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When King James VI of Scotland inherited the throne of England in 1603 he had ruled his native land almost as long as had Queen Elizabeth. He showed both vision and determination in pursuing his major political goals: a united Britain, and a foreign policy based on peace rather than bellicose chauvinism. Of course, there was a darker side: in the face of growing Parliamentary opposition, he would need all his celebrated wisdom to prevent open conflict. This book is a sympathetic portrait of a worthy first king of Great Britain.

King James, VI of Scotland, I of England Details

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Brenna says

If you don't know a lot about James I of England, this is a good introduction. For me, it lacked a lot of in-depth information that I would have liked Fraser to elaborate on. She completely glossed over James's personal life and most of the more significant "conspiracies" that made up his reign. Still a good reference guide.

Jamie Collins says

This is a lightweight summary of the life of King James, and I found it frustrating. I'm not very familiar with Stuart history and this assumes knowledge I didn't have - or at least I think that's why the prose became incoherent at times, rattling off names and events with little context. I think this is meant to be a revisit for someone already familiar with the history.

It's a large-format, nice-looking book with lots of illustrations.

Phoebe says

Excellent introduction to the life of an underrated king. In but a few pages (around half of which are illustrations), Fraser makes a man long gone feel real and three-dimensional.

On one hand, James was a great peacemaker who brought an end to war with Spain, an enlightened thinker who believed in religious freedom, and a scholar who founded one university and greatly enriched another. His reign was a time of art, academia, and culture, his greatest legacy of course being his translation of The Bible (lesser known treasures include the first anti-smoking leaflet). Unfortunately - being a man ahead of his times - his pacifism and tolerance towards Catholics would not be appreciated until long after his death.

But James was also a man with a tendency to overestimate things, such as his power and his treasury. This combined with his generally uninspiring public persona - did little to endear him to his people or his parliament. But for his faults Fraser offers understandable explanations (though not excuses). The economy wasn't exactly in ship-shape when he ascended to the throne in the first place, and his lack of charisma was rendered worse against the shadow of his predecessor, The Great Gloriana Elizabeth.

Antonia Fraser integrates King James' virtues and flaws in a refreshingly measured manner, writing with nuance and a flair for being fair. It's an old book, and sometimes you can tell - at one point Fraser feels compelled to defend James for his sexuality (he was at least bisexual and more likely gay), something most modern readers wouldn't feel needs excusing. But I can forgive that in a book written in the 70s. All-in-all, in a world where so many historians cannot resist polemic, a well-balanced biography is like an oasis in a desert. Personally, I came to admire the king that Fraser brought to life through her sensitive and thoughtful appraisal.

Marie Carmean says

I bought this book in part because we discovered there is a genealogical connection in our family to King James and I wanted to know more about him. The book was not heavy with a lot of historical data, but was just the type of overview of James's life that I was looking for. I feel like I have learned a lot. It was well-written and included just the right amount of information on what can sometimes be a complex, overwhelming era in English history.

Ollie says

The man who commissioned the translation of the Bible now popularly known as the King James Version was also a voracious gayer who fell passionately in love with boys from the age of 13 until his death at 58. Take a minute to savour that sweet irony. Antonia Fraser certainly didn't since, when she wrote this introduction to the man in 1974, she blamed his "tendencies" on his brutal separation from his mother, Queen Mary, and a harsh upbringing in Scotland. In many ways, James had a lucky reign: the power generated under Queen Elizabeth's rule came into its own under him, beginning Britain's expansion as a world power; he survived the Gunpowder Plot; knew Shakespeare (and perhaps even saw some of his plays performed for the very first time); and generally enjoyed a peaceful reign and various close relationships with pretty male courtiers. This book is a good introduction for anyone who doesn't know his story, especially because of the large amount of illustrations included. Sadly, though, the famous painting of him salivating over one of his favourites didn't make the cut.

Allison Thurman says

library

Russell Hall says

A good and unbiased view of James from the point of view of someone who knows nothing about James.

Lyn Elliott says

James hasn't interested me much, except for the authorized translation of the Bible that carries his name, and I doubt that I'll read more about him after this lightweight, chatty bio, but I am interested in the flow of ideas from religion to politics and war through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and James' reign sits squarely in the middle of that in both Scotland and England.

Any suggestions?

Donna Maguire says

I enjoyed this, I learnt more about King James VI of Scotland and I of England and it gave me a good introduction to him as a person, I read it in just over a day, which for a non fiction book for me is good and it kept my interest. I knew the basic facts about James as most people do, his mother was Mary Queen of Scots and she was forced to abdicate and he became King at thirteen months and he succeeded Elizabeth I to the Crown of England and was nearly blown up in the Gunpowder Plot, but I didn't really know much about James as a man, other than the rumours of a bi-sexual tendency and that after his good looking son died, the second inherited the throne and was subsequently executed and the period of Oliver Cromwell began. The book for me was excellent, it had a lot of images which allowed you to actually see what the people being mentioned looked like and it helped to give more detail to the period and that it was more than just a stop gap between the rule of Elizabeth I and Cromwell, personally having read this now, I feel James is very overlooked.

Tiphanie Stocks says

I am working on some family history research, which led to my reading this book on early 17th century England. I wanted to get an idea of what King James I was like as a person. I have read some of Fraser's books before, and I like her narrative style. This book was a little more simple than what I expected; however it served the purpose of giving me a pretty good background on King James I of England.

Shankar says

Sympathetic portrayal of a significant monarch, but far too light on the process of translating the KJV.

Edward says

KING JAMES I of England (actually King James VI of Scotland) is one in a series of oversize "London Book Club Associates" which appeared in the 1970's and were never meant to be more than an introduction to lives of English monarchs. The earlier ones that I read of Elizabeth and Mary Tudor were more interesting, simply because there was more physical action (plots, beheadings) going on than in this short life of King James, who once he was finally established as King of England, led a relatively calm life.

It's true that his insistence on royal authority, sanctioned by God, led to acrimonious disputes with parliament, much of it over financing (James was a poor manager). and these unresolved issues would ultimately lead to England's civil war, but that would be a generation later, after his death in 1625. He was not a bad king at all, he kept England out of potentially devastating wars; it's just that following Queen Elizabeth I was a hard act.

Sara says

A light read. Nothing really substantial and went off on a tangent before coming back so that was kind of disappointing. Not a good introduction to the historical figure.

Cynthia Karl says

The facts are accurate and interesting but overall the book seemed pretty dry. There are some exceptional pictures accompanying the text and this book is worth reading if you're a history buff.
