Henry VIII before Jonathan Rhys Meyers:
A Study of the Changing Image of Henry VIII during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

A thesis submitted to the Department of History,
Miami University, in partial fulfillment of the Requirements for Honors in History.

by
LiMin Hang
May, 2010
Oxford, Ohio
Introduction

“Divorced, beheaded, died, divorced, beheaded, survived.” This popular mnemonic describes the fates of the six wives of King Henry VIII of England who reigned England from 1509 to 1547. In the thirty-eight years that Henry VIII sat on the throne of England, he divorced himself from two wives as well as the Roman Catholic Church, beheaded two more wives along with hundreds of other people and created a legend of ruthlessness and romance which thrives in popular memory today. Although he accomplished much during his reign-the legal union of England and Wales, the establishment of the Church of England and the expansion of the Royal Navy- Henry is ultimately remembered as a grossly overweight bully with a nasty temper who ran through his wives like water. The drama, romance and violence of his reign have captured the attention and imaginations of people since the early seventeenth century. There have been countless movies and novels produced that center on the volatile personality of Henry VIII and his tumultuous relationships with women, presently his life is even the subject of a successful drama series on Showtime. The popularity of these fictional works has mythologized Henry VIII and his court, thereby obscuring them.

Henry VIII lived in a time of transition when changing loyalties, dynastic instability and betrayal were not uncommon practices. His reign marked the beginnings of early modern Europe; his personal and political decisions dramatically changed court politics and the monarchial structure of the English monarchy. The sheer amount of public interest in Henry VIII demands that studies should be made in order to fully understand the impact of his reign in history.
Even during Henry VIII’s lifetime, aspects of his personality and reign were already becoming romanticized, and common misconceptions were solidified into truths that would be retold throughout the following centuries after his death. As early as the Stuarts (1603-1715), history and popular memory bought the idea of Henry as an overweight bully, tyrant and wife-killer. Popular conceptions of Henry’s court and those closest to him were created, such as the Sainted Queen Katherine of Aragon, the witch Anne Boleyn with her extra finger and the greedy, conniving nobility who created court factions for their own gain. Only recently have historians begun to step back and take another look at Henry VIII and his court; some have come up with drastically different conclusions.

During the twentieth century, scholars have traditionally portrayed Henry VIII to be a king who outwardly seemed to be strong, brutal and in control of his court, but at times was highly susceptible to outside influences. Since the 1970’s, J.J. Scarisbrick’s portrayal of Henry VIII is accepted by most modern historians. His interpretation of Henry VIII depicted the king as a fickle, indecisive king who, although brutal to his enemies, was not as bloodthirsty as painted by previous histories and living memory. His work, *Henry VIII*, is considered one of the most comprehensive works on Henry VIII in modern scholarship, and typically serves as the basis for most of the specialized studies on Henry produced during the later half of the twentieth century.¹ Another noted Henrician historian, David Starkey, has produced many works and a television series centered on the Tudor family. In his *The Reign of Henry VIII*, Starkey follows

Scarisbrick’s lead concerning the monarch. He argues that although Henry VIII had an outward appearance of a strong king, his volatile personality led to factionalism within his own court that was unseen during his father’s reign. These two authors take on the more traditionalist view of concerning the monarch and his reign, more recently other historians have come up with different interpretations of Henry.²

Besides attributing important events of Henry VIII’s reign to his unpredictable personality, historians have also looked to Henry’s desperate attempts to procure a legitimate male heir, a strong desire to follow his moral conscience and the ability to appoint good administrators as the basis of the most important and history-changing decisions of his reign. Historian Susan Brigden argued that Henry VIII’s political and personal decisions were based upon his theological cogitations, a strong desire to appease his own conscience, and an obsession to procure a legitimate male heir in her work New Worlds, Lost Worlds: The Rule of the Tudors, 1485-1603.³ Michael Graves, in his Henry VIII: A Study in Kingship, portrayed Henry VIII as a master “image maker” who possessed the ability to mask the realities and harmful effects of his kingship. An example includes the problems which resulted due to Henry’s desires to obtain a male heir and the drastic consequences these desires had on religion and the Catholic Church in England. Graves also stated that although Henry VIII’s power was exercised in increasingly cruel ways as a result of these desires, he knew how to appoint good administrators...

ministers and administrators to follow through with his bidding. These historians looked to Henry’s own desires and abilities as the causations for the important events of his reign.

Historians have also turned to Henry’s own susceptibility to court factions and the nobility’s ability to sway his political opinions and personal desires; however, they do debate on whether Henry himself was in control or was a puppet of the powerful nobility in his court. For the most part, historians agree that Henry was in charge, dissent typically occurred in the discussion of exactly how much control he had as well as the nature of his authority. John Guy’s *Tudor England* maintained that although Henry VIII’s ministers and courtiers engaged in constant intrigue and competition for political favor and advancement, in the end it was Henry who remained the ultimate source of political power. Helen Miller’s *Henry VIII and the English Nobility* suggests that the reasons behind Henry’s decisions to ennable and elevate particular individuals throughout the course of his reign were based on a desire to preserve the nobility and their historical roles, but also to increase royal power at the same time. Lucy Wooding argues that more emphasis should be placed on Henry VIII’s powerful personality than on his nobility. She held that Henry’s kingship was an intensely personal matter in which his personality alone was central to all the key developments of his reign.

Finally, historians have been looking at Henry VIII’s reign within the grander sixteenth-century European scale. Using Baldassare Castiglione’s *Book as a Courtier* as

---

a guide, scholars seek to place his kingship within a trend toward personal monarchy during the Renaissance. David Loades’ *Henry VIII and His Wives* argues that Henry VIII’s marital career could be considered a story of constitutional manipulation and political rivalries, as well as an example of the workings of the European monarchies during the Renaissance.\(^8\) In *Renaissance Monarchy: The reigns of Henry VIII, Francis I and Charles V*, Glenn Richardson proposes that Henry VIII’s reign could be considered an example of personal monarchy. He emphasizes the importance that the Renaissance culture of nobility and models of princely exemplarity played upon these kings. Seeing the “Renaissance monarchy” not as something new or different from medieval monarchy, he argues that intense social changes merely reshaped the European monarchies of the sixteenth century.\(^9\) Throughout the latter part of the twentieth centuries, historians have struggled with the question of exactly how much Henry VIII was influenced by other members of his court and how the effects of his reign fit into the grander European scheme.

Throughout the centuries, the tumultuous reign of Henry VIII of England has captured both scholarly and public attention. Countless number of biographies and historical accounts has been published about his powerful personality and life. Recently, there has been an influx of scholarly materials published regarding the various aspects of Henry VIII, his court and his political choices. While these scholars seek to develop new perspectives on the life and reign of this unique King and disprove past accounts, my

thesis will look at the sixteenth and seventeenth century accounts produced about Henry VIII mostly disregarded by modern historians. This analysis will explore how Henry VIII’s life was viewed during his own time and during the reigns of his daughter Elizabeth and of the Stuarts.

This thesis seeks to discover what aspects of Henry’s reign might have interested peoples of the sixteenth and seventeenth century and what critiques they might have offered. It will address how historians shifted perceptions regarding Henry and his place in history during his reign and during the 100 or so years after his death. To what extent did social, economic and religious circumstances affect their perceptions and conclusions regarding the monarch? Finally, this thesis will examine how the presentation of history has changed over time and the ways in which these changes reflect contemporary concerns about monarchy, religion and other related issues.

For this thesis, I will be using selected histories from the reigns of Henry VIII, his daughter Elizabeth I, and two of their Stuart successors. I have divided the thesis into three chapters. Chapter one will provide a brief narrative of Henry’s reign and look at the works produced by chroniclers Edward Hall and Charles Wriothesley. Chapter two will examine two authors from Elizabeth I’s reign, Richard Grafton and Raphael Holinshed. The last chapter will focus on documents which were produced under the Stuarts who ruled England during the greater part of the seventeenth century. Historians from this time include Francis Godwin, Richard Baker, Gilbert Burnet, Edward Herbert, and David Lloyd. These authors were selected for their involvement with court politics, both direct and indirect, and the access they would have had to important court records or other
viable sources of information. Their writings were also some of the most popular
published works concerning Henry VIII during their lifetimes, so they serve as useful
tools to determine what issues were considered important at the time of publication.
Finally, these authors were chosen to ensure that there would be a wide range of authors
to represent the different periods covered by this thesis.

Although all of the histories I have selected for this thesis cover Henry VIII’s entire reign, I have chosen to narrow down my analysis to the years 1527-1533. During this time, Henry VIII sought to put aside his Spanish wife, Katherine of Aragon, for her lady-in-waiting Anne Boleyn. Katherine refused to relinquish her title as his wife and queen. The resulting struggle spanned for many years. It finally ended with Henry VIII declaring his marriage to Katherine unlawful, marrying Anne Boleyn and breaking ties with the Roman Catholic Church. These were the most important years of Henry VIII’s reign and the ones that he is most remembered for. They set the stage for Henry VIII’s remaining years as king and irrevocably changed the course of English history. These years have also been of the most interest in popular media today. For those reasons, I decided to narrow down my thesis topics to cover those five years.

The Tudor historians saw their primary functions to be strictly educative and to record historical events to pass along to future generations. Their favorite means to record these histories was in the form of a chronicle. A chronicle consists of historical facts or events which theoretically were recorded as they occurred; unlike historical narratives, chroniclers usually gave equal weight to both important events and local events. Most chronicles were written as “live chronicles” in which one or more authors
added contemporary events immediately after they occurred to the chronicle. Chronicles were immensely popular during the Middle Ages and carried on well into the sixteenth century. Chronicles were often unoriginal; most of the time they lacked serious study and research. More often than not, a chronicler would take another chronicle, merely update the existing information, add new information concerning the more recent past at the end of the work, and call it his own. An example of this borrowing and adding is evident in Richard Grafton’s *Abridgement to the Chronicles* produced in response to Edward Hall’s *Hall’s Chronicle*. In Grafton’s work, he primarily built upon the information presented in *Hall’s Chronicle*.

Besides reworking previously published works, chronicles produced before and during the Tudor era lacked analysis; they did not attempt an interpretation of history. These historians believed that everything that happened in history had already been determined through God’s will and fate; they therefore felt little need to explain occurrences. Rather they simply listed them, sometimes without any commentary. A specialist in early modern British history and the history of historical thought and writing at the University of Alberta, Dr. Daniel Woolf stated in *The Idea of History in Early Stuart England*: “to subordinate fortune or chance to God or providence was not simply a matter of intellectual convenience; it was positively necessary in the context of a Christian cosmology in which God was accepted as the omnipotent First Cause.”

Their histories taught God’s presence in time and stressed how men were to behave in a variety of situations.

---

of situations. They believed that everything was predetermined by God and their works reflected this belief in fate and that everything happened for a reason. In their accounts, the Tudor historians were mostly concerned with the final cause of events and the consequences to which they led. Throughout the reigns of Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, historians closely followed the traditional chronicle format popular in the Middle Ages. These chroniclers were not interested in the overarching effects of the historical events that played out through Henry VIII’s reign. They were however concerned to make sure that the events they recorded were presented in a manner that would satisfy their king.

