



# Tudor women in power in a patriarchal world (1485-1603)

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**Asya Brozzetti**

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(1485 – 1603)**

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# TUDOR WOMEN IN POWER IN A PATRIARCHAL WORLD (1485-1603)

BROZZETTI  
Asya



Année Universitaire 2020-21.

Mémoire de Master LLCE Recherche Études Anglophones.

Sous la direction de Madame La Professeure Stéphanie Bory et Monsieur Le Professeur Steven Sarson.

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## **Introduction**

Sixteenth-century England witnessed one of the most powerful dynasties in English history: the Tudors. At the end of a long period of civil wars called the Wars of the Roses, which shaped England throughout the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the conflict between the Houses of Lancaster and York was finally over following the entrance on the stage of battlefield of the Tudor family with Henry VII.<sup>1</sup> Managing to win over Richard III of the House of York in the famous battle of Bosworth, Henry became the first Tudor monarch of a dynasty that lasted until the very beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This dynasty introduced England to one of the most popular and interesting monarchies of royal history, which marked the history of his country socially, religiously, and politically.

Beyond the popular image of the Tudors, England actually went through a period of social, religious and political changes during this century and the possession as well as the pursuit of power were the ambition of most of the members of the Royal Court in order to mark their own influence in such changes.<sup>2</sup> At Court, everything turned around the King whose decisions were crucial to the functioning of the system and in this social and political order, the closer one was to the King the more power one held. Yet, the real meaning of power differed whether it concerned women rather than men and in a century when patriarchy prevailed, women's place in society depended on and was usually decided by men themselves. This began to change during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which was marked

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<sup>1</sup> The Wars of the Roses was a period of civil war in England that lasted for thirty years, from 1455 to 1485. It consisted of the fight for the throne between two Houses, the House of Lancaster and the House of York. The name of the wars comes from the emblems of the two Houses, a white rose for the Yorks and a red one for the Lancastrians. The war began as King Henry VI lost his power, considered as a weak ruler, and two men fought against one another for the throne. These men were Richard of York, King Edward III's great-grandson, and Edmund Beaufort, Duke of Somerset. There are several wars that led to the final victory of Henry Tudor in 1485 and here is a brief summary of the main events. First, Richard fought against Somerset in the battle of St. Albans in 1455, which led to his victory. In 1459, during the Battle of Blore Heath, the Yorks are defeated and expelled from nobility through an Act of Parliament. The third battle is the Battle of Ludford Bridge and Northampton, which Richard of York won, thus capturing the King and the Queen, Margaret of Anjou, even though he was to be eventually killed in the Battle of Wakefield in 1461. The war was, then, continued by Richard's son, Edward IV who managed to win against the Queen's army in the Battle of Towton, considered as one of the bloodiest one-day battles in England's history. Then the war pursued as Edward IV married Elizabeth Woodville, thus challenging one of his most loyal and efficient men, Warwick, who had found a French alliance for him. Eventually, Edward IV triumphed against Henry VI, Margaret of Anjou and Warwick, but after his death, his brother, Richard succeeded him instead of Edward's son and, in order to secure his position, he probably killed his two nephews – who were to be known as the Princes in the Tower and never to be found. At this point, Henry Tudor moved forward against Richard and he eventually killed him in 1485 in the Battle of Bosworth, after which a new dynasty began and a long period of wars ended.

<sup>2</sup> The main changes that occurred in England under the Tudor dynasty from a religious and political perspective concerned England's position and alliance in a European level. Under Henry VIII, the Catholic relationship with the Church was to change permanently as the King decided to break with Rome in the 1520s in order to marry his second wife Anne Boleyn and, therefore, to divorce from Catherine of Aragon. This choice was to turn upside down England's position in Europe as well as its alliances with Catholic powers such as Spain and France. Moreover, the spread of the Reformation by Martin Luther led the English people to welcome the new faith and to move away from the Catholic Church and religion, considered as corrupted. We will study the way Tudor Queens tried to impose their own religious ideas in a religiously changing period and the way they managed to make this country one of the most powerful countries in Europe. The social changes, which we will analyse in this work, concern the general mindset of women's position in society and their success as monarchs from a political perspective.

by social changes concerning gender and women managed to establish their own influence from the top of the social ladder. The meaning of power took, therefore, a different direction that turned upside down the traditional conception of it, linked to privileged men who represented the main characters of the patriarchal system.

The word “power” engenders, in fact, different meanings and nuances according to the point of view it is looked at, whether it refers to religion, politics, or gender. An example can be found with the figures of the King and the Pope; if, on the one hand, in a monarchical system the former held the political power, on the other the latter represented the highest religious authority. Nonetheless, during the 16<sup>th</sup> century, profound changes were put forward and they broke the normal order of medieval English society, thus unsettling the political and religious conception of power. This latter was at the centre of the system of the Court where politics was administered and every issue and decision turned around the monarch, but it was also a place where ambition and skills were exploited in order to achieve the ultimate power that could allow people to control or even manipulate the King himself. It is crucial to understand the meaning of power from different perspectives in order to have a depiction of 16<sup>th</sup>-century life at Court.

If we take into consideration the etymology of the word, which goes back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, we discover that “power” is the

ability to act or do; strength, vigor, might, especially in battle; efficacy; control, mastery, lordship, dominion, ability or right to command or control; legal power or authority; authorization; military force, an army.<sup>3</sup>

All these characteristics that define power are traditionally associated with men since they were the ones who used to have the necessary physical strength to fight in the battlefield. In this definition, power becomes a manly quality concerning the ability to take command and have the strength to win wars that were to increase the notoriety of a country. In such a way, power became strictly associated with men and women did not seem to have any power, except in the domestic sphere. Physical strength was a quality that belonged to men only because of biological reasons and that strength was the image of power – from a Darwinian point of view, the strongest was the fittest and therefore the one who would take control of the weakest and who would be able to keep the species alive.

However, with the creation of monarchies and the inheritance of titles, the conception of power took a different direction and physical strength was not the main quality that determined who attained power, but rather the “chance” to be born in a powerful family, and of course to be born a man. Within the higher social classes, power meant wealth and women were, in fact, excluded from the inheritance

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<sup>3</sup> “Power”, in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=power> consulted on 6 April 2021.



of family wealth and, only in case of marriage, that wealth was to be taken under the control of their husbands. In the same way, monarchs preferred sons to daughters because they were the only ones who could keep the family name alive and they were considered more suitable to the task of administering a country. Nonetheless, there was no Salic law<sup>4</sup> in England, as it was the case in France, and therefore women could actually inherit the power of sitting on the throne and become Queens, but the mindset of 15<sup>th</sup>-century England led people to be wary of women in such a position. Henry Stafford, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Buckingham – an English nobleman of that century - affirmed that “It was not women’s place to govern the kingdom, but men’s”<sup>5</sup> and his statement is representative of the general feeling towards women concerning the fact that

women were regarded as weak, irrational creatures at the mercy of their reproductive cycle, their chief function being the bearing of children. They were seen as unfit to lead armies in battle and interfere in affairs of state. Once wed, they had no control over their own property. In law they were regarded as infants. Their primary purpose was to be wives and mothers, subordinate to their menfolk.<sup>6</sup>

A woman had to be associated with a male figure and depended on men, either her father, husband or even her son in case of a Queen Regent and it was through her relationship with men that she could achieve power. In the case of Queens alone in power, as with Elizabeth I, they inherited political power through the inheritance of the Crown, but marriage was generally the most urgent issue in order to find a King that could share and filter that power in a manly tradition. Under Henry VIII, only through their lawful union with the King, women could have some influence in the administration of the country and that would be by advising their husband. Their position was generally linked to the well-functioning of their household at Court and their duty was mainly the production of male heirs. However, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Queens began to affirm their own positions both as devoted wives to their King and by revealing that behind what was thought to be “weak, irrational creatures”, they were actually women with strength of character, intelligence and skills. Queen Catherine of Aragon was the daughter and aunt of three most important monarchs in Europe: Isabel of Castile, Ferdinand of Aragon and Charles V. She arrived in England in order to marry Henry VII’s first son, Arthur, but after he died only one year after their union, she was married to Arthur’s brother, Henry. In England, she managed to impose her own authority as Spanish princess and English Queen in a European level and her ability to take up the role as a capable monarch during Henry VIII’s absence by leading a war on her own allowed her to gain popularity and respect. Her marriage

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<sup>4</sup> Salic Law refers to a tradition in some royal families of Europe which prohibited females and descendants in the female line from inheriting land, titles, and offices.

<sup>5</sup> Henry Stafford, 2<sup>nd</sup> Duke of Buckingham, in Weir Alison, *Elizabeth of York: The First Tudor Queen*, London: Vintage 2014, p. 171.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*



to Henry lasted for almost twenty years, but her inability to give him a son that he desperately needed was the cause of her fall. In the 1520s, Henry began a fight with the Catholic Church in order to obtain a divorce from Catherine so that he could be free to marry Anne Boleyn. Catherine herself revealed her strength of character as she kept her loyalty to the King and to the sacred union of marriage, just like a good Catholic would do. However, the King's will was stronger than a Queen's and Henry managed to obtain the divorce as he declared himself the Supreme Head of the Church, causing the break with Rome and making Catherine's only child, Mary, illegitimate. Similarly to Henry's first wife, Anne Boleyn, too, revealed her ability to impose herself within a patriarchal world. The "self-made Queen" managed to elevate herself to the top of the hierarchy by marrying the King himself and to reveal her talents in politics and courtship, at the basis of her success and of her fall. These two women were to be at the origin of a revolution of gender that involved themselves and their daughters, Queen Mary I and Elizabeth I. Four women who were all linked to one another through their family legacy and their relationship with the male power in a patriarchal society where they had to fight in order to impose themselves. In a monarchical England that witnessed a revolution in government and in its association with the Church thanks to powerful men, women in power unconsciously began their own revolution by subverting all beliefs towards their gender and by showing that women, too, could do a man's job.

In a century when manipulation, corruption and power were the main means for success, women managed to impose their abilities in achieving their objectives and marking history through concrete actions that had an impact on the country itself. Each one of them underwent a battle against the traditional assumptions and customs that the patriarchal system imposed on them and they all personified a revolution in power as 16<sup>th</sup>-century women. In this work, we will present the fight for power in a patriarchal system by five Tudor Queens as representatives of the main events that marked English history. These women were Elizabeth of York, Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Mary I, and Elizabeth I and here is a brief biography of each one of them.

Elizabeth of York was Henry VII's wife and Henry VIII's mother. She was the last member of the House of York and the first Tudor Queen. Her union to Henry Tudor gave him the security to establish his own power as King and to start a new dynasty. She personified a transition between the new Tudor dynasty and the past governance of the House of York linked to a country at war and her ability at overcoming her family legacy by embracing her future as Tudor Queen allowed her to gain the people's respect. Catherine of Aragon was Henry VIII's first wife and her position as Spanish princess gave her the power to show her ability in politics and to maintain a stable relationship between England and Spain. Her experience in politics and her notorious religious devotion allowed

her to gain popularity and the strength that was to be needed in her fight for her marriage.<sup>7</sup> To Catherine's fall followed Anne Boleyn's rise to power. She was an English noblewoman who had managed to enter the Royal Court by becoming one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting. She had spent most of her years of education in France, at Margaret of Austria's Court and she spoke French fluently. This foreign education introduced her to the new evangelical ideas – as we shall see in part 2 chapter 2 – that were beginning to spread in Europe in the 1510s. Her presence at the English Court caught the King's eye and, since Catherine did not seem to give him the son he desired, Henry VIII began to seriously think about remarrying. Anne Boleyn was one of the main causes that led to the break with Rome in the late 1520s and she managed to socially elevate herself by becoming Queen in 1533. However, Henry's hope for finally having a son began to fade away as Anne gave birth to a daughter, the future Elizabeth I and that was to be the beginning of her fall. We will see that Anne Boleyn managed to exploit the patriarchal system in order to achieve power, but at the same time, she became a victim of that same system as she was accused of adultery and executed in 1536. After Henry VIII's death, his only son by his third wife, Jane Seymour, succeeded him at only nine years old as Edward VI. His brief reign is crucial in the establishment of the Reformation in England and after he died at fifteen, her sister, Mary Tudor, acceded the throne as the first female monarch. She was Catherine of Aragon's daughter and she received a Catholic education. Her accession to the throne was briefly prevented by Protestant men who had enforced the Reformation under Edward VI by proclaiming Mary's cousin, Lady Jane Grey, as Queen. Mary managed to defeat her Protestant enemies and, at the beginning of her reign, she had the support of the English people, as she was considered as the only legitimate heir of the Crown. However, her Catholic beliefs were too conservatives and she was not able to adapt to the reforming mentality of her times. Her marriage to Philip II of Spain and her policy of burning of Protestants were to cause her fall and her reputation as Bloody Mary. After her death in 1558, Anne Boleyn's daughter, Elizabeth became Queen and her death marked the end of the Tudor dynasty. Elizabeth represented the climax of her gender revolution as she refused to marry. She exploited her feminine body to increase her power by creating the image of the Virgin Queen. Elizabeth was aware of all the prejudices and assumptions linked to her gender and, instead of denying them, she revealed her strength of will and of character, by comparing herself to a King. Her ability to bring England towards an era of military achievements and Golden Age

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<sup>7</sup> As we shall see, Catherine of Aragon was to play a major role in the political course of the events by taking up the role of ambassador for her Spanish family and English King. Moreover, her capacity in adapting in a situation of war during Henry's absence made her one of the women who shaped history. Of course, she is best known for the events concerning Henry's desire to divorce from her. Thanks to the popularity that she gained throughout her years as Queen as well as the Catholic support coming from Rome and Spain, she managed to lead a fight for her marriage that was to last almost ten years, even though she was eventually defeated by the patriarchal system.

thanks to her cooperation with the patriarchal system made her one of the most important women in English history who turned upside down the traditional rules linked to her gender.

These women in power shaped 16<sup>th</sup>-century England by defying the male authority of the time and by managing to initiate a feminine revolution that was to mark the history of the country. Their will and right to impose their power had consequences within the main institutions such as the Catholic Church and within the Tudor dynasty's present and future times. On the social perspective, their actions did not only involve men, but women as well. This is what happened between Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn; their will to keep or to achieve the bond of marriage with the King was to begin a war that took a greater extent as it put into danger England's alliance with Spain and it caused Henry's break with the Catholic Church. In the same way, the tensions between Mary Tudor and Lady Jane Grey, also known as the 'nine-days Queen', and between Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, revealed how patriarchy could interfere with Royal succession by exploiting their influence on the monarchs for their own interests, thus making them either victims or heroines of their own power.

In order to accomplish such an analysis, I have based my researches on historical works that depicted and explained the functioning of English society and monarchy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most important authors who dedicated his life to the Tudor dynasty from all perspectives is Geoffrey Elton, whose *Tudor Revolution in Government* and *England under the Tudors* allowed me to build the right contextualization of the time. His clear analysis of male authorities who had an impact on the political and religious changes of the 16<sup>th</sup> century helped me to understand the functioning of the system at the time. His studies concerning Henry VII, Henry VIII, Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Wolsey allow us to have a closer look to these historical figures who made the Tudor dynasty immortal as they played major roles in the political and religious changes. Elton explained how Henry VII was still very much politically involved in the governance of the country, which was not the case with his son, Henry VIII. Because of that, skilful men such as Thomas Cromwell were able to reform the political power of the English monarchy by taking more control over the country, thus introducing a revolution in government. In the same way, Elton's depiction of Cardinal Wolsey allow us to understand the process of the break with Rome in the 1520s, which subverted all relationships with the Catholic Church. Elton's works help us understand the political and religious changes under the Tudors by emphasising on the actions of powerful men. That is why Tudor Queens' biographies are also crucial in the understanding of the events from a feminine point of view. Alison Weir's *Elizabeth of York, the First Tudor Queen* and *Elizabeth the Queen* give us a detailed analysis of the reigns of Queen Elizabeth of York and Elizabeth I and their relationship with

the institutions with which they were confronted. Giles Tremlett, too, managed to emphasise the importance of Catherine of Aragon's impact in English history in his biography *Catherine of Aragon: Henry's Spanish Queen* and Eric Ives's *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn* clarifies the events linked to Henry's second Queen. I also based my researches on original works of the time such as John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* and Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* in order to understand the 16<sup>th</sup>-century events and mindset through direct witnesses of the time. However, their works have to be read with suspicion and the knowledge of 16<sup>th</sup>-century background is crucial to understand to what extent their testimonies have to be accepted. Both Foxe and Knox bring two personal perspectives concerning their beliefs and their way to perceive the events. On the one hand, Foxe wrote a list of Protestant martyrs, by denigrating the actions of Catholic important figures such as Queen Mary I. Being a Protestant himself, it is not surprising that he would emphasise Protestant achievements and that is why his work must be read in this perspective in order to be able to construct our own opinion. Knox as well gave us an important testimony of the general mindset of the time concerning women. In the same way as Foxe, however, Knox's perspective is influenced by Mary I's bloody reign, using it as a justification to generalise what he believed to be women's incapacity to govern on their own. That is why it is important to read their works with care and by being aware of the author's background. The study of contemporary books concerning the time becomes therefore crucial in order to have an objective perspective of those times. Works written by contemporary historians such as *Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* by Muravyeva and Toivo as well as *Origin Stories in Political Thought: Discourses on Gender, Power, and Citizenship* by Wright clarify the 16<sup>th</sup>-century mindset concerning gender and the functioning of society according to that, by giving us a proper analysis based on the evidence of those times.

Thanks to the study of all these works, I was able to construct an analysis of the way powerful women managed to revolutionise the 16<sup>th</sup>-century conception of their gender by exploiting their awareness of belonging to a weaker side of society and turning upside down all prejudices and assumptions that the patriarchal system had imposed on them. Their ability in revealing themselves as capable monarchs in the same way as Kings make them worth to be remembered and studied.

In a century that stood at the foundation of the Renaissance era, women brought with them a series of traditional prejudices and limits imposed on them since medieval times.<sup>8</sup> However, during the Tudor dynasty, England witnessed a very powerful gender revolution in which women fought for power by defying or exploiting the patriarchal system with which they were confronted. Male authority was considered as the normal order of society and women's fight for their success clashed against the general mindset of the time. Their fight can be associated with a cry for authority and what made their actions a revolution was their awareness of their condition as women and we will analyse the way they managed to take advantage of their own femininity in order to succeed. We will also study what power meant in 16<sup>th</sup>-century England, who held it, and to what extent women could take control of such power. Moreover, the fight for influence and success led women to have an impact on political, social and religious institutions in which men kept the spotlight for decisions – such an impact was to turn upside down many traditional ideologies linked to gender and it was to allow women in power to mark history in the same way as men.

The following analysis will propose a study of the general background of 16<sup>th</sup>-century monarchical England by depicting the political and religious male authorities who shared the monarch's power in the governance of the country. At the same time, we will focus on the mindset of the time by revealing the condition of women and the prejudices and assumptions that were linked to their gender and that limited their authority in society. After this contextualization, we will switch the focus on the balance of power between powerful men and female monarchs, whose cooperation or rivalry led to a gender competition of power. This is necessary to understand the role of women in relation to patriarchal institutions such as marriage, Church and government and see how they had an impact on them, always keeping in mind that their power had limits, it could be ephemeral, and it depended most of the time on men. We will see the way Tudor Queens managed to take advantage of male authorities within the institutions that surrounded them in order to achieve success, in the same way as those male authorities could also exploit their powerful positions to defy their Queens' power. Moreover, this competition of gender was to cause rivalries among women themselves,

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<sup>8</sup> The Renaissance was a period of European cultural, artistic, political and economic "rebirth" following the Middle Ages. It began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and lasted until the 17<sup>th</sup> century and it promoted the rediscovery of classical philosophy, literature and art. Some of the greatest thinkers, authors, statesmen, scientists and artists in human history thrived during this era, while global exploration opened up new lands and cultures to European commerce. The Renaissance is credited with bridging the gap between the Middle Ages and modern-day civilization. The main difference with the Middle Ages concerned a change in the interest of the philosophical studies. If, on the one hand the Middle Ages represented an era mostly based on religion and superstition, the Renaissance focused on humanist studies. Humanism promoted the idea that man was the centre of his own universe, and people should embrace human achievements in education, classical arts, literature and science. Moreover, the creation of the printing press in 1450 boosted the spread of these new Humanist ideas and the Protestant Reformation can be included within these changes that made the Renaissance era.

especially when the final prize was the Crown and women such as Lady Jane Grey and Mary Tudor and Elizabeth Tudor and Mary Stuart underwent these races for power through men who either supported or wanted to suppress them. Following this study of gender and the relationship between men and women, we will focus on the way Tudor Queens marked English history by beginning a feminine revolution that was to create myths and eternal remembrance around their characters and reigns. By putting forward a personal and political war against the patriarchal world, Tudor Queens managed to change the traditional understanding and conception of their gender.

## **I. Sixteenth-Century Power and Gender Mindset in England.**

The notion of power in 16<sup>th</sup>-century England was represented by well-established institutions and traditions that were inherited from the Middle Ages. In a period when democracy was not the ruling system of the country, the monarchy retained that power and, therefore, the King and Queen, who were at the head of that system.<sup>9</sup> However, the medieval functioning of power – through the means of men who served the monarchs – found a change and an evolution, thus creating a more intricate web of political positions that were introduced within the English Royal Court. Specialised men began to hold more power, which gave them the control to govern the country in the King's place. These developments within the political power became particularly clear in the transition from Henry VII's to Henry VIII's reign and it was under this latter that a revolution in government took place, thus giving birth to precise functions that are still part of English politics today. In this century, however, all these powers could only be achieved and held by men as 16<sup>th</sup>-century England was based on patriarchy. Ordinary women, in fact, could not be part of those functions and they were strictly confined to the domestic sphere, their role being the production of male heirs and, therefore, the continuity of their husbands' name. Women, however, could inherit power through titles and, therefore, their wealth and this condition was even greater as long as Queens were concerned. Because of their title, they found themselves at the top of the social hierarchy and, for women, it was the greatest power they could inherit. However, even in the case of Queens, power was still very much limited and it was generally rare for a female monarch to govern on her own. Marriage was, in fact, the main purpose in a woman's life as it allowed her husband to inherit her power and to keep it under his control. Prejudices and assumptions were widely spread within this patriarchal society and men were led to beware of a woman alone in power. It was not considered as the normal order of things the fact that a woman did not marry and held power by herself. However the Tudor dynasty was to witness a challenge of gender in this traditional conception. In the following chapter, we will analyse what power meant under the Tudors and the way it changed thanks to the introduction of specialized functions that were to help the monarch to govern. It is important to introduce first the place and positions that held the political power in order to better understand the functioning of this patriarchal system and the way men found themselves in a condition of conflict in order to achieve those powers. That is why, in the second chapter, we will focus on the way patriarchy worked and the effects it had within the Royal Court and, finally, we will analyse the meaning of gender and the way women were affected by this patriarchal system.

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<sup>9</sup>According to the Cambridge Dictionary, democracy is “the belief in freedom and equality between people, or a system of government based on this belief, in which power is either held by elected representatives or directly by the people themselves.”



## **I. I. Power at Court.**

As it was the case with all the monarchies in Europe, the Royal Court played a central role in the administration of power. It represented the King's home and the most important institution, the complexity of which allowed the monarch and his councillors to have a regular and organized control of power and administration of the country. Surprisingly, the Court did not refer to the place where the monarch lived during his or her reign, as it could change according to the sovereign's pleasure or necessity. Instead, the Court represented the ensemble of the people who helped the monarch in the governance of the country. This institution also had a public function, which was to reveal the splendor of the dynasty and to show the strength of the country itself to foreign powers. Monarchs such as Henry VII spent a lot of money in the ceremonial effect of the Court, consisting in the entertainment of its members through public events that also had political aims. Under him, Geoffrey Elton stated that "the feasts and joustings and displays which attended the visits of foreign potentates, the coronations and weddings of the reign, were things to marvel at, impressive even to the eyes of Venetian and Milanese ambassadors."<sup>10</sup>

Since the Middle Ages, the Court had been the central power of the monarchy and this did not change with the Tudors. This dynasty, which lasted from 1485 to 1603, found itself in a time of transition from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance and the royal power adapted itself to this new period and to shape itself accordingly, still inheriting ideologies and functions from the medieval system. Power under the Tudor monarchs became more organized and it began to be associated with other institutions than the only figure of the monarch. Men were therefore the ones who held power as it was not possible for a woman of the time to achieve high-ranking positions in the administration of the reign. Those functions were reserved to men only and women's only possibility to have some power at Court was through the inheritance of a royal title, as it was the case for a princess and a Queen, or through the marriage with the King. Still, in those situations, women could only have an indirect power that was filtered by the monarch himself and this widespread mindset was one of the elements that was pursued in the following century.

The Court represented a royal society, which revolved around the monarch and being part of it meant being considered loyal and useful to the sovereign and to the political functioning of the realm. Being part of this organized society within the palaces of the King or Queen gave men and women a prestigious reputation as it reflected their loyalty to the monarch. Since they could not achieve an

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<sup>10</sup> ELTON, G., R., *England under the Tudors*, London ; New York, Routledge, 2018, p. 48.

official political function in the system, women's presence at Court was necessary in the domestic sphere; they occupied positions at the sides of other women such as the Queen and princesses and this gave them prestige and honor in the same way as being a close councillor to the King was for men. It was for this reason that "fathers from the most powerful families in the land sought positions for their unmarried daughters. It was an ideal place for them to meet a wealthy husband and make alliances between families."<sup>11</sup> By being admitted within the Court, noblewomen were given a privileged position and the only power they held was their influence on the monarch by, for example, advising the Queen who would afterwards advise the King or by becoming the King's mistresses, which could allow them to have a direct access to his power.

The monarch was the one who held power at Court, but the administration of an entire country was such an overwhelming task that he or she needed other people with whom share such a task. This meant that the King's power was actually distributed to those considered as the most loyal and dutiful noblemen who were charged with precise positions in the economic or political administration of the country. After the bloody period of civil wars in the 15<sup>th</sup> century<sup>12</sup>, a new period of peace and stability began in 1485 under the Tudor dynasty with Henry VII, whose new emblem reunited both red and white rose. Henry Tudor's main success was linked to the restoration of government and the refill of



the treasury emptied by the costs of war and this was to leave his heir with an ordered and prosperous country after the instability that preceded him. However, Henry VII's reign still represented a medieval form of Kingship in which the monarch held the most important position in power and the relationship with the

Figure 1. *Tudor Rose*. King was based on loyalty, just like the relationship between the tenants and their landholders in the feudal system during the Middle Ages.<sup>13</sup>

The Royal Court represented both the royal household, which carried a symbolic and traditional legacy for the monarchy, and the place where powerful men took the decisions that were to shape the administration and the governance of the country under the control of the monarch. The power to govern England was, officially, personified by the sovereign, but the task was huge for only one person to hold. That is why the King or the Queen needed the help of many skilful members of the Court in order to keep the record and the control of state issues. As long as the country's

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<sup>11</sup> "Life at the Tudor court", in *Historic Royal Palaces*, <https://www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/history-and-stories/life-at-the-tudor-court/>; consulted on 4 January 2021.

<sup>12</sup> See footnote 1 in the Introduction for more details.

<sup>13</sup> Feudalism, also known as the feudal system, was a combination of the legal, economic, military, and cultural customs that flourished in medieval Europe between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. It was a way of structuring society around relationships that were derived from the holding of land in exchange for service or labor.

governance was concerned, both financial and executive powers were necessary to the well-functioning of the state.

### I. I. I. The Financial Power.

First, it is crucial to study the historical context of the very beginning of the Tudor reign, which began with the coronation of Henry VII, in order to understand the decisions that were taken and that were to involve the main political bodies of the Court

Like every country after a period of war, England found itself in a precarious financial situation and the most urgent issue for Henry VII was the reestablishment of the country's wealth. The restoration of the financial department called the Exchequer was essential to the records of payments and to the financial administration, at the basis of a strong country.<sup>14</sup> The wealth of a nation determined, in fact, the amount of power it held, and it was by acquiring more wealth that a monarch was more powerful as he or she had the power, which meant the money, to invest in wars. That is why the Treasurer of the Chamber, the chief financial officer of the Crown, came to occupy an important position in the country's financial administration and it remained so until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, Henry VII was an active participant in the checking of the Treasurer's account books, which meant that he constantly followed the actions of his financial branch. This stands in contrast with the governance of Henry VIII under whom the task came to be held by two Surveyors General of the Land Revenues of the Crown who would act as a department of audit, their function being the management of Crown lands. Such a function was essential in order to keep records of all the payments from the lands, and since Henry VII actually inherited many, the power of the Treasurer of the Chamber consisted in ensuring the entrance of exact sums of money, necessary for refilling the empty and indebted treasury.

However, if, under Henry VII Crown Officials were mainly pure administrators, at the end of his reign and under his son, Henry VIII, the task was given to trained lawyers, as Geoffrey Elton explains in his book *England under the Tudors*. Their job consisted in "the taking of bonds in which men promised to pay fines imposed for breaches of the law, or debt contracted, or sums in case of non-performance of certain duties."<sup>16</sup> The acquisition of wealth was the most urgent issue at the end

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<sup>14</sup> The Exchequer was the government department that was responsible for receiving and dispersing the public revenue. It was introduced in in the 12<sup>th</sup> century under Henry II and it was divided into the upper and lower Exchequer. The upper was closely connected to the King's Court as it consisted in a court that met twice a year to regulate the accounts, whereas the lower was an office for the receipt and payment of the money and it was closely connected to the Treasury.

<sup>15</sup> The Treasurer of the Chamber was a position that was separated in 1485 from that of the Master of the Jewel Office and in the department of the Lord Steward. It was to be crucial during Henry VII's and Henry VIII's reign, but it was to be eventually abolished in 1782.

<sup>16</sup> ELTON, G., R., *op. cit.* p. 59.

of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and after a period of wars. For this reason, the King focused entirely on this objective, at the expense of a real political organization of the nation. In fact, his actions were not a revolution, but rather a restoration of policies that already existed in the Middle Ages and that he reinforced. That is why Henry VII can be considered as a medieval King and only during his son's reign, England was to witness several changes within the political power, which mainly consisted in the specialization of the individuals in precise tasks that were to help the King or the Queen to govern the country, thus sharing his or her power.

However, from the late 15<sup>th</sup> century until the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, England as well as all Europe suffered from a long period of crisis called the Price Revolution. Briefly, it was a period characterized by a high inflation rate. It began with an extreme increase the prices of goods, which sometimes could go up to six times the original price. This economic crisis had generally been associated with the greedy European exploitation of silver mines in Germany and Bohemia<sup>17</sup>, the present-day Czech Republic. Moreover, in 1532, the break with Rome under Henry VIII allowed the financial administration to acquire new lands from the Catholic presence in the country, like monasteries.<sup>18</sup> These two main events led to the establishment of a more specialized financial power in order to keep records of money entrance in the treasury. That is why, by the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century a national bureaucracy was to dominate at the expense of a more “household” government in the finances.

During Henry VII's reign, the Exchequer had a major importance in the financial administration, even though the “chamber-system” was privileged. This latter concerned the transferring of the crown lands revenue from the Exchequer to the chamber itself and it took the place of the Exchequer of receipt, the role of which was to keep a record of money received from the lands. However, by the 1550s, the financial administration witnessed the decline in the Chamber and the restoration of the Exchequer's supremacy, which, as G.R. Elton clearly explains in *The Tudor Revolution in Government*. It consisted of:

a chancellor, two general surveyors, a treasurer, two masters of the woods, an attorney, a solicitor, two surveyors of the woods, a clerk, ten auditors, two auditors of priests and

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<sup>17</sup> ELTON, G., R., *op. cit.*

<sup>18</sup> The break with Rome was one of the major events in English history that concerned the separation from the Catholic power of the Pope. The monarch became the religious authority of the country and all religious matters were to be discussed within the monarchy rather than with Rome. In the following chapters, we will see that it was caused by Henry VIII's desire to divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, who could not give him a son. However, being Catherine a Spanish princess and part of one of the most powerful families in Europe both politically and religiously, the Pope denied the divorce and, consequently, Henry decided to do it anyway, by separating from the Catholic Church.

foreign accounts, eleven receivers, one surveyor, a keeper of the records of court, one usher, and three messengers.<sup>19</sup>

These were the main functionaries who held the financial power and they were all part of a new Court, which was revolutionized, too, thanks to the introduction of more specialized functions under Henry VIII. Each member of this bureaucratic organization allowed the King to have fewer tasks to follow and this was very helpful to Henry VIII, who, unlike his father, was not a business-like King.<sup>20</sup> That is why it is important to understand the task of these specialized people in order to understand how the financial power was distributed among the most loyal members of the Court. The chancellors and the general Surveyors took accounts of revenues by making an annual report to the King.<sup>21</sup> Besides, they could direct warrants – documents that gave authority to do something – for payment to the Treasurer of the Court, who, on the contrary, took records of the receipts and payments of the Court and, as he stood in a lower position than the chancellors, he had to bring his report annually to the latter. Beneath him, there was the function of the Clerk who registered all the leases made at court, meaning the contracts that conveyed a particular estate for a rent. Then, the auditors of the priests kept the record of wars, buildings, ordnance – military supplies – and of all payments delivered and ready to use. At the bottom of this financial hierarchy stood the Keeper of the records who held the custody of the records, making copies that were eventually given to the Clerk of the Court.<sup>22</sup> With such a complex and efficient administration, it became easier to control both income and expenditure. Moreover, with the break with Rome and therefore the dissolution of monasteries, the King himself became Head of the Church and, since the religious members in the country were known to be paying taxes to Rome, a new organization was created in order to redirect those funds to the King as their new chief. This organization, established in 1540, was called the Court of First Fruits and Tenths, the role of which was to make sure that the clergy paid “a portion of their first year's income (known as annates) and a tenth of their revenue annually thereafter.”<sup>23</sup> Eventually, it was to be included in the Exchequer in 1554.

The financial system had always represented one of the main powers of a monarch and its country as it determined its wealth, necessary for its prosperity. It controlled the great amount of money that was spent and acquired by the monarch. If, in the Middle Ages, the King was the one who mostly monitored the financial activity of its reign, with the transition to the Early Modern period, more specialized and trained people were placed at the head of particular functions, thus sharing the

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<sup>19</sup> ELTON, G., R., *op. cit.*, p. 58.

