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## Mildred Cooke Cecil

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# Mildred Cooke Cecil

## **Abstract**

Married to William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth's chief advisor, Mildred Cooke Cecil occupied a rare position in Elizabethan England. She traveled in the inmost circles of high politics and occasionally participated directly in political, typically international, situations. Born on 25 August 1526 to Sir Anthony Cooke and Lady Anne Fitzwilliam, Cooke Cecil became one of the most famous learned women in England during and even after her lifetime. Elizabethan educator Roger Ascham lauded Cooke Cecil for being able to read Greek as easily as English. She had proven this skill by translating Greek works by the early church fathers, St. Basil and St. Chrysostom. A few years after she married Cecil (on 25 December 1545), she offered her translation of a sermon by Saint Basil to Anne Stanhope Seymour, duchess of Somerset, wife to the lord protector of England.

## **Disciplines**

European History | European Languages and Societies | Literature in English, British Isles

## **Comments**

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### Cecil, Mildred Cooke (1526–1589)

*Member of Elizabeth I's court, known for her humanist education and as an expert reader and translator of Greek and Latin texts*

Married to William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth's chief advisor, Mildred Cooke Cecil occupied a rare position in Elizabethan England. She traveled in the inmost circles of high politics and occasionally participated directly in political, typically international, situations. Born on 25 August 1526 to Sir Anthony Cooke and Lady Anne Fitzwilliam, Cooke Cecil became one of the most famous learned women in England during and even after her lifetime. Elizabethan educator Roger Ascham lauded Cooke Cecil for being able to read Greek as easily as English. She had proven this skill by translating Greek works by the early church fathers, St. Basil and St. Chrysostom. A few years after she married Cecil (on 25 December 1545), she offered her translation of a sermon by Saint Basil to Anne Stanhope Seymour, duchess of Somerset, wife to the lord protector of England.

In 1558, the Cecils entered a new phase of political prominence when Elizabeth I ascended the throne and appointed Cecil as principal secretary. This new status, coupled with Cooke Cecil's impressive mind, prompted political figures to request her advice and support. In the years surrounding the Treaty of Edinburgh (1560), Cooke Cecil corresponded with Scottish Protestant leaders on issues that required such secrecy that trusted messengers conveyed the details. In 1567, Queen Elizabeth acknowledged Cooke Cecil's familiarity with Scottish politics (and her experience as a mother) by choosing her to talk with Lady Lennox when her son, Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, was murdered. In October 1573, Cooke Cecil used her political prowess in a Latin letter to her cousin, Sir William Fitzwilliam, when he was the target of slander as lord deputy of Ireland.

Following Saint Basil's advice against pride, Cooke Cecil avoided public notice. She never published her translations. She engaged ac-

tively in philanthropy, giving to the universities and the local poor, but often so quietly that even her husband did not know of her generosity until after her death on 4 April 1589. Such modesty has shrouded Mildred Cooke Cecil in relative silence.

*Linda Shenk*

*See also* Elizabeth I; the subheadings Greek Learning and Women; Latin Learning and Women (under Education, Humanism, and Women); the subheading Letter Writing (under Literary Culture); Translation and Women Translators.

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### Cereta, Laura (Cereto; 1469–1499)

*Humanist and feminist, author of a Latin autobiographical letterbook and a comic dialogue*

Laura Cereta was born into an urban, upper-middle-class family in Brescia in 1469. She was the daughter of Silvestro Cereto, an attorney and magistrate in Brescia, and Veronica di Leno, whose brother's noble pretensions Cereta mocked. But almost everything we know about Cereta comes from the colorful image she crafted for herself in her own autobiographical letters. She learned Latin grammar and "to draw pictures with a needle" from the nuns at a convent, where she lived from ages seven to nine, wandering its secret passages "under lock and key." She was not educated by her father or by a male tutor but by women. The eldest of six children, Cereta was soon saddled with her siblings' care. But every night, when the labors of the day were done and her sisters and brothers were put to bed, Cereta continued her studies, savoring the