During the reigns of James I and the later Stuarts, this perception of history began to shift and change. Although the chronicle still existed, authors produced other forms of media and literature which took its place in importance. The medieval chronicle served as a narration of history, a presentation of news and entertainment, the commemoration of great events and finally, the preservation of documents. With the advent and growing popularity of the printing press, other mediums of information began to take on more substantial significance. Newspapers, diurnals and news books began to provide the sort of information about events that chronicles had once tried to preserve.

The context for history writing began to change at the same time. In comparison to the chronicle, there was a new emphasis on the actual author of the text. Although this seems like a small and relatively unimportant detail, in fact this trend drastically altered the way most histories were written and perceived. This shift gave authors more creative license and encouraged them to be more original in their texts. These authors also had to

---

12 Woolf, Reading, 27.
prove their credentials through serious study and a strong educational background. Even as they tried to write in a way that would have broad appeal, they also had to be cautious about the political reception of their published works. Like authors of chronicles, they considered the possible reaction of the monarch to their works. Authors might dedicate their books to a member of the royal family or the ruling monarch himself. Overall, a new culture was created that promoted originality in writing style, authorial status and selectivity over inclusiveness. In this context, the chronicle began to be replaced by histories which began to resemble modern historical narratives.

As a result of this shift in recording and remembering important historical events, people began to change the way they looked at their history. Rather than a source of morals, piety and manners, people began to look to history for models of emulation in world affairs; in other words, readers “shifted their focus from the realm of moral behavior to that of practical action.” At this time, there was a growing feeling amongst the English people that they were living in an unstable world created by the multiple crises of Elizabeth’s final years and the controversies found in the early ears of James’s rule. As a result, people turned to the past for solace and reassurance; however, they could no longer rely on previous notions that everything could be simply attributed to fate. Instead, they began to realize that time changed not only dynasties, but societies and not only individuals but institutions.

13 Kevin Sharpe, Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); 31, 52.
14 Woolf, Idea of history, 76.
15 Woolf, Idea of history, 11.
Stuart historians also used their histories to offer political advice and personal opinions, unlike Tudor historians whose histories merely provided information. They hoped that by critiquing previous monarchs, their works could inspire a change in behavior and attitudes of the present ruler without offending them. Indeed, the Stuart monarchs, especially James I, embraced these histories and even encouraged them to flourish at his court. In this thesis, the Stuart historians spent a lot of their time and attention on Henry VIII’s divorce from Katherine of Aragon and the consequences of his actions. Instead of merely recording the events as their predecessors had, they examined the effects his decisions had on English history, especially concerning the creation of the Church of England.

---

Chapter 1: Narrative and Analysis of Henrician Documents

Henry VIII ruled England from 1509 to 1547. Although he accomplished many things during his reign, Henry is best known for splitting from the Roman Catholic Church and establishing himself as the Supreme Head of the Church of England. The catalyst for these events can be found in his efforts to procure a legitimate male heir to the throne by divorcing the aged Katherine of Aragon and his relationship with her lady-in-waiting Anne Boleyn. Henry’s attempts to annul his first marriage has become popularly known as the “King’s Great Matter.” His quest for divorce lasted from around 1525 to 1533.18

Throughout Henry’s reign, several groups of people recorded their personal thoughts, popular opinions and information about the controversies surrounding the royal court. One of these groups was the Venetian ambassadors who were present at court and reported back to their country the ongoing events. In their letters and accounts, they sought to report all of the important events concerning the divorce which would most affect the court they represented. They also freely injected their own critical biases into their letters and accounts which were sent back to their sovereigns. Their criticism of Henry VIII’s royal decisions could be explained through their Catholic beliefs and their status as outside, and sometimes hostile, observers. A second group was the court chroniclers and historians such as Edward Hall and Charles Wriothesley. They

---

understandably took the side of their King and supported his decisions to divorce Katherine of Aragon, marry Anne Boleyn, and split with the Roman Catholic Church. In their chronicles, these writers focused on the illegality of the marriage between Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon and Henry’s attempt to rectify his mistake of marrying his brother’s widow. They believed that the tainted marriage and subsequent divorce were the primary catalysts which led to England’s split from the Roman Catholic Church.

This chapter will be divided into two sections. The first section will present a narrative of the events which occurred during Henry VIII’s time on the throne of England. The second section will consist of an analysis of the documents produced during and just after his reign. It will examine the letters and accounts written by the Venetian ambassadors present at court, as well as two accounts written by English chroniclers living at court. The ambassadors and chroniclers focused, in different ways, on King Henry’s struggle to divorce Katherine and its aftermath. While the Venetian ambassadors enjoyed more freedoms to write according to their own biases, Henry VIII’s chroniclers were limited by their connections to the royal court and status as an English citizen. They paid more attention to Henry VIII’s humanist nature as an explanation for the English king’s decisions and actions. Also, they were concerned with the dynastic concerns caused by the alleged illegitimacy of his marriage with Katherine of Aragon and the absence of a legitimate male heir rather than the impact of Henry’s subsequent break with the Roman Catholic Church.

Born on the 28th of June in 1491, Henry VIII was the second son of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York. As the second son, he was expected to enter the Church when he
reached adulthood. After the sudden death of his older brother Arthur on February 18, 1503; however, Henry became the heir apparent. Henry VII died on April 21, 1509 leaving his seventeen year old son on the throne of England. One of Henry VIII’s first acts as king was to marry his brother’s widow Katherine of Aragon. Their wedding occurred on June 11, 1509 at the Grey Friars Church in Greenwich. For the marriage to take place, they had to obtain a papal dispensation based on the grounds that Katherine had never consummated her marriage with Arthur. With Katherine theoretically still a virgin, her marriage with Arthur would not have been considered legal. The legality of Katherine’s marriage to Arthur and then her next marriage to Henry would come into question some twenty years later.

After the elaborate coronation of Henry VIII and his queen on June 24, 1509, relatively few events of great importance took place until 1527. During this period, Henry VIII was a perfect example of the Renaissance prince. A newly arrived Italian ambassador to the English court, Mario Savorgnano was very impressed by the young king and his people. In his accounts, he depicted Henry VIII to be “tall of stature, very well formed, and of very handsome presence, beyond measure affable, and I never saw a prince more disposed than this one.” Savorgnano went on to discuss the king’s thorough education and many accomplishments. During this time, Cardinal Thomas Wolsey rose to great power and enjoyed a stronghold over Henry VIII’s policies as Lord Chancellor, the King’s chief adviser. During the early years of his reign, Henry VIII

---

21 Rawdon Brown, ed, *Calendar of State Papers Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, and in other Libraries of Northern Italy: 1528-1533* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867), 287.
engaged in a series of wars with France and later Scotland; Henry VIII longed to partake in both chivalrous and military exploits. Years later, Henry VIII turned his attention to peace making; most notably the Field of the Cloth of Gold masterminded by Cardinal Wolsey.\(^\text{22}\) Despite his later actions, Henry VIII gave all appearances that he was a very devout Catholic and loyal to the papal court in Rome. In 1520, he published \textit{Assertio Septem Sacramentorum} (The Defense of the Seven Sacraments), which refuted the claims made by Martin Luther. In return, he was rewarded by the Pope who gave him the title \textit{Fidei Defensor}, Defender of the Faith.\(^\text{23}\)

By 1527, Henry VIII was growing increasingly frustrated with his marriage to Katherine of Aragon. Although they had six children, only one daughter survived past infancy. By the mid 1520’s it was obvious that Katherine could no longer bear children. Some worried about a looming crisis of succession, among them Henry himself. Although he had at least one bastard son, Henry VIII did not have a legitimate male heir to inherit his throne; his union with Katherine produced only one daughter, Mary. Henry began convincing himself that the absence of a son was a sign of divine retribution for marrying his sister-in-law. He ordered Cardinal Wolsey to open investigations to have his marriage annulled.\(^\text{24}\) Although it is uncertain, many believe that Henry VIII began his relationship with Katherine’s lady-in-waiting Anne Boleyn at this time. Unwilling to relinquish her title as Queen and her marriage, Katherine of Aragon fought Henry VIII’s petition for divorce and dragged out the proceedings for the next six years. Cardinal


\(^{24}\) Wooding, \textit{Henry VIII}, 119-121.
Wolsey fell drastically from power when he was unable to obtain the divorce Henry so desperately wanted. The “King’s Great Matter” finally ended with Henry VIII breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church and establishing the Church of England.

By 1532, Henry VIII, tired of the endless divorce proceedings, decided to take matters into his own hands. Although Rome had not yet granted him his divorce, Henry secretly wed Anne Boleyn, who was already pregnant, on January 25, 1533. He also nominated Thomas Cranmer as the Archbishop of Canterbury to declare his first marriage null and void and officiate his marriage to Anne.25 These events marked the beginning of the English Reformation. The following June, the heavily pregnant Anne was crowned Queen of England and all of Henry’s hopes for a male heir rested in her unborn child. However, on September 7, 1533, Anne gave birth not to a son, but to a daughter named Elizabeth, much to Henry’s disappointment. Several miscarriages and years later, Henry ordered Anne to be beheaded on alleged charges of adultery and treason on May 16, 1536.26 Henry VIII remarried just weeks later to Anne’s lady-in waiting, Jane Seymour.

During Jane Seymour’s time on the throne, England saw a further and more permanent separation from the Roman Catholic Church. With this break, Henry was named the Head of the Church of England. Thomas Cromwell oversaw the dissolution of the monasteries. On October 12, 1537, Jane gave birth to Henry’s longed for son, Edward, before dying twelve days later of puerperal fever at Hampton Court.27 After Edward’s birth and Jane’s subsequent death, Henry VIII went through a quick succession

26 Wooding, Henry VIII, 198-199.
27 Starkey, Six Wives, 585- 608.
of marriages, which would later add to his infamy. In 1640, he married a German princess named Anne of Cleves. Their marriage was arranged by Thomas Cromwell, who paid dearly for making this ill-fated arrangement. Henry had their marriage declared null and void six months later on the grounds of Anne’s pre-contract with the Duke of Lorraine. The divorce could also be attributed to Henry’s obvious distain for his fourth wife.\(^{28}\) Another reason for Henry VIII’s hasty divorce from Anne of Cleves was his desire for marriage with another lady-in-waiting, Katherine Howard.

