

“INNUMERABLE OTHERS”:

REASSESSING KING JAMES VI/I'S SCANDINAVIAN SOJOURN¹

■ JOHN F.L. ROSS

Questions perennially shroud the wedding in 1589 of Anna, princess of Denmark, and King James VI of Scotland. Less a single event than a protracted odyssey, it was marred by the unexpected and the dramatic: plan reversals, venue changes, and extraneous incidents (unseasonal storms, freak fatalities) that were regarded even at the time as deeply portentous. In its wake came witchcraft trials, death sentences and damaged official reputations in both countries² – and in time, a marriage that lost its bearings amidst strife and disillusion. At its outset lay a confluence of actions that similarly defy simple explanation: James's sudden, late-night sailing to meet Anna, who was waylaid in Norway; their wedding in Oslo a month later; and his overwintering in Scandinavia.

Analysts have long puzzled over James's precipitate actions. The question of motive lingers without apparent resolution. Here is a case of a young Scottish king, whose position at home (much less his future on the English throne as Elizabeth I's eventual successor) was potentially threatened by treasonous intrigues,³ who suddenly sets off across treacherous seas with five stocked ships

-
- 1 The author thanks the editors and two anonymous referees for insightful comments on an earlier draft.
 - 2 Prosecution of the 'North Berwick coven' implicated Scotland's fifth Earl of Bothwell for attempted murder. Renewed witch hunts commenced in 1597 and periodically resurfaced for decades. Proximate Danish trials drew in Danish Admiral Peder Munk and Christopher Valkendorf. Thomas Riis: *Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot: Scottish-Danish Relations, c. 1450-1707 (I)*, Odense: Odense University Press 1988, pp. 266-69.
 - 3 The extent of James's vulnerability is disputed. William Patterson: *King James VI and the Reunion of Christendom*, Cambridge: CUP 1997, pp. 13-14, points to furtive communications by Catholic-sympathizing Scottish nobles with King Philip II, courting a counter-Protestant, Spanish-led incursion well after the Armada's defeat in August 1588. Some general studies concur (e.g. P. Hume Brown: *A Short History of Scotland*, new ed. by Henry W. Meikle, Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd 1951, p. 217), holding he was "unable to keep order in the land". Warnings from Queen Elizabeth about plots may corroborate such views, as does James's banning of public demonstrations during his journey. Others dispute this, e.g. Caroline Bingham: *James I of England*, London: Weidenfeld 1981, p. 113. Subsequent quiescence suggests *post-hoc* evidence of wider stability; see Jennifer M. Brown: "Scottish Politics 1567-1625", in Alan G.R. Smith (ed.): *The Reign of James VI and I*, London: Macmillan 1973, p. 26.

to the bleakness of wintertime Norway,⁴ evidently for the sole purpose of greeting a young woman who, at any rate, would soon enough be coming to him. The voyage was physically risky, costly, hastily arranged, politically questionable and indeed unnecessary, given that the two had recently been married by proxy and were already formally united.

In fact, the journey presents a three-part puzzle: why James decided to go (rather than send Maitland of Thirlestane, his chancellor, as per the stated plan); what his precise purpose was (to ‘fetch’ Anna for their delayed Scottish wedding, or to marry *in situ*?); and why he readily scuttled the planned return to Scotland. Among other things, the episode appears seriously out of character. James was known for his retiring disposition, his excessive caution, his long-term strategizing, and his weakness for young men,⁵ a tendency apparently sustained from afar even during his post-wedding Danish layover.⁶ Yet his trip bears the hallmarks of conviction, resolution, even recklessness, including two serious breaches of royal protocol (landing unannounced on another sovereign’s territory, later trying to cross another’s without prior assent). His actions along the way speak further of unusual boldness, almost as if another person were involved.

Explanations range widely, but tend to link James’s trip with an attempted resolution of a personal crisis. Permutations on this theme include escape from suffocating court pressures, fears for the safety of his missing bride, and an urge to end the rumor-mongering about his sexual orientation and ability, or willingness, to sire a legitimate heir. Another relates to family heritage, with James, ever attendant to Stuart lore, emulating his grandfather, James V, who had sailed to France as a youngster to wed a foreign bride (Madeleine de Valois).⁷ Still another theory is that James felt honor-bound to act, having earlier pledged to the Scottish nobles he would marry within the year (1589) and thus end the tiresome, “will he or won’t he” marital speculation.

David Stevenson, author of the sole English-language monograph covering the wedding’s circumstances – but consciously sidestepping the Scandinavian con-

4 The initial message reaching James pronounced Norway, where Anna was stranded, as “a miserable place for victual or any good thing”; Ethel C. Williams: *Anne of Denmark*, London: Longman 1970, p. 18. His Norwegian experience included a frostbitten right index finger.

5 Philip Edwards: *The Making of the Modern English State, 1460-1660*, London: Palgrave 2000, p. 256; also Conrad Russell: *The Crisis of Parliaments: English History 1509-1660*, London: OUP 1977, p. 258.

6 In March 1590 James was busying himself with the question of (male) courtier access to his chambers; Amy L. Juhala: “Shifts and Continuities in the Scottish Royal Court, 1580-1603”, in David J. Parkinson (ed.): *James VI and I, Literature and Scotland: Tides of Change, 1567-1625*, Leuven: Peeters 2013, p. 11.

7 These notions are broached respectively in Bingham: *James I*, pp. 118, 145; Williams: *Anne of Denmark*, p. 18; Alan Stewart: *The Cradle King: A Life of James VI and I*, London: Chatto and Windus, p. 111; and Gordon Donaldson: *A Northern Commonwealth: Scotland and Norway*, Edinburgh: Saltire 1990, p. 131.

text – holds it was “an irrational obsession (otherwise known as love) which led him to so dangerous an act ... a folly explicable only by royal infatuation”.⁸ James biographer Alan Stewart attributes the king’s “fear of ridicule” stemming from his procrastination and cold feet.⁹ James himself gave colorful credence to this view, wishing “... that I be not unjustly slandered as an irresolute ass who can do nothing of himself”.¹⁰

The common denominator suggests actions in the heat of the moment, a hasty crisis response to unexpected circumstances. There is indeed ample evidence of emotionally driven, reactive behavior, including pre-departure accounts of an agitated king, penning overwrought love-poems¹¹ while keeping vigil, who “could neither sleep nor rest” due to acute anxiety.¹² The resulting trip is frequently characterized as odd or even bizarre,¹³ especially given his longstanding open doubts about marrying at all, and seen against the misogynistic elements later coloring his written works *Daemologia* and, more openly, *Basilicon Doron*.

While the crisis-driven narrative may ring true, it nonetheless lacks the full ring of truth. Consigning the episode as exceptional or one-off behavior raises four problems. First, it makes James’s actions hard to measure against his overall life and reign, and does little to assess its relevance. This is a potentially serious problem given that this proved to be his one and only foreign trip (excluding England) in a reign spanning more than half a century, and moreover entailed a substantial, six-month chunk of time, which alone marks it out for scrutiny. It can also leave an erroneous impression of James as a lost and love-struck adolescent, rather than the shrewd sovereign of two decades’ standing he actually was.

Second, it presents a convenient artificiality that is hard to square with James the committed divine-righter, for whom the personal and professional were inextricably linked. The marriage itself was a state matter no less than a private one, and a negotiated affair to boot. Third, it leaves aside possible motivating factors of a proactive or forward-looking nature. And fourth, it underplays circumstances obtaining in the late 1580s, a transitional time for Scotland as well as

8 David Stevenson: *Scotland's Last Royal Wedding: The Marriage of James VI and Anne of Denmark*, Edinburgh: John Donald 1997, p. 28.

