

The Vestal Flame Portrait of Elizabeth I



A picture revealing that Queen Elizabeth I of England had three children, the two surviving ones becoming known as Francis Bacon and Robert Devereux.

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In this particular engraved portrait from De Larray's *Histoire de l'Angleterre, d'Ecosset d'Irlande* (Rotterdam, 1707), the secrets of Queen Elizabeth I's motherhood are disclosed.¹



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Every portrait in De Larray's four-volume *Histoire de l'Angleterre, d'Ecosse et d'Irlande* is intentionally and systematically descriptive of his subject, with every detail being a careful emblematic and erudite representation of the life and destiny of the historical personages he depicts. As he states in his preface: "the celebrated painter wanted to illustrate the history² of each portrait and, by figures that give it pleasant relief, give at the same time a just idea of the person."

The Queen is represented adorned with pearls, symbol of purity and motherhood, whilst her portrait is enclosed in an oval frame entwined with olives, symbol of peace, prosperity and plenty. This is the Virgin Queen ideal that Elizabeth promoted for nearly all of her regal life, thereby generating a cult of goddess-like virginity related to that of the Virgin Mary. Pertinently, of course, but often overlooked, is the fact that the Virgin Mary had several children, the eldest of whom was Jesus.

Portrayed with the Queen are three children who are clearly being shown as her progeny. The one in the shadowy background, to the left of the Queen, is draped with a shroud and in the act of dowsing the vestal flame upon the altar—the temple fire that, in ancient Rome, was tended and kept burning by chaste vestal virgins. The other two children are in the forefront, in the light, touching and looking at each other as close friends joined in common purpose, whilst directly behind and above them is the Queen, overlooking them. One of these two children, seated higher than the other, wears a paludamentum and holds up in his right hand the palm branch of victory. The paludamentum is a type of cloak held by a clasp on the right shoulder that was worn by Roman military commanders and, after the reign of Augustus, by the Emperor only. The other child, seated lower, is not vested with such a cloak, but holds in his right hand some ears of wheat and in his left hand a rudder and helm. The symbolism is perfect for identifying these children.

The shadowy, shrouded child is clearly meant to signify the Queen's first-born—a child who was either still-born or died early, and who was the result of her first sexual affair that took away her virginity, with his conception and birth being covered up and denied. This almost certainly refers to the child that many people suspected had been conceived by Elizabeth as a result of her young teenage affair during 1547-8 with the adulterous Thomas Seymour, Lord Admiral, uncle of the boy-king Edward VI and brother of Edward Seymour, Lord Protector of England.

The child holding the ears of wheat and a rudder and helm portrays Elizabeth's second-born and eldest living son, Francis, who was adopted by Sir Nicholas Bacon, Lord Keeper of the Great Seal, and his wife Lady Anne Cooke, a leading Lady-in-Waiting to Queen Elizabeth. The ears of wheat are emblematic of the Classical Mysteries, as also of the Christian Mysteries. They are also used in Freemasonry as a symbol of the 2nd degree of initiation, which involves a study of the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences and of the Winding Stairs of initiation. Bacon's magnum opus, *The Great Instauration*, is all about developing the arts and sciences in a morally good way, to glorify God and do good in the world, and to know the summary (universal) law of love by means of discovering, understanding and practicing it. He wrote that he was going the way of the Ancients and using the Initiative Method and Acroamatical and Enigmatical way of delivery, which discloses and unveils the Mysteries of Knowledges to the

Sons of Wisdom but excludes the profane vulgar. He also, as the second St Alban (Viscount St Alban), became the founder and first Grand Master of modern Speculative Freemasonry. As Ben Jonson said of Bacon: "Thou stand'st as if some mystery thou didst!"³ The rudder and helm identify Bacon as the helmsman of the kingdom, which was his role as Lord Chancellor, second only to the King (the captain). In the words of Pierre Amboise, who wrote the first *Life* of Francis Bacon: "he saw himself destined one day to hold in his hands the helm of the kingdom ...".⁴

The child holding the palm branch perfectly represents Elizabeth's third-born child, Robert, who was adopted by the Devereux family, became the 2nd Earl of Essex, and was made commander-in-chief of several military-naval expeditions and, finally, Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, in charge of Elizabeth's armies. He chased after military victory and fame, became the people's hero and Elizabeth's favourite, but ultimately ended up as a martyr in many people's eyes when he raised an unsuccessful rebellion against the Queen and her Council, and was tried and executed for treason.

The big question is, is there any corroborating evidence that these children might indeed have been the natural-born children of Elizabeth Tudor, Queen Elizabeth I? The answer is, yes, and especially so in respect of Francis Bacon.

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Endnotes

¹ Queen Elizabeth 1 with children ('Vestal Portrait'), engraved by Adriaen van der Werff, published in Isaac de Larrey's *Histoire d'Angleterre, d'Ecosse, et d'Irlande* (Rotterdam, 1698). Two parts published by Reinier Leers in 1697-1698, covering the history from Henry VII to James I (Vol. 2 contains QE to James I).

² French: historier, 'to give the history of'.

³ Ben Jonson, 'On Lord Bacon's Birth-day,' LXIX, *Miscellaneous Poems, Underwood* (1640).

⁴ Pierre Amboise, 'Discourse on the Life of M. Francis Bacon, Chancellor of England,' *Histoire Naturelle de Mre. Francois Bacon, Baron de Verulan, Vicomte de Saint Alban et Chancelier d'Angleterre* (Antoine de Sommerville, Paris, 1631).