Henry’s final years brought an end to this trend. First, however, he made Katherine Howard his fifth wife on the 28\(^{th}\) of July in 1540. On the same day, he had Thomas Cromwell beheaded for treason for arranging his disastrous fourth marriage to Anne of Cleves. Unfortunately, Henry VIII’s marriage to Katherine Howard did not last long. Less than two years after their marriage, Katherine Howard was discovered to be partaking in extramarital liaisons with other gentlemen in court. On February 13, 1542, she was beheaded and buried near her cousin Anne Boleyn.\(^{29}\) By 1543, Henry VIII was fifty-two years old; heavily overweight, he had a festering ulcer on his leg which needed to be drained daily. He sought companionship in his old age and found it in the already twice widowed Lady Latimer, Catherine Parr. On July 12, 1543, he married her. Catherine was the ideal stepmother to Henry’s three motherless children; she used her influence to bring Mary and Elizabeth back into favor with Henry. In 1546, Henry

established the Trinity College in Cambridge as on of his final acts before dying on January 28, 1547 at the age of fifty five.\textsuperscript{30}

Henry VIII paid some attention to how his historical reputation was constructed during his lifetime. When his father Henry VII seized the throne of England in 1485 and established the Tudor dynasty, he had had to fight for legitimacy and to cement his shaky claim through propaganda and displays of power. When his son Henry VIII ascended the throne in 1509, he expanded the propaganda techniques used by his father and molded it to his own advantage. During his reign, Henry VIII authorized and commissioned several works to cultivate his public image. Henry VIII used various forms of propaganda to represent him as a humanist scholar and philosopher king. By doing so, he sought to be publicly portrayed as a disinterested seeker of truth who welcomed debate and truthful counsel.\textsuperscript{31} Henry’s goal in this respect could be traced throughout various chronicles, including Edward Hall’s \textit{Hall’s Chronicle} and Charles Wriothesley’s \textit{A Chronicle of England during the Reigns of the Tudors}. They all repeatedly emphasized Henry’s humanistic nature. Despite Henry’s claims to be open to debate and discussion, in reality the king retained almost total control over who and what was allowed to be published. He left little room for dissent or counter-propaganda in sixteenth century England. In the chronicles written during Henry VIII’s reign and published shortly thereafter, the writers were cautious to censure themselves and avoid criticizing their king.

\textsuperscript{30} Scarisbrick, \textit{Henry VIII}, 495-498.
Edward Hall and Charles Wriothesley were both born and raised in England. Hall was a lawyer and historian born in the parish of St. Mildred Poultry, London. He received his education at Eton College and King’s College, Cambridge, where he earned his BA and began a career as a lawyer. It is believed that Hall was elected to the House of Commons in 1523; by 1528 he was included among the nobility, judges and councilors and other people who were summoned by Henry VIII to listen to his “Great Matter.” Edward Hall’s greatest claim to fame was his authorship of *The Union of the Two Noble and Illustre Families of Lancaster and York, covering the History of England from the usurpation of Henry IV to the death of Henry VIII*. Today, his work is better known as *Hall’s Chronicle*. Although Edward Hall died before the completion of his chronicle, he entrusted his manuscript to the publisher and historian Richard Grafton to complete and publish. Records show that Hall fully completed his history to the year 1532. His information concerning the remaining years was documented in papers and pamphlets. Grafton finished the rest of Hall’s manuscripts with only some editorial shaping, and later on wrote his own chronicle, *Abridgement to the Chronicles*.33

The second chronicler, Charles Wriothesley, lived from 1508 to 1562. Wriothesley came from a heraldic dynasty that had been founded by his grandfather, John Writhe, Garter king of arms. He worked for Thomas Audley who succeeded Sir Thomas More as Lord Chancellor in 1533. Baron Audley presumably influenced on Charles Wriothesley, giving Wriothesley the opportunity to form a number of advantageous

33 Herman, *Hall, Edward*, 1.
connections and promotions in court. Wriothesley attended the creation of Anne Boleyn as Marquess of Pembroke in 1532 and her coronation in 1533. These events inspired him to write a chronicle of the Tudor family, covering the reigns of both father and son (Henry VII and Henry VIII), based on his observations. Wriothesley mainly focused on Henry VIII’s reign starting from the coronation of Anne Boleyn. For the events preceding 1520, he borrowed heavily from a chronicle written by his relative, Richard Arnold. For the important events between the years 1520 to 1533, Wriothesley relied on other chronicles and his memory. After 1533, as he chronicled current events, his work became much more detailed. Due to his status as a herald in the king’s household, Wriothesley tried to create a chronicle which was both observant and loyal to his King and country.34

At the same time that Edward Hall and Charles Wriothesley produced their chronicles, various foreign ambassadors recorded their observations about Henry VIII’s court. Henry’s court was never without an abundance of international ambassadors who were the eyes and ears for their countries. They constantly reported back to their sovereigns. For Henry’s reign, a complete set of such documents produced by officials of the Italian city states of Venice survived and were compiled in the mid-nineteenth century into the Calendar of State Papers, Venetian.35 They recorded the important events as well as everyday doings of Henry’s court. These ambassadors did not have to

---

35 Calendar of State Papers Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, and in other Libraries of Northern Italy: 1528-1533, Edited by Rawdon Brown (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867).
censure their reports in the same manner as the court chroniclers did; their documents were confidential. Indeed, they often criticized the King and pointed out flaws which the chroniclers strove to bury or downplay. Their accounts reveal what information was available as the events unfolded. Their frank and often critical views also provide a contrast to the more cautious chroniclers.

The letters written by the Venetian ambassadors and the accounts written by the English chroniclers contained noticeable differences. While the chroniclers tended to be more reserved of their own personal judgments and criticisms of Henry’s reign, the Venetians had no qualms about recording their personal reactions regarding current events. Not having to censure themselves as much as the chroniclers who wished to maintain royal favor, they wrote reports that were riddled with disapproval and contempt for Henry VIII’s royal choices. Their condemnation of Henry VIII’s divorce from the well beloved Katherine of Aragon was quite apparent, as well as their scorn for Anne Boleyn. Although they observed the ongoing events at court to the extent that their vantage point allowed, they were sometimes deliberately excluded from current happenings and kept in the dark about certain decisions or incidents. Therefore their accounts often included rumor and speculation as well as reporting and opinion.

Throughout their letters, the Venetians did not bother to format their opinions to agree with current royal position, unlike other members of court who were careful to align their views with Henry’s on the pain of falling from royal favor. During the “King’s Great Matter,” the ambassadors forcibly expressed their undying support for the legality of Henry’s marriage to Katherine of Aragon. Although they supported Katherine
outright, it was evident from their letters that they believed her to be England’s true queen. In a letter written by Sebastian Guiustinian to the Signory in November of 1528, he noted: “Cardinal Campeggio tried to persuade the Queen of England to make choice of a monastic life, and consent to the divorce, so that it may be decreed justly, she refused positively.”  

Mario Savorgnano, a Venetian ambassador, had previously praised Henry’s many qualities. He had just one complaint about the king’s character: “were it not that he now seeks to repudiate his wife, after having lived with her for 22 years, he would be no less perfectly good, and equally prudent.” This quote, taken from a description of Henry VIII, shows Savorgnano’s distaste for Henry’s desire to cast aside Katherine of Aragon for another.

The woman that Henry VIII sought when he repudiated his wife of twenty two years was none other than Anne Boleyn. The Venetian ambassadors had much to say about this particular lady-in-waiting. “Madam Anne is not one of the handsomest women in the world; she is of middling stature, swarthy complexion, long neck, wide mouth, bosom not much raised, and in fact has nothing but the English King’s great appetite, and her eyes, which are black and beautiful, and take great effect...Madam Anne lives like a Queen at Calais, and the King accompanies her to mass and everywhere as if she was such.”

During Henry VIII’s courtship of Anne Boleyn, very few dared to speak out against the king’s growing desire for Lady Anne. However, the Venetian ambassadors

---

36 Brown, Calendar of State Papers, 176.
37 Brown, Calendar of State Papers, 287.
38 Brown, Calendar of State Papers, 365.
did not feel the need to hold back their opinions; they were quite outspoken in their confidential reports.

One example of their frequent exclusions from current events at court can be seen in their reporting on Henry VIII’s marriage to Anne Boleyn. When Henry and Anne were officially married on the 25th of January in 1533, their marriage was kept so secret that the Venetian ambassadors were kept guessing after the event took place. As early as January 1532, rumors were circulating at court of the supposed marriage between King Henry VIII and his mistress Anne Boleyn. In a letter written almost a full year before their actual marriage, an ambassador noted: “This morning it was said there were letters from London, dated January, stating that the king had taken to wife his favourite, Madame Anne, although at Rome the divorce case was not despatched.” The report was later proven to be false. Four months later, another ambassador noted that “his Majesty is endeavouring to dispatch with all speed...as Madame Anne is pregnant.” This statement was also untrue. Even months after their actual marriage in early 1533, the Venetian ambassadors were still kept in the dark about Henry and Anne’s nuptials. For on March 15, 1533, Carlo Capello wrote to the Signory: “With regard to the divorce, it is considered certain, and said publicly, that his Majesty will epouse the Marchioness Anne; they are awaiting the bulls from Rome for the Archbishop of Canterbuy, which will arrive in a few days.” From these letters, it is clear that the Venetian ambassadors were stuck in a field of speculation regarding the English king’s true marital status.

40 Brown, *Calendar of State Papers*, 335.
41 Brown, *Calendar of State Papers*, 388-89.
As the Venetians wrote their accounts for the eyes of their sovereigns, their English counterparts wrote theirs for English eyes. Keenly aware that the success of their works depended on public and royal reception, the chroniclers strove to write accounts which reflected positively on their monarchs. They sang praises for Henry VIII and lauded his decisions. Even from the beginning, Hall went out of his way to support and justify all of Henry’s marital decisions. Like Hall, Charles Wriothesley’s account of Henry VIII supported Henry VIII’s decisions; unlike Edward Hall’s almost extravagant praises and justifications, however, Wriothesley supported his king by the subtle omittance of important details and events. In both of their accounts, Hall and Wriothesley attempted to shift the reader’s attention away from the controversies caused by Henry VIII’s quest for divorce and his relationship with Anne Boleyn. In order to accomplish this, they chronicled the events surrounding the “King’s Great Matter” in a manner which left no room for doubt, skepticism or negativity. In his chronicle, Hall expounded Henry’s character to be reasonable, logical and a great humanist thinker inspired by God.

Although Edward Hall implied that he wrote his chronicle as a “living chronicle,” there were some events which must have been written later or heavily revised over time. From the very beginning of Henry VIII’s reign, Hall claimed to have taken a staunch stance against Henry’s marriage to Katherine of Aragon believing it to be a sin against God. In his chronicle, he wrote:

The kyng was moued, by some of his counsail, that it should be honorable and profitable to his realme, to take to wife the lady Katherin, late to Prince Arthur his brother diseased...by reason of whiche mocion, the kyng beyng young, and not understandyng the lawe of God, espoused the said lady Katherin, the third daie of
Iune, the whiche mariage was dispensed with by Pope Iuly...This mariage of the brothers wife, was muche murmured against in the beginnyng and euer more and more, searched out by learning and scripture, so that at the laste by the determinacion, of the best vniuersities of Christendom it was adjudged detestable, and plain contrary to Goddes lawe.42

In this passage, Hall sought to establish King Henry’s right to contest his marriage to Queen Katherine. By immediately pointing out the Queen’s previous marriage to Prince Arthur, King Henry’s early youthfulness and naiveté, the laws of God which their marriage seemingly broke, and the dissent amongst the people at such a marriage, Hall discredited Henry’s first marriage and thus allowed his readers to sympathize with Henry’s concerns as these would emerge later in the chronicle.

