

LIBERAL ARTS

The Education of a Tudor Queen: Mary I's Preparations for the Throne

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When thinking of powerful women and queens in England, Mary I is often overlooked. Scholars traditionally have looked at Mary as a weak figure, unprepared for the throne or the responsibilities that came with it. By examining her early education, new and more positive conclusions can be reached about Mary's preparedness for the throne, something that supports a trend of redefining this iconic queen. The idea that Mary lacked preparation for the throne is counterintuitive, as Mary was the sole heir of Henry VIII for the first seventeen years of her life. Most scholars have ignored her education, and so this research was conducted with the intent to determine whether or not Mary received an education that would have prepared her for the throne. The research methods included studying a range of primary documents, such as personal letters, educational documents commissioned by her mother, and accounts of Princess Mary as recorded by foreign diplomats serving in her father's court. The results of the research suggest that Mary received an education that was both varied and comparable to one that a prince would have been given, especially as she aged. Recent scholarship reexamining Mary I has not covered this particular aspect of Mary's early educational life. These conclusions about her education challenge earlier work that argues that Mary was unprepared for her role as queen. This returns a measure of autonomy to Mary I, by showing that whatever her choices were as queen, she made them on her own without making excuses for herself or her upbringing. Further research is still required in order to determine how Mary's early education affected her choices as a queen regent.

Research advisor Melinda Zook writes, "Kelsey Campbell is a history student with an interest in Tudor history, particularly in Tudor queens. For her research on Queen Mary, she found a part of Mary's educational life had been overlooked and sought to fill in some of the gaps. She hopes to one day continue her research through graduate studies."



Mary I, painted 1544 by Master John. Courtesy of the Granger

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