<sup>20</sup> ELTON, G., R., *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> edition, Cambridge University Press, 1911, consulted on 10 January 2021.

great amount of work that stood at the basis of the economic system of the monarchy.<sup>24</sup> The same procedure can be found in the branch of the executive system, the power of which allowed a proper regency of the country.

### I.I. II. The Executive Power.

The power of governing a realm was divided in different functions that witnessed a development throughout the Tudor dynasty in such a way that they became the foundations of the executive branch of government that still exists today. Such a task was huge for only one person to hold and that is why several people were chosen by the monarchs themselves to share that power and to keep records of all the main legislative and administrative decisions that were made. From King Henry VII to Queen Elizabeth I, such powers were created, developed and specialized and it is therefore important to have a look at the different functions into which these powers were divided in order to understand the system of legislative and political power under the Tudors.

As previously said, the main differences between the first Tudor King, Henry VII, and his son, Henry VIII, was the fact that they belonged to two different centuries: : the 15<sup>th</sup> century being the one which still carried a medieval legacy, whereas the 16<sup>th</sup> century came to be known in relation to the new Renaissance era. Such a distinction involved the evolution from a medieval kingship under Henry VII to a new political system developed under Henry VIII. What was at first a rudimentary way of governing the country that functioned under the control of a chosen elite of the most loyal people to their monarch became a wide and complex bureaucratic system that was to be crucial to the well-functioning and the prosperity of the country.

As for all Kings and Queens in power, the Court was essential to the governing of the country as it represented both the centralized power of the Crown and the connection between the sovereign with his or her most loyal subjects. It was the place where both monarchical rule and symbolic tradition took place – feasts and ceremonies were also very important from a political perspective as they showed to the rest of the people, as well as to foreign countries, the power and wealth of England. However, even though the King and the Queen were the traditional symbols of political power, the system that stood behind and beneath them was actually more complex and more crowded.

At the very beginning of the Tudor period, Henry VII inherited the old medieval kingship of the 15<sup>th</sup> century and even though he shared his power with some loyal subjects, government still revolved

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<sup>24</sup> According to Jonathan Dewald, the Early Modern Era is the period that went from 1590 to 1720. “It starts with the last spasms of Europe's religious wars; these opened a period of extreme political violence across the continent, and coincided with a variety of other disruptions of Europeans' daily lives. The early eighteenth century brought this period of instability to a close. By 1720 religion had declined as a factor in European politics, and the Enlightenment's critique of organized religion had begun.”

around him. He was, in fact, the one who personally chose those who were to be part of the council, a group of people close to the king and who advised him in political decisions. This council was made of 227 councillors, trusted by the King, and whose function concerned both administrative and judicial tasks.<sup>25</sup> This initial group of councillors was named the Great Council and it was divided into two parts: the Council attendant, which was itinerant as it followed the King's moving from one palace to another and the Star Chamber, which remained at Westminster, waiting for the monarch to come back, in which case, the two parts merged back together.<sup>26</sup> Of course, among the 227 councillors, only few of them represented the closest members of the council and they were part of what was known as the 'inner ring'. However, at the very beginning of the Tudor reign, the political and legislative functions were still very simple and no member of the council was specialized in a particular administration.

Under Henry VIII (1509-1547), things began to change and even though his father's council was inherited by him, his bureaucracy became more and more organized in specific functions which allowed a better control over the country. It was in fact under Henry VIII that major reforms shaped the way executive power was organized and such changes were defined as a 'revolution' by G.R. Elton. What was at first a medieval group of monarchical advisers became eventually an official bureaucratic function in control of both political and economic issues. The reforms that were put forward by both Wolsey and Cromwell aimed to create a differentiation between Henry VII's council attendant and Star Chamber which led to the creation of two different political functions: one held political and administrative activities, whereas the other held judicial tasks. Even though Henry VIII was at first still advised by his father's members of the 'inner ring', by 1529, more power was given to the Council attendant, the itinerant part of the Great Council, and this led to the creation of the notorious Privy Council, which was composed of the closest members who were previously part of the 'inner ring'. This political body became official in 1536, when the social rebellions in the north of England known as the Pilgrimage of Grace<sup>27</sup> pushed the King to call nineteen advisers in order to find solutions over this problem.<sup>28</sup> From this moment, the Privy Council was officially part of the country's administration and became a very much powerful political body. Moreover, one of the main differences between Henry VII's medieval council and his son's Privy Council was the frequency of

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<sup>25</sup> CRANKSHAW, D. J., "The Tudor Privy Council, c. 1540–1603", in *State Papers Online 1509–1714*, Cengage Learning EMEA Ltd., 2009, consulted on 11 January 2021.

<sup>26</sup> The Star Chamber was made of judges and privy councillors that grew out of the medieval king's council as a supplement to the regular justice of the common-law courts.

<sup>27</sup> The Pilgrimage of Grace was an uprising that spread in the north of England between 1536 and 1537. It was the largest rebellion under the Tudors and its participants were against Henry VIII's decision at breaking with Rome and at closing the monasteries in the country. This rebellion was eventually defeated by a great army dispatched by the King and leaders such as Robert Aske were executed as traitors.

<sup>28</sup> CRANKSHAW, D. J., *Ibid.*



the meetings that took place; under Henry VIII, in fact, the councillors met frequently and regularly, which was not the case during the previous century and this allowed a better control and monitoring of the country's administration.

Its main function consisted in governing the country on the sovereign's behalf. Moreover, councillors had a role within the functioning of Parliament meaning that "they planned the government's legislative program for each parliamentary session and oversaw the passage of Bills from within the two Houses"<sup>29</sup>, as Crankshaw explains. Of course, only men were allowed to be part of the Privy Council, as women could not take up political functions except if they inherited a royal title and became Queen. The following list reveals the name of the members of the first Privy Council that assembled in 1536:

1. Thomas Cromwell, vicegerent in spirituals, Lord Privy Seal<sup>30</sup>, etc.
2. Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury.
3. Sir Thomas Audley, Lord Chancellor.<sup>31</sup>
4. Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, Lord Treasurer.<sup>32</sup>
5. Charles Brandon, Duke of Suffolk, President of the Council.
6. Henry Courtenay, Marquess of Exeter.
7. Jon de Vere, Earl of Oxford, Lord Great Chamberlain.<sup>33</sup>
8. Robert Radcliffe, Earl of Sussex.
9. Cuthbert Tunstall, Bishop of Durham.
10. Edward Foxe, Bishop of Hereford.
11. Richard Sampson, Bishop of Chichester.
12. William Lord Sandys, Lord Chamberlain of the household.
13. Sir William Fitzwilliam, Lord Admiral, Treasurer of the household, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.
14. Sir W. Paulet, Controller of the household and Master of the Wards.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> CRANKSHAW, D. J., *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> The Lord Privy Seal was responsible for the monarch's personal (privy) seal until the use of such a seal became obsolete. The privy seal refers to the personal seal of a reigning monarch, used for authenticating official documents of a personal nature.

<sup>31</sup> The Lord Chancellors was in charge of the monarch's Great Seal, which, contrary to the Privy Seal, was used for documents of great importance.

<sup>32</sup> The Lord Treasurer was the fourth-ranking Great Officer of State and it was one of the most important official of the government. He was in charge of the King's treasury.

<sup>33</sup> The Lord Chamberlain was responsible for every person that worked in the King's chambers : the Privy Chambers, which were the King's personal chambers; and the Great Chambers, which consisted of the outer rooms where the King met with dignitaries.

<sup>34</sup> The Master of the Wards was in charge of the Court of Wards and Liveries, the purpose of which was to administer a system of feudal dues and the court was also responsible for wardship and livery issues.

15. Sir W. Kingston, Vice-Chamberlain of the household and Captain of the Guard.
16. Sir John Russell, Lord High Admiral and Lord Privy Seal.
17. Edward Seymour, Viscount Beauchamp.
18. George Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, Lord Steward of the household.
19. Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester.<sup>35</sup>

These are the names of the chosen members of the very first official Privy Council and the evidence shows that each one of them was in charge of a particular function in the country's politics. The number of members remained stable and unchanged under Henry VIII and if, on the one hand, Queen Mary I increased the members to fifty, on the other, Elizabeth I "restored the membership to Henrician proportions, even though this proportion decreased during her reign, leaving fourteen men sitting at the board when she died in 1603".<sup>36</sup>

Clerics who held a high position in the religious hierarchy were also part of the Privy Council and in the first assembly, four of them were among it – Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of Winchester was officially in the list but he was rarely present as he was a resident ambassador in France.<sup>37</sup> Bishops and Archbishops held political tasks and they actively participated in the governance of the country. The main examples are Thomas Wolsey in the years before the Reformation and Henry's divorce from Catherine of Aragon, and Thomas Cranmer whose roles will be discussed later on in the analysis. The Privy Council gained more power in the course of its establishment and consolidation, which was finally achieved under Elizabeth's reign. The 16<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the development of a well-organized executive power being the foundation of the present-day system.

An important political body in Tudor times was Parliament which did not begin as an official and organized institution as we know it today and its power was still very much limited at the beginning of the Tudor reign. However, the word "parliament" had been existing for more than 200 years, and its etymology is the following:

**parliament (n.)**

c. 1300, *parlement*, "consultation; formal conference, assembly," from Old French *parlement* (11c.), originally "a speaking, talk," from *parler* "to speak" (see **parley** (n.)); the spelling was altered c. 1400 to conform with Medieval Latin *parliamentum*.

Anglo-Latin *parliamentum* is attested from early 13c. The specific sense of "representative assembly of England or Ireland" (with capital *P*-) emerged by mid-14c.

<sup>35</sup> ELTON, G. R., *The Tudor Revolution in Government*, Cambridge University Press, 1962, p. 145.

<sup>36</sup> CRANKSHAW, D. J., *op. cit.*, p. 9.

<sup>37</sup> ELTON, G. R., *op. cit.*

from the broader meaning "a conference of the secular and/or ecclesiastical aristocracy summoned by a monarch."<sup>38</sup>

At first, in fact, parliament referred to a group of people, the so-called barons, who were summoned at the King's pleasure to talk about state issues. Parliament had no independence at all and it was associated with the monarch and known as the King's Parliament.

In the thirteenth century, its structure was better organized with the creation of the King's Bench, composed of both the Exchequer and the chancery, held by professional and specialized members of the Court. At the time, the main function of Parliament consisted in representing and applying justice as well as controlling matters of taxation. That is why it was also known as the Court of Justice and under Henry II, at the very beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the old procedure of *writs* – a "written order made by the English monarch to a specified person to undertake a specified action"<sup>39</sup> – was replaced by a new one, of *bills* – a "written statement detailing articles sold or services rendered by one person to another."<sup>40</sup> By the 15<sup>th</sup> century, taxation and legislation became the official functions held by Parliament and political issues became more and more matters of interest within this institution. Parliament evolved from being an unofficial political body that barely met, under Henry VII, to a structuralized body politic with power by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, the Reformation Parliament that was held between 1529 and 1539 was the one that "transformed the relationship between the English Crown, the English people and the Church, as well as formally incorporating the principality of Wales into the kingdom of England."<sup>41</sup> It was by the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century that Parliament's importance and power grew, as people began to keep official records of speeches or debates. Moreover, the House of Commons moved to Westminster, where the House of Lords was already established, thus shaping Parliament the way we know it today. Parliament was necessary as it was the only institution that could have access to the public purse and it had a voice in issues concerning foreign affairs – especially in the crisis between England and Spain when Henry wanted to divorce from Catherine of Aragon.<sup>42</sup> Parliament was used as an instrument to put forward the King's or Queen's will over matters of state such as the succession, what was legal and what was

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<sup>38</sup> "Parliament", in *Online Etymology Dictionary*,

[https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=parliament&ref=searchbar\\_searchhint](https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=parliament&ref=searchbar_searchhint) ; consulted on 11 January 2021.

<sup>39</sup> "Writ", in *Wikipedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Writ&oldid=998399464> ; consulted on 11 January 2021.

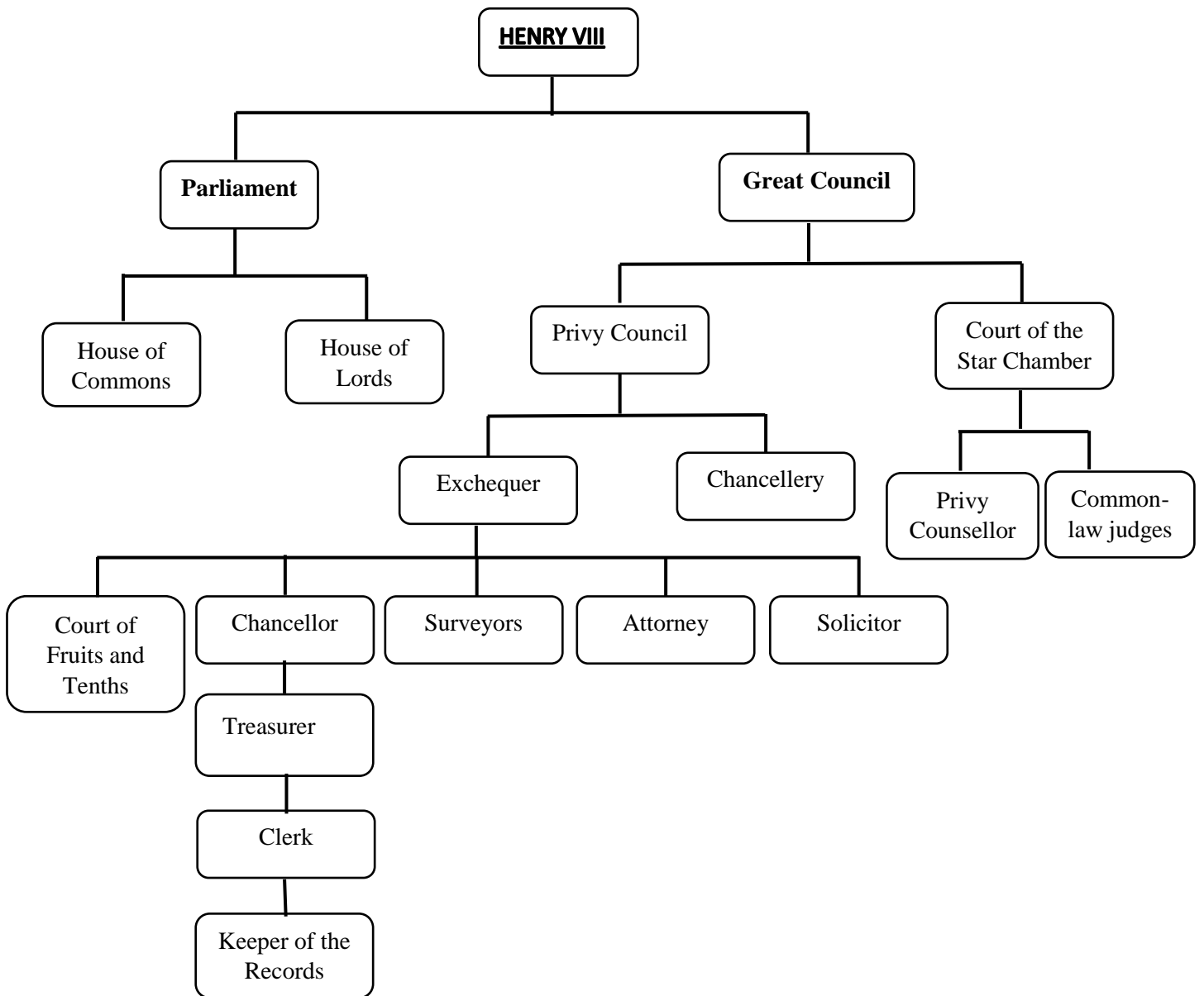
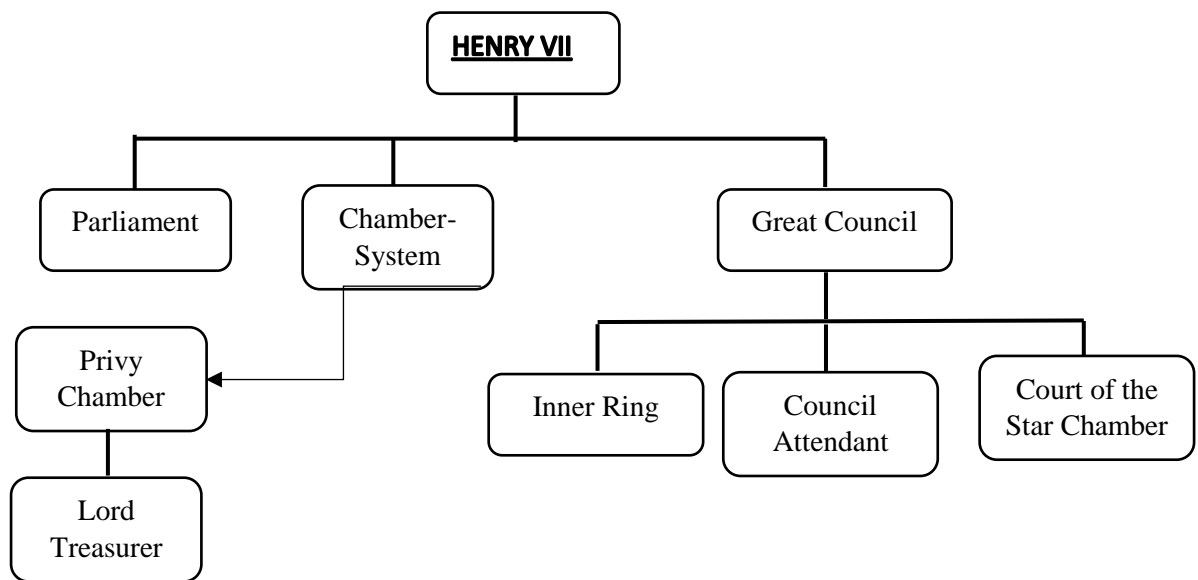
<sup>40</sup> "Bill", in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/word/bill> ; consulted on 11 January 2021.

<sup>41</sup> "Tudors: Parliament and politics from Henry VIII to Elizabeth I: 1509-1603", in *The History of Parliament: British Political, Social and Local History*, <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/periods/tudors> ; consulted on 11 January 2021.

<sup>42</sup> HUGHES, P. L., FRIES, R. F., *Crown and Parliament in Tudor-Stuart England, a Documentary Constitutional History 1485-1714*, New York: G.P. Putnam Sons, vol. 1, 1959.

not and it mirrored the character of the monarch through his or her will of conservatism rather than that of reform, or vice versa. That is why, at this time of British history, Parliament was not an independent organization and its main objective was to help the sovereign to govern the country, still accepting his or her presence as being the one at the top of social and political hierarchy of power.

The structure of the main powerful institutions in Tudor times was complex and the following outline might be helpful in order to better understand the main political bodies that shared the monarch's power in the governing of the country.



In these outlines – created by myself in order to have a clearer list of all the functions at Court – it is clear how political structure had changed only from one sovereign to another. In about fifty years, political and financial power under the Tudors evolved and developed in such a way as to create a balance of power between the sovereign and the surrounding institutions. Each of them was administered by skilful members of the Court, who were personally chosen by the monarch and who managed to have an impact on the political functioning of the country.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the balance of power between the sovereign and these powerful people was at the center of the functioning of the system, and yet it was still very much fragile. Ambition and talent were the main features of these powerful men that led them to an endless war for power against one other. That is why it is important to study the main representatives of power who had an influence in the functioning and shaping of the country and see the impact that power had on them, as well as the other way round.

## I.II. Men's Decisions

The political and royal system of 16<sup>th</sup>-century England was represented by both the government and the symbolic tradition of the monarchy. It was a system of relationships and loyalties between the men and the monarch, this latter being at the head of a very complex and intricate web of social, political, and religious connections. The vast and crowded Royal Household could be compared to a large family in which every sibling fought to be under his or her parent's attention and to make him or her proud. This family battle was to be found within the Royal Court, in which all members struggled to find themselves in a privileged position by accomplishing the monarch's desire. The Royal Household worked in the same way as all ordinary families at the time. Men were, in fact, the ones who took the decisions and were the ones who were mostly concerned in this fight to accomplish the sovereign's wishes. As we have previously studied, only men were allowed to achieve high-ranking positions at the top of the system of government and that is why the system of patriarchy existed both within and outside the Royal Court. Even though this term made its appearance only by the half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the mindset of the time was strictly connected to this notion, as we know it today. Patriarchy, originally, referred to an "ecclesiastical province under a patriarch; church government by patriarchs" and by the 1630s it began to be associated with a "system of society or government by fathers or elder males of the community."<sup>43</sup> This came very late considering the fact that it represented the way society worked even before the Middle Ages, but if we consider the fact that the word "patriarchy" came from "patriarch", the notion becomes clearer. The etymology of this latter goes back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and it is the following:

**patriarch (n.):** late 12c., *patriarke*, "one of the Old Testament fathers," progenitors of the Israelites, from Old French *patriarche* (11c.) and directly from Late Latin *patriarcha* (Tertullian), from Greek *patriarkhēs* "chief or head of a family," from *patria* "family, clan," from *pater* "father".

This notion finds its origins from the Old Testament and just like many cultural and social notions, patriarchy was also one that was actually introduced by the Bible itself. In some excerpts, this social construction is very explicit and the questions concerning the origin of patriarchy and the reason why it developed finds an answer, especially if we consider the fact that the Bible has been the greatest literary and religious Canon on which Western society has been built. An example of the notion of patriarchy within the Bible can be found in the following extract from Corinthians:

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<sup>43</sup> "Patriarchy", in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=patriarchy>, consulted on 12 January 2021.



But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God... Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. - 1 Corinthians 11:3 & 9 (KJV)

According to the Bible, women find themselves at the bottom of a social normal order and they should be as devoted to men as men should be to God, who, on the contrary, occupies the highest position. By making men superior to women, men justify their legitimacy to hold power and this notion is deeply rooted in our society.

This is the way the concept of patriarchy was born and this notion was carried on throughout centuries, ending up with the creation of a model of society in which men represented both power and the continuity of their legacy. This explains why men could achieve powerful positions and had access to power more easily than women. In fact, the official definition of “patriarchy” refers to

a society in which the oldest male is the leader of the family, or a society controlled by men in which they use their power to their own advantage. It is also the control by men of most of the power and authority in a society.”<sup>44</sup>

The Tudor period represented a transitional century that worked around this patriarchal system many similarities to our century can be seen with the specialization of powers within the Royal Court, such as, as previously studied, the creation of the Privy Council and of a bureaucratic national organization. Patriarchy was therefore at the basis of these developments since men were the ones who occupied powerful and influencing positions in society and the understanding of this notion is therefore crucial to conceptualize power in 16<sup>th</sup>-century England.

The notion of patrimonialism is also an important concept, which is strictly linked to the idea of a patriarchal society. Such a term is explained in Max Weber’s work, *Economy & Society*, written and published in 1921. His study on the functioning of the capitalist society in which we live today revealed how deep a cultural and social tradition can be set in the people’s mindset. In her article “The Rule of the Father: Patriarchy and Patrimonialism in Early Modern Europe” by Julia Adams, she based her studies on Weber’s analysis of society and she showed that the organization of Early Modern European society could be similar to the present-day’s. Both patriarchy and patrimonialism represented the foundation of this organization and 16<sup>th</sup>-century England was also concerned with these concepts. Patrimonialism can be seen as a wider and political form of patriarchy, if we consider that it “mainly refers to forms of government that are based on rulers’ family households. The rulers’ authority is personal-familiar, and the mechanics of the household are the model for political

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<sup>44</sup> ADAMS, J., “The Rule of the Father: Patriarchy and Patrimonialism in Early Modern Europe”, in *Max Weber Economy and Society: a Critical Companion*. May 2005, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, p. 237-266. <https://sociology.yale.edu/publications/rule-father-patriarchy-and-patrimonialism-early-modern-europe>, consulted on 13 January 2021.

administration.”<sup>45</sup> The concept of the monarchy and the Royal Household seen as a political and wider family could therefore explain why patriarchy stands at the heart of a patrimonial state in which father-rule is fundamental to patrimonial politics.<sup>46</sup> Monarchy in Late Medieval and Early Modern England functioned in this way if we consider that

patrimonialism is a social system in which a royal elite rules through personal and arbitrary control over a bureaucracy and over slaves, mercenaries, and conscripts who have no power themselves and serve only to enforce the monarch’s rule.<sup>47</sup>

According to this definition, father-rule is fundamental as it determined how social hierarchy had to be organized. Of course, biblical examples were at the origin of this social mindset and the Bible itself helped in the establishment of patriarchy. This notion had been absorbed by society in such a way that the social consensus helped it to be included within the normal order of things. In fact, patriarchy was present both from an individual perspective and from a social one, as it referred to the bond between father and son as well as the political relation between the ruler and the ruled. Aristocratic families in Early Modern England based their wealth and the continuity of their privileges on the longevity of their names, which was accomplished through the transmission of properties and that same wealth from father to the first-born son, the future heir. In these families, patriarchy is revealed through the authority of the *pater familias* who was at the top of their hierarchy and his position had originally no specific link with natural fatherhood; in fact, the word referred to the master of the household<sup>48</sup> whose position revealed his authority over the members of the household.

If we focus on the relationship between father and son, patriarchy takes a more complex meaning as it involved the

transmission of land by primogeniture, political and economic value of inheritance, the use of the father figure as the intermediary between the collective expression of the public will and the small social units, and the paradigmatic links with biblical and heavenly models.<sup>49</sup>

These represented the responsibilities that a first-born son acquired as soon as his father died and, just like his father before him, he felt the necessity of continuing the family legacy through males.

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<sup>45</sup> ADAMS, J., *op. cit.*

<sup>46</sup> According to Max Weber, a patrimonial state refers to a political system in which the prince organizes his political power over extra patrimonial areas and political subjects.

<sup>47</sup> CROSSMAN, A., “Patrimonialism.”, in *ThoughtCo*, September 2020, [thoughtco.com/patrimonialism-3026446](https://www.thoughtco.com/patrimonialism-3026446/), consulted on 13 January 2021.

<sup>48</sup> MITTERAUER, M., and SIEDER, R., *European Family*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982, p. 6.

<sup>49</sup> ROSENTHAL, J. T., *Patriarchy and Families of Privilege in Fifteenth-Century England*, University of Pennsylvania Press: 1991.

This was the way society worked in Early Modern England – and Europe in general. Patriarchy represented the way society was structured in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and this idea involved society in all social levels, from the poorest to the wealthiest families. This means that the royal family was also involved in this concept of patriarchy and Weber's patrimonialism. That explains why a King's main objective was to have a son and heir to whom he could transmit both his royal title and the responsibilities of a monarch at the head of a country. Within this patriarchal mindset, a woman was not considered capable of administering a country and that is why sons were the first in the line of succession. In the case of Henry VIII, in fact, Edward VI inherited his father's title at his death, even though his birth came after Mary's and Elizabeth's and he was only 10. Such a patriarchal conception of power was even more pushed to the extreme as the monarchy preferred a 10-year-old boy who did not yet have the ability to perform the responsibilities proper of a King by himself.

The need for the continuity of a family power and wealth through the male line was so crucial in the minds of 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>-century people, that this could cause a real anxiety among men. In fact, it was believed almost useless to grow a family wealth or a prosperous country, in the case of a King, if that lifetime achievement could not be inherited and owned by the male succession of the same family. Within the powerful families, all their wealth could only keep on belonging to the family if the heir was a son, because, in the case of a daughter, her inheritance was to be kept under the control of her husband, therefore under another name, as soon as she married.

Royalty functioned in the same way, with the only difference that a greater power was involved and, in a patriarchal society, women were not considered naturally suitable for that role. Besides, a woman was always associated with the man she was married to, and therefore the power and wealth she inherited was to be controlled by her husband, as we shall see later on in our analysis. For all these reasons, men and Kings felt a real anxiety towards their succession as the birth of a male heir was part of their responsibilities. If they failed, society could put into question their masculinity and virility – and therefore the honor and pride that are linked to those concepts. Concerning this anxiety, Mark Breitenberg wrote, in his work *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, the following statement:

masculinity is inherently anxious: according to this argument, anxiety is not a secondary effect of masculinity, nor simply an unpleasant aberration from what we might hypothetically understand as normative. Instead, I argue that masculine anxiety is a necessary and inevitable condition that operates on at least two significant levels: it

revealed the fissures and contradictions of patriarchal systems and, at the same time, it paradoxically enables and drives patriarchy's reproduction and continuation of itself.<sup>50</sup>

What Breitenberg explains is the fact that the patriarchal system represented a situation of malaise for some men as well, a situation that was imposed on them and from which they could not find an escape. The only way to be excluded was to be born second or third son. Even women themselves had a major role in this system as being victims or part of the oppressed. Only in the case of a man who was not the first in line of the succession, he could avoid all the responsibilities linked to the role of head of the family and, still, he could benefit from a position of wealth. Moreover, Breitenberg reveals what seems to be a contradictory situation as this very same anxiety is the cause of the continuation of patriarchy itself. In the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, the patriarchal system was an evident rule that had reached a social consensus and it was therefore considered as the normality of life. It was a reality that had been both created by men and imposed on men and that is why it can also be understood as a form of involuntary imprisonment for both men and women from which they could not escape. This leads to a feeling of anxiety that each one who takes part of such a system can feel, but does not dare to rebel. All this ends up in a voluntary continuation of that system as it represents the only deeply rooted system of society, which derives from both biblical and biological explanations, both of which cannot be put into question.

Such an anxiety was even more real with Kings, who, beyond being the head of an entire nation, had to ensure the continuity of their family name. In the Tudor dynasty, such a position had been fought for during the Wars of the Roses in the 15<sup>th</sup> century and Henry VII literally and personally fought in order to become King and begin his own and rightful dynasty. Therefore, in order to honor the endeavors of a King's predecessor, or of the King himself, it was necessary to increase the power of the royal family through stability and continuity in the line. In a patriarchal society, male heirs were crucial for Kings and Queens to achieve that aim and this represented that "masculine anxiety" explained by Breitenberg. This feeling of anxiety was all the more highlighted in an era when death was an every-day reality because of the lack of knowledge in medicine. This might explain the way Henry VIII acted during his life. If, on the one hand, Henry VII did not lack of heirs – he had six children, three of whom were boys – on the other hand, his son had troubles doing the same. It is impossible for historians to know whether he had fertility problems, but what we know is that he was almost obsessed with having a male heir and he mobilized his political institutions in order to achieve that. After his marriage to his brother's former wife, Catherine of Aragon, who "had at least one, possibly two failed pregnancies, and in February 1516 she and Henry finally produced a child who

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<sup>50</sup> BREITENBERG, M., *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*, Cambridge University Press: 1996, p.2.



Figure 2. Henry Fitzroy.

would live,”<sup>51</sup> Henry became a father for the first time, but the child was a girl, the future Queen Mary I. As we said, women were not supposed to be the privileged choice for a monarch, even though, as we shall see, that was to change at the end of Henry VIII’s reign. Catherine’s incapacity at producing an heir led the King to an almost desperate situation, making him recognize his mistress’s illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy.<sup>52</sup> His birth was probably the event that led Henry to believe that it was Catherine’s fault if he did not have a son, even though she actually gave birth to two

sons who died prematurely. The many titles that the King gave his illegitimate son show how relieved Henry was in finally having a son:

the young boy was given a royal household with his own staff, provided with an education equal to that of a prince, and given a number of official positions. He was made Lord High Admiral of England, and granted posts assigning him governance of the North of England from his power base in Sheriff Hutton, North Yorkshire. More importantly though, Fitzroy was elevated to the peerage, the first time that a King of England had granted this privilege to an illegitimate son.<sup>53</sup>

However, Henry Fitzroy did not live enough to give us evidence that he would actually become a King, but all the titles and privileges that he gained throughout his life reveal us how a King could be personally affected by such an anxiety and could use their power to act in their interests.

In the same way as a King could legitimize a son, as we have just studied, he could also choose the men who were to work for him. In 16<sup>th</sup>-century England, the power of the monarch began to be widely shared by the political institutions that helped him or her govern the country. Those institutions became more and more organised and, therefore, more powerful than the previous century. These men were in charge of high functions and important roles and they represented the skilful instruments of the monarchs in order to take the most important decisions. They both executed the monarch’s will and advised him, thus creating a situation of checks and balances that limited the power of the sovereign and of the political institutions. These men were included within the patriarchal system of the Royal Household and they were ruled by the monarch, as they followed his or her orders, and at the same time they also ruled for themselves. In fact, with the creation and development of political

<sup>51</sup> “The Tudor Succession Problem”, in *Tudor Times*, August 2015, <https://tudortimes.co.uk/politics-economy/tudor-succession-problem/henry-viii>, consulted on 16 January 2021.

<sup>52</sup> At the time, women’s most important duty was to produce children and, preferably, sons and if she failed in doing so, it was her fault only.

<sup>53</sup> AYRES, J., “Henry Fitzroy: Bastard or Heir?”, in *The York Historian*, October 2016 <https://theyorkhistorian.com/2016/10/13/henry-fitzroy-bastard-or-heir/>, consulted on 18 January 2021.

bodies specialized in several fields of government, especially at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the sovereign depended entirely on them to govern the country, as we shall see with Elizabeth I's reign.

This patriarchal system within the Royal Household and the political institutions of the monarchy triggered a situation of conflict among the men who were part of it. Ambition and power were the main features of those men and they were involved in fights against one another. The final aim was to catch the monarch's attention and eventually being in his or her favor in order to achieve important functions for the administration of the country. Patriarchy was, therefore, not only noxious for women's condition of the time, but also for men, too. Since the beginning of time, men had to fight against one another in order to survive and from a 16<sup>th</sup>-century monarchical perspective that meant to obtain enough power and wealth thanks to the King or Queen's favor.