Although the reading of this text would meet with little disapproval at the time of the publication, had Edward Hall actually stressed this opinion at the time of Henry and Katherine’s marriage he surely would have been severely punished. Hall’s text often substituted popular opinion at the time of an event with current beliefs held by the royal family in order to avoid censure and maintain favor. When Hall began writing this chronicle during the late 1520’s, Henry had already begun an active pursuit for a divorce from Katherine of Aragon. When Henry took Katherine of Aragon to be his bride, their nuptials were met with grand celebration throughout the court and kingdom. Henry VIII doted on his new wife and she adored him; there were few objections regarding the match. When Edward Hall began his manuscript, Henry’s affection for Katherine had

long faded. As a result, Hall’s chronicle concerning Henry’s marriage to Katherine reflected current opinion rather than the opinion at the time of the marriage itself.

Edward Hall also focused on the King’s morals and personality and propagated that Henry’s choices were made with God’s laws and the best interests of England in mind. Concerning Henry VIII’s marriage to Katherine, Hall stressed that Henry’s decision was not based on personal feelings, but on the fact that their marriage broke the laws of God. Hall discussed at great length Henry VIII’s desperate query to find an answer to the great question regarding his marriage to Katherine. Hall described Henry VIII as a “wise prince” wanting the “quietyng of his conscience” and as a result “called together the best lerned of the realme” and “wrote his cause to Rome because the best clerkes in Christendome wer ther, and also he sent to al the vniuersities of Italy and Fraunce and to all the great clerkes of al christendom.”

In his quest for answers regarding his marriage, Hall emphasized how Henry never stopped being a good and loving husband to Queen Katherine, although he did abstain from her bed. His opinion portrays Henry VIII in a very sympathetic light. Hall’s Henry VIII is a kind, generous husband who was very unwilling to separate from his queen, despite the fact that she had tricked him and that their marriage was illegitimate from the beginning. In this chronicle, however, Hall deliberately left out two very important facts, Katherine’s inability to bear any more children and Henry VIII’s burgeoning relationship with Anne Boleyn. He sought to have his readers believe that reasons for Henry VIII’s quest for divorce was

---

43 Hall, *Hall’s Chronicle*, 753.
solely rooted in religious convictions and a troubled conscience rather than dynastic concerns or lust for another woman.

Although he could not fully cover up the presence of Anne Boleyn and her questionable relationship to the king, Edward Hall did his utmost to justify her existence and position in court. Compared to the Venetian ambassadors, Edward Hall presented a decidedly more favorable view of the Lady Anne. He brushed away the contempt held against Anne Boleyn which claimed that she was a usurper and upstart. In his chronicle, he noted the people’s hatred for the woman who sought to replace the beloved Queen Katherine; however, he waved aside their distrust of Anne claiming that they were ignorant commoners who did not know any better. He wrote, “The Lady Anne Bulleyne was so moche in the Kynges fauour, that the commen people which knew not the Kynges tretw entent, sayd and thought the absence of the Quene was onely for her sake, which was not trew; for the king was openly rebuked of Preachers for kepying her company with his brothers wife, which was the occasyon that he eschued her companye, tyll the truth wer tryed.”

In this paragraph, Hall came to the defense of Anne’s character and role in the divorce of Henry VIII. He chalked up the common peoples’ distrust and dislike of Lady Anne to ignorance and biases in Queen Katherine’s favor.

Although Edward Hall mostly agreed with and even celebrated Henry VIII’s decisions, he did have a small complaint regarding Henry’s hasty marriage to Anne. His complaint was so great that he felt the need to inject his own opinion regarding the

---

matter. When Henry VIII married Anne Boleyn in late January of 1933, his divorce proceedings were not yet quite finished. Contracting a second marriage made him into a bigamist. Hall believed that Henry should have waited for the divorce to be finalized, so that his new marriage could not be called into question. “The kyng was not well counsailed, to mary the lady Anne Bulleyne, before the diuorse was adiudged, for by mariyng before the firste mariage was dissolued, they said, the second mariage might be brought into question.”

This passage was one of the only criticisms of Henry VIII’s that Hall made in the course of his work. Hall most likely did this in response to the negative reception Henry’s marriage with Anne received. He most likely wanted to acknowledge what they did was wrong, but not for the reasons typically expected. He carefully laid blame on Henry’s councilors, rather than citing his impatience, poor judgment or other character flaws.

While Edward Hall carefully injected his own criticisms and mostly favored the King with supportive commentary, Charles Wriothesley’s chronicle seemed to be free of bias or personal opinion. His chronicle focused only on facts; it did not offer any explanation of events or details of personal feelings of the peoples he describes. However, his biases could still be discovered through the examination of the details and events that Wriothesley decided not to put into his chronicle. During his account of the first twenty or so years of Henry’s reign, he never once mentioned Queen Katherine by name. She was simply referred to as “the Queen.” Little to nothing was noted of her multiple miscarriages, though the birth of the “Ladie Marie” was briefly listed. Also

---

45 Hall, *Hall’s Chronicle*, 796.
during these years, nothing was mentioned of Henry’s mistress or bastard son by Bessie Blount.

During the years of the “King’s Great Matter,” Wriothesley again neglected to communicate anything regarding the divorce proceedings or the reasons behind Henry’s desire to divorce Katherine and marry Anne. In fact, his account bypassed the years 1527 to 1529 completely. In 1526, Wriothesley noted the mint of new coins and then picks up his narrative three years later at Cardinal Thomas Wolsey’s downfall and death. Afterwards, Wriothesley skips ahead to Henry’s marriage to and the coronation of Anne Boleyn; there his chronicle details the coronation of Anne Boleyn at great length. It was interesting to note that his description of Anne’s coronation was the first time he acknowledged the existence of Anne Boleyn in the chronicle. He also never noted her previous occupation as a lady-in-waiting to Katherine, but only ever referred to her as the Marquess of Pembroke. He never nodded to her family, her connections to the queen, or any public discontent regarding the divorce and marriage.\footnote{Charles Wriothesley, \textit{A Chronicle of England during the Reigns of the Tudors, from A.D. 1485-1559}, ed. William Douglas Hamilton (London: Camden Society, 1875), 20.} Wriothesley’s almost disinterested tone carried throughout his entire chronicle. His tenor regarding the disappointing birth of Elizabeth carried the same weight as his account of Anne Boleyn’s execution and Henry VIII’s declaration of himself as the supreme head of the Church of England.

In conclusion, the accounts written during Henry VIII’s reign pierced together a story which would become one of the most famous in English history. Although all of the documents strove to tell the same story all inherently differed in both their
perspectives and content. The Venetian ambassadors, who did not have to fear censorship or a fall from royal favor, tended to be more open in their letters and accounts sent back to their employers. Despite the fact that they had more freedoms than the English chroniclers, their accounts were far from perfect. Their letters portray obvious biases in favor of the Spanish Katherine of Aragon during her divorce from Henry VIII and apparent concerns for Henry VIII’s radical actions against the Catholic Church. Gaps throughout their reports suggested that they were often excluded from ongoing events or information. The English chroniclers had access to more detail and information inside court proceedings. Yet, they had to be extremely careful that their writing matched the current royal position at the time. Edward Hall and Charles Wriothesley worked in close relation to the English court; both sought to glorify their king to whom they were loyal and write down his history to the best of their abilities. Edward Hall, in particular, was quite supportive of the match between Anne and Henry VIII, although he still held reservations about the Act of Supremacy. Charles Wriothesley’s opinion regarding the matter was not as obvious; however, he still wholeheartedly supported King and country. Throughout the succession of Henry VIII’s remaining children and the Stuarts, chroniclers and court historians would begin to shift their focus from Henry VIII as a good, humanistic king and study instead the impacts of his reign in a more critical context.
Chapter 2: Henrician Chronicles published during the reign of Elizabeth I

At the young age of twenty-five, Elizabeth Tudor ascended the throne of England on November 17, 1558. For the next forty-four years, Elizabeth I shaped the era now known as the Elizabethan era in English history. Although the transition of royal power from her predecessor, Mary I, to herself was remarkably smooth, Elizabeth’s journey to the throne was fraught with difficulties and multiple challenges to her birthright. One of these challenges was the fact that she was the only daughter of Henry VIII’s second wife, Anne Boleyn, who had been beheaded as an adulteress when Elizabeth was less than three years old and was often referred to as “the Great Whore.” It is unknown how much her mother’s execution affected Elizabeth, for not once during her life did Elizabeth publicly mention her mother or her ignoble death. After her mother’s beheading, Elizabeth was reduced in status from Princess of Wales to a bastard who was ineligible for the throne. When Elizabeth was informed of her status reduction, she was reported to have responded, “Governor, how hap it yesterday my Lady Princess and today but my Lady Elizabeth?” Not until her father’s sixth marriage to Katherine Parr in 1543 was Elizabeth’s royal status reinstated. Despite these humiliations and degradations, however, Elizabeth was determined to be her father’s child.

49 Starkey, Elizabeth, 31.
After the death of her father in 1547, Elizabeth waited for her chance to be Queen of England. Although she fared well during the Protestant reign of her brother, Edward VI, problems concerning succession arose when he died only five years after his ascension at the age of fifteen. In an attempt to prevent a Catholic monarch, Edward and his scheming council tried to rewrite Henry VIII’s will and appoint his cousin, the Lady Jane Grey, as his lawful heir instead of the Princess Mary. Using Henry VIII’s old claims concerning his first and second wives, they labeled Mary and Elizabeth to be half-blood bastards and therefore unfit for the throne of England.\(^{50}\) Despite their best attempts, Mary received overwhelming support from the English people and was crowned Queen on the 19\(^{th}\) of July 1553. It was during her reign when Elizabeth found herself in the most danger of losing her life. A fervent Catholic and very much her mother’s daughter, Mary blamed Elizabeth’s mother Anne Boleyn for her own unfortunate childhood, believing that Anne had bewitched her father into discarding his true wife, Katherine of Aragon. Although Mary tried to love her half-sister, her bitterness about the humiliations suffered by her mother and herself at the hands of Anne Boleyn often turned into hostility directed towards Elizabeth. This contention was reinforced by Elizabeth’s refusal to convert to the Catholic faith, which made Mary believe that Elizabeth was indeed her mother’s daughter: heretical as well as illegitimate.\(^{51}\) Due to these fears, Mary had Elizabeth taken to the Tower of London for a time and later placed under house arrest.

After Mary’s death, Elizabeth ascended to the throne in a smooth transition of power; however, a lifetime of political propaganda concerning her bastardization

\(^{50}\) Starkey, Elizabeth, 114.

\(^{51}\) Starkey, Elizabeth, 121.
provided some insecurity to her claim. In order to counter these claims, Elizabeth attempted to restore some legitimacy to her parents’ marriage and her status as the rightful successor to the throne through histories and propaganda. During the early years of Elizabeth’s reign, she also had to deal with a religiously divided England. After Henry VIII broke away from the Roman Catholic Church with the first Act of Supremacy in 1534, Edward VI and his council carried on the Protestant tradition in England; however, the act was repealed in 1554 by the staunchly Catholic Mary. After Mary’s death, one of Elizabeth’s first acts as Queen was to reinstate the Act of Supremacy in 1558. Elizabeth relied heavily on her advisors, the most important being William Cecil, all of whom were determined to establish a truly Protestant church in England. Their influence, along with an outpouring of returning Marian religious exiles to England, moved Elizabeth to support the permanent establishment of the Protestant Church of England. Two acts were approved by Parliament which later became known as the Elizabethan Religious Settlement. The first act was the Second Act of Supremacy which restored royal control over the Church. Under this act, Elizabeth was given the title of “Supreme Governor of the Church of England,” because Henry VIII’s title of “Supreme Head of the Church of England” was considered inappropriate for a woman. Also under this act, all government office holders and church officials were required to take an oath acknowledging Elizabeth’s governorship. The second act became known as the Act of Uniformity. Under this act, all of Elizabeth’s subjects were required to attend services at the local parish churches every Sunday and holy days and to participate in the prescribed services.

