Who can think of the sixteenth century without contemplating James VI of Scotland as one of the central figures around whom all contemporary persons, events, and circumstances tangled? His characteristic virtues and defects, his sympathies and antipathies, his very whims and caprices are writ large across the political history of Scotland and Europe. It is his figure that has made the sixteenth century the period of Scottish annals that has commanded the attention of the world. For over four centuries, historians and researchers from all over the world have tried to study, analyse, explain and understand his character and his fortunes as man and king. Even to this day James still remains one of the most controversial characters in history, admired and reviled in equal measure; but in strictest truth, it may be said that James’s rule was one of the most momentous periods in the history of Scotland.

James’s contribution to the shaping of modern political and diplomatic theory and practice has been the subject of scholarly debate throughout the twentieth century. Michael Lynch, Julian Goodare, Pauline Croft, and Maurice Lee, are among many whom have been captivated by the charismatic Scottish sovereign. Although many British historians who have written works on the elations between England and Spain during the last two decades of the sixteenth century have widened their geographical scope to include James’s intrigues with Spain, for example, the work of Geoffrey Parker on the army of Flanders and Albert Loomie’s study of the English exiles, none have examined specifically

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Hispano-Scottish relations during this period except for John Rawson Elder in his now dated general study on *Spanish Influences in Scottish History*, which focuses on the Scottish Catholic nobility’s intrigues with Spain. In a very similar way, Spanish historiography has overlooked this important question treating it as no more than a series of rumours during the time of the Armadas, as we can see for example in Mia Rodriguez-Salgado’s “Felipe II y la Crisis post-Armada” and Enrique García Hernán’s *Irlanda y el Rey Prudente*, probably due to the scarcity and inaccessibility of the sources. It should be borne in mind that the volume of contemporary written records kept in a country that has suffered a great defeat is infinitely less than those of a country that has won a great victory, and in this case nearly all of Spain’s actions to influence the course of history in the British Isles failed. Nevertheless, I hope that the present article will be judged mainly as a contribution to our understanding of an important and neglected part of James’s early political interests: Spain, which as a case-study, can add light and shade to the picture of the Scottish monarch.

In 1580, Scotland was drowning in a sea of instability. James was in a position which, for good or ill, was fraught with momentous issues for the future of the kingdom. Yet the task of controlling the forces in Scottish political life might well have been too much even for a skilful and determined statesman. James, aged only fourteen, faced two complex tasks: to govern an intractable realm, and to successfully endure, and if possible take advantage of, the increasingly tense relations between England and Spain. A latent pattern in Scottish politics began to emerge: the Protestants were on the whole committed to the English alliance, while the Catholics associated themselves with Spain. The choice between rival policies had been complicated by the choice between rival religions. Neither James’s Protestant education nor his Catholic mother were sufficiently powerful in themselves to sway either the Protestant or the Catholic forces, inside and outside his kingdom, staidly in its favour. Thus, during this period as a whole, James was successful in presenting himself as friendly and well-disposed towards Catholics, as he was towards Protestants. James’s apparent inability to restrain his noblemen, or himself, from dealing with foreign powers, especially Spain, frustrated England’s Elizabeth I on many occasions.
For no country was this new attitude of the ruling forces of Scotland more important than Spain. Philip II was becoming increasingly involved in Scottish political affairs, being petitioned by both Catholics and dissidents to support their activities and organisations. Despite Scotland’s apparent remoteness, tucked away in the north-west corner of the British Isles, it was curiously her strategic geographic position as a natural stepping-stone to England that gave her significance, an opportunity that Spain could not afford to overlook.

Through the persuasive power of an oft-repeated opinion, we have become accustomed to the idea that Philip was dominated by his religiosity. It could be affirmed that the Spanish monarch, obsessively devoted to his faith, was concerned primarily with restoring Catholicism to the British Isles; however, it may also be said that as much as the agonies of the heretics would have delighted him, Philip also knew that any instability inside the Isle could mean the end of English aid to the rebels in the Netherlands and a cessation of England’s piracy and privateering of the Spanish Atlantic fleet. Moreover, Scotland could be used as a secure base in the North Sea for the Spanish navy. On all these grounds, Philip’s preoccupation with Scotland was understandable, and from his point of view justifiable. Indeed, religion was paramount, but there were other more subtle forces at work, which made these affairs infinitely more complicated.