During Henry VIII's reign, several men worked in the Household as personal advisers and political ministers, but very few of them actually played a major role in the shaping of England from a political, religious, and economic perspective. Two of these men became the most famous in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, almost in the same way as the King was and each of their achievements – as well as their falls – marked some of the most important events of the century. Their presence at Court was fundamental to the establishment of reforms within the monarchy, thus helping to make the Tudor reign one of the most remarkable and unique periods in English history. These men were Cardinal Thomas Wolsey (circa 1471-1530), and Henry's principal adviser from 1532 to 1540, Thomas Cromwell (1485-1540). They were all part of a patriarchal system where power and ambition brought them to their success, as well as to their fall. They were two of the major personalities who made England and who were linked to each other, being under Henry VIII's ultimate power. Moreover, they stand as an example for the way the sovereign's power could be shared and managed within the political institutions and, by being talented and skillful men, they managed to create their own revolution and to make themselves remembered for that.

As we have previously analyzed, the 16<sup>th</sup> century was a period when power at Court began to be held and shared by more organized political institutions such as the King's Privy Council. Both Cromwell and Wolsey represented important figures in this governmental background, and yet, they had been



Figure 3. *Thomas Cromwell.*

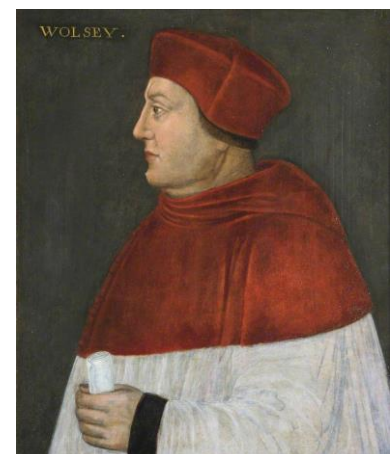


Figure 4. *Thomas Wolsey*

put into contrast by several historians. If, on the one hand, Cardinal Wolsey represented a late medieval presence at Court in a transitional period that balanced towards the Renaissance era, on the other hand, Thomas Cromwell came to be associated with the establishment of new ideas and reforms and, therefore, to a Protestant England, managing to implement the foundation of the present-day English politics. In the same way, they were also complementary to each other as the fall of Cardinal Wolsey was the success of Thomas Cromwell, and the other way round. Cromwell and Wolsey were involved in major events that marked the Tudor reign and they were included in a period when the authority of the King was almost tyrannical. The first event was Henry VIII's need to divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, in order to marry Anne Boleyn. When a marriage is involved in matters of state, the Church becomes the first actor and for this reason, the understanding of Cardinal Wolsey's presence at Court is crucial.

Beyond being part of the Catholic Church, Thomas Wolsey was a skilful statesman who made his way to the King's Court thanks to his own work. He was an ambitious man who knew that to remain close to the King meant to increase his own influence within the political bodies.<sup>54</sup> He eventually managed to fulfill his ambition and to find his success thanks to the King's support. As Geoffrey Elton explains, "from 1515 to 1529 Wolsey was not only the king's chief minister but virtually his only one. Though Henry never surrendered ultimate control over affairs, it was Wolsey who ruled."<sup>55</sup> Henry VIII, in his young age, was a King who spent most of his time in amusements and sport, so Wolsey's success derived from his ability to change the political institution. In doing so, the matters of state were controlled by more specialized people, other than the King. Before, the 'chamber system of finance' was supervised by the monarch, in this case Henry VII, as we have analyzed in the previous part. However, Henry VIII's refusal to work was the cause of one of the changes that Wolsey established within the body politics. As long as the chamber system of finance was concerned, "two general surveyors of crown lands were to administer the revenues from these properties and to audit other revenue accounts."<sup>56</sup> These changes reflected Wolsey's power at Court, but his position, as any powerful position under Henry VIII, could still be put into question and eventually, it could even be destroyed, according to the King's will or any successful competition worth to take his place, as it was to be the case with Thomas Cromwell. This was the way the patriarchal system worked within the monarchy in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; powerful men were always at rivalry with one another in order to gain the King's favor. When Henry wanted to divorce from Catherine of Aragon, it was Wolsey's job to bring a positive answer from the Pope, being himself a

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<sup>54</sup> ELTON, G.R., *England Under the Tudors*, London ; New York, Routledge, 2018, p. 79.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, p. 78.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid*, p. 79.



representative of the Catholic Church. However, the religious institution was not the only one involved in the divorce, but also foreign affairs and England's power in Europe knew a period of tensions and instability. In Europe, in fact, Charles V, King of Spain and Holy Roman Emperor, represented the major power with whom England was at the brink of war. Charles V was Catherine of Aragon's nephew, which meant that harming her position had political and religious consequences in Henry's relationship with Spain. Moreover, marriage being a religious vow, the Pope – who at the time was Leo X – was the only one who could actually declare the marriage between Henry and Catherine void. Wolsey, therefore, found himself in a difficult position, which was to bring him to his fall. His inability to achieve a divorce for the King became the reason of his fall and these events revealed the endeavors one had to achieve to establish one's influence, and, at the same time, it also revealed how easy it was to lose it all. Rivalry and competition represented the main features in 16<sup>th</sup>-century patriarchal system and Wolsey was an example of a political power defeated by such a system.

If on the one hand, one was defeated, on the other, there was another who had won and that was the case with Thomas Cromwell. He managed to satisfy the King's desire by giving him the divorce he had fought for more than six years and which was the cause of a period of tensions both within England and in a European context. The paradox of this event is the fact that Cromwell actually began working for Wolsey himself by being his confidential adviser and he executed orders coming from the Cardinal such as the dissolution of lesser monasteries in the territory.<sup>57</sup> After 1529, the date of Wolsey's fall, Cromwell entered Parliament and the King made him his personal adviser and gave him more important functions in the administration of the country like Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1532, Principal Secretary in 1534 and Lord Privy Seal in 1536. His power at Court increased after Wolsey's disgrace and that happened because he managed to achieve Henry's supremacy over the Church, which was the only solution that allowed the King to divorce from Catherine. His major achievement during his years in power was to make the King Head of the Church and, by getting the monarchical rule at the top of all institutions, he ensured himself a secured position within the King's favorites. Cromwell showed that power could be all the more important even if it did not come from the monarch himself. Moreover, such a power was even greater than the monarch's if we consider that he was the maker of one of the major events in the English history that revolutionized the political and religious context of 16<sup>th</sup>-century England.

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<sup>57</sup>ELTON, G. R., "Thomas Cromwell: English Statesman", in *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Cromwell-earl-of-Essex-Baron-Cromwell-of-Okeham>, consulted on 20 January 2021.

To conclude, Wolsey and Cromwell were both executants and rulers of a patriarchal system that dominated Early Modern England. Such a system had been deeply rooted within the social mindset of the time following biblical and biological notions linked to the origins of humankind. In such a system, the rule of men was considered as the only legitimate power as only men were capable of such a role. Patriarchy, behind the walls of the Royal Household, worked in the same way as it did within the families of English society. Men at Court held diverse functions that contributed in the development and the administration of the country, following the King's will. However, in this transitional period from a medieval to a better specialised organization of political bodies – which began to be similar to our present-day politics –, these same political institutions gained more power, in such a way as they were not directly controlled by the monarch anymore.

As we have seen with both Wolsey and Cromwell, skilful men who had achieved the King's favor were actually the ones who held most of the power at Court. They managed to reverse power by reinforcing the political power of the men who stood beneath the sovereign and making them the principal actors of major reforms. Of course, their success was permitted by Henry VIII who held the ultimate power for the decisions taken in government, however their actions were the consequence of their own power and influence. Wolsey and Cromwell represented two of the political men at Henry VIII's Court who marked the English history by highlighting the men's rule within the monarchy.

Nonetheless, power at Court was not represented by men only, as the major events that we have just studied were actually caused, put forward and fought by women as well. Anne Boleyn was, in fact, the reason why Henry wanted to divorce from Catherine of Aragon and the fight of this latter for her marriage made this situation last for many years. Women in power could actually have their own influence, even though it was limited by the patriarchal system in which they lived. Moreover, many prejudices and beliefs were associated with the notion of "woman" and many of them were inherited from the medieval legacy. We will see that by the end of the Tudor reign, the condition of women in power, as well as the ideas linked to it, was to be revolutionised and to acquire new meanings both in society and in the state institutions. Before, analyzing the women's position among those institutions, it is crucial to analyse the way women were considered by the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>-century mindset and how that influenced the condition of women in this patriarchal society.

### **I.III. Gender and the Conception of Women in Early Modern England.**

So far, we have mainly analysed the role of men and the power they held both in society and at Court. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the position of women mostly depended on their relations to men and that is why it is essential to understand at first the power and condition of men in society. In a period when specific roles had been already established for each sex, women in power represented an anomaly to society and it was a situation that was not privileged.<sup>58</sup> Gender distinction was at its highest level meaning that men held the power to command both within the private, being the head of the family, and the public sphere, whereas women represented the submissive part of the population and their power was limited to the domestic sphere. These distinctions were deeply rooted within society as they were part of cultural traditions coming from the Middle Ages. We find an example with the story of Griselda, a fictional character and heroine of several romances of medieval and Renaissance Europe. She was the stereotype who served as an example to the women of the time as she represented the obedient and patient wife.<sup>59</sup> Besides, women were raised to be inferior to men and that was the widely spread conception of their sex, whereas men represented the strongest side of society because of their masculinity. Henry VIII highlighted this notion by imposing the importance of his masculinity through tournaments “where he insisted on only challenging the strongest, most talented competitors.”<sup>60</sup> However, at the time, people were not aware of these conceptions of gender as we understand them today. Moreover, there was no cultural difference between gender and sex, even though many questions were to be raised concerning women’s role in power during Elizabeth I’s reign. Nonetheless, it is important to comprehend such a difference in order to understand the general mindset of the time regarding women.

Gender and sex began to take different meanings by the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>61</sup> The notion of sex refers to the biological compositions of which men and women are made. More precisely, it is “a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential” and it is “based in a combination of anatomical, endocrinal and chromosomal features, and the selection among these criteria for sex assignment is based very much on cultural beliefs about what actually makes someone

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<sup>58</sup>HASELKORN, A. M., TRAVITSKY, B. S., *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print: Counterbalancing the Canon*, Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 1990, p.58.

<sup>59</sup> She was the heroine of the last tale in the Decameron by Giovanni Boccaccio, who derived the story from a French source. Petrarch translated Boccaccio’s Italian version into Latin in *De Obidentia ac fide uxoria mythologia*, upon which Geoffrey Chaucer based his English version found in “The Clerk’s Tale” of the Canterbury Tales.

<sup>60</sup>WILLIAMS, T., “Conflicting Gender Expectations in the Tudor Dynasty”, in *Manchester Historian: UOM Department’s Student Newspaper*, March 2018, <http://manchesterhistorian.com/2018/conflicting-gender-expectations-in-the-tudor-dynasty/>; consulted on 25 January 2021.

<sup>61</sup> Historically, this distinction began with John Money and his colleagues in the 1950s; they used the term *sex* to refer to individuals’ physical characteristics and the term *gender* to refer to individuals’ psychological characteristics and behavior.

male or female.”<sup>62</sup> Sex involves therefore the physical characteristics of men and women and it is purely biological, which means that one cannot choose it. On the other hand, gender is the psychological conception of the sex, which is built on particular behaviors associated with that same sex. Wearing high heels and make up has become linked to femininity whereas muscles and swagger to masculinity. These stereotypes have become representative of the way women and men should be today and they are therefore a social construct of how each sex should appear in society. In other words, sex is something we are born with and something we have, whereas gender is something we do, something we perform.<sup>63</sup> This distinction has been all the more highlighted in our days as the freedom of being who one feels to be goes beyond the biological sex. Today, in fact, such a discourse is very much discussed and it is strongly claimed by heterosexuals and transgender people whose gender – their “psychological sex” – becomes more important than their sex.

However, the 16<sup>th</sup> century did not permit such liberties of expression. Those who were born women were supposed to appear as women and to act like women and the same discourse worked with men. This does not mean that homosexuals did not exist, but rather that they were seen as an anomaly and they usually lived in the dark.<sup>64</sup>

Women and men of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance were therefore categorised in specific canons to which they had to aspire and their models of the right man and the right woman could be found in literary and religious canons, which had been at the basis of the shaping of society. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the Bible has served as the foundation of the right criteria for society, for example with the establishment of patriarchy. The “rule of the father” in Early Modern Western society has been absorbed in the general mindset so easily that it was taken for granted and not even questioned. The patriarchal society was imposed almost naturally because of both biological and religious reasons and it revealed the different condition of women compared to men’s. The origin of such a distinction has been clearly explained by Professor Androniki Dialeti in his article “From Women’s Oppression to Male Anxiety – The Concept of ‘Patriarchy’ in the Historiography of Early Modern Europe”. He states that

the patriarchal family was legitimized in relation to patriarchal political rule, religion, and assumptions encoded in scientific discourse. Women had to submit to their husbands not only because they were descendants of Eve, the first sinful and disobedient woman, but

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<sup>62</sup>ECKERT, P. and McCONNELL, S. G., *Language and Gender*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, Second Edition, 2013, p.113.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> A homosexual in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century was called a “bugger” or a “sodomite”. Sodomy became a civil offense, punishable by death, in 1533. Henry VIII issued a formal decree on the subject and sodomy remained a capital offense in England and the rest of Europe until 1828. The act of sodomy was punishable by imprisonment.

also because contemporary medical discourse asserted their physical and intellectual inferiority.<sup>65</sup>

Both religious and medical reasons were at the basis of the distinction between men and women and these were such strong claims that no one could question them. Regarding the medical discourse, no source can be found concerning the basis or evidence on which 16<sup>th</sup>-century scientists based their statements about the discourse of women's inferiority. Today, we know that the development of psychiatry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially thanks to Freud's work, has contributed to the categorization of women as the "weaker sex" and this caused women to be more easily sent to mental institutions as soon as they rebelled to the male desires.<sup>66</sup> However, the enforcement of such prejudices concerning women were nothing more than an ancient notion that had been absorbed by society even before the Early Modern period. Dialetti has explained that the very first reason for women's inferiority goes back to the religious origins of men and women. As we all know, men descended from Adam, whereas women descended from Eve. The latter, however, was created after Adam *and* by Adam, as she was born from his rib. This original creation reveals a difference order of appearance in the world, which can already explain Eve's inferiority to Adam, without whom she could have never been created. Beside her original inferiority, there is also an original stigmatization linked to the original sin of having eaten the forbidden apple after subduing under the temptation of the snake. That was the reason for her expulsion from Paradise which can be linked to the general idea of women being those who fall more easily to temptation and to the power of their emotions, which makes them both sinful from their birth and weaker than men.

The Bible has therefore played a major role in the categorisation of men and women and that mindset was widely spread in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. That created many prejudices towards women who were supposed to act according to specific canons, always proposed by the Bible. Those who did not follow those canons could be negatively and socially stigmatized and more easily associated with the sinful woman. The socially acceptable woman was the one who, at some point of her life, was married and had children and that was the main objective of both ordinary and powerful women. As previously said, a woman was generally associated with a man and marriage allowed that. In this case, a woman's behavior had to follow the established pattern of the good wife whose aim was to satisfy her husband, obey to his orders, and give birth to children, who, in the case of powerful women, were crucial to the continuity of the power and properties of the family. A married woman with children and who revealed obedience to her husband represented the ideal woman, and therefore she suited society in

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<sup>65</sup> Professor Androniki Dialetti in MURAVYEVA, M. G. and TOIVO, R. M., *Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Routledge, 2013.

<sup>66</sup> FAUVEL, A., and YEOMAN, J., "Crazy Brains and the Weaker Sex: the British Case (1860-1900)." *Clio. Women, Gender, History*, no. 37, 2013, pp. 38–61. *JSTOR*, [www.jstor.org/stable/26238680](http://www.jstor.org/stable/26238680). Consulted on 26 January 2021.

the best way as being the reproduction of the religious canons proposed by the Bible. In fact, beside the prejudice concerning the sinful woman, the Old Testament also revealed the example of the good wife through the story of Sarah, Abraham's wife.<sup>67</sup> Her story brought up a sensitive subject for women, which was the inability of not being able to produce a child. Already in the Bible, this incapacity resulted in fears and anxiety and this shows that the religious canon was also at the origin of such a necessity for women and men, especially concerning male heirs. Eventually, Sarah was to be known as the model for a good Christian wife by being a symbol of obedience and loyalty.

The story of Sarah in the Old Testament reflected the importance for a woman to become a good wife for her husband by submitting to him and by giving him a male heir. That was the norm to which a woman had to aim and such a conception lasted for many centuries, from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance. The question of the woman's incapacity in the production of an heir was, in fact, one of the main problems under Henry VIII, whose obsession brought two of his marriages – his marriage to Catherine of Aragon and to Anne Boleyn – to tragedy.

However, if, on the one hand, the fact of not having a child could be noxious to her future and her marriage, on the other hand, a woman who gave birth to a son could acquire more power because, thanks to her, the family's prestige could find a continuity in time. For a woman in power, beside the fact of establishing her presence at Court, she could also gain a political right over her child. This concept is analyzed in detail by Thomas Hobbes, an English philosopher of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In his masterwork *Leviathan*<sup>68</sup>, he attacks the patriarchal system and claims the theory of 'original maternal dominion'. According to him, the patriarchal power that normally goes to men should actually be attributed to the mother as she is the one at the origin of the precious heir, and therefore of the power of the family. Hobbes said that a mother is the person who establishes the first physical relation with her child and that should be enough to claim a political right over the child, and consequently over the family, as well. Assuming that a child is the result of the union between a man and a woman through marriage, Hobbes disagrees with the fact that matrimonial laws are established by nature. According to him, in fact, they do not exist in a state of nature and, therefore, there is no certainty of the paternity of the child "unless it be declared by the Mother". That is why he insists that the mother should claim the dominion over her child. Consequently, there is therefore no logic in the fact that a

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<sup>67</sup> Sarah was unable to have children. That proved distressing for her because God had promised Abraham and Sarah that they would have a son. God appeared to Sarah's husband Abraham when he was 99 years old and made a covenant with him. He told Abraham that he would be the father of the Jewish nation. After waiting many years, Sarah convinced Abraham to sleep with her handmaiden, Hagar, to produce an heir. That was an accepted practice in ancient times. The child born of that encounter was named Ishmael. But God had not forgotten his promise and he sent three heavenly beings, disguised as travelers to Abraham. God repeated his promise to Abraham that his wife would bear a son. Even though Sarah was very old, she did conceive and deliver a son called Isaac.

<sup>68</sup> WRIGHT, J. H., *Origin Stories in Political Thought: Discourses on Gender, Power, and Citizenship*, University of Toronto Press, 2004, p. 93.

child should obey his or her paternal rule rather than her maternal one and, by claiming a maternal supreme dominion, Hobbes also turns upside down the traditional conception of woman, family, and, more generally, of society. Moreover, according to him, women have the ability to give their own consent for claiming dominion over their children. In fact, the general mindset of the time was that women could not actually decide for themselves over political matters and it was the husband who usually took those decisions. On the contrary, Hobbes appears to have more faith than his contemporaries on the women's power and intelligence and he revealed this theory in an assertion that he made as he referred to marriage. Marriage was a social contract, which required the woman's consent and Hobbes compared it to a battle. He wrote that

whereas some have attributed the Dominion to the Men only, as being of the more excellent Sex, they misreckon in it. For there is not always that difference of strength, or prudence between the man and woman, as that the right can be determined without War. (Leviathan II: 20, 139)

Hobbes disrupts the conventional belief concerning women as the weaker sex and he implies that marriage refers to a power relationship between a man and a woman in which one dominates and the other is submitted. According to him, only the battle between the two can decide whose role is given to whom, therefore, both man and woman have the same chance of gaining power. In this discourse, Hobbes puts the two sexes on a level of equality and that can be considered a revolution in thought for a 17<sup>th</sup>-century philosopher.

Robert Filmer is also a British philosopher and contemporary to Hobbes who also advocated the issue of a woman's consent on marriage. In the chapter entitled "The Anarchy of a Limited or Mixed Monarchy" of his work *Patriarcha*, he defends the political patriarchalism, basing his theories on the fact that men come from Adam, the father of all flesh, but he also defends a woman's right to give her consent in what would be the end of her virginity. He wrote that

where there is equality by nature, there can be no superior power; there every infant at the hour it is born in, hath an interest with the greatest and wisest man in the world... not to speak of women, especially virgins, who by birth have as much natural freedom as any other, and therefore ought not to lose their liberty without their own consent.

Filmer shows that virginity is something precious for a woman as it gives her the power to choose whether or not and to whom give it away. According to Filmer, virginity, being so precious, became the reason why the woman's legal consent was essential for her marriage and this condition allowed her to have more freedom and power. Filmer's writings joined Hobbes' theories concerning this matter.

The public and the private sphere and the association of men and women with one rather than the other is another issue concerning women and their distinction from men in society. This issue allows us to have a better understanding of the conception of women in Early Modern England. In

this social discourse, Hobbes' theories are again very important in the comprehension of gender studies as he analysed the dichotomy of public and private in his times. He made such a distinction in his social contract theory, which refers to the behavior that an individual has to have as being part of a society. In brief,

it stated that common security should be favored and that a bit of individual liberty should be sacrificed by each person to achieve it. Under the Social Contract, the natural right to liberty would be mutually transferred. An example of this would be if someone gave up his right to steal property from his neighbor while the neighbor also gave up that right. Hobbes claimed that this agreement to give up some of the natural right is not an explicit one because we are all born into a civil society with laws and contracts in place.<sup>69</sup>

Besides this social behavior, Hobbes distinguished two different spheres within that same society, the private and the public. However, according to him, these spheres did not exist in a state of nature, just like the marital laws. For him, in fact, all associations to one sphere rather than to the other were conventional and, consequently, Hobbes denied all gender associations to them. The general mindset of Early Modern English society was to assign the private and domestic sphere to women, but this differed in Hobbes' work. According to him, "there is no idealized, womanly private sphere in which women are described as performing their complementary functions to the male role of citizenship"<sup>70</sup> and therefore he does not link women to the private sphere as it was usually assumed in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century.

However, even though this might seem at first a modern and revolutionary theory for Hobbes' times, we actually understand that he did not take women into consideration for the social contract – the discourse of women's maternal dominion is abandoned as well. Consequently, we understand that men prevail over their opposite sex. For him, both private and public sphere belonged to men; they were the only ones who were considered capable of ruling, and therefore to create a commonwealth. If the private sphere of the family had its own hierarchies, similar to those of a social and political domain as the commonwealth, then men had to rule there, too. Hobbes's studies of gender could be seen as revolutionary for his times as he gave women a place in his discussions and he associated her maternal role with the acquisition of power and political right over their child. Nonetheless, from a political and social perspective, men still dominate, whereas women literally disappear and this reflects the cultural conception of the patriarchal society based on gender inequalities in which the general assertion was that "men are naturally fitter than women, for actions of labour and danger."<sup>71</sup>

Contrary to the belief that women were not capable of being in power, in some situations, they could actually find themselves at the top of the hierarchy and even replacing a man's power. In

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<sup>69</sup> "What Is Thomas Hobbes' Social Contract Theory?", in *Reference.com*, April 2020, <https://www.reference.com/world-view/thomas-hobbes-social-contract-theory-1c0d40a2e08398e2> ; consulted on 28 January 2021.

<sup>70</sup> WRIGHT, J. H., *op. cit.*, p. 107.

<sup>71</sup> HOBBS, T., *Leviathan*, p. 19.



society, it was the case with widowhood, which happened very often at the time, because of the high rate of mortality caused both by the lack of medicines and by men's campaigns in wars. When a husband and father of a family died, his wife was to take the power to control the family's properties in the case the children were not of age. However, widows were looked at with mistrust because of all the prejudices linked to their sex and generally, men, either children or relatives, took charge of her husband's role. Widows were a burden for society and they were usually marginalised and did not live a happy life. A contented widowhood was the consequence of a happy marriage in which the man had left entire estates under her wife's command in case he died. Concerning women in power such as Queens, widowhood was a negative position for them because with no King, the stability of the reign could be put into danger. Men at Court could exploit that occasion to acquire the vacant place of the King or to increase their own power and, in a patriarchal society, a woman, even if she was a Queen, could be easily defeated. Moreover, widows altered the traditional conception of women and they did not fit within the social expectations.<sup>72</sup> The fact that they were in control of their own wealth and executing their husband's power almost scared society, which did not consider them capable of doing that. That is why many widows were either marginalised or lived in a constant condition of anxiety, fearing that someone would take advantage of their widowhood to take charge of their power. Widowhood challenged the traditional order of the patriarchal society and that was the reason why widows represented a danger for the stability of society.

Nonetheless, widowhood was an exceptional condition and that social attitude towards women in power was generally spread within the Royal Court, being the place where power was held, and therefore, women who lived there could also take their chance and have access to that power. That is why fathers from powerful families wished to see their daughters enter the Court as the Queen's ladies-in-waiting; thanks to that, they could increase the family's power and they could have an influence over the monarchs themselves.<sup>73</sup> In order to achieve that, they had to follow a particular behavior that reflected the stereotypes coming from the religious models, of which we have previously discussed. Assuming the fact that "women were charged with being virtuous, chaste, modest, genteel, courteous, and obedient to their male forebears and to their husbands,"<sup>74</sup> their

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<sup>72</sup> ALVAREZ, A. D., *A Widow's Will: Examining the Challenges of Widowhood in Early Modern England and America*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2013, p.35.

<sup>73</sup> "Life at the Tudor court", in *Historic Royal Palaces*, <https://www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/history-and-stories/life-at-the-tudor-court/> ; consulted on 28 January 2021.

<sup>74</sup> KILDAY, A. M., "'That Women are but Men's Shadows' – Examining Gender, Violence, and Criminality in Early Modern Britain", in *Gender in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Routledge, 2013.

position in society was supposed to remain beneath the men's control. The person who emphasised this conception of women in the 16<sup>th</sup> century was John Knox, a Scottish minister and founder of the Presbyterian Church of Scotland after the Reformation. In his work *The First Blast of Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, written in 1558, Knox revealed his beliefs concerning the position of women in society and, according to him, the teaching of scripture was sufficient to prove that women should not bear rule over men. He wrote that



Figure 5. John Knox.

to promote a woman to bear rule, superiority, dominion, or empire above any realm, nation, or city, is repugnant to nature; contumely [an insult] to God, a thing most contrary to his revealed will and approved ordinance; and finally, it is the subversion of good order, of all equity and justice. Nature, I say, does paint them forth to be weak, frail, impatient, feeble, and foolish; and experience has declared them to be inconstant, variable, cruel, lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment. They ought to be repressed and bridled at all times and especially when they aspire to be independent from their menfolk.<sup>75</sup>

His statement might seem quite extreme, especially coming from a religious man who should regard men and women as brothers and sisters and therefore on the same level. Yet, at the same time, if we remember the way the relationship between men and women is taught in the Bible, we understand that Knox's opinion follows that traditional teaching, even though he amplifies it even more. In fact, he compares women to animals by saying that they ought to be "bridled at all times" and the way he describes their intelligence seems foreign to the description of a human's brain, which, on the contrary, is developed. If we assume that both Knox and Hobbes based their theories and statements on the general mindset of their centuries, by reading their works we realize that they reflect a general knowledge and amount of prejudices concerning women that they had not made up themselves. These notions of women were already present within society and, of course, such a matter became all the more powerful as long as women from the higher social hierarchies were concerned. In fact, if assumptions such as Hobbes' and Knox's were widely spread within all levels of society, we should not be surprised to acknowledge the fact that women in power were not tolerated because of all the prejudices linked to their sex.

However, many prejudices and assumptions were reexamined under the reign of Elizabeth I, the first female monarch who was not influenced by a husband, as she refused to marry – we will focus on this subject later on in the analysis. In this matter, John Aylmer took the defense of Elizabeth

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<sup>75</sup>KNOX, J., *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, 1878 edition, London, English Scholar's Library, 1558.

and of women in power in general by responding to John Knox's *The First Blast of Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. Aylmer was an English Bishop, therefore, he, too, was a man of the Church and yet, his opinion differs from his contemporary. He wrote *Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjectes* in 1559, which was a reply to Knox's work. Aylmer describes Queen Elizabeth I through the traditional conception of women, which was being virtuous and merciful. He wrote that "there is a marvelous mercy and no rigour, an exceeding pacience, and no desire of reveng in her"<sup>76</sup>, which draws a difference with her sister's reign, Mary I, known for her persecutions against Protestants. The fact that Elizabeth was compared to Mary's actions allowed Aylmer to emphasise her mercy and this was an important feature linked to her gender. Aylmer, in fact, highlights her mercy by writing the following statement:



Figure 6. John Aylmer.

Are not these great tokens thou good subject, of much mercy to follow? Marke her coming in, and compare it with others. She comes in like a lamb, and not like a lion, like a mother, and not like a stepdam. She rushes not in the first chop, to violate and break former laws, to stir her people to change what they list, before order be taken by law. She hangs no man, she beheads none. She burns none, spoils none.

According to Aylmer, a female monarch can rule just as a King and he defends the propriety of women's rule by implying that the second body of the Queen regnant can suffer no infirmity, even that of being female.<sup>77</sup> We therefore understand that under Elizabeth's reign, public opinion concerning women split, even though there were still those who mistrusted a woman in power, especially after all the persecutions and instability that England witnessed during Mary I's reign.

As John Aylmer already mentioned in his work, with the question of a woman in power, the issue of her body was also widely implicated. If, on the one hand, the King's body was considered the mirror of his masculinity and his virility, on the other, the Queen's body was her weak spot. In fact, a woman was strictly connected to maternity and emotions and that could represent a problem in the case of a female ruler. Besides, the fact that a woman was always associated with a male through marriage, this represented another problem because of the influence in England of a foreign monarch. In the case of the marriage between Mary I and the Spanish King Philip II in 1554, many fears concerned the foreign King's control over England, a control that could have been noxious for England and fruitful for Spain. That is why the notion of a woman as a dual-figured ruler was widely spread; the female monarch was, on the one hand, ruler of the people and, on the other, she was ruled

<sup>76</sup> AYLMER, J., *Harborowe for Faithfull and Trewe Subjectes*, Strasborowe, 1559.

<sup>77</sup> KANTOROWICZ, E., *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, Illustrated edition, Princeton University Press, 2016, p. 97.

and submitted by her husband. It was, in fact, under Mary I's reign that John Knox wrote his work and he used Mary as an example to show why women should not rule over men. He wrote the following statement:

Wonder it is, that the advocates and patrons of the right of our ladies did not consider and ponder this law, before they counseled the blind princes and unworthy nobles of their country to betray the liberties thereof into the hands of strangers: England, for satisfying of the inordinate appetites of that cruel monster Mary (unworthy, by reason of her bloody tyranny, of the name of a woman), betrayed, alas! to the proud Spaniard...<sup>78</sup>

Knox showed how the liaison of a female monarch to a foreign King through marriage could be noxious to the country itself.

It was probably for these reasons that Queen Elizabeth I decided not to marry and to dedicate herself to the ruling of the country without sharing her power with a man. Of course, she had witnessed several unsuccessful marriages with her father – especially concerning her mother's beheading – and with her sister, whose marriage with Philip II led England to a bloody war against France which was to cause her fall.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, Elizabeth's endeavors in undermining her sex revealed that she was aware of all the prejudices linked to a female monarch within a patriarchal society, thus defying this system in her own way. By refusing to marry and, therefore, exploiting her sexuality for political purposes, Elizabeth managed to create her own myth as a virgin. That became the way she revolutionised the conception of women of the time and her ability in giving a Golden Age to England turned upside down all prejudices and assumptions towards her gender. Later on in our work, we will analyse the revolution female monarchs managed to create despite the patriarchal system.

In this chapter, we have focused on the notion of gender and the conception of women in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Women represented the submissive and submitted side of society and they had to follow particular models coming from religious and literary canons. The prejudices and assumptions that men had towards their opposite sex was all the more amplified with women in power, as more important responsibilities had to be dealt with. Women were regarded as weak both physically and psychologically and for that reason, they were considered incapable to rule or to submit other men. In a patriarchal system, men were privileged to govern a country whereas women were strictly

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<sup>78</sup> KNOX, J., *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, 1878 edition, London, English Scholar's Library, 1558.

<sup>79</sup> Mary entered England into a war against France from 1557-1558, which was a disaster for England, considering the loss of numerous lives and the loss of the Calais territory. Influenced by her husband, Philip, Mary entered a conflict that was initially contested by Spain and France over territory in Italy, known as the Italian Wars. Beginning in 1494, the Italian War dominated a majority of the sixteenth century, with a frequent back-and-forth between Emperor Charles V of Spain and the Valois kings of France. Due to preexisting French hostilities between France and England, as well as her marriage to Philip, Mary was more inclined to pursue assisting Spain against France. England did eventually decide to assist Spain and declare war on France. The war ended with the decline of Mary's popularity and the loss of Calais.

confined within the domestic sphere, where their only power was over their children. However, under the Tudors, female monarchs began to impose their own control and to be able to deal with political institutions such as the Church, the government and marriage. Women from Elizabeth of York to Elizabeth I defied and challenged these institutions by, either using them as allies for their success, or by making enemies who were to cause their fall. In this way, Tudor Queens managed to impose their own power by turning upside down the traditional conception of their gender.

## **II. Queens and Institutions.**

In the previous chapter, we have studied the way the patriarchal system worked in 16<sup>th</sup>-century England and the way women were perceived by society through social prejudices and assumptions linked to their sex. The position that women occupied in society did not change much whether they belonged to powerful or poor families. In both cases, they depended on their male authorities, either their father or their husband, and their relationship permitted women to acquire power. This, of course, could also happen in the case of a woman's relationship with the King, thanks to whom she could achieve the top of the hierarchy by becoming Queen. Even though a woman could actually carry a legitimate power for herself – as in the case of Elizabeth of York<sup>80</sup> – her bond to a monarch permitted her to secure her position and the only possibility to do so was through the Catholic institution of marriage. Marriage allowed a legitimate union between two monarchs through the means of the Catholic authority and it also gave Queens access to official power. By becoming Queens, women acquired the highest position in society and the power linked to that. As they acquired more power, they were confronted with other institutions that were part of the patriarchal system. These institutions were the Church and government and Queens had to find allies within the members of these institutions in order to succeed as women in power. However, women were also confronted with enemies within those same institutions and, in this case, their possession of power could be put into danger or, in extreme cases, nullified. That was why marriage, Church and government represented the main tools through which power was achieved, maintained, and destroyed. In this chapter, we will see the way Queens such as Elizabeth of York, Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Mary I, and Elizabeth I managed to impose their own authority as women in power by exploiting and defying the patriarchal world with which they were confronted.