Absence from these services resulted in a fine of one shilling, which was quite a sum for poorer members of a congregation. The relative peace brought to England by this religious settlement was one of the many accomplishments that led Elizabeth’s reign to be known as a Golden Age in English history.

During Elizabeth’s reign, several accounts or histories provided different opinions upon Henry VIII’s marriage to Katherine of Aragon, his break from the Roman Catholic Church and the character of Anne Boleyn. These histories emphasized the invalidity of Henry’s marriage with Katherine and the legality of his second marriage. They also placed heavy emphasis on the seemingly easy acceptance of the English people on the authority claimed by Henry VIII and Elizabeth as the heads of the Church of England. These writings served to reinforce Elizabeth’s legitimacy and birthright which had been denied to her during various points of her life and weaken arguments that questioned her mother’s marriage to her father. This chapter will examine the works of two historians who published during Elizabeth’s reign, Raphael Holinshed and Richard Grafton. Although there were many similarities between their works and the works produced by Edward Hall and Charles Wriothesley, differences in their accounts could be found in the ways they regarded the figure of Anne Boleyn. However, the methods in which these two sets of authors regarded Henry VIII’s break with the Roman Catholic Church were remarkably similar.

Of the two historians discussed in this chapter, the more prominent was Raphael Holinshed, an English historian who lived from about 1525 until 1580. Born in Chesire,

53 Lockyer, *Tudor and Stuart Britain*, 188.
Holinshed most likely obtained an education from Cambridge. He later went on to work in the printing house of Reyner Wolfe. The first edition of his *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* appeared in 1577 and was part of a deliberate movement to elevate England’s literature through map work, histories, national epics and poetry. Holinshed’s chronicles met relative success; they later served as the major basis for most of William Shakespeare’s historical plays. Richard Grafton lived from perhaps 1511 to 1573 and was a printer and historian. He was apprenticed to John Blage, was a man of evangelical sympathies and grocer to Thomas Crammer. This relationship helped Grafton to develop his own reforming standpoint and create a network of connections with prominent reformers, such as Thomas Cromwell. In 1562, the first edition of Grafton’s *Abridgement of the Chronicles of England* was published by his son-in-law, Richard Tottel.

In their works, Raphael Holinshed and Richard Grafton’s accounts and writing styles often paralleled the works of Edward Hall and Charles Wriothesley. Like the Henrician chroniclers, Holinshed and Grafton both focused heavily on Henry VIII’s honorable intentions and outstanding moral character regarding his decision to divorce Katherine of Aragon. Their accounts of the divorce proceedings bore remarkable similarities to the earlier accounts. Both brushed aside the first twenty years of Henry VIII’s marriage to Katherine and instead centered their arguments on the religious controversy created by Henry VIII in his bid to divorce Katherine. Holinshed and

---

Grafton also deliberately excluded information regarding Henry VIII’s passionate seven-year relationship with the Lady Anne Boleyn prior to their marriage. Finally, the Elizabethan chroniclers adapted the same matter of fact tone regarding the English reformation as their predecessors. They neither questioned nor overly praised the separation from the Roman Catholic Church; they just stated the establishment of Henry VIII as the Supreme Head of the Church of England as undisputable fact.

Aside from the similarities found in these chronicles, some key differences emerged between the accounts written by the Henrician chroniclers and the accounts written by the Elizabethan chroniclers. While the Henrician chroniclers hid Henry VIII’s relationship with Anne to preserve Henry’s name, the Elizabethan chroniclers hid their relationship to preserve Anne’s. They strove to portray her as a modest, intelligent young woman worthy of the title Queen. They spoke of the great deeds she accomplished for Protestant England. They also defended her honor, questioning the accusations of adultery which resulted in her execution. Additionally, they celebrated the birth of Anne’s only child, her daughter Elizabeth. Their treatment of Elizabeth’s birth revised what had at the time been a disappointing event, the appearance of another daughter instead of Henry’s much longed for male heir.

In the accounts of Henry VIII produced in Elizabeth’s reign, the legality of his marriage to Katherine of Aragon was questioned from the onset. Both Richard Grafton and Raphael Holinshed sought to justify Henry’s decision to divorce Katherine by using canonical law to prove that their marriage was not legal in the eyes of God. They also referenced a lack of public support concerning the marriage at the time, which they may
have taken from previous chroniclers of Henry VIII rather than using actual testimony. They attributed Henry’s decision to marry Katherine to outside peer pressure. In his *Abridgement of the Chronicles of Englande*, Grafton merely parroted Edward Hall’s opinion regarding Henry VIII’s marriage to Katherine. “King Henry married the Lady Katherine, late wife to his brother Arthur, having a dispensacion of Leo then Bishop of Rome, but not without great murmuring of Cardimalles, and dyvers learned men of other realmes.”

Raphael Holinshed attempted to provide an alternative justification as to why Henry chose to marry Katherine. In his chronicle, Katherine’s great dowry was the reason Henry took her to be his wife. “The king was advised by some of his counsell to take to wife the ladie Katharine, late wife to his brother prince Arthur, least she hauing so great a dowrie as was appointed to hir, might marrie out of the realme, which should be to his hinderance. The king being hereto persuaded, espoused the said ladie Katharine the third daie of Iune.” Holinshed suggested that Henry was persuaded into marriage for financial and economic purposes, countering popular notions that Henry married Katherine out of filial duty or love.

Regarding the King’s “Great Matter,” both Holinshed and Grafton focused on Henry VIII’s attempt to divorce Katherine, his scruples concerning her feelings, and his desire to justify his actions. Holinshed’s work in particular concentrated on Henry’s efforts to procure, legally, an annulment of his marriage to Katherine from the Roman Catholic Church and the English Parliament on the ground that their marriage defied the

---

57 Raphael Holinshed, *The Third Volume of Chronicles, Beginning at Duke William the Norman, commonly called the Conqueror; and the descending by degrees of yeeres to all the Kings and Queens of England* (London, 1577), 547.
laws of God and was thus cursed. There was little mention in either account of Henry VIII’s desire for a legitimate male heir or his relationship with the Anne Boleyn.

Although in truth, Henry’s treatment of Katherine during this time could be described in adjectives such as studied neglect, anger, and hostility, Holinshed portrayed Henry’s treatment of his first wife in a more generous and kindly light. “And because the king... knew well that the queene was somewhat wedded to hir owne opinion, and wished that she should do nothing without counsell, he bad hir choose the best clearks of his realme to be of hir counsell, and licenced them to doo the best on hir part that they could, according to the truth.”58 In this passage, Holinshed suggested that Henry genuinely wanted Katherine to have her own counsel so that they could salvage their marriage; however, Henry’s mind had already been made up before the official proceedings of the divorce even began.

After the divorce was decreed, according to Holinshed, the king “himselfe sore lamented his chance, and made no maner of mirth nor pastime as he was woont to doo. He dined and resorted to the queene as accustomed, and diminished nothing of hir estate, and much loued their daughter the ladie marie: but in no wise would he not come to hir bed.”59 This passage suggested that Henry did not actually want to divorce Katherine, but had to according to the laws of God. In doing so, it attempted to free Henry VIII from the scorn he may have received if it were believed that he put Katherine aside for reasons other than religious ones.

58 Holinshed, Chronicles, 736.

59 Holinshed, Chronicles, 772-73.
Interestingly, in their accounts both Holinshed and Grafton neglected to mention Henry VIII’s almost seven-year relationship with Anne Boleyn and the connection between their relationship and his divorce. In Richard Grafton’s chronicles readers are first introduced to the person of Anne Boleyn by this simple statement: “This yere [1532] the Lady Anne Boleyn was made Marquess of Pembroke.” From that entry, nothing is said about Anne until her secret marriage to Henry a year later. Raphael Holinshed had a little more to say concerning Anne; however, he did not provide much more information on her personality or character. The most Holinshed offered about the relationship were the concerns held by Cardinal Wolsey and his attempts to stop it.

The cardinall of Yorke was advised that the king had set his affection upon a yoong gentlewoman named Anne, the daughter of sir Thomas Bullen, vicount Rochford, which did wait upon the quemene. This was a great griefe unto the cardinall, as he that perceived beforehand, that the king would mariye the said gentlewoman, if the divorse took place. Wherefore he began with all diligence to disappoint that match.

It is interesting to note that Holinshed placed Wolsey’s concerns about Henry’s infatuation with Anne Boleyn right before Henry VIII’s divorce was finalized, when in history Wolsey had been voicing his concerns regarding their relationship long before. This compression allowed Holinshed to imply that the relationship was a relatively new development, begun just prior to the divorce, rather than one that had been going on all through the period leading up to his final break with Katherine.

The refusal of Holinshed and Grafton to discuss Henry VIII’s adulterous relationship with Anne Boleyn closely paralleled the accounts written by the Henrician

---

60 Grafton, *Abridgement of the Chronicles*, 137.
61 Holinshed, *Chronicles*, 740.
chroniclers; however, their unspoken support for Anne Boleyn, quite apparent through the texts, marked a new element in their histories. For their lack of information concerning the early relationship between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, both historians expended a good amount of space and detail concerning their secret marriage and Anne’s coronation. Holinshed wrote, “He married the priuillie the ladie Anne Bullongne the same daie, being the fourteenth of Nouember, and the feast daie of saint Erkenwald; which marriage was kept so secret, that verie few knew it till Easter next insuing, when it was perceived she was with child.” Holinshed also made sure to specifically mention the acceptance of their new queen from the English people. He observed, “Of this diuorse and of the kings mariagie with the ladie Anne Bullongne men spake diverselie; some said that the king had doone wiselie, and so as became him to doo in discharge of his conscience. Other otherwise iudge, and spake their fansies as they thought good; but when everie man had talked inough, then were they quiet, and all rested in good peace.”

While Holinshed attempted to ease his readers into accepting the sudden marriage between Henry and Anne, Grafton’s chronicle delved straight into the facts. He noted Henry’s marriage to Anne, Katherine’s title being changed from Queen to Princess Dowager, and the death of Queen Mary, the dowager Queen of France, wife of the Duke of Suffolk and the sister of Henry VIII, all in the same paragraph.

