



Philip's Phoenix: Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke

Margaret P. Hannay

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In contrast to previous studies that have portrayed Mary Sidney as a demure, retiring woman, this biography shows that she was actually an outspoken and dynamic figure. Basing her work on primary sources including account books, legal documents, diaries, and family letters, Hannay shows that Sidney was a vibrant, eloquent, self-assertive woman who was deeply involved in Protestant politics. Although she did confine her writings to appropriately feminine genres, she called herself "Sister of Philip Sidney" to establish a literary and political identity. As a Phoenix rising from her brother's ashes, she transcended gender restrictions by publishing her brother's writings, by writing and translating works which he would have approved, by assuming his role as literary patron, and by supporting the cause for which he died. Hannay also reveals--via court cases--that in her final years the countess turned from literary to administrative responsibilities, contending with jewel thieves, pirates, and murderers.

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