Through the sixteenth century, it was the universal endeavour of the kings to make themselves the absolute masters of their kingdoms. Not until the reign of James VI did any Scottish sovereign succeed in making himself a ruler in the fashion of Henry VIII. The year 1578 had brought an abrupt end to James’s childhood, when, at the age of twelve, he became officially responsible for the government of Scotland during a brief loss of power of the regent, the earl of Morton. Scottish politics were never entirely stable and they grew more unstable during the time while the young James advanced towards manhood. The apparently anarchic condition of Scotland and the apparent vulnerability of James were a standing temptation to foreign powers, most notably Spain.

James formalised his decision to take up the reins of his kingdom when he appointed Esmé Stewart as earl of Lennox in
March 1580. Esmé was James’s distant French kinsman, who had come to Scotland in 1574 as an agent of the duke of Guise, charged with securing the restoration of Mary Queen of Scots and Catholicism. This decision was viewed suspiciously by the Kirk and the Protestants. In fact, this was a calculated manoeuvre to attract the attention of foreign powers, especially the Catholic powers, by showing that he was not Elizabeth’s puppet and that he was not afraid of opposing the Kirk. Esmé’s appointment prompted the overthrow of the regent Morton – the leader of the pro-English faction – and the sudden resurgence of Catholicism in the realm convinced Philip that it was the right time to directly intervene in Scottish politics. Subsequently, an open struggle for the amity of the young king developed between Philip and Elizabeth. Don Bernardino de Mendoza – the Spanish ambassador to London – noted that, “the English try by all means to gain control of that King [James VI]”; however, in England it was known that, “the said Queen [Elizabeth] is in marvellous suspicion of the King of Spain in practice with the Prince of Scotland, and in search of friendship and alliance.”

To this point there had not yet been any direct contact between James and Philip, but Elizabeth feared that the king of Scotland would let the Spaniards enter the country and then travel with them to the continent in exchange for money and troops. Curiously, in March 1581, a missive supposedly written by James reached the Spanish embassy in London. The document was a direct attack against Catholicism. Mendoza sent a copy of it to Philip with an explanatory report, in which the diplomat suggested that the missive was a forgery written in England under the auspices of Elizabeth, with the clear intention of impeding communication between both kings. The letter did not seem to produce the effects that the anonymous author desired, since Philip did not even comment about this incident and, during the following weeks, the English intelligence informed Elizabeth of James’s continuous dealings with Spain. But not even two months elapsed before Philip received a report affirming that James was playing a cunning game, and was not even close to collaboration with Spain. Nevertheless, the Spanish monarch believed that James was not a lost cause and asked Mendoza to gain James’s friendship. James was aging, but not maturing into the form that either Elizabeth or Philip desired; although his
diplomatic craft was still in its early stages, he was already showing signs of his manipulative political nature. Nevertheless, his attitude did not discourage either of them.\textsuperscript{xv}

James’s activities were interrupted by the Ruthven Raid in 1582, and after a short interlude, by the Stirling Raid in 1584. After these experiences, James had good reasons to be suspicious of the Anglo-Protestant faction in Scotland, which prompted him to be more prepared than ever before to consider the possible advantages of a Spanish attack on England through his kingdom.\textsuperscript{xvi} This was a very curious situation since James was fully aware that Philip would only intervene in Spain’s interests, not in James’s. Obviously, Philip would not conquer England just to hand it over to James; however, his idea seems to have been that, in maintaining a balance between Protestants and Catholics, between England and Spain, he would gain more independence than could be afforded by complete reliance on either side.\textsuperscript{xvii}

James not only desired to accomplish the consolidation of his position in Scotland, but also to secure his succession to the throne of England. Thus, the problem was complicated by James’s pursuit of a succession of allies in his quest to inherit Elizabeth’s crown. In Spain, it was understood that Philip represented the will of God, and thus, he should acquire the crown of England even if he did not have valid claims, because the succession of a Protestant prince would be damaging for Christendom. However, even though James was the nearest relative to Elizabeth, he knew that the support of his candidacy, not only by foreign powers but also by his own countrymen, depended on the religion he chose.\textsuperscript{xviii} During the period as a whole, James was successful in presenting himself as well-disposed to both Protestantism and Catholicism. Quite understandably, he looked for help outside of England, since Elizabeth did not confirm him as her heir, even after the Anglo-Scottish league was concluded in 1586. Mary’s execution, after the discovery of the “Babington Plot” by Walsingham, reinforced James’s status as Elizabeth’s nearest relative, but even this did not assure his accession to the English crown upon the queen’s death. Moreover, James’s candidacy faced strong opposition, not only from foreign countries such as Spain, but also from competitors from within his own kingdom and family, such as his cousin – the earl of Bothwell.\textsuperscript{xix}
If obtaining the English crown was indeed James’s main objective, he was at least not alone in his ambition. Mary Queen of Scots was an important influence in the shaping of her son’s political consciousness and in the development of the relations between Spain and Scotland. In fact, the presence of Mary in England changed the very nature of Scottish and Spanish politics. It is clear that she did much to provoke the slow but inexorable breakdown of Spain’s relations with England and to spur Philip’s interest in Scotland and subsequently in James. However, even if Mary had not been imprisoned in England, the relations between Elizabeth and Philip would have worsened due to the affairs of the Netherlands and the English attacks to the Spanish fleet. And, obviously, James would have looked for foreign political, military, and economic help due to his unstable position within Scotland.xx

