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The 'diplomatic masculinity' of Henry VIII

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the place of royal masculinity in the conduct of Henry VIII's international relations with his two principal rivals, Francis I of France and Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor. It argues that while strategic considerations evidently drove the conduct of his warfare and diplomacy with Continental rulers, those strategic considerations were themselves often informed by his wish to enhance his reputation as a man before other male rulers. While historians now routinely link gender and diplomacy in their accounts of female rulers, the significance of masculinity as a force in the diplomacy of early modern kings awaits fuller articulation. Henry was a monarch whose masculinity directly informed his interactions with his fellow European kings.

KEYWORDS

Charles V; diplomacy; dynasty; Francis I; Henry VIII; gender; hegemony; kingship; masculinity; monarchy; patriarchy; Renaissance; warfare

In the Spring of 1515, a new resident ambassador arrived in England from the Republic of Venice. Sebastian Giustinian began four years of service at the court of Henry VIII. The king first received the ambassador, together with his secretary and other companions, at Richmond Palace on 23 April, St George's Day. Henry was dressed in the robes of the Order of the Garter and surrounded by his fellow knights. The ambassadors accompanied him to Mass and afterwards he dined with them in a hall furnished with 'a display of gold plate, of most immense value, as well as a great quantity of silver'.¹ From the start, Henry impressed the Venetian nobleman with his personal charisma and the magnificence of his court. Giustinian's reports, and those of other envoys who came on specific missions during the time he was in England, provide what remain among the fullest contemporary descriptions of the young English king and his court. At the end of his embassy Giustinian described Henry at the age of 29 as:

Extremely handsome; nature could not have done more for him; he is much handsomer than any other sovereign in Christendom, a great deal handsomer than the king of France; very fair, and his whole frame admirably proportioned... He is extremely fond of tennis, at which game it is the prettiest thing in the world to see him play, his fair skin glowing through a shirt of the finest texture.²

It is clear from these sources that the personal and physical attributes of the king, or at least of this king, were considered fit and significant subjects for ambassadorial comment. It is also clear that Giustinian's description was informed by repeated interactions with Henry during the course of the four years of his embassy. Most of these were carefully, and evidently successfully, undertaken by Henry to focus attention on his physical strength, his intelligence, and adroitness as a youthful male monarch in ways that asserted qualities of honour, reliability, and exceptionality in

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his life as a man and in the exercise of his sovereignty. This article examines the king's performance of his 'diplomatic masculinity' in the context of his relations with his rivals, Francis I of France and the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. It reviews key events in Henry's reign to show how they may be interpreted as part and parcel of a consistent attempt to establish his masculinity internationally, observing in more detail than has hitherto been done, how this self-conscious presentation of his male power to other kings, in person as well as through ambassadors, changed as Henry aged and was subjected to the anxieties, diseases, and infirmities to which he was prone in his later years. Some observations are made about his diplomacy with female sovereigns, regents and nobles, but the primary concern of the research presented is the way Henry related to his two principal male rivals.

It is not argued here that the whole complexity of Henry's international relations can be explained simply as the story of the king's growth and development as a man and as a ruler. The security of the kingdom and its relative position internationally, its traditional rivalry with France and its often-fraught relations with Scotland and Ireland were primary strategic concerns. Consequently, there were strategic and economic imperatives in maintaining generally good relations with Spain, and with the Habsburgs whose territories in the Netherlands were crucial markets for English woollen cloth and the source of numerous commodities crucial to the English economy, especially in the south and east. The crown profited through taxing imports and exports, and the livelihood of the country's merchant elites depended on stable trading relations with as much of Europe as possible. Peaceful relations with France at times brought significant sums of cash into the royal coffers. This assisted the crown in financing its own establishment and lessened somewhat its need for taxation. Nevertheless, even these strategic considerations and aims were primarily conceived of, and expressed, in personal terms by Henry and his fellow kings.³

Hegemonic masculinity and royal gender

The origins of what is now termed 'hegemonic masculinity' can of course be traced back beyond Antiquity. Yet, it has only been comparatively recently that the term has been used in discussions of the projection of royal power. It was first coined by Raewyn Connell whose research demonstrated how cultural assumptions and practices inform performances of masculinity and frequently inhere authority in particular types of men.⁴ Joan Scott's work emphasised that the construction of masculinity generally has ever been closely aligned with claims to power.⁵ Judith Butler's research into gender identity as performance showed how hegemonic masculinity can be examined directly through the sources generated by its staging, such as recorded speech, action, ritual, gesture, and writing.⁶ It has recently been suggested that 'hegemonic masculinity' may be an insufficiently nuanced concept, albeit that certain normative models of masculinity were dominant within what have been termed particular 'communication communities'.⁷ Nevertheless, it is evident that pre-modern societies constructed ideal males as those able to govern themselves and, crucially, others through self-control, self-sufficiency, rationality, physical strength, and courage. Alexandra Shepard and Elizabeth Foyster have applied the work of Connell and others to research into the construction of manhood and masculinity in early modern England.⁸ John Tosh has explored similar themes in his studies of British colonial history as a gendered exercise in the assertion of power.⁹ Much of this research has concentrated on gentry experience, where sources are evidently more ample, and to a lesser extent on commoners. Ecclesiastical and secular court records have provided useful insights into the performance of masculinity at lower social levels in disputes of various kinds and among particular communities, such as the clergy.¹⁰

Against this background, the masculinity of medieval and early modern kings specifically has secured increased historical attention in recent years. A further stimulus in this direction has been the attention given over the last thirty years or so to the performance of masculine authority by female European sovereigns and especially the two Tudor queens regnant, Mary I and

Elizabeth I, who are now being studied in a more comparative framework.¹¹ These studies of queenship have decisively changed approaches to monarchy as an exclusively male preserve. They have shown how royal women negotiated beliefs about female rule held in patriarchal societies and adjusted the performance of their roles as rulers to emphasise sovereignty based on legitimacy, formal and legal recognition, religious orthodoxy (however defined) and service to the realm, rather than on their sex. On some celebrated occasions, such as Elizabeth I's 'Armada' speech, a female sovereign deliberately played with contemporary notions of gender roles, but most of the time they did not allow their sex to define their capacity to govern.¹² There has been, however, something of a tendency in scholarship to assume that only female monarchs had to engage with and resolve for themselves the dichotomies of gender and monarchy. That is, to regard male monarchs' relationship to kingship and to patriarchy at a further remove as normative and generally unproblematic. With the exceptions of kings whose sexuality may be debateable, such as Edward II, James VI/I or Henri III of France where interesting insights have been offered, the effective performance of male monarchy has largely been assumed by scholars of medieval and renaissance kingship (and queenship) with little of the precise observation of gendered behaviour now accorded to female rulers.¹³ Or to put it another way, why is Elizabeth I's gender such a central issue in most accounts of her diplomacy and governance whereas it features only implicitly, if at all, in accounts of the reigns of her grandfather and father?

