

# **Holy Henries: The First Tudor and the Cult of the Last Lancastrian**

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## Abstract

Throughout most of his reign, Henry VII of England was engaged in intermittent negotiations with the papacy regarding the canonization of his predecessor, Henry VI, as a saint. Henry VI, who had been murdered in 1471 by agents of Edward IV, was one of the most popular saints in England at the time, but Henry VII's campaign for his official canonization eventually failed. While many historians have seen this campaign as motivated by Henry VII's cynical political opportunism, I argue that in this matter Henry VII's political aims cannot be understood as separate from his Christian piety. Contrary to his popular portrayal as the ultimate political manipulator, Henry VII was in fact a deeply pious man. His piety was very much informed by his upbringing in France and Brittany and by the pervasive late-medieval cult of holy monarchy. Medieval kings were believed to have a religious as well as a political role, and Henry VII demonstrated a strong interest in the sacral nature of his kingship. The cult of Henry VI also promoted the role of a divinely appointed king in establishing reconciliation and harmony, which accorded well with Henry VII's objective to restore peace and piety in England following the Wars of the Roses. The campaign for Henry VI's canonization thus can only be properly understood within its own cultural sensibility, and within the context of Henry VII's piety and ideology of his reign as a whole.

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## Introduction

Henry VII's religious activities are among the least-studied areas of his reign, but a close study of them offers a wealth of insight about the founder of England's most famous dynasty. In particular, Henry VII's campaign to have Henry VI canonized as a saint reveals much about the first Tudor's piety, beliefs about the nature of kingship, and vision of his reign as a whole. From the very beginning of his reign, he portrayed himself as the legitimate successor to Henry VI, the last Lancastrian, and he planned to be buried with him when he died.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that Henry VI had been an utter failure as a king, his memory became an important aspect of Henry VII's narrative of his own reign. Had the canonization ever taken place, it would have been a central part of this ongoing commemoration. While Henry VI was never declared a saint in Rome, however, his cult and the legends surrounding him continued to be significant to Henry VII.

The cult of Henry VI (r. 1422-61, 1470-71) has been called one of the most significant saint's cults in English history.<sup>2</sup> Henry was an austere pious but ineffective

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<sup>1</sup> Danna Piroyanski, *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 77-78.

<sup>2</sup> J. W. McKenna, "Piety and Propaganda: The Cult of King Henry VI," in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, ed. Beryl Rowland (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), 72.

ruler who presided over England's collapse into civil war. On the night of May 22, 1471, he was murdered in the Tower of London, almost certainly by agents of Edward IV (r. 1461-70, 1471-83), who was crowned king the following morning. Henry's body was buried in the remote abbey of Chertsey after having been publicly displayed in London for a few days to quell rumors of his survival.<sup>3</sup> By 1472 a popular cult was developing around the dead king, whom many considered to be a martyr.<sup>4</sup> Edward IV tried to suppress this cult, but it continued to grow.<sup>5</sup> Its principal centres were at his tomb in Chertsey and at York Minster, where a statue of him was included in the Screen of Kings.<sup>6</sup> Beyond these centres, devotion to Henry was widespread throughout the kingdom of England.<sup>7</sup> In 1484, Richard III (r. 1483-85) had the king's body translated from Chertsey to Windsor Castle.<sup>8</sup> From this point, the cult grew even more prominent, with Henry VI becoming perhaps the most popular saint in England until the Reformation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> McKenna, 74.

<sup>4</sup> McKenna, 74.

<sup>5</sup> *Acts of the Court of the Mercers Company*, eds. Laetitia Lyell and Frank D. Watney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 139.

<sup>6</sup> McKenna, 74.

<sup>7</sup> McKenna, 74.

<sup>8</sup> McKenna, 75.

<sup>9</sup> Simon Walker, "Political Saints in Later Medieval England," in *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society*, ed. R. H. Britnell and A. J. Pollard (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 86.

Henry VI's popularity continued into the reign of Henry VII (r. 1485-1509). Henry VII certainly did not invent the cult of Henry VI, but he was the first to press for his formal canonization. By 1492, he had written to Pope Innocent III on the subject.<sup>10</sup> Innocent started a commission to investigate Henry VI's miracles, which was subsequently renewed in 1494 by Pope Alexander VI and by Pope Julius II in 1504.<sup>11</sup> By 1500, a collection of 174 posthumous miracle stories had been compiled for the inquiry. The canonization campaign made no progress after Henry VII's death in 1509, after which England's relations with the papacy rapidly deteriorated. In 1538, a royal injunction banned the observation of Henry VI's cult.<sup>12</sup> Even so, Henry VI's relics were still being venerated at Windsor as late as 1577.<sup>13</sup> Although the cult lost popularity in the seventeenth century, to this day, visitors to Windsor Castle pay their respects at his tomb.<sup>14</sup>

Henry VII had various objectives in mind with the campaign to canonize Henry VI, whom he always referred to as his uncle. One of the most oft-cited goals of the

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<sup>10</sup> Piroyanski 77-78.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Waldram Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 135.

