

Queen Elizabeth I: The Golden Age

[B2]

La cosiddetta Regina Vergine guidò l'Inghilterra verso la sua epoca più gloriosa. Oltre a preparare l'espansione coloniale del Paese e a condurre le guerre contro il cattolicesimo, Elisabetta I promosse lo sviluppo delle arti e conquistò il consenso dei suoi sudditi.



Elizabeth I was Queen of England from 1558 to 1603, a period subsequently called The Golden Age or the Elizabethan Age. This was a time when England became a major European power in politics, commerce and the arts. It was also a period of great danger at home and abroad, but Elizabeth's mixture of courage, astuteness and majestic [self-displays](#) inspired a powerful loyalty and unity from her subjects.

MOTHER BEHEADED

Elizabeth was the daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife, Anne Boleyn. Henry had Boleyn executed before Elizabeth was three. Elizabeth's own position was precarious for many years, but she finally came to the throne on 17 November 1558, aged twenty-five. A woman [ruler](#) in a patriarchal world, Elizabeth had to create a new model of governing, in which she combined imperious [command](#) with an elaborate cult of love: she was the Virgin Queen, married to her kingdom.

TO MARRY OR NOT TO MARRY

As soon as she became Queen, Elizabeth was faced with the question of marriage and providing an [heir](#) for her dynasty. For decades she would manipulate potential English and foreign [suits](#), always finally refusing marriage — she probably did not want to share her power, or to complicate politics. She also manipulated her rival (male) [advisors](#).

I am already [bound unto](#) an husband, which is the kingdom of England... for every one of you, and as many as are English, are my children and [kinsfolks](#).

THE RELIGIOUS QUESTION

One of Elizabeth's major problems was religion. The country had moved to Protestantism from Catholicism under Henry VIII, and the Queen was now the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. But many people were still Catholic, and Mary, Queen of Scots, was regarded by the Catholic Church as the [rightful](#) Queen of England. The 1560s and 1570s were a time of political intrigue and violence. Finally, Elizabeth [reluctantly](#) took the decision to have Mary executed in 1587. She firmly established the Church of England but imposed a compromise between the two faiths, keeping the peace.

EUROPEAN CONFLICTS

The struggle between Catholics and Protestants also extended to Europe. Elizabeth tried to remain neutral in the religious struggle between Spain and France. In 1588, Spain attempted a naval invasion of Britain, with the Spanish Armada, but was defeated by the Queen's ships in one of the most famous naval encounters in history. Before the battle, Elizabeth made the most significant speech of her [reign](#). Addressing her forces, she said: "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."

A GLORIOUS REIGN

Elizabeth's [reign](#) is one of the most glorious in English history. England emerged as a world power, with voyages of discovery to the Americas and India, which helped prepare the country for colonisation and trade expansion in the future. At home, the arts flourished — Elizabeth was seen attending the first performance of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Through clever public relations, regularly showing herself in majestic [outfits](#) in public, Elizabeth [wooed](#) her people, earning loyalty and her own unique place in history.

Glossary

- **rightful** = legittima
- **reign** = regno
- **outfits** = vestiti
- **wooed** = corteggiare
- **self-display** = auto-esposizione
- **suitors** = pretendente
- **advisors** = consiglieri
- **bound** = legare
- **reluctantly** = con riluttanza
- **command** = comando, dominio
- **heir** = erede
- **unto** = verso
- **kinsfolks** = parenti
- **ruler** = governante
- **feeble** = debole