As leaders of pre-modern patriarchal societies, kings were expected to incarnate and perform their roles in the exercise of male authority in an exemplary fashion. Having to embody and enact the expected manly qualities was an on-going process, lived out daily by the ruler. A failure to uphold them at any time affronted his personal honour or reputation. Consequently, princes had an even greater obligation than their fellow noblemen to perform as men throughout their daily routine. Yet, in certain circumstances, or in relation to particular individuals, that kind of masculine performance could be internally contradictory, contested, and even fragile. Age, disease of body and mind, physical infirmity or disability might require considerable effort from individual kings to adapt and recast the performance of kingship to avoid their authority being questioned and perhaps undermined as insufficiently masculine. These issues in medieval and early modern English kingship have recently gained greater attention. Susan Doran has focused on the relationship between monarchy and manhood more generally from the mid-1530s to the outbreak of the Civil War. In her study of the reigns of Henry V and VI and her critique of their contrasting reputations as a success and a failure respectively, Katherine Lewis has explored how ideal masculinity was part of the criteria against which the performance of kingship was assessed in the later medieval period. Her research suggests that royal manhood could be, indeed had to be, presented in varying ways according to differing circumstances faced by individual monarchs.¹⁴ For early modern monarchs and their nobles, embodying and enacting the expected manly qualities was an on-going process closely tied to status and lived out daily. Strenuous physical activities, such as hunting and tournaments, alongside other physical skills such as dancing, were ways of asserting effective masculinity.

To date, and perhaps understandably, Henry VIII's performance of his masculinity has received most attention of this kind, although too often this has come down, particularly in popular representations of him, to his supposedly insatiable libido, for which there is actually no evidence whatsoever.¹⁵ By contrast, Kevin Sharpe offered insightful gendered readings of the presentation of Henry's male body in courtly performance, in print, and in the work of Holbein.¹⁶ Henry's youthful masculinity was, perhaps surprisingly, an issue that he had himself carefully to negotiate at the outset of his reign. The same is true of Francis I, the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V and very probably Süleyman the Magnificent, too.¹⁷ Sharpe discussed the implications for Henry's sense of his masculinity of the series of romances and marriages of his middle years. He observed that particularly in the annulment case, Henry 'exposed to print not only his conscience but the royal sexual body as the question of whether Catherine had consummated her marriage with Prince Arthur became a central issue'. He also noted that Henry's passion for Anne Boleyn

was expressed in his own songs and verses that circulated at court, and got beyond it, in which the royal body was implicitly central. Suzannah Lipscomb took up a related theme, arguing that Henry's sense of his honour was linked very much to his physicality and was an abiding psychological preoccupation in the events surrounding accusations of adultery levelled at Anne Boleyn and that these had national and international implications for Henry's reputation as a man.¹⁸

Traditionally, diplomatic history largely confined itself to gender neutral descriptions of Henry's 'strong' kingship or leadership in the international context. More recent analyses have, however, looked at how concepts of honour and chivalry informed Henry's foreign relations and, to varying extents, have argued that honour and reputation were the driving forces in the foreign policy of Henry and his contemporaries. Honour was part of a calculus in maintaining a prestigious place with each other and before the noble elites of their own kingdoms.¹⁹ These less explicitly gendered insights have informed my own discussions to date of Henry's personal diplomacy, particularly with Francis I (to whom Giustinian first compared him). Deriving from the Latin 'vir' for man, the quality of possessing *virtus*, *virtù* or *vertu* is best read as a sixteenth-century homologue of our word masculinity, only weakly and indirectly rendered in the modern English word 'virtue'. It meant a set of idealised 'masculine' qualities such as strength, courage, wisdom, self-restraint, generosity and honesty, all needed for effective and respected leadership of other men, not least in warfare. Possessing them, or at least being regarded as doing so, was key to honour. So, masculinity, now more gender-specifically understood and discussed, has a place in understanding the diplomacy of these monarchs, not least Henry VIII.²⁰

Masculinity, tutelage, and the young king

In his ancestors Edward III, Edward the Black Prince, and Henry V, Henry certainly grew up with strong male role models. Their reputations closely accorded with their successful public performance of kingship. With Henry VII's court poet, John Skelton, the young Henry VIII learnt Latin and some Greek; he read chivalric romances and historical chronicles, and did some poetry writing. He developed his skills further with later tutors, John Holt, William Hone, and Giles Duwes with whom he obtained the essentials of the fashionable *studia humanitatis*, particularly grammar and history together with contemporary languages, music, and perhaps theology.²¹ Like the Venetian ambassadors' reports, Edward Hall's *Chronicle* of Henry's reign emphasised the king's physical stature and strength as a young man well able to shoulder, as it were, the burdens of kingship. In that account, first published soon after Henry's death, the young king is represented as a superlative horseman and hunter, a champion jousting, archer, and dancer, based on observed displays of the required skills that, for contemporaries, proceeded from his own inherent *virtus* and in the way observed by the Venetians and French ambassadors.²²

Most of the leisure pursuits of monarchs, but particularly hunting and jousting, were designed to allow them to demonstrate the expected qualities, surrounded by the men who most needed to witness and be co-opted into such demonstrations. These sports required highly developed skills, constant training and practice, and expensive technical equipment - indicative of wealth and status. Their mastery was perceived to be closely related to potential leadership in warfare.²³ Gifts of the accoutrements of tournaments, or of hunting clothes, or game, were demonstrations in themselves of prowess that could be sent to those not physically present to witness its exercise. Conversely, the king was often presented by his nobles and gentry with hunting and jousting equipment or clothing, intended to associate the giver with Henry's skill and enjoyment of these pastimes. Other physical activities and sports such as archery and tennis had an analogous function. Many of the gifts exchanged between Henry and Francis I in particular were of this kind, including horses, dogs, wild boar piglets, knives, game, and food made from it - such as pasties. They also gave each other horse trappings and equipment, longbows, cross bows, boar staves, pieces of armour and on occasions whole suits of armour.²⁴