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<sup>80</sup> See part II. I.

## II. I. Queens and Marriage.

“Death is by far the happier condition than marriage; and although marriage at first is pleasing, yet after a time it is displeasing like meat which is sweet in the mouth, but proves bitter in the stomach.”

Margaret Cavendish, “Letters” in *Philosophical Letters* (1664).

This is the way Margaret Cavendish described the condition of marriage in her work and it is evident that her perspective on this institution was extreme, and yet it can reveal a wider perspective that women had towards marriage. Cavendish pronounced this statement during her funeral oration for a newly married woman and she wrote a response to Hobbes’s philosophical theory<sup>81</sup> concerning the social contract that he explained in the *Leviathan*. Cavendish was, in fact, a contemporary to Hobbes and the wife of a friend of his, the Duke of Newcastle.<sup>82</sup> Even though she wrote half a century later at the end of the Tudor dynasty, she embodies women’s perspective towards marriage and the way an apparent and superficially agreeable condition could actually hide a darker side that causes pain to the woman. Despite this personal and extreme opinion towards marriage, this latter could also give women the necessary power to mark history and to change the traditional conception of women from a monarchical perspective. Marriage, in fact, allowed rich and powerful families to find an alliance on state and property matters and it could both prevent and cause several conflicts that could put into question the possession of power.

Besides, marriage represented the very first legal and religious union between a man and a woman and it had been existing for several millennia. In fact, the origins of marriage go back to 2,350 B.C. and researchers have found evidence of these ceremonies in Mesopotamia, thus revealing that it already existed before the establishment of the Catholic Church. At first, marriage had little to do with religion and politics; it allowed a man and a woman to bind together and, therefore, to have the insurance that the children that were born from this union were the man’s biological heirs.<sup>83</sup> These ceremonies were already practiced by the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans, but the traditional conception of marriage was established after the birth of Catholicism and, consequently, of the Catholic Church. As the Roman Catholic Church became a powerful institution in Europe, marriage became all the more crucial both in family and state matters and that was why the blessings of a priest became a necessary step for a marriage to be legally recognized. By the 8<sup>th</sup> century, marriage was

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<sup>81</sup> See part I.III.

<sup>82</sup> WRIGHT, J., H., *Origin Stories in Political Thought: Discourses on Gender, Power, and Citizenship*, University of Toronto Press, 2004, p. 102.

<sup>83</sup> “The Origins of Marriage”, in *The Week*, January 2007, <https://theweek.com/articles/528746/origins-marriage>, consulted on 8 February 2021.

widely accepted in the Catholic Church as a sacrament, or a ceremony to bestow God's grace. At the Council of Trent in 1563, the sacramental nature of marriage was written into canon law<sup>84</sup> which expressed the fact that cases of separation of spouses belonged to the competence of the Church, and that anyone who said otherwise "let him be anathema"<sup>85</sup>, which meant that he should be excommunicated.

Marriage played a crucial role during the Tudor dynasty, especially if we think that Henry VIII himself went through six different marriages. Royal marriages were fundamental for the continuation of a dynasty and the stability of the reign and it was essential for a King or Queen to find the perfect candidate who was to bring advantages to the country to which he or she got married. Of course, the monarchs could not choose for themselves their own suitor and the idea of a marriage based on love was totally excluded. Therefore, future sovereigns were to grow up with the idea that arranged marriages represented the normality. These marriages, however, were even more a reality for princesses rather than for men as these latter could have more chance to choose their bride-to-be according to the best interests for the country. On the contrary, a woman had to wait for her male authority, her father or brother, to make an agreement for her marriage. Alison Weir explained this in her biography of Henry VIII's mother, Elizabeth of York and she wrote that

a father marrying off his daughter would also look to her future financial security, negotiating a jointure, or living, for her maintenance during her married life and in the event of her widowhood; often it rents from estates, of which a queen's jointure was largely made up. Upon marriage, a woman's property and title was transferred to her husband; she retained no control over any of it.<sup>86</sup>

This relates to the conception of their sexes, which we have analyzed in the previous chapter, and which pushed a woman to obey her male's authority. That is why marriage was such an important issue for a woman as "a girl's future status, happiness and success depended largely on the marriage she made, her relationship with her husband and her ability to perform her wifely duties."<sup>87</sup> Marriage was therefore the main objective in a woman's life and her upbringing was made in order to shape her in that perspective. Marriages between aristocratic families allowed alliances that could last for a lifetime and these alliances were very important within Royal families as they were to keep the peace between two countries. Royal marriages, in fact, usually happened between families coming from foreign countries so that a wider peace and stability could be established on a European level. Those alliances could also allow two countries to defend each other in case of wars and therefore, to have a

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<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> WATERWORTH, J., *The Canons and Decrees of the Sacred and Œcumenical Council of Trent*. 1888<sup>a</sup> ed., vol. Council of Trent, 24th Session, Burns and Oates, 1563.

<sup>86</sup> WEIR, A., *Elizabeth of York: The First Tudor Queen*. London, Vintage, 2014, p. 27.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*



larger army coming from the two sides. That was the case with the marriage between Catherine of Aragon, daughter of the two most important monarchs representing the Catholic Church in Europe, Isabel of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon, and Arthur Tudor, Henry VII and Elizabeth of York's first son. Even though their marriage did not last long – Arthur died nearly one year after their marriage – their union is an example of an alliance between Royal families from different countries.<sup>88</sup> Catherine's presence in England, even after the death of her first husband and after her marriage to Henry VIII, permitted the support both by the Catholic Church and by Spain with its Emperor, Charles V. In fact, this latter represented the Holy Roman Emperor and he was Catherine's nephew, which meant that her position in England was protected, both religiously and politically. Her family support guaranteed that if she was to suffer from any injustices in England, the original alliance could break up and that was to be considered as an offense both to the Catholic Church and to Spain, thus destabilising the harmony between the two countries.



Figure 7. *Arthur Tudor and Catherine of Aragon.*

The marriage between Henry VIII's parents, Elizabeth of York and Henry VII, is another example of marriage used as a tool for stability and legitimacy. As we have previously studied, this latter was the King thanks to whom the Tudor dynasty began and that happened after three decades of civil wars within England. Such a period was called the Wars of the Roses and it was one of the bloodiest periods in English history. It is



Figure 8. *Elizabeth of York and Henry VII.*

important to contextualise in order to understand their union and the effects it had in history. As a reminder, the Wars of the Roses consisted in the fight for power and authority between two Houses, the Yorks and the Lancasters, and the origin of these conflicts was the fact that the King, Henry VI, was considered weak and fragile and he had no heir who could succeed him.<sup>89</sup> After several conflicts between men who claimed the throne – more details about the wars are given in the introduction – Edward IV, Elizabeth of York's father, succeeded Henry VI and he reigned from 1461 to 1483. However, his marriage to a widow from no royal origins, Elizabeth Woodville, risked to destabilise England again as she was Edward's personal choice and she already had two sons from her previous

<sup>88</sup> Catherine's marriage to Arthur Tudor was to be a matter of debate for many years as Henry VIII tried to obtain a divorce from her in order to marry Anne Boleyn. He wanted to prove that his marriage to her was null and void by looking for evidence that Catherine and Arthur actually consumed their marriage.

<sup>89</sup> King Henry VI's personality was to play a fundamental role in the cause of the wars. He lacked, in fact, of political judgement and senses and he was considered to be weak and an imbecile. It was her French wife, Margaret of Anjou, who actually controlled the country with William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk.

marriage.<sup>90</sup> That is why his conflict with Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, began as this latter tried to re-install Henry VI on the throne. Eventually, Warwick was killed in 1471 during the Battle of Barnet and after Edward's death in 1483, his first twelve-year-old son, Edward V, succeeded him under the protection of the Duke of Gloucester. Gloucester took advantage of the situation and sent Edward and Elizabeth's two sons in the Tower – they were never to be found again and they were to be known as the Princes in the Tower.<sup>91</sup> The Duke of Gloucester managed to take the throne as Richard III and he was the last Plantagenet King as he was defeated in the Battle of Bosworth by Henry Tudor, who took his place in 1485 as Henry VII.<sup>92</sup> By marrying Edward IV's daughter, Henry was to end a long period of wars and to give England a new dynasty. Elizabeth of York represented the last member of her family who still carried her legacy of the House of York. It can be believed that she was stuck between two periods; she was both the legitimate heiress of her House and, at the same time, she was the first Tudor Queen. After a period of uncertainty – it was even thought that Richard III would marry her<sup>93</sup> –, she managed to officially access power thanks to her union to Henry. However, the fact that she was the eldest daughter of a former King put her on a legitimate position for inheriting her father's power, especially after her brothers' disappearance. Because of that, she was actually thought to be even more legitimate than Henry VII, whose link to the Royal family was more distant – her mother, Margaret Beaufort, was a descendant of the House of Lancaster, whereas his father, Edmund Tudor, was King Henry VI's half-brother. Elizabeth was therefore the closest relation to a former king and many thought that, thanks to her legitimacy, she could actually govern by herself. The following poem written in 1487 acknowledged that:

His title is fallen to our sovereign lady  
 Queen Elizabeth, his eldest daughter lineal;  
 To her is come all the monarchy,  
 For the fourth Edward had no issue male.  
 The crown therefore and scepter imperial  
 Both she must have without division.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Richard Neville, Earl of Warwick, was actually looking for the best suitor for Edward IV according to the country's interests. He managed to arrange a marriage with the French princess, but by 1464 Edward was already married to Elizabeth Woodville, whom he married secretly. That caused Warwick to side against Edward.

<sup>91</sup> Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville's sons were Edward V of England and Richard of Shrewsbury and they were only twelve and nine years old when they were sent to the Tower. The Duke of Gloucester saw them as a threat as he himself claimed the throne – which he managed to get as Richard III – and the only solution to that was to make them disappear. No one was never to find them again and still today, historians do not know what could have happened to them and who could have killed them, even though it is possible that Richard III himself commanded their death. In 1674, workmen at the tower dug up from under the staircase a wooden box containing two small human skeletons. The bones were widely accepted at the time as those of the princes, but this has not been proven and is far from certain. King Charles II had the bones buried in Westminster Abbey, where they remain.

<sup>92</sup> The House of Plantagenet referred to four royal houses: the counts of Anjou, and the houses of Lancaster and York. The Plantagenet family was on power from 1154, with Henry II, to 1485, with Richard III's death.

<sup>93</sup> WEIR, A., *Elizabeth of York: The First Tudor Queen*. London, Vintage, 2014, p. 131.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

In this poem, it is clear that Elizabeth's power was recognized in terms of her legacy rather than her marriage and even the Pope Innocent VIII and the Papal collector in England, Giovanni de' Gigli, believed she was a legitimate Queen and heiress of a former King. In fact, the Pope called her "the undoubted heir of the famous King of immortal memory, Edward IV"<sup>95</sup> and, in the same way, de' Gigli recognized that Edward's "firstborn, should of right succeed her mighty sire."<sup>96</sup> Despite all the evidence concerning the fact that she actually had the power to govern England by herself, in reality no one believed that a woman could reign as Queen Regent, even if the person in question is Edward IV's legitimate heiress. Her marriage to Henry VII was the only condition that could allow her to access the throne, which might seem a paradox if we consider that her powerful legacy itself permitted Henry VII to inherit the crown. In other words, she was a rightful and legitimate Queen and her marriage to Henry was her only possibility to become as such and to transmit that power to him. Thanks to her, Henry could officially become King and inherit the political power that was necessary to govern a country. That was the way politics worked, and, in a patriarchal society, even the heiress of the throne had to stand aside. In fact, as Alison Weir explained in her book, "traditionally women could transmit the crown – the royal houses of Plantagenet, York and Tudor derived their claim through the female line – but could not wield sovereign power."<sup>97</sup> However, her marriage to Henry VII allowed her to achieve the highest position a woman could aim to and by giving him a male heir, Elizabeth of York permitted to secure her husband's position on the throne and to ensure the beginning of a new dynasty.

The birth of a male heir was, in fact, the main objective for a royal couple. That was another essential feature of marriage besides creating alliances and stabilising the country as it ensured the continuation of the dynasty in power. It was, therefore, the wife's duty to give birth to a male heir and if she failed doing that, her position could lose its stability. Elizabeth of York managed to give Henry VII two sons, Arthur and Henry, but that was not the case with Catherine of Aragon. Nonetheless, in terms of 'wifely duties', Catherine represented the obedient and loyal wife and she had all the features concerning the general mindset of the time of how a wife should be and behave. George Cavendish, an English writer and Thomas Wolsey's biographer, declared that Catherine represented "a perfect Griselda", who stood in contrast to Anne Boleyn's personality, which Cavendish labelled "Venus



Figure 9. Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon.

<sup>95</sup> In his dispensation of 1486 (*Foedera*) in WEIR, A., *Elizabeth of York: The First Tudor Queen*. London, Vintage, 2014, p. 170.

<sup>96</sup> Giovanni de' Gigli, *Collectanea*, in *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> WEIR, A., *Elizabeth of York: The First Tudor Queen*. London, Vintage, 2014, p. 170.

insatiate goddess”<sup>98</sup> as she pushed Henry to divorce. Henry believed that women were inferior and he had a traditional perspective towards marriage and the social order.<sup>99</sup> That was why Catherine’s character appeared to be suitable for Henry’s beliefs of how marriage should be and how a wife should behave with her husband. However, the fact that Catherine was incapable of producing a male heir broke one of the main rules that concerned a wife’s duty. In fact, the issue of succession was to become one of the most important concerns for Henry VIII, and his capacity in getting rid of two of his wives – Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn – could be interpreted as a desperate way of looking for the right woman who was capable to give him a son.

After several miscarriages and a stillborn baby boy, Catherine managed to give birth to a daughter, the future Mary I, in 1516, but as we have already said, women were not taken into consideration in the line of succession and that is why a male heir was needed. After more than twenty years of marriage, from 1509 to 1533, Henry VIII must have lost all hope for finally having a son from her and that is why he took the extreme decision of getting a divorce and to disrupt all normal orders and rules of marriage.<sup>100</sup> It took almost ten years for the divorce to become official, as it was not a normal practice, especially if we consider England’s bond to the Catholic Church. It was, in fact, the first time that an English King requested the permission to the Pope to divorce from his wife. That was an outrageous offense for Catherine of Aragon, whose position as Queen was supposed to be secured, especially thanks to his nephew, Charles V, as the Holy Roman Emperor. An attack on Catherine meant an attack to the Catholic Church and after ten years of struggles in order to obtain the Pope’s permission for the divorce, Henry decided to take an even more extreme solution and to break his bond with the Catholic Church. This did not mean that he was to renounce to his faith and his beliefs, but it was rather a separation from the institution, which did not grant him what he wanted. Catherine, who was a very religious woman, was strategically able to demand her nephew’s help in order to support her against this matter, which was to be remembered as “the King’s Great Matter”.<sup>101</sup> For many years, Henry tried to find evidence that his marriage was ‘null and void’ by affirming that Catherine’s previous marriage to his brother, Arthur, had actually been consummated. An English chronicler had written his testimony concerning the morning after Catherine and Arthur’s first night together and he reported Arthur’s words after having being enquired for his thirst:

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<sup>98</sup>George Cavendish, in POTTER U., “Tales of Patient Griselda and Henry VIII”, in *Early Theatre*, vol. 5, n° 2, 2002, p. 11-28, [https://www.academia.edu/7234911/Tales\\_of\\_Patient\\_Griselda\\_and\\_Henry\\_VIII](https://www.academia.edu/7234911/Tales_of_Patient_Griselda_and_Henry_VIII), consulted on 11 February 2021.

<sup>99</sup>TRUEMAN C. N., “The Beliefs of Henry VIII”, in *History Learning Site*, March 2015, <https://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/tudor-england/the-beliefs-of-henry-viii/> ; consulted on 11 February 2021.

<sup>100</sup> We will analyse this issue more in detail later on in our analysis.

<sup>101</sup> ELTON, G. R., *England Under the Tudors*, London ; New York, Routledge, 2018, p. 101.

I have this night been in the midst of Spain, which is a hot region, and that journey maketh me so dry. And if thou hadst been under that hot climate, thou wouldst have been drier than I.<sup>102</sup>

These words caused one of the greatest controversies in English history and they were to be used by Henry as a justification for the divorce. Moreover, the Bible threatens that “if a man shall take his brother’s wife, it is an unclean thing... he shall be without children” (Leviticus 20:21) and that was exactly what was happening to Catherine and Henry’s marriage. However, concerning Arthur’s statement, only Catherine could know what had actually happened during her first night with her previous husband. Her fight in supporting the fact that she had not consummated her first marriage and that she was a virgin when she married Henry was to reveal her strength of character and her faith in marriage and religion, which she could not betray. Despite all efforts in going against Henry’s will, eventually he managed to divorce her by turning upside down England’s relationship with the Catholic Church and to marry the woman he had been longing for during almost ten years, Anne Boleyn.

Catherine and Henry’s divorce was an example of the power held by the King and the impossibility for a woman to succeed in a matter that went against her husband’s will. Catherine’s incapacity to produce a male heir resulted in Henry’s anxiety for his succession and after the divorce, he could hope for success thanks to her marriage to Catherine’s former lady-in-waiting, Anne Boleyn, who was already pregnant when they



Figure 10. Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn.

married in 1533. What was peculiar in their marriage, besides being the reason for many to go against Anne Boleyn and standing on Catherine’s side, was the fact that she was not part of a royal family.<sup>103</sup> On the contrary, she was a noblewoman who had lived in France for almost nine years at Margaret of Austria’s court – in fact, she was to be considered as ‘wholly French’<sup>104</sup> as she brought the French fashion in England and she spoke French fluently – and she entered the Royal Court as Catherine of Aragon’s lady-in-waiting. Her marriage to Henry VIII allowed her to become the richest woman in England as she received the title of Marquess of Pembroke in 1532, one year before becoming the

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<sup>102</sup> TREMLETT, G., *Catherine of Aragon: The Spanish Queen of Henry VIII*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, New York, Walker & Company, 2010, p. 89.

<sup>103</sup> Henry VIII demanded all the members of the Court to sign an oath in order to swear their support for Henry and Anne’s marriage. The problem was that many were opposed to Henry’s decision to break all relationships with Rome and they stood on Catherine’s side as she was the lawful Queen of England and her family represented one of the most important Catholic powers in Europe. Because of their refusal to sign the oath, men like Thomas More, author of the famous *Utopia*, Bishop John Fisher and other three monks were beheaded in 1535.

<sup>104</sup> IVES, E., *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 86.

second Queen consort under Henry's reign. Besides rising herself in the social hierarchy, Anne's marriage to Henry also allowed her family to achieve power and this situation was a rare example of the fact that a woman, too, could give access to power to men. Her father, Thomas Boleyn, was included in Henry's government and he was to be part of the triumvirate that governed England.<sup>105</sup> He managed to rise to noble rank thanks to his daughter's place in the King's affections, thus allowing him to reveal his ability in politics. Moreover, Anne Boleyn became the cause of many political and religious changes in England, such as the break with Rome without which she could not have married the King, the introduction of Protestantism in England, and, of course, she was the mother of the sovereign who was to transform the century into a Golden Age, Elizabeth I. This latter was, in fact, the only heir she produced and that was one of the reasons why Henry wanted to get rid of her, in the same way as he did with his first wife. The justifications that he found in doing so were the following: sixteenth-century superstitions declared that a deformity in a baby was a sign of misbehavior of the parent and that was what was thought of Anne after giving birth to a deformed foetus in 1536.<sup>106</sup> Anne was therefore believed to be an adulteress and a witch and Henry had said that he had

made this marriage seduced and constrained by sortileges and for this reason he held the said marriage void and that God had demonstrated this in not allowing them to have male heirs and that he considered that he could take another.<sup>107</sup>

Anne Boleyn was therefore beheaded at the Tower of London in 1536 and Henry married his third wife, Jane Seymour, who eventually managed to give him a son, the future Edward VI.<sup>108</sup>

All these marriages were men-centered as they all involved Queens who achieved power thanks to their union to the King. That was not the case with Henry and Catherine's daughter, Mary I, who became Queen after the death of her seventeen-year-old brother, Edward, in 1553. Mary was the first legitimate female monarch to reign and her monarchical power did not depend on a man. Nonetheless, her being a woman still brought all the prejudices and assumptions of the time and marriage was a necessity. Mary was thirty-seven when she inherited the Crown and she had not married yet – such a situation reveals her father's negligence towards her following her mother's fall. The fact that she was Queen and a mature woman permitted her to decide for herself the husband that could suit her as English Queen and her choice directed towards her Spanish roots. In 1554, she

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<sup>105</sup> The government was in the hands of Thomas Howard, the duke of Norfolk, Charles Brandon, the duke of Suffolk and Thomas Boleyn, the earl of Wiltshire.

<sup>106</sup> Ives, E., *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 297.

<sup>107</sup> A courtier's words in *Ibid*, p.298.

<sup>108</sup> She was Catherine of Aragon's and Anne Boleyn's lady-in-waiting and she married Henry VIII only eleven days after Anne's execution. She produced a legitimate male heir, but she died nine days later of puerperal fever, an infection that could occur after childbirth. Henry VIII would eventually demand to be buried in Jane's same tomb after his death, probably as a homage to the only wife who managed to give him what he had been longing for during many years.

married Philip II of Spain, Emperor Charles V's son, and, by doing so, Mary wanted to establish her power both from a religion and geographical perspective. Her marriage to Philip renewed the alliance with Spain, which had been alienated after Henry's break with Rome, but at the same time, her power was maintained and she was to be 'sole Queen'. A treaty was therefore created in order to separate Mary as Queen of England from Mary as Philip's spouse. Such treaty declared

that your Majesty as our only Queen, shall and may, solely use, have, and enjoy the Crown and Sovereignty of, and over your Realms, Dominions, and Subjects... in such sole and only estate, and in as large and ample manner and form... after the hithertofore of the said marriage, and at all times during the same...<sup>109</sup>

One of the main purposes of this treaty was to secure England's future in the hands of an English and legitimate monarch rather than a foreign King's. One of the main concerns for their marriage was the fact that it could bring England to war against France in order to support the Spanish during the Italian Wars<sup>110</sup>, and that was why an act of marriage was created stating that

the realm of England, by occasion of this matrimony, shall not directly or indirectly be entangled with the war that is between the most victorious lord the emperor, father unto the said lord prince, and Henry, the French king, but he the said lord Philip, as much as shall lie in him, on the behalf of the said realm of England, shall see the peace between the said realms of France and England observed, and shall give no cause of any breach...<sup>111</sup>

However, Mary led England to be part of the Italian Wars that saw Spain and France into conflict. Because of her marriage to Philip and of other reasons that caused the relationship between England and France to be less peaceful than with Spain, Mary ignored the act and sided with her husband to support his country during the war.<sup>112</sup>

However, despite Mary's effort to make her marriage work by supporting her husband for his geographical and religious aims, Mary did not produce any male heir and that was to be the main cause for Philip's departure in 1557. Mary was so desperate to give birth to an heir that, in 1555, she believed to be with child, even though that might have been quite peculiar for a forty-year-old woman.

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<sup>109</sup> WHITELOCK, A., *Mary Tudor, England's First Queen*, London, Bloomsbury, 2009, p.227.

<sup>110</sup> The Italian Wars lasted from 1494 to 1559 and they were a series of violent wars for control of Italy. They were mostly fought by France and Spain, even though they eventually involved much of Europe. They resulted in the Spanish Habsburgs dominating Italy and shifted power from Italy to northwestern Europe.

<sup>111</sup> "Act for the Marriage of Queen Mary to Philip of Spain (1554)", in *History is Now Magazine, Podcasts, Blog and Books* / *Modern International and American history*, July 2018 <http://www.historyisnowmagazine.com/blog/2018/7/22/how-did-queen-mary-i-of-englands-reign-fail-king-philip-ii-of-spain-the-struggle-between-france-and-spain-and-how-england-lost-calais> ; consulted on 12 February 2021.

<sup>112</sup> Henry II, king of France, supported Jane Grey, of whom we will talk later on in our analysis, as the successor of Edward VI due to Mary's inclination towards the Spanish. Another event that continued to sour Mary's sentiment towards the French occurred in 1556 when Henry Dudley conducted a conspiracy in France. He was discovered attempting to steal from the Exchequer and invade England due to hatred of the Spanish and his favor of Mary's sister, Elizabeth. The conspiracy was defeated, and the French ambassador who was suspected in the plot, Antoine de Noailles, was dismissed from the English court.



It was eventually discovered that she suffered from a false pregnancy and, in 1558, she died at only 42, leaving her sister as heir to the Crown.<sup>113</sup>

Elizabeth I succeeded her sister and she brought England back to Protestantism. The fact that she was a woman in power pushed all the men of the Council to find a well suited husband-to-be, which was to reveal an impossible task that went against Elizabeth's will. In fact, she had no interest in being married to a foreign power<sup>114</sup> nor to forebear children because she feared that they "would grow out of kind, and become perhaps ungracious,"<sup>115</sup> meaning that they would have tried to overthrow her. That was the reason why she declared that she left the matter of succession to Providence to decide and she concluded saying that "in the end, this shall be for me sufficient, that a marble stone shall declare that a queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin."<sup>116</sup> It was for her decision not to marry that the image of the Virgin Queen was born, as well as the prosperity of a Golden Age that was introduced for the first time by a female monarch alone – we will study this more in detail in the last chapter of this analysis.

In this chapter, we have seen that marriage represented a very important issue in a woman's life, especially if the woman in question was to become Queen. Marriage was the main institution that allowed the continuation of a patriarchal system, and, at the same time, it gave women access to direct power. As we have studied, marriage had different aims according to the monarchs concerned and the background of the time. It could be made for stabilising a dynasty after a period of wars, as it was the case for Elizabeth of York and Henry VII; for alliances between foreign countries, as for Catherine of Aragon and Henry VIII's marriage and for Mary I and Philip II's; for love and for hope of succession, as between Anne Boleyn and Henry VIII; or it could even be refused in order to keep the female monarch's power untouched by a male influence. This institution was to give Queens enough power to deal with the other institutions, the Church and government, and to defy the patriarchal system by revealing their capacity in taking up the role of female monarchs.

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<sup>113</sup> She thought herself to be with child, but her health was only deteriorating. According to Anne Whitelock in her book *Mary Tudor, England's First Queen*, she was suffering from "intermittent fevers, insomnia, headaches, and loss of visions" and the fact that her belly swelled – which made her even more convinced that she was pregnant – was another sign that her health was deteriorating.

<sup>114</sup> There was the possibility that she could marry her sister's husband, Philip II of Spain.

<sup>115</sup> Elizabeth I in WEIR, A., *Elizabeth, the Queen*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1998, p.44.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*



## II. II. Queens and Church.

One of the most important relationships to which the monarchs were confronted with was the one concerning the Church. At the time, religion was a very important part of people's lives and, therefore, the institution that represented Catholicism was one of the most powerful institutions within Europe. This institution had been establishing its position in all European western countries for several centuries and it had shaped the people's mindset as well as their way of life, as we have previously studied. The Pope represented the most important person whose power went beyond a monarch's from a religious perspective and his influence was always present for most decisions. The Pope stayed at Rome, the siege of the Catholic Church and, in order to allow the institution that he represented to be in control of political and religious power within the countries, he had to rely on Cardinals, Bishops and Archbishops who were to obey to his orders and to make sure that the Catholic faith was followed. These members of the Church were the real protagonists of everything that happened between a monarch and their institution as they worked as messengers and spokesmen for the Pope and, beyond being religious figures, they also held important positions in politics. However, the 16<sup>th</sup> century witnessed major changes that were to affect the Catholic Church and the normal balance of power between the State and the Church. Within these changes, important female monarchs were to play a major role, thus making themselves remembered in the history of Early Modern England. Before analyzing the relationship between these Queens and the members of the Church, it is crucial to understand the religious background of this century and the changes that quickly spread throughout Europe.

One of the major changes introduced in Europe that were about to weaken the power of the Catholic Church was the Reformation, a movement that began in the early 16<sup>th</sup> and lasted until the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The person who initiated this movement was Martin Luther, a monk of the Order of St. Augustine in Germany. The weakening of the Church, however, had already begun even before Luther's publication of his *Ninety-Five Theses*, the work that revealed his ideas that stood at the basis of the Reformation.<sup>117</sup> In fact, the introduction of



Figure 11. Martin Luther.

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<sup>117</sup> The *Ninety-five Theses* or *Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences* was a list of propositions for an academic disputation written in 1517 by Martin Luther, professor of moral theology at the University of Wittenberg in Germany. They advanced Luther's positions against what he saw as the abuse of the practice of clergy selling plenary indulgences, which were certificates believed to reduce the temporal punishment in purgatory for sins committed by the purchasers or their loved ones. In the *Theses*, Luther claimed that the repentance required by Christ in order for sins to be forgiven involved only inner contrition, and that sacramental confession was unnecessary. He argued that indulgences led Christians to avoid true repentance and sorrow for sin, believing that they could forgo it by obtaining an indulgence. These indulgences, according to Luther, discouraged Christians from giving to the poor and performing other acts of mercy, which he attributed to a belief that indulgence certificates were more spiritually valuable.

Humanist studies focusing on the understanding of human beings rather than of God and faith began to put into question the traditional mindset of Western culture, which had been centering entirely on God. Humanism coincided with the transition towards the new era of the Renaissance, in contrast with medieval times that revolved and functioned around religion. Moreover, people began to be aware of the corruption and the greed for power among the members of the Catholic Church, and that was why an increasing need for reform spread throughout Europe. In this context, Erasmus<sup>118</sup> was one of the main figures who prepared Europe to the Reformation by attacking the corruption within the Catholic Church, which was to lead many people to leave Catholicism.<sup>119</sup> However, Erasmus did not go as far as to detach himself from the Church, as he still recognized the authority of the Pope, contrary to Luther, and that was why he cannot be considered to be involved in the introduction of the Reformation itself. Martin Luther was therefore the one at the head of this new movement and his ideas differed from the traditional perspective of the Catholic Church. Like Erasmus, he was convinced that the Church was corrupt and had lost sight of what he saw as the central truths of Christianity. The most important for Luther was the doctrine of justification – God’s act of declaring a sinner righteous – by faith alone through God's grace. He believed that salvation or redemption was a gift of God's grace, attainable only through faith in Jesus as the Messiah. This teaching by Luther was expressed in his 1525 publication *On the Bondage of the Will*, in which he supported the theory of Predestination.<sup>120</sup> He believed that Christians receive such righteousness entirely from outside themselves and it is the righteousness of Christ transmitted to Christians through faith. That was why, according to him, faith alone was enough to achieve salvation, contrary to Christianity that imposed confession. With these new ideas, Martin Luther managed to introduce a new conception of faith and religion that was spread throughout Europe, thus introducing Protestantism.<sup>121</sup>

It is important to keep all these pieces of information in mind in order to better understand the major changes that took place within England as well. The break with Rome under Henry VIII was one of the most important events in English history as it was to change all perspectives towards religious authority, and in a context of Reformation, towards religion itself. Three of the Tudor

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<sup>118</sup> Desiderius Erasmus was a Dutch philosopher and Christian scholar considered to be one of the greatest scholars of the northern Renaissance. As a Catholic priest, Erasmus was an important figure in classical scholarship who wrote in Latin. Using humanist techniques for working on texts, he prepared important new Latin and Greek editions of the New Testament, which raised questions that were to become influential in the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation.

<sup>119</sup> “The Beginning of the Reformation in the 16th Century”, in *Brewminate*, August 2020 <https://brewminate.com/the-beginning-of-the-reformation-in-the-16th-century/> ; consulted on 17 February 2021.

<sup>120</sup> In this work, Luther argued that people can only achieve salvation or redemption through God and could not choose between good and evil through their own willpower. It was his reply to Erasmus’ *On Free Will* which was his first public attack on Luther. The debate between Luther and Erasmus is one of the earliest of the Reformation over the issue of free will and predestination.

<sup>121</sup> However, the term appeared in the 1640s and therefore it was not yet used at the beginning of the Reformation.

Queens were to play a major role in England and its future as they fought either for the traditional relationship with the Catholic Church or for the transition towards a new religious era. These Queens were Henry VIII's first and second wife, Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn, and Henry's eldest daughter, Mary I. Two of them, Catherine and Mary, represented both the conservatism and the rigidity of the Catholic Church – probably the fact that Mary was Catherine's daughter influenced her religious views – whereas Anne Boleyn represented one of the patrons who introduced England to the Reformation. However, a Queen did not act alone and she needed members of the Church themselves to actually help her with her religious plans. For each Queen, in fact, a high ranked cleric played a major role in the establishment of the Queen's religious ideas, as well as in the following of her orders. Of course, Catherine and Anne were not sole monarchs, as it was the case for Mary I, and, therefore, their power and actions depended on Henry VIII's will. Nonetheless, even behind a King, both of them managed to sustain their own ideas and to manipulate the events on their own. As England was not yet separated from the Catholic authority of the Pope, the sovereign relied on the members of the Church to communicate directly with Rome. Three of them were crucial as they acted as the King's or Queen's right arm in religious matters, which had political consequences as well. They were Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, and Cardinal – later Archbishop – Reginald Pole and each one of them fought to maintain their position close to the King's or Queen's favor. Each Queen, of whom we will talk about, personified a particular period in the religious English history and each cleric represented the endeavors through whom the sovereign shaped England from a religious perspective.