Another circumstance the chroniclers chose not to dwell upon was the accident of Elizabeth’s birth and how her father’s displeasure over her sex contributed to her

---

62 Holinshed, Chronicles, 777.
63 Holinshed, Chronicles, 775.
64 Grafton, Abridgment of the Chronicles, 137.
mother’s eventual downfall. When Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn started their courtship, one of her most desirable traits was her promise to succeed where Katherine could not: the production of a healthy male heir. When Anne became pregnant, she, along with Henry and the rest of the court, were confident that she was carrying the future king of England. It came as a great disappointment when she gave birth to a healthy baby girl instead of boy.65 This crushing blow turned the monarchy into a laughingstock; for Henry VIII had spent so much time trying to divorce a wife who could not give him his son, only to marry another who gave him another useless girl. Holinshed and Grafton both brushed aside these great disappointments and ridicules in their accounts and instead glorified Elizabeth’s birth. Grafton was the less extreme of the two, merely noted that “The vii. day of September, the Lady Elizabeth (which now is our most dere and souvraine Lady) daughter to kyng Henry the eight, was borne at Greenwiche.”66 In contrast, Holinshed went into great detail about the Elizabeth’s christening and the celebrations held after her birth. “When the ceremonies and christening were ended, Garter cheefe king of armes cried alowd, God of his infinite goonesse send prosperous life & long to the high and mightie princess of England Elizabeth.”67 These authors found it wise to omit the disappointments that followed Elizabeth’s birth, since these reactions undermined their intent to glorify their reigning monarch.

One of the most critical moments in Elizabeth’s life was the execution of her mother when Elizabeth was not yet three years old. Suddenly accused of adultery with

---

67 Holinshed, *Chronicles*, 787.
four other men, including her own brother, Anne Boleyn was beheaded on May 16, 1536 after a whirlwind of accusations and hasty trials. After Anne’s death, Elizabeth’s birthright was thrown into question; she was stripped from her position as Princess of Wales to a mere bastard. At times, some questioned her legitimacy as Henry’s daughter. Even her half-sister Mary was known to question whether or not Elizabeth was Henry’s real daughter, believing that she might be the offspring of Mark Smeaton. In his account, Holinshed made sure to clear Anne’s name, and with that confirm Elizabeth’s birthright. He recounted the sudden departure of the king from court, and the even more sudden arrest of Anne, her brother George and others. Holinshed also briefly touched on the court proceedings where Anne pleaded innocence and not guilty. Surprisingly, at this point Holinshed decided to inject his opinion on the matter, which was very unusual since Holinshed mostly kept his comments and opinions to himself. “There hir indictement was read, wherevnto she made so wise and discréet ansers, that she seemed fullie to cleere hir selfe of all matters laid to hir charge: but being tried by hir péeres...she was by them found guilty.” Holinshed repeatedly made it quite clear that he did not agree with the final verdict. After Anne’s execution, Holinshed again went out of character to inject a final after word concerning Anne’s brief reign as Queen of England: “Now bicause I might rather saie much than sufficientlie inough in praise of this noble quéene, as well for hir singular wit and other excellent qualities of the mind, as also for hir fououing of learned men, zeale of religion, and liberalitie in distributing almes in reliife of the

---

68 Starkey, Elizabeth, 121.
69 Holinshed, Chronicles, 796.
poore." In this final statement concerning Anne Boleyn, Holinshed sought to reassert her status as a good Queen of England, and not the image of a whore or witch that was spread through popular rumor.

Finally, both chroniclers only briefly mentioned Henry’s split with Rome and never discussed its importance or historical implications. In Grafton’s chronicle, he noted how the Pope’s authority was banished from England and that the king was “reputed to be taken as the Supreme hed of the Churche of England.” Afterwards, he spoke very little regarding the subject and offered no analysis or more specific information. Holinshed’s account referenced briefly the act passed by parliament “that no person should appeale for anie causes out of this realme to the court of Rome...” Although both authors did chronicle the 1536 peasant uprising in York, which later became known as the Pilgrimage of Grace, they included only minimal information about the subject. In their accounts, the authors listed the names of the leaders and the suppression of the rebellion. They also mentioned the many pardons and assurances granted by Henry VIII to appease the unhappy peasants and to put an end to the rebellion. The authors did not discuss how Henry failed to keep his promises to the leaders of the rebellion. Grafton and Holinshed instead focused on the King’s power and the assertion of his position as the Supreme Head of the Church of England.

During Henry VIII’s reign, his split with the Church of Rome and his new title as the “Supreme Head of the Church of England” was the cause of much dissent and

---

70 Holinshed, Chronicles, 797.
71 Grafton, Abridgment of the Chronicles, 139.
72 Holinshed, Chronicles, 777.
conflict across his realm. Although Edward carried on the tradition, his eldest daughter Mary fought to bring back Catholicism to England. So when the Protestant Elizabeth ascended the throne upon Mary’s death, she faced a troubled England. Her chroniclers, Richard Grafton and Raphael Holinshed, did not focus on the difficulties England faced during the initial years of separation from the Catholic Church. Suggesting the church’s bases was less than secure might have undermined Elizabeth’s power and position as the head of the Church of England. Instead, they focused on maintaining her legitimacy as heiress to the English throne and her birthright to the position as the head of the Church of England. In order to do so, these authors presented her father, Henry VIII, as a conscientious and godly man. They portrayed his bid for divorce from Katherine of Aragon and the subsequent break from the Roman Catholic Church as having been right by Christian laws. They also remolded Anne Boleyn’s tattered image from an adulterous sinner to a model queen, a worthy mother of their present day Queen Elizabeth. Finally, these authors built on but altered their predecessors’ approach concerning Henry VIII and his decisions.
Chapter 3: Henrician Histories produced during the Stuart Period

Elizabeth I was the last of the Tudor monarchs. After death of the Virgin Queen in 1603, the English crown passed to her closest relative, James VI of Scotland, who was the only son of Elizabeth’s rival Mary, Queen of Scots. James VI, or James I of England, was the first Stuart monarch to rule England. The House of Stuart would rule both England and Scotland until 1714, with only a brief interruption at the mid-century “Interregnum” when James’ son was deposed and executed in favor of a republican alternative. James’ reign was fairly tranquil. The country was glad to have a male ruler with numerous sons. Religious rivalries between Protestant and Catholic appeared to be problems of the past, since James, raised as a Protestant, gladly took on the role as head of the Church of England. During the reigns of his son and first grandson, Charles I (1625-1649) and Charles II (1660-1684), religious and political tensions again arose. While the elder Charles fought his own subjects in civil wars and eventually lost his head as a result, his son faced his lesser crises during his reign. The most serious of these was perhaps the effort to exclude his brother and heir from the throne on the grounds of his Catholicism, a crisis that was fueled by bogus accusations of a “Popish Plot” to assassinate Charles II and put his brother on the throne in his place.

After Elizabeth’s death, Henry VIII’s reputation declined rapidly. Because he had specifically excluded the Stuart line from the English succession, the Stuart monarchs had little incentive to defend the Tudor king from constant attacks by other politicians, historians, and popular memory. Once during a session of Parliament, the Earl of
Salisbury called Henry VIII “the child of lust and a man of iniquity,”\textsuperscript{73} A statement that would not have been made in so public a place during the Tudor era. After Elizabeth’s death, historical scholarship concerning Henry VIII took on a more critical appearance than ever before. During James’ reign, and those of his successors, the public image of Henry VIII transformed. Since he or his children no longer lived to censure what works were produced, historians had more freedoms to record their own personal opinions of the king which could be both positive and negative at times. Their historical works concerning Henry VIII often reflected popular opinion of the British monarchy at the time of publication. They also exposed the religious conflicts which divided the kingdom and provided commentary on prevalent social issues. Throughout the next century, historians dropped the popular chronicle format which had dominated most of the Middle Ages and remained in use during the sixteenth century. Although some of these works retained the title of “chronicle,” these histories mostly followed a more narrative and analytical format akin to what modern historians use.

The first of these authors was Francis Godwin. He published his book, \textit{Annales of England}, in 1616. Godwin’s work veered away from the previous works concerning Henry VIII, and for the first time his portrayal of Henry the King was not filled with glowing praise and approval. Other historians also followed this trend; they were not bound by their ruling monarch to stifle their opinions regarding the reign of Henry VIII. Although some authors took the side of Henry and supported his decisions, there were others who most certainly did not. All of these authors however did support the Anglican

Church, even if they did not agree on the manner of its creation. These authors include, in addition to Francis Godwin, Edward Herbert, Richard Baker, David Lloyd, and Gilbert Burnet.

Francis Godwin was a bishop who lived from 1562 to 1633. Born at Hannington, Northamptonshire, Godwin attended Oxford University where he was elected to a studentship at Christ Church and earned his BA and MA. His first ecclesiastical appointment was in 1586. Today, Godwin is best known for his historical works. Unhappy with the state of historical writing in England and a great admirer of William Camden, Godwin decided to write his own book, Rerum Anglica rum, Hen rico VIII., Edwardo VI. et Maria regnantibus, Annale, which later became known as Annales of England. Published in 1616, Godwin’s work sought to mimic William Camden’s biography on Elizabeth; however, he was not nearly as successful or thorough in his research. Godwin wanted to produce a history that was a didactic narrative of great men rather than a general history covering social, religious, and cultural change. Godwin believed that there was a great need to revise and rework all of England’s history, incorporating primary sources.

Francis Godwin’s account of Henry VIII borrowed heavily from George Cavendish’s Life of Wolsey, which was unpublished at the time. The borrowing of Cavendish’s text influenced Godwin to form a more favorable assessment of Wolsey and a less favorable opinion of Henry VIII’s personality. According to Godwin, Wolsey was

---

a good counselor to Henry VIII and entirely responsible for the relative successes of Henry’s early years as king. Overall, Godwin had a relatively low opinion of Henry believing him to be an “incipient tyrant, restrained only by the leash of his own Seneca, the cardinal.” Godwin opened his document with this statement: “That, if the end of his Raigne had beene answerable to the beginning, Henry the Eight might have desrvedly haue beene ranked amongst the greatest of our Kings. For if you consider his first twenty years, you shall not easily find any one, that either more happily managed affaires abroad, or gouerned more wifely at home, or that bare greater sway among his Neighbout Princes.”

It is clear to see from this passage that Francis Godwin believed that Henry VIII had the potential to be one of England’s greatest kings; however, he allowed other evil influences and vices to take over and destroy his reign.

Although he was a strong supporter of the English Reformation, Godwin disliked the way Henry had handled his marriages. He believed that Henry “tooke this course more to satisfie his lust then his conscience.” Godwin clearly believed that Henry VIII did not start the English Reformation for purely religious reasons, but rather to satisfy his own personal desires. The first of these reasons that Godwin addressed was Henry VIII’s relationship with his first wife, Katherine of Aragon. Although previous authors thought Henry’s desire to divorce Katherine stemmed from his belief that their union was illegal by God’s laws, Godwin stated, “Indeed Catharine was a noble and virtuous Lady, but she

---

had lived so long, as to make her husband weary of her.”80 Clearly Godwin believed that Henry’s desire to divorce Katherine did not come from his troubled conscience, but rather that he had tired of her and wanted to move on to greener pastures. Another reason for the break was Henry’s attitude towards the Roman Catholic Church. According to previous historians, Henry desired to reform the church because he was offended by its corruption and incompetence; however, Godwin believed that Henry’s desires for change arose from his own greed. “But the wealth of the clergy being very great; and considering how they had in the Reigns of his Predecessors strongly sided with the Pope, the King was somewhat jealous of them.”81 Godwin made it quite apparent that he believed Henry’s desire to be rid of the aged Katherine of Aragon, lust for Anne Boleyn and envy of the wealth held by the clergy were the reasons which propelled the English Reformation, rather than the reasons of conscience that early Henrician historians suggested.