<sup>12</sup> Parliament Rolls of Medieval England, Henry VII's 1485 Parliament, Part I, Vi-280, column a, 6. [11]. Accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.sd-editions.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/AnaServer?PROME+0+start.anv+id=HENRYVII>

<sup>13</sup> Piroyanski, 78.

<sup>14</sup> Piroyanski, 78.

canonization was to confer legitimacy upon Henry VII's reign. As a usurper who had been under attainder, Henry was aware of his weak political position after the Battle of Bosworth. His claim to the throne was tenuous and contemporary accounts suggest that most people were unaware of the basis on which it rested.<sup>15</sup> He had spent much of his life in Brittany and France and remained largely an enigma to the English people.<sup>16</sup> Henry VI, on the other hand, was extremely popular by the time of Henry VII's accession, due rather to the widespread belief in his miraculous intercession than to any appreciation for his achievements as king. While Henry VI was indeed the half-brother of Henry VII's father, and therefore in a sense his half-uncle, the relationship between them had no dynastic significance. Henry VII had a much stronger claim to the throne through his mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, but chose not to emphasize it. By focusing upon his relationship with Henry VI, Henry VII hoped to promote the legitimacy of his own reign both in dynastic terms and by associating himself with a holy figure. Here it is crucial to recognize that Henry VII did not portray himself as the initiator of a new dynasty and almost never used the name "Tudor".<sup>17</sup> His emphasis was instead upon continuity and his

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<sup>15</sup> C. S. L. Davies, "Information, Disinformation and Political Knowledge under Henry VII and early Henry VIII," *Historical Research* 85, no. 228, 230.

<sup>16</sup> Davies, 230.

<sup>17</sup> Davies, 228.

relationship to Henry VI. By putting his official support behind a tremendously popular cult, Henry VII attempted to ensure that the power of the cult was working in his favor.

There is also ample evidence to show that Henry VII saw promotion of Henry VI's cult as a means of restoring harmony in his kingdom. He was aware that his invasion and usurpation of the throne during a time of peace could be seen as an act of hostility against the divine order of the realm, which the king was supposed to protect. Based on the French perspective, which had influenced him in his youth, however, England was a realm constantly beset by turmoil and dynastic upheaval and in need of a new king.<sup>18</sup> According to a legend, Henry VI had prophesied that Henry VII was the hoped-for king who would restore England.<sup>19</sup> In order to effect such a restoration, Henry VII needed to reconcile with the other side of the conflict. He did this on a practical level through his marriage to Elizabeth of York and through the De Facto Act, which granted amnesty to all parties who had followed either Edward IV or Henry VI during the period of contested kingship.<sup>20</sup> Symbolically, reconciliation was sought in part through the cult of Henry VI. Literature put out by Henry VII's court emphasizes Henry VI's role as a peacemaker, while often passing over the violent circumstances of his death. Rather than

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<sup>18</sup> Goodman, 122.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard André, *Historia regis Henrici Septimi* (London: Longman, Brown, Goodman, Longman, and Roberts, 1858), 14.

<sup>20</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton UP, 1957), 370-72.



division or revenge, his cult was widely associated with themes of harmony and reconciliation.<sup>21</sup> Since both the Lancastrians and the Yorkists could, in most cases, agree upon the holiness of Henry VI's life and his power to work miracles in death, the saint provided a starting point for reconciliation.<sup>22</sup> According to literature produced in Henry VII's court, Henry VI was intervening from heaven to restore relationships between his enemies, whom he had forgiven, and his defenders.<sup>23</sup> The potential of the cult as a tool for reconciliation was highly significant, and its recurrence in court literature demonstrates that Henry VII was well aware of its value.

While the functions of the canonization campaign as a means of promoting Henry VII's dynastic legitimacy and as a tool for reconciliation were important, it also had a deeper significance for Henry VII. While his actions demonstrate that he was clearly cognizant of the social and political functions of the cult, these functions were not the cult's most important aspect – at least not for Henry VII himself. He was a remarkably pious individual whose style of kingship demonstrated a keen interest in the emerging ideas of holy monarchy. Only within this cultural context, in which the religious and the political were mingled together, can the canonization campaign be most fully understood.

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<sup>21</sup> Walker, 95.

<sup>22</sup> Walker, 91.