In truth, one of the main reasons why, in the 1580s, James became increasingly inclined towards intriguing with the Catholic faction in Scotland and Spain was because of the strong influence that his mother had over him even though they never actually met in person.xxi It should be borne in mind that as early as the 1560s, Mary was trying to integrate the continental powers, especially France and Spain, into Scottish politics, and in 1571, Mary, while negotiating her liberation with Spain, proposed to Philip that James should be transported to Spain to marry one of the _infantas_, as part of a long-lasting alliance between the two kingdoms.xxii

This would not be the last time that Mary used James as part of her negotiations with Spain. The most illustrative case was in 1574, when Mary sent a letter to Spain with Lord Hamilton in which she offered to have her son educated in Spain, as a Catholic, in exchange for the protection of her claim to both the English and Scottish thrones.xxiii Examples such as this give us an image of a queen who used her son as a pawn in an international chess game, but the truth is that in criticising Mary for such calculating behaviour we are guilty of judging her by modern standards. In indicting her for lack of maternal love, we are in fact falsely accusing her of a crime she did not commit. In truth, Mary’s correspondences and papers reveal that the majority of her concern was with keeping the Stewarts’ rights to the English crown, not only hers but also James’s, who by the early 1580s was already following in his mother’s footsteps in his quest for Elizabeth’s throne.xxiv
Clearly, the most valuable things that James inherited from Mary were her gusto and passion for political intrigue. Just before Mary’s death, he sent a final letter to Elizabeth to beg for his mother’s life, but at no time did James confront Elizabeth about Mary’s imprisonment and execution. This letter did not have the desired “official” effect, but in fact, with this action James was able to raise the hopes of the Catholics, who started to see him as the most suitable candidate, and to secure him Spanish support for his candidacy to the English throne. With no “real” opponent still standing against James, Mary’s death in 1587 had a simplifying effect; barring any unexpected surprises, it was now more than probable that he would eventually obtain the crown of England.

During this whole period, there was another group of individuals who influenced the relations between James and Spain: the Jesuits. It had actually been Mary who introduced the Jesuits to James. At the beginning of September 1580, Mary had written to Father Robert Persons, an English Jesuit with whom she had been in correspondence since the times of her imprisonment, asking for some missionaries to be sent to Scotland to convert her son. She believed that James, now a fifteen-year-old youth, would be more receptive to the Jesuit message. She entreated Persons to take charge of the mission, which was to be overseen by the Spanish ambassador to England, don Mendoza. Just a few months later, Persons had already reported to Mendoza that he and Father James Beaton had been welcomed to Scotland and had enjoyed a personal audience with James. During this meeting, the king had assured them that he would declare his Catholicism in front of the Parliament before the following Christmas. According to the Jesuits, the king had affirmed “that[,] although for certain reasons it was advisable for him to appear publicly in favour of the French, he assured him that in his heart he would rather be Spanish.” It is most likely that James did not make such a direct statement, but was appearing to appease all sides in order to ascertain the most profitable alliance. This has been corroborated by the historian Thomas Graves, who affirmed that, although “James was interviewed by these agents secretly and professed to favour Spain, he gave no real ground for hope of his conversion, and was avowedly schismatic.” But it is even
more probable that in this case the missionaries were attempting to heighten Philip’s interest in the realm, since a very significant portion of the mission’s funding came from Spain. A religious mission to Scotland may have been an almost irresistible crusade for the Spanish monarch, but Philip had asserted on several occasions that any funding would depend on projected results.