9 Stewart: *The Cradle King*, p. 111. In the backdrop was a childless Virgin Queen in London.

10 G.P.V. Akrigg (ed.): *Letters of King James VI and I*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1984, p. 100.

11 James’s ‘Anna sonnets’, the first of the *Amatoria*, have been characterized as “ostensibly nuptial sonnets [that] allegorize or ‘fabularize’ the sovereign voyage” and having an ‘interpretive evasiveness’; see Sarah Dunningham: *Eros and Poetry in the Courts of Mary Queen of Scots and James VI*, London: Palgrave Macmillan 2002, pp. 83, 79.

12 James Melville: *Memoirs*, Edinburgh 1752, p. 359.

13 Simon Adams twice refers to the trip as “bizarre” (“David Stevenson’s *Scotland's Last Royal Wedding*”, *Innis Review* 49, 1997, p. 91) as does Stevenson (p. viii). Reviewing the same text, Alasdair MacDonald calls the May 1590 coronation “a bizarre ceremony” (*Tijdschrift voor Skandinavistiek*, 1998, p. 112).

James, with 1589 frequently pinpointed as a watershed year both in foreign and domestic policy. The absent-bride crisis of October 1589 poses a necessary but not sufficient condition for his going. A long-missing ingredient is a sense of wider context, while the notion that James's journey may have had political or policy significance, or such factors of possible causation, is infrequently addressed.

This article posits the trip as a window onto King James's rule, priorities and character, and argues that complex considerations touching on matters of state – domestic politics (defined broadly to cover England), trade issues and foreign policy, all with significant economic undercurrents – need factoring into the equation. Only by reconciling James VI the monarch with James the man can we see his actions as potentially revealing, rather than brushed away as inconveniently aberrant. These wider elements might point to ways out of the intellectual cul-de-sac to which this episode has long and unfortunately been consigned by dint of its seeming strangeness.

James's journey into the heart of Scandinavia in the heart of winter – a sail to Norway, overland to Oslo, then south through Bohuslän, across a geopolitically sensitive east-west Swedish corridor,¹⁴ and over the Øresund to Denmark – mixed the personal elements of a wedding journey with an attempted rebooting of his diplomatic presence on the European stage. Up until then his focus was primarily domestic. Several long-vexed issues – notably his relations with Elizabeth I, his ecumenical-cum-power struggles with the Kirk and the marital decision itself – had seen significant breakthroughs in the months just prior to his going. Much has been made of James's cultural diplomacy in Denmark in spring 1590, notably calls on Tycho Brahe on Hven and Niels Hemmingsen at Roskilde. Yet analysts have overlooked the remarkable congruence of his six-week stay at Helsingør (Elsinore), a strategic focal point for Baltic trade and the Scottish economy, and generally downplay the trip's economic underpinnings – notwithstanding the impoverishment that drove so much of his overall decision making.

While the scope of this article is wide, its aims are limited. Drawing primarily on Scottish sources, it broaches questions left hanging by the plausibility gap and extends an exploratory finger at the broader political constellation in ways that may help illuminate the episode and the decisions involved. Insofar as the whole

14 Bohuslän was Norwegian after the Kalmar Union's breakup in 1503. Amidst the subsequent era of intra-regional rivalry, geopolitical repositioning and monarchical whim, Sweden maintained a "narrow strip of land between the Danish and Norwegian coastal provinces" that was "her only contact with the North Sea" (Ingvar Andersson: *A History of Sweden*, trans. Caroline Hannay, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1956, pp. 143-46, 161). This corridor was jealously guarded and often disputed. At least twice – in 1570 through the Treaty of Stettin, and in the 1612 Peace of Knäred – Sweden had to pay Denmark heavily to redeem the sea outlet and fortifications at Älvsborg, near Gothenburg. Along with Skåne (including Halland and Blekinge), Bornholm and Trøndelag, Bohuslän was later (1658) ceded to Sweden via the Roskilde Treaty.

affair has drawn sparse Scandinavian interest, European historians might find fruitful elements looking through the opposite lens. For the marriage was a focal point of a broader *rapprochement* linking the Scottish and Danish courts, a match that both, for quite separate reasons, had actively sought.

More specifically, it posits the trip as a reputation-building exercise: a calculated risk serious enough to be worth taking only if it held out the prospect of substantial and long-term political and status enhancement, for James personally, his court, and Scotland. And for this its particular timing becomes a critical consideration. Developments in 1588-89 had established for him a stronger, more independent base, from which a bold move of some kind had suddenly become more possible, more likely, more appealing and potentially more impactful than perhaps at any other time in his Scottish reign.

A central but rarely posed question is whether James went with the aim of ushering Anna back to wed in Scotland (the ‘fetch’ hypothesis) as long planned, or went with the expectation of marrying abroad. Analysts tend, unhelpfully, to muddle the distinction.¹⁵ But if, as is contended here, the latter was the case – that he traveled intending to marry and linger abroad, in apparent contravention of his recent dowry agreement with the Danish crown¹⁶ – then we must assume his trip involved an element of strategizing, forward planning and diplomatic sleight of hand. This reinforces the need to survey wider elements bearing on the role and person of James, particularly those that suggested opportunities, alongside the obvious risks, in setting out blindly to the wintry north.

MYSTERY ON PAPER

Part of the trip’s lingering mystery derives from James’s personal testament, ostensibly setting out his rationale for going.¹⁷ The lengthy letter, which he placed in the Privy Council Registry to be unveiled after his departure, appears soul-baring in its honesty, but also curiously incomplete. It strikes a defiant yet poignant note, underscoring personal travails like chronic solitude, his lack of a partner and a desire to silence his critics, without so much as mentioning Anna or love – notwithstanding the wistful letters and love-poems he was dashing off to her in

15 Meikle, for example, says James “went to rendezvous with his bride” (“A Meddlesome Princess: Anne of Denmark in Scottish Court Politics, 1589-1603”, in Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (ed.): *The Reign of James VI*, East Linton: Tuckwell Press 2000, p. 128), Caroline Bingham that he went “to bring her home” (*The Stewart Kingdom of Scotland 1371-1603*, London 1974), p. 245, and Roger Mason that he went to “fetch his bride in person” (“Renaissance and Reformation”, in Jenny Wormold (ed.): *Scotland: A History*, Oxford: OUP, 2005, p. 140).

16 Under the dowry terms the Danes were responsible for the civil, proxy ceremony while the Scots would handle the subsequent religious service, presumably on home soil.

17 Akrigg (ed.): *Letters*, pp. 97-100.

those same weeks.¹⁸ “The reasons were that I was alone, without father or mother, brother or sister”, he wrote. “My nakedness made me weak and my enemies strong”. The intent to elicit public sympathy while diverting criticism was plain.

More specifically to our purposes, his ‘confessional’ also alluded to “these reasons and innumerable others, hourly objected”, factors pressing on him that he (typically) left unexplained. Further, it set out a trip timetable that was cryptically nuanced and which he later flouted,¹⁹ and it referred to his decision to “hasten the treaty of my marriage”, without specifying which one he meant (proxy or religious) – a notable lapse, given that he was then between the two events. He also claimed that his going was a sudden, impetuous decision (“I, upon the instant, yea very moment, resolved”) even while leaving detailed instructions for running Scotland in his absence.²⁰ Despite feverish speculation beforehand, he never fully revealed his intentions for a foreign wedding, much less a five-month European honeymoon.²¹ Yet that is what happened, so he evidently changed his mind at some point (and subsequently that of Anna and her handlers). It behooves us to ask why, considering the massive royal wedding then being actively orchestrated – and heavily taxed – for Edinburgh,²² and given his halfway, “formally but not fully married” status as of August 1589.

