



*Henry VIII and the Court:
Art, Politics and Performance,*
Thomas Betteridge and
Suzannah Lipscomb
(Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

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The 500th anniversary of the accession of King Henry VIII of England saw a flurry of exhibitions, documentaries and publications celebrating the king and his reign. The seventeen essays in this collection are the result of one such celebration: the “Henry VIII and the Tudor Court: 1509-2009” conference that was held at Hampton Court Palace in 2009. These essays are intentionally interdisciplinary and diverse in scope to both revisit familiar subjects and address gaps in the history of Henry VIII. The contributions are thematically divided into seven sections: “Writing about Henry VIII”, “Material Culture”, “Images”, “Court Culture”, “Reactions,” “Performance”, and “Afterward”.

G.W. Bernard’s introductory essay offers a unique autobiographical perspective of how his views and interpretations about Henry have evolved during his academic career. In “Reflecting on the King’s Reformation”, Bernard offers many suggestions that the other essays in this collection support. Primarily Bernard’s Henry was not lazy and dim-witted, but was actually the man making decisions who got others (Wolsey, Cromwell, etc.) to act for him. For Bernard, Henry was no “Bluff King Hal,” but a tyrant who was at the same time both charming and ruthless.

Following Bernard, the remainder of the essays alternate between revisiting old topics and offering new directions for scholarship. Tatiana C. String argues that the old cliché that Hans Holbein’s portraits were courtly propaganda is inaccurate. Through examination of the Whitehall Mural, she concludes that Holbein’s Henry was not a frozen likeness, but a construction of “royal masculinity and dynastic vigour” (141). Likewise, Brett Dolman reassesses the portraits of Henry’s six queens. Dolman challenges the practice of attempting to deduce characteristics of Henry’s queens from their portraits, since often it is hard to determine when the portraits were painted or even if they are really of the queen in question. Like String, he concludes that character cannot be determined from a painting in the same way dress, jewelry, and symbolism can be evaluated.

Thomas S. Freeman revisits Katherine Parr’s accusation of heresy in John Foxe’s 1570 edition of the *Book of Martyrs* to ascertain its accuracy. Freeman concludes that some details are verifiable and others are plausible, but the involvement of Stephen Gardiner is neither. Therefore, Freeman believes that though the incident did happen it did not unfold in quite the way depicted by Foxe, making the *Book of Martyrs* a reliable source but one that must be read critically for discrepancies. Suzannah Lipscomb re-evaluates one of the most debated topics of Henry VIII’s reign: the fall of Anne Bo-

leyn. For Lipscomb, Anne's fall must be understood as a gender crisis, in that Anne may not have been guilty of sexual crimes against the king, but she was guilty of being a reckless female, thereby forcing Henry to act swiftly and harshly to protect his manhood.

Other essays successfully present new areas of study for Henrician England. Glenn Richardson assesses the practice of gift-giving at the Field of Cloth of Gold. Not only was the gift exchange between Henry VIII and Francis I an important social custom but also in this instance it was used as a weapon by the two kings to demonstrate to each other their wealth and honor. This is a subject he further develops in his 2014 full-length monograph, *The Field of the Cloth of Gold*. Kent Rawlinson argues that architecture, as represented in Henrician art, is under-studied compared to dress, posture, portraiture, or even physical architecture of the reign. Tudor buildings in art cannot be thought of only in terms of wealth and display, but "consciously employed" in Tudor art and image making (95). Susan Wabuda, Eamon Duffy, and Susan Brigden all offer fresh perspectives regarding the importance of Cardinal Pole and international diplomacy.

Altogether these seventeen essays point out the shifts and revisionist themes that have been taking place in Henrician scholarship since the 1980s but are only now being tied together to provide new directions for research and important revisions to older interpretations. The most successful essays tend to be those that revisit older subjects and place them within the newest historiography of gender, religion, and gift-giving. For example, all scholars of Katherine Parr will have to consider Freeman's re-evaluation. This is, therefore, a valuable collection and a suitable starting place for further revision of Henrician scholarship, as the editors' introduction succinctly lays out areas for further research. By incorporating art, politics, and performance, this volume successfully reconsiders Henry VIII at this important historical junction. This collection effectively demonstrates how Henry needs to be placed centrally in the history of his reign and cannot be considered a weak and easily-manipulated king. Henry was not a malleable man, but a tyrant who controlled his own affairs while letting his contemporaries think otherwise.

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