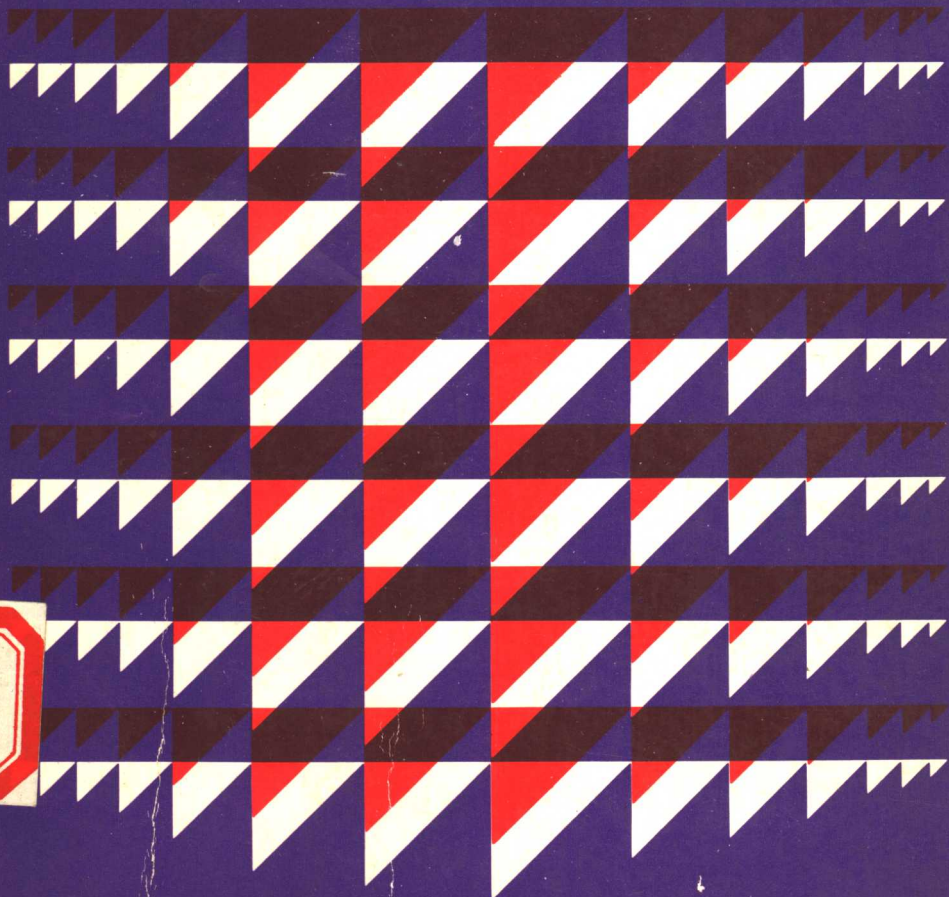


Elizabeth I, Queen of England

Edited and with an
introduction by
Richard L. Greaves



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The Florida State University

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For my parents

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the fact that "few rulers have impressed themselves so forcibly on the memory and imagination of the English race as Queen Elizabeth I,"¹ much about the magisterial queen remains enigmatic and controversial. The rapid growth of critical scholarship in the twentieth century has not dissipated either the often fervid response to her or the range of historical problems associated with her reign. It is the purpose of this volume to introduce the reader to a sampling of the varying analyses of Elizabeth and to some of the controversy surrounding such key problems as Elizabeth's religious views, her treatment of the Roman Catholics, the enigma of Mary Stewart, her relationship to her government, and the question of marriage and succession to the throne. Each problem both illumines and complicates the fascinating question of Elizabeth's character. The markedly different ways in which writers have depicted her character provide a reminder that Elizabeth's impression on the memory and imagination of the English is a multifaceted one, devoid of harmony and unity.

As in the case of Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, there are several discernible traditions of historical writing about her reign.² There is an avowedly Protestant tradition represented here by William Camden, Robert Naunton, and Bishop Mandell Creighton. James Froude also wrote from the Protestant standpoint, but unlike the others his study of Elizabeth led him from a position of admiration to one of marked criticism. The Catholic tradition is represented by William Allen and Edward Rishton, both hostile contemporaries of Elizabeth.

¹ J. B. Black, *The Reign of Elizabeth, 1558-1603*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1959), p. 1.