One of the earliest images of Henry shows him acting out this masculinity very precisely. The Great Tournament of Westminster was held on 12th and 13th February 1511 to celebrate the birth on January 1st that year of the king's heir, Prince Henry. The getting of a male successor was a demonstration of the expected royal masculine qualities and the event was celebrated and commemorated with an exceptionally lavish tournament. The heralds' roll recording it shows Henry entering the lists, accompanied by his fellow noblemen and surrounded by attendants and servants. He jousts before his wife Katherine and the ladies of her court, before older lords and ambassadors who all watch him from a special viewing stand. He is depicted shattering his lance against his opponent's head in a charge down the tilt, gaining full points in the competition. As Emma Levitt has shown, Henry's sense of his skills, as recorded in the jousting 'checks' or scores, was closely bound into his own sense of his masculine capacity to lead.²⁵ Hall's *Chronicle* records numerous competitions during the first ten years of Henry's reign and his description of the royal summer progress the previous year has the king:

exercising himself daily in shooting, singing, dancing, wrestling casting of the barre (staff, stave or lance) playing at the recorders, flute virginals and in setting of songs, making of ballets (dances) and did set two goodly masses, every of them five parts, which were sung oftentimes in his chapel, and afterwards in divers other places. And when he came to [W]oking there were kept both jousts and tourneys; the rest of the progress was spent in hunting and hawking and shooting.²⁶

Although ambassadors were less likely to have witnessed summer progresses like these in full, they often reported activities of this kind as part of the daily round at the young king's court. Banquets, to which they were invited, were routinely reported with an emphasis on the king's personal participation – as in the tournaments which they often followed. His physical capacities and enthusiasm for dancing as an expression of youth and manliness were emphasized in numerous reports to the Venetian authorities and the court of France particularly. Just as Henry intended that they should be.

In September 1513, Paulo da Laude, the Mantuan ambassador at the court of the emperor Maximilian I, was at a banquet at Lille hosted by the emperor and his daughter, Margaret of Savoy, to celebrate Henry's conquest of Tournai. He reported that the king danced with Margaret 'from the time the banquet finished until nearly day, in his shirt and without shoes'.²⁷ Dancing without his doublet was the Tudor equivalent of being stripped to the waist; the king's physique could not have been more overtly displayed without breaking the bounds of propriety. The ambassador later reported that Henry abruptly ended a conversation with him 'as he was in a hurry to go and dine and dance afterwards. In this he does wonders and leaps like a stag'.²⁸ On such occasions Henry's performance of his skills often extended beyond his physical prowess in the dances themselves to playing instruments and to the music he composed for banquets, some of which survives.²⁹

In October, the same ambassador wrote that he had seen Henry dance 'magnificently in the French style, in his doublet and play the virginals and the flute in company most creditably, affording great pleasure to all those present'.³⁰ Much of this behaviour was prompted primarily by Henry's natural spontaneity as a young man but it was, nevertheless, also carefully choreographed – literally in the case of his dancing – to focus maximum attention on his presence. Ambassadors reported how, as part of the masque tradition, the king was often first presented disguised and then, at a carefully chosen moment, dramatically revealed to refocus attention on himself as sovereign. Thus, Henry reinforced his role not only as the lordly patron of the festivities but also the principal player in the masque.³¹

On such occasions the display was for all ambassadors present but after the accession of Francis I as king of France in 1515 and Charles of Habsburg (Henry's nephew by marriage), as king of Spain the following year, it was to their representatives, or any intermediaries, that Henry increasingly directed his performances. The extravagant display of himself at the centre of the court for Giustinian's arrival in April 1515, with which we began, was prompted in part by the

king's awareness that some of the ambassadors would be returning to France shortly afterwards. That the Venetians themselves understood this was made clear two weeks later at the usual May Day jousts and festivities. The ambassadors participated in an *al fresco* banquet. Afterwards, Henry met them and questioned them closely about Francis I's appearance and physique. When told they thought the French king's legs 'spare' or thin, Henry opened his doublet and placing a hand on his thigh said 'Look here! And have I also not got a good calf to my leg'. The Venetians then watched the king joust with his usual skill and flair. That they understood who the real audience for this display was is clear from their description of the jousts. They reported that the king jousted strenuously:

more particularly on account of Pasqualigo (who is returning to France today), that he may be able to tell King Francis what he has seen in England, and especially with regard to his Majesty's own prowess.³²

War, peace, and the autonomous assertion of masculinity

During the first decade and more of his reign the king's physicality and personal accomplishments were, therefore, a crucial aspect of the presentation domestically and internationally of his capacity to lead. Yet, as was true of all young kings, Henry's hegemonic masculinity had to be asserted in less physical but arguably far more important ways in working with his council to provide effective governance of his kingdom. It had taken him some time to make the council he had inherited from his father acknowledge the reality of his personal authority, and not merely his status, as king. Henry's reign only really got into its stride with the advent of Thomas Wolsey and his becoming the dominant figure on the king's council. According to his first biographer, George Cavendish, from about 1511 Wolsey rapidly showed himself to be 'the most earnest and readiest among all the council to advance the king's only will and pleasure without any respect to the case'.³³ Wolsey gained power by assisting the king in his desire to show himself to be a leader of men through real military endeavour; to move from the tournament field to the battlefield, through asserting his claim to the French throne. Wolsey presented war with France that Henry wanted to undertake as a necessary part of his education in kingship; a mark of its authentication at home and the means to high status internationally, something Henry craved.³⁴ He then organised Henry's first two attacks on France in 1512 and 1513, undertaken ostensibly in the service of Pope Julius II and against Louis XII with whom the pope was then in dispute.³⁵ In the aftermath of these conflicts, Wolsey then brought about a favourable peace with France in 1514 which was based, as had been previous English peace settlements, on annual payments to Henry, theoretically recognising (and paying off) his claim to the throne of France.³⁶

Francis I's accession in January 1515 and his conquest of Milan in September that year after his victory at Marignano, catapulted him to the forefront of European attention and somewhat marginalised Henry. Francis's determination to retain, then regain, the duchy of Milan became the driving force in his foreign policy throughout his reign. This, Henry quickly appreciated. Once again guided by Wolsey, he cooperated with Pope Leo X's plan for a truce between Christian princes in 1517. In Wolsey's hands, the resulting 1518 Treaty of Universal Peace and Anglo-French alliance that secured it, established a European non-aggression and collective security pact. It was designed at once to return Henry to centre-stage in Christendom, and to curb Francis by making the English king the arbitrator of international disputes.³⁷ The celebrations that ensued presented Henry with a valuable opportunity to reaffirm his kingship internationally. In June 1520, at the Field of Cloth of Gold, Francis and Henry fought alongside each other in the 'tournament of peace' to inaugurate their alliance. Henry acted out the role of warrior-king as never before. He treated his French counterpart and his court with extravagant generosity and politeness intended to express a masculine self-confidence and his willingness to offer friendship to his rival, provided it was on Henry's terms. He presented himself as a ruler who, though

capable of war, preferred peace. The alliance was potentially advantageous to Francis's own claims to prominence but, for the English at least, it enhanced Henry's international status to a far greater extent. As the 'arbiter' of international disputes between all signatories to the 1518 multi-lateral agreement, the king's personal masculine qualities were asserted as the authentication of his goodwill and his strength, rather than weakness, in peace, particularly with his 'good brother and friend', the king of France.