Obviously, James’s Catholic “tendencies” were being exaggerated by the Jesuits, who knew the geo-religious importance of James’s kingdom. It was at this time that Persons stated, “now Scotland is our chief hope; from there depends not only the conversion of England; but also that of all the northern parts of [Europe].” In fact, there were many ways in which the Pope and Spain could try to encourage and support the re-evangelisation of Scotland, and hopefully of the rest of the Isle, but among the possible strategies, excluding military action, the most plausible and achievable option was the conversion of the young king of Scotland to Catholicism, and James knew it. Thus, just as he was trying to build a solid relationship with the Kirk of Scotland, he sent Pope Gregory XIII a warm letter in which he wrote at the very end: “I hope to be able to satisfy Your Holiness on all points.”

After this declaration of intentions, the Jesuits hastily informed Philip of James’s conversion to the Spanish cause. With good reason, the Catholics started to believe that the re-Catholisation of England could be achieved by securing James’s succession to the English throne, as James desired. In fact, he was playing a double game: his secret diplomacy aimed at making both Catholics and Protestants believe that he would embrace the religion of those who helped him obtain the English crown. However, Philip needed James to declare Catholicism in Scotland and his assurance of collaboration in the war against England before accepting his candidacy. If he refused to do so, Philip would oppose James’s candidacy and instead insist upon his own. Before this could happen, however, Philip would have to make sure that Catholics everywhere believed that he had done everything possible to carry Catholicism to Scotland before launching an invasion.

James’s plans seemed to have worked: the possibility of an alliance between James and Philip alarmed Elizabeth, who sought
to abandon her present policy toward James and to give him positive indications that his bid for the English throne would be successful. \textsuperscript{xxxviii} When Scotland supported England during the episode of the Great Armada, Phillip was incensed, and launched a campaign to sabotage James’s bid for the English throne, supervised by the count of Olivares, the Spanish ambassador to Rome. \textsuperscript{xxxix} James’s supposed secret Catholicism needed to be proven false by those who supported the Spanish candidacy, and who better to fulfil this task than Persons, who had known James since his adolescence. \textsuperscript{xli}

Still, the defeat of the Armada, Phillip’s persistent claims to the English throne, and Persons work against his own petition, might have pushed James closer to England and Protestantism; however, James, who was intelligent enough to see the advantages of alliance with Elizabeth, had learnt the importance of Catholic support, especially from the Pope. \textsuperscript{xli} He knew that Philip would not act without the consent of the Pope; thus, if he maintained an inconsistent attitude towards Catholicism, the Pope would not take the decision to openly oppose his candidacy, which, even if it would not make Philip desist, at least would buy James more time to strengthen his position. \textsuperscript{xlii} As planned, his posture provoked the Jesuits to inform the Pope of James’s intention to restore Catholicism to Scotland even after Philip’s death. \textsuperscript{xliii} Nevertheless, by the end of the century, it was clear that James was never going to take the Catholic side. In 1601, the Jesuit Father Alexander McQuhirrie affirmed that “the King [James VI] hated all Catholics, except so far as he could make use of them for the purpose of furthering his designs upon the English crown.” \textsuperscript{xliv}

It is said that the James’s religious policy was driven by his political ambitions. There is some truth in this, but it is unduly simplified. It is true that in the sixteenth century politics and religion collided, but economic motives were just as significant in James’s intrigues with Spain. As we have seen, if James wanted to strengthen the position of the Scottish crown by restraining the power of his noblemen and pursuing his claim to the English throne, he was going to need financial support. His options were the same as those of his noblemen: Spain and England. During the period up to Elizabeth’s death, James cleverly played both sides.
In 1581, Lennox asked Philip and the Pope for 10,000 crowns to fortify the port and castles of Dumbarton and Edinburgh, and to reinforce James’s personal guard; however, it is unclear whether James knew of this petition. Curiously, just two years later, the Duke of Guise pleaded for Philip to send 12,000 crowns to Scotland to reinforce James’s guard. Once again, James’s knowledge and participation in this request is debateable. The obvious explanation is that Guise, aware of James’s financial troubles, thought that if Spain would send money, James would see the advantages of a Catholic alliance. History tells us that, although Philip sent the 12,000 crowns to Mendoza, only a few days after the money arrived at the Spanish embassy in London, he ordered his ambassador to retain it until it could safely be returned to Spain. The reason for this was that James had accepted a subsidy of £4,000 sterling (16,000 crowns) from Elizabeth. In this case, it is quite difficult to believe that Guise would have recommended Philip to send such a precise sum of money based on his own intuition of James’s financial needs when Elizabeth made such a quick and determined counter-offer. Obviously, James had made an open petition for money and was willing to sell to the highest bidder. But, if this English subsidy should have ended James’s contacts with Spain, conversely, it had just taught him the “real value” of his kingdom. Moreover, it also showed that he could attempt a new deal with Philip at any time.

