



What kind of king was Charles I?

Case Study 2: Charles I as a ruler – Source 3

An order to pay a bill for embroidering royal gowns, March 1627
(Catalogue ref: SP 39/19/51)

What is this source?

This is an order to pay a bill for embroidering the gowns of Charles's wife, Queen Henrietta Maria, and thirteen ladies in waiting.

The order went to the Treasurer of the Exchequer, the man in charge of the government 'department' that dealt with money and taxes. The £913 10s in this bill would be the equivalent of about £115,000 in the early 2000s – just for the embroidery, not the gowns themselves!

What's the background to this source?

Charles was a small shy young man with a stammer. He was probably a little insecure. This was one reason why he wanted to be surrounded by impressive art, buildings and clothes for him and his wife and his nobles.

Most of the nobles loved art, architecture and fine things. As king, Charles was keen to have the finest things of all. Magnificent buildings like the Banqueting House and the Palace of Whitehall did impress people. Charles also insisted on strict rules of behaviour at court. People could only talk to him at certain times. His rules were designed to remind people that he was the king.

It's worth knowing that ...

All monarchs liked to be surrounded by beautiful things. Elizabeth I and James I both spent large amounts of money on art, architecture, entertaining, clothing etc. Charles I was the same.

Elizabeth and James were often in financial trouble. When their money troubles became critical they usually called a Parliament. Both realised that ruling involved give and take. MPs would agree to taxes and in return the monarch listened to the concerns of MPs and tried to do something to help. Charles found it hard to listen to any advice or



concerns and saw all comments as criticism. This meant he had a difficult relationship with MPs, but he needed them because they had to agree to new taxes to raise money.

Your turn: What does this source tell us?

1. What is being paid for in this document?
2. Does it seem like a lot of money?
3. Check out a newspaper or website. Do celebrities today spend similar amounts on clothes?
4. Do you think people in the 17th century would have all agreed with one of the following views, or do you think they would have been divided?
 - It's an outrageous amount of money to spend on decorating clothes.
 - It's necessary that the queen and the royal court look their best so that the country looks rich and important.

Source 3