<sup>23</sup> Hymn to Saint Henry, in *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, Ronald Knox and Shane Leslie, ed. and trans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 9.

Henry VII's deep piety is evidenced by his intense private religious observance as well as many public acts of devotion, and this piety should not be dismissed by modern historians. Henry VII appears to have genuinely believed that Henry VI was a saint and should be canonized. The campaign was pursued at least partly because Henry believed in his uncle's power to intercede on his behalf, not only benefitting him during his life but also interceding with God for his soul after he died. A man as famously frugal as Henry VII would never have embarked on such a lengthy and expensive process as a canonization at Rome if he were not reasonably sure that Henry VI's sanctity could be proven. In addition, his will stipulated that the work on King's College be continued, explicitly declaring that this was in order to secure his uncle's prayers for his soul.<sup>24</sup> In context, this command appears as one manifestation among several of Henry's preoccupation with the fate of his soul as well as that of his dynasty.<sup>25</sup>

Henry's religious motivation in pursuing the canonization tends to be overlooked and must be emphasized. His political motivations for the campaign were certainly significant, but they too should be understood as operating in a context full of religious meanings. To Henry, the religious and political spheres were not so sharply divided. In a culture where regicide was a form of heresy, and heresy a form of treason, kings were

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<sup>24</sup> Lockyer and Thrush, 94.

<sup>25</sup> R. L. Storey, *The Reign of Henry VII* (New York: Walker, 1968), 63.

believed to possess a particularly spiritual power and authority.<sup>26</sup> Belief in sacral kingship was becoming more pronounced in the late Middle Ages, and many of Henry's acts demonstrate that he was very interested in this aspect of his rule.<sup>27</sup> His perspective on royal piety and sanctity was shaped by his youthful experiences in France and Brittany, where he became aware of the political significance of dynastic saints. The Duke of Brittany had succeeded in 1455 in procuring the canonization of a friar closely associated with his family, and Henry Tudor had witnessed the advantages of this cult firsthand during his residence at the ducal court.<sup>28</sup> Beyond the political level, he was also influenced by the preoccupation of his Breton guardians, the Montfort ducal family, with various forms of princely piety, and these influences were made manifest later in his life.<sup>29</sup>

The exact reasons for the canonization's failure are unknown, but it seems clear that Henry VII's lack of interest was not to blame. Between 1482 and 1523, within which period most of the campaign for Henry VI's sainthood took place, the papacy only

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<sup>26</sup> Walker, 88.

<sup>27</sup> Walker, 87; Anthony Goodman, "Henry VII and Christian Renewal," in Keith Robbins (ed) *Religion and Humanism: Ecclesiastical Historical Society Papers, Studies in Church History* 17 (1982), 115-16.

<sup>28</sup> Goodman, 120-21.

<sup>29</sup> Goodman, 120-21.

canonized five individuals.<sup>30</sup> Owing to this reluctance in Rome to make new saints, even a king in as good standing with the papacy as Henry VII was up against difficult odds in seeking a canonization. Many historians, following the example of Edward Hall, have believed that Henry simply wasn't willing to spare the expense necessary to acquire a canonization.<sup>31</sup> This view is contradicted by his many pious bequests in life and in his will, as well as several instances of lavish spending which demonstrate that he was far from stingy when it came to promoting his image or protecting his spiritual interests.<sup>32</sup> In addition, provisions made in his will for the furtherance of his uncle's foundations at King's College and the translation of his remains to Westminster Abbey, where he himself was to be buried, demonstrate that he was still interested in the cult as he neared the end of his life and still had hope for its eventual success. He even laid out elaborate plans for a double tomb in which he and his uncle would be buried together, thus associating the two kings perpetually in death. The lack of activity in the campaign between 1504, when the commission investigating Henry VI's miracles was renewed for

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<sup>30</sup> Ronald Finucane, *Contested Canonizations : The Last Medieval Saints, 1482-1523* (Washington, DC, USA: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), xiv.

<sup>31</sup> Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, Henry Ellis, ed. (London: J. Johnson, 1809), 304; Richard Jenkyns, *Westminster Abbey* (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 53; J. W. McKenna, 83.

<sup>32</sup> For example: H. M. Colvin, "Henry VII's Works of Piety," in *The History of the King's Works, III, 1485-1660 (Part 1)* (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1963), 196, 202; Storey, 63.

the second time, and Henry VII's death in 1509 does not demonstrate that Henry VII had lost interest or given up on the canonization at all. Since canonizations sometimes took centuries, a five-year period was relatively very short. While these delays may have been frustrating or discouraging for Henry, there is no reason to believe that he went to his death believing that the canonization had already failed.

