DAVID LOADES

HENRY VIII

Court, church and conflict

FROM RENAISSANCE prince to bloated monarch, Henry VIII dominated his country and court for almost 40 years. Destined for the centre stage of Europe, united with the royal line of Aragon, Henry's dramatic break with the Church of Rome led his kingdom into years of turmoil. Yet the headstrong monarch was also a shrewd operator who managed the powerful personalities around him to build one of the most momentous—and controversial—of English reigns.

Henry VIII explores the fluctuating, often fraught relationship between the king and his court, his Church and his people. It reveals the strategies that bolstered Henry's power, from the shaping of his royal image to the treatment of key players such as Wolsey, Cromwell, Fisher and More, to navigating the shifting alliances of continental Europe. The compelling narrative charts the king's struggles—against northern rebels, the religious establishment, the 'wild Irish' and, vitally, to secure the survival of his Tudor dynasty. David Loades also probes the nature of the man behind the monarch, not least his complex religious beliefs, and dashes some modern misconceptions about Henry the tyrant, or Henry the gullible, or Henry the feckless slave to sexual appetite.

Illustrated with full colour portraits and original documents from the National Archives, this is a fascinating portrayal of an iconic king in his realm.

Front cover: Henry VIII, attributed to Joos van Cleve (*c.*1485–1540/1). The Royal Collection © Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.
Back Cover: Illuminated initial from Coram Rege rolls in The National Archives (TNA KB 27/1096).

Preface

HENRY VIII has always been a little larger than life. Physically he was a very big man, and in later life gross, but that is not really the point. The image that Holbein created for him is still the first that springs to mind when the word 'king' is mentioned. He is notorious, even among those with the most minimal knowledge of English history, for having had six wives, two of which he executed. Those with slightly more retentive memories may recall that he removed the Church of England from the papal jurisdiction, and brought to an end almost a thousand years of English monasticism. To his contemporaries he was awe-inspiring, even terrifying, and to later historians either a blood-thirsty tyrant or a great national leader, according to taste or prejudice. His admirers have credited him with the foundation of parliamentary government and the Royal Navy; his detractors have accused him of cultural vandalism upon a gigantic scale. The one thing that no one has done with Henry VIII—not even Jane Austen—is to ignore him.

Studies of different aspects of his life and reign are legion. Peter Gwyn has examined his relationship with Thomas Wolsey, Richard Marius his relationship with Thomas More, and Diarmaid MacCulloch his relationship with Thomas Cranmer. John Guy has examined Wolsey's influence on Henry and the country, and Geoffrey Elton that of Thomas Cromwell. Each of these works, and particularly the last, has stirred up controversy among historians that has rumbled on for years. Henry's various marriages have been picked over even more industriously. Garrett Mattingly's classic work on Catherine of Aragon is now over sixty years old, but has not been replaced. Eric Ives has written two excellent and exhaustive studies of Anne Boleyn; Anne has been approached from a different angle by Wretha Warnicke, who has also written on Anne of Cleves. The brief and tragic career of Catherine Howard was examined many years ago by Lacey Baldwin Smith, while much more recently Susan James produced a biography

of Catherine Parr. Henry's marriages in general, and the succession problem that they reflected, have been written about in a more popular vein by David Starkey, Antonia Fraser and myself. Novels, plays, films and TV dramas based upon the lives of Henry's various wives and mistresses are numerous, while Beverly Murphy has written an excellent study of his illegitimate son, Henry FitzRoy. Almost every Tudor historian of repute has written about Henry, or some aspect of his career. The best biography was written in 1968 by Jack Scarisbrick. More recent research has to some extent dated it, and the appearance of a new edition in 2000 created opportunities for revision that were unfortunately not taken. Nevertheless it remains the standard work. In 2005 George Bernard, a scholar with a notable track record in early 16th-century studies, approached Henry from a slightly different angle. The king, he argued, has been too often overshadowed by his ministers and servants. The English Reformation was not created by Cranmer, or Cromwell, much less by imperfectly visible ecclesiastics and preachers, but by the king himself. This thumping assertion of the royal supremacy will not, of course, be the last word on the subject. Some writers have already expressed reservations, and the debate about Henry's religion, no less than the debates about his marriages and his foreign policy, will persist as long as the Tudors continue to fascinate us.

This book is not intended to emulate professors Bernard or Scarisbrick, much less Elton or MacCulloch. It is, I hope, based on sound research and a great deal of thought, but the intention is to offer some useful perspectives on Henry for the benefit of those who find him interesting but who have no specialist knowledge of the period. In one respect it also differs from its predecessors. Henry's reign saw an enormous increase in the quantity of surviving documentation. There are chronicles, narratives and State Papers of various kinds in unprecedented profusion. The papers of those arrested for treason, such as Thomas Cromwell, were preserved, and the records of the new courts, such as Augmentations, survive. The narrative here is supported by a selection of these documents, which I hope will not only illustrate some of the points being made, but also convey a flavour of this unique period in English history.

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