As we have already seen in the previous chapter, Catherine of Aragon's marriage to Henry VIII allowed the country to have an alliance both with Spain and with Rome, thus insuring a support both geographically and religiously. Of course, England was already a Catholic country, but Henry and Catherine's union strengthened England's relationship with the Church. This stability, however, was to collapse as soon as Henry realized that he was not going to have a male heir from Catherine and it was at that moment that Catherine's religious support from both her nephew, Charles V, and the Pope was her only possibility to maintain her power at the King's side. Even though Henry's desire for divorce from Catherine was, at first, kept a secret – it was to be remembered, in fact, as the 'King's Secret or Great Matter' – the fact that his right arm, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, surrounded her with spies and informants revealed Catherine's loss of power and influence within the Court. Giles Tremlett explained this in his biography entitled *Catherine of Aragon, Henry's Spanish Queen*: even a private meeting between Catherine and the Spanish ambassador, Íñigo de Mendoza, had “to

be organized through Wolsey.”<sup>122</sup> In fact, this latter was trying to increase his power by giving the King a divorce and the Cardinal took advantage of his legatine powers to achieve that and to get closer to the King’s favor.<sup>123</sup> Even though Henry and Wolsey tried to maintain a certain secrecy, the situation eventually came to be acknowledged by the Queen right after Wolsey’s call for a secret tribunal in his residence in 1527 when it was suggested that Henry and Catherine’s marriage was null because of her previous union to the King’s brother, Arthur.<sup>124</sup> We actually do not know whether Henry believed in this religious curse enunciated by the Bible, according to which a man who married his brother’s wife shall remain childless, but it is sure, whether he believed it or not, that he used this to make his marriage be declared null and void.<sup>125</sup> As soon as the Spanish ambassador was informed of Henry’s will, he sent a letter to Charles V in which he explained that

the king is so bent in this divorce that he has secretly assembled certain bishops and lawyers that they may sign a declaration to the effect that his marriage with the queen is null and void, on account of her having been his brother’s wife. It is therefore to be feared that either the pope will be induced by some false statement to side against the queen – or that the cardinal, by virtue of his legatine authority, may take some step fatal to her marriage. I am perfectly aware, though the queen herself has not ventured, and does not venture, to speak to me on the subject, that all her hope rest, after God, on your imperial highness.<sup>126</sup>

This letter revealed Catherine’s hope that her nephew could actually position himself against Henry’s desire for divorce, thus making the realization of the matter even more difficult. Moreover, marriage being a traditional union blessed by the Catholic Church, the fact of declaring it void meant defying the Catholic authority, the Pope, and England’s alliance with Spain.

However, at first, Henry did not want a divorce, but rather an annulment of his marriage, which would not have caused the official break with Rome, being Henry himself a devoted Catholic.<sup>127</sup> One of the main reasons why Pope Clement VII did not allow the annulment of the marriage was because Charles V was keeping him as a hostage after he had sacked Rome during the Italian wars in 1527 and he pushed him to side against Henry on this matter. Thanks to Charles V, Catherine received the support and the power she needed to put pressure on the Catholic authority, but, as we have previously seen, the power of a male monarch such as King Henry was superior to the Queen’s. Consequently, as the Catholic Church was not to declare the annulment of Henry and

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<sup>122</sup> TREMLETT, G., *Catherine of Aragon: Henry’s Spanish Queen*, London, Faber and Faber, 2010, p. 254.

<sup>123</sup> Powers given by the Pope himself and that made the person who had them – the legate – a papal ambassador.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, p. 255.

<sup>125</sup> In 1532, a book entitled *The Glass of Truth* was published in support of Henry’s desire to annul his marriage. It is believed that Henry wrote it himself, even though it was published anonymously.

<sup>126</sup> Íñigo de Mendoza in TREMLETT, G., *op. cit.*, p. 264.

<sup>127</sup> The fact that he was the second son meant that he had been educated to become a member of the Church. Only the first son’s upbringing was the one of a future king, but Arthur’s precocious death caused Henry to become King.

Catherine's marriage, he decided that the only way to end their union and, therefore, to be able to marry again, was to break from that same authority. After almost ten years of negotiations during the 1520s, Henry's divorce from Catherine brought England to the break with Rome, thus declaring the King – and each future monarch – the Supreme Head of the Church through the Act of Supremacy of 1534.<sup>128</sup>

The break with Rome brought Catherine of Aragon's alienation from all powers and her daughter, Mary, was declared illegitimate. Moreover, this situation also brought the fall of one of the most important men within the Court who had helped – but failed – Henry to obtain his annulment and this man was Cardinal Thomas Wolsey. As Geoffrey Elton explained in his book, *England under the Tudors*, Wolsey was a very important figure in politics and in diplomatic affairs. "From 1515 to 1529 Wolsey was not only the king's chief minister but virtually his only one. Though Henry never surrendered ultimate control over affairs, it was Wolsey who ruled"<sup>129</sup> and this reflected his importance and influence. However, as Catherine's marriage to Henry had entered a crisis, Wolsey's powerful position was in balance and it became essential to him to rescue the Pope from Charles V, and his failure in doing so, as well as in giving Henry the divorce, were the main causes for his fall in 1529.<sup>130</sup> According to Elton, "Catherine, and Spain with her, believed Wolsey to be at the origin of it all, but in this she was certainly mistaken" as he "had nothing to gain from a plan which aimed at putting the Boleyns" in power – they supported the Reformation in its attack to the Church and they were hostile to Wolsey himself.<sup>131</sup> Catherine's fall from power was caused, in part, by Wolsey's action as he tried to increase his own power within the Royal Court. Eventually, Catherine's foreign support from Charles V and the Catholic Church had little influence within England, and, her future became even more uncertain as Henry decided to make himself Supreme Head of the Church, thus declaring the annulment of his marriage to Catherine himself. Such an historic event brought, as we have seen, the fall of those who had failed in giving him what he wanted – Catherine, as she fought to maintain her marriage, and Thomas Wolsey – and, on the contrary, other people took advantage of this situation and increased their power.



Figure 12. *Thomas Cranmer.*

The divorce from Catherine of Aragon led to the accession to the throne of Anne Boleyn, Catherine's former lady-in-waiting, and

<sup>128</sup> From this point, the Church of England was created in 1534, and even though, it was to be separated from the Papal authority, Henry wanted it to remain Catholic.

<sup>129</sup> ELTON, G. R., *England Under the Tudors*, London ; New York, Routledge, 2018, p. 78.

<sup>130</sup> According to Elton, his rescue was essential for three reasons: he derived all his powers from the papal authority, he was bound to an anti-imperial policy, and Henry's need of divorce made it necessary to free the Pope from Charles V, Catherine's nephew.

<sup>131</sup> ELTON, G. R., *op. cit.* p. 119.

this time Anne had an ally within the members of the Church, the Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. This latter had, in fact, played a major role in the annulment of Henry's marriage as he argued the case as part of the embassy to Rome in 1530, and, in 1532, he became the ambassador to the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V<sup>132</sup>, which might seem a paradox according to the situation between England, Spain and the Catholic Church. After the break with Rome, Cranmer declared the marriage void and, four months later, he married the King to Anne Boleyn, in 1533. One of the reasons why he wanted Anne to achieve power was, first of all, to give Henry what he had longed for since the early 1520s, thus increasing his own power, and, another reason, which is crucial to the understanding of those times in England, was the fact that both Anne and Cranmer supported the Reformation. Cranmer had actually been sent to Germany to learn more about Lutheranism and he had married the niece of a Lutheran reformer.<sup>133</sup> He was therefore very much influenced by the ideas of the Reformation and he was known as a Protestant.<sup>134</sup> Anne Boleyn, too, was influenced by the Reformation, even though historians still argue about her religious beliefs. The fact that she had spent nine years in France was crucial to her education and to her faith. She had known women with different religious views from the traditional Catholic ones and the general atmosphere of reform nurtured them. In France, Anne had served Marguerite of Angoulême, one of the most important Renaissance women and author of *Le Miroir de l'Ame Pécheresse*, a poem with evangelical Protestant ideas, the copy of which was translated by Elizabeth I in 1545 as a gift for her stepmother, Henry's sixth wife, Katherine Parr.<sup>135</sup> Anne Boleyn was therefore very likely to have developed new ideas concerning her religion that changed from the traditional Catholic views. In her Book of Hours – which is displayed at Hever Castle – a personal note can be found below an illumination of the Last Judgement.<sup>136</sup> The note says “le temps viendra” (the time will come) and, according to Eric Ives in his book *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, it refers to a proverb the full version of which is “a day will come that shall pay for all.” This is a comment of *L'Ecclésiaste*, an illuminated manuscript produced for Anne, writing that “the judgement of God shall be general and universal whereas all things shall be discovered and nothing shall abide hidden, whether it be good or evil.”<sup>137</sup> This was the reason why many historians wondered – and still do – about Anne's personal faith. At the time, it

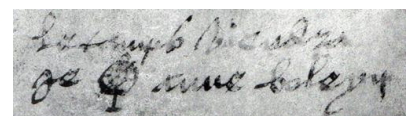


Figure 13. Anne Boleyn's note 'le temps viendra' in her Book of Hours.

<sup>132</sup> BBC - History - Thomas Cranmer, [https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic\\_figures/cranmer\\_thomas.shtml](https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/cranmer_thomas.shtml). Consulted on 22 February 2021.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>134</sup> After Edward VI's death, he supported the accession to the throne of Lady Jane Grey, who was to be known as the nine-days Queen, instead of Henry's daughter, Mary.

<sup>135</sup> Ives, E., *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 278.

<sup>136</sup> The book of hours is a Christian devotional book, which contained a collection of texts, prayers and psalms, often with appropriate decorations, for Christian devotion.

<sup>137</sup> RIDGWAY, C., “Anne Boleyn's Faith”, in *The Anne Boleyn Files*, April 2010, <https://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/anne-boleyns-faith/>, consulted on 23 February 2021.

was not common for a Catholic to write his or her own personal comments next to the prayers, as it was generally the task of the members of the Church to understand the reading of the Bible. However, during the Reformation, evangelicals wanted to win “the Church back to the inwardness of true religion and to the spiritual realities which underlay its fossilized formality”<sup>138</sup> and even though Anne could be considered to be evangelical, she still recognized some Catholic traditions, like mass.<sup>139</sup> Even though her personal faith differed from the traditional Catholic conception of the practices of that religion, Anne was actually a very devout woman and, thanks to her faith, she was to become one of the patrons of the Reformation in England.<sup>140</sup>

Thomas Cranmer and Anne Boleyn represented two of the main figures who made the Reformation enter the English soil. Moreover, they were complementary: Cranmer had been essential to Anne’s accession to the throne and Anne’s support of the Reformation, and her new conception of religion responded to the general feeling that spread throughout Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and that was highly supported by Cranmer himself. Of course, they acted with the King’s consent and even though Henry had received a traditional Catholic education, he accepted Luther’s supremacy of the Scripture and he authorized the publication of an English Bible, more accessible to the laity.<sup>141</sup> The break with Rome and Anne Boleyn’s accession to power radically changed the traditional conception of Catholicism and the ideas of the Reformation put into practice a general anti-clerical feeling of those times. The separation from the Papal authority made the number of – as we would call them today – Protestants increase and two main figures in the English history tried to fight this new movement through what was to be known the Counter Reformation. The two people who tried to revive traditional Catholic beliefs were Queen Mary I and Cardinal Reginald Pole.

One of the first revenges that Mary took as soon as she succeeded her brother, Edward VI, in 1553, was the execution of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. From Mary’s perspective, he was the cause of many injustices in her life: he had declared her mother’s marriage null, which had caused her to become an illegitimate daughter, he had married his father to Anne Boleyn, and he had supported Lady Jane Grey as her brother’s successor.<sup>142</sup> Cranmer was, therefore, burnt in 1556 after being

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<sup>138</sup> *Ibid*, p. 283.

<sup>139</sup> Eric Ives wrote about an episode in which Tristram Revell tried to dedicate to the queen his English translation of *Farrago Rerum Theologicarum*, which had already been translated in French by François Lambert of Avignon. The work denied the sacrifice of the mass and because of this, Anne refused Revell’s request to dedicate it to her.

<sup>140</sup> Her faith was to be one of the main features of her person that will allow her to be remembered in history and we will talk more about it later on in our study.

<sup>141</sup> DORAN, S., “Henry VIII and the Reformation”, in *The British Library*, September 2019, <https://www.bl.uk/sacred-texts/articles/henry-viii-and-the-reformation>, consulted on 23 February 2021.

<sup>142</sup> Lady Jane was the great-granddaughter of Henry VII through her mother, Lady Frances Brandon, whose own mother was Mary, the younger of King Henry VIII’s two sisters. Her Protestantism, which was extreme, made her the natural candidate for the throne of those who supported the Reformation.



declared a heretic and this event can be considered as the beginning of Mary's plan that consisted in the revival of traditional Catholicism and the punishment of its enemies. In these actions, Mary was helped by one of the most important figures during her regime and he was Reginald Pole, Cranmer's successor as Archbishop of Canterbury. Both Mary and Pole were regarded "as part of the posthumous history of medieval Christendom"<sup>143</sup> and both of them "saw the future in terms of the past."<sup>144</sup>



Figure 14. Archbishop Reginald Pole.

They wanted, in fact, to reestablish the Catholic faith as it existed before the Reformation and, according to them, it was important to eradicate all evangelical beliefs, which they considered as heretical. Consequently, Mary supported one of the bloodiest burning campaigns in English history that stigmatized her reputation – she was, eventually, remembered as Bloody Mary. Eamon Duffy, in his book *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor*, explained the Queen's involvement in the realization of the campaign; she stipulated that the punishment of heretics had to be done "without rashness", directed first at "such as by learning would seem to deceive the simple" and the rest "so to be used that the people might well perceive them not to be condemned without just occasion, whereby they shall both understand the truth and beware to do the like."<sup>145</sup> According to her, the burnings were to represent a warning to other heretics, who, fearing to follow the same fate, would convert back to Catholicism, thus defeating the Protestant resistance. Another important element of Mary and Pole's campaign was the role of the preachers, who were present at all executions and their importance was highlighted by Pole's Legatine Synod of 1555.<sup>146</sup> Duffy wrote that, according to Pole, "heretics could harm the multitude as much by their death as ever they did alive"<sup>147</sup> and the presence of a preacher at their execution could, therefore, 'filter' their influence on the public. In a period when ideas deriving from the Reformation had deeply spread and the medieval conception of religion had radically changed, Mary needed to impose her beliefs and to shape England as she wanted it to be by force. That was why everyone had to be reconciled with Rome and the people were warned that

the sayde tyme being ones past, and they not so reconciled, every one of them shall have process made ageynst hym according to the Canons ... for which purpose the pastors and

<sup>143</sup> BOSSY, J., *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850*, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1975, [https://books.google.fr/books/about/The\\_English\\_Catholic\\_community\\_1570\\_1850.html?id=jkAJAQAAIAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.fr/books/about/The_English_Catholic_community_1570_1850.html?id=jkAJAQAAIAAJ&redir_esc=y), p. 156.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> Queen Mary I in *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England* in DUFFY, E., *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 97.

<sup>146</sup> DUFFY, E., *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 17.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, p.18.



curates of every parysche ... are to certify me in writing of every mans and womans name that is not so reconciled.<sup>148</sup>

However, this was not the impression that Mary wanted to have on the people and she always tried to demonstrate that every effort was being made to win the accused over by persuasion. On this matter, she stated “that the people might well perceive them not to be condemned without just occasion, whereby they shall both understand the truth and beware to do the like.”<sup>149</sup> This was, of course, a justification she probably used to hide her real intentions of eradicating Protestantism. However, Mary did not put into place this campaign on her own; Pole was Mary’s closest adviser in such a way as she actually depended on his opinion, as Eamon Duffy explained in his book. As we have previously studied, clerics could be part of the political administration of the country and Pole also had an important function in Mary’s government, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Mary and Pole’s efforts in reestablishing Catholicism happened in a period when the Reformation had already settled its roots in Europe – it had been almost forty years since Luther wrote the *Ninety Five Thesis*. Consequently, their actions represented something that belonged to a medieval era, whereas the people’s mindset was already projected towards a Renaissance future. Even though religious persecutions were widely spread in those times, Mary I put into place the bloodiest burning campaign that lasted for four years and that caused the death of 284 Protestants.<sup>150</sup> Moreover, some historians believe that her policy was actually politically and religiously counter-productive, as Professor Andrew Pettegree considered in his book entitled *Marian Protestantism: Six Studies*. He stated that the regime miscalculated from the beginning in attempting to “terrorize evangelicals into conformity through the execution of high profile preachers and bishops” because “the execution of well-educated and respectable citizens by such a barbaric means was never popular.”<sup>151</sup> Moreover, according to him, the regime failed to discredit the victims or justify the burnings, thus failing in spreading a well-functioning propaganda – which he called “a critical lost opportunity.”

In this chapter, we have focused our analysis on the relationship between Queens and the members of the Church and the way their actions influenced the shaping of English history from a religious point of view. In Catherine of Aragon’s perspective, the Church represented an ally, by refusing to grant Henry’s divorce, whereas the local member of the Church, Thomas Wolsey, represented her closest enemy, whose ambition went beyond his powers, thus causing his fall. On the contrary, Anne Boleyn and Mary I found in two members of the Church their allies, who helped them

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<sup>148</sup> *The Declaration of the Bishop of London* in *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>149</sup> Queen Mary I in *Ibid*, p. 102.

<sup>150</sup> Her sister, Elizabeth I, was to persecute more than 200 Catholics, even though she did not burn them, as Mary did with Protestants.

<sup>151</sup> Professor Andrew Pettegree in DUFFY, E., *op. cit.*, p. 80.

to shape the religious ideas of England according to their beliefs. England's relationship to the Catholic Church was radically changed and these women led their own fight either in supporting it for personal reasons – as it was the case with Anne Boleyn – or in pushing these changes back and find a more traditional religious situation in England. The men of the Church represented, therefore, crucial instruments for these Queens and their complementary relationship marked English history forever.

Another important institution with which Tudor Queens had to impose their own power was Government and their efforts were all the more difficult, as they were women against a male political administration.

## II. III. Queens and Government.

As we have previously studied in our first part of our analysis, Tudor government increased its influence in the administration of State affairs and the men who were part of it represented the main instruments that the monarchs used to govern the country. Of course, the sovereign was still at the top of the hierarchy and the men who surrounded him or her worked in such a way as to satisfy their wishes, thus increasing their own power within the Royal Court. The monarch and the statesmen were complementary to each other as the latter were to take actions in order to obey to the sovereign's orders and the former was helped in governing the country. However, these men cannot be comparable to our present-days politicians as they were not elected by the people – there was no democracy in Tudor politics and the power resided mostly in the figure of the monarch. Moreover, the word 'politician' actually began to appear at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as its etymology reveals us:

### **politician (n.)**

1580s, "person skilled in politics;" see **politics** + **-ian**. Especially "one engaged in party politics, especially as a trade; one who promotes the interests of a political party," and thus it quickly took on overtones, not typically good ones: "one concerned with public affairs for the sake of profit or of a clique."<sup>152</sup>

Political factions, as we understand them today, did not exist in Tudor times and, even though there were political rivalries within the Court, they only concerned the individuals. Political parties such as the Whigs and the Tories<sup>153</sup> played a major role in politics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, even though the terms had already appeared at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup>.<sup>154</sup> On the contrary, men who dedicated their work to the political administration of the country were known as 'statesmen' and, in Tudor times, all noblemen who revealed themselves to possess an eminent ability in public affairs could actually become statesmen.

These men were essential tools for the monarchs as they used them to pass certain acts and to put into practice their decisions that were to shape the functioning of the system. Moreover, they represented the monarch's closest advisers, whose power increased throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In fact, as we have seen in the first chapter, Henry VII was still very much in control of political affairs and he himself managed the financial administration, therefore the power of government – and,

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<sup>152</sup> "Politician", in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=politician>; consulted on 25 February 2021.

<sup>153</sup> The Whigs represented the Liberal party, whereas the Tories, the Conservative party and their opposition was a particular historical event during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>154</sup> Originally, "Whig" and "Tory" were terms introduced in 1679 during the heated struggle over the bill to exclude James, duke of York, from the succession. Whig was a term applied to horse thieves and, later, to Scottish Presbyterians; it connoted nonconformity and rebellion and was applied to those who claimed the power of excluding the heir from the throne. Tory was an Irish term suggesting a papist outlaw and was applied to those who supported the hereditary right of James despite his Roman Catholic faith.

consequently, the statesmen's – was limited. However, as his son, Henry VIII revealed himself to be not as interested in politics as his father was, the role of these men took even more importance as they acquired more knowledge and specialisation in the art of government, in such a way as the monarch actually depended on them to govern the country. There was, in brief, a balance of power between the sovereign and the government, as the one depended on the other and vice versa – the former represented the symbolic and highest idea of power and his or her orders had to be obeyed, whereas the latter was the force that allowed the sovereign's decisions to be established in the system.

Under Henry VIII, the King's statesmen were also used as allies by the Queen in order to achieve power for herself. We can find an example in Anne Boleyn's rise to power, the battle of which lasted for several years and involved skilful men such as Thomas Cromwell. In a period when Henry wanted to divorce from Catherine and marry Anne Boleyn, Cromwell managed to draft a the Act in Restraint of Appeals to Rome, which prevented the Catholic Church to make appeals that would go against Henry's matrimonial case. According to Elton, such a document is considered as "Cromwell's masterpiece in statute-making" as he "succeeded in getting a general statute which put all ecclesiastical jurisdiction in the king's control."<sup>155</sup> This act bound Cromwell to Royal favour and sealed his success in the eyes of the monarch. Besides declaring the King Supreme Head of the Church, the act, also, allowed Anne Boleyn to become Queen, and, therefore, it made Cromwell one of her closest allies, especially if we think about their religious ideas. Both of them, in fact, shared similar Lutheran ideas and this is shown by John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* in one of Cromwell's prayers as he waited for his execution in 1540; he declared to trust only in the grace of God

to be in the number of them to whom thou wilt not impute their sins; but will take and accept me for righteous and just ... Most merciful Saviour ... let thy blood cleanse and wash away the spots and foulness of my sins. Let thy righteousness hide and cover my unrighteousness. Let the merits of thy Passion and blood-shedding be satisfaction for my sins.<sup>156</sup>

According to John Schofield, Cromwell's prayer revealed his Lutheranism and the fact that he was one of the major promoters of the dissolution of the monasteries after the break with Rome could be associated with his indifference towards the Catholic institution.<sup>157</sup>

Cromwell and Anne's relationship was a complementary one as both took profit from each other; Cromwell increased his power by making the King marry Anne and, thanks to him, she became Queen. However, we cannot really say that they were friends as they acted according to the King's

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<sup>155</sup> ELTON, G. R., *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>156</sup> SCHOFIELD, J., "Thomas Cromwell and the 'Catholic Faith'", in *The History Press*, <https://www.thehistorypress.co.uk/articles/thomas-cromwell-and-the-catholic-faith/>, consulted on 25 February 2021.

<sup>157</sup> We cannot say the same thing for Henry VIII. Even after the break with Rome, he remained a devoted Catholic and he probably saw the dissolution of the monasteries as a necessary consequence that could fill the State's treasury.

will and orders and it is widely known that Henry VIII had an impulsive character, as well as a changeable mood – the fact that he changed his wife six times throughout his reign was a sign of his capricious temperament. Cromwell’s endeavours in government had the only aim of keeping the King’s favour and, as soon as he realized that Henry’s desire for Anne Boleyn was fading away and turning towards one of her ladies-in-waiting, Jane Seymour, Cromwell suddenly became Anne’s enemy. John Schofield wrote, in fact, that “Thomas Cromwell was the king’s servant, indebted to Henry and to nobody else. Should Henry’s love for Anne ever fade, Cromwell was duty bound to serve and support the king.”<sup>158</sup> That is why he began to inquire into Anne’s possible liaisons and, even if they did not probably happen, Cromwell needed them to be true in order to cause her fall, in the same way as he put her on the throne. However, the fact that she gave birth to a deformed child in 1536 was believed to be a sign of misbehaviour by the parent,<sup>159</sup> which was to help Cromwell in the legitimization of his inquiries. Moreover, according to Claire Ridgeway, Anne’s liaison “with a single man would have threatened Henry’s masculinity. But the charges were designed to show Anne as an insatiable, lustful monster, and Henry as the victim.”<sup>160</sup> Consequently, five men were also executed as they were accused of being Anne’s lovers and on 19 May 1536, Henry got finally rid of her and a skilful statesman such as Thomas Cromwell was able to adapt according to the situation, thus increasing his own power.<sup>161</sup>

Just like Catherine of Aragon only a decade before, Anne Boleyn found herself to be a “victim of state.”<sup>162</sup> As soon as she was not useful, the same statesman who took profit from her coronation, in 1533, also took advantage of her fall, thus making her a political puppet for self-achievement – contrary to what was normally supposed to be the other way round.<sup>163</sup> However, statesmen acted very differently with Henry’s wives compared to how they did with Mary and Elizabeth as they became Queen. The situation changed as these latter were actually legitimate monarchs on their own, whereas Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn were the ‘collateral effects’ of the statesmen’s endeavours to

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<sup>158</sup> SCHOFIELD, J., *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>159</sup> IVES, E., *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 297.

<sup>160</sup> RIDGEWAY, C., “The Real Wolf Hall - Thomas Cromwell and Anne Boleyn”, in *The Anne Boleyn Files*, May 2015, <https://www.theanneboleynfiles.com/the-real-wolf-hall-thomas-cromwell-and-anne-boleyn/>, consulted on 26 February 2021.

<sup>161</sup> These men were, in order of execution, Anne’s brother, George Boleyn, Henry VIII’s Groom of the Stool, Henry Norris, the privy Councillor, Francis Weston, Henry’s Groom of the Privy Chamber, William Brereton, and Anne’s musician, Mark Smeaton.

<sup>162</sup> DONOGHUE, S., “Catherine of Aragon: A Victim of State”, in *The National*, January 2011, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/arts-culture/books/catherine-of-aragon-a-victim-of-state-1.571143>, consulted on 26 February 2021.

<sup>163</sup> Generally, monarchs took advantage of their powerful position to manipulate their advisors in order to achieve their goals. However, as government developed and many skillful and talented statesmen began to be part of Henry VIII’s Council, the situation could reverse. Henry, in fact, did not monitor the governing of the country as his father did, so basically his statesmen were informed of the situations and could exploit them to increase their own power.

acquire the King's favour. That was why Mary I and Elizabeth I were actually supported by loyal statesmen throughout their reigns.

Elizabeth I, in particular, managed to find skilful and loyal councillors who were to serve her until the end of her reign – in opposition to Wolsey and Cromwell who served Henry VIII with monotonous regularity. Elizabeth was able to create a particular bond between the Council and herself that was based on the confidence to one another and she explicitly revealed her trust on her statesmen in the following declaration: “I mean to direct all my actions by good advice and council.”<sup>164</sup> In fact, according to Peter Brimacombe's *All the Queen's Men: the World of Elizabeth I*, she rarely took a decision without consultation, but, despite the bond of trust between her and her councillors, manipulation was still at the basis of their relationship. The fact that the same statesmen served her throughout her reign made it possible for them to really get to know the Queen's character in such a way that they were actually to become “masters of manipulation”, as Brimacombe explains. They became “soothing when Elizabeth became strident, and reassuring when she was depressed and anxious.”<sup>165</sup> However, the Queen knew about her councillors' endeavours in manipulating her and the following statement that she pronounced in her ‘Golden Speech’<sup>166</sup> proves it:

I perceive they deal with me like physicians who, ministering a drug, make it more acceptable by giving it a good aromatical savour, or when they give pills do gild them all over.<sup>167</sup>

Even though she was aware of her councillors' manipulation, Elizabeth could not impose her own will because of too much pressure coming from them, as it was the case with the execution of her cousin, Mary Stuart, which we will study in the next chapter. Brimacombe highlights, in fact, that the councillors “were skilfully able to persuade the Queen to embark on courses of action that were sometimes contrary to her personal inclinations,” thus revealing how thin was the line that distinguished the monarch's power from the statesmen's.



Figure 15. William Cecil.



Figure 16. Robert Dudley.



Figure 17. Christopher Hatton.



Figure 18. Francis Walsingham.

<sup>164</sup> Queen Elizabeth I in BRIMACOMBE, P., *All the Queen's Men : the World of Elizabeth I*, Sutton Publishing Ltd, 2000, p. 52.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68.

<sup>166</sup> The Golden Speech was delivered by Queen Elizabeth I to the Members of the Commons on 30 November 1601. It was a speech that was expected to be addressing some pricing concerns. Instead, she revealed that it would be her final Parliament and turned the mode of the speech to addressing the love and respect she had for the country, her position, and the Members themselves.

<sup>167</sup> Queen Elizabeth I in *Op. Cit.*

Therefore, besides the trust and support that she had for her statesmen, there was also a ‘game’ of power between them that was emphasized through manipulation and, at the same time, it allowed a balance of power between the monarch and her councillors that permitted a political stability, renowned during Elizabeth’s reign. Four men were to be known as the most loyal and long-serving members of Elizabeth’s Council and they were William Cecil, Robert Dudley, Christopher Hatton, and Francis Walsingham. The Queen had personally chosen each one of them soon after her coronation, thus insuring the trust she needed and that she could not have acquired if she had kept the members of her sister’s former Council – of which Elizabeth retained only ten members.

The first member that the Queen chose – only three days after her coronation – was William Cecil, who was to occupy the function as Principal Secretary of State.<sup>168</sup> He was to serve her for nearly forty years and his relationship to Elizabeth was considered as a “political marriage of considerable convenience” as both of them were “cautious and extremely conservative.”<sup>169</sup> The Queen had such a high esteem of him and this is revealed in the following statement: “This judgement I have of you that you will be faithful to the state and that without respect of my private will, you will give me that council that you think best.”<sup>170</sup> However, even though he remained a central figure of Elizabeth’s government, his early dominance was to be replaced by Robert Dudley who became the Queen’s favourite and part of the Privy Council in 1562. He was involved in domestic and foreign policies alongside William Cecil and he had a special relationship with Elizabeth – it was even thought that he would have married her. He was mostly known as the Queen’s suitor as he did not marry for 18 years, for Elizabeth’s sake. The Queen probably found pleasure in such situation, being the only woman among many men who fought to achieve her favours and she was jealous of them – of Robert Dudley, in particular.<sup>171</sup> Another important member of Elizabeth’s Council was Christopher Hatton who became Lord Chancellor and played a major role in Mary Stuart’s execution.<sup>172</sup> He was to be noticed by the Queen while dancing at a masque at the Inner Temple and, for this reason, he was to be known as ‘the Dancing Chancellor’. The last – but not the least – most loyal statesman was Francis Walsingham, known as the Queen’s ‘spymaster’. He became Elizabeth’s Principal Secretary in 1573 and he played a major role in domestic, foreign and religious policies. His nickname came

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<sup>168</sup> The title of Secretary of State came into being near the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) and the usual title before that was King’s Clerk, King’s Secretary, or Principal Secretary. The primary duty of this office was carrying on the monarch’s official correspondence and advising the monarch.

<sup>169</sup> BRIMACOMBE, P., *op. cit.*, p.53.

<sup>170</sup> Queen Elizabeth I in *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> After 18 years, Robert Dudley got finally married and, soon after, his wife, Amy Robsart was banished from Court – an explicit sign of Elizabeth’s jealousy.

<sup>172</sup> The Lord Chancellor was considered the monarch’s unofficial ‘First Minister’, and performed much of the work of running the country, especially the enforcement of the law. The Chancellor also had frequent personal access to the monarch himself and he was responsible for bearing the Great Seal of the Realm, which was traditionally returned to the monarch after his or her death.

from the network of spies that he had set up and financed in order to provide intelligence for the Queen. He was to become the protagonist in the resolution of the threat concerning Mary Stuart, as we shall see in the following chapter. All these men were known Protestants, just like Elizabeth was and, even though religion remained an important issue on a national scale, its influence on political matters was less highlighted than during Mary I's reign.

One of the most important statesman who played a major role in the establishment of Mary I's policies was Richard Pole, a member of the Church. As we have seen in the first part, clerics were part of the monarch's government and even the Privy Council, and he became one of the closest advisers with religious influence. Under Henry VIII, the main religious figures who had a political function were Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, in the first part of his reign, and Archbishop Cranmer. The break with Rome and the spread of the Reformation introduced England to Lutheranism and the members of the Catholic Church found their position in an increase alienation. However, with the reestablishment of Catholicism and the fight against Protestantism during Mary's reign, there was a revival of the clerics' functions at Court. As soon as she succeeded her brother, Edward VI, Mary inherited sixteen bishops and, in order to renew the episcopate and the higher clergy, Mary added twenty bishops more "who were university-trained theologians and who had a record of loyalty to Catholic beliefs."<sup>173</sup> Religious functions dealt with political issues and the person who helped Mary in the establishment of her policy was Cardinal Reginald Pole, whose "voice had become the official voice of the Marian regime"<sup>174</sup>, as we have seen in the previous chapter.

In Tudor times, government evolved and the circumstances helped to make it more efficient. Skilful and talented men became the protagonists of political affairs as they detained enough power to manipulate and advise the monarch. At the same time, they represented the patriarchal system that did not stop to exist, even under female monarchs such as Mary and Elizabeth. Queens and statesmen managed to find a complementary relationship that helped them achieve their objectives. The statesmen took advantage of their ability in political matters in order to gain the Royal favour that was to allow them to increase their power and influence, and, in the same way, the monarch was surrounded by efficient and loyal men who answered to his or her orders. In this part, we have seen the way female monarchs managed to impose their own authority, despite all the prejudices and assumptions linked to their sex, and all the institutions – marriage, Church, and government – were, therefore, influenced by their position and their actions.

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<sup>173</sup> DUFFY, E., *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 33.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38.



After analysing the way gender beliefs fuelled the establishment of a patriarchal system in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and the way women in power managed to work with the various institutions, which were still part of that patriarchal system, we will focus on the accomplishments and endeavours that these women managed to do throughout their reign. We will see how the fight for power did not only involve rivalries among men, but also among women, especially if the final prize was the accession to the throne. Moreover, these Queens managed to impose their own authority and, thanks to that, they could shape the history of England and give birth to new myths and icons linked to their persons that was to represent a feminine revolution within a patriarchal system.