He also acknowledged that his trip went against character (“I am known ... not to be intemperately rash”). It thus requires a leap of logic to accept that his actions – the surreptitious preparations, the late-night departure, the shotgun wedding in remote foreign territory – reflected spontaneous choices and ‘snap decisions’. Too much remains unexplained by such alleged dramatics; too much was at stake. At the time of going he was not just 23 – already rather ripe for royal betrothals – but (in Akrigg’s phrase) an ‘old young man’²³ and crowned head of an unruly and impoverished kingdom; no rowdy princeling on gap year he.

His trip undoubtedly reflected a confluence of factors befitting a complex character. James VI/I has been called “one of the most complicated neurotics ever

18 The best-known being “A complaint against the contrary Wyndes that hindered the Queene to com to Scotland from Denmarke”, in Neil Rhodes, Jennifer Richards and Joseph Marshall (ed.): *King James VI and I: Selected Writings*, Archgate: Aldershot 2003, pp. 121-22.

19 His trip “shall be, God willing, within the space of 20 days, wind and weather serving”, two caveats adroitly distilled into one phrase.

20 Akrigg (ed.): *Letters*, p. 98. The Duke of Lennox was to run the Privy Council, with Bothwell seconded and Robert Bruce, a Kirk notable, as overseer. Tertiary roles were also specified.

21 James apparently informed the Privy Council on 17 October, two days before his planned 19 October departure that was delayed for three days by storms; Stevenson: *Scotland’s Last*, p. 30.

22 Michael Lynch: “Court Ceremony and Ritual During the Personal Reign of James VI”, in Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (ed.): *The Reign of James VI*, East Linton: Tuckwell Press 2000, p. 88; Clara and Hardy Steeholm: *James I of England: The Wisest Fool in Christendom*, London: Michael Joseph 1938, pp. 115-16.

23 Akrigg (ed): *Letters*, p. 8.

to sit on the English or Scottish thrones” and “one of the most secret princes of the world”.²⁴ Prominent writers have underscored the paradox of his birth; even in death he was cryptic.²⁵ His hatred of violence and love of the hunt is one of many apparent contradictions. He was also a prolifically agile writer, gifted linguist and occasional poet, arguably the most literate of all British monarchs, a Shakespearean contemporary who presided over the immense King James Bible project.²⁶ A subtle and at times coldly strategic thinker whose overweening ambition was the English throne, he was eminently capable of juggling multiple concerns and obligations. He also had a record of leaving his subjects guessing his motives.²⁷ Sheer intellectual curiosity, an abundant and lifelong Jamesian trait, is oddly absent from most assessments of his journey.

James was scarcely a naïf. Crowned at 13 months, he had witnessed ceaseless royal intrigue including, at five, the murder of his grandfather the Earl of Lennox, later escaping a lengthy kidnapping ordeal (the Ruthven raids). He had been brought up, isolated in Stirling Castle, to be dubious of women as “a dangerous and distrustful phenomenon”.²⁸ James (along with many others) evidently regarded the question of an heir from a fundamentally political point of view, as a link in his wider calculations.²⁹ Fast-spreading but ultimately false rumors, in March 1590, of an Anna pregnancy well indicated the wider interest (and accompanying pressures) attaching to this question.³⁰ Whatever his convoluted personal motivations, these need to be slotted into the broader narrative of his reign.

Despite a fount of Stuart-age studies, multiple lacunae continue to mark research into the Jacobean period. Goodare and Lynch cite a “black hole in our knowledge” of James’s middle Scottish phase, notably 1585-89.³¹ Post-1560 Scottish foreign policy has drawn scant attention despite the looming importance of the English accession.³² Anna’s role is particularly neglected,³³ with sourcing often reliant on Ethel Williams’s 1970 biography. Assessments have been marred by

24 Akrigg: “Introduction”, p. 3; Bingham: *James VI*, p. 152.

25 George Trevelyan called James “the comic offspring of [a] tragic union” (*A Shortened History of England*, London: Pelican 1970, pp. 277-78. A 19th century search for his Westminster Abbey grave, which had gone oddly unrecorded, found it in the tomb of Henry VII (Antonia Fraser: *Mary, Queen of Scots*, London: Panther 1971, p. 650).

26 Rhodes et. al.: “Introduction”, pp. 1-4.

27 Jane E.A. Dawson: *Scotland Re-Formed, 1488-1587*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 2007.

28 Stevenson: *Scotland’s Last*, p. 13.

29 James saw a dynastic heir as “a move on the chessboard of politics” (David Mathew: *James I*, London: Eyre & Spottiswoode 1967, p. 44).

30 Stewart: *The Cradle King*, p. 117.

31 Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch: “James VI: Universal King?”, in Goodare and Lynch (ed.): *The Reign of James VI*, East Linton: Tuckwell 2000, pp. 10-11.

32 Keith Brown: “Early Modern Scottish History: A Survey”, *The Scottish Historical Review* suppl. 234, 2013, pp. 7, 9-10, 23.

33 Meikle: “A Meddlesome”, p. 126.

innuendo or invective ('frivolous' and even 'stupid' have been employed by mainstream historians), while Anna's patronage of the arts is often passed off as infatuation with dancing and jewelry.³⁴ Research by Maureen Meikle has assigned Anna a significant if meddling role in Scottish court politics,³⁵ and her headstrong nature was underscored later (ca. 1599) by her conversion to Catholicism. Her overall impact remains contentious but far from negligible.

The wedding(s) itself has drawn "surprisingly little interest" from biographers,³⁶ flummoxed perhaps by the fragmentary record and the story's inherent oddity. The event has left a faint and occasionally errant footprint in histories of Oslo and Norway.³⁷ Stephenson's monograph, featuring Peter Graves's translation of a contemporaneous Danish account that was first published in 1852,³⁸ resolved some contentious details, such as the ceremony's location³⁹ and relevant dates.⁴⁰ It did less to counter a certain prejudicial overhang in British historiography, including erroneous impressions of a dissolute Danish royal family rather than the powerfully competent purveyors of great-power politics who wielded political primacy in Scandinavia.⁴¹ James's own correspondence can leave an impression of a sybaritic, alcohol-besotted interlude, rather than one that stood to strengthen his, and Scotland's, cultural, dynastic, and potentially economic and political standing. Another reason for the analytical caution, or subject-avoid-

34 Akrigg: "Introduction", p. 19; Alan G.R. Smith: *The Reign of James VI and I*, London: Macmillan 1973, p. 3; Meikle: 'A Meddlesome', pp. 126-7. Through patronage of Inigo Jones, an impresario with links in both countries, Anne introduced the allegorical, Jacobean masque-based Italian performance art into court life; Lawrence Stone: *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641*, Oxford: Clarendon 1965, p. 709.

35 Meikle: "A Meddlesome", pp. 126-140.

36 Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*, p. vii.

37 An otherwise authoritative compendium dates the wedding 19 November and gives Anna's original departure city as Oslo not Copenhagen; N.P. Thuesen: *Historien om Oslo: år for år*, Oslo 2010, p. 93. The 15-volume *Norges Historie* (Bind 6 av Rolf Fladby, Oslo: J.W. Cappelens Forlag 1977, p. 315) more correctly calls it the (royal) marriage of Norway's century.