Henry VII cannot be credited with inventing the cult of Henry VI, nor is there any evidence to show that his activities stimulated it significantly. Rather, he tried to manipulate an already popular movement for his own political and spiritual advantage. The canonization campaign was significant both to provide his reign with legitimacy, on spiritual and dynastic levels, and to restore harmony in the kingdom. More significantly, it was an expression of his belief in sacral kingship and in the religious significance of his own reign. Ultimately, it would provide the basis for the "Tudor myth", which portrayed the Tudors as unique monarchs who had presided over the restoration of peace and the dawn of a golden age in England.<sup>33</sup> For Henry VII, the campaign for the canonization of Henry VI was a powerful reification of his concept of kingship.

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<sup>33</sup> Goodman, 122.

## Literature Review

Historians have differed widely as to the nature of Henry VII's religious agenda and of his personal piety. Knowles' 1959 biography of the king maintained that while Henry was conventional in his beliefs and behavior, he had no sincere interest in theology or piety. Ten years later, Storey contended that Henry VII was in fact much more pious than most of his contemporaries. In 1972, Chrimes argued that Henry's relations with the papacy and the church were just ordinary, while McKenna in 1974 argued that their relations were excellent, and Goodman in 1982 wrote that Henry's dependence upon and support for the papacy were "unprecedented."<sup>34</sup> To assess the nature of Henry VII's religious life is certainly not easy; Francis Bacon expressed the frustrations of all future historians of the reign when, in the frontispiece of his book on Henry VII, he included the quotation "Unsearchable is the heart of a king."<sup>35</sup>

Biographies of Henry VII have tended not to pay much attention to the canonization campaign; instead, the canonization and Henry VI's cult more generally

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<sup>34</sup> Anthony Goodman, "Henry VII and Christian Renewal," in Keith Robbins (ed) *Religion and Humanism: Ecclesiastical historical society papers, Studies in Church History* 17 (1982), 123.

<sup>35</sup> *The Historie of the Raigne of Henry the Seventh*, London: W. Stansby, 1622.

have occupied their own separate corner of the literature. Sean Cunningham's 2007 biography of Henry VII barely mentions the cult of Henry VI or the significance of the canonization.<sup>36</sup> Roger Lockyer and Andrew Thrush's 1968 biography makes brief mention of Henry VII's special reverence for his uncle, but does not notice the cult or canonization at all.<sup>37</sup> However, Cunningham does argue that throughout his life, and especially as he neared death, Henry was driven by the desire for "spiritual absolution, the preservation of perpetual memory, and the grounding of dynastic prosperity."<sup>38</sup> Though Cunningham does not dwell long upon the cult of Henry VI, all three of these concerns seem to have been associated in Henry VII's mind with the effort for his uncle's canonization.

Marc Bloch was one of the first and certainly one of the most significant historians to address the phenomenon of holy monarchy in the Middle Ages, and as such his work has influenced the study of Henry VI's cult. His book, *Les Rois Thaumatourges* (published in English as *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France*) was published in 1923 and remains one of the most important works on the subject of medieval sacral kingship. Of particular relevance to this thesis were his

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<sup>36</sup> Sean Cunningham, *Henry VII* (London: Routledge, 2007) 116.

<sup>37</sup> Roger Lockyer and Andrew Thrush, *Henry VII*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 1997), 94.

<sup>38</sup> Cunningham, 119.

observations upon the subject of making saint-kings. He wrote that whenever a new dynasty took power, it needed to seek some kind of divine legitimation in order to survive and become powerful.<sup>39</sup> This is certainly an important aspect of the cult of Henry VI during the reign of Henry VII, and the legitimation thesis has continued to be predominant in almost all treatments of the subject.

Very frequently, the cult of Henry VI is interpreted as belonging to the tradition of English political saints more than that of saint-kings. J. C. Ryle was one of the first modern historians to pay attention to the phenomenon of the medieval political saint, and has had a major influence on later scholarship on the subject. His 1929 essay, “The Canonization of Opposition to the Crown in Angevin England”, discussed the careers and posthumous cults of saints such as Thomas Becket, Simon de Montfort, and Stephen Langton, all of whom were in some sense opponents of royal authority in life and venerated as saints after their deaths. Ryle’s thesis was that their cults functioned as a means for people in an otherwise repressive state to express their grievances against royal authority.<sup>40</sup> He focused upon the period of the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, and noted that during this time only anti-establishment figures were subjects of popular political

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<sup>39</sup> Marc Bloch, *The Royal Touch: Sacred Monarchy and Scrofula in England and France* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), 79-85.