### **III. Towards a Feminine Revolution.**

Queens' relationship with the institutions that represented the patriarchal system of the time contributed to the establishment of their power and their authority. Their collaboration with each other allowed them to find a stability based on respect and trust, even though their relationship could sometimes be ruined by betrayal and the priority of one's interests. This was also the case, among not only men and female monarchs, but also between female monarchs themselves, whose legitimacy could bring them to clash against one another, as it was the case between Mary Tudor and Lady Jane Grey and between Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. Tudor Queens were able to impose their own legitimacy against all odds and they managed to shape English history, thus making themselves remembered in future times. In the following chapter, we will analyse the way women's threat against one another also concerned their male entourage who was to exploit them for their own interests and we will see the way these Queens became either victims or heroines of their own power. Then, we will study the way Tudor Queens managed to make history through their actions and the way they were able to gain immortality in the English memory thanks to their public image that contributed in the creation of their myths.

### **III. I. Victims or Heroines of Power.**

In the previous chapter, we have studied the relationship between female monarchs and the male representatives of each institution, which reflected the patriarchal system. These Queens found either allies or enemies in men who shared their power in the governance of the country and their relationship to the Queen allowed them to secure their position at Court. In these events, Queens managed to take up the role of strong and determinate women as a reaction to the oppressive patriarchal world, but they also began a fight for power against other fellow women. Power, in fact, was the main ambition for all those who could claim to be in a legitimate position to hold it, and that could create tragedies among powerful women for the establishment of a Queen's power. However, if, on the surface, these disputes for the Crown could appear as women's struggles to impose their own legitimate position against each other, in reality, powerful men held the reins of these events, thus making women tools for their own success. If, on the one hand, a woman succeeded, on the other, a woman was defeated and this situation created feminine tensions within Court that went beyond a fight for a King, as it was the case between Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. The problem of inheriting a Crown in Tudor times concerned the fact that monarchs such as Mary and Elizabeth Tudor could face obstacles in imposing their own legitimacy because of other people's interests and, of course, because of their gender. Their family history made powerful men doubt their right to become monarchs because of the Acts of Succession passed under Henry VIII and according to which both Mary and Elizabeth were declared illegitimate after the failure of the King's marriage to their mothers. The royal family was large and all blood relations to the previous King could have made a member of that same family claim for legitimacy. Moreover, religious and political opinions could differ from one claimant to the throne to another and that was another factor that made the Court prefer the one rather than the other, thus imposing their own control over the future monarch.

Two main events happened in the history of the Tudor dynasty and they concerned four Royal women whose power was manipulated and controlled by men, who wanted to establish their own position at Court. These women were Mary Tudor, whose Catholic beliefs did not make her the preferable choice for the Court and, for this reason, her Protestant cousin, Lady Jane Grey, was to become the instrument for other men to achieve power by making her Queen. Then, Elizabeth Tudor, whose unwillingness to marry had caused a problem in the succession of the dynasty, thus allowing her cousin, Mary Stuart, to find several opportunities to attempt at becoming Queen at her place. In this chapter, we will study the way these powerful women established their own claim to the throne by becoming strategic political puppets for other men's ambitions – as it was the case for Lady Jane

Grey – and by defying members of their own family through public support, thus becoming either heroines or victims of familiar tragedies.

Before analysing the struggle for power between the first two women, Mary Tudor and Lady Jane Grey, it is important to contextualise. After King Henry VIII's death in 1547, his only son, Edward, became king as Edward VI. As we have previously studied, the male line succession was very important for King Henry and, as he desperately looked for the right wife who was capable of giving him a son, he finally had his first male heir thanks to his third wife, Jane Seymour. Even though he already had two daughters from the two previous marriages with Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn, only a son could succeed him and, consequently, Edward became King at the age of nine, despite his sisters' mature age. Of course, Edward could not govern by himself and his power as King was confided in the hands of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland and of his uncle, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset, who were to play a major role in the establishment of Lady Jane Grey's position as Queen. Edward VI's reign lasted for only six years, but it was to be fundamental for England's future events, especially from a religious perspective. Protestantism had already been spreading throughout Europe for several decades and Henry's break with Rome had been one of the main factors that brought the country to move away from Catholicism and to welcome the new religion as an attack to the corrupted Catholic Church. Religion was, therefore, one of the main issues in 16<sup>th</sup>-century England and Edward's reign represented the real rupture from a Catholic past and the enforcement of Protestantism. By the end of Henry VIII's reign, the King allowed more evangelicals to enter Parliament and to hold political functions at Court<sup>175</sup>, which was to explain the Council's preference for the Protestant Lady Jane Grey after Edward's death. The King's young age allowed members of Parliament and of the Privy Council to hold more power and to reinforce the establishment of the new religion through the annulment of previous Acts.<sup>176</sup> The following statement is an extract from a letter written by the Privy Council to the bishops and it is kept in the country's National Archives. It represents the first piece of evidence in the Edwardian state papers on religious reform and it states that



Figure 19. *Lady Jane Grey.*



Figure 20. *Edward VI.*

<sup>175</sup> MacCULLOCH, D., "Parliament and the Reformation of Edward VI", in *Parliamentary History*, vol. 34, n. 3, 2015, pp. 383–400, <https://onlinelibrary-wiley-com.ezscd.univ-lyon3.fr/doi/full/10.1111/1750-0206.12165>, consulted on 9 March 2021.

<sup>176</sup> In the first months of Edward's reign, Parliament abolished the heresy laws, including the Act of Six Articles, which gave legal and penal authority to a set of reactionary statements on issues of church belief and practice. Whoever did not follow the traditional Catholic practices were considered as heretics and, consequently, burned.

it was among other things most godly established that according to the first institution and use of the primitive church, the most holy sacrament of the body and blood of our saviour Jesus Christ should be distributed to the people under the kinds both of bread and of wine. [...] The word of god ... may also be faithfully and reverently received of his most loving subjects to their comforts and wealth, hath caused sundry [various] of his Majesty's most grave and well learned prelates and others learned men in the scriptures to assemble themselves for this matter who after long conference together have with deliberate advise finally agreed upon such an order to be used in all places of the king's Majesty's dominions in the distribution of the said most blessed sacrament as may appear unto you by the book there of, which we send here with unto you all be it knowing your Lordships knowledge in the scriptures and earnest good will and zeal to the setting forth of all things according to the truth.<sup>177</sup>

This letter reveals the strength through which Protestantism had been established since the first days of Edward's reign and, because of the King's young age, Parliament played a fundamental role in this religious matter. Even though, the country was still religiously divided and Catholicism was still very much present in England, "this first Edwardian session of parliament had achieved a great deal for evangelical reformation, and it all sent a clear message that conservative stonewalling would not deflect a measured pace of change."<sup>178</sup>

Protestantism was therefore spreading strongly within the country and government was a major player in the enforcement of the 'new religion'. For all these reasons, as soon as King Edward VI died at only fifteen in 1553, most members of the Privy Council did not want Mary Tudor to succeed her brother, even though her legitimacy was undeniable. The Court knew that she had strong Catholic views and her ascending the throne would have meant deleting all the efforts done to reinforce the Reformation in the country. Consequently, the members of the Privy Council – led by John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland – turned their attention to Lady Jane Grey, who had been chosen by King Edward VI himself to succeed him.<sup>179</sup> She was a young woman of sixteen with Protestant beliefs and the granddaughter of Henry VIII's sister Mary and Charles Brandon.<sup>180</sup> Her opinion towards Catholicism is described in John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments* and he states that she compared Catholics to Romish anti-Christians, their Church to the Whore of Babylon<sup>181</sup> and she desired her correspondent – obviously a Catholic – to turn from "the most wicked Mass" and "the

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<sup>177</sup> "Letter from Privy Council to the Bishops, 15 March 1548", in *The National Archives*, <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/the-english-reformation-c1527-1590/edward-vi-and-religion/>, consulted on 9 March 2021.

<sup>178</sup> MacCULLOCH, D., *op. cit.*, p. 391.

<sup>179</sup> It was the Duke of Northumberland himself who persuaded the King to name Lady Jane Grey as his heir.

<sup>180</sup> Charles Brandon, 1st Duke of Suffolk, was the brother-in-law of the English king Henry VIII and a prominent courtier during his reign. In 1514, he was sent to France to promote a match between Henry's sister Mary and King Francis I of France; instead Suffolk married her himself, thereby incurring the danger of being accused of treason. However, the duke soon returned to royal favour and, for several years, he was among the dominant members of the king's council.

<sup>181</sup> The Whore of Babylon refers to both a symbolic female figure and place of evil mentioned in the Book of Revelation in the Bible. Her full title is *Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and Abominations of the Earth*.

swill of strangers, to the delicates of your most benign and loving Father.”<sup>182</sup>

This revealed her strong Protestant beliefs that were to suit the Privy Council in her accession to the throne, instead of the Catholic Mary. Because of her religious views and her blood relation to the former King, she was considered the right candidate for the Crown and the man who planned all this was the Duke of Northumberland. Lady Jane Grey became, in this way, the instrument through which Northumberland could increase his power and establish his own position at Court and, in order to do so, he married her to



Figure 21. John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland.

his eldest son, Guilford Dudley, so that this latter could inherit the title of King thanks to his union to Lady Jane. For these reasons, she cannot be regarded as an active participant of the plot and, therefore, it is appropriate to consider her as an instrument used for another men's purpose. In fact, as Northumberland proclaimed her Queen, she affirmed that “the Crown is not my right, and pleaseth me not. The Lady Mary is the rightful heir.”<sup>183</sup> This statement reveals that she was aware of the consequences of her accession to the throne; she could be accused of treason if Mary Tudor became Queen and she could, therefore, be executed for that. She was also aware that she was the central figure of a plot “which thing I for my part heard truly a troubled mind and with ill will, even with infinite grief and displeasure of heart.”<sup>184</sup> However, even though she was actually scared of her acceptance to the new position as monarch, she also realised that her own power could not control the plans put into place by powerful men and, because of that, she can be regarded as a victim of both her power and that of the Privy Council.

Soon after Lady Jane's accession to the throne, the fear that had always hunted her came true as Mary Tudor eventually reacted to this usurpation by sending a letter in which she proclaimed herself Queen, adjured the councillors to avoid bloodshed, promised to respect the reformed faith and concluded with the following statement:

We require and charge you... on your allegiance, which you owe to God and us and none other, that for our honour and the surety of our realm, only you will employ yourselves; and forthwith, upon receipt hereof, cause our right and title to the Crown and Government of this realm to be proclaimed in our city of London, and such other places as to your wisdom shall seem good... not failing hereof, as our very trust in you; and this our letter, signed with our own hand, shall be your sufficient warrant.<sup>185</sup>

One of the most important elements that we have to highlight during this struggle for power between Lady Jane and Mary was the public opinion of the time. Even though 16<sup>th</sup>-century monarchy in

<sup>182</sup> John Foxe in CHAPMAN, H. W., *Lady Jane Grey*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Grafton and Collins, 1985, p. 161.

<sup>183</sup> Lady Jane Grey in *Ibid*, p. 106.

<sup>184</sup> Lady Jane Grey in *Ibid*, p. 117.

<sup>185</sup> Mary Tudor in *Ibid*, p. 122.

England was still very much despotic compared to the Royal family of our present days, public opinion was still very much important, depending on the situations. By the time Lady Jane was proclaimed Queen publicly, “the people showed nothing but grief,”<sup>186</sup> according to a German eyewitness. Even though she was a fervent Protestant, Lady Jane could not achieve national support, as she was associated with the Duke of Northumberland, who was widely hated. Chapman described him as “a cunning, witty, unabashed deceiver, who seemed to know exactly what he wanted, and who was as cynically indifferent to loathing as to flattery.”<sup>187</sup> Moreover, the people knew that Mary was the rightful heir to the throne, being Henry VIII’s daughter and Edward VI’s sister. Mary’s national support was to be helpful and probably one of the main reasons why she managed to defeat the councillors, especially the Duke of Northumberland, and to declare herself Queen. She took advantage of that support in order to raise her own army and to be prepared to fight if necessary. By that time, some members of the Privy Council began to wonder whether it was the right choice for them to side against the rightful heir to the throne, as they knew that if Mary became Queen, they became traitors to the Crown. Consequently, in order to claim their innocence for the plot, they betrayed Lady Jane by referring to her “supposed title” and threatened to punish her if she did not submit herself to them.<sup>188</sup> This reflects the changeability of powerful men’s loyalty as soon as they feel in danger, even though the possibility concerning the fact that they actually believed Mary to be the rightful heir in the first place cannot be excluded. In fact, Chapman relates that as soon as the Duke left with an army to face Mary, “the sudden cessation of Northumberland’s personal magnetism enabled the Lords to reconsider, and so to break out of the spellbound existence in which they had moved”<sup>189</sup> throughout the plot. By the 19 July – only ten days after Jane was proclaimed Queen – Mary Tudor entered the city as monarch and the following day, the Duke of Northumberland was imprisoned in the Tower. Queen Mary was probably aware of Lady Jane’s innocence in the plot as she declared that her conscience will not permit her to have Lady Jane put to death,<sup>190</sup> but she also knew that her cousin represented a danger for the stability of the dynasty. That was why the councillors put pressure on the Queen to hasten Jane’s execution and, in order to persuade her, one of King Philip II’s advisors, Renard Simon, compared the events to Roman times saying that

the Emperor Theodosius caused Maximus, his son, to be put to death, notwithstanding his tender age, because Maximus arbitrarily attributed to himself the title of Emperor, with the intention of transmitting it to his son. The title she hath borne, though in itself insufficiently proves, yet hath some semblance of foundation, and this might be revived

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<sup>186</sup> German eyewitness in *Ibid*, p.120.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, p. 125.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid*, p.119.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, p. 132.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, p. 160.

again to trouble the succession to the Crown. Power and tyranny have sometimes more force, especially in affairs of state, than right or justice.<sup>191</sup>

It was after another rebellion initiated by Sir Thomas Wyatt, remembered as the Wyatt's rebellion, that Mary eventually realised the danger of keeping Lady Jane Grey alive.<sup>192</sup> This rebellion, in fact, hastened the demise of the latter, who was eventually executed soon after her husband, Guilford Dudley.

These events created religious and political tensions within the monarchy and they threatened the future of the dynasty. In fact, if Lady Jane Grey had actually triumphed as Queen, the Tudor monarchy would have ended in 1553 and all the following events concerning the burning of more than two hundred Catholics would not have happened. Some historians also believe that Queen Jane would have been a better monarch as Mary Callcott wrote in her book, *Little Arthur's History of England*. She affirmed that "some people would have liked Lady Jane [as Queen] best, first because their dear young King Edward had wished her to be Queen; and next, because she was as beautiful, virtuous and wise, and, above all a Protestant."<sup>193</sup> However, her position within the Royal family brought her to her tragedy. She was a victim of powerful men whose ambition blinded them in such a way as to see in Lady Jane Grey the power and success they could achieve, rather than a young and clever girl of sixteen, who did not want to become Queen. Mary Tudor was aware of the fact that she had been used, but the danger of keeping her alive was too high and could threaten the realm, and, furthermore, political issues were more important than personal affections. Nonetheless, Lady Jane managed to become a heroine for her own faith, which she did not change and she remained a fierce Protestant until the end of her life, thus receiving a place in John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.<sup>194</sup>

The rivalry between Queen Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots, too, marked the Tudor dynasty and risked to put into danger the stability of the realm. These two women saw each other confronted with one another because of the position and the power they held, as well as because of their religious beliefs, which, once again, differed. Long-serving men to Queen Elizabeth's government also played a crucial role in the developing and solution of these events, thus allowing

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<sup>191</sup> Renard Simon, Imperial Ambassador, in *Ibid*, p.160.

<sup>192</sup> The Wyatt's rebellion was a reaction to Mary's marriage to Philip of Spain, which many considered as an affront to English sovereignty. Other conspirators who took part in the rebellion were Henry Grey, Duke of Suffolk, Sir Peter Carew, and Edward Courtenay, Earl of Devon. However, the popular outbreak upon which the rebellion depended once they had reached the city did not take place and Wyatt surrendered.

<sup>193</sup> BURNET, G., *History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, vol. III, pt. I, January 1843, p. 163-164.

<sup>194</sup> In John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, we can read the conversation that took place before Lady Jane's execution between herself and Fecknam. This latter was Queen Mary's confessor, therefore a Catholic, and he was sent by the Queen to give Lady Jane a chance to convert herself to Catholicism. Of course, it was a failure as Lady Jane defended fiercely her religious convictions.



one woman to triumph over the other. In order to understand the conflict of power between these two Queens, it is important to have a look at Mary Stuart's life and education as well as at the general background that came before Elizabeth's accession to the throne in 1558.

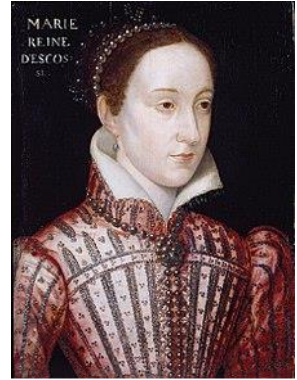


Figure 22. Mary Stuart.

First, it is important to remark that Mary Stuart was Queen Elizabeth's cousin. She was the daughter of James V of Scotland and Mary of Guise and granddaughter of Henry VIII's sister, Margaret Tudor, thus making her a blood relative to the former King. Few days after her birth, in 1543, her father died and she was crowned Queen of Scotland, but her power was taken under the regency of her mother and, therefore, the French side of her family. Because of her position as female monarch, it was important to ensure the continuation of the Stuart dynasty by betrothing her to a husband-to-be and, because of her French origins, the betrothal to Francis, the Dauphin of France, was established. For this reason, she spent all her childhood in France at King Henry II's Court and she received a Catholic education. Her connection with the French and the House of Guise was to be considered as a crucial element to her image in front of the English people who believed the House of Guise to be the cause of several Catholic conspiracies against English Protestants, including Queen Elizabeth. This popular perception towards the French House is revealed in William Cecil's *Perils upon the Overthrow of the Prince of Conde* of 1562 in which he states that

The whole regiment of the Crowne of France shall be in the hands of the Guise and to maintain their faction they will pleasure the king of Spain in all that they may. Hereupon shall follow, a complot betwixt them two, to advance their own private causes the king of Spain to disable the house of Navarre forever from claiming the kingdom of Navarre. The house of Guise to promote their niece the Q. of Scotts to the crown of England and for doing hereof two things principally will be attempted: The marriage betwixt the prince of Spain and the said Queen and in this compact the Realm of Ireland to be given to the k. of Spain.<sup>195</sup>

It is clear that the threat to the Crown was real because of the Franco-Spanish alliance and, as a result, that was to lead Elizabeth's members of the Privy Council to look at Mary Stuart with suspicion. Moreover, her relation to Henry VIII allowed her to have a claim to the English throne and the fact that Elizabeth did not have any heirs made Mary's position for the succession even stronger. However, the fact that she was a Catholic did not play in her favour in front of the English; as we have previously seen, from 1553 to 1558, Mary Tudor became Queen and she forced the people to

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<sup>195</sup> William Cecil in SCHUSTER, R. *Mary, Queen of Scots and Plots against Elizabeth I*, May 2003, <https://www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/tbacig/studproj/h3099/maryscots/mary%20site.%20plots%20paper.htm>, consulted on 11 March 2021.

follow the Catholic practices and beliefs by burning all those who were considered as heretics. These events were recent in the minds of the population and they did not want to go back to that regime. The Reformation had been widely spread for many decades and the actions taken by Catholics in order to fight it resulted in counter-productive consequences<sup>196</sup>, leading the people to distance themselves even more from Catholicism. On the other hand, many English Catholics still considered Queen Elizabeth as Henry VIII's illegitimate child, whose reputation was stained by her mother's story. For all these reasons, Mary Stuart and Elizabeth Tudor represented two conflicting women in beliefs and relations and we will see how their powerful positions and their link to one another shaped the history of England, either by being victims or heroines of the course of the events.

Alison Weir explains this conflict in her biography *Elizabeth the Queen*, in which she presents the gradual degradation of Elizabeth and Mary Stuart's relationship. The event that can be considered as the debut of Mary's fall is the murder of Mary's husband, Darnley. Many believed it had been caused by Mary herself "who had long since ceased to love him and had discussed ways of ridding herself of him" because "it was well known how her husband was plotting to kidnap their son and rule in his name."<sup>197</sup> Moreover, the consequent marriage between Mary and the person considered as the chief suspect<sup>198</sup> for Darnley's murder led Elizabeth to "deplore her cousin's behaviour."<sup>199</sup> These events were the beginning of several plots against Queen Elizabeth that brought this latter to regard her cousin with growing suspicion and to make her the victim of one of the Queen's long-serving statesmen, Francis Walsingham. Mary Stuart's marriage to the Earl of Bothwell made her unpopular among her Catholic supporters and the Scottish people to whom she was the Queen.<sup>200</sup> It was probably for these reasons that Mary's former supporters did not rebel against the news of her imprisonment in Loch Leven Castle in 1567, and Queen Elizabeth's contrasting popularity made people and the members of the Court to support her actions and decisions and to adopt the monarch's suspiciousness towards the Queen of Scotland. What worsened the course of the events in Mary's disfavour was her active involvement in two main plots against Elizabeth, which threatened the stability of the reign and forced these two female monarchs to side against one another. It is important to remark that Mary Stuart was actively involved in these conspiracies, as opposed to Lady Jane Grey's indirect

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<sup>196</sup> DUFFY, E., *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2009, p. 117.

<sup>197</sup> WEIR, A. *Elizabeth, the Queen*. Jonathan Cape, 1998, p.184.

<sup>198</sup> Mary wed James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell. The public found the marriage shocking, and Mary was denounced as an adulteress; Bothwell had been, in fact, married previously, so Catholics considered the marriage to Mary unlawful.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, p. 187.

<sup>200</sup> The Scots lords disagreed entirely of Mary's marriage to Bothwell and they prepared for an armed confrontation with him, which ended with Mary's custody and Bothwell's escape. As she was led to Edinburgh, the people showed how they felt about their actions and they reviled her as an adulteress and murderess and placards that depicted her as a mermaid – a symbol for a prostitute – were revealed.

participation in her claim to the throne, nearly fifteen years before. If, on the one hand, several influential men had used the latter as an instrument for their achievement of power, on the other hand, Mary Stuart was the one who exploited her male supporters in order to initiate her own war against Queen Elizabeth. This latter was aware that Mary represented “a force for rebellion, or treason”, but, at the same time, she was still her cousin and a Queen and that was why she kept Mary “not in prison, but in honourable custody as her ‘guest’, and under constant observation.”<sup>201</sup> In this way, Elizabeth could watch over her, yet, with all the respect and honour a Queen deserved. However, despite her lack of freedom and her surveillance, Mary managed to be involved in several plots, which were to bring her to the scaffold.

The first major plot to dethrone her cousin took place in 1571 and was remembered as the Ridolfi plot, after the name of the man who brought his support to Mary’s accession to the throne. Roberto Ridolfi was a Florentine banker and he was the author of a plan whereby the Catholic European powers would invade England, overthrow Elizabeth, and put Mary in her place as Queen. Such a plan could only become real if Ridolfi had the support of influential and powerful men and after he received the approval of King Philip II of Spain and the Pope, he only needed Mary’s consent, which she “was only too happy to give.”<sup>202</sup> Ridolfi and Thomas Howard, Duke of Norfolk, were the main players of the plot as they acted as Mary’s messengers and go-between: Ridolfi would ensure the invasion of England with 6000 Spanish troops from the Netherlands, whereas Norfolk would incite English Catholics to rise up against Elizabeth and proclaim Mary Stuart Queen of England. This was the outline of the plan and, at first, it appeared a possible success if it were not for several mistakes explained in Alison Weir’s book. Ridolfi had, in fact, overestimated the number of English Catholics who would be willing to rise against Queen Elizabeth and his little understanding of the English people worked against him. At the same time, Ridolfi did not receive the approval from the Duke of Alva, the man who had to invade England with his Spanish troops, and Norfolk was probably too focused on his ambition for power to actually see the flaws of the plan.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, Elizabeth had more supporters than enemies and they informed her of the plot, after several letters were intercepted by her loyal statesmen. Eventually, Ridolfi and Norfolk were executed under the charge of high treason, whereas Mary Stuart denied her participation in the plot by stating that who asserted otherwise “were false villains and lied in their throats.”<sup>204</sup> Despite her claim for innocence, Elizabeth

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<sup>201</sup> WEIR, A., *op. cit.*, p. 195.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid*, p. 270.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, p. 272.

<sup>204</sup> Mary Stuart in *Ibid*, p. 277.

grew even more suspicious of her cousin and her custody became stricter as Mary Stuart's members of her household decreased.

However, if Mary's life was threatened, but eventually saved after the discovery of the Ridolfi plot, she was not to have the same chance in the second major plot that confirmed her as an enemy and an active threat to Queen Elizabeth. This plot – remembered as the Babington plot – took place in 1586. By this time, Mary had been imprisoned for sixteen years and her health was suffering from it; this could have been one of the reasons why she got involved in the plot with carelessness<sup>205</sup> for the several spies who watched over her and who waited for the evidence that was to incriminate her. In fact,



Figure 23. Babington's code letter to Mary Stuart and its cypher.

this plot was mostly directed and controlled by the Queen's Principal Secretary and "spymaster", Francis Walsingham, who managed to make Mary become a victim of her own power. Walsingham was the mind behind the trap that was to cause Mary's fall. He monitored the passing of letters from Mary's supporters in Paris to her through the local brewer, who had been recruited by Walsingham himself in order to have the control of all the letters. Furthermore, in order to find the right opportunity for Mary's incrimination, Walsingham began spreading false rumours about foreign support and Catholic uprisings in England and the opportunity he was waiting for appeared as a young Catholic gentleman, Anthony Babington, decided to create a plot to rescue Mary and place her on the English throne.<sup>206</sup> Through Walsingham's brewer, Mary received a letter from Babington laying out the plan to rescue Mary and she gave her approval to the plot, unaware that she had been caught red-handed by the Queen's loyal servants. In the letter that was to become her death warrant, Mary wrote the following words:

The affair being thus prepared, and forces in readiness both within and without the realm, then shall it be time to set the six gentlemen to work; taking order upon the accomplishment of their design, I may be suddenly transported out of this place.<sup>207</sup>

With these words, Mary Stuart gave Walsingham the evidence that he needed to incriminate her and, even though Elizabeth was still reluctant to execute her cousin, she could do nothing to prevent the trial from going ahead. Mary Stuart was eventually executed on 8 February 1587 and, even though her death assured the security of the dynasty, Elizabeth's

<sup>205</sup> FRASER, A., *Mary, Queen of Scots*, New York: Delacorte Press, 1970, p. 134.

<sup>206</sup> SCHUSTER, R. *Mary, Queen of Scots and Plots against Elizabeth I*, May 2003, <https://www.d.umn.edu/cia/faculty/tbacig/studproj/h3099/maryscots/mary%20site,%20plots%20paper.htm>, consulted on 15 March 2021.

<sup>207</sup> Mary Stuart in *Ibid*.

countenance changed, her words faltered, and with excessive sorrow she was in a manner astonished, insomuch as she gave herself over to grief, putting herself into mourning weeds and shedding abundance of tears.<sup>208</sup>

Elizabeth's paradoxical reaction to her cousin's execution can be explained in several ways: first, she actually cared about Mary Stuart because of her blood relation and the fact that they were female monarchs; second, Elizabeth saw herself as a victim of her statesmen's actions, even though they had acted for her safety; third, the execution of a Catholic Queen could have triggered the reaction of other Catholic powers against England. However, her threat was real and, just like what happened with Lady Jane Grey, the monarch's reign could not be peaceful as long as she was alive.

For these reasons, both Lady Jane Grey and Mary Stuart became the main victims of political functionaries whose necessity for national peace and stability went beyond the Queen's innocence – as for Lady Jane – or the Queen's personal affection – as for Elizabeth I. These four women found themselves in conflict against one another, either directly or indirectly, and their actions became major national issues involving powerful men whose control over them went beyond their position as monarchs. Lady Jane Grey became a victim of her own power, which gave her the claim to the throne, thus being the cause of her tragedy, whereas Mary Stuart actively participated in her own incrimination by being a victim of Elizabeth's manipulative statesmen. On the contrary, Mary I and Elizabeth I triumphed in this conflict of powers, thus becoming two of the main Tudor Queens who managed to shape history and impose their feminine dominion within a patriarchal world.

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<sup>208</sup> William Camden, an Officer of Arms under Queen Elizabeth I in FRASER, A., *op. cit.*, p. 380.

### **III. II. Making History.**

Early Modern Queens in England were constantly confronted with the patriarchal world that had been established for centuries. As a result, their role and power as female monarchs were always covered with all the prejudices and assumptions linked to their sex and, because of that, the men of their entourage tried to control their power in order to increase their own. As we have seen in the first chapter, in Tudor times, the functions that governed the country developed and an efficient Privy Council began to surround the monarchs in such a way as to make themselves indispensable for the King or Queen. At the same time, they also represented crucial tools for the monarchs in order to make their decisions and wishes a reality. In these relationships of power, the monarchs took advantage of their statesmen and, in the same way, the statesmen managed to increase their power thanks to their actions and loyalties to the sovereign. Under Henry VIII, we have seen how they strategically used their power in order to satisfy the King's wishes and to make Queens either fall or rise, as it was the case for Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn. As the English rightful monarch governed the country with the help of his government, the role of his Queens appeared more discreet and it has mostly been related to the King's changing moods and desperate need for a son. During Henry VII and Henry VIII's reigns, the Queens' powers were submitted to the supreme power of their husbands and, as a result, their positions were shadowed and limited by men's control. In addition, the fact that they could have enemies within the members of the Privy Council might have worked against their ambition and power. This happened because the greater authority in the realm was the King, and, as it was the case with Henry VIII, if he wanted to change his Queen, his men had to make his wishes come true in order to show him their loyalty. Of course, this situation was to become very different as Mary and Elizabeth Tudor acceded the throne as they themselves represented the rightful monarchs, just as Henry VIII was. Yet, the statesmen had still all the prejudices and assumptions of the time towards women, which made them put pressure on these first female sovereigns in order to accomplish traditional rituals such as marriage and the production of an heir. Their mother's past accompanied them throughout difficult times when their throne was threatened by other claimants of the Crown, but their actions managed to make themselves impose in a world dominated and made by men. For the first time in English history, these Queens were able to shape the world through actions that were to be remembered in future times. Even though they did not defeat the patriarchal system, they took advantage of it by using men as means for their own accession to power and success. For the first time, their female identities were to be associated with their actions as 'first-line soldiers' that made England, thus introducing the monarchy to a female Golden Age, in which women imposed their position and succeeded in their purposes by having the courage to defy and exploit the patriarchal world.

As we have previously said, Elizabeth of York, Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn have to be taken separately from Mary and Elizabeth Tudor. That was because of their attachment to a male English sovereign, which made their actions become all the more discreet and subtle and that is why it is important to analyse their achievements in order to give them the right value. In some cases, in fact, their skill in imposing themselves at the expense of others – as with Anne Boleyn – nurtured the construction of prejudices and negative connotations that still dominate our minds as soon as we are confronted with their history. It is generally believed that Anne Boleyn was the witch and adulteress who made Henry VIII fall for her, thus putting aside the virtuous Catherine, whereas Mary Tudor is generally associated with the bloody massacre of Catholics, which caused her the nickname of ‘Bloody’ Mary. It is true that these actions might appear bad for human consciousness, but it is also true that very often, in history, monarchs took those decisions and actions because of political and religious purposes. Yet, how do we know whether actions are good or bad? It is definitely not our role to position ourselves and bring a judgement over these Queens’ actions. However, what is important to remark is that all those actions and decisions – sometimes remembered and sometimes not – were crucial for the establishment of their position in power in order to have an influence in the shaping of England, and for that matter, we can say that they achieved it in their own way.

Elizabeth of York is not generally remembered as a chief participant in English history as she is often shadowed by her association through marriage with Henry VII. Nonetheless, we must not forget that she was at the origins of the Tudor dynasty, being the mother of Arthur and Henry, who were to become monarchs themselves. Her daughter Margaret, too, was to be implicated in the continuation of the Tudor history, as she was to be the only woman in history to have been daughter, sister, niece, wife, and mother to English kings.<sup>209</sup> Besides being at the origin of the Tudor genealogy, Elizabeth of York also had a more symbolic position linked to her legacy; she represented the last member of the Plantagenet family, which had had an active role during the Wars of the Roses in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Her name gave her, in fact, the right to be a legitimate monarch on her own, as she was Edward IV’s daughter. Even though Henry Tudor managed to defeat Richard III, which ended thirty years of civil wars, it was thanks to his marriage to her that his accession to the throne could not be questioned. Moreover, history reveals that Elizabeth’s marriage to Henry was actually a success in all domains; besides having produced two male heirs as an accomplishment for her role as Queen consort, there are also proofs that their relation between one another was actually based on affection and, possibly, love. As we have previously studied, in those times, arranged marriages represented the tradition and high-ranking men and women were prepared for that since their birth. Elizabeth and

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<sup>209</sup> LEWIS, J. J., “Biography of Elizabeth of York, Queen of England”, in *ThoughtCo*, July 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/elizabeth-of-york-3529601>, consulted on 18 March 2021.

Henry VII's marriage responded to the tradition of the time as it brought to both parties the advantages that people usually looked for in this religious union. However, there were exceptions in which Kings chose themselves the wife they wanted as we have briefly seen with Elizabeth of York's parents, Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville and with Henry VIII. In other cases, it was even possible that the couple managed to feel affection for each other after some years of marriage and this was probably the case with Elizabeth of York and Henry VII.<sup>210</sup> After Elizabeth's death at 37 for childbirth consequences, it was clear that her "departing was as heavy and dolorous to the King as ever was seen or heard of."<sup>211</sup> He retired at Richmond and "took with him certain of his secretest, and privily departed to a solitary place to pass his sorrow, and would that no man should resort to him but such [as] his Grace appointed."<sup>212</sup> In her biography, Alison Weir explains that Henry's health began to decline from that moment, which revealed the affection and love he felt for her. She even highlights a possibility that Henry VIII's

six marriages represented attempts to recreate the marital harmony of his parents, and mirror their example" knowing that "the qualities he admired in his wives – fidelity, dignity, piety, virtue, fruitfulness, intelligence and docility – were those his mother had had in full measure."<sup>213</sup>

Moreover, Elizabeth of York was also very much loved by the English people as she "was one of the most gracious and best-beloved princesses in the world in her time being."<sup>214</sup> The importance and the legacy of her name stood as a reminder of the bloody times of the civil wars, but her marriage to Henry VII made her the initiator of a new dynastic era that was to last for more than a century.