38 "The Danish Account of the Marriage", translated by Peter Graves, in Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*, pp. 79-122. According to Stevenson, the Danish account was found in the 18th century in Oslo and published by P.A. Munch in 1852, based on an 18th century copy in Ledreborg.

39 Many sources (Bryan Bevan: *King James VI and I*. London: Rubicon Press 1996, p. 42; Williams: *Anne of Denmark*, p. 18; Bingham: *James VI*, pp. 121-22) have put the venue as St. Halvard's Cathedral, long connected by walkway to the actual venue, the Old Bishop's Palace ('Kristen Mule's House', later the Ladegård).

40 In the late 16th and early 17th centuries Britain adhered to the Julian calendar, while most of Europe had switched to the Gregorian, ten days ahead. Patterson: *King James VI*, p. xv.

41 Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*, p. 17, cites the common (non-Danish) view that heavy drink shortened the life of Anna's father, King Frederick II. Recent research however proposes lung ailments as the main factor behind James's father-in-law's death in 1588 (c.f. Poul Grønder-Hansen: *Frederik II: Danmarks Renæssancekonger*, Copenhagen: Gyldendal 2013, 301-04). The author is indebted to both reviewers on this point. James himself noted, in a letter (19 Feb.) to Bruce, the need "to keep decorum to, coming out of so drinking a country as this" (Akrigg (ed.); *Letters*, p. 104).

ance, may be that the trip's readily romanticized elements fit awkwardly with the sober preoccupations of social science.

THE BACKGROUND

The James-Anna union slots into an Anglo-Nordic nexus with deep roots in early Norse raids, the *Danelag* and King Cnut. These were later strengthened by instruments of statecraft as well as through organic ties of migratory settlement and trade. No less than five different figures from the 13th to 18th centuries attained dynastic supremacy in royal houses across the North Sea.⁴² England's Stuart Age, which transplanted Scottish royalty to London, united the two crowns and gave birth to Britain, was actually bookended by Danish royal consorts.⁴³ Each contained elements of political association and broached lingering territorial issues related to the Shetlands and Orkneys island groups, lost to Scotland in 1469 via an unredeemed dowry.⁴⁴ Yet all yielded little of substance, apart from highlighting ancestral ties.⁴⁵

The marriage was nearly a decade in the making, with feelers put out as early as 1582. A renewed Danish overture to Scotland, in 1585, hinged partly on winning back the Shetlands and Orkneys, though some doubt this was King Frederick's sole purpose.⁴⁶ Another latent Danish aim may have been to strengthen influence in England – a far bigger prize – by way of James and Scotland. Intense 16th century rivalries with Sweden, punctuated by the bloody Northern Seven Years' War (1563-70), also strongly suggest intra-Scandinavian rivalry as a key – particularly as Swedish King Erik XIV, in mid-century, had assiduously courted England's Elizabeth I for marriage. An efficient Danish diplomatic network would certainly have known of James's position as her putative successor. Both sides recognized the value of a Protestant alliance, even though Norway-Denmark's Reformation was both earlier (1537 vs. 1560) and more decisive than in Britain.⁴⁷

42 Anna's predecessors included Margaret of Scotland, who married Erik II, king of Norway, in 1281 to patch up Scots-Norwegian relations; their daughter Margaret, "Maid of Norway", presumptive queen of Scotland only to die, aged seven, while en route; and Margaret of Denmark, who married James III and became queen of Scotland in 1469.

43 Anna became England's queen consort in 1603, while a century later another Queen Anne, married to Jørgen (George) of Denmark, ushered in the Hanoverian line.

44 In 1468 Denmark's King Christian I pledged the Orkneys as dowry security for his daughter Margaret. As it was never paid the islands were thus 'pawned' to Scotland, and quickly assimilated; See W.P.I. Thomson: *The New History of Orkney*, Edinburgh: Birlin 2008, p. 189. The Scots hoped for acknowledgement of the status quo, the Danes latching onto hopes of their redemption. For background see I. Steinar: "The Scottish-Norwegian Border in the Middle Ages", in A. Wolf (ed.): *Scandinavia-Scotland-Twenty Years After*, St Andrews 2009, p. 22.

45 Anna's coronation processional juxtaposed images of heraldry, "tracing the consanguinity" of the two royal houses since Margaret and James III in 1469; Lynch: "Court Ceremony", pp. 86-7.

46 Adams: "David Stevenson's", p. 91.

47 In Britain the 'Long Reformation' suggested bottom-up as well as top-down processes; Karen Bowie: "Cultural, British and Global Themes in the History of Early Medieval Scotland", *The Scottish Historical Review* suppl. no. 234, 2013, p. 40.

Early Scottish overtures to Spain and, subsequently, to Huguenot France and Catherine, daughter of Henry II of Navarre (and Elizabeth I's preferred solution) were cast aside in favor of Lutheran Denmark. The Danes also offered physical proximity, substantial north European influence,⁴⁸ and a significant if imprecise source of outside wealth. Briefly, it also offered choice and fecundity; Anna and her sister Elisabeth were both, unlike Catherine, younger than James.

Only in early 1589 did James feel compelled to decide – after, it is said, 15 days of seclusion and prayer. A shadowy figure and probable Danish spy, William Stewart, instrumentally secured the decision. Even then, preparations dragged. In mid-June a convoy, led by George Keith, the fifth Earl Marischal, finally left for Copenhagen to negotiate the marriage terms. The possibility of failure, and uncertainty over Queen Elizabeth's attitude, could explain why James continued to cultivate the Navarre option until late in the day.

The negotiations commenced with extravagant Scottish demands that were immediately whittled down. These included a dowry of 250,000 daler; reciprocal freedoms for Scots in Denmark and vice versa; exemption from Danish customs duties by Scots trading ships; standing promises of military aid to Scotland if circumstances required (at Danish expense); renunciation of claims over the Orkneys while either king was alive; and a mutual promise of anti-Catholic alliance should either country be threatened.⁴⁹ Some of this built on previous mutually agreed rights in trade and asylum.

The Danes' counteroffer was just 75,000 daler⁵⁰ and broader political overtures were cut off citing the ongoing regency and matters "customary since ancient times". In return they requested properties worth double the dowry's valuation (thus 150,000 daler), along with rights of religious leeway and nullification.⁵¹ By August "a marriage has been arranged" in broad conformity with Danish wishes. At the Kronborg ceremony Marischal, representing James, presented Anna with jewels and symbolically entered the bed-chamber. The property agreement, giving her Linlithgow palace, Falkland castle, and one-third of his Scottish properties, however remained a point of contention (as James resisted putting a monetary amount on the last-mentioned), and in Oslo he was also to stump up an additional 'morning gift', the Lordship of Dunfermline, partly in response to Danish insistence that the property matter be clarified in Norway.⁵²

48 Danish territory then included Norway, southern Sweden (excepting the corridor) and northern Germany. On the latter's importance, see Patterson: *King James VI*, p. 90.

49 "The Danish", pp. 79-80.

50 This was equivalent to 100,000 guilder or a barrel of gold.

51 "The Danish", pp. 82-3.

52 Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*, p. 37; R.S. Brydon: *The Finances of James VI, 1567-1603*, University of Edinburgh, PhD Dissertation, 1925, p. 60.