After Godwin wrote his critical account regarding Henry VIII’s reign, numerous other histories were produced, among them one by a Kentish gentleman Richard Baker. Baker (1568-1645) studied at Oxford but left before graduation. Afterwards, he studied law in London and traveled the Continent. He was granted the MA degree upon his return in 1594. Baker sat in the Elizabethan Commons and published several pious works during his lifetime. He also published a number of histories, the most famous being A Chronicle of the Kings of England. A popular history, Baker’s Chronicle continued to be reprinted posthumously. When it first appeared in 1643, the work was

dedicated to Charles, Prince of Wales. For his work Baker claimed to have consulted with more than ninety authors and texts. His chronicle, despite its name, was written in a narrative form and dabbled in literary, social and economic affairs.  

Richard Baker, like Francis Godwin, was also fairly skeptical of Henry VIII’s character and he questioned the king’s primary reasons for divorcing Katherine of Aragon. Baker gave several possible explanations held by various peoples of Henry’s court as to why he wanted a divorce. While other authors supported one argument, this author listed off several and allowed his reader to determine which explanation they favored. Some of these reasons included Henry’s attraction to the Lady Anne Boleyn, his troubled conscience regarding Katherine’s previous marriage to his brother Arthur, a plot masterminded by Cardinal Wolsey, and even an innocent comment made by the president of Paris. From his first mention of the match, it was obvious that Richard Baker did not respect the marriage between Henry and Katherine. He ultimately believed that Henry VIII married Katherine merely out of filial piety and duty; as a result, he “had not the greatest devotion” to her. Baker also did not buy into Henry VIII’s claims that Katherine’s first marriage to his brother Arthur rendered illegitimate their later union. Indeed, he made sure to inject doubt when introducing Henry VIII’s argument; “if we will believe the King himself...” At the same time, Baker also doubted Katherine’s claims that Arthur left her a virgin, “to say the truth, it were strange, Prince Arthur and

84 Baker, Chronicle of the Kings of England, 272.
she having lyen 5. months together, and he no less than almost 16. years old.”

Baker sincerely believed that Henry VIII wanted to divorce Katherine because of the lust he felt for the Lady Anne Boleyn. In conclusion, Richard Baker believed that England’s split with Rome resulted because of King Henry VIII’s desire to cast aside his aging wife and the difficulties he encountered obtaining his divorce from the papal courts.

Although Henry VIII’s character and historical persona suffered in the histories written during the early seventeenth century, it was given a boost during mid-century by Edward Herbert, the first Baron Herbert of Cherbury. A poet, politician, philosopher, historian, and autobiographer, Herbert was briefly introduced to the aged Queen Elizabeth I just before she died. During the reigns of James I and Charles I, Herbert served as a member in parliament, an ambassador to France and a member of the council of war. In 1634, Charles I asked him to write a history of Henry VIII, which Herbert began after the death of his wife. In his work, *The Life and Raigne of King Henry VIII*, Herbert made use of materials in official archives and from the Cotton Library, which previously had been closed since 1629. Throughout his work, Herbert sought to contrast popular myth and perceptions about the events of Henry VIII’s reign with what was stated in the documents. He also felt free to insert his own opinions from time to time.

The book was completed in 1639, but it was not published until a year after his death in 1649. Herbert’s biography has been regarded as a standard, authoritative study of

---

Henry’s reign from the seventeenth century. Today it is still often consulted by Henrician historians because Herbert had transcribed and commented on several sixteenth century documents which have since then disappeared or were destroyed.\(^89\)

In his introduction, Edward Herbert acknowledged the popular beliefs and conceptions held by others which portrayed Henry as a corrupt, violent, and vice-ridden king. “I shall labour with this difficulty in King Henry VIII...being, about his declining age, so diverse in many of his desires, as he knew not well how either to command or obey them...derogated not a little from those vertues which at first made him one of the most renowned Princes of Christendom.”\(^90\) Hebert realized the difficulties he was going to face shaking popular conceptions held about Henry VIII, but was undeterred by that fact. Herbert emphasized that although Henry VIII’s reign was greatly degraded and riddled with sin towards the end of his life, Henry could still be considered a great king. He remarked that, “Had his age answered his youth, or expectation, none of his predecessors could have exceeded him. But as his exquesite endowments of nature engaged him often to become prey to these allurements and temptations...so his courage was observed by little and little to receive into it some mixture of self-will and cruelty.”\(^91\) Herbert stressed the importance of remembering the earlier glory years of Henry’s rule. He blamed outside influences and temptations as the cause of Henry VIII’s downfall. It is interesting to note that Edward Herbert’s work was published the same year as the beheading of Charles I and the overthrow of the monarchy by the English

---

\(^90\) Herbert, *The Life and Raigne of King Henry the Eighth*, 1.
\(^91\) Herbert, *The Life and Raigne of King Henry the Eighth*, 2.
Commonwealth. Despite the pro-monarchy tone of his account, which contrasted with the more recent anti-monarchical views sweeping England, he was still able to publish his history.

The Restoration of the monarchy took place in 1660; five years later, David Lloyd published his work *The Statesmen and Favorites of England*. David Lloyd was a biographer who lived from 1635 to 1692. Once called “a loyal biographer and historian,” David Lloyd’s works were well known for their royalist sympathies and biases in favor of the monarchy. In one of his less popular works, Lloyd accused people of “continued disloyalty to the monarchy and the Church of England, and of clinging on to ideas of popular resistance inherited from the civil wars and republic.”

His work *The Statesmen and Favorites of England* was published in 1665, and reissued in 1670, continued in his pro-monarchy vein. Although this work was originally met with a warm reception, a critic of the work once stated that there were “almost as many errors as lines” throughout the text.

From this history, Lloyd gained a reputation not only as “a most impudent plagiarist, but a false writer and a mere scribbler.” It is interesting to note how history writing standards have changed by this point of the seventeenth century. It used to be a common practice for historians to borrow from each other; now historians had to be wary not to garner accusations of plagiarism.

In *The Statesmen and Favorites of England*, his Henry VIII section featured Thomas Wolsey, Charles Brandon, Thomas More, Thomas Cranmer, Thomas Cromwell,

---

among others. Although Lloyd focused on the career of each individual rather than Henry VIII, his opinion of the king could be discerned from how he presented these men’s relationships with Henry. Lloyd proposed that Henry VIII had many favorites in court who rose and fell from favor depending on how they served his needs. Although they were usually given free rein to carry on their other interests, the moment these men failed to comply with Henry VIII’s demands or agree with his current views, they would fall quickly from power. Lloyd’s writings give readers insight into the beliefs and opinions of the Anglican and royalist clergy during the first few decades of the Restoration.

In his narratives of Thomas Wolsey and Thomas More, David Lloyd’s opinions concerning Henry VIII were made quite clear. According to Lloyd, Thomas Wolsey advanced to great power due to his own smooth tongue and clear head, coupled with King Henry’s youthfulness. Despite Wolsey’s many accomplishments, he ultimately failed Henry when it mattered most. Unable to obtain the divorce Henry so wanted, Cardinal Wolsey was quickly stripped of his wealth and cast into disgrace.

The King gave him many places, & he bestowed on him his magnificent Palaces; White-Hall, that Good Hypocrite, more convenient within, than comely without, Hampton-Court, Windsor; the two first to be resident in, and the last to be buried in….But the King broke with him at last about the divorce, being vexed with so many delays desers, retardings and prorogations between two Popes, Clement that was, and Wolsey that would be; yet rather eased him of his burdens, than deprived him of his preferments.95

---

In this passage, David Lloyd outlined Wolsey’s rise and fall from power. Although he was much admired for his services at the beginning of Henry VIII’s reign, Cardinal Wolsey was swiftly removed from power the moment he was unable to meet the king’s demands. Thomas More’s ascent and descent into power also paralleled the Cardinal’s. As Lloyd described, “The King raised him to the Chancellership, but not to his own opinion; he professed he would serve his Majesty, but he must obey his God: he would keep the Kings conscience and his own. His Wisdome and Parts advanced him, his Innocence and Integrity advanced him, his Innocence and Integrity ruined him: his Wit pleased the King, but his resolution crossed him.” Again, David Lloyd used Thomas More as an example of how Henry VIII tended to choose favorites at court whom he doted on until they disagreed with or otherwise failed him. In Lloyd’s description of the two men and others, he conveyed his feelings regarding Henry VIII. According to Lloyd, Henry could be comparable to a spoiled child. When his statesmen obeyed his expressed wishes, Henry granted them many royal favors and allowed them to pursue their interests freely. Once his favorites could not or would not satisfy his desires or their interests collided with his, Henry VIII would grow angry at their apparent incompetence. He would then remove and sometimes destroy them.

Originating in an explicit desire to defend the Church of England, the final history that will be analyzed in this thesis is a text written by Gilbert Burnet (1643 to 1715). He was of Scottish origin and birth and grew up to be a bishop of Salisbury and historian. Over the course of his early life, Burnet found himself in and out of favor from his

---

patrons, which in turn influenced his likelihood of receiving royal favor. In 1674, he sealed off all of his Scottish ties and remained in England for the rest of his life. At this time, however, he was forbidden at court. Given the twists in his fortunes, Burnet was always anxious to demonstrate his loyalty to the king and to defend his church against the Roman Catholic Church. When the legitimacy of the Church of England was challenged in the mid 1670’s, Burnet began research for his work *History of the Reformation of the Church of England* in late 1677. He published the first volume, covering the reign of Henry VIII in 1679. The second volume was published in 1681, and the supplemental third volume was published in 1714. The first volume, when published, was greeted with wild enthusiasm in the midst of the revelations of the Popish Plot.  

In his work, Gilbert Burnet acknowledged Henry VIII’s many unsavory traits; despite this, he still supported the majority of Henry VIII’s royal decisions. He especially lauded Henry’s divorce from Katherine of Aragon. Regarding Henry VIII’s marriage to Katherine, Burnet admitted that the marriage was flawed on many counts. Besides the illegality of a match between a man and his brother’s widow, Burnet also pointed to Katherine’s inability to bear offspring as a problem. “She bore him two sons, who died soon after they were born; and a daughter Mary, that lived to reign after him; but after that the Queen contracted some diseases that made her unacceptable to the King; so all hope of any other issue failing.”  

According to Burnet, Henry expected his divorce to be granted fairly quickly. European monarchs had often put aside their wives in the past.

Only Katherine’s familial influence with the Pope halted the process, much to Henry’s dismay. “The King had reason enough to expect a quick and favourable dispatch of his business at Rome, where dispensations or divorces in favour of princes used to pass, rather with regard to the merits of the Prince that desired them, than of the cause itself.”

Burnet also discussed at much length the many quality traits of the King’s new love interest. According to Burnet, “She was much admired...and continued to live without any blemish till her unfortunate fall gave occasion to some malicious writers to defame her in all the parts of her life.” He championed Anne Boleyn despite the popular rumors which denounced her. Some of these rumors included suspicions of witchcraft and that she had previous lovers before and during her relationship with Henry.