If the first years of the Tudor dynasty under Henry VII represented a period of national stability after the turmoil of the Wars of the Roses, we cannot say the same for Henry VIII's reign. English relationships with foreign countries had always been one of the main issues throughout the dynasty, because of religious, political and economic reasons. Queens did not generally interfere with those issues personally and it was the King's role to leave for battle, meanwhile the Queen took the reins of the household and dealt with national matters during her husband's absence.<sup>215</sup> However, it was possible that urgent military mobility was needed, and, the King being already occupied with

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<sup>210</sup> Just to remind you, Elizabeth Woodville was a middle rank woman and a widow with two grown-up sons. Edward IV was King of England from 1461 to 1470 and a loyal member of his Court, Warwick, had planned to marry him to a French noble woman, which never happened. Edward had, in fact, already chosen her wife-to-be and married her in secret before announcing the union publicly. This was to become the beginning of Warwick's war against Edward.

<sup>211</sup> *Antiquarian Repertory* in WEIR, A., *Elizabeth of York: The First Tudor Queen*. London, Vintage, 2014, p. 404.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>213</sup> WEIR, A., *Elizabeth of York: The First Tudor Queen*. London, Vintage, 2014, p. 431.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> In this case, we refer to Queens who were married to a King, as it was not the same thing with 'sole' monarchs such as Mary I and Elizabeth I. These latter were themselves the sovereigns of England and, just like a King, they had to deal with war issues, too, as we shall see in particular with Elizabeth I.



other issues, it was the Queen who was to make crucial decisions for the country's sake. This was exactly what happened with Catherine of Aragon during the first years of her marriage to Henry VIII and those events were to increase her popularity, as well as they give us the right to classify her as one of the women who made history. Before analysing Catherine's involvement in war, it is important to remember that she was the daughter of two important monarchs in Europe who represented the Catholic Empire: Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabel of Castile. Her marriage to Henry represented, therefore, an alliance between the two countries and she was actively involved in politics. Giles Tremlett explains this in his biography as he writes that "Catherine remained her father's ambassador for most of her years as queen" and "even after a new envoy arrived, Ferdinand still used her as a way of communicating directly with Henry."<sup>216</sup> Moreover, the King himself valued her political influence and according to Henry, "Catherine's role was, anyway, by no means confined to that of royal childbearer. She was also, in effect, one of his most influential (if unofficial) advisers, as well as being the conduit to one of the most powerful men in Europe,"<sup>217</sup> her father. This reveals that women in power actually began to have an active role in the governing of the country and their marriage to the King gave them the possibility to be active participants in political decisions. It is all the more crucial as we learn that Catherine herself, at some point, became a war chief, as she actively participated in the war against Scotland in 1513. Before analysing her decisions as war chief, it is important to understand why she found herself in that situation. In 1513, Henry VIII led a campaign<sup>218</sup> against Louis XII of France and, consequently, she became "Regent and Governess of England, Wales and Ireland."<sup>219</sup> Moreover, Henry gave her

full power to convoke and bring together, when it seems necessary and opportune to the queen, each and every one of our subjects who are most suitable and capable of defending and protecting our kingdom of England ... to arm and equip them for war and to station, prepare and lead them.<sup>220</sup>

It was therefore clear that Catherine had gained her husband's trust in dealing with political affairs, thanks to her experience in the field. Those powers were to become crucial for Catherine as she was to lead her own war, two months after Henry had left for France.

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<sup>216</sup> TREMLETT, G., *Catherine of Aragon: Henry's Spanish Queen*, London, Faber and Faber, 2010, p. 181.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>218</sup> The campaign was England's role as part of the Holy League from October 1511. It aimed at defending the Pope's lands in Italy from France and her allies. The English used Calais, their last outpost in France, as the assembly point for an army of at least 25,000 soldiers, which set off at the end of June to attack the town of Thérouanne. The aim, initially, was to draw French troops from their deployment in Italy.

<sup>219</sup> Henry VIII in TREMLETT, G., *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

By July 1513, news that James IV of Scotland was preparing a large army arrived at the English Court, as they were to take advantage of Henry's absence in France to invade England.<sup>221</sup> Financed and supported by the French, the Scottish King was ready to attack the English northern border, without knowing that Catherine herself was actually organising its defence. She sent a large amount of money to the north in case of war expenses and, most importantly, she sent "artillery, gunners and a fleet of eight ships, including the *Mary Rose*, which carried additional troops."<sup>222</sup> Of course, her decisions had to rely on a man who was to be present for the concrete organisation of the defence and that man was Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey.<sup>223</sup> For the first time, however, one of the most important men of Henry's Court witnessed the Queen's direct involvement in politics, which was very much unusual at the time and, probably, Surrey himself could not have expected it. In figure 24 and 25, we can see two images from the English National Archives that reveal the Queen's actions for the war: figure 24 is a page from the Book of Payments in which two entries of money were registered and, in the highlighted extracts, we can read the following statements:

*Item, to William Bulstrode upon a warrant for the conveyance of the ordinance with the queen's grace northwards – £100.*

*Item, to Owen Holand upon a warrant for the conveying of 1500 almain rivets northward – £36 14s 4d.*<sup>224</sup>

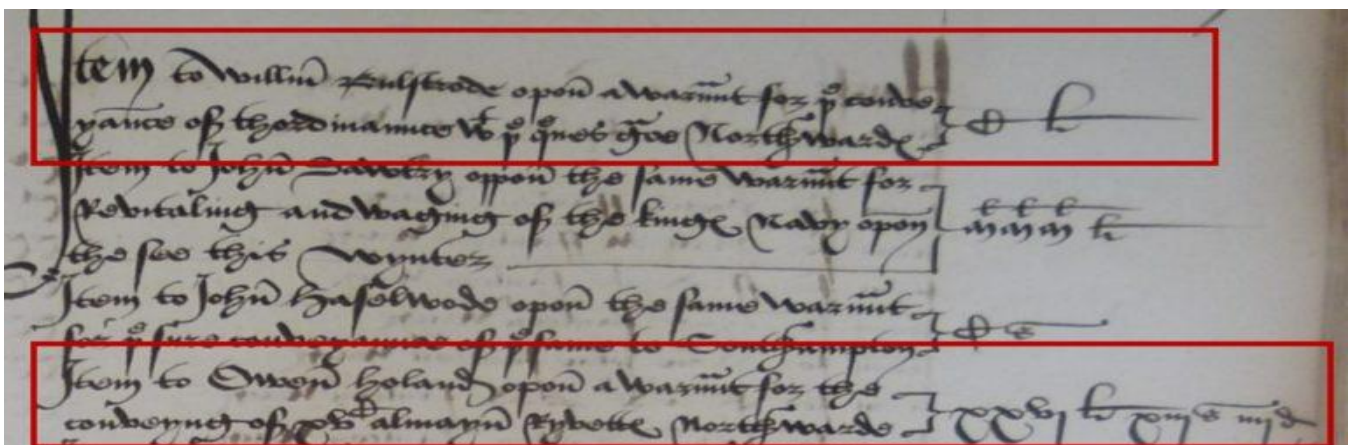


Figure 24. Chamber Book Payments, September 1513. The first and fourth entries related to the Tower's guns and armour.

<sup>221</sup> CUNNINGHAM, S., "Katherine of Aragon and an Army for the North in 1513", in *The National Archives*, May 2020, <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/katherine-of-aragon-and-an-army-for-the-north-in-1513/#note-49549-1>, consulted on 22 March 2021.

<sup>222</sup> TREMLETT, G., *op. cit.*, p. 194.

<sup>223</sup> Surrey was one of the oldest of Henry VIII's counsellors. Yet his experience in governing the north in the 1490s made him indispensable, as the region looked vulnerable to the main Scottish attack when more than 30,000 men crossed the River Tweed on 24 August. Surrey's efforts had prevented full-scale war in 1497, but he knew he had to fight this time. By 1 September, at least 25,000 English soldiers were on the border under his command.

<sup>224</sup> CUNNINGHAM, S., *op. cit.*

In the same way, figure 25 shows Catherine's signature (at the top left of the page) – 'Katherin the Qwene' – in a warrant that authorised the delivery of the Tower armour to a participant of the war.

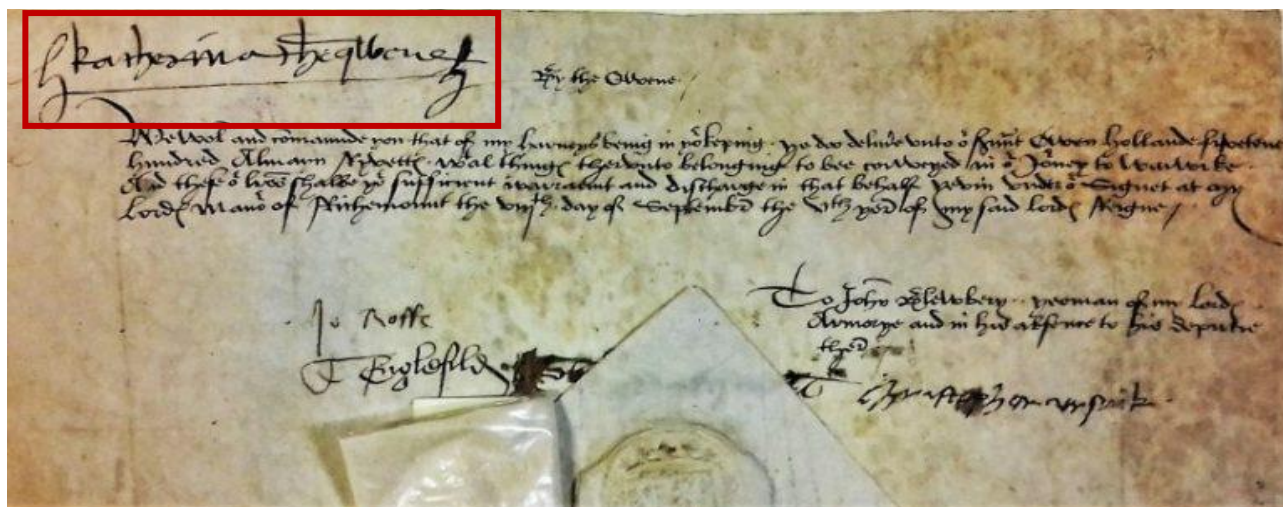


Figure 25. Catherine signed this warrant on 8 September 1513 authorising the delivery of the Tower armour.

Catherine's involvement in the Scottish war reached a major importance as she actively participated in that same defence that she had been organising. In fact, the delivery of the armour in figure 25 was destined to herself and, beyond that, she asked for "two banners with the arms ... of England and Spain" along with images of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Trinity and St George.<sup>225</sup> Those symbols represented Catherine's personal banners that were to make people remember that it was her war they were fighting and, even though she did not actually fight herself, her actions were widely spread throughout Europe and in her native country where she was celebrated as her mother's imitation. The following statement relates a version of those events saying that

Queen Catherine, in imitation of her mother Isabel and imbued by the spirit of her father ... made a splendid oration to the English captains, told them to be ready to defend their territory, that the Lord smiled upon those who stood in defence of their own, and they should remember English courage excelled that of all other nations.<sup>226</sup>

Catherine's celebration as Queen was to become even more important as the Scots were eventually defeated and James IV died in the battle of Flodden. These events showed how Catherine managed to lead a war for herself by exploiting her Royal powers as Queen. Her presence nearby the battle as well as the decisions she made in the organisation of the defence confirmed her as a successful national commander who turned upside down all prejudices and assumptions linked to her gender, thus managing to defy the stability of the patriarchal system and to shape English history.

<sup>225</sup> TREMLETT, G., *op. cit.* p. 195.

<sup>226</sup> Peter Martyr in *Ibid*, p. 196.

Elizabeth I also came to be celebrated as a successful national leader in war times. She can be considered as the second most important monarch after her father, Henry VIII, who made the Tudor dynasty worth to be remembered and, because of that, she was to become the symbol of an English Golden Age. This idea of a Golden Age, however, defined the end of Elizabeth's reign and, most surprisingly, the beginning was very hard for this Queen. In fact, she inherited an indebted Crown<sup>227</sup> following several wars against France and Scotland and, besides, "many members of the political elite were disillusioned by continental warfare and demoralised by the military and political defeats against France and Scotland."<sup>228</sup> One of the main problems concerning warfare was the fact that England's population was significantly lower than that of the other powers such as France and Spain and, therefore, fewer people were at the Queen's disposal for conscription and the English army was behind in technology and training.<sup>229</sup> Moreover, her accession to the throne as a well-known Protestant Queen represented a threat to foreign Catholic powers, even though, from a national perspective, her religion was widely accepted. Her Catholic sister Mary I, in fact, had failed to defeat what she considered as the 'heretics' and her policy of burnings and execution of the Protestant had actually revealed counter-productive and led more people to take a distance from the former Queen's religion. As we have already seen, religion was one of the main reasons for European conflicts and Elizabeth's war with Spain from 1585 to 1603 made two countries representing different religions clash against one another for religious and territorial dominion. Furthermore, the belief that Elizabeth was illegitimate because of her father's declaration was still very much alive and it was also used by Philip II of Spain to reveal his hostility towards England. Consequently, for the second time in Tudor history, England's amity with Spain encountered a crisis, which was to lead Elizabeth and her people to a long war.<sup>230</sup> France and Spain were allies as they shared the same religion, consequently, they tried to find ways to defy the English power by making plots against Elizabeth herself. Moreover, threats to Protestant citizens were also perceived as an attack by the English and an example of those attacks was the notorious massacre of Huguenots in France during St. Bartholomew's day in 1572.<sup>231</sup> The French also tried to attack England through Mary Stuart, who, as we have previously studied,

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<sup>227</sup> In her book that focuses on Elizabeth's foreign policy, Susan Doran explains that between 1538 and 1552, the English Crown spent about £3.5 million on wars against France and Scotland and when Elizabeth became Queen in 1558, she inherited a debt of £300,000, which was only paid twenty years later.

<sup>228</sup> DORAN, S. *Elizabeth I and Foreign Policy, 1558-1603*, Routledge, 2000, p. 5.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>230</sup> The first time England's relationship with Spain declined goes back to the 1520s when Henry VIII broke with Rome in order to obtain a divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon, and to marry Anne Boleyn.

<sup>231</sup> The Huguenots were French Protestants and their massacre in St. Bartholomew's day was considered as an attack to the religion they represented. It is believed that it was engineered by Catherine de Medici herself a few days after the wedding of King Charles IX's sister, Margaret, to the Protestant Henry of Navarre. It marked a turning point in the French Wars of Religion and, according to Henry Chadwick in his book *Atlas of the Christian Church*, it "printed on Protestant minds the indelible conviction that Catholicism was a bloody and treacherous religion."

became Elizabeth's opponent in religion and politics. As a result, because of these religious tensions, the years between 1568 and 1585 witnessed many Anglo-Spanish riots, which prepared the countries to war. The turning point that turned localised riots into a continental war was the signing of the Treaty of Joinville in March 1585 between Philip II of Spain and the Catholic League and it ensured Spain's financial support to the League.<sup>232</sup> As a response to the Catholic threat, Elizabeth signed the Treaty of Nonsuch in August 1585 with the Dutch rebels who fought against Spanish rule.<sup>233</sup> Philip considered this alliance as Elizabeth's declaration of war, which officially began in that same year.

Despite the English military difficulties at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, by 1585 the Queen had managed to "build up an effective fleet and improve the quality of her fighting men."<sup>234</sup>

Moreover, Elizabeth's ships were built in such a way as to reach a greater speed, a better manoeuvrability and a more effective gunpowder. It was thanks to those improvements in the navy that, as soon as the war with Spain began, "England could deploy abroad a well-equipped army, headed by experienced captains, and also muster



Figure 26. *Model of 16<sup>th</sup>-century ships.*

some 11,000 trained troops and another armed 62,000 men for home defence."<sup>235</sup> Those developments in the Royal navy were to become crucial for the outcome of the war, which resulted in the English victory and Elizabeth as the representative of that glory. In fact, the war against Spain was mostly fought in the sea, which explains why the improvements in the navy were fundamental, and "each year between 1589 and 1591, at least 236 ships were operating in Spanish waters."<sup>236</sup>

Beyond Elizabeth's ability to invest money in the right moments and for the right causes, she also revealed to have a great charisma and to support her people in war times, like a national commander. The most important example that shows her personality in this perspective is the speech she gave at Tilbury in 1588, which was to mark her reputation as a capable and charismatic war chief. By that time, the English troops were expecting a Spanish invasion and Robert Dudley, earl of

<sup>232</sup> The Catholic League was a union between the French Catholic clergy and gentry set up in France in 1576. It aimed at defending the Catholic faith during the religious wars in order to combat the Huguenots. A new league was formed in 1584 with Henry Duke of Guise at its head. The fact that the King of Spain supplied the league with money could represent a threat for England, which was preparing for war.

<sup>233</sup> The Habsburgs governed the Spanish Netherlands from 1556 to 1648. This region comprised most of the modern states of Belgium and Luxembourg, as well as parts of northern France, the southern Netherlands, and western Germany with the capital being Brussels. The Spanish Netherlands were a strategic land that was used by Philip II of Spain in his plan to invade England.

<sup>234</sup> DORAN, S. *Elizabeth I and Foreign Policy, 1558-1603*, Routledge, 2000, p. 51.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.



Leicester, invited her to go to Tilbury and to rally her troops. Despite the councillors' disagreement at the invitation because of the possible danger she could face, Elizabeth accepted and, on 9 August, she "appeared before her troops in the guise of 'some Amazonian empress.'"<sup>237</sup> The speech she gave on that day was to be remembered in English history as the Queen's direct participation at her men's sides as she pronounced the following words:



Figure 27. *Queen Elizabeth I addressing her troops at Tilbury in 1588.*

My loving people,

we have been persuaded by some that are careful of our safety, to take heed how we commit ourselves to armed multitudes, for fear of treachery; but I assure you I do not desire to live to distrust my faithful and loving people.

Let tyrants fear. I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and good will of my subjects, and therefore I am come amongst you, as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live and die amongst you all, to lay down for my God and for my kingdom, and my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust.

I know I have the body but of a weak, feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues.

I know already, for your forwardness you have deserved rewards and crowns; and We do assure you on a word of a prince, they shall be duly paid. In the mean time, my lieutenant general [Leicester] shall be in my stead, than whom never prince commanded a more noble or worthy subject; not doubting but by your obedience to my general, by your concord in the camp, and your valour in the field, we shall shortly have a famous victory over these enemies of my God, of my kingdom, and of my people.<sup>238</sup>

In this speech, Elizabeth did not refer to herself as the Queen, but as a soldier who was to take arms, just as her audience was. The fact that she compared herself to a King revealed her strength of character and her ability to understand how the patriarchal system worked and to adapt accordingly. Her presence at the battlefield had given the necessary motivation to the army and her role as the monarch who supported her people was fully acknowledged. Moreover, we can also add that, as the Privy Council put pressure on the issue of marriage and succession, she had revealed that she was already married to England and to the English people and her complete devotion to the nation made

<sup>237</sup> WEIR, A., *Elizabeth, the Queen*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1998, p. 392.

<sup>238</sup> Queen Elizabeth I in *Ibid*, p. 393.

her speech more credible and her role as a war leader and monarch fully recognised by her people.<sup>239</sup> By breaking all codes of tradition that concerned 16<sup>th</sup>-century women in power, Elizabeth managed to govern an impoverished country and to make it become one of the greatest powers of Europe. She introduced England to a Golden Age that was marked by stability, peace, and global exploration.<sup>240</sup> She transformed an indebted country into a naval power and her legitimacy on the throne of England was not questioned anymore by the other Catholic countries. According to Alison Weir in her biography, Elizabeth's faith gave people the "belief that they were a chosen nation, protected by Divine Providence, and this confidence gave rise, in the years after the Armada, to the flowering of the English Renaissance."<sup>241</sup> For all these reasons, we can affirm that Elizabeth managed to impose her authority as a female monarch by devoting herself entirely to her country and by adapting to the patriarchal system. She was able to work with the men of her entourage by creating a stable and efficient cooperation between Privy Council and monarch, which allowed England to rise. Even though Elizabeth died £400,000 in debt, "England had defeated the might of Spain, won the respect of the rest of Europe, and established a lasting peace through the union of the crowns"<sup>242</sup>, thus making her one of the women who made English history.<sup>243</sup>

The reason behind Elizabeth's refusal for marriage has always been a matter of discussion among historians, who have put forward a possible hypothesis in order to understand it. Alison Weir believes that she was afraid of childbirth. In fact, two of her stepmothers, Jane Seymour and Catherine Parr, her grandmother, Elizabeth of York, and several acquaintances had died in childbed. Moreover, Elizabeth's father, Henry VIII, had had her mother, Anne Boleyn, executed for treason and adultery, and because of that, Elizabeth herself was to be considered as illegitimate even after her accession to the throne.<sup>244</sup> That is why it is important for us to take a look at her mother's actions in order to better understand history and to have a less judgmental opinion concerning Anne Boleyn.

Henry VIII's second wife had made herself remembered in English history because of her achievement in making the King fall in love with her, in such a way as to divorce from his first wife and to cause political and religious changes in the country. Her character and her implication in a love

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<sup>239</sup> Elizabeth's idea of marriage is explained in a response to a petition from the House of Commons urging her to marry and produce an heir. In her speech, Elizabeth reserved the right to choose who she would marry, and indeed whether or not she would marry at all. Consequently, from the early 1580s she began to be represented as the Virgin Queen.

<sup>240</sup> The war against Spain represented the apex of a century of conflicts and tensions between the two countries. England's victory of the war allowed the country to impose itself in a European and global perspective, thus managing to stop all conflicts and instability for the years to come.

<sup>241</sup> WEIR, A., *op. cit.*, p. 487.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> At Elizabeth's death in 1603, Mary Stuart's son, James VI of Scotland, reunited the Scottish and English Crown under his reign and he became King James I.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

triangle have been source of inspirations for fictional movies such as Justin Chadwick's *The Other Boleyn Girl* with Natalie Portman and Scarlett Johansson and Michael Hirst's series *The Tudors*. In both works, Anne Boleyn is represented as a clever noblewoman whose ambition brought her to her success, but also to her fall. In the fictional world, which has mostly influenced our beliefs of her character today, Anne Boleyn is often hidden behind a stained reputation according to which she is believed to be a witch and an adulteress whose only ambition was to achieve power. However, such a depiction of her diminishes the real qualities that distinguished her and that brought her to actually have an impact in history. Anne Boleyn was much more than a simple English girl greedy for power. She was actually very clever and her education in France helped her in her cultural development. In his biography, Eric Ives affirms that "people's memories of Anne as she was after some months at Mechelen were still vivid twenty years later – intelligent, self-possessed, wide awake, rapidly coming to grips with the French language and with the sophistication of European courts."<sup>245</sup> Besides being a very beautiful woman, which was probably one of the first things that King Henry VIII noticed about her, Anne was also sophisticated, elegant, and independent and these qualities made her stand out from 16<sup>th</sup> century noblewomen.<sup>246</sup> Her intelligence and understanding of the world were the main factors that allowed her to become Queen in 1533. As we have already studied, it was normal for a King of those times to have mistresses; first, because it was a sign of virility that a monarch had to manifest and second, because Kings and Queens were united by arranged marriage and, therefore, there was rarely love for each other. However, there are proves that Henry's marriage with Catherine was quite cheerful during the first years and Henry's ballad *Pastime with Good Company* reflected those years.<sup>247</sup> Nonetheless, Anne Boleyn's arrival at the King's Court as one of the Queen's ladies-in-waiting happened in a moment when Henry's marriage to Catherine was slowly declining because of her failure to produce a male heir. For this reason, Anne was able to take advantage of the situation in order to achieve power. In fact, she managed to make the King fall in love with her in such a way as to make him fight against all traditions of the time, but what made her different from a King's mistress was the sexual act. Anne had understood that giving herself to the King before marriage would not have given her power and she had witnessed her sister's adulterous and brief relationship with Henry.<sup>248</sup> Consequently, Anne gave herself to Henry only when she was sure she would become

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<sup>245</sup> IVES, E., *The Life and Death of Anne Boleyn*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2005, p. 25.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>247</sup> *Pastime with Good Company*, also known as *The King's Ballad*, is an English folk song written by King Henry VIII shortly after his coronation. It is regarded as the most famous of his compositions, and it became a popular song in England and other European countries during the Renaissance. It is thought to be written for Catherine of Aragon.

<sup>248</sup> Mary Boleyn was Anne's sister and we know about her sexual relationship with the King following a dispensation that Henry demanded to the Pope in order to marry Anne. In this dispensation was revealed the reason why the Pope could not grant Henry with his permission; there was the impediment of affinity in the first degree due to Henry having slept with Anne's sister.



Queen<sup>249</sup> and that happened almost ten years after they first met. From being a lady-in-waiting, Anne managed to achieve the higher position in society by causing crucial events that were to change England's future forever. She was one of the main causes for Henry's break with Rome and the spreading of Protestantism in England – see part II chapter II – and, of course, she was the mother of one of the most important sovereigns in history, Elizabeth I. Moreover, because of her faith and beliefs, she committed herself in helping the poor by making the ladies of her household spend “considerable amounts of time sewing clothes which were taken on progress and distributed to the poor at each stopping place by arrangement with the local priest.”<sup>250</sup> She also supported learned institutions such as Oxford and Cambridge with annual subventions, and, for this reason, “she was remembered for years as a generous patron of students.”<sup>251</sup> These are the main actions that made Anne Boleyn worth to be considered as one of the women who made history. She managed to impose her personality and her strength of character by undergoing an evolution that was to bring her on the throne of England. She was one of the first self-made women and because of her, the traditional notions of marriage and religion were turned upside down. Her intelligence and ambition made her at the top of social hierarchy and her social elevation allowed her to defy the patriarchal system with which she was confronted. Even though that same system became the cause of her fall in 1536, she must still be considered as a heroine of her times and her faith was to be defied by the future Mary I, whose life had been drastically upset by Anne's accession to the throne.

Queen Mary I acceded the throne after a glorious victory against her Protestant enemies who had supported the accession of Lady Jane Grey after Edward VI's death. She began her reign as a Queen fully supported by her people, yet that initial positivity eventually doomed beneath a series of religious persecutions. Mary was a conservative Catholic Queen who did not accept the new religion to be pursued under her reign. We must understand that, at the time, religious toleration was very rare and “the idea that faith was separated from law or that varying beliefs could thrive within one geographic area was not the progressive thought we believe it to be but something between heresy and treason.”<sup>252</sup> After having witnessed her mother's fall following her father's fight for marrying the Protestant Anne Boleyn, Mary took advantage of her position and power to impose her own faith and, probably, to take her revenge against those who had caused her to become illegitimate. The burning execution of Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop who had married Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, was

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<sup>249</sup> IVES, E., *op. cit.*, p. 156.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 284.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>252</sup> WILCOXSON, S. “The Counter-Reformation of Queen Mary I”, in *Samantha Wilcoxson, Author of Historical Fiction*, January 2019, <https://samanthawilcoxson.blogspot.com/2019/01/the-counter-reformation-of-queen-mary-i.html>, consulted on 25 March 2021.

an example. By imposing these policies of persecutions, Mary caused five years of national instability within England, in such a way as to increase religious hostility towards Protestantism, yet with the counter-effect. Her aim was to eradicate the Protestant beliefs from the isle, but, as we have already studied, her policies made people detach themselves from Catholicism. During her reign, Mary made two crucial mistakes that were to determine the future events and her reputation. She had chosen to marry a Spanish King, instead of an English nobleman and that was the cause why she lost her people's support.<sup>253</sup> Moreover, the fact that she led England to war because of her alliance to Spain made her popularity fall even more and it caused rebellions and distrust of Mary's Queenship. Her second mistake, and probably the one that made her personality incompatible with the times of her reign, was the strength of her Catholic faith. In a moment when Protestant ideas had been spreading for several decades, Mary imposed her traditional and medieval ideas linked to Catholicism that resulted in the Marian persecutions. John Foxe explained this in his *Book of Martyrs* and he revealed that

she first ... had promised her faith to the Suffolk men, to maintain the religion left by king Edward, her brother ... But after that she, breaking her promise with God and man, began to take part with Stephen Gardiner<sup>254</sup>, and had given over her supremacy unto the pope, by-and-by God's blessing left her, neither did anything well thrive with her afterwards, during the whole time of her reign.<sup>255</sup>

Of course, she was not the only monarch who led a policy to eradicate heresy and her sister Elizabeth was to do the same with Catholics, yet, her choice to introduce her own Counter-Reformation in England and to devote herself to the Spanish alliance was not compatible with the times she lived in.<sup>256</sup> As she directed her country towards a medieval era, there was a general need to look forward and the English people did not approve her religious persecutions. Mary was not able to adapt to a time that was already transitioning to a Renaissance era, centred on humanist studies rather than on religion. Her faith and her attachment to her Spanish origins were to become the reasons for her national unpopularity and her reign was to be remembered as one of the bloodiest period of English history, in such a way as Mary herself was to be known as Bloody Mary.

In this chapter, we have studied the way Tudor women in power marked the course of English events in their own way, by defying the patriarchal system with which they were confronted. Each

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<sup>253</sup> Two eligible Englishmen had been proposed to Mary and they were Edward Courtenay, Earl of Devon, and Reginald Pole.

<sup>254</sup> Stephen Gardiner was an English bishop and politician during the English Reformation period who served as Lord Chancellor during the reign of Queen Mary and he actively participated in the Marian persecutions.

<sup>255</sup> FOXE, J., *The Book of Martyrs: a History of the Persecution of the Protestants*, Nicholson & Sons, 1563, p. 304.

<sup>256</sup> The Counter-Reformation, also called the Catholic Reformation or the Catholic Revival, was the period of Catholic resurgence initiated in response to the Protestant Reformation. It began with the Council of Trent (1545–1563) and largely ended with the conclusion of the European wars of religion in 1648.

Queen was able to impose their own power by taking advantage of that same system that was to help them in their rise. Elizabeth of York gave Henry VII the legitimacy to become King and thanks to her marriage to him, she became the first Tudor Queen and the last Royal member of a period marked by civil wars. Catherine of Aragon gave Henry VIII an alliance with the powerful Spain and her ability to impose herself as a war chief at the King's absence allowed her to receive the respect and popularity that were to be crucial in her fight against her divorce. Elizabeth I, too, revealed herself a capable national commander. Moreover, her refusal to marry and to submit to a man's power changed the way women were perceived and her existence was due to Anne Boleyn who was already revolutionary for her time. She marked history by elevating herself socially and by becoming Queen. Her help in the support of Protestant ideas were to change drastically the religious direction of England, which, on the contrary, Mary tried, but failed, to rectify, still remaining the first female monarch in English history. It was thanks to all these achievements that these Queens must be remembered as their influence was crucial for the defeat of all prejudices and assumptions linked to women and it was because of those actions that people came to know them under particular qualifications that were to be at the origin of myths surrounding their reigns.

### III. III. A Queen's Myth: the Public Image and Legacy of Tudor Queenship.

“Although I may not be a lioness, I am a lion's cub, and inherit many of his qualities.”<sup>257</sup>

Queen Elizabeth I.

These are the words pronounced by Queen Elizabeth I as she talked with her counsellors. In the same way as she compared her strength to a King's in the speech at Tilbury, this statement also allows us to understand her character and her power during her reign. Her depiction as a “lion's cub” reveals her ability to progress and learn as a monarch and to become, metaphorically speaking, a lion itself. This sentence was to become one of the main depictions of Queen Elizabeth I that transformed her into a myth and, even though she represents the best-known example thanks to her long lasting reign, the representations of Queens who preceded her also made an impact in their cultural remembrance, thus transforming Queenship into a sacred and legendary ritual. Queens in Tudor times began to reflect the Renaissance style that was spreading throughout Europe in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, both in clothing and in their education. Their public image was to become their means to impose their power and to symbolically represent their Crown and, therefore, their way of choosing what to wear turned into a political choice that was to be part of their myths. Queenship also allowed women to take advantage of their sexual body by turning it into power and privilege that only a woman could have. Sexuality was, in fact, the first element that society associated with women and, therefore, a Queen needed to turn upside down those codes in order to impose herself as more than an underestimated woman in a patriarchal world. The Queen's body became, therefore, a means of power with political purposes and it contributed in the Queens' achievements of power and in the construction of their myth. The idea of the Queen's untouchable body as well as the Queen's association with religious icons such as the Virgin Mary made female monarchs gain a religious halo around their figure transforming them into a saint in Earth. These elements were highlighted under Elizabeth I, whose refusal to marry and to bear children made her sexuality at the centre of her myth as she came to be known as the Virgin Queen. The Queen's public appearance was the first main element that contributed in the building of her memory in future times as it represented the first impact on people and on political situations, and, because of that, it was essential for a Queen to be concerned with her image. Furthermore, beyond the Queens' public appearance, their actions were to increase their popularity during their reign as well as to shape England either positively or negatively, thus contributing in the creation of their representations through myths and through a widely spread fame that was to settle in the English cultural acknowledgement of the country's royal family.

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<sup>257</sup> Queen Elizabeth I in WEIR, A., *Elizabeth, the Queen*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1998, p. 222.