THE TRIP IN BRIEF

The trip's outline has been described elsewhere.⁵³ Anna, departing on 5 September aboard the *Gideon*, ran into unseasonable storms. Springing leaks, the 16-ship convoy was blown back, beached at Gammel Sellohe in Norway, patched up and tried again. Several ships (including hers) sprang more leaks, and the effort was abandoned at Flekkerø around 1 October. A shaken Anna was advised to return to Denmark, by land. Meanwhile James got word of her travails while at Craigmillar Castle, penned agonized verse and called for a public fast for her safe deliverance. Around 10 October he received definite word that she was in Norway. His chancellor, Maitland, was engaged to go intercept them. James at some point decided (or was convinced) to go along, leaving his plans vague, and the flotilla left late on 22 October.⁵⁴

He landed (29 October)⁵⁵ in Flekkerø, overnighing at the same farmhouse where Anna had stayed a month earlier. His party traveled to Oslo via Tønsberg, covering 200 miles (ca. 300 kilometers) in two weeks. The two finally met on 19 November at the Old Bishop's Palace, James marching in with muddy boots and attempting to kiss Anna in the Scottish way. After initial confusion they apparently bonded, held a longer session the following day, and arranged a wedding for the 23rd in the same venue. A simple service, in French, was led by Scots chaplain David Lindsay, and after a modest reception (probably at Akershus fortress, 2 km across Bjørvik fjord), the couple remained in Oslo for a month.

The original plan had James returning forthwith to Scotland. Two things appear to have changed his mind: Anna's traumatic earlier voyage and the caution of advisors in both courts. By now if not before, James was determined to stay on.⁵⁶ Meanwhile Queen Sophia had proffered an invitation, and on 22 December the couple left for Denmark. A series of delays, due to weather and Anna's illness, were complicated by miscommunications that left Sweden's King Johan III uninformed about their plan to cross the Swedish corridor. James personally broke the week-long impasse by dispatching an envoy, Captain Murray, to obtain safe passage, averting a diplomatic row.⁵⁷ They arrived, on 21 January to a blaze of fanfare, in Helsingør, where they were based until early March. Travels ultimately took them to Copenhagen. In late April they attended the marriage of Elisabeth, Anna's sister, to the Duke of Brunswick before setting sail, meeting storms of less-

53 Sources include Bingham: *James VI*, pp. 112-26; Williams: *Anne of Denmark*, pp. 11-25; Antonia Fraser: *King James VI of Scotland, I of England*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1974, pp. 51-5; Steeholm: *James I*, pp. 104-31; Stewart: *The Cradle King*, pp. 105-23; Akrigg (ed.): *Letters*, pp. 94-102; and Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*; "The Danish", pp. 86-99.

54 "Little by little ... his Majesty was moved to take the voyage himself"; Melville: *Memoirs*, p. 361.

55 "The Danish" (p. 90) indicates 3 November.

56 Melville's account says "he could not be persuaded to return to Scotland" (*Memoirs*, p. 362).

57 Mentioned briefly in the *Danish Account* (p. 97), the Bohus incident is discussed in Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*, pp. 41-3.

er intensity, arriving with due pomp in Scotland, where an elaborate coronation took place on 17 May.

A DOMESTIC TURNING POINT

James was long preoccupied with his position at home. Shoring it up was a delicate, continual process complicated by his youth, absence of a nuclear family and his shaky political relations, not just across the border with Elizabeth I but with power rivals in the Kirk – some of whom presumed to represent highest temporal authority – and the gentrified, noisily assertive Scottish nobility. The four-estate Parliament was an active deliberative body and decidedly no direct instrument of the crown.⁵⁸

Amidst this uncertain matrix came a breakthrough via an alliance with Presbyterians in 1589, which addressed his reign's most intractable political problem and turned them, especially the poet Andrew Melville, from opposition to establishment figures.⁵⁹ This agreement bolstered a tenuous peace James had managed, against great odds, by the late 1580s,⁶⁰ although it is sometimes interpreted narrowly as reduced tensions.⁶¹ As a watershed it remains tarnished by its temporariness and abrupt termination in 1596. James nonetheless had proved skillful and "more and more in control of his turbulent kingdom".⁶² The stumbling-block posed by his long-unresolved marital status, in contrast, required decisiveness of a personal nature.

A related process was the cultural awakening and post-Reformation nation-building then underway.⁶³ This process was heralded in a seminal 1582 text (*Rerum Scoticarum Historia*) by George Buchanan, James's influential first tutor (and proponent of elective monarchy). Radical politics aside, this work came to signify a 'self-fashioning' for Scotland while serving up cultural reassurance for a country and people facing an uncertain, post-Elizabethan future.⁶⁴ This cultural flowering, embracing poetry, art and mapmaking, had heady, messianic overtones

58 Alan R. MacDonald: "Deliberative Processes in Parliament c. 1567-1639: Multicameralism and the Lords of the Articles", *The Scottish Historical Review* 131, 2002, p. 45.

59 Paul J. McGinnis and Arthur H. Williamson: "Politics, Prophecy, Poetry: The Melvillian Moment, 1589-96, and its Aftermath", *The Scottish Historical Review* 227, 2010, p. 11.

60 "James... made a unique contribution to the growth of order"; Gordon Donaldson: *Scotland: The Shaping of a Nation*, Newton Abbot: David and Charles 1980, p. 80.

61 Goodare cites a "temporary political consensus – or perhaps a lull in the intensity of factual conflict [in Scotland]"; "Scottish Politics in the Reign of James VI", in Julian Goodare and Michael Lynch (ed.): *The Reign of James VI*, East Linton: Tuckwell Press 2000, p. 38.

62 Akrigg: "Introduction", p. 8.

63 Scotland's Renaissance "... transformed the manners and mores of the landed elite" through humanist education; Mason: "Renaissance", p. 141.

64 Roger A. Mason: 'Certain Matters Concerning the Realm of Scotland: George Buchanan and the Scottish Self-Fashioning at the Union of the Crowns', *The Scottish Historical Review* 233, 2013, pp. 61-2.

that “fueled hope, expanded vision and made Scotland integral to the crusade for world reform, perhaps its new and decisive launching pad” by decade’s end.⁶⁵ The ecumenical universalism of James’s later worldview found roots in such theoretical agitation.

Cultural self-awareness thus became linked to developments exogenous to the Scottish realm, and was more grounded than fringe notions of a Protestant apocalyptic. Politically, James’s engineered order at home was linked, in one view, to an educational propensity, a pedantic eagerness “to teach his Scottish subjects [and] raise their standards to those of ‘other well governed commonwealths’”.⁶⁶ Joining with the established Danish crown was one obvious manifestation.⁶⁷ James during his trip proved an assiduous student of the Danish monarchy, which he admired for its ability to manage the aristocracy. Earlier correspondence between Buchanan and Brahe (acknowledged by James on his day-trip to Hven)⁶⁸ showed these cultural networks ran far deeper than royal ties alone, and included prominent thinkers like Niels Krag, Peter Young and Nicholaus Theophilus.⁶⁹ Intellectual contact between the two countries peaked during Christian IV’s regency (1588-96).⁷⁰

A third contextual element involved the prospect of union with England, heralded since James IV and Margaret Tudor’s marriage in 1503, but left hanging by Elizabeth’s refusal to name a successor. Since the 1586 Treaty of Berwick, the widespread but unspoken assumption marked James as heir apparent. This remained the case through the traumas that saw Elizabeth condemn and execute Mary Queen of Scots, James’s mother, in early 1587, over his muted protests. James’s path was then clearer yet still narrow, between keeping her confidence and asserting independence. James’s opting for a Danish union, nudged by his court, helped to distance him from Elizabeth without sowing rancor. The marriage deal, to which she latterly assented, potently demonstrated his enhanced sense of autonomy.

