

## In the Shadow of *Lepanto*: Latin Translation at the Court of James VI and I

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When King James VI of Scotland acceded to the English throne in 1603, some of his literary works were revived for the occasion. These included his *Lepanto*, an allegorical epic written twenty years earlier, celebrating the victory of the Holy League against the Ottoman empire in the famed 1571 naval battle. A panel depicting the Battle of Lepanto was displayed at James's coronation celebrations – an allusive complement to the king's interest in the subject that some scholars speculate inspired the background noise of Shakespeare's *Othello* – and a Latin translation of the poem by the Scottish courtier Thomas Murray was published in 1604. This



talk will give a reading of Murray's translation, both as an instrument for establishing James's political intentions and Scoto-Franco-Latinate Protestant poetics across Europe, and as an early example of the practice of Latinizing English literature. James's poem has posed interpretative challenges since it was composed. Its stance on its central subject, a Catholic victory, seems elusive, even avoidant – a quality that, in the absence of other marks of literary genius, makes the poem hard to engage with. Murray is in the fraught position of 'interpres superum' in more ways than one, translating a poem by a king who tried to exercise tight control over the interpretation of his royal intent, and who advocated a constrained style of translation. How does the translation deal with these challenges, and how changed (for the better?) are the poem and its politics in Latin?