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Mary Stuart: Turbulence in Politics & Religion

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Mary Stuart: Turbulence in Politics &

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Introduction

Born on December 8th, 1547 Mary Stuart, commonly known as Mary Queen of Scots, grew into a passionate and persuasive individual. Once Mary had something set in her mind it was written in the stars. John Guy seems to be correct when he insists that, while Mary was often subject to her emotions and was known for being unyielding and divisive, she was quite the political genius. Mary was a Catholic but refused to allow that to limit her political pursuits. On the contrary, Mary used her religion to her advantage and did not allow it to dominate her politics but played her Catholic card when necessary and often kept it close to the vest to retain power. At a young age her Catholicism may have dominated her choices, but upon her return to Scotland she used it when convenient. Mary used her religion to play on Catholic Europe for aid and, in the very end, used her death as a weapon for Catholic allies to wield against her enemies. Mary Queen of Scots used her religion to her advantage in the realm of politics.

Purpose

This paper was written and researched in conjunction with two of my peers: Ellen Long and Morgan Myers. We all wrote papers on the religion and politics of queens in the sixteenth century. Ellen wrote about the political aspects of Elizabeth Tudor being “The Virgin Queen” as well as the impact that religion had on her reign. Meanwhile Morgan wrote of how Mary Tudor’s religion dominated her politics and asserted that “Bloody Mary” was a misnomer.



Evidence

During Mary’s time in France she allowed her Catholicism to be used in order to strengthen her claim to the English throne and continued to do so herself throughout her life. Mary continuously used her religion in order to gain support and eventually used her religion to play on martyrdom when she was put on trial. Mary also used her religion to justify two of her marriages. Her marriage to Francis was used by her mother to strengthen Catholic ties with France and to protect her from Protestant threats at home. Later on her marriage to Darnley, though sought due to desire, was undoubtedly a great connection in uniting two Catholic Stuarts. Mary had strong ties to Catholic Europe, France in particular, thus allowing her to have connections to the Pope and the Holy Roman Empire. She often enjoyed their support and they continued to fight for her return to Scotland. Meanwhile Catholics in England rallied for Mary to take the throne from Elizabeth. When not convenient, Mary would forgo using Catholicism as a point and left Protestants to their own devices, even keeping Protestants on her Privy Council in order to make connections with her Protestant cousin, Elizabeth I. Mary even proposed renouncing her faith to preserve her life and gain access to her son. Mary knew when to play the devote Catholic and when to appease Protestant desires.

Conclusions

Mary used her Catholicism as a weapon in both her early and later life. She used it, coupled with her bloodline, to assert her claim to the English throne throughout her reign. When ruling she did not buckle to the whims of Protestants but did allow their mutual existence and even kept them on her privy council. When her life was threatened and she became uncomfortable she even proposed her abandonment of her faith and her Catholic alliances, but upon the acknowledgement that her demise was imminent she played up her position as a martyr. All passion and quick wit, Mary was a force to be reckoned with. James Stuart went on to become King of England and Scotland, uniting Britain under one crown.

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