In his *History of the English Reformation*, Burnet argued that although Henry VIII was a man of many faults, even poor princes could be the instruments of God’s providence. Burnet believed that the English Reformation could not have been achieved by any ordinary man, only a man of Henry’s temperament could have started the reformation. Thus, Burnet thought that in the last analysis Henry’s political act of state was in fact God’s will. This argument supported the idea of an English national church and the fundamental doctrines of the Reformation which had been under attack for so long.

The five historical documents featuring Henry VIII discussed above were all written during the reigns of Charles I and Charles II. Both Charles I and Charles II struggled to exert their royal power with Parliament and the Church of England. Charles I especially struggled with his subjects; the Civil War dominated the last years of his reign until he was overthrown by parliament. In 1649, Charles was executed and the monarchy abolished by the Commonwealth of England. Although the monarchy was later restored in 1660, Charles I’s son, Charles II, still faced difficulty establishing a good working relationship with his parliament. Throughout their reigns, both Charles I and Charles II dealt with the question of religion and its function in English society. Although opponents accused both Charles I and Charles II of having Catholic sympathies, their Protestant subjects were very much entrenched in the Church of England and especially in the outcome of the Reformation. The ongoing controversies of Charles I and Charles II’s reigns could be seen within the works of Godwin, Baker, Herbert, Lloyd and Burnet. Throughout all of their works, these authors expressed concerns for the personal character of Henry VIII, but each whole heartedly supported the Reformation. Francis Godwin believed that Henry had the potential to be a good king; but that he all too often gave into his own personal whims and vices. Godwin argued that the English reformation was born solely out of the King’s lust for Anne Boleyn. Richard Baker shared Godwin’s viewpoint that Henry wanted to put his marriage aside out of his personal desires rather than religious conviction. In other ways, Baker was much more supportive of the Protestant Church and its creation than Godwin. Baker believed that reformation was absolutely necessary and that Henry’s actions, although unsavory, were
justified by the consequences. Out of the five authors, Edward Herbert was the only one who attempted to salvage Henry VIII’s reputation. While he agreed with the other accusations that Henry VIII was prone to violent rages, hasty decisions and selfishness, Herbert believed that despite all of those personal flaws, Henry VIII was still a decent king who did much for his country. These three authors, Herbert, Baker and Godwin, all wrote their histories during the reign of Charles I. Their works reflected the ongoing turmoil surrounding the English monarchy at the time. Their criticisms of Henry VIII as a bully and tyrant closely reflected popular resentment towards Charles I. Baker and Herbert would have been especially exposed to this viewpoint, for they were writing their documents during Charles’ fall from power and the English Civil War.

After the Restoration of the monarchy, the attitude towards Henry VIII was slightly altered. While the writers still held Henry VIII and his personal decisions in contempt, David Lloyd and Gilbert Burnet were not quite as hostile as the other authors. In his work, Lloyd depicted Henry VIII as a common bully: a man who showed gratitude to those who served his interests, but whose temper they provoked at their peril. Lloyd admired Henry VIII’s strong personality and believed it was what single handedly drove England towards the Reformation. Gilbert Burnet was a major advocate of Henry VIII’s reign. While he did agree that Henry VIII may not have been the best of persons, he argued that without Henry VIII’s dominant personality there would have been no Reformation. Burnet concluded that Henry VIII’s temperament, as disagreeable as it was, must have been God’s will. The works of these writers reflected the shift of English thought during the latter half of the seventeenth century. With the Restoration of the
monarchy, the faith of the English subjects in their monarch would have been uplifted, even if just a little. In addition, by the time Lloyd and Burnet wrote, the consequences of enduring a weak king had been made painfully obvious. In lieu of blaming the king’s strong but capricious character, these authors turned their attentions toward other topics, like religion and faith.

As the last of the Tudors died, the Stuart family took their place on the throne of England and their place in English history. With Elizabeth’s death, English historians no longer felt the need to censor their writings concerning the Tudor family to appease their current monarch. For the first time, historians were able to take a critical eye on Henry VIII and his politics. These historians, for the most part, disliked Henry VIII’s personality and personal decisions. They believed that he was driven by lust and other vices; yet, they all wholeheartedly supported the effects of his reign, namely the English Reformation.


Conclusion

Henry VIII triumphantly acceded to the throne of England in 1503 after the death of his father Henry VII. For the first twenty or so years of his reign, he enjoyed the reputation of being a model humanist; he was the perfect example of a godly Renaissance prince. During this time, Henry was also happily married to the Spanish princess Katherine of Aragon. Nobody, not even he, could have predicted the chain of events that ensued when the Lady Anne Boleyn caught his attention in the late 1520s. When Henry VIII died in 1547, his reputation as a great king was no more. Historically, Henry is primarily known for his history altering decision to break with the Roman Catholic Church and establish himself as the Supreme Head of the Church of England. In popular memory today, however, he is known as an overweight, tyrannical womanizer that enjoyed wedding, bedding, and beheading ladies in his court.

Court historians writing during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries portray a very different Henry VIII than the popular television dramatizations and best selling books do today. In general, early historians were more concerned with the political rather than the personal aspects of Henry’s reign. Henry’s reputation evolved with each successive monarch as the history writers took their own spin on his story. Although they all focused on his divorce from Katherine of Aragon and his split with the Roman Catholic Church, these historians came up with various conclusions as to the nature of divorce and how Henry VIII should be judged for his actions. Throughout the reigns of Henry VIII’s remaining children and of the Stuarts, chroniclers and court historians...
began to shift their focus from Henry VIII as a good, humanistic king. They studied instead the impacts of his reign in a more critical context.

In the chronicles written by court historians under Henry VIII, these writers focused on the illegality of the marriage between Henry VIII and Katherine of Aragon. They believed the primary catalysts which led Henry VIII to break with Katherine, and subsequently the Roman Catholic Church, could be found within his troubled conscience and his great humanist nature and learning. According to their documents, Henry himself insisted that his actions were driven by his conscience and his strong belief that he was doing the right thing. The authors most likely made sure to follow Henry’s views for various political reasons. If they had disagreed with Henry, they probably would have been punished for treason. As a result, these authors were more concerned with the dynastic issues caused by the illegitimacy of Henry’s union with Katherine and the absence of a legitimate male heir than the impact of Henry’s reformation. Besides being cautious about offending their king, these authors most likely legitimately cared about the continuity of the monarchy and the political stability that a clear succession would bring to the country.

During the reign of Elizabeth I, Henry’s second daughter, historians built on, but altered, their predecessors’ approach concerning Henry VIII and his reign. Their works reinforced Elizabeth’s legitimacy and birthright which had been denied to her at various points of her life. In this, they developed a point that earlier chroniclers had deemed inconsequential, or perhaps politically dangerous. They also weakened arguments that questioned her mother’s marriage to Henry by emphasizing the invalidity of Henry’s
marriage to Katherine of Aragon and the legality of his second marriage to Anne Boleyn. In order to do so, these authors focused on promoting Elizabeth’s father, Henry VIII, as a conscientious and godly man. They portrayed his bid for divorce from Katherine and the subsequent break from the Catholic Church to be lawful by God. They also remolded Anne Boleyn’s tattered image from an adulterous sinner to model Christian queen, a worthy mother of their own Queen Bess. Finally, the historians placed heavy emphasis on the seemingly easy acceptance of the Reformation on the part of the English people. They emphasize the legitimacy of the authority claimed by Henry and later passed onto Elizabeth as the head of the Church of England. These authors deliberately did not focus on the difficulties England faced during the initial years of England’s separation from the Catholic Church. They did so to avoid accidentally undermining Elizabeth’s position and power.

The next rulers, the Stuart family, were distant cousins of the Tudors and held no particular loyalty to the memory of the long deceased Henry VIII. During the reigns of James I, Charles I and Charles II, historians did not share the same views as the Tudor historians concerning the monarch and did not hesitate to voice their opinions. Their historical works concerning Henry VIII often reflected popular opinion of the monarchy at the time of publication and also exposed religious conflicts which divided the kingdom. Throughout all of their works, the Stuart historians expressed concerns about the personal character of Henry VIII, if not outright derision for him. Still, each fully supported his break with the Roman Catholic Church and the resulting English
Reformation. To these historians, he may not have been a worthy king, but his actions leading to the departure of England from the Roman Catholic fold were praiseworthy.

In the chronicles written during Henry VIII’s reign and published shortly thereafter, the writers were cautious to censure themselves and avoid criticizing their king. This trend continued into the reign of his daughter who remained loyal to the memory of her father. After the last of the Tudors died, English historians no longer felt the need to censor their writings concerning the Tudor family to appease their current monarch. For the first time, historians were able to take a critical eye on Henry VIII and his politics. These historians, for the most part, disliked Henry VIII’s personality and his personal decisions regarding his marriages. They believed that he was driven by greed and lust; despite criticizing him personally, they supported the long term effects of his reign, the English Reformation.

These documents help us understand modern scholarship about this illustrious king and the shifts in history writing over the early modern era. In a grander scheme, these documents also show how early historians documented and viewed their own histories. History writing, then as now, pays attention to the issues of most concern to the larger society. Henry’s first chroniclers shared his worry about dynastic continuity, and they wrote histories emphasizing the suitable nature of the actions Henry took to ensure an heir. Under Elizabeth, supporting a somewhat vulnerable but popular monarch pointed historians to different aspects of Henry VIII’s story. These writers were more interested in the legitimization of Elizabeth, who was newly relevant in the Tudor efforts to maintain their dynastic control over England. The later writers could disregard Tudor
dynastic concerns that dominated the histories of their predecessors. As a result, they turned their analysis to the religious legacy left behind by Henry VIII’s reign and how the implications of his political decisions affected the world they lived in. In a period of turmoil over the performance of their own monarchs, they explored criticisms of Henry’s character, but they always endorsed the church he founded.

Although it may not seem apparent at first, all modern scholarship on Henry VIII and his court can be traced back to the histories which were written during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In their works, these early English historians laid down the basic foundations of the Henry VIII that is remembered today. The Henrician and Elizabethan chroniclers ensured that his greatness of character and many accomplishments would not be forgotten. The histories produced during the Stuarts’ reign could be seen as the very beginnings of early modern historical scholarship on Henry VIII. For the first time, the Stuart historians began to take a step back and approach their histories in a similar manner to that used in historical scholarship today. They analyzed important events within the context of their contemporary issues; they studied how Henry VIII’s history affected their societal beliefs concerning the monarchy and religion. Finally, it was during these times that popular conceptions of Henry VIII originated. English citizens under that Stuarts were the first to latch onto the perceptions of Henry VIII as a tyrant and womanizer that dominate popular culture today.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


*Calendar of State Papers Existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice, and in other Libraries of Northern Italy: 1528-1533*. Edited by Rawdon Brown. London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1867.


Holinshead, Raphael. *The Third Volume of Chronicles, Beginning at Duke William the Norman, commonlie called the Conqueror; and the descending by degrees of yeeres to all the Kings and Queens of England*. London: 1577.


Secondary Sources