² Arthur J. Slavin's Introduction to *Henry VIII and the English Reformation* (Lexington, Mass., 1968).



FIGURE 1. Elizabeth I, c. 1575. This anonymous portrait, believed to have come from Cobham Hall, was perhaps the last to depict Elizabeth realistically. Subsequent portraits are increasingly stylized. The whiteness of her face reflects

Two Catholic historians, both of whom sought vainly to be objective, are included—John Lingard and Philip Hughes. The growing inclination to approach historical figures from a psychological perspective is perhaps best illustrated in Elizabethan studies by the work of Elizabeth Jenkins. Bishop Creighton earlier sought to explain the influence of heredity and a traumatic emotional experience on Elizabeth's character. Generally, however, modern historians have avoided the speculative pitfalls of a psychological approach to Elizabeth. The best biography in most respects continues to be that of J. E. Neale; his work is characterized by sound scholarship, a conservative approach, and a sympathetic portrayal of the queen. Neale is also an outstanding representative of those modern historians who have intensively studied Elizabeth's relationships with her government. Others who have dug deeply in this vein include Wallace MacCaffrey and Conyers Read. R. B. Wernham has applied the critical tools of the modern historian to Elizabeth's foreign policy, correcting older misconceptions about Elizabeth and incidentally providing new insight into her character. In the aftermath of such major studies new biographies of the queen have been written, notably those of Neville Williams and Joel Hurstfield. As in the case of her father's historians, there is a growing inclination among most modern scholars to skirt the fires of religious passion and to concentrate more on other aspects of Elizabeth's reign. The result has not been less controversy but more, as disagreement over interpretation and significance spreads to a broader spectrum.

Elizabeth's contemporaries reacted in markedly different ways to her rule. The enthusiasm which generally greeted her accession is described by William Camden, a teacher and headmaster at Westminster School and subsequently a member of the College of Heralds. Although he did not commence *The Annals or History of Queen Elizabeth* until 1608, he was actively engaged in historical writing during Elizabeth's reign as he composed his *Britannia*, a survey of English history. He was first encouraged to write *The Annals* about Elizabeth by Lord Burghley, who put his own papers and those of the royal archives at Camden's disposal in 1597. *The Annals* were intended to celebrate "the Memory of that Princess (which amongst

current fashion, providing a vivid contrast with her brilliantly-colored costume. A crown and scepter rest behind the queen's left arm. (*National Portrait Gallery, London*)

English-men ought ever to be gratefull and sacred),” yet Camden also sought to write as an unprejudiced, critical historian. His models were Polybius and Tacitus. He was convinced that a factual rendering of Elizabeth’s reign would serve as a self-evident record of her greatness.

Camden provides an early estimate of Elizabeth’s religious views—one of the more vexing questions surrounding her. For him Elizabeth was genuinely concerned to promote Protestantism, though he was also careful to note both the positive and the negative political implications of the adoption of a Protestant policy. Froude’s assessment of Elizabeth’s religious views is very different from Camden’s. Froude, an avowed admirer of the English Reformation who saw its history as great drama, was convinced of Elizabeth’s open contempt for Protestantism. She is likened by Froude to the Bourbon monarch Henry IV; both sovereigns, he believes, were impatient with the differences in outward expression between Protestants and Catholics. Both believed “in certain elementary truths lying at the base of all religions.” Elizabeth adopted a Protestant policy, but only because of political exigencies involving England’s relationship with the Continent. Froude’s judgment has been essentially reiterated in this century by Wallace MacCaffrey. His Elizabeth is coolly indifferent to religion, possessing the politician’s flexibility and moral neutrality. Yet her political acumen was such that she used members of her Council (e.g., Bedford and Knollys) to mediate between her religious indifference and the Protestant passions of many of her subjects. The views of Froude and MacCaffrey have not, however, proved totally compelling. Some scholars continue to find deep religious convictions in Elizabeth. Joseph Hodges (who is not included in this volume) has argued in *The Nature of the Lion: Elizabeth I and Our Anglican Heritage* (London, 1962) that Elizabeth was an Anglo-Catholic in her religious views.