Somewhat paradoxically perhaps, the most famous episode of the Field was the impromptu wrestling match between the two monarchs. One day while they were enjoying a drink together and perhaps watching some wrestling, Henry suddenly challenged Francis to a bout and shaped up to him. Francis responded with a rapidly executed hip throw, leaving Henry on his back on the ground. The move was so decisive that he was able, within the rules, to decline Henry's offer of a second round. We only know about the wrestling match because it is mentioned in one French source. English ones are entirely silent on the subject. The match was characteristic of that spontaneity of which both men were naturally capable. It was probably due to Henry's frustration at the protocols of the meeting and may have been his way, literally, of coming to grips with his rival. Of course, Henry expected to win but it was he who was required to be magnanimous in defeat. The episode reminds us that these two kings could demonstrate physical prowess more easily than most and Francis's appearance was no less subject to adulation in and around his own court than was Henry's. A French poet's description of Francis waiting to meet his English counterpart for the first time on 7 June 1520 is strongly in this tradition of casting physical attractiveness as proof of inner manliness and outward valour:

... his neck bears the chain in the form of shells; his neck
bears the chain, magnificent with gold and gems; there is
nothing more sumptuous in the whole wide world. His milk-white
neck receives his flowing locks and a golden band clasps;
them together with marvellous art: through his face and shoulders
... Francis, through his whole body, his valour, his triumphs,
his lineage, his counsels, his religion, mighty:
Francis, the most just sovereign that we have ever seen,
the greatest in war, and the greatest in piety ... For us, under
the reign of Francis, the age of gold rises up once more, such
as they say existed when Saturn was king.³⁸

Another French court poet, Clement Marot, also praised Francis's handsomeness as proof of his *virtus* which was itself capable of engendering chivalric peace with England. Competition of all kinds characterised the Field of Cloth of Gold but, perhaps contrary to modern expectations, it was seen at the time as the way the two rulers and their supporters validated their claims to offer genuine friendship. After all, you need to know your friend's strength as much as you do your enemy's.³⁹

It was axiomatic for Cardinal Wolsey that Henry be kept on the winning side internationally. Despite the grand hopes for peace in 1518-20, the preponderant power of Charles V provoked Francis into covertly starting a disastrous war in 1521 which was only concluded after his defeat at Pavia in 1525 and the imposition upon him of the ignominious Treaty of Madrid in January 1526.⁴⁰ Desperate for assistance, he turned to Henry who was willing to help - at a price. Over the following two years a new Anglo-French 'Eternal Peace' and alliance was negotiated by Wolsey, based on increased annual payments by Francis to Henry and promises of assistance in Henry's effort to obtain an annulment of his marriage to Katherine of Aragon.⁴¹

Marriages and international masculinity

There is no other controversy in Henry's reign that has received greater historiographical and popular attention than the annulment campaign, his subsequent break with Rome and his

successive marriages. All this secured his reputation as the most famous king in English history, even if not quite in terms the young Henry might have imagined or wanted. It made his marital status an active consideration in dealing with him for almost the next twenty years until his marriage to Catherine Parr in 1543, and a major part of his strategic calculus in his international dealings in a way that was not true of either of his principal rivals. Henry's pressing need for a male heir has usually, and rightly, been explained by his patriarchal conviction that males made the most capable monarchs. Despite his own anxieties, by 1527 Henry *had*, so far as anyone else was concerned, secured the Tudor succession through his lawful marriage to Katherine in June 1509 and the birth of their daughter Mary in 1516. He had demonstrated to a sufficient extent both his fertility and potency as required by patriarchal expectations.⁴² He had conceived a living son with Katherine, the short-lived Prince Henry, and at least one other male who was one of the succession of tragic miscarriages and still-births suffered by his wife, and for which she would have been understood to be responsible. He also had a natural son, Henry Fitzroy, by his first mistress Elizabeth Blount and perhaps an unacknowledged child by Mary Boleyn. He was not in any sense used then, or now, 'childless'. Yet, the king described himself privately and later publicly as such, despite the risk of reputational damage to which childless married men were subject in a patriarchal society with its expectation, particularly among the nobility, that marriages were contracted primarily for the begetting of legitimate children.⁴³ Henry did so because his annulment request was for him, not so much a crisis of his 'hegemonic masculinity' per se but an issue that went very directly to the respect which he believed it was due. Such was Henry's sense of himself as a king and a man of exceptional calibre (as constantly publicly acted out since his accession) that he saw himself as working to perfect the work his reign had begun, by putting Katherine aside in favour of a wife who could give him a male heir to secure the dynasty. From that position, reached quite early in the annulment proceedings, Henry never resiled.⁴⁴

Wolsey used the considerable diplomatic capacities at his disposal to fight the case on narrowly legal, rather than theological, grounds based on the insufficiency of Pope Julius II's 1504 bull of dispensation allowing the marriage of Henry to Katherine. Yet, in the summer of 1527, and without warning, Henry brushed this aside in favour of taking a direct approach to Pope Clement VII to which he believed himself entitled.⁴⁵ Henry clearly saw the papacy, and Clement personally, as being in his debt, rather than the other way around although this was not publicly stated at this stage, nor was it conveyed to Henry's rivals by his ambassadors. But it was there from the start all the same. Had he not, he would later say, fought for the papacy against Louis of France in 1512-13? Had he not then promoted Christian peace and unity under the pope's nominal aegis in 1518-20 when (he could now convince himself) he had been in a strong position to continue the war? And had he not personally written in defence of the papacy against Luther a year later when he published the *Defence of the Seven Sacraments*, for which Leo X had conferred upon him the title of Defender of the Faith?