Before analysing the way Tudor Queens managed to build their own public and political image through their clothing and to gain popularity through their actions and decisions, it is important to understand the concept of “myth”. Even though we use this word very frequently in our days, we usually take its origins for granted and it surprises us when we actually realise that the word was only coined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The surprising fact is that we tend to associate the word with stories from the Greek mythology and, for this reason, we might believe that the term appeared in Ancient Greece times. If we take a look at its etymology, though, we learn that

**myth (n.)**

1830, from French *mythe* (1818) and directly from Modern Latin *mythus*, from Greek *mythos* "speech, thought, word, discourse, conversation; story, saga, tale, myth, anything delivered by word of mouth," a word of unknown origin.<sup>258</sup>

We, therefore, understand that this word refers to oral stories transmitted from generation to generation and this idea of orality becomes all the more important as we read its definition:

myths are stories about divine beings, generally arranged in a coherent system; they are revered as true and sacred; they are endorsed by rulers and priests; and closely linked to religion. Once this link is broken, and the actors in the story are not regarded as gods but as human heroes, giants or fairies, it is no longer a myth but a folktale. Where the central actor is divine but the story is trivial ... the result is religious legend, not myth.<sup>259</sup>

Tudor Queens were able to impose their Queenship as a sacred ritual and their image reflected religious figures, thus creating historical myths that settled in the English cultural legacy. Even though the idea of myth is mainly associated with fictional stories, it can also refer to historical heroes or heroines whose fame became the origins of stories with an historical background, even though their veracity can be put into question. Generally, those stories are created in order to amplify the protagonist's actions and glory during her or his reign. Moreover, the production of several movies, as we mentioned earlier, the historical realism of which is usually coupled to fictional elements, allow us to state that Tudor Queens have actually become historical myths. For this reason, it is important to highlight the important elements of their Queenship that made them increase their popularity and build their own political and religious image.

One of the main elements that helped Tudor Queens to construct their public image was their representation as religious icons and this idea of sacralisation of their body became effective since their coronation. This was crucial in a period when religion was widely present in most of the political affairs. The sacralisation of the Queens' body was fundamental for their public image as it

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<sup>258</sup> “Myth”, in *Online Etymology Dictionary*, <https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=myth>, consulted on 29 March 2021.

<sup>259</sup> SIMPSON, J., and ROUD, S., "Dictionary of English Folklore," Oxford, 2000, p.254.

“contributed to their ability to become both exemplars and moral leaders for their people”<sup>260</sup> and her coronation, which was a sacred ritual, “further emphasised the Queen’s special relationship with God by enjoining her to cultivate virtue and spread the Christian faith.”<sup>261</sup> The Queens’ union with the King through the sacrament of marriage imposed even more their legitimacy as religious beacons for their people and these two rituals aimed at turning the Queens’ body into a holy relic. We will see later on in our analysis that their clothes took a religious importance as Michelle L. Beer explains in her book. She states that

just as a reliquary might both celebrate and hide a holy relic of a saint’s body, the queen’s magnificent exterior clothing emphasised her body’s preciousness and exclusivity, in part because it was covered or partially hidden.<sup>262</sup>

The religious symbolism of a Queen became, therefore, the most essential element during her Queenship and this was true with all Tudor Queens. The break with Rome under Henry VIII had not interfered in the loss of importance of religion, which was still very much linked to political issues. As we have seen in chapter 3 of our first part, women had to personify the religious qualities linked to their gender and charity was one of them. It is for this reasons that the offering of alms, as well as the Royal Maundy, became the Queens’ means to transmit their symbolic image of charity.<sup>263</sup> The first Tudor Queen who managed to gain popularity thanks to this virtue was Elizabeth of York, whose distribution of alms became “a key component in the successful practice of queenly piety, which in turn fostered her positive reputation and widespread affection amongst the populace.”<sup>264</sup> Thanks to her charity as monarch, the first Tudor Queen increased her popularity and she was remembered in history as the ‘White Queen’. Of course, this nickname can refer to two symbolic elements of her Queenship; the first concerns her belonging to the House of York, the symbol of which was a white rose – in contrast with the red one of the House of Lancaster – and the second refers to the religious symbol of the colour white linked to purity, holiness and innocence.

In the same way as Elizabeth of York, the other Tudor Queens acknowledged the importance of charity in such a way as the almoners themselves gained both importance and the Queen’s favour. They represented the Queen’s charity and their “duties involved mediating between the queen and the wider world, acting as the queen’s representative and organiser of public spiritual occasions.”<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> BEER, M. L., *Queenship at the Renaissance Courts of Britain: Catherine of Aragon and Margaret Tudor, 1503–1533*, Boydell & Brewer, 2018, p. 126.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>263</sup> Royal Maundy was celebrated on Maundy Thursday, the day before Good Friday that comes before Easter. Maundy Thursday commemorates the Last Supper, that final meal that Jesus Christ had with his disciples before his arrest. In Tudor times, on Maundy Thursday, it was customary for the monarch to wash the feet of poor people and to give alms.

<sup>264</sup> BEER, M. L., *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 134.

The tradition of giving alms was inherited by Catherine of Aragon, as well, as it was important for her to represent the Catholic faith because of her Spanish origins and to gain popularity in England. She exploited those alms to spread her own reputation abroad as a virtuous Queen and she often offered them to Spanish friars. She managed to gain popularity thanks to those acts of charity, especially after her divorce, in such a way that, “according to the Spanish ambassador, Anne Boleyn forbade any contact between Catherine and the poor.”<sup>266</sup>



Figure 28. *Queen Mary I's clothing style.*

Public image was very important for Queens in order to establish her own authority and power and the main element that allowed them to have an immediate impact on the public was their clothing. Michelle Beer explains that

the importance of clothing to the creation of early modern social and political status meant that dressing as the queen cemented their identities as queens, not only for themselves, but also for their households, courtiers and kingdoms.<sup>267</sup>

This meant that Queens created their own clothing style within the Royal Court, which was eventually reproduced by the Queens' ladies-in-waiting. Yet, beyond the impact on the royal style, clothing had also a political purpose. Mary I, for example was known to wear black gowns as a symbol of the rigidity and sobriety of Catholicism, whereas Elizabeth I used to wear colourful dresses and numerous jewels, typical of the Renaissance style that was spreading in Europe. The French ambassador described Elizabeth's abundance of jewels after meeting the Queen in 1597. He affirmed that she wore “innumerable jewels, not only on her head, but also within her collar, about her arms and on her hands, with a very quantity of pearls round her neck and on her bracelets.”<sup>268</sup> However, we actually understand that Elizabeth's clothing style was nothing but her way to impose her authority and Queenship as Alison Weir explains that “her clothes and jewels were her working clothes, the outward symbols of majesty, and essential for the preservation of the Virgin Queen.”<sup>269</sup> All elements concerning the Queen had to be thought for because of their political impact on the public as female monarchs. Queens, therefore, took advantage of their bodies to create their own image that contributed to the constructions of their myths and other examples of the Queens' clothing for political purposes can be found with Catherine of Aragon and Elizabeth I.

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<sup>266</sup> BEER, M. L., *op. cit.*, p. 129.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid*, p. 46.

<sup>268</sup> French Ambassador in WEIR, A., *Elizabeth, the Queen*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1998, p. 236.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid*, p. 237.

As we have studied in the previous chapter, both Catherine of Aragon and Elizabeth I managed to impose their reputation as capable war chiefs and political leaders and their clothes were crucial to their public image in that particular context. In 1520, Catherine of Aragon participated in what Michelle Beer considers as “one of the most difficult ceremonial events of her political career, the Field of Cloth of Gold.”<sup>270</sup> This event consisted in eighteen days of celebration near Calais, in France and its purpose was to strengthen an Anglo-French alliance. However, England’s relationship with Spain could have been threatened because of the French and Catherine used her own clothing in order to have her own political impact on the event. In fact, “as queen, she could not publicly oppose her husband’s intentions to meet the French, so she had to work within the ritual framework of court spectacle in order to express her opposition and propose an alternative alliance.” After ensuring her nephew Charles V’s meeting with Henry VIII before their departure to France, Catherine’s clothes were presented in such a way as to indirectly express her political opinions by inserting “symbols of her dynasty and of Spain into the Anglo-French spectacle, thus publicly offering the English an alternative to the alliance with France.”<sup>271</sup> As a result, Henry VIII kept a close alliance with Spain, even though Catherine’s hope of avoiding an Anglo-French amity did not succeed. This event reflects how the Queen’s public image could actually have an impact by transforming her own body in a political symbol. Moreover, Catherine’s clothing strategy allowed her to impose the duality of her power both as a Spanish princess and as an English Queen.

Queen Elizabeth I also had the opportunity to use her clothes for strategic purposes and the most important example was her appearance at Tilbury in 1588 where she delivered her famous speech. That event was very symbolic for her public image as she deliberately revealed herself as a war chief who stood at her men’s side, waiting for war. Of course, Elizabeth was not to fight personally, as she was still the monarch, but her presence and her motivational speech allowed her men to have the right confidence to fight and not to feel abandoned by their sovereign. Alison Weir describes the Queen’s clothing as she arrived at the battlefield; she was “dressed as ‘an armed Pallas’ with her silver breastplate and a small silver and gold leader’s truncheon in her hand.”<sup>272</sup> It is clear that Elizabeth chose the right clothes in order to reveal herself both as a monarch – the colours silver and gold represent the splendour of the monarchy – and as a warrior. Moreover, her speech affirmed Elizabeth as a capable leader and Ashley Butler gives a good analysis of it. In fact, Elizabeth was

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<sup>270</sup> BEER, M. L., *op. cit.*, p. 60.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>272</sup> In Greek mythology, Pallas was Athena’s favourite companion when she was a child as they shared their fighting skills. However, Pallas accidentally died during a sparring session following a mortally wound caused by Athena herself. In her honour, Athena made a wooden image of her dead best friend and she called it the Palladium. Today, armed Pallas describes the European tradition in the arts of combat and it embodies the following virtues: wisdom and strategy, inspiration and civilization, geometry and mathematics, strength and skill, temperance and elegance, art and science.



widely aware of the gender stereotypes of her times and she did not deny the belief that women had a “feeble and weak” body, yet she was able to put forward the most important elements of a warrior that, according to her, are more crucial than the physical strength, typical of men. By saying that she had the “heart and stomach of a King”,

Queen Elizabeth uses the words *heart* and *stomach* to convince her people that she has the stronger emotions and thought processes of a male instead of the weaker emotions and thoughts of a female, and she insists that she will use that masculine side of her when she has to make important decisions for her country.<sup>273</sup>

By saying so, she demonstrated that, despite her gender, she was a strong woman who was capable of running a country.

It is important to remark that, Queen Elizabeth and her predecessors did not deny nor refuse their gender; instead, they were able to use their feminine bodies for political purposes in such a way as to defy the patriarchal system in which they were consciously trapped. They were able to exploit their “sexly weaknesses”<sup>274</sup> – meaning the weaknesses linked to their sex according to the patriarchal society – and to turn them into strengths in order to survive in a man’s world. Elizabeth of York managed to build a peaceful marriage and a long-lasting dynasty by adapting to her present situation and by putting aside her family legacy for peace. Catherine of Aragon exploited the duality of her power as a Spanish princess and an English Queen in order to maintain a stable relationship between her mother country and her country of adoption. Moreover, her ability to reveal herself as a capable monarch at her husband’s absence – as we have seen in the previous chapter – allowed her to gain popularity, that was to last until her fall. Anne Boleyn was able to exploit her femininity to seduce the King and to socially elevate herself and, even though she is mostly remembered for being an adulteress and a witch, her cleverness in achieving power made her one of the best known women in English history, despite the fact that she was Elizabeth’s mother. However, that same femininity upon which she relied was also the cause of her fall as she failed to produce a male heir and her tragedy was to be rooted in English culture by being an inspiration for many fictional works. It was highly probable that Henry VIII would have acted differently with Anne Boleyn if he knew the power her daughter was to achieve. In fact, Queen Elizabeth I can be considered as the apex of the Tudor Queens’ fight against all the prejudices linked to their gender. Her refusal to marry was to elevate her into a sacred sphere, in such a way as to build the myth of the Virgin Queen. The sacred body of the Queen was emphasised by her virginity, which Elizabeth managed to exploit for her public image and for political purposes. She fought against her males’ pressure concerning marriage; at the time,

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<sup>273</sup> BUTLER, A. “Queen Elizabeth I: Warrior Queen”, July 2016, <https://adbearden.wordpress.com/2016/07/20/queen-elizabeth-i-warrior-queen/>, consulted on 1 April 2021.

<sup>274</sup> Queen Elizabeth I in WEIR, A., *op. cit.*, p. 222.

it was inconceivable to leave a woman run a country by herself and her union to a man aimed at keeping her power under her husband's supervision – and this idea was supported by those who witnessed Queen Mary's burning policy. However, her presentation as both a virgin and a King made her public image even more honoured and it became the foundation of her long-lasting remembrance. By accepting and acknowledging the gender mindset of the time, Elizabeth was able "to combat prejudice and underline her position" as "she invariably referred to herself as a prince, comparing herself with kings and emperors."<sup>275</sup> We can affirm that she succeeded in building a respectable image of a female monarch by overcoming the men's prejudices and William Cecil stated that she was "more than a man and, in truth, something less than a woman."<sup>276</sup> Furthermore, she made England a world power and, because of her conservatism and stability, she managed to build a strong nation and such a glory contributed in Elizabeth's remembrance as 'Gloriana'.

So far, we have mostly described the positive elements that made Tudor Queens immortal and that created a myth that contributed in the glory of the country. However, tragedies and extremist policies can also become the object of eternal remembrance for a Queen, leaving a feeling of fear and horror in people's memory. This was the case with Mary I and her burning policy during her reign, which allowed the patriarchal system to become even more wary of women in power. Her reputation as 'Bloody Mary' is due to John Foxe's explanation of the events in his *Book of Martyrs* in which he wrote the following depiction of Queen Mary:

Queen Mary inherited many of the worst qualities of her father, Henry VIII, with none of the virtues of her brother Edward. Educated in the Romish communion, she yielded her conscience to the direction of the priests; cherishing the deadliest bigotry, and exhibiting a mind incessantly haunted with gloomy superstition. She seems to have felt no remorse in shedding human blood, especially in the name of her religion; and hence her reign is justly characterized as "the bloody" in the annals of England.<sup>277</sup>

By reading this, we understand that Foxe established Mary's reputation as we know it today, but it is also true that his aim as Protestant was to emphasise the achievements of the people who shared his beliefs and to denigrate the Catholic leaders and monarchs. Concerning Queen Mary, his judgements towards her character and her reign can actually be justified because of the persecutions of Protestants in a period when their religion had already put its roots in England. However it is important to analyse Mary's life in order to understand her acts.

In fact, Mary had overcome many obstacles in her life and we cannot diminish her power only by relying upon her burning policy, which has become the foundation of her myth in English history.

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<sup>275</sup> WEIR, A., *Ibid.*

<sup>276</sup> William Cecil in *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> FOXE, J., *The Book of Martyrs: a History of the Persecution of the Protestants*, Nicholson & Sons, 1563, p. 317.

Geoffrey Moorhouse, in his journal article and review of Anna Whitelock's *Mary Tudor: England's First Queen* and Eamon Duffy's *Fires of Faith: Catholic England Under Mary Tudor*, wonders whether Mary Tudor actually deserves her reputation for cruelty. According to him, it is important to remember all the events that happened in her life in order to build a judgement over this Queen. In English memory, Mary Tudor only appears as the cruel Queen who burnt almost three hundred Protestants and yet, her life does not summarise to that. She suffered from many injustices in her life such as

the wretchedness of her upbringing, the humiliation of her bastardisation and banishment, her battle to become queen against heavy odds, or the epic sterility of her marriage to the Holy Roman Emperor's son (including the phantom pregnancies which followed disdainful absences by Philip, and the growing threat presented by her half-sister Elizabeth).<sup>278</sup>

It was probably the fall of her mother because of Anne Boleyn that had hurt her most and Mary revealed this by burning Thomas Cranmer, the Archbishop who had married Anne and her father, among the first heretics. By breaking her promise of creating a reign of acceptance for the new faith, Mary made the greatest mistake of her life and her inability to accept the spreading of Protestant ideas in the country made her a victim of her own faith and beliefs. However, it is important for us to remark that, despite her reputation as Bloody Mary following the burning policy, Mary represented the first Tudor Queen who had been able to fight for her Crown – especially during the events concerning Lady Jane Grey – and to be faithful to both her religion and her Spanish origin.

Tudor Queens became the mistress of their image by taking care of it through clothing and charity actions. They all understood their position as female monarchs in a patriarchal system and they managed to create their own story without being shadowed by the presence of a man. Even Queens such as Elizabeth of York, Catherine of Aragon, and Anne Boleyn, who were married to a Tudor King, were able to make history by themselves, thus gaining popularity and respect. In a system dominated by men, sole female monarchs such as Mary and Elizabeth still felt the pressure of their male entourage, but by creating an efficient cooperation of genders, they were able to put into practice their own policies. Under Elizabeth I, as we have seen, long-lasting relationships between the monarch and her statesmen contributed in the stability of the country and, by subverting the codes linked to her gender, Elizabeth managed to overcome all prejudices and to reveal a new face of femininity. These women in power demonstrated their capacity to deal with political and religious

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<sup>278</sup> MOORHOUSE, G., "Burning Question: Geoffrey Moorhouse wonders if Mary Tudor deserves her reputation for cruelty", in *the Guardian*, July 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/jul/04/mary-tudor-anna-whitelock-review>, consulted on 2 April 2021.

matters, in the same way as a King would do, and their fight for power can be considered as an unconscious cry for emancipation before its time.

## **Conclusion**

Tudor women in power in a patriarchal world were able to fully take up their role as female monarchs in a man's world and to impose their power in a period when prejudices and assumptions stained their gender. The Tudor dynasty witnessed a revolution in power from all perspectives and women managed to introduce their own gender revolution by exploiting their powerful position and the same patriarchal system with which they were confronted. From a political perspective, we have seen that the execution of power to govern the country changed drastically as Henry VIII succeeded his father. Of course, as in all monarchies in Europe, the Court was the centre of monarchical power that revolved around the sovereign and it was where the most brilliant and skilful statesmen took the decisions that were to influence the governing of the country. As we have studied in chapter 1, Henry VII's Court was still centred on the King himself as he monitored personally the political actions that were decided, as well as the financial branch of this political power. At his death, however, in 1509, his second son, Henry VIII acceded to the throne and he changed completely the traditional conception of power at Court. It was probably not a voluntary change, but rather a collateral effect of his inability to be involved personally in the governing of the country in the same way as his father was. We know that he was not a business-like man like his father and, because of that, government evolved and more functions were added in order to help the King to govern properly. More tasks were given to the King's councillors who began to share more of their sovereign's power and the Privy Council took a greater importance that was to last until the end of the Tudor dynasty. Within this evolution of government, women had no chance to achieve any political positions and both the financial monitoring of the King's Treasury and the administration of the country were men-centred functions. This was how the patriarchal society worked; men took the decisions and held the power to rule and dominate. In this men's world, women had a very specific function and their gender brought several prejudices and assumptions that were rooted within society since the Ancient times.

First, women were given an inferior position because of the teachings that could be found in the Bible. They came from Eve, who was created from Adam's rib and this already placed women in a submitted position compared to men. Besides, the fact that Eve gave in to the snake's apple stained women's reputation as temptress and sinners. This was the original conception of women that influenced society and, from this religious perspective, women had to be educated in order to be obedient and loyal wives who would be able to produce heirs. This latter was, in fact, the main purpose in a woman's life and, even in the case of Queens, their marital and maternal life was very important. Women were always associated with men and it was therefore impossible to consider a woman alone. For this reason, marriage played a major role from both a religious and political perspective. In the case of women in power, this religious union was arranged to create an alliance

between two countries, as it was the case with Henry VIII and Catherine of Aragon's marriage, or to bring peace and stability after a period of wars, as with Henry VII and Elizabeth of York's. At the same time, it permitted women to achieve the highest power in society and to become legitimate Queens and we can find an example with Anne Boleyn's marriage to the King. Married Queens represented the ideal figure of the virtuous woman taught by religion and their role was fully achieved once they gave birth to male heirs.

In a patriarchal society, in fact, only men could allow the continuity of the family name and, in a monarchy, the production of sons was one of the most urgent issues for a King. This was one of the major concerns in Henry VIII's life and the fact that he underwent six marriages can be considered as a desperate search for the right wife who was able to give him a son. It is clear, therefore, that even women's position in power as Queens could be ephemeral if they did not accomplish their duties as wives. Catherine of Aragon's incapacity to give birth to a son was a crucial event that caused Henry VIII's break with Rome. Her position as Spanish princess and aunt of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, allowed her to fight against Henry's call for divorce in what was to be known as the 'King's Great Matter', which lasted for almost ten years. The consequent break with Rome, followed by the King declaring himself as Supreme Head of the Church, changed the future of England forever as new evangelical ideas that were already spreading throughout Europe were introduced in the country as well.

Tudor Queens played a major role in this religious background and two of them, more specifically, represented a fight for either religious progress or conservation. These Queens were Anne Boleyn and Mary I and their influence in English history was remarkable. If, on the one hand, Anne Boleyn represented one of the patrons who introduced Protestant ideas in England, on the other hand, Mary tried to fight against this by burning those she considered as heretics and against the Catholic faith. Of course, their positions as Queens gave them the possibility to exploit their powers as they wished and their actions influenced the general mindset concerning their gender. In fact, Mary's reign became one of the bloodiest and most traumatising for the English people in such a way that it fuelled patriarchal ideas and it caused more people to beware of women in power. John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* was written by the end of Mary's reign and it was representative of the male perspective towards women.

Tudor women in power in a patriarchal society were always confronted with men and this gender relationship could be either favourable or disruptive to both men and women. The men in question were the main representatives of the institutions with which the sovereigns shared their power in the administration of the country and the main institutions that played major roles were

marriage, Church and government. Each Queen had to find political allies within these institutions in order to keep her position and to achieve her purposes, especially in a period when most of the sovereign's powers were shared and practiced by statesmen or religious people. The influence of the Church from a political perspective was strong as clerics could actually be part of the King's Privy Council. Three of the Tudor Queens found either allies or enemies who were to change their future as Queens. Catherine of Aragon's fight for her marriage underwent many obstacles as Cardinal Thomas Wolsey tried to accomplish the King's wish to divorce and to remain among his favourites. However, his inability to do so was the cause of his fall to which followed Archbishop Thomas Cranmer's rise to power, being the one who married Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn. For this reason, and also for the fact that they shared similar religious beliefs, Henry's second Queen found an ally in Thomas Cranmer and he was to help her in the spread of Protestant ideas within the country. In the same way as Anne Boleyn, Queen Mary I, too, found a precious help in Cardinal Reginal Pole, as he put into practice the Queen's policy concerning the burning of Protestants. During her reign, religion took a greater importance, being Mary a devoted and traditional Catholic Queen and it does not surprise us when we realise that Cardinal Pole had a huge influence in the political issues of the country. Her main purpose was to re-establish Catholicism in England and this was one of her biggest mistakes. The second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was, in fact, directed towards a Renaissance era and Mary's attempt to go back to a more medieval and conservative period was against the national flow of moving forward. Cardinal Pole revealed himself Mary's most important religious and political ally throughout her reign, but, for the other Tudor Queens, men with specific political functions played a major role as part of the monarch's government.

One of the most important statesmen during Henry VIII's reign was Thomas Cromwell and he is considered as the one who revolutionised the political system, being the head behind what Geoffrey Elton called a 'Tudor revolution in government'. Cromwell was also the one who managed to achieve the King's divorce from Catherine of Aragon and to make him the Supreme Head of the Church, so that he did not depend on Rome for national religious issues. For this reason, Cromwell can be considered as an ally to Anne Boleyn, even though his actions had the only purpose to reveal his loyalty to the King. In fact, in the same way as he made Anne become Queen, he was also the one who caused her execution, as Henry wanted to get rid of her. Because of his loyalty to the King only, he managed to be both an ally and an enemy to Anne Boleyn and he demonstrated that men's power was stronger than a Queen's. However, this changed drastically under Elizabeth I's reign, which lasted for almost fifty years, thus revolutionising even more the patriarchal mindset concerning female monarchs. Elizabeth managed to exploit the patriarchal system in order to achieve her purposes and, with her statesmen, she established a relationship based on trust. In this way, she created

a stability at Court that was to give England a strong and efficient balance of power between the sovereign and her councillors.

After having analysed Tudor Queens' relationship with the male representatives of the institutions, we have focused on the way women managed to create their own revolution throughout this century. It was important to highlight the fact that this fight for power did not only put men and women against one another, but it was also a fight that concerned women in power themselves, even though men were still very much involved. We have therefore studied the tensions between Lady Jane Grey and Mary Tudor and between Elizabeth I and Mary Stuart, Queen of Scots. In this fight for power, women were either victims or heroines of their own power and, among these two pairs, only one of them was to succeed. Lady Jane Grey was definitely a victim of her power, being related to the King and thus capable to claim the throne. Her position, however, was exploited by men who wanted to increase their own power and they used Jane for their own purposes. Moreover, her Protestant beliefs made her the perfect candidate in order to continue the reinforcement of the Reformation that had begun under Edward VI's reign. There is evidence that Jane's acceptance of the Crown was imposed on her and that is why she can be considered as a victim of her power. Eventually, Mary Tudor succeeded as her claim was stronger, being Henry VIII's daughter, and, by exploiting her initial popularity, she managed to defeat her Protestant enemies.

Contrary to Lady Jane Grey, Mary Stuart was an active participant in her fight for power against Elizabeth Tudor. Being already a Queen and a married woman, her claim to the throne of England was strong, especially if we consider that at those times the issue of succession was an important state matter that could create tensions. However, Mary's association to the French and Catholic House of Guise made the English be wary of her. Such a suspiciousness had its right to exist, especially when we acknowledge her association to two plots, the Ridolfi and the Babington plot, to which she contributed. Despite her active participation in this monarchical fight for power with her cousin, Mary was a victim of her actions as one of Elizabeth's statesman, Francis Walsingham, sent a letter to Mary himself in order to have the direct evidence that was to incriminate her in these plots. Both Mary I and Elizabeth I managed to impose their own power against their threats and to either defeat or exploit the men's power in order to achieve that.

Tudor Queens revealed their ability to take up their role as female monarchs within a patriarchal society and to have an impact in English history without their association to men. Both Catherine of Aragon and Elizabeth I contributed in their gender revolution by showing their abilities as national commanders during wars. Their presence in dangerous moments, such as the Scottish invasion for Catherine and the Spanish invasion for Elizabeth, demonstrated their fearlessness and



their capacity to personify a war chief, just like a King would do. In the same way, Anne Boleyn managed to impose her own power by socially elevating herself and by exploiting her powerful position to spread Protestantism in England, thus contributing to the changing of the future of England from a religious point of view. Elizabeth of York is mostly remembered for her position as both representative of the House of York and first Tudor Queen. Her power gave Henry VII the legitimacy to claim the throne of England and to initiate the Tudor dynasty that was to last for more than a century. Queen Mary I, too, marked history in her own way, even though her actions took a negative direction. Mary had the 'misfortune' to be too faithful to her Catholic beliefs and her inability to acknowledge the spiritual changing that were happening in England made her take the decisions that traumatised her country.

All these actions allowed these Tudor Queens to mark history and to create myths around their Queenships. They managed to exploit their public image in order to gain popularity and, in order to do so, they used their feminine body, as well as the way it was perceived, as the main tools for that purpose. A female monarch had a symbolic function as a sacred figure in society and that is why the Queens' charity allowed them to be associated with a religious icon. Virtuousness was a very important quality in a female monarch and she had to accomplish it through charity and loyalty to her husband. Elizabeth of York was the one who began this tradition of charity among the Tudor Queens and her daughter-in-law, Catherine of Aragon, followed her in her steps. Besides this public image as a sacred figure, Queens could also use their feminine bodies to achieve their purposes. In this matter, clothing was very important as it was used in order to have a political impact on the people who were to see it. Catherine of Aragon managed to use her clothes in order to influence Henry with a stronger Anglo-Spanish alliance and Elizabeth I's clothes revealed the splendour of her reign and England's powerful position in Europe. From Elizabeth of York and the myth of the 'White Queen' to Elizabeth I as both the Virgin Queen and Gloriana, Tudor Queens were able to impose their powerful positions as women and to be remembered for that.

Tudor women in power in a patriarchal world lived in a period when their gender was very much underestimated as it was considered as the weakest side of society as long as power was concerned. Nonetheless, Elizabeth of York, Catherine of Aragon, Anne Boleyn, Mary Tudor and Elizabeth Tudor managed to challenge the patriarchal system with which they were confronted and each one of them represented an evolution to the concept of woman in power. The climax of this evolution is associated with Elizabeth I who completely turned upside down the 16<sup>th</sup>-century conception of women in power as she decided to refuse marriage, thus disrupting what was considered as the main purpose in a woman's life. These women were all linked to each other and what happened

to one had some influence on the other, as in a chain of events. Their ability to acknowledge the social consensus over their gender gave them the possibility to revolutionise it in their own way.

In a century when patriarchy and gender – as well as social – inequality were taken for granted, Tudor Queens managed to introduce a social awareness concerning women's potential in the world. Today, power is more accessible to women as we live in a society that is slowly directing towards a possible equality of gender and women are given the more and more chance to follow the same education or career as men. Of course, more than four centuries have gone by since the Tudor dynasty and women have undergone many obstacles and many fights throughout this lapse of time. It can be therefore reductive to focus only on our present-day society, since the way women live today is nothing but the result of the blood spilled by other women in order to have the possibility to detain power. Moreover, the meaning of this word has drastically changed compared to Tudor times, especially if we consider the fact that today the monarchy has a more symbolical than a political and active influence in the events. The Queen's power today is limited and her title is not associated with our idea of power.



Figure 29. *Nancy Witcher-Longhorne.*

In fact, government has developed in such a way as to become the real execution of power and women have now been able to take part of it. Starting with Nancy Witcher-Longhorne as the first woman to take a seat in Parliament in 1919,<sup>279</sup> women witnessed a wide range of possibilities for their climb to power and they could also detain the highest power by becoming Prime Minister – Margaret Thatcher was the first woman to become England's PM in 1979.<sup>280</sup> Of course, the possibility to go to



Figure 30. *Margaret Thatcher.*

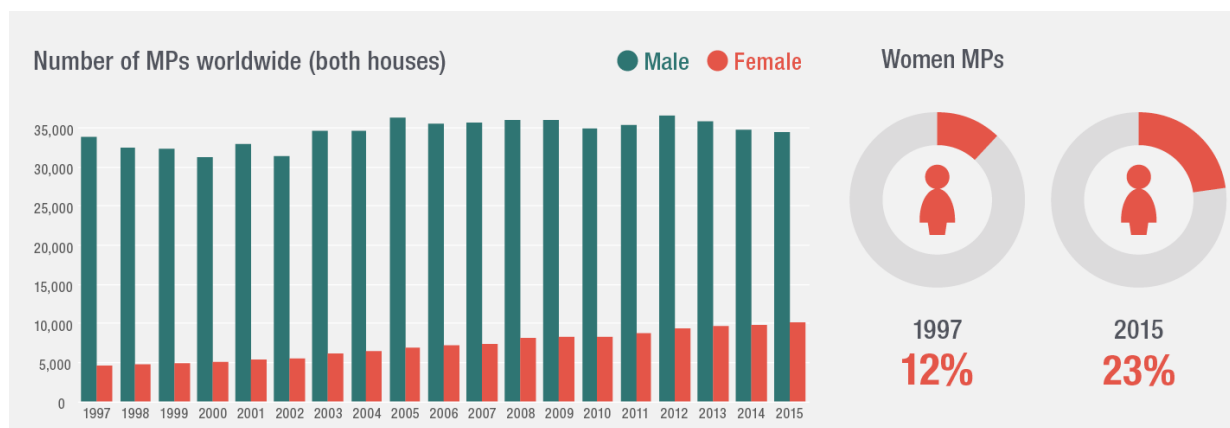
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<sup>279</sup> The first woman elected to Westminster was actually Constance Markiewicz, who, however, did not take her seat because she was an Irish Nationalist. That is why the first one to take up a seat in Parliament in 1919 was American-born Nancy Witcher-Longhorne. It was thanks to her second husband, Waldorf Astor, that she was able to achieve such a position. In fact, she used their connections that were consequent to their good social match to drive her husband away from the family's business, which he apparently hated. She directed him towards politics and she became a major player in her husband's campaign. As his father died in 1919, Waldorf had to renounce to his seat in the House of Commons in order to replace him in the House of Lords and it was at that moment that he suggested that his wife, Nancy, could take up his vacant seat in the House of Commons. Despite the political risks of accepting a woman in Parliament and the problem of Nancy's suitability because of her previous divorce, she eventually accepted to run for the job and succeeded. However, the first years of her career were 'hell' for her as the other members of the House were unwelcoming. Her position in power was, nonetheless, very symbolical as the first woman who could personally make a change through politics: during her career, her priority was welfare issues relating to under-privileged women and children and she changed the legal drinking age from 14 to 18.

<sup>280</sup> Her strength of character, however, led President Mitterand to affirm that she was actually the only man in the English cabinet and this statement is very interesting in terms of gender issue.

university was a crucial factor that helped women from all social classes to have access to a greater chance to achieve power, even though men still remain a majority in those positions of power.

In an article published in 2019, D. Clark affirms that “the United Kingdom ranked fifteenth in the global gender gap index, placing it just behind other European countries such as France and Germany, but it was one of the leading nations for gender equality nevertheless.” In fact, even though men occupy most of the seats in Parliament, “the proportion of female MPs in the House of Commons has been increasing in almost every election since 1979, when it was just three percent, compared with 32 percent in 2017.”<sup>281</sup> The following graphic<sup>282</sup> shows the discrepancy between women and men in Parliament and the increase of women as MPs from 1997 to 2015:



Thanks to this evolution in society, power is mostly open to both men and women, even though, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it was still a white privilege. Our society is constantly fighting to achieve equality and the question of race or ethnicity has recently taken a major importance. In America, black people were still legally discriminated until the 1960s and today racism and social inequality are their every-day reality. Black women were therefore the ones who suffered from the greatest level of discrimination in society, both for their gender and for their skin colour. However, this issue is undergoing an evolution in the social mindset and black women are also given the possibility to access power and an example can be found with Kamala Harris’s election as the American Vice President in 2020. Her success represents a victory of women’s fight to impose their power in a patriarchal world, from both gender and ethnic perspectives.



Figure 31. Kamala Harris.

<sup>281</sup> CLARK, D., “Gender Inequality in the UK”, in *Statista*, August 2019, <https://www.statista.com/topics/5273/gender-inequality-in-the-uk/>, consulted on 26 April 2021.

<sup>282</sup> Source : <https://odi.org/en/about/our-work/women-and-power-overcoming-barriers-to-leadership-and-influence/>.

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