INTRODUCTION

The last war between Henry VIII and Francis I, which formally began in July 1543 and ended in June 1546, seems at first a postscript to the long series of conflicts generated by feudal claims and national rivalries in the later middle ages and fuelled by competitive emulation of Renaissance princes in the sixteenth century. The purpose of this book is to show that, in fact, it was a far wider and more destructive conflict than it looks at first sight and had long-term implications. This was the most serious and destructive war between France and England in the reigns of Henry VIII and Francis I. In addition, France faced an enormous threat to its security which required a gigantic effort of organization to resist. For England, the war was pivotal in the redeployment of the country’s military and political resources. It was the first war since the mid-fifteenth century in which, for a while, England had to fight alone against France. There were unfamiliar developments. Irish kerns were seen parading with bagpipes in Saint James’s park in 1544. The roofs of monasteries were further stripped of their lead in a vain attempt to plug the financial caused by expenditure at levels not seen since the mid-fourteenth century. The timetable of herring fisheries and of the Icelandic herring fleet became matters of crucial concern. In 1545, the flagships of the two kingdoms sank in the greatest naval oceanic campaign before 1588. German princes were deeply involved at every stage, while English agents scoured the roads of Germany desperate to raise mercenary forces. England became drawn into the confused and exhausting struggles within the Scottish nobility and the Venetian Republic was drawn into mediation and peace-making. In every sense this began as and remained a Europe-wide war.

It was also a war fought against a background of Europe-wide cyclical social and economic crisis. In August 1545, a French galley was found beached at Etaples with its ghastly crew of slave oarsmen all dead of the plague. The ship had probably come all the way from Marseilles to participate in the Anglo-French naval campaign.¹ The gruesome image evoked unites two major themes: the complexity and

¹ Chapuys to Granvelle, Bourbourg, 25 June 1545 and enclosure, L&P, XX, i, 1036 and 1036ii.
scale of the war and also the bleak social and economic background against which it was fought. All across Western Europe in the middle years of the 1540s we see evidence for harvest failure, rising prices, rising taxes and finally, the plague. The deaths at Etaples coincided with that of Charles duke of Orléans, Francis I’s younger favourite son who died, probably of plague, on campaign with his father against the English at the abbey of Forêt Montier south of Montreuil on 9 September.²

Though plague was cyclical and there is probably no automatic causal link between famine and plague in this period,³ there was clearly a peak in the 1540s and the evidence for the overlap between dearth and plague across Western Europe is compelling. Peddlers of astrological predictions in 1544 like the Netherlander Cornelis Scute safely foretold a ‘great burning and fervent sycknesses, of the which many people shall dye,’ in the spring, rumours of war to come, hard weather and ‘many new diseases,’ in the summer, great blood shedding and wars. He owed his translation and publication in England to his prediction of excellent fortune and triumph for Henry VIII in this year and of ‘great losse in his dominion’ for Francis I.⁴ The grim story of dearth and death is clear enough from London-based chroniclers. The summer of 1542 was exceptionally wet and flooding reduced the supply of wood the following winter. The spring of 1543 was very cold and then cattle disease broke out, causing a huge rise in the price of meat.⁵ This misery is confirmed by reports from Newcastle and Northumberland in September 1542, where ‘the extreme wether and rayne that hath fallen’ seriously undermined the supply arrangements for the campaign that had been planned against Scotland.⁶ Predictably,