



THINKER IN BOXES

KING JAMES VI AND I

Team: Edinburgh Midges

Position: Forward short leg

Status: Not buried in Grant's Tomb

I don't claim to be an expert on kings or anything, and many of my students debate my claim to any expertise at all, but I have yet to hear a good explanation for how good old King James VI (1566–1625) could also be King James I. I suspect that time travel is involved. You see, he started out as King James VI, then he became King James I, but in both Roman numerals and the alphabet, I comes well before VI, so he must have traveled back in time or something to go from VI to I. Also, if he was both James I and James VI, that would make him his own great-great-grandfather, but that's what you get when amateurs mess with time travel. Putting aside James's failure to practice proper paradox prevention prophylaxis procedures, King James VI and I deserves a notable place in my executive chapter as a king who reflected upon and wrote about the role of the monarch.

The True Lawe of Free Monarchies^a and *Basilikon Doron*^b provide two very interesting insights into monarchy and the role of the executive. In terms of political theory, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, also known as *The Reciprocal and Mutuall Dutie Betwixt a Free King and His Naturall Subjects*, is a key text on the subject of the executive role in government. It is notable in that it sets out the roles of the king and the subject as reciprocal and mutual responsibilities, while the argument itself is clearly a treatise asserting the divine right of the English king.

Basilikon Doron, also called *His Majesties Instrctions to His Dearest Sonne, Henry the Prince*, was intended as, quite literally, a handbook for his heir. James I was not known as a great king of England, and his spelling seems suspect to me, but he did have a reputation as a studious man and a moderately accomplished writer. Never intended for the public—in fact, even when it was published, only seven copies were made—*Basilikon Doron* is notable for the frankness of the discussion, particularly when it comes to the king's role as both monarch and head of the Church of England.

The truly interesting thing about the writings of King James is that the combination of these two books provides insights into both a philosophical understanding of the executive and the practical concerns of a ruling monarch.

^a King James I, *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies* (Edinburgh, 1598).

^b King James I, *Basilikon Doron* (Edinburgh, 1599).