THE QUESTION OF FINANCE

The parlous state of court and Scottish finances was an irritating (and partly self-generated) constant in James’s reign, and underlay virtually all his policy initiatives, though it has generated few targeted studies.⁷¹ While often attributed to

65 McGinnis and Williamson: “Politics”, p. 11; Mason: “Certeine Matters”, p. 57.

66 Donaldson: *Scotland*, p. 80.

67 Mason: “Renaissance”, p. 140.

68 Stewart: *The Cradle King*, p. 115. James had broken with Buchanan over divine right.

69 Riis: *Should Auld*, pp. 124-29.

70 Riis: *Should Auld*, p. 137.

71 An exception is S.G.E. Lythe: *The Economy of Scotland in its European Setting, 1550-1625*, Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1960.

Anna, a foreign consort anxious to impress,⁷² it was a preexisting if hard-to-determine reality. Two elements came to characterize it. One was the emergence, under James, of major taxation in peacetime.⁷³ Another was a shaky dependency on Elizabethan goodwill, in the form of payments from London starting in 1586. As Goodare has shown, this was no annual allowance, as commonly assumed, but an intentionally irregular series of payments that accounted for roughly a fifth of James's income.⁷⁴

The pecuniary imperatives of James's six-month trip reflected the fundamentally economic driving force behind the marital agreement itself. In spring 1589 local politics were animated by feared economic consequences if the proposed Danish marriage fell through. A turning point came in late May, via threats from the burghs brought against James's chancellor, Maitland, for allegedly trying to scuttle the Danish marriage.⁷⁵ This event seems to have catalyzed efforts to finalize the union.⁷⁶

The subsequent dowry to-and-fro, negotiated in Copenhagen, laid bare Scotland's poor economic state, where revenue-raising was a chronically tough task.⁷⁷ A convention of Scottish estates in April 1588 had voted a special marriage levy (100,000 pounds), topped up in August 1589 by a 20,000-pound loan from the burghs.⁷⁸ Despite this, wedding preparations were running far behind. James had had to "beg and even threaten the landed men of Scotland to supply victuals and furnishing",⁷⁹ yet supplies were awaiting delivery, while castle upgrading was short of hopes. Queen Elizabeth donated 2,000 pounds' worth of silver – but held back her formal approval of the match until September, when it was a *fait accompli*.

The high spirits briefly sparked by the marital pact, dampened by the wedding disarray, were dashed by late September 1589 as James got word, via Lord Dingwall, of Anna's seaborne dramas. In straitened circumstances, setting off to

72 In the mid-1590s James was forced into an internal audit (by the 'Octavians') which he subsequently undermined; Juhala: "Shifts and Continuities", pp. 10-11.

73 Michael Lynch: *Scotland: A New History*, London: Century 1991, p. 236.

74 Julian Goodare: "James VI's English Subsidy", in J. Goodare and M. Lynch (ed.): *The Reign of James VI*, East Linton: Tuckwell Press 2000), believes the sums were varied to sow uncertainty, enabling Elizabeth "to buy him cheap" (p. 125). James received about 3,000 English pounds per year or roughly 30,000 Scots.

75 That day burgesses and officials cornered Thirlestane in his chambers, apparently threatening death if the Danish marriage was scuttled; Stewart: *The Cradle King*, p. 107; Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*, p. 15. James later also blamed Thirlestane, along with "others of his council as had plainly voted against the said marriage"; James Melville: *Memoirs*, Edinburgh 1752, p. 359.

76 A day before the May 28 riot, Marischal had dismissed his two ships readied to sail for Denmark, ironically just as a Danish envoy was arriving to ascertain the delay. These were hastily reassembled and departed three weeks later.

77 Bowie: "Cultural, British", p. 41.

78 Lynch: "Court Ceremony", pp. 86-7.

79 Meikle: "A Meddlesome", p. 129.

intercept Anna makes far more sense if it accompanied expectations that the actual wedding could take place abroad, and seen done on his own initiative. Stevenson plausibly suggests that James had this eventuality in mind, along with associated cost savings.⁸⁰ Brydon attributed James's anxiety to go and stay away to his being "very clearly ashamed of his poverty";⁸¹ suggesting a touchiness to his penury. By now he would have heard of elaborate preparations in Copenhagen, including 300 seamstresses sewing the wedding gown.

Edinburgh also awaited two other, extravagant related events – a royal entry combined with a coronation, not seen there since 1503, and a prospective baptism of a putative heir to James – both of which would require funding. James had showed himself to be an agile gift-switcher regarding Elizabethan largesse,⁸² but this was a poor substitute for true economies. Those (coronation) plans, it later happened, were delayed, underfunded and criticized by some nobles as chaotic.⁸³

Scotland's domestic economy was marked by structural impediments including sectoral rigidity, rudimentary technology and lack of risk capital – in Trevelyan's arched phrase "a land of feudal anarchy" untouched by Europe's pre-industrial craft guilds.⁸⁴ Heavily rural-based, it was also dominated by monopolies distributed from the crown. Post-civil war, growth remained sluggish, with a growing urban underclass. These socio-economic woes were exacerbated by currency debasements (under royal fiat), and lost income due to secularization of church lands.⁸⁵ Even needed basics like salt were sold abroad. A "serious subsistence crisis" of unseasonable cold and agricultural shortfalls, of famine and plague,⁸⁶ punctuated a scenario both intractable and dismal.

James did enjoy a temporary reprieve that may have induced a fleetingly personal relief. Goodare's analysis indicates 1589 as an unusually flush year – partly in thanks for James's support for fending off the Armada – with Elizabeth mak-

80 "Did they [the Danish council] suspect that one of his motives for coming had been to avoid paying for his own marriage? If so, it is possible that they were right"; Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*, p. 36.

81 Brydon: *The Finances*, pp. 64, 66-7. The tax monies paid for basic palace refurbishment and repair, mostly while he was away in Scandinavia.

82 Before leaving Oslo (22 December) James gave Bishop Jens Nilsson two gilded silver plates supplied by Elizabeth. Steen Brahe, Axel Gyldenstjerne and Maitland were other beneficiaries; Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*, p. 39. Earlier, Elizabethan funds had paid for Marischal's trip to negotiate the dowry. Her dismay over such practices reinforced a desire to monitor how her subsidies were spent; see Goodare: "James VI's English Subsidy", p. 121.

83 Upon arrival in Scotland, Anna laid up at King's Wark in Leith for five days while Holyrood Palace was fitted out; the Danes supplied the royal carriage as none was available in Scotland. Lynch: 'Court Ceremony', pp. 83-4, 87.

84 Trevelyan: *A Shortened*, 238.

85 Dawson: *Scotland Re-Formed*, pp. 287-91; Lythe: *The Economy*, p. 188; S.G.E. Lythe: "The Economy of Scotland under James VI and I", in Alan G.R. Smith (ed.): *The Reign of James VI and I*, London: Macmillan 1973, pp. 67-9.

86 Dawson: *Scotland Re-Formed*, pp. 322-23.

ing two separate payments to James, 3,000 English pounds in May and again in September,⁸⁷ apart from the 2,000-pound wedding gift. This minor windfall, set against Scotland's chronic economic weakness and mismanaged wedding-tax hikes, gives a nuanced picture of his pecuniary circumstances that could help explain his alacrity in exiting Scotland in October 1589.

