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Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation

Chelyabinsk State University

The Linguistics and Translation Faculty

"The golden age" of Elizabeth I

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## Introduction

Elizabeth I was Queen of England and Ireland from 1558 to 1603, the last of the Tudor monarchs. She never married and consciously styled herself as the Virgin Queen, wedded to the nation, and ruled over England during its "Golden Age". She remains one of the world's most famous and most highly regarded monarchs.

Elizabeth's reign is known as the Elizabethan era, famous above all for the flourishing of English drama, led by playwrights such as William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, and for the seafaring prowess of English adventurers such as Sir Francis Drake. Some historians are more reserved in their assessment. They depict Elizabeth as a short-tempered, sometimes indecisive ruler,[4] who enjoyed more than her share of luck. Towards the end of her reign, a series of economic and military problems weakened her popularity. Elizabeth is acknowledged as a charismatic performer and a dogged survivor, in an age when government was ramshackle and limited and when monarchs in neighboring countries faced internal problems that jeopardized their thrones.



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## 1. Childhood of Elizabeth I

Elizabeth was born on September 7th 1533, the second daughter of King Henry VIII. Elizabeth was something of a disappointment for Henry, who had been hoping for a son to succeed him. Elizabeth was two when her mother, Anne Boleyn, fell from grace and was executed for treason and adultery; the marriage was declared invalid and Elizabeth declared illegitimate. Reports suggest the young girl noticed changing attitudes towards her. However, after Henry fathered a son Elizabeth was brought back into the line of succession, third behind Edward VI and Mary. She received an excellent education, proving very good at languages.

## 2. A Focal Point for Discontent

Elizabeth's position became very difficult under the rule of her siblings. She was first involved, without her knowing, in a plot by Thomas Seymour against Edward VI, and was questioned thoroughly; she remained composed and lived, but Seymour was executed. The situation worsened under the Catholic Mary I, with Elizabeth becoming the focal point for Protestant rebellions. At one point Elizabeth was locked up in the Tower of London, but remained calm throughout. With no evidence found against her, and Queen Mary's husband viewing her as an asset for political marriage, she avoided execution and was released.

## 3. Elizabeth I becomes Queen

Mary died on November 17 1558, and Elizabeth inherited the throne, the third and final of Henry VIII's children to do so. Her procession into London and coronation were masterpieces of political statement and planning, and her accession was treated warmly by many in England who hoped for greater religious toleration. Elizabeth quickly assembled a Privy Council, albeit one smaller than Mary's, and promoted a number of key advisors: one, William Cecil (later Lord

Burghley), was appointed on November 17th and remained in her service for forty years.

#### 4. The Marriage Question and Elizabeth I's Image

One of the first challenges to face Elizabeth was marriage. Advisors, government and the people were keen for her to marry and produce a Protestant heir, and to solve what was commonly considered a need for male guidance; Elizabeth, it appears, was not keen, preferring to maintain her single identity in order to retain her power as Queen and maintain her neutrality in European and factional English affairs. To this end, although she entertained offers of marriage from many European aristocrats to further diplomacy, and had romantic attachments to some British subjects, mainly Dudley, all were eventually turned down.

Elizabeth attacked the perceived problem of a woman ruling, one which had not been solved by Mary, by a carefully maintained display of royal power which built a new style of regal lordship in England. She partly relied on the old theory of the body politic, but partly created the image of herself as the Virgin Queen wedded to her kingdom, and her speeches made great use of romantic language, such as 'love', in defining her role. The campaign was entirely successful, cultivating and maintaining Elizabeth as one of England's best loved monarchs.

#### 5. Religion

Elizabeth's reign marked a change from Mary's Catholicism and a return to the policies of Henry VIII, whereby the English monarch was head of a, largely Protestant, English church. The Act of Supremacy in 1559 began a process of gradual reform, effectively creating the Church of England. While all had to outwardly obey the new church, Elizabeth ensured a measure of relative toleration across the nation by allowing people to behave as they wished internally. This



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wasn't enough for more extreme Protestants, and Elizabeth faced criticism from them.