All this intervention achieved, however, was to alert the papal curia to the true nature of Henry's matrimonial dilemma, his intentions towards Anne Boleyn, and further to hamper Wolsey's often imaginative but still conventional, approach to the problem. It ultimately resulted in the fruitless legatine trial proceedings at Blackfriars in July 1529. Caught up in them, Wolsey could not work his accustomed magic abroad and, in the same month, Henry's two great rivals reached an apparent settlement of their differences in the Treaty of Cambrai, negotiated by Francis I's mother Louise of Savoy and Charles's paternal aunt Margaret of Savoy, without Wolsey's input or much consideration of Henry's needs.⁴⁶ Clement revoked the case to Rome and there was a danger that Henry might have to be represented before the papal court in response to his wife's appeal to an authority higher than his own. For Henry this was unthinkable, and he was more fearful than ever for the succession and his personal reputation, at the heart of which was the masculine performance of securing the dynasty.

Wolsey's dismissal in October 1529 and Henry's consequent campaign, no longer to request but to compel the papacy to annul his marriage, brought him to what might reasonably be

called his 'personal rule' for the first time. His relations with the papacy rapidly deteriorated and he alienated Charles who would not brook the dishonour being done to his aunt, Queen Katherine. In these circumstances, Francis I was Henry's only powerful European ally. After Wolsey's fall, the members of the Boleyn family and their adherents came rapidly to the fore in conducting Anglo-French relations, adopting and adapting the cardinal's financially advantageous pro-French policy, capitalising on the personal connections Anne Boleyn had formed at the French court in her youth, particularly with Francis's sister, Marguerite de Navarre. Like her mother Louise before her (with whom she had often worked), Marguerite usually presented the friendly and sympathetic face of the French regime.⁴⁷ Like Louise, she advocated peace and her own evangelicalism helped to shape Anne Boleyn's religious views. Anne's father Thomas and her brother George were soon made special or resident ambassadors in France and often praised Marguerite as friend, a peace-maker and a highly intelligent woman upon whom Henry might rely. The diplomatic discourse of these years developed upon the earlier model of Henry and Francis as chivalric 'good brothers and friends' so that Marguerite was not only a good sister to her brother the king, but, by extension, to Henry as well. Her mother had been addressed as 'good mother' by both Henry and Wolsey at the height of her influence and power as regent in the 1520s. These familial terms of address were widespread in the early modern period and enabled Henry and his ambassadors to seek the assistance of influential women, implicitly recognising their informal power but with no diminution of the king's own power or status as a male monarch by so doing. Marguerite tried to counter the influence upon him of Francis's chief advisor Anne de Montmorency. While she did not necessarily oppose a reconciliation with Charles that Montmorency advocated, Marguerite was sceptical of the emperor's motives. She therefore always supported a balancing Franco-English alliance. She corresponded with Anne Boleyn, sent gifts to her and Henry, and expressed a willingness to assist. Throughout the remainder of Francis's reign, Marguerite always trod a careful line between offering sympathy and support for Henry and doing anything that might compromise her own high status within her brother's regime.⁴⁸

The patriarchal, familial, mode was Henry's preferred way of dealing with younger royal males as well, not least his nephew James V of Scotland. James's relations with Henry in his early years were generally cordial but distant. Henry usually offered an assertively avuncular arm, and plenty of advice with it, to James and those around him. During James's minority, Lord Dacre of the North several times assured his mother, Margaret, that Henry intended only good towards his nephew. In 1522 he described James to Lord Hay, a member of Albany's council, as being, 'for lack of issue of my said sovereign, which he has, and trusts to have more, your sovereign is heir apparent to this realm'; an extraordinary statement which seems to deny the existence of Henry's actual heir, Princess Mary.⁴⁹ Margaret and the Scots lords frequently demanded assurances for James's safety and that of his realm from her brother. Writing to James himself in July 1524 urging him to take upon himself full authority as king, and against Albany, Henry assured his nephew that he wished to assist him in 'the increase of his honour' and promised money and troops if required to establish James's 'royal dignity'. He wrote to Margaret with even greater force on the subject.⁵⁰ James did not in fact begin his personal rule for another four years and his trust in Henry's advice and 'protection' was always limited. If the young king of Scots acknowledged any kind of older mentor it was probably Francis, who habitually addressed James as his 'très cher et très aimé frère et filz'.

As Henry aged into the later 1530s and onwards, he was cast less as the dashing warrior king, than as the staunch brother and ally of Francis, and once more as the caring uncle, this time to Francis's three sons, but especially his two eldest, François and Henri, duc d'Orléans. They had been held in Spain for four years from 1526 as hostages for their father's performance of his obligations under the treaty of Madrid. In 1530 they were released, but not before Henry had helped Francis to pay Charles an enormous indemnity under the terms of the Treaty of Cambrai. In return, Francis supported Henry to some extent in Rome during these years as he pursued his campaign to marry Anne.⁵¹

