

The Sexual Politics of Elizabeth I - I

Lead: On January 14, 1559, Elizabeth Tudor, the daughter of King Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn was crowned ruler of England. She faced a lot of problems, not the least of which, the monarch was a woman.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Prior to the reign of Elizabeth, the English had made every effort to avoid placing a woman on the throne, treating the possibility as it were a plague. Since the Norman

invasion in 1066, a woman had aspired to rule only twice. The first was a disputed reign, the cause of much disorder and conflict. The second was a unqualified disaster. With all the difficulties that screamed out for Elizabeth's attention not the least of which was the nation's skepticism about her gender's potential for successful rule.

Medieval King Henry I of England was quite a lover. He produced twenty illegitimate children and two legitimate heirs. When his son William died during wild shipboard party in 1120, Henry designated his daughter Matilda as his successor. A headstrong and aggressive woman, as a girl of eleven Matilda was married off to the

Holy Roman Emperor. At his early death she came home, a childless widow at twenty-five. Her second marriage was to a boy ten years her junior, the French Count Geoffrey of Anjou. At first, the two couldn't get along but eventually were reconciled.

Matilda, ambitious and forceful, drew her husband into a war with her father. They were locked in a dispute over land when the old King died of indigestion in 1127. Since the King had been at odds with this daughter at the time of his death, her succession accession was disputed by the barons and the crown went to Count Stephen of Blois (ble-wa). He was pleasant person but his indecisive rule brought on years of chaos. Historian David

Crouch calls it, "a true and terrible Anarchy."

Ten years later in 1139, Matilda and Geoffrey taking advantage of Stephen's incompetence invaded England and for a time she ruled as Queen. Eventually had to surrender the claim. King Stephen lived to a natural death but it was the Plantagenet offspring of Matilda that succeeded him. So vivid was the memory of Matilda's chaos, that it would be many hundreds of years before Englishmen would again consider a woman to be King. Elizabeth had to struggle against the memory of Matilda as she attempted to establish her authority. Next time:

the disastrous reign of Bloody Mary.

**At the University of Richmond, this
is Dan Roberts.**

Resources

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