Closely related to the problem of Elizabeth’s religious position is the question of her treatment of Catholic subjects. Catholic authors from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries have been strong in their indictments of her. Yet one of the earliest tracts is surprisingly sober and reasoned, if critical. *A True, Sincere, and Modest Defense of English Catholics* was written by the influential William Allen. Allen, principal of St. Mary’s Hall, Oxford, was forced into exile at Elizabeth’s accession. In 1568 he founded a college at Douay in the

Netherlands to train missionary priests. His efforts were largely responsible for his condemnation to death in 1581 (in absentia). Allen's work was written in response to a tract by Burghley entitled *The Execution of Justice in England* (1583). Burghley's purpose was to defend the penal action of the Elizabethan government against Catholics on the ground that Catholics were seditious. Burghley cited the foreign seminaries (including Allen's college at Douay) as centers to train men to sneak into England and persuade Elizabeth's subjects to adhere to the papal bull of 1570 excommunicating her. Catholics were not, Burghley insisted, being persecuted for religious reasons. Allen's reply, published the following year, insists that the persecution is religious in nature, and ties the government's action to Elizabeth's position as supreme governor of the Church of England. Edward Rishton, a product of Allen's college at Douay, writes on a lower level, accusing Elizabeth of hypocrisy and cunning cruelty. The brunt of his charges echo those of Allen: the Catholics are the victims of religious persecution.

The white-hot emotion of Rishton has since cooled, but Catholic historians have not deviated from the essential charge of Allen and Rishton. John Lingard sought to write only the truth, regardless of its impact on Catholics. The notes to his work, however, were to be laden with evidence in favor of the Catholic cause. Moreover, he admitted that "whatever I have said or purposely omitted has been through a motive of serving religion."³ His assessment of Elizabeth is unfavorable, in marked contrast to that of Camden. The immoral, irresolute sovereign is guilty of the persecution of Catholics for religious reasons. This too is the considered judgment of the premier Catholic historian of the English Reformation in modern times—Philip Hughes. A judicial review of Elizabethan penal legislation leads him to a ringing defense of the views expressed by William Allen in opposition to the "slandorous tract" of Burghley. Against the reaffirmation of the traditional Catholic charges, summed up in Hughes's accusation that "Queen Elizabeth put to death, solely because of their religion, between the years 1577 and 1603, 183 of her Catholic subjects," the student of history must weigh J. E. Neale's account of Elizabeth's relationship with her parliaments, especially

³ Cited in C. H. Williams, "In Search of the Queen," *Elizabethan Government and Society: Essays Presented to Sir John Neale*, ed. S. T. Bindoff, J. Hurstfield, C. H. Williams (London, 1961), p. 9.

that of 1581. Neale credits Elizabeth with restraining and modifying the desire of Parliament to enact sweeping anti-Catholic legislation. Neale accepts Francis Bacon's observation that in matters of religion Elizabeth did not want consciences "to be forced," though she would not tolerate conscientious actions which became matters of faction. Neale's careful study of source documents has laid to rest the mistaken notion that Elizabethan parliaments were servile tools of the sovereign, but the student is still faced with the problem of assessing the nature of Catholic subjugation and Elizabeth's role in it.

Closely involved with the Catholic question is the enigma of Mary Stewart, whose very existence posed a threat (in whatever degree) to Elizabeth. The nature of the problem at the outset of the reign is discussed by Camden. Because of Elizabeth's illegitimacy in the eyes of the Catholic church, the appropriate claimant of the throne was Mary, granddaughter of Henry VIII's sister, Margaret Tudor. Once again the Catholic writers are highly critical of Elizabeth for her treatment of her Scottish cousin. In Rishton's partisan judgment the treatment accorded to Mary, a queen not subject to English law and also Elizabeth's "invited guest," was barbaric. With considerably more care, Lingard examined the events surrounding Mary's execution and pronounced Elizabeth guilty of dissimulation. Her major concern, having been responsible for the execution, was to avoid blame by pretending ignorance. Froude, on the other hand, credits Elizabeth with genuine feelings of mercy and kindness towards Mary. It is the Queen of Scots, not Elizabeth, who manifested fierce animosity as revealed in the historical record. Of the many historians who have discussed the problem, perhaps the best in his rendering of the tortuous period preceding and immediately following Mary's execution is Conyers Read. A careful examination of the events which transpired between Elizabeth's signing of the warrant for Mary's death and her actual execution led him to conclude that Elizabeth was indeed genuinely indignant over Mary's execution. However Elizabeth's role is viewed in this Marian "tragedy" determines to a significant degree the overall analysis of her character and ability as a ruler.