Evidence that James promised Dunfermline Abbey to Anna at their first or second meeting at Mule's house also strengthens arguments for prior intent based on economic consideration.⁸⁸ James's initially large supporting cast in Oslo was cut sharply back after the wedding, leaving a retinue of 40-50.⁸⁹ Niggling financial issues cropped up frequently during his months abroad and animated his chief advisors.⁹⁰ Pressure abated in February 1590 when Queen Sophia gave James 20,000 pounds Scots additional to the dowry, presumably to cover his expenses in Denmark.

FOREIGN AND TRADE ISSUES

External relations had likewise reached a turning point in 1589. Scottish foreign policy under James is generally regarded as low priority,⁹¹ and like finance has been studied intermittently. One reason is surely James's aversion to the military adventurism otherwise fundamental to post-Reformation European politics; another is Scotland's uncertain status as an English client-state. James's few initiatives proved ill-conceived. In keeping with the 'Auld Alliance', France was an early focal point, having produced an influential advisor and his first intimate, Esmé Stuart; James's first language was in fact French.⁹² Yet the link was attenuating by a passing generation (his mother Mary had briefly been queen of France) and the confessional fracture of the Reformation.⁹³

James, a staunch Calvinist, curried favor with France, Philip II's Spain, and the Pope, all in vain hopes of financial reward for showing leniency toward Catholics. James's foreign policy has been directly attributed to the crown's extreme poverty.⁹⁴ Post-Armada, his fumbling efforts to play England and France against each other similarly came to naught; Elizabeth retained Henry of Navarre, now king

87 Goodare: "James VI's English Subsidy", pp. 114-15.

88 Steeholm: *James I*, p. 122; Meikle: "A Meddlesome", p. 130; Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*, p. 36.

89 Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*, p. 38.

90 Maitland, dependent on royal favor, had advocated a quick return to Scotland, James at first leaned toward a low-key stayover in Oslo; Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*, pp. 36-9. Uncertain burden-sharing along with anticipated costs complicated matters; Melville (*Memoirs*, p. 363) mentions "their continual janglings, strife, pride and partialities" that produced two hostile factions while in Denmark.

91 Mathew: *James I*, p. 6.

92 Bingham: *James VI*, p. 41. He wrote to Anna in French, the language of their wedding service.

93 Mathew: *James I*, pp. 1-4.

94 Brydon: *The Finances*, p. 186.

of France, as an ally. Imperial Spain agitated learned debate in Scotland and later figured hugely in James's foreign overtures, yet like France, he never set foot there. Franco-Spanish rivalry nonetheless promoted English-Scottish rapprochement and paved the way for James's later assumption of the combined throne.⁹⁵

Pursuit of the Danish link had similar pecuniary basis but held wider importance for Scotland, in two respects. One was agitation by merchants to secure stronger access to Baltic trade routes, making it an economic question for Scotland and not just a matter of crown finance. A second involved James's dreams of a unified Christian community, in which Lutheranism would represent an important ecumenical link. Moreover both the trade and cultural/religious strands were amenable to personal interventions. By putting a personal stamp on the Danish link, James could further distance himself from Elizabeth who, despite endless European power machinations, never left English soil. After his return, James attempted to capitalize on his links with Christian IV to push his European peace project, with limited success.⁹⁶

The foreign backdrop assumes added significance when coupled with Scottish trade policy that was rapidly reorienting toward the Baltic. Reliance on foreign trade created a vulnerability bordering on dependence on developments as far afield as Danzig and La Rochelle,⁹⁷ though it sustained Borders ports like Berwick-upon-Tweed. Domestically, the Convention of the Royal Burghs kept a tight grip on trade policy, which was later (1597) extended to include an *ad valorem* tax on imports, a plainly fiscal (revenue-enhancing) measure rather than a commercial-based one.⁹⁸

Scottish trade then had four foci: Norway, Western France, the Low Countries and the Baltic, two of the four thus being broadly Nordic. Vital goods flowed in both directions.⁹⁹ A breakdown of ship arrivals in Dundee between 1580 and 1618 shows more than half (259 of 483) from Baltic or Scandinavian ports.¹⁰⁰ The Baltic was a crucial granary, especially rye, for Scotland given periodic food shortages. The years 1586-87 brought one such shortfall (after another in 1575-78), and Scottish exports of skins and salt to the Baltic notably rose in those years. From roughly 1580 the connection broadened to the Baltic proper and eastern

95 Trevelyan: *A Shortened History*, pp. 236-37.

96 Patterson: *King James VI*, p. 192.

97 S.G.E. Lythe: "The Economy of Scotland under James VI and I", in Alan G.R. Smith (ed.): *The Reign of James VI and I*, London: Macmillan 1973, pp. 72, 59.

98 Lythe: "The Economy", pp. 58-66.

99 Scottish traders took hides, leather, cloth, salt, cured fish and coal; they received corn, flax, hemp, and forestry products e.g. tar and pitch; from about 1580, when trade with Stockholm grew, they also imported iron and copper from Sweden. Timber from Norway was a mainstay for denuded eastern Scotland. Scotland for Baltic traders, in contrast, remained comparatively marginal.

100 Lythe: "The Economy", pp. 68-9.

Sweden. Still another factor was the growing Scottish diaspora in the Baltic, especially Poland.¹⁰¹

Of special interest is the intervention James made with Elizabeth on behalf of one George Mar, a mayor of Helsingør, in April 1590, just before leaving Denmark. The king arranged for the Scots merchant, normally a salt trader, to export 1,200 cloths duty-free to Denmark.¹⁰² It is a rare but telling indication that Helsingør for James was a place of attention and involvement.

Since Erik of Pomerania probably around 1429,¹⁰³ the Danish crown had controlled the Sound which involved paying levies and made Helsingør, at the chokepoint, a 'compulsory call' for passing ships.¹⁰⁴ The Great Belt (Store Bælt), another Baltic entryway, was also in Danish hands. For all its later Shakespearean overtones, the town's principal importance then lay in the more mundane context of regional commerce, a link detailed by Riis.¹⁰⁵ Studies of Baltic commerce tend to focus on Dutch preeminence,¹⁰⁶ but it was utterly central to the English as well as Scottish economy.¹⁰⁷ Shipbuilders relied on organic products like tar, hemp and timber from the Baltic.¹⁰⁸

Several writers have shown that customs tolls weighed on official Scotland in the 1580s – in terms of domestic policy¹⁰⁹ and specifically regarding Denmark and the Sound. Since mid-century the Scots had fruitlessly lobbied the Danes to eliminate a troublesome (one percent) *ad valorem* duty charged to Scottish products passing through the Sound, which had possibly been linked to the Orkneys issue; the point resurfaced in the 1589 dowry negotiations. Since their 1469 treaty, mutual free movement was guaranteed between Scots and Danes, but now contingent on paying tolls.

101 D. Armitage: "The Scottish Diaspora", in Jenny Wormald (ed.): *Scotland: A History*, Oxford 2005, p. 278. Scottish traders in Poland were so prevalent that traveling pedlars were nicknamed 'Scots'; Dawson: *Scotland Re-Formed*, 287.

102 *Calendar of State Papers Relating to Scotland, 1509-1603*, London: 1885, p. 573; Riis: *Should Auld (II)*, p. 234; Stevenson: *Scotland's Last*, 53.

103 Thomas Riis: "Elsinore," in Byron J. Nyrdstrom (ed.): *Dictionary of Scandinavian History*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 1986, 160-62; Jens E. Olesen: "Inter-Scandinavian Relations", in Knut Helle (ed.): *The Cambridge History of Scandinavia*, Cambridge: CUP 2003, p. 730.