<sup>40</sup> J. C. Ryle, “Canonization of Opposition to the Crown in Angevin England”, in *Haskins Anniversary Essays in Medieval History*, ed. by Charles Holt Taylor and John L. La Monte (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1929), 286.



canonization; no English saint-kings were created in this period. He concluded from this that by sanctifying the opposition to the crown, the cult of anti-royal saints “helped to neutralize” the cult of English monarchy, which he believed had never been significant to begin with.<sup>41</sup> He speculated that the decline of the political saint in England in the 14<sup>th</sup> century might have been due to the rise of Parliament, which provided people for the first time with a reliable means of expressing their frustrations with the king.<sup>42</sup> Ryle likely overestimated the significance of the saints he discussed, however. Danna Piroyanski, in her book *Martyrs in the Making*, has pointed out that no cult of royal opposition, with the exception of Becket’s, ever attracted anywhere near as much devotion as the more complex cult of Henry VI.<sup>43</sup>

While Ryle did not write about the cult of Henry VI, his work provided a starting point for later scholarship on the subject. McKenna was the first historian to provide a detailed study of Henry VI’s cult in his essay “Piety and Propaganda.” Like Ryle, he emphasized the cult’s political aspect and Henry VII’s political motivation for seeking the canonization. He criticized Henry VI as not only a bad king but an ineffective political saint, although he agreed with Ryle’s thesis in describing adherence to Henry’s

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<sup>41</sup> Ryle 289.

<sup>42</sup> Ryle 290.

<sup>43</sup> Danna Piroyanski, *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 76.

cult as “a quasi-religious touchstone of political opposition.”<sup>44</sup> He argued for a pre-Bosworth date for John Blacman’s *Collectarium* of Henry VI and for its nuanced portrayal of the king’s character.<sup>45</sup> This argument was further developed by Roger Lovatt in his article “A Collector of Apocryphal Anecdotes: John Blacman Revisited.” While repudiating the claim that Henry VII had sponsored the *Collectarium*, McKenna did draw attention to Henry VII’s preoccupation with his predecessor’s reputation. He blamed Henry VII’s stinginess for the failure of the canonization campaign, since the first Tudor king was on good terms with the papacy and he could see no reason for failure other than lack of funds. He also advanced the theory that the cult of the last Lancastrian was no longer relevant toward the end of Henry VII’s reign, since Henry VII was no longer in a weak political position.<sup>46</sup> According to his interpretation, Henry VI’s cult had merely been a political tool for Henry VII, to be abandoned when it was no longer useful.

Anthony Goodman, in his essay “Henry VII and Christian Renewal”, offered a novel and more subtle argument. He examined Henry VII’s religious ideas and his concept of his own destiny in the context of the Franco-Breton political culture in which he had spent his youth. Goodman argued that Franco-Breton historiography laid a heavy

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<sup>44</sup> J. W. McKenna, “Piety and Propaganda: The Cult of King Henry VI.” In Beryl Rowland, ed. *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), 75.

<sup>45</sup> McKenna, 77-78.

<sup>46</sup> McKenna 83.

emphasis upon the moral depravity of the English that resulted in dynastic strife such as the Wars of the Roses, and especially in their deposition and murder of their kings.<sup>47</sup> He argued that Henry VII saw himself as having a divine mission to restore English piety and thereby the harmony of the nation.<sup>48</sup> He only briefly touched upon the relevance of the canonization to this mission, although he did make mention of contemporary Breton nobles' success in procuring the canonization of an individual who had been significant in their family history.<sup>49</sup> This article will be of special importance to my argument, as I intend to further develop the ideas Goodman set forth. Henry VII's approach to the cult is much better understood in the context of the Franco-Breton royal saint tradition than in the context of the English political saint. Theilman, however, argued that Henry VII's support for the canonization was "haphazard", not nearly on the same scale as French support for their royal saints.<sup>50</sup>

Subsequent writers on the cult of Henry VI have not attended very much to Goodman's argument, but there has been a departure from simply political interpretations to ones that take religious feeling and meaning into greater account. A prime example of this is Simon Walker's essay "Political Saints in Later Medieval England." Rather than

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<sup>47</sup> Goodman, 121-22.

<sup>48</sup> Goodman, 122.

<sup>49</sup> Goodman, 122.