Elizabeth's role in the government of the state has also been an area of broad controversy. One of the earliest assessments of value was written by Robert Naunton about 1630. Regarding the queen with marked admiration, Naunton was an astute writer when he dis-

cussed her political involvement. Here the essential characteristic in his estimation was her rule by factions, a theme explored more fully in the modern works of Neale and MacCaffrey. He correctly recognized that Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, was not as powerful as had been assumed. Elizabeth's supremacy is emphasized. Even in her relationship with Parliament, Naunton comments on the mutual loyalty underlying their differences. Neale's classic study of the relationship between Elizabeth and her parliaments, however, necessitates some modification of Naunton's rather rosy picture, for in more than one parliament there was "pertinacious dispute" over such questions as religion, the succession, the fate of Mary Stewart, and monopolies. Still Neale's studies confirm the ultimate goodwill between sovereign and parliaments that Naunton observed. Naunton also handles the question of Elizabeth's notorious parsimony with acumen, noting her underlying financial troubles and the Irish "malady."

Lingard is more critical of Elizabeth as a sovereign. A zealous adherent of absolute monarchy, she presided over a judicial system characterized by arbitrary tyranny. She did not spare the blood of her subjects. Despite her parsimony, she imposed heavy financial obligations on her people. The blame, however, is placed by Lingard on "the foreign policy of the cabinet . . . [which] plunged the queen into a gulf of unfathomable expense."⁴ Her relationship to Parliament is described in terms that emphasize its servile status—a view that must now be modified in light of Neale's research. One of the most striking facts about Elizabeth's rule is her habitual irresolution. To Lingard this was not a sign of cautious statesmanship but essentially resulted from a defect "in the constitution of her mind," due in part to an excessively suspicious nature. Froude, on the contrary, argues that Elizabeth's vacillations in governing were caused by the fact that she was forced to adopt policies favorable to Protestants but distasteful to a ruler who regarded religious controversy as useless speculation. MacCaffrey offers another explanation: her reluctance and suspicion were the result of the insecurity she felt as a *female* sovereign.

Any assessment of Elizabeth's role as a sovereign must, of course, take into account her relationship to her key advisers. Froude's

⁴ Lingard, *A History of England from the First Invasion by the Romans to the Accession of William and Mary in 1688*, new ed. (Boston, 1855), vol. 8, p. 419.

provocative view (which later scholars have rejected) is that the sound decisions of the reign were made by William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and that whenever Elizabeth altered his recommendations the results were injurious. Still Froude recognized that the ultimate power and responsibility of decision making were the queen's. While MacCaffrey would not disagree on this point and would cite Elizabeth's belief in divine-right monarchy, he would also insist that by 1572 Cecil and Dudley become sharers in the supreme power of government, forming a "secular trinity." But the trinity, if there was one, did not last. Read, who has made the most intensive study of the relationship between Elizabeth and Cecil, describes the development of a partnership between the two, though a partnership in which the queen was the dominant member. Whatever personal attachments Elizabeth may have had for Dudley, it was Cecil who was her junior partner in government. Neale too confirms the ability of Elizabeth to handle her advisers as well as her parliaments.

A different portrait of Elizabeth the sovereign emerges in the work of R. B. Wernham, a leading expert in Elizabethan foreign and military affairs. In a closely argued study of Elizabethan war aims and strategy, Wernham demonstrates that there were important occasions when the queen was not hesitant. Moreover, against the prevailing view of Elizabeth's ability to exercise her ultimate sovereignty, Wernham depicts her lack of control over her men of war on more than one occasion. The latter are the target of some sharp criticism by Wernham, for though Elizabeth is recognized to lack the genius for war, she nevertheless had a better grasp of the problems than her military men. Wernham thus provides a dimension to understanding Elizabeth that is traditionally lacking.

