



# Henry VIII and History

*Thomas S. Freeman*

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Henry VIII remains the most iconic and controversial of all English Kings. For over four-hundred years he has been lauded, reviled and mocked, but rarely ignored. In his many guises - model Renaissance prince, Defender of the Faith, rapacious plunderer of the Church, obese Bluebeard-- he has featured in numerous works of fact and fiction, in books, magazines, paintings, theatre, film and television. Yet despite this perennial fascination with Henry the man and monarch, there has been little comprehensive exploration of his historiographic legacy.

Therefore scholars will welcome this collection, which provides a systematic survey of Henry's reputation from his own age through to the present. Divided into three sections, the volume begins with an examination of Henry's reputation in the period between his death and the outbreak of the English Civil War, a time that was to create many of the tropes that would dominate his historical legacy. The second section deals with the further evolution of his reputation, from the Restoration to Edwardian era, a time when Catholic commentators and women writers began moving into the mainstream of English print culture. The final section covers the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which witnessed an explosion of representations of Henry, both in print and on screen.

Taken together these studies, by a distinguished group of international scholars, offer a lively and engaging overview of how Henry's reputation has been used, abused and manipulated in both academia and popular culture since the sixteenth century. They provide intriguing insights into how he has been reinvented at different times to reflect the cultural, political and religious demands of the moment; sometimes as hero, sometimes as villain, but always as an unmistakable and iconic figure in the historical landscape.

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