Henry's apparently ardent desire for the French princes' release was emphasised at every turn in expressly paternal terms, as if they had been his own sons. When news of it finally came in July 1530, it was received with conspicuous rejoicing by him in the presence of the French ambassador. Plans were soon laid for a second meeting between Henry and Francis. In the summer of 1532, as Thomas Cromwell took increasing oversight of what became the parliamentary enactment of the king's royal supremacy over the English church, a new alliance was signed with France. In October that year the two kings met again, at Calais and at Boulogne, for the first time since 1520.⁵² Francis was accompanied by Marguerite de Navarre, but she refused to meet Anne Boleyn, the newly-minted Marquess of Pembroke, who accompanied Henry. Francis was also accompanied by the dauphin François, Henri, and his youngest son, Charles d'Angoulême. He introduced them to Henry when they met outside Boulogne, entreating them very publicly to show their gratitude to the king of England. Francis then withdrew a little and they dutifully thanked Henry for his help in securing the release of their father in 1526, and their own. Henry embraced them and kissed them on the mouth, a gesture of great paternal intimacy. Francis's youngest, Charles, spoke 'so sweetly and sagely, according to report, that he spoke like an angel; so that the English King again embraced him alone, [i.e. apart] kissing him several times'.⁵³ Henry elaborately repeated his own devotion to the boys, specifically as godfather to Henri, who had supposedly been named after him. Back in June 1519, Sir Thomas Boleyn had represented the English king at the duke's baptism, presenting the baby with a gold salt cellar, cup and ewer.⁵⁴ As a further expression of this quasi-paternal connection between the two kings, in the service of their good relations, Henry's natural son Henry Fitzroy, Duke of Richmond, and the duke of Norfolk's son Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, the future poet, remained in France for a year after the meeting as the guests of the dauphin and his brothers. Francis welcomed Richmond at Chantilly and told him that, like many of the English ambassadors at the French court during these years, he would have unfettered access to the king.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, Henry pressed on with the renunciation of papal authority in England. In March 1534, Clement declared Henry's marriage to Katherine to be lawful in canon and divine law and again ordered that she be restored as his wife and queen. Henry simply defied the pope and the Parliament of that autumn passed a raft of legislation, including the Act of Supremacy, that vested him with headship over the Church in England, legitimised Princess Elizabeth and made denial of her rights, or of the king's title, treason.⁵⁶ Henry thereby began something of a 'cold war' with Catholic Europe which necessitated a recasting of his usual mode of asserting himself internationally, playing one rival off against the other where possible. He continued to demand support from Francis who, in turn, tried to distance himself from Henry's schism while not breaking from him strategically. Henry's relations with Charles were hostile, as evidenced by the correspondence of these years of Eustace Chapuys, the imperial ambassador in England.⁵⁷ The ambassador never formally recognised Anne Boleyn as queen. The death of Katherine in January 1536 and Anne's fall and execution in May the same year eased things with Charles somewhat. Henry now wanted the world set to rights – his rights. He felt that the papal censures over his marriage to Anne and the execution of Cardinal John Fisher in 1535 should be lifted. He also wanted Francis dutifully paying the 'tribute' of pensions agreed in 1527 but which had fallen into arrears. For Francis, Henry's refusal to assist him under the terms of the 1532 treaty of mutual assistance when he began another war with Charles in 1536, was as clear a breach of faith as anything Henry alleged against him. Henry now also wanted to be reconciled with Charles V but without his having to undo any of the changes instituted in England under the Royal Supremacy.

Fatherhood, masculinity and international sovereign status

In the last decade of their reigns, a series of legal disputes arose between Francis and Henry which seem oddly trivial and unnecessarily prolonged to the modern observer. Yet, there was an

earnest tenacity about them. The apparent issue in each was the respect for the legalities of treaties between them, and particularly honouring the financial obligations each had to the other. At heart, however, they were really about their respective claims to personal honour as kings and brothers. Having competed, although never at close quarters, as warriors and as material patrons, and now constrained by the power of Charles V from breaking with each other strategically, Henry and Francis began rivalling each other as governors in the administration of royal justice in the international sphere. As we have noted, trustworthiness and reliability were seen as crucial aspects of public manhood in the early modern period. In line with this view, each king asserted that he had always honoured his obligations to his brother monarch, and his subjects, under the terms of agreements between them. The corollary was that the other had failed to do so, that he was not therefore the king he claimed to be. In other words, that he was not demonstrating a *virtus* or manliness that deserved honour and respect in the international community of kingship and nobility – a highly personal and damaging allegation.

The first of these disputes arose in April 1537 when Cardinal Reginald Pole, the king's cousin, arrived in France from Rome, ostensibly to sponsor some kind of Franco-Imperial and Scottish action against Henry, the exact nature of which remains undetermined, and for which there was no real appetite. He made a formal entry to Paris and was welcomed at the French court. The English king demanded that he be apprehended as a traitor, under the terms of the Eternal Peace agreement of 1527. Sir Francis Bryan was despatched to secure his arrest and, with Stephen Gardiner, the resident English ambassador, to press for a resumption of the French pension debts to Henry. Francis received Pole politely but then sent him away from his court and maintained that the two English envoys had not formally requested his arrest and certainly not had him 'by some means trussed up and conveyed to Calais' as Henry had wanted.⁵⁸ This assertion was deeply resented by Henry who bided his time. Returning from this mission, Bryan brought with him evidence of an apparently libellous poem about Anne Boleyn written by a servant of the Bishop of Tarbes. Henry demanded that Francis explain why he had not suppressed it.⁵⁹

This was followed by one of those sudden re-flowerings of friendship when, in October 1537, Jane Seymour gave birth to Henry's longed-for male heir. The proud father received the congratulations of Francis, telling him in response that his joy was mingled with sadness at the death of Jane.⁶⁰ Henry now saw his dynasty as secured. Henceforward, the one-time chivalric warrior increasingly regarded himself, and was portrayed, not just as the father of his own heir, but of the whole English people. To some extent the king as father was a familiar trope in royal propaganda across the period, but it had a very particular force in Henry's England, and beyond. Perhaps the most famous image of Henry, the mural portrait made by Hans Holbein for the king's Privy Chamber at Whitehall sets out this vision of royal fatherhood and masculine power in heroic terms. The king is pictured with his parents Henry VII and Elizabeth of York and with Jane, the mother of his son. A plinth in the centre of the painting proudly declares in Latin:

If it pleases you to see the illustrious image of heroes, look on these: no picture ever bore greater. The great debate, competition and great question is whether father or son is the victor./For both indeed were supreme./The former often overcame his enemies and the conflagration of his country, and finally brought peace to its people./The son, born indeed for greater things removed the unworthy from their altars and replaced them by upright men.⁶¹

The iconography of the painting emphasises Henry's fertility and legitimacy as ruler and makes explicit claims for him as a greater man and monarch than his father, the founder of the dynasty. The mural would have been seen by comparatively few people but some French envoys who were close courtiers of Francis were certainly among them.⁶²

The physical reality behind Holbein's splendid image of the king was rather different. During these years, Henry suffered several hunting and jousting accidents with deleterious effects on his health. The most serious injury had come in 1536 when he lay unconscious for some two hours.

His ulcerated legs restricted his mobility and without any changes in his diet, precipitated the obesity and further medical problems that thereafter beset him. In 1541 the French ambassador Marillac, reported that Henry was 'very stout and marvellously excessive in eating and drinking so that people with credit say he is often of a different opinion in the morning than after dinner'.⁶³

Soon after Jane Seymour's death, Cromwell told the English ambassador in France that Henry, following the good advice of his council, was determined to marry. A farcical search for a bride among French noblewomen, including Marie de Guise duchesse de Longueville, ensued with Henry at one point suggesting that a group of them should be assembled at Calais so he could make his choice. The French king regarded this suggestion as ludicrously ungallant. Louis Perreau, seigneur de Castillon, Francis's ambassador in England was told that:

Francis laughed greatly at the language used to his ambassadors, saying that it would seem they [the English] meant to do with women there as with their geldings, collect a number and trot them out to take which goes best.⁶⁴

Henry dithered over Marie, but nevertheless expected that Francis would give her to him when he finally determined upon her for his bride.