James was already showing signs of frustration as Elizabeth remained obdurately silent about the succession. Consumed by his ambition to succeed her, he was angered at being treated with condescension as a beginner in the arts of kingship. Thus, James re-opened negotiations with Philip during the time of the Armada. This time the motive was Scotland’s participation in the enterprise. Philip sent one of his advisors for British affairs – Scotsman William Sempill – to Scotland as his special envoy. Philip offered James 142,000 gold crowns and 12,000 paid and armed soldiers. While James meditated on the Spanish offer, Sempill travelled north to seek participation from the Scottish lords in the invasion. James did not make his decision until the very last minute, hoping to get a counter-offer from Elizabeth. With the Spanish ships already sailing towards British waters, Elizabeth wrote to James, “I hope you will take Ulysses’ wax to save you from such sirens,” and promised him a payment of
20,000 footmen, 5,000 horsemen, a yearly pension of £5,000, and a sustained guard of fifty Scottish gentlemen for his security. James accepted Elizabeth’s offer and allied himself with the English; the Armada failed.

But if both offers were equally generous, why did James choose to side with England? First, because the Spanish enterprise seemed destined to fail from the very beginning, as, for instance, one contemporary report observed that, “the most part of their shippes with leaking weare half full of water.” Second, it is possible that James refused the Spanish offer since he could not accept one of the seven clauses that Philip had demanded: that he would have to renounce any right that he would have had to the crowns of England and Ireland, something that he would have never accepted. But it is more likely that it was a combination of both.

During his whole reign, James never directly received any Spanish money, but he certainly allowed it to flow into his kingdom. The Scottish nobility, both Catholic and dissident, knew that they could not survive as a force in politics without foreign support. Spanish financial subsidies, gifts, and pensions allowed them to maintain their military, and subsequently, political power. A clear example of this relationship was the earl of Huntly, who, while collaborating with Spain, was hastily extending his authority throughout the Highlands. But if James wanted to affirm his authority over his kingdom, why did he allow this?

First, the pension system had been working for over a decade before James was able to take a consciously active role in Scottish politics. In fact, he was only seven years old when Philip granted a pension to John Seton, son of George, fifth Lord Seton, for his services as bearer between Spain, Mary and the Scottish Catholic nobility. By the early 1580s, the system was deeply rooted in the kingdom and many of Scotland’s principal men were receiving pensions and “gifts” from the hands of the Jesuits, who acted as administrators. Thus, by 1590, the list of pensioners included nobles such as the earl of Bothwell and the earl of Perth.

Second, James thought that he could take advantage of the pension system. It should be noted that in 1594 he did try to obtain funding from his Catholic noblemen, knowing that they were being subsidised by Spain. James still had not been confirmed as Elizabeth’s heir, and thus could not afford to
discount an alliance with Spain, nor annoy the queen. When news reached him of a Spanish fleet ready to sail for Scotland, and Phillip’s invasion plans were an open secret, James was most probably trying to negotiate with Spain. It is likely that this was not done openly, as during the Great Armada, but through his noblemen. James’s men quickly informed the missionaries of the King’s “good disposition.” Philip and the Pope replied to these reports by sending Father George Sampiretti and Sergeant Major Pozas to Scotland with “a large sum of money which they were to give the King of Scotland, promising him a monthly allowance of ten thousand ducats on condition of his protection to the Catholics.” However, this affair did not go as smoothly as James hoped; the arrival of the Jesuit and the presence of Pozas in the realm provoked fears of a new Spanish plot in the minds of the ministers, who forced James to order the arrest of Sampiretti and Pozas. The “Spanish faction” – Huntly, Errol, and Angus – joined forces and went to rescue the envoys. James, prompted by his ministers, sent Archibald Campbell, sixth earl of Argyll – a nineteen year old man on Elizabeth’s payroll – with an army against the rebel earls. The clash of both armies became what would be referred to by some writers as “the battle of Glenlivet,” and by others as “the battle of Altchonlachan.” Despite an initial Catholic victory, the rebels were forced to surrender and to conciliate with James. This was the last concerted protest by the nobility during James’s reign. Moreover, Bothwell, having been excommunicated by the Presbytery of Edinburgh two months earlier, left Scotland in April 1595. With most of the Catholic and dissident nobility now in exile, and James closer to Elizabeth than ever before, Philip finally decided to use Ireland instead of Scotland as the springboard for the “enterprise of England.”