104 Riis: *Should Auld*, p. 68.

105 Riis: *Should Auld*, pp. 150-99.

106 David Kirby: *Northern Europe in the Early Modern Period: The Baltic World 1492-1772*, London: Longman 1990, pp. 63, 180-81.

107 George Trevelyan: *England under Queen Anne*, London: Longman, Greens 1931, p. 9.

108 Trevelyan: *England under*, p. 10. The mercantilist Navigation Acts however came later (1651).

109 For example, a failed experiment (1582-87) to privatize the collection of Scottish customs pressured burghs facing fiscal shortfall to institute novel ways of collecting taxes (Goodare and Lynch: "James VI", pp. 9-10).

There was also a deeper Scottish foothold in the area. Scots accounted for 6-7 percent of Helsingør's population, of which around 30 percent were foreign-born,¹¹⁰ mainly traders ('pedlars'). In previous decades these business links had transformed into political clout with multi-generational staying power. Scots like Richard Wedderburn had served as burgesses, while Alexander Lyall, his son Frederick, and David Hanson, all of recent Scottish ancestry, assumed important posts. From 1583 the latter two were in charge of the Sound Toll, in addition to keeping accounts for building Kronborg castle.¹¹¹ Their duties brought visibility, tax-free privileges and negotiating heft. Wedderburn dealt prominently in malt, barley and corn while Lyall the elder had traded accounts for James V, underscoring an organic linkage between trade and policy and connecting the Stuart dynasty directly with Helsingør's commercial life.

Around the time of James's trip, this strategic relationship was shifting gear. In the 1580s iron ore from eastern Sweden had widened the geographical scope of trade, while by 1590 the once-dominant transit trade was evolving into a multi-purpose commercial relationship, with up to a third of Scottish ships dealing directly with the Danish monarchy via physical cargos and supplies along with duties. This also introduced complex competitive considerations: greater Scottish involvement could interrupt trade patterns involving Germans and other Scandinavians.¹¹² Frequent disputes over trade irregularities in the Danish hinterland hinted at such pressures. These changes were unfolding just as overall foreign trade was helping, fitfully, to pull Scotland out of prolonged recession that was prompted by sharp price rises characterizing the late Tudor era.¹¹³

With royal accounts chronically short, sea trade crucial to Scottish economic prospects, Denmark a pivotal player but source of concern, and Helsingør at the beating heart of Baltic commerce, it was an obvious focal point for attention at highest levels. And it was arguably a key rationale for an extended foray into Denmark (January-April 1590) by James, who was certainly apprised of the history and current concerns and evidently given to intervene on behalf of home producers.

CONCLUSIONS

James's Scandinavian journey is, and presumably will remain, a part mystery; at 400+ years' remove we search in vain for a 'smoking gun' to explain actions and motives of a congenitally fluid and complex thinker. That said, setting the trip against the broader backdrop, the defining themes as of 1589, can sharpen our

110 A. Tønnesen: *Helsingørs udenlandske borgere og andre indbyggere i sidste halvdel af det 16. århundrede med særlig henblik på deres sociale stilling*, Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen 1967.

111 Riis: *Should Auld*, pp. 168-71.

112 Riis: *Should Auld*, pp. 34, 76-7.

113 Goodare and Lynch: "James VI", p. 9; N.J. Mayhew: "Prices in England, 1170-1750", *Past and Present* 219, 2013, pp. 4-5.

perspective on an event frequently but unjustifiably labeled an emotionally driven escapade.

Crisis notwithstanding, overall conditions were comparatively benign, suddenly improved, and conducive to personal initiative. James was better positioned than at any time in his Scottish reign. His autonomy – both real and perceived – reflected multiple breakthroughs: temporary largesse from Elizabeth; relief from the sense of foreboding post-1585; completion of sensitive dowry negotiations, and the happily imminent crown payments from Denmark they heralded; his ‘formally married’ status as of end-August and the political headache it removed; and a seeming resolution of the convoluted triangular politics of Kirk-crown-nobility via his Presbyterian alliance.

A politically more confident James could embark leaving behind the semblance of a domestic status quo, relying on associates and occasional shipped messages. Primarily it was his personal honor which needed boosting, and his late-night sailing for Norway (on the heels of storms that nearly sank Anna’s flo-tilla) amply managed that. And by adding the foreign factor, he could one-up Elizabeth while escaping her lengthy shadow. The notion of James striking while the iron was hot suggests itself.

Scotland’s external position, too, stood at a threshold. It sprang not from breakthroughs but from policy failures, specifically the dead-ending of James’s early efforts to cultivate Europe’s Catholic world and his pious hopes of driving a wedge between France and England. A suddenly formalized Danish link had reignited hopes for the neglected northern, “traditionalist” strand of Scottish relations. This now meant commercial interests, Baltic access and influence with Denmark, for which the Sound Tolls were treated as royal income. This had become a matter of burning domestic import, shown by the attacks against Thirlestane in May.

Aroused by prospects of union with England, cultural diplomacy was also entering the picture. The idea of a post-Reformation, Protestant-led, north-European movement of Christian amity, which would dominate James’s later diplomacy, was still nascent. Marriage into the Lutheran Danish monarchy was a factor, as were his high-profile theological engagements in winter 1590. Personal diplomacy was necessarily part of the mix – but arguably more as a consequence than a cause of the trip.

Throughout, James’s economic straits stood front and center. Dilatory wedding preparations and accompanying resource wastage were unwelcome developments in an impoverished kingdom. Setting off with bravado and marrying elsewhere would deflate the embarrassment factor and save faces all around; a low-key ceremony abroad would save the crown (and pressured nobles) money; lingering dowry details could be resolved, and promised payments secured; and economic interests at home stood indirectly to gain in the medium term.

Assessment of James's decision making as a complex exercise in reputation enhancement thus provides a thread that links a set of personal and narrowly political calculations with significant exogenous policy concerns. The cumulative strength of such an approach is suggestive but powerfully so, insofar as it allows for consideration of multiple variables and subtle issue linkages that a supple mind like James was both able and prone to make – especially when it came to vital royal matters, as he showed in handling his mother's execution.¹¹⁴ The dramatic non-appearance of Anna sparked a crisis that strengthened his resolve rather than weaken it, as might have been the case previously.

Seeing his trip in this broader light – with James taking possession of incipient opportunities on multiple fronts – argues for its significance as a defining moment of his budding adult dynasty. James was emerging as a strategist with anticipatory faculties, and the Scandinavian sojourn provides corroborating, rather than countervailing, evidence of this characteristic.

JOHN F.L. ROSS

PH.D.

AMERICAN COLLEGE OF NORWAY

ROSSJHN10@GMAIL.COM

ABSTRACT

John F.L. Ross

'Innumerable Others': Reassessing King James VI/I's Scandinavian Sojourn

This article addresses the circumstances surrounding a six-month whirlwind Scandinavian trip by Scotland's King James VI in 1589-90, an event that has long puzzled historians. The late-autumn sailing to Norway, where he married Anna, Princess of Denmark, and their subsequent overwintering in Denmark, gave the future King James I of England and Scotland his only foreign experience. While traditional analysis has ascribed youthful passion to the young sovereign's sudden departure, evidence presented here suggests the trip as a politically risky but shrewdly timed exercise in reputation enhancement for James – the putative yet unnamed successor to Queen Elizabeth I on the English throne – and a means of bolstering Scotland's trade and foreign policy prospects at a critical time of national reorientation.

114 Antonia Fraser notes James's inconsistent public piety over his mother Mary's death, whereby "so long as the English crown dangled within his reach, he was prepared to swallow the insult to his family and his nation" (*Mary*, p. 640).