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Interpretations of Bloody Mary's Use of Religion and Politics

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Introduction

Following her brother, Edward VI's, death, Mary Tudor began to restore Catholicism to England. This was a difficult feat, as since Henry VIII's reign and the English Reformation, the monarch became the head of the Church. Thus, with the coronation of Mary, began England's reconciliation with Rome (Whitelock, *Mary Tudor*, 258-271). Mary believed the legislative changes made under Edward and Henry could be reversed, thereby restoring Catholic bishops, expelling Protestants, and arresting Protestant preachers. Mary's initial tolerance, rested in her belief that force would not be necessary if England was reconverted to Roman influence. This changed by Mary's third parliament in the latter half of 1554 into the beginning of 1555. She successfully reunited with Rome, restored the heresy laws, and reinstated Catholic exiles, including Cardinal Pole (Guy, *Tudor England*, 233-5).

Purpose

I wrote this paper and research in conjunction with two of my peers, Ellen Long and Latayzia Harris. We all wrote papers on the religion and politics of three Sixteenth Century Queens.. Ellen Long focused on Elizabeth I and Latayzia Harris wrote about Mary Stuart. All three papers were part of a panel presented at the Kansas Association of Historians conference in Manhattan, Kansas on March 29.

The purpose of my paper is to challenge the narrative that has resulted in Mary being remembered as "Bloody Mary" since her death in 1558. John Foxe, Protestant and author of numerous books, wrote of Mary's abuse of Protestants. He descriptively described the burnings that were subjected to the Protestants, or Heretics, in Mary's five year reign (1553-1558). Thus, after her death, Mary began to be known as "Bloody Mary." In contrast, her beloved successor, Elizabeth I, was admired by most and not remembered as a bloody queen (Richards, *Mary Tudor*, 197).

Evidence

During her reign, Mary Tudor had 300 heretics burned. In comparison, Elizabeth had 200 Catholics and 100 priests hung, disemboweled, or dismembered. Elizabeth is not known as a bloody queen because she repealed the heresy laws implemented under Mary's reign (Duffy, *Fire and Faith*, 82; Lockyer, *Tudor and Stuart Britain*, 216). The Catholic's killed under Elizabeth were labeled treasonous, while the Protestants were viewed as heretics, which soon became congruent with martyrs under Mary. In the fifty years in the martyrdom era, 7,000 Protestants were killed in Europe. Over 1,300 heretics were killed in 1556 in the Netherlands alone. The Church of England, which was restored by Elizabeth, increased the hostility felt by this period (Richards, *Mary Tudor*, 195).

There can be little doubt that Mary endorsed the burning of heretics. However, she only held this belief if they remained belligerent to recant their Protestant beliefs and accepted Catholicism. Despite this belief, the outcome she most desired was for heretics to recant (Richards, *Mary Tudor*, 198). Each heretic was offered a pardon; if they were refused, they were burned at the stake (Whitelock, *Mary Tudor*, 282). The burnings quickly escalated and neither Mary nor Cardinal Pole anticipated the amount of heretics that would burn (Whitelock, *Mary Tudor*, 285). Penry Williams argues that once the burnings began, they could not stop them without confessing that reenacting the heresy laws was a failure (Williams, *The Later Tudors*, 103).

In comparison to other monarch's of the time, her reign was no bloodier than her admired successor's. This ideal began, according to David Loades' *The Reign of Mary Tudor: Historiography and Research*, with John Foxe's detailed accounts of the heretic's burnings and Mary's legacy has been tainted (Loades, *"The Reign of Mary Tudor,"* 547). Loades' research on the historiography of Mary Tudor outlines the misconceptions surrounding Mary's reign. Since its publication in 1989, substantial research has been done to further support the claim that Mary Tudor did not warrant the name "Bloody Mary."

Results/Conclusions

In her short five years as queen, Mary set the precedent for how a female should rule England while being labeled "Bloody Mary." This name was not warranted but has lasted as a result of Elizabeth's accomplishments and restoration of Protestantism in her time as monarch. She reversed the heresy laws and validated the killing of hundreds of Catholics by calling it treason. She also ensured she would not have to share her power by not marrying. While Mary killed hundreds of Protestants during her short reign, she was not so different from her sister and numerous Continental European rulers in the 1500s, who brought about the death of thousands Protestants and Catholics alike.

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Picture

"Unlocking Our Collections: Mary I." Society of Antiquaries of London. https://www.sal.org.uk/museum-collection/unlocking-our-collections/mary-i/.