



What kind of king was Charles I?

Case Study 2: Charles I as a ruler – Source 1

An image of Charles I from the records of the Court of King's Bench, c.1625

(Catalogue ref: KB 27/1542/2)

What is this source?

This image of Charles I appears at the start of a document recording a court case.

Cases dealt with by the Court of the King's Bench usually involved the monarch in some way, for example cases involving taxes or customs duties. Monarchs were always interested in cases concerning how much money they received.

What's the background to this source?

Charles did not actually sit in the court and make the judgements. His image is in this record to show that he was the ruler of the kingdom. However, Charles was very involved in the daily business of government.

Records like the State Papers in the National Archives show that Charles was always on top of his paperwork. He personally took charge of appointing top government officials. He also took personal charge of important decisions such as war or peace or summoning Parliament.

It's worth knowing that ...

Charles had very similar ideas to his father about the Divine Right of Kings. This was the idea that kings were appointed by God, therefore their subjects should obey them.

At the time Charles was beginning his reign, monarchs in Europe were becoming increasingly powerful. Rulers like Louis XIV of France were becoming 'absolute monarchs'. They had absolute control of their kingdoms and no person or organisation was allowed to challenge them. They could even break their own laws if they felt the need. Charles had a similar attitude towards ruling his lands.



Your turn: What does this source tell us?

1. In what ways is this image similar to the images in the seals of Elizabeth I and James I? (See Case study 1: Monarchs before Charles I)
2. Does this image give you any clues about Charles's views on how a king should rule?
3. Study some other images of Charles I painted at the time. What do they tell us about how Charles saw his role as king? Good examples can be found at:
 - <http://www.abcgallery.com/V/vandyck/vandyck52.html>
 - <http://www.abcgallery.com/V/vandyck/vandyck1.html>

Source 1

