Thomas Betteridge and Suzannah Lipscomb, eds. *Henry VIII and the Court: Art, Politics and Performance.*

Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013. xviii + 328 pp. $124.95. ISBN: 978-1-4094-1185-7.

Among the most substantial and significant commemorations of the quincentenary of Henry VIII's accession to the throne was the 2009 conference "Henry VIII and the Tudor Court: 1509–2009" at Hampton Court Palace. This setting afforded an ideal location to reconsider Henry's legacy in a meeting that included a plenary lecture in the Great Hall, surrounded by tapestries Henry himself had commissioned, and a Tudor music concert in the palace's Chapel Royal. This volume collects the proceedings of the conference and provides a road map, as it were, for much of the exciting work now being conducted on the king, his court, and his reign. Anyone interested in this subject will need to have this book on the shelf.

Scholars will find much here that delights. The editors' introductory essay rightly describes the volume's ability to "expand the range of sources and paradigms" (3) for the study of this subject, and they are equally correct that it "should change our very ways of thinking about Henry VIII and his court" (6). G. W. Bernard's opening essay on the Henrician Reformation concludes by contrasting the image of Henry the tyrant with that of "Bluff King Hal," which has "succeeded in deceiving the world" for "much too long" (26). Henry's reign is in many ways a study in contrasts, and this collection very admirably captures these diverse viewpoints by including essays devoted to material culture, images, court culture, reactions, and performance. Perhaps unusual in a collection of this kind is that not a single essay falls flat. All contain fresh, compelling research and challenge readers to think again about elements of this subject that we thought we understood. Steven Gunn's peroration to the book, for instance, observes vividly, and quite correctly, that 2009 also represented the quincentenary of the death of Henry VII, but "hardly anyone noticed" because, compared to his father, "Henry VIII looms disproportionately large" (316–17). Among the virtues of this collection are those essays that document contemporary opinion of Henry's monstrosity, an opinion that was much more entrenched than earlier historians and literary scholars have been aware. The book very much rises to the editors' challenge that we must grapple with why Henry's reign contains "violence, despair and, at times horror," coupled with outstanding cultural achievement (6).

That achievement has to a degree always been central to our understanding of the Tudor era. It is the gruesome, atrocious Henry that now comes into much sharper focus. Once the preserve of Roman Catholic historiography, the figure of the tyrant now is central to our understanding of the reign. During Henry's final decade, as Maria Hayward reminds us here, the king enjoyed a reputation for avarice as well as ruthlessness (41). Susan Brigden's contribution draws our attention to an early seventeenth-century fresco located in the charterhouse of San Martino, Naples, in which Henry supervises the execution of English

Carthusians while dressed as the Great Turk. Thanks to the work of Eamon Duffy, some of which appears in this book, we have gained substantial understanding of the influence of Reginald Pole and his *De unitate* (1536) upon later historical writings. Pole's book, which Cromwell called a "detestable booke, where one lye lepeth in every lyne" (208), is today infrequently read. At the same time, evangelical iconographies of this king emerge as more complex than before. In his chapter, Kent Rawlinson argues that architectural imagery in portraits of Henry VIII combines with other iconographical elements to create complex symbolic effects that go far beyond merely expressing Tudor power. Among other images, he discusses Robert Pyte's *Apotheosis of Henry VIII* (1546), which contains a representation of Henry VIII eating a book in an allusion both to the Johannine Apocalypse and to the figure of the scroll-eating Ezekiel from the Old Testament. *Henry VIII and the Court* challenges readers to assess more thoroughly the precedents, good and bad, used by contemporaries to understand Henry's rule.

Space does not permit a similar survey of the rich insights offered by every essay in this collection. Contributions ranging from gift giving to Anne Boleyn's fall, from court conspiracy to drama and prison poetry, from royal progresses and medicine to portraits of Henry's queens, and more — all contain important new insight and have much to teach. *Henry VIII and the Court* lays to rest G. R. Elton's colorful description of Henry as "a bit of a booby and a bit of a baby." In its place it offers a highly complex, even contradictory figure who occupied a complex and ambivalent world. These essays shape directions for the study of this subject that will be viable for many years to come.

MARK RANKIN
James Madison University