When Philip II died on 13 September 1598, James knew that the succession of the new king to the Spanish throne would mean change in the European political scene. Immediately after Philip’s death, James sent Robert, fourth Lord Sempill, to Spain, not only to offer his official condolences, but also to represent his claims for the English crown to the new king. By now, James was an experienced monarch, having been king of Scotland for nearly thirty years, and had built himself a reputation as a master in the art of political intrigue. Philip II had been expected to bequeath
his policy, especially concerning the British Isles, to his son and successor, Philip III. However, his son’s primary concern was the depletion of Spain’s financial resources; thus, his father’s policy was abandoned and, once for all, James emerged as the undisputed heir to the English throne, for which he had fought for so long. In this respect the story is soon told: it was left for James, to unite the crowns of England, Scotland and Ireland, which he achieved with his ascension to the throne in 1603.

After twenty-eight years of Scottish kingship, James was delighted to leave the poverty of the perpetually troubled Scottish court. The acquisition of the English throne was probably James’s greatest personal achievement, something that he had accomplished through persistence, luck, and of course, calculated strategy. A long time had elapsed since 1580, when James had first decided to try to attract the attention of Catholic Europe. In fact, the early years of that decade brought a sharp change in his priorities in foreign affairs: the sudden struggle between the Spanish and English monarchs for his amity had a profound political and indeed psychological importance for James, bringing about a dramatic reorganization of his political strategy. Strongly influenced by his mother, James became increasingly inclined to intrigue with Spain, but at no time would he have risked a war with Elizabeth to satisfy the ambitions either of Mary, the Scottish Catholics, Philip, the Pope, the Jesuits, or any combination therein.

In fact, James’s greatest strength was his natural survival instinct. He was extremely adept at adapting to, and even taking advantage of, the strained international political scene. James knew that Scotland’s independence was guaranteed by England and Spain’s military, political and religious enmity. In holding a balance between Protestants and Catholics, and between Elizabeth and Philip, he was able to gain more independence to act and more economic benefits than could be afforded by relying on either side. In the final analysis, James was an intelligent and active monarch; a strong personality with a winning, and often manipulative, manner. James’s political attitudes towards Spain are an example of his clear understanding of the new forces of religion and politics; he was able to estimate the inherent strength of Protestantism and Catholicism in Scotland and in Europe,
integrating his thoughts, beliefs and ideas with the Machiavellianism of European politics.

Thus far, we have sought only to understand the conditions which motivated James’s intrigues with Spain, but the most important question remains: what effects did his actions have on Scottish politics? Clearly, James’s sudden quest for foreign alliances in 1580 jolted the country out of its old local framework, giving Scotland European significance. Scotland’s strategic position as England’s Achilles’ heel and the religious struggle within the realm were likely to lead to interference by the European Catholic powers. The possibility of gaining control over England through the Stewart succession to the English throne, which could lead to greater European stability, was even more appealing to Spain. However, the judgement of its significance in the construction of the country is far too sweeping since the Spanish activity in Scotland was not designed to promote a higher civilisation; on the contrary, it was purely destructive. James’s contacts with the Catholic powers during the 1580s and 1590s confirmed Protestant conspiracy theories. Protestant fears, which seem rather forced in the light of the internal situation, were justified only in relation to the progress of the Counter-Reformation on the continent and the possibility that Spain would intervene in Scotland. Subsequently, they tended to see the Catholic shadow lying behind most, if not all, opposition to the English and Scottish governments. In their views of contemporary foreign affairs, they had, since the beginning of James’s reign, constantly suspected the machinations of a Catholic league, whereby Spain, probably in conjunction with an internal rising, would combine to destroy Protestantism in the Isle. This helped to revive a flagging English interest in James’s kingdom; clearly, Elizabeth sought to wean or cajole Scotland from the orbit of Spain. Thus, Scotland became the proving ground in the great test of strength between pan-European Protestantism and the Counter-Reformation; a struggle between Spain, a giant in decline, and England, a rising power.

Whether James’s Spanish intrigues had any actual influence upon the shaping of Spanish policy of this period is also difficult to determine, but it is clear that Philip was conscious of the primary necessity of securing mastery within the British Isles as a
means to regain control of his rebellious Netherlands and to stop English attacks on the Spanish fleet. The key to achieving that mastery, however, lay with England’s neighbours. It was also Scotland that linked the discontent of the conservative English north to the turbulence in Ireland. And as long as there were contacts between Spain and the James, Philip would always have the “postern gate” into England held open. Elizabeth now turned her attention to close that back door, by drawing Scotland into England’s orbit, as soon as she felt herself in serious danger of Spanish attack. Elizabeth sought to attract James, using his ambition to gain the English throne as bait.

