THE REIGN OF JAMES I (1603–25) has long been overshadowed by the prior glory of Elizabeth and the later outbreak of the Civil War. Yet how, without understanding the Jacobean court, are we to understand the world of Jonson, Donne and the late Shakespeare, divine right theory, court scandal and reform, appeals to the ancient constitution and reason of state, arguments from necessity and parliamentary precedent, chivalric nostalgia and classicism, mannerist excess and baroque grandeur? In this volume an international group of specialists in history, literature and political theory set about reconstructing the mental world of the Jacobean court and challenging older orthodoxies on Jacobean politics, ideology, religion and culture.

While the volume marks fresh departures in the study of the Jacobean court, it makes no attempt to offer a comprehensive study of the era. Rather, it presents chapters of original research, strongly interpretive in character, and sometimes in disagreement. There are three different but highly suggestive interpretations of the role and writings of the king himself from Jenny Wormald, Johann Sommerville and Paul Christianson which, taken together, provide the most definitive portrait yet offered of James as king and theorist. Several essays give important new emphasis to the neglected early years of James’s reign. Other contributions examine the way in which the court articulated its political ideology, the multiple centres within Jacobean court culture, and the tensions confronted by its writers and artists. Fresh perspectives on the origins of and changes in divine right theory are also offered, along with discussions of the court’s religious views, the impact of Roman philosophy and common law on Jacobean court culture, the relationship of court culture to court politics, and the influence of the court on the literature and art collecting of the period.

Royal court culture in early modern Europe is proving an important and exciting area of interdisciplinary concern. While revisionism in early seventeenth-century history has transformed the landscape of early Stuart studies, the new historicism has also raised major questions for standard interpretations of early Stuart literature. This volume forms part of the continuing dialogue between historians and literary scholars and makes an important contribution to the debate among early modern specialists on the role of the court in determining the pattern of political order and disorder.
THE MENTAL WORLD OF THE JACOBEAN COURT
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Edited by
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PREFACE

This volume grows out of a conference on ‘The Mental World of the Jacobean Court’ held in March 1988 at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, DC and sponsored by the Folger Institute Center for the History of British Political Thought. Several of the essays in this volume began as papers presented at that meeting. It is a rare privilege to be asked to organize a conference at the Folger Shakespeare Library and a great challenge. I want to express my great thanks to Werner Gundersheimer, Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library and Barbara Mowat, Chair of the Folger Institute. The Steering Committee of the Folger Institute Center for the History of British Political Thought invited me to help shape this programme and I am most grateful to J. G. A. Pocock, Lois Schwoerer, Gordon Schochet and Lena Cowen Orlin for this opportunity. To Lena Orlin, Executive Director of the Folger Institute, I owe a special debt of gratitude for her constant help, wise counsel and wit. Carol Brobeck and Gregory Barz of the Folger Institute were of invaluable aid in the preparations for the conference. The meeting was supported by the Research Programs Division of the National Endowment for the Humanities, the John Ben Snow Memorial Trust, the George Washington University and the Exxon Education Foundation.

The conference generated a great deal of excitement and drew a large and distinguished interdisciplinary audience. All of the participants benefited from comments provided by Thomas Cogswell, David Norbrook, David Harris Sacks, Donald Kelley and Gordon Schochet.

I am very grateful to Purdue University, to Vice President Varro T. Tyler, Dean David Caputo and to the history department and its head, John J. Contreni, for allowing me the opportunity to teach a seminar at the Folger and to organize this conference. I wish to thank Joyce R. Good and the history department staff under the direction of Judy McHenry who were, as always, both gracious and efficient in supporting this endeavour.

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In editing this volume, I benefited from the very helpful advice of John Guy, John Morrill, Jenny Wormald, David Bevington and John Salmon. To William Davies of Cambridge University Press I am indebted inter alia for the suggestion that the book have illustrations, a project that sent me on a voyage of discovery. For permission to reproduce photographs of Jacobean paintings, drawings, metalwork, buildings and tombs, I am most grateful to Her Majesty The Queen, the Marquess of Salisbury, The Trustees of the Chatsworth Trust and the Duke of Devonshire, the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, the National Portrait Gallery, the British Museum, the British Library, the Syndics of Cambridge University Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Huntington Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Royal Institute of British Architects, the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, St John’s College, Oxford, the Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen, the Victoria and Albert Museum and Worcester College, Oxford. I have benefited greatly from the aid of archivists and curators at the British Library, the British Museum, the Huntington Library, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Middle Temple and the Newberry Library. I wish particularly to thank Peter Barber and Helen Wallis of the British Library Map Department and Philippa Glanville, Curator of Metalwork at the Victoria and Albert Museum, not only for teaching me about their specialities but also for showing me treasures that made their way into this volume. I wish especially to thank John Millard, Adrian and Tristan Morgan, members of the Church of St Michael’s, Framlingham, for their great kindness in photographing the Surrey tomb. I cast my bread upon the waters and was repaid manifold with great kindness and good will.

This is a fruitful harvest: each of these essays is a new and thought-provoking contribution to the fields of history, literature and political thought. Taken together, The mental world of the Jacobean court offers fresh perspectives on early modern politics and culture which it is hoped will stimulate further work on this important period in English and European history.

Linda Levy Peck
West Lafayette, Indiana
September, 1990

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