<sup>50</sup> John M. Theilmann, "Political Canonization and Political Symbolism in Medieval England," *Journal of British Studies* 29, no. 3 (1990): 264.

seeing political cults as vehicles for expressing political grievance, he saw them as tools for reconciliation. Since both sides of a conflict were usually in agreement about the holiness of a saint, they could immediately establish a common ground, thus making progress towards harmony.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Walker argued that people only had confidence in a saint's power to save if the saint also had the power to establish social harmony in the present.<sup>52</sup> Ironically, while Henry VI had presided over a spectacular failure of harmony in his lifetime, Walker argued that harmony and peacemaking were major themes of his cult.<sup>53</sup> He also argued, contrary to Ryle's view, that the cult of political saints drew its legitimacy from the very institution it seemed to oppose, the monarchy, and ultimately "served only to reinforce the ideology it challenged."<sup>54</sup> Finally, he argued for a resurgence of sacral monarchy in England in the late Middle Ages.<sup>55</sup>

Henry VI was not a political saint in the tradition identified by Ryle. He was in some sense both a royal and an anti-royal saint. Evans, in *The Death of Kings*, has argued that, for late medieval people, the phenomenon of the royal martyr provided a means of

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<sup>51</sup> Simon Walker, "Political Saints in Later Medieval England." In *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society*. Edited by R. H. Britnell and A. J. Pollard (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 90.

<sup>52</sup> Walker, 90.

<sup>53</sup> Walker 95.

<sup>54</sup> Walker 86-87.

<sup>55</sup> Walker 87.

reconciling their anger against tyranny with their reverence for monarchy.<sup>56</sup> They found in the memory of Henry VI an ideal king who transcended earthly governments, and who, perhaps because of his failures and sufferings as well as his martyrdom, had paradoxically won a victory over the limitations of earthly monarchy.

Cavell, in her article on Henry's first progress to the north in 1486, argued that Henry's public display of piety was part of his effort to win popular support and prevent rebellion.<sup>57</sup> Curiously, even though Henry VI was believed to have been martyred at the hands of the Yorkists, his veneration was quite widespread in the Yorkist regions of Northumberland, Yorkshire, and County Durham. By publically allying himself with Henry VI's cult, Henry VII stood to gain some of the popular devotion ascribed to his uncle, while resolving tensions with the Yorkists. Likewise, in his book *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, Kevin Sharpe highlights how Henry VII used public symbolism, piety, and charity to connect himself to Henry VI, the Pope, and God in the popular consciousness.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Michael Evans, *The Death of Kings: Royal Deaths in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003), 129.

<sup>57</sup> Emma Cavell, "Henry VII, the North of England, and the First Provincial Progress of 1486", *Northern History* XXXIX: 2 (September 2002), 189-90.

<sup>58</sup> Kevin Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 84.

Henry VII is probably the least-studied of the Tudors, but there has certainly been ample scholarship done on his reign. Likewise, sacral kingship, the political use of saints, and the significance of royal canonizations have also been studied extensively. There has, however, been relatively little research done on Henry VII's campaign for Henry VI's canonization, where all these themes intersect. The purpose of my thesis is therefore to provide an intersection between the study of Henry VII's reign and the study of royal and political sainthood and the cult of holy monarchy.

## Section I: Henry VII's Interest in Henry VI Early in His Reign

### A. Legitimation of His Usurpation

In order to become the king of England, Henry Tudor had only to win a battle. In order to stay king, he had to do quite a lot more. One of the most significant tasks ahead of him after the Battle of Bosworth Field was to convince the people of England that he was a legitimate king. At the outset, his usurpation had very little legitimacy. He had invaded a kingdom at peace and overthrown its king, and there appeared to be no reason for his having done so beyond his own greed for power. The peace of the kingdom was a blessing bestowed by God, and by breaking it Henry had upset the divine order and behaved contrary to the nature of a good king. He needed to provide a reason for having seized the throne and disrupted the natural order.<sup>59</sup> His success in battle could certainly be seen as a mark of divine favour, and he tried to ensure that it was interpreted as such by commanding *Te Deum* to be sung immediately following his victory. Success in battle was not, however, enough to ensure the secure establishment of his dynasty. The source

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<sup>59</sup> Simon Walker, "Political Saints in Later Medieval England," in R. H. Britnell and A. J. Pollard, eds., *The McFarlane Legacy: Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995), 90.

of Henry's legitimacy had to come from the past. As the successor of Henry VI, he could portray himself as a restorer, rather than a disrupter, of order.

By 1485, Henry VI's cult was already one of England's most prominent saint's cults. Images of him appeared in churches from East Anglia to Northumberland. John Blacman's hagiographical *Collectarium*, sometimes incorrectly dismissed as a piece of Tudor propaganda, had almost certainly already been written.<sup>60</sup> In one of the most important events in the history of the cult, Richard III had already moved Henry's body from the obscure abbey of Chertsey to its permanent home at Windsor. Hundreds of pilgrims travelled there annually, inspired by Henry VI's reputation as a miracle-worker. Henry VII therefore cannot be credited with, or accused of, creating the cult of his predecessor; it was in full force before he ever arrived in England. What Henry VII did, however, was to recognize the significance of this cult not only as a spiritual institution, but as an aspect of his own dynasty. By emphasizing his connection to a king who was widely perceived to be a saint and martyr, Henry VII could secure the legitimacy of his rule. It was the Yorkists (and in the minds of many, Richard III himself) who had committed "a crime against nature and against the divine moral order" by murdering

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<sup>60</sup> Roger Lovatt, "A Collector of Apocryphal Anecdotes: John Blacman Revisited," in Anthony Pollard, ed., *Property and Politics: Essays in Later Medieval English History* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1984) 179-81.