James was conscious of the privileges accrued to him in return for making Scotland the springboard for Spain’s “Great Enterprise.” It might have been expected that the Spanish intervention in Scotland would have led to a Spanish domination of the realm; however, James had, in reality, little fear of a Spanish attack. Spain’s interest in Scotland depended on its relations with England, in the same way that its ability to assist its allies in the kingdom was always conditioned by its constraining commitments in the Low Countries and France. Moreover, James knew that Spain saw Scotland as a retainer and only sought his cooperation for planned invasions of England, rather than a conquest of Scotland itself. The full consequences of a Spanish invasion would have been incalculable; the only certainty being that it would not have led to total control of the Isle by the Scots themselves. The defeat of the Spanish Armada did not signal the end of a Spanish military power, but, conversely, Spain could attempt a new assault on the Isle at any time, something that James would not ever forget as king of England, when he tried to rekindle Spanish relations by arranging a marriage between his son Charles and the Spanish infanta, and by executing Sir Walter Raleigh at the behest of Spain.

By now, it is evident that James, quite understandably, tried to exploit his position; however, there is still little evidence of him sacrificing his political, religious, ideological or strategic considerations for a foreign alliance. James’s leniency towards Spain meant that the Catholic intrigues in Scotland involved no massacres or religious wars. There were one or two rather half-hearted rebellions and an occasional demonstration of force, but
even then, as in the case of Lord Maxwell’s two revolts or in the Bridge of Dee affair, the crown did not retaliate with any state executions or mass reprisals. By the end of the century, revolts were things of the past and, by 1598, the crown had achieved a rapprochement with its nobility, in which its power was amply confirmed.\textsuperscript{1xxvii} The earls of Huntly, Errol and Angus, contemporarily known as the leaders of the “Spanish faction in Scotland,” capitulated in June 1597, after decades of being Catholic, signing their subscription to the Protestant Confession.\textsuperscript{1xxviii} Although it is probable that they remained Catholics at heart, in the public’s eyes they died as Protestants.\textsuperscript{1xxix} Indeed, by the last days of Philip II, most of the Scottish nobility had been reconciled with the crown, leaving Philip’s policy in ruins. In fact, Angus, Huntly, Errol and Bothwell were the last nobles ever to stage, with foreign support, a serious and direct challenge to the Scottish crown.\textsuperscript{1xxx} However, as paradoxical at it seems, James’s experiences ruling this volatile Scotland had taught him the necessity of having an obedient nobility, a lesson which proved vital when he became James I of England.\textsuperscript{1xxxi}

The analysis of James’s relations with Spain tells us of a story of success. Apart from a few minor crises, James achieved all his goals: he acquired the English crown, becoming king of England, Ireland and Scotland; he subdued the nobility; and he emerged as one of the key political figures in early modern Europe. The causes of his success were varied: Scotland’s remoteness, Elizabeth’s effectiveness in her political and diplomatic manoeuvres, Philip’s indecisiveness, Spain’s over-extended foreign preoccupations, and the disparate interests of those involved in these affairs. But without doubt, James succeeded because of his loyalty to the principle \textit{ius suum conservare} (the right to preserve himself). James was indeed a king in the Machiavellian tradition: ruthless, pragmatic, superbly rational in his manipulative intelligence, strategically flexible, with a capacity to prioritize and persevere. In truth, James’s own political cleverness was responsible for affirming him as the most influential, and controversial, of the Scottish kings.
NOTES


ii M. Rodríguez-Salgado, ‘Felipe II y la Crisis post-Armada: política exterior y rebelión, 1588-1594’, in Después de la Gran Armada: la historia desconocida (1588-16...) (Madrid, 1993); E.G. Hernán, Irlanda y el Rey Prudente (Madrid, 2000).

iii P. Croft, King James (Basingstoke, 2003), 5-17.


v Since the early 1570s, Philip was regularly informed of the ‘miserable conditions’ in which the Catholics had to live in Scotland. For example, see the letter titled “Razones por saber si Escosia es deseando al Rey d’España.” Scottish Catholic Archives [SCA], CA4/9/10.


vii P.H. Brown, Surveys of Scottish History (Glasgow, 1919), 44-45.

viii CSP Scot, v, 380-81. Some historians seem to have discovered a more “intimate” relation between James VI and Esmé Stewart. See D. Bergeron, King James and Letters of Homoerotic Desire (Iowa City, 1999), 33. It was in 1580 when James had his first intervention as protagonist in the international political stage. In December of that year, he sent a letter, which he had signed as “King James,” something that he had not done before out of respect for his mother. See, M. Salvá (ed.), Colección de Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de España (Madrid, 1849), xci, 512-14.