One of the most pressing problems facing Elizabeth as a monarch was that of succession to the throne. Entwined with this was the political and personal question of marriage. Although the crown ultimately went to Mary Stewart's son, James VI of Scotland, the issue of the succession was in doubt much of the reign. Froude actually accuses Elizabeth of lacking interest in the question, and MacCaffrey concludes that she must not have had any dynastic ambitions. Beyond such superficial judgments is a complex problem requiring a thorough examination of domestic and foreign affairs as well as Elizabeth's personal desires. Camden discusses the question of (avoiding) marriage to Philip II of Spain, husband of Elizabeth's

deceased sister Mary. Bishop Creighton, reflecting the Victorian sense of the importance of heredity on character, finds the key to Elizabeth's relations with men in her experience as a young girl with Lord Admiral Thomas Seymour, husband of her stepmother and brother of Lord Protector Somerset. The sensual Seymour, whom Creighton believes was typical of Elizabethan men, provided her with a lesson that "did more than anything else to form her character," especially teaching her how dangerous it was to give rein to her affections. Elizabeth Jenkins analyzes the same episode, concluding that the Seymour affair and her mother's execution left Elizabeth with permanent damage to her nervous system and sexual development. This is borne out, Jenkins believes, in her subsequent relationship with Dudley ("a sexual one which stopped short only of the sexual act") and her other suitors. Elizabeth had learned, in the subrational recesses of her mind, that sexual intercourse meant capitulation, terror, and (through the impact of her mother's experience) death. Lingard, on the other hand, true to his promise to print any evidence in his footnotes which might favor the Catholic cause, ransacked the sources for heresy evidence to prove that Elizabeth, far from being reluctant to consummate a sexual relationship, was licentious. The student of history, recognizing the partisanship of Lingard and perhaps wary of the speculative element in Creighton and Jenkins, may find Neale's explanation of Elizabeth's relationship with Dudley a key to the broader problems of marriage and succession. Although Elizabeth wanted to marry Dudley, the suspicious death of his wife, Amy Robsart, and the ensuing uproar provoked strong opposition from the Council. Elizabeth, placing her obligations as a ruler above her personal desires, yielded to the wishes of her councillors. Henceforth Elizabeth determined that, as queen, she would marry only if necessity required it. Yet neither would she name a successor, bearing in mind how the "inconstant" English people "preferred the rising to the setting sun."⁵ Had satisfactory arrangements been worked out with Mary Stewart, she would have been designated Elizabeth's heir, despite the inconstancy of the English, but this was never to be.

Was Elizabeth a great ruler? Again the historians have not agreed. There is a sharp difference of judgment between MacCaffrey and

⁵ Neale, *Queen Elizabeth* (New York, 1934), p. 108.

Neville Williams over the results of Elizabeth's rule to 1572. MacCaffrey's thesis is that by 1572 the queen had created a solid monarchy, restoring a political stability that had been lacking in England since the late 1520s. A key factor in that stability was Elizabeth's acquisition of two "surrogate husbands," Cecil and Dudley, who provided the political world with an air of permanence and predictability. Another important factor was the queen's use of prominent subjects to mediate between herself and her people. Royal control and stability were more basic, to MacCaffrey, than the uncertainties of the succession, the enigma of Mary Stewart, and the general problems of Europe. The judgment of Williams is gloomy in contrast. If the reign of Elizabeth had ended in 1572, it would have been a failure; she would have broken faith with those who placed their trust in her at her accession. The problem of succession was not settled; there was no unity in religion; she was in disagreement with her Council, with Parliament, and with Convocation; and England was isolated, lacking an ally. In short, by 1572 Elizabeth was "an unremarkable failure."

She reigned, of course, until 1603, but the assessments of her reign remain divided. It was a great age, but both the Protestant Naunton and the Catholic Lingard attribute the greatness fundamentally to favorable conditions, not to Elizabeth. Creighton, on the other hand, gives credit to the queen, and specifically to the instinctive sympathy she had for her people—a sympathy reflected in the article by Camden. She has been credited with much, including the early stability of the Bourbon monarchy and the salvation of the Dutch from Spanish domination (by Wernham), and a major contribution to the growth of the English liberal tradition through her efforts on behalf of Catholics (by Neale). The latter view, however, differs sharply from those of Lingard and Hughes. Ultimately each reader must decide the issues for himself. The difficulty is recognized in the final selection by Joel Hurstfield, one of the queen's most recent biographers. Here, to complement the controversial issues already raised, are fresh questions requiring further research by historians. The answers will vary, creating yet more controversy about one of England's most intriguing monarchs.

Note: All footnotes to these articles, except footnote 9 to R. B. Wernham's article, are those of the editor of this volume, not of the authors of the articles.

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I CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