Henry VI.<sup>61</sup> Henry VII's own overthrow of Richard could therefore be projected as the restoration of the divine order that had been disrupted by Henry VI's assassination at the hands of Edward IV's agents. This narrative comes across most strongly in the account of Bernard André, Henry VII's court historian, who had come across the Channel with him. Reflecting popular belief, André depicted Richard III as having murdered Henry VI at his brother's command, and added the sensational detail that Richard was "humani sanguinis sititor", a thirster after human blood.<sup>62</sup> In André's account, the evil deed caused calamitous events to take place in the realm, Richard eventually became a tyrant, and the kingdom was desperate for the salvation provided by Henry VII.<sup>63</sup>

Henry VII's background, like that of Bernard André, predisposed him to approach the life and the cult of Henry VI in this way. He had spent much of his youth on the continent, as the ward of the Duke of Brittany and later of the King of France. During his formative years, he was influenced by the Franco-Breton court religion as well as by their

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<sup>61</sup> Michael Evans, *The Death of Kings: Royal Deaths in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003), 120.

<sup>62</sup> Bernard André, *Historia Regis Henrici Septimi*, ed. James Gairdner (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, and Roberts, 1858), 23. For the popular belief in Richard's involvement, see Anglo, 40.

<sup>63</sup> André, 23-35.

conception of English political culture.<sup>64</sup> The view prevalent in France and Brittany in the late medieval period was that the kingdom of England was in a constant state of political instability characterized by civil war and dynastic upheaval. Worst of all was the willingness of the English to depose and even kill their kings.<sup>65</sup> This sense of revulsion at the regicidal tendencies of their neighbours was a standard theme in French historiography of England throughout the late Middle Ages. In the words of Jean Juvenal des Ursins, a fifteenth-century French chronicler, “Ilz ont une maniere en Angleterre quilx ne tiennent comte de changier leur roy quant bon leur semble, voire de les tuer & faire morir malvausement.”<sup>66</sup> In 1484, during a public address to the Estates Generals of Tours on the accession of Charles VIII, the chancellor of France described Richard III’s alleged slaying of his nephews within the context of the English tradition of treachery.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Anthony Goodman, “Henry VII and Christian Renewal,” in Keith Robbins, ed., *Religion and Humanism: Ecclesiastical Historical Society Papers, Studies in Church History* 17 (Blackwell: 1982), 122.

<sup>65</sup> P. S. Lewis, “Two Pieces of Fifteenth Century Political Iconography”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 27 (1964): 319.

<sup>66</sup> “They have a fashion in England by which they take it as no account to change their king when it seems good to them, indeed to kill them and make them die wretchedly.” (My trans.) Jean Juvenal des Ursins, *Traictie compendieux de la querelle de France contre les Anglois*, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. Fr. 17512, fol. 34v a. Quoted in Lewis, 319.

<sup>67</sup> J. Masselin, *Journal des États Généraux de France tenus a Tours en 1484* (ed A. Bernier, 1835), 37-39. Quoted in *English Historical Documents vol. 4 (Late Medieval) 1327-1485*, edited by David Charles Douglas and Alec Reginald Myers (London: Routledge, 1969), 331-32.

The English were a people who approved of having murderers as their kings. Bernard André likewise described England as a land plagued by “ancient” discord, where Richard III’s bloodthirstiness was hardly novel.<sup>68</sup> The assassination of Henry VI in 1472 was therefore seen across the Channel as an atrocious crime that was worthy of vengeance, but nonetheless standard behaviour for the English. From the French perspective, the English needed a king who could save them from themselves. According to Bernard André’s account, Henry VII was just such a king; it was his destiny to restore the kingdom to peace and good Christian practice. This perception of the traumatic state of the English crown figured in Henry VII’s justification for invading a kingdom seemingly at peace.<sup>69</sup> He was not deposing a legitimate king but restoring a ruptured dynasty and correcting a crime that had been committed against God.

## **B. Reconciliation and Restoration of Peace**

The crimes that had been committed against the crown of England did not merely open an opportunity for Henry, but also posed a problem for him. Of the last four kings of England, all but one had met violent deaths, and the one who died naturally had been deposed in his lifetime. There was no reason to believe that this trend would not

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<sup>68</sup> Goodman, 121.