ix G. Hewitt, Scotland under Morton, 1572-80 (Edinburgh, 1982), 181; Colección de Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de España, xci, 514.

x Deciphered letter of Mendoza, 16 Sept. 1580, BL ADD

xi CSP Scot, iv, 633, 664-65.

xii CSP Scot, v, 658-59.

xiii Teulet (ed.), Relations, iii, 115-18.

xiv Colección de Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de España, xcii, 48-51.

xv For example, Teulet (ed.), Relations, v, 228-29.


xvii M. Lee, Great Britain’s Solomon: James VI and I in his three kingdoms (Illinois, 1990), 31-58.


xx P. Williams, Philip II (Basingstoke, 2001), 111, 125, 204.

xxi For example, G. Akrigg (ed.), Letters of King James VI & I (Berkeley, 1984), 44-45.


xxiii AGS E Leg. 828.


“Dissension with the ministers to pray for Queen Mary,” BL ADD MS 32,092, fo.78.


W. Forbes-Leith (ed.), *Narratives of Scottish Catholics under Mary Stuart and James VI* (Edinburgh, 1885), 181.

M. Hume (ed.), *Calendar of Letters and State Papers relating to English Affairs, preserved principally in the Archives of Simancas* (London, 1892-1899) iii, 196, 234, 238; *Colección de Documentos Inéditos para la Historia de España*, xcii, 205-9. The reason why James mentions France here is because for centuries Scotland’s most famous connection with Europe was the “Auld Alliance” with France. First agreed in 1295/6, the “Auld Alliance” was built on Scotland and France’s shared need to curtail English expansion. See, H. Fenwick, *The Auld Alliance* (Kineton, 1971).


T.G. Law (ed.), *Collected Essays and Reviews* (Edinburgh, 1904), 229.


Teulet, Relations, v, 493-96.

“Letter to Sir Francis Walsingham dissuading him from war with England” (1587), BL Stowe MSS 142, fo.27; R. Wernham, *Before the Armada: the emergence of the English nation, 1485-1588* (New York, 1972), 399.


xli See, for example, R. Persons, *A Conference about the Next Succession to the Crowne of Ingland, divided into twvo partes* (St. Omer, 1594).

xlii “Reference to a secret embassy from James VI to the Pope” (1595), BL Stowe MSS 166, fo.289.


xliv Quoted in W.A. Ward, ‘James VI and the Papacy’, *Scottish Historical Review* 2 (1905), 250.


xlix Sempill’s commission can be found in the Catholic Archives of Scotland at Columba House; Colonel William Sempill’s Collection (1587), SCA CA4/10/10.

li Letter entitled: “Por partidos que el Rey de Escocia oferce a su Magd Cath,” SCA CA4/9/16; C.F. Duro, *La Armada Invencible* (Madrid, 1884), i, 159.


liii Elizabeth I to James VI (9 July 1588), BL ADD MSS 23,240, fo.73.

Elizabeth I to James VI (9 July 1588), BL ADD MSS 23,240, fo.79. James committed the Spanish bearer to prison. See *CSP Scot*, ix, 595-96.


*CSP Scot*, ix, 589-91


This produced a very curious situation: it was clear that native collaboration was needed for any attempt to invade the Isle, but the Spanish monarch did certainly not have a good opinion of the Scots. Mendoza had informed Philip of the “natural inconstancy” of the Scots and further commented that they “being needy, will be content with little.” The continuous requests of financial support by Scots confirmed Philip in his belief that they could be easily bought. See Letter to the Duke of Alba (13 Nov. 1554), SCA CA4/1/2; *CSP Span*, iv, 613-14.


CSP Scot, xi, 166; “Discourse on designs of the King of Spain, and reply; with discourse about attack on England” (1593), Public Record Office [PRO] SP 94/4.


Letter of James VI (4 May 1596), BL ADD MSS 48,049, fo.331; Parker, Strategy, 278.

“Instruction given by King James to Robert Lord Sempill, his ambassador to Philip III of Spain” (1599), SCA CA4/1/14.

Williams, Philip, 251.


CSP Scot, v, 664.


Goodare and Lynch (eds.), James VI, 42.

See, for example, CSP Scot, x, 47, 54, 61, 85.

RPCS, viii, 159, 176, 262; Calderwood, History; vii, 159, 244.

Brown, Bloodfeud, 251; Goodare, State, 143.