## 6. Mary, Queen of Scots and Catholic Intrigue

Elizabeth's decision to adopt Protestantism earned her condemnation from the Pope, who gave permission for her subjects to disobey her, even kill her. This inflamed numerous plots against Elizabeth's life, a situation exacerbated by Mary, Queen of Scots. Mary was catholic and an heir to the English throne if Elizabeth died; she had fled to England in 1568 following difficulties in Scotland and was a prisoner of Elizabeth. After many plots which aimed to put Mary on the throne, and advice from Parliament to execute Mary, Elizabeth hesitated, but the Babington plot proved a final straw: Mary was executed in 1587.

## 7. War and the Spanish Armada

England's Protestant religion put it at odds with neighboring Catholic Spain, and to a lesser extent France. Spain was involved in military plots against England and Elizabeth came under pressure from home to become involved with defending other Protestants on the continent, which on occasion she did. There was also conflict in Scotland and Ireland. The most famous battle of the reign occurred when Spain assembled an armada of ships to ferry an invasion force over to England in 1588; English naval strength, which Elizabeth maintained, and a lucky storm shattered the Spanish fleet. Other attempts also failed.

## 8. Ruler of the Golden Age

The years of Elizabeth's rule are often referred to simply using her name - The Elizabethan age - such was her effect on the nation. The period is also called the Golden Age, for these years saw England rise to the status of world power



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thanks to voyages of exploration and economic expansion, and the "English Renaissance" occurred, as English culture went through a particularly rich period, spearheaded by the plays of Shakespeare. The presence of her strong and balanced rule facilitated this. Elizabeth herself wrote and translated works.

## 9. Problems and Decline

Towards the end of Elizabeth's long reign problems began to grow, with consistently poor harvests and high inflation damaging both the economic situation and belief in the queen, as did anger at the alleged greed of court favorites. Failed military actions in Ireland caused problems, as did the resulting rebellion of her last noted favorite, Robert Devereux. Elizabeth, experienced ever more depression, something which had affected her all her life, and declined notably in health, dying on March 24th 1603, having confirmed the Scottish Protestant King James as her heir.

## 10. Reputation

Elizabeth I has drawn widespread praise for the way she cultivated the support of an England who could have reacted badly to the rule of a single, female monarch. She also portrayed herself very much as her father's daughter, fierce if need be. Elizabeth was lavish in her presentation, part of her brilliantly orchestrated campaign to mold her image and retain power. She travelled the south, often riding in the open so people could see her, in order to further the display of power and form a bond. She gave many carefully worded speeches, the most famous given when she addressed troops during the attack of the Spanish Armada, playing on her perceived weaknesses: "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England too." Throughout her rule Elizabeth maintained her control on



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government, remaining cordial with parliament and ministers, but never allowing them to control her.



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## Conclusion

Much of Elizabeth's reign was a careful balancing act, between both factions of her own court as well as other nations. Consequently, and perhaps strangely for such a famous monarch, we know little of what she really thought, so powerful was the mask she constructed for herself, for instance what was her true religion? This balancing act was, however, greatly successful.

Under Elizabeth, the nation gained a new self-confidence and sense of sovereignty, as Christendom fragmented. Elizabeth was the first Tudor to recognise that a monarch ruled by popular consent. She therefore always worked with parliament and advisers she could trust to tell her the truth—a style of government that her Stuart successors failed to follow. Some historians have called her lucky; she believed that God was protecting her. Priding herself on being "mere English", Elizabeth trusted in God, honest advice, and the love of her subjects for the success of her rule. In a prayer, she offered thanks to God that:

‘At a time when wars and seditions with grievous persecutions have vexed almost all kings and countries round about me, my reign hath been peacable, and my realm a receptacle to thy afflicted Church. The love of my people hath appeared firm, and the devices of my enemies frustrate’.





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