He was, however, rebuffed not just by Francis but it seems by Marie herself, and was outflanked by his fleet-footed nephew James of Scotland. In the autumn of 1536 James had joined the French court, then in mourning for the dauphin François who had died in August. On 1 January 1537, he had married Francis's daughter Madeleine at Nôtre Dame in Paris, thereby greatly strengthening the auld alliance with France. Tragically, Madeleine died on 7 July, barely two months after her arrival in Scotland. By the start of the following year James was seeking the hand of Marie de Guise for himself. He had congratulated his uncle on the birth of Prince Edward in October 1537, but thereafter showed total indifference to his English uncle's new matrimonial ambitions. While Henry looked elsewhere, James secured a marriage contract that brought him a dowry for 100,000 *livres tournois*. He and Marie were married by proxy on 9 May 1538 and she arrived in Scotland the following month, received with great celebrations, including a tournament and banquets, held at St Andrews.⁶⁵

Even as this all played out, a disappointed Henry attempted to interpose himself as mediator of a new settlement between Charles and Francis who had been at war since 1536. Far from being in any way marginalised by the break with Rome, Henry now saw himself as able to lead his fellow kings, to warn and alert them to the dangers to their authority posed by the papacy. He urged both to reject Pope Paul III's offers of mediation in favour of his own. He instructed Sir Thomas Wyatt, his ambassador with the emperor, to remind Charles just how obligated he should feel towards Henry: he could not choose a mediator of more honour than Henry, 'nor one to whom he has more cause to show gratitude'. While Henry understood that Charles's familial affection for Queen Katherine had led to a regrettable rupture between himself and the emperor, now she was dead, and 'the cause of affection being removed, he trusted to have the former amity revived'. Charles, Henry went on, 'should ponder whether he or the bishop of Rome could best serve him'.⁶⁶ These efforts turned on a new, possibly Imperial, or French, wife for Henry and a husband for Princess Mary. They came to nothing as Henry dithered further about which potential bride to choose from the several still remaining on offer in France.

The two continental rulers eventually met at Aigues-Mortes in July 1538 and reached a form of *entente-cordiale*, guided by Paul III and without Henry's advice or assistance.⁶⁷ There followed two years of difficult but earnest efforts by both sides to show trust and confidence in each other. Henry sought ways to break up their apparently cosy consensus, fearing that it presaged some form of action against England, particularly after the suppression of the Pilgrimage of Grace and the despoliation of the tomb of St Thomas Beckett at Canterbury. A range of issues from the seizure of English bibles printed in France, various maritime disputes and demands for extradition occupied both regimes in seemingly endless bickering and point-scoring about royal

honour.⁶⁸ As in the Cardinal Pole case, these controversies still seen by the counsellors of both kings as a vital expression of their sovereign's status because they touched upon his authority as judge or governor of his realm.⁶⁹

By January 1539, Henry was convinced that an attack on him was imminent. In February, the French ambassador Castillon suddenly quit his post saying that Henry had 'neither reasoning nor understanding left' and that he was fearful of being taken hostage amidst deteriorating relations with France. This only heightened Henry's anxieties further. He began the fortification of the southern coasts of England and Wales, from Lincolnshire and Essex around to Milford Haven and increased naval preparedness. Playing on the theme of Henry as father of the nation, the royal propagandist Richard Morison also praised him as the good shepherd (a figure of Christ himself of course) who would 'diligently watch that we may safely sleep' protected from the, presumably malign, designs of foreign powers.⁷⁰ Henry was certainly very actively governing his kingdom's life that year. As well as the defensive works he undertook, the Great Bible in English (into which some elements of the French-printed Matthew's Bible had found their way) was published. As Sharpe and many others have discussed, its frontispiece showed Henry as a David of the Old Testament, priest, prophet, and king, distributing the Word of God to his people at all social levels and being thanked profusely by a grateful kingdom.⁷¹

As all of this went forward, Charles V, then in Spain, received news that part of his dominions appeared very ungrateful to him indeed. In August 1539 there was an uprising in his native city of Ghent. The emperor was determined to go there personally to restore his authority. Surprisingly perhaps, Francis accepted Charles's secret request to invite him to travel from Spain through France to Flanders. Although the prospect greatly worried the emperor's council, it was his initiative. It also worried Henry lest it betokened an increased prospect of joint action against him. The emperor entered France in late November and was fêted by his French hosts as he made his way up from Bayonne to the Loire Valley, thence to Fontainebleau where Charles spent Christmas. On 1 January 1540 he was formally received into Paris.⁷²

Henry's image was being yet again re-packaged at this time as he took a major personal and strategic decision, to marry Anne of Cleves. Against the background of the apparent Franco-Imperial rapprochement, Henry sought allies. Influenced, if not entirely guided, by Cromwell's advocacy of an alliance with Johann the duke of Cleves, Henry saw himself and his prospective queen as defending an England reformed in his own image, just as he had once hoped to have done with the first Queen Anne of his reign, and in a way that the Whitehall portrait and the front page of the Great Bible in English now proclaimed him to be doing. Although worried, Henry was determined to be on the front foot once more. By this dramatic *volte-face* in the conventional pattern of alliances, he hoped to disconcert his two great rivals as well as the pope, and everyone else into the bargain, and to force himself into the reckoning once more on the international stage, just as he had first done in 1514. Anne was received in Calais in early December but, famously, Henry's first horrified glimpse of her at Rochester on New Year's Day 1540, the same day the emperor entered Paris, presaged all that followed. A desperate search for loopholes ensued but with none found, the marriage went ahead. A forlorn and angry Henry had no choice but to have it annulled in July on the humiliating grounds of non-consummation, with the necessarily embarrassing details of his impotence in the marriage bed read into the transcript of the case put before Convocation - albeit in a way that imputed the fault to the confused bride's unappealing physicality and immature sexuality rather than the king's incapacity, and this is the way it was explained internationally.⁷³

By the summer of 1540 Henry was asserting that he had only ever sought to steer a 'middle way' in religion at home, presenting his realm as righteously reformed and still theologically orthodox and therefore undeserving of papal censure, or worse. And this he had been doing by the time of Cromwell's fall from power and his execution for treason in July 1540. Indeed, it has been argued that this was what precipitated that fall, as Henry sought to rid himself of the minister responsible for the Cleves debacle and one who could now be characterised as a dangerous

sacramentarian from whose malign influence Henry had freed himself, and who was justly brought to the block. Imperial and French ambassadors in turn eagerly welcomed Cromwell's death, assuring Henry that the minister's removal was the surest means to a return of good relations with their respective masters.⁷⁴ The French were indeed by then much more interested in an alliance with Henry, as was Charles.

