Mercy and Authority in the Tudor State

Using a wide range of legal, administrative and literary sources, this study explores the role of the royal pardon in the exercise and experience of authority in Tudor England. It examines such abstract intangibles as power, legitimacy, and the state by looking at the concrete life-and-death decisions of the Tudor monarchs.

Drawing upon the historiographies of law and society, political culture, and state formation, this work uses mercy as a lens through which to examine the nature and limits of participation in the early modern polity. Contemporaries discussed mercy as a virtue expected of all but necessary in the prince: they deemed it both a prerogative and a duty of the ruler. The Tudors responded with grand ceremonies of mercy, personal gifts of grace for offenders of every sort, and statutes that offered remission for a host of petty sins. Public expectations of mercy and the broadly participatory nature of early modern governance imposed restraints on the sovereign’s exercise of power. Yet the discretionary uses of punishment and mercy worked in tandem to mediate social relations of power in ways that most often favored the growth of the state.

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MERCY AND AUTHORITY IN THE TUDOR STATE

K.J. KESSELRING

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# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments  page vii  
Abbreviations and conventions  ix  

1 Introduction: mercy and the state  1  

2 Changing approaches to punishment and mitigation  23  
   Punishment and the law  
   Traditional sources of mitigation  

3 Changing approaches to the pardon  56  
   General pardons  
   Special pardons  

4 Patronage, petitions, and the motives for mercy  91  
   Petitions  
   Processes and patronage  

5 Public performances of pardon  136  

6 Protest and pardons  163  

7 Conclusion  200  
   Appendix I: Sources  209  
   Appendix II: Benefit of the belly  212  

Bibliography  215  
Index  233
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### ABBREVIATIONS AND CONVENTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BL</td>
<td>British Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJ</td>
<td>Journal of the House of Commons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPR</td>
<td>Calendar of the Patent Rolls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSP</td>
<td>Calendar of State Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL</td>
<td>Ellesmere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HA</td>
<td>Hastings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEH</td>
<td>Henry E. Huntington Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HLRO</td>
<td>House of Lords Record Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HMC</td>
<td>Historical Manuscripts Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIS</td>
<td>List and Index Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LPL</td>
<td>Lambeth Palace Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LJ</td>
<td>Journal of the House of Lords</td>
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Throughout this work, modern spelling and punctuation have been used in all quotations, even for those taken from printed sources. When dates are given, the year is assumed to have begun on 1 January. All manuscript references are to the Public Record Office unless otherwise noted and are quoted by the call numbers in use at each repository (see the bibliography for the class designations). For parliamentary acts, the Statutes of the Realm, ed. A. Luders et al., 11 vols. (London, 1810–28) has been used, but citations are made by regnal year and chapter.