne Boleyn, “ We tend to see her backwards” and so create a narrative which predetermines her fate. The same is true of Mary, Queen of Scots. Consequently, it is important to take a holistic view of the lives of both of these women— of all women in history, really—as well as women in our present.

The irony is not lost on me that Mary, Queen of Scots died at the hands of the daughter of Anne Boleyn. Yet, I feel very strongly (and not to be too reductionist here) that Elizabeth I's decision was based on fear mongering and Mary's use *by* Catholic nobles more so than the feelings these women had for each other. This is evidenced when Mary was first taken captive by her Scottish nobles. Elizabeth I was horrified at Mary's treatment as a queen regnant and demanded her release (Porter).

However, I'm not here to argue over four hundred-some-years of history; but I do wish to show, through my drawing, that Mary, Queen of Scots stands tall in history. As a result, I wanted to incorporate into this image, symbols which show her strength, her character, and her agency.

Firstly, the shield in the upper left hand corner can be well explained by J. Paul Murdock from his blog “A Royal Heraldry:”

When Francis died at the end of 1560 and Mary became a widow and Dowager Queen of France, her Arms changed slightly and France became dimidiated and not impaled. France's half of the Shield showed only half of France's Coat of Arms. The fashion of either impaling Arms (where the full Arms are used on both sides) and dimidiation (where half the Arms are used and both 'merge' into one another) is an often confusing topic in itself. The representations of Mary's Arms shown here are taken from Mary's seals and Scottish coins of the time. No coins were issued in Scotland however, between 1562 and 1565. Thereafter, only the plain Scottish Arms were used again as can be seen in (the drawing).

The use of unicorns is intriguing and has been explained in the following way:

Unicorns are associated with purity, strength and power...they are also proud and untamable— two words people would use to describe Scots throughout history. Since the 15th century, many monarchs of Scotland have used the unicorn in their coat of arms. Kings favored the mythical beast because they considered it to be the best representation of power. In fact, unicorns are believed to be so strong that only kings and virgin maidens could keep them captive. (Rabbies)

Incorporated on Mary's Kirtle are symbols from her time as queen consort to Francis II of France from 1559-1560. The dolphin symbolizes her husband, the dauphiné of France. The word dauphiné does in fact mean "dolphin" in English and refers to the region of France that is now Grenoble. When the Lord owning it died, he gave it to the King of France with the conditions that it would be ruled by the heir to the throne. Hence, the dolphin used on Mary's kirtle in this image is taken directly from Francis II's coat of arms.

The kirtle also holds Mary's symbol of Queenship in Scotland: the thistle and crown. Mixed among these symbols on the kirtle are the fleur de lis, which symbolizes the French divine right to rule.

Mary is drawn in an attifet, her famous heart-shaped hat. The dress was inspired by a portrait at the Blairs Museum in Aberdeen, Scotland by an unknown artist. According to historian Estelle Paranque, "There's a striking resemblance between the dress in this portrait, which was painted in the seventeenth century, and the costume worn by the actress who played Mary Stuart in Pierre-Antoine Lebrun's 1820 tragedy (based on Schiller's 1800 play). The gold and black dress embodies both Mary's martyrdom and queenship."

The original play Paranque refers to is a verse play by Friedrich Schiller's and was based on Mary's last days. It later inspired Donizetti to compose his opera, "Maria Stuarda" in 1835.

The symbols with the name "Marie Stuart" scribed to the right of Mary's figure are also taken from the same portrait at the Blairs Museum.

In Mary's hands are various items which define her. In her left hand is the rosary which she had at her execution and which was, unfortunately, recently stolen from Arundel castle. In her right hand are riding gloves which denote her love for equestrian sport. Also in her right hand is her long chained girdle, indicating she is about to read her small girdle (prayer) book.

Among other sources, research for girdle books can be viewed at the British Art Studies website. There, the portrait of *Lady Philippa Speke (nee Rosewell)* displays the unusual pose of grasping at a girdle to read a prayer book. Additionally, this abstract by William Aslet (link below) offers images of exquisitely decorated girdle books. The actual girdle chain in the drawing of Mary is taken from the Blairs Museum portrait.

At the onset of this project, Tonya directed me to a wonderful resource on Mary's clothing: *The Fashion Secrets of Mary, Queen of Scots*. The link is below and it will offer insightful suggestions on fabric types and colours. It is here where I first decided on the Blairs Museum portrait.

I hope this image showcases the magnificence of Mary, Queen of Scots and I also desire that you have as much pleasure studying its meaning and colouring it in, as I did creating it for you.

With Warm Wishes,

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References and Further Reading:

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