

theology to Henry, I am less concerned with the context aspects of the Great Matter, which have been thoroughly explored by other scholars. My own work has been largely on the King's marriages, and on military developments, particularly the navy, and that will be obvious from the pages which follow. I have also been specifically guided by the work of others, most notably of Helen Miller, Mervyn James and, more recently, Eric Ives and George Bernard. In writing this book, it has struck me forcibly what an extraordinary person the King was, and how difficult it is to get inside the minds of renaissance men. Personal monarchy is, and has been for many years, alien to our political mindset. Preoccupied with democracy, we tend to forget how important it was for Henry VIII to build on the support of the gentry. Interest in his opponents has also detracted from our appreciation of just how much support he had, particularly towards the end of his reign. Henry thought of himself as enjoying a direct relationship with God, but he was also aware that God sometimes spoke through the people. I hope that I have succeeded in doing justice to this complex and compelling man.

David Loades
Burford, August 2010

HENRY VIII
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PP 9-28.

INTRODUCTION: THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF A KING

Our King does not desire gold or silver, but virtue, glory, immortality ... (Lord Mountjoy, 1509)

Ricco, feroce et cupido di Gloria ... (Nicolo Machiavelli, 1513)

Both these very different observers noticed one outstanding characteristic of Henry VIII – his desire for glory, or reputation. It was as true in 1547 as it had been at the beginning of his reign, and was to enjoy a long and vigorous afterlife. Thanks largely to his own actions, he has remained one of the most fascinating of English kings, and speculation about his motives and his effectiveness is as vigorous today as it has ever been. Henry was passionately concerned about his own image, and thanks to his employment of Hans Holbein as his court painter, his magnificence and (largely spurious) self-assurance has communicated itself down the centuries.¹ He has been a hero and a villain; a lecherous tyrant and a constitutional monarch; ‘bluff King Hal’ and a serial wife-killer. The one thing that no serious student of the sixteenth century can do to Henry VIII is to ignore him.

The construction of his image began, not only in his own lifetime, but before he had even come to the throne. It was visual and ceremonial, and designed to support the dynasty through the creation of honours. In

