

The Correspondence of Elizabeth I and
James VI in the context of Anglo-Scottish
Relations, 1572-1603

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Abstract

From 1572 until 1603 Queen Elizabeth I of England maintained a significant correspondence with King James VI of Scotland. This correspondence has recently begun to receive some scholarly attention but generally it sits separated from its context in historical analysis. This thesis seeks to analyse the lengthy correspondence in order to understand its role in diplomacy and to reintegrate it into its broader Anglo-Scottish diplomatic context. In doing so it explores the idea of the existence of a multilayered approach to diplomatic relations during the Elizabethan period, which enabled Elizabeth to manage the difficulties that arose in the Anglo-Scottish relationship.

The thesis discusses the role of the correspondence through four main concerns that occurred from 1585 until Elizabeth's death in 1603. It commences by examining the negotiations for the Treaty of Berwick that occurred in 1585-1586, negotiations that took place within the royal correspondence and through the work of ambassadors. Shortly after the treaty's conclusion the discovery of Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, involvement in the Babington plot sparked a diplomatic storm that involved not only the various threads of Anglo-Scottish diplomatic relations but also pressure from France. Diplomatic relations were only restored shortly before the Spanish Armada but were immediately placed under significant strain by the uncovering of the Brig o' Dee Affair and the Spanish Blanks plot in Scotland. A situation made worse by James' appeared inaction against his Catholic nobility. This led to one of the most diplomatically difficult periods of the correspondence and alliance that lasted from 1588 until 1595. From 1595 the Anglo-Scottish relationship calmed, although this does not mean that it became insignificant. During this period James became highly anxious in regards to his right to succeed Elizabeth. As a result he became somewhat obsessed with the seemingly minor issue of Valentine Thomas, a criminal who implicated James in an assassination plot against Elizabeth.

In addition to these four broad points this thesis will also analyse other themes and concerns that arose within the correspondence. These include such concerns as the problem of rumours in diplomatic relations, the rhetorical trope of innocence, which is used on several occasions by the monarchs, and the mutually shared concept of royal honour that was fundamental to both Elizabeth and to James.

This thesis seeks to place the correspondence of Queen Elizabeth and King James back into its original context of Anglo-Scottish diplomacy and in so doing demonstrate that Elizabethan England possessed a multilayered approach to diplomacy.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material, which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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- Border Papers, 1* Bain, Joseph ed. *Calendar of Letters and Papers Relating to the Affairs of the Borders of England and Scotland*. Vol. 1. Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1894.
- Border Papers, 2* Bain, Joseph ed. *Calendar of Letters and Papers Relating to the Affairs of the Borders of England and Scotland*. Vol. 2. Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1896.

- CSPScots, 7* *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547-1603*. Ed. William K. Boyd. Vol. 7: 1584-1585. Edinburgh, Scotland: H.M. General Register House, 1914.
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- Salisbury, 3* Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury, Preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire*, Vol. 3: 1583-1589. Edited by S. R. Scargill-Bird. London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1889.
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