Henry's reputation was not exactly enhanced by his next marriage, to Catherine Howard, in July 1540. He was rejuvenated in mind and soul at least, and perhaps in body, by Catherine and as the French ambassador Marillac reported Henry was 'so amorous of her that he cannot treat her well enough and caresses her more than he did the others'.⁷⁵ Unfortunately, Catherine's admitted sexual, or at least romantic, interactions with several young men before her marriage and those with Thomas Culpepper as she accompanied Henry on his extended progress to York in 1541, left him cuckolded and once more humiliated. The queen's transgressions brought her to the ultimate punishment. Its imposition saved Henry's face and he portrayed himself domestically and internationally as the victim of ill-intentioned females, but that hardly improved his standing measured against contemporary patriarchal expectations of male control over women.⁷⁶

The courts of Europe doubtless sniggered behind their collective hands over Henry's latest matrimonial antics but the fragility of the Franco-Imperial entente that had so demoralised him in 1538-9 had become apparent by surprisingly early in 1540. In April, Charles announced that he would invest his own son Philip with the duchy of Milan, in flat contradiction of his 'understanding' with Francis that he would give it to one of Francis's two younger sons. This, despite the extravagant hospitality he had received, and assurances he had seemed to give, while in France the previous winter. The English ambassador in France, Sir John Wallop urged senior courtiers including Marguerite de Navarre and Anne de Heilly, Madame d'Etampes, the king's mistress, to persuade Francis to be reconciled with Henry.⁷⁷ David Potter has demonstrated that, like Marguerite, Madame d'Etampes had an ambiguous, perhaps even ambivalent, attitude towards relations with England, but was broadly anti-Habsburg and was carefully courted by English ambassadors in the early 1540s.⁷⁸ Katherine Wellman has confirmed that her influence over Francis in these years worked generally in English interests insofar as she opposed Montmorency's policies, promoted his rivals at Francis's court and favoured maintaining cordial personal relations between the two kings.⁷⁹

War broke out between the emperor and Francis in 1542. Faced, delightedly, once more with conflict between his rivals, Henry chose to back the imperial side, as he had done twice before in his reign. He agreed an alliance with Charles in 1543 that committed him to a war that began with the invasion of France and the siege of Boulogne in July 1544. The king hauled his huge bulk into a carapace of armour and directed the operation, re-living to the extent that his disabling obesity allowed him, the excitement of personal warfare that he had first experienced in 1513. Henry entered the conquered city on 18 September. He knighted a number of his commanders and, in poor health, quickly withdrew to England.⁸⁰ The successful siege was supposed to presage a joint attack on Paris, but meanwhile Charles, rapidly running out of money, had abandoned Henry in the field and signed a hastily agreed peace, of Cr  py, with Francis. This freed Francis to turn against England the following year. Henry's successful defence of Portsmouth and Southampton (despite the loss of the *Mary Rose*) against a French invasion fleet in July 1545 was the final military achievement of his reign.

Conclusion

Writing in January 1538, during one of those frequent periods of heightened tension in relations between Henry VIII and Francis I, the French ambassador Louis de Perreau described Henry as 'a marvellous man, with marvellous people around him'. He wished he could do more to get an

advantageous financial settlement for Francis from Henry but, he went on, 'he is an old fox and as proud withal as if the payment were due to him'.⁸¹ In these few pithy phrases the ambassador certainly summed up the key elements of Henry's disposition in Anglo-French relations, but also accurately characterised his approach to diplomacy more generally and reflected Henry's international reputation as a monarch and man.

This article has argued that in the early sixteenth century there was a strong personal dimension in relations between these monarchs. Henry's ambition to be king of France, or those of Charles V and Francis I to be duke of Milan, were based on personal dynastic claims. They had to be aligned with and adapted in the light of circumstances and strategic considerations but were, nevertheless, driven by an effort to demonstrate *virtus* or manliness in all its forms and dimensions; from personal bravery and adroitness in battle, to intelligent planning and execution of strategy, in the way Machiavelli characterised all princes as having to do. Beyond warfare and effective peace-making, *virtus* had to be demonstrated in the maintenance of good government, true religion, and justice for individual monarchs themselves and for their subjects. This was the conception of personal princely authority, and right, that lay at the heart of Renaissance monarchy. When Henry and Francis called each other 'good brother and friend' in their correspondence and on the two occasions they actually met, they were really making statements about themselves and their own masculine qualities or 'virtues' which should command the other's respect and cooperation. When Francis and Charles refused to accord one another similar titles, they expressed a mutual disdain because each considered that the other had not shown himself worthy of such an accolade.

As a young man, Henry used his physical advantages to the full in presenting himself to his own court and people and to ambassadors as the literal embodiment of this *virtus*. As he aged, his efforts were less focused on demonstrating physical prowess and more on his personal power to have what he saw as right for himself and his kingdom. The complexities of the annulment case and their culmination in the fall of Wolsey allowed, indeed forced, Henry to take a far more active role in his own diplomacy than previously. His struggle with the papacy forged Henry's already highly developed sense of his own significance and authority into the 'royal supremacy' over the Church in England and his 'imperial' conception of English monarchy more generally.

Cooperation with Francis remained strategically vital in this context, given the preponderant power of Charles V. Constrained by these circumstances, Henry nevertheless used his evolving legal authority within his own kingdom as a means of reminding his often-uncooperative ally how much he needed him, or at least how much he should respect all that Henry had done for him since the time of his great crisis of Pavia in 1525 and to co-operate with Henry in return. The many and varied legal and jurisdictional disputes of the 1530s and 1540s were all conceived and conducted in highly personal terms as stratagems to compel Francis's attention. They can certainly be interpreted simply as proxy disputes in a wider political context. Yet, if the actions and the language of 'honour' and dependability deployed in trading these accusations are taken seriously, they alert us to the close proximity between sovereign status and a reputation for masculine effectiveness in all its forms. This review of the interplay of Henry's military action and diplomacy has focused on just this proximity and suggests that the concept of 'hegemonic masculinity' has its place in accounting for and understanding the actions not just of Henry but those, too, of Francis I and perhaps to a significant extent Charles V, the three most prominent Renaissance monarchs of early sixteenth-century Europe.

Notes

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