<sup>69</sup> Goodman, 122.

continue. The violence that had been committed against King Henry VI provided Henry VII with the justification for his seizure of power, but, especially as seen from the exaggerated French perspective with which Henry was familiar, any king of England was perpetually at risk of being violently deposed and even killed. Henry was aware that his position was weak after Bosworth, and that he needed to do whatever he could in order to secure the support of the realm – both the Yorkists and the Lancastrians.

The widespread popularity of Henry VI was a phenomenon greatly to Henry VII's advantage as he sought a way to reconcile these two factions and bring them round to acceptance of his own reign. Upon first consideration it might seem unlikely that a king who had been violently killed by one side of a civil conflict could be a vehicle for reconciliation between the two sides, but in fact this phenomenon is an ancient and recurring one. Simon Walker has demonstrated that throughout the Middle Ages, "political" martyrs, rather than being perpetrators of conflict, were most significant as restorers of peace.<sup>70</sup> They were venerated to a great extent for their ability to provide social harmony and reconciliation to communities that had been beset by conflict. When a slain political figure was believed to be performing miracles from heaven, both those who had followed him in life and those who had opposed him could agree on his present state of holiness and sainthood. Saints could not prevent strife from occurring, but

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<sup>70</sup> Walker, 90.

according to Walker, they could “restore a measure of harmony after the strife was over and ... [make] reconciliation, even on unfavourable terms, easier for the losers by offering a higher, and more objective, constraint to which all could submit without dishonour.”<sup>71</sup> This agreement on the martyr’s holiness, and on the nearness of heavenly virtue, provided a common ground, a starting-place for reconciliation. The view that a martyr granted legitimacy only to his side of an argument and thus served to further conflict may have been true of some cults, but a cult as powerful as that of Henry VI depended upon its wide, almost universal appeal.<sup>72</sup>

From the beginning, Henry VI’s cult enjoyed a wide appeal. His devotees came from both sides of the Yorkist-Lancastrian conflict, and he performed miracles without discrimination.<sup>73</sup> This was in keeping with how he was believed to have behaved in life. Blacman’s *Collectarium* emphasized again and again King Henry’s willingness to forgive his “persecutors”, writing that “he never would that any person, however injurious to him, should ever be punished”.<sup>74</sup> In accordance with Henry VI’s pacific and forgiving

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<sup>71</sup> Walker, 91.

<sup>72</sup> For the view that political saints furthered conflict, see John M. Theilmann, “Political Canonization and Political Symbolism in Medieval England”, *Journal of British Studies* 29, no. 3 (July, 1990): 244.

<sup>73</sup> Piroyanski, 81.

<sup>74</sup> *Henry the Sixth: A Reprint of John Blacman's Memoir with Translation and Notes*, trans. M.R. James (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1919). Project Gutenberg. No page numbers.

nature, the cult focused upon his patience and piety in life and rather than the violent and divisive manner of his death.<sup>75</sup> Piroyanski has called him “a national figure, one which any person in the Kingdom could relate to”.<sup>76</sup>

Because of the emphasis upon forgiveness and mercy, Henry VI’s cult attracted people who would have been his political enemies. Even in its early years, the cult had become very popular in the Yorkists’ greatest stronghold, York, where a shrine developed around Henry’s statue on the elaborate rood screen depicting all the kings from William the Conqueror. In 1479 Lawrence Booth, the Archbishop of York, declared the cult to be illegal since Henry VI had not been formally canonized, and stated that devotion to the dead king was “done... to the dishonouring of our Lord Edward IV, King of England”.<sup>77</sup> Edward IV himself had asked the London Mercer’s Company in 1480 for their assistance in preventing pilgrims from traveling to Chertsey.<sup>78</sup> Despite, or perhaps to some extent because of, royal opposition, devotion to Henry VI spread across the kingdom, including in the north. There are images of him dating from this period in

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<sup>75</sup> Danna Piroyanski, *Martyrs in the Making: Political Martyrdom in Late Medieval England* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 119-20.

<sup>76</sup> Piroyanski, 81.

<sup>77</sup> Eric Waldram Kemp, *Canonization and Authority in the Western Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 134.

<sup>78</sup> *Acts of the Court of the Mercers Company*, eds. Laetitia Lyell and Frank D. Watney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936), 139.

Alnwick parish church in Northumberland, and in Ripon and Durham.<sup>79</sup> A bequest was made to his light at a church in Lincolnshire.<sup>80</sup> Efforts to suppress the cult were futile and indeed misguided, and Richard III, another Yorkist, recognized this fact. His translation of the body from Chertsey to Windsor, along with the cessation of royal persecution, indicates that he wished to promote the cult out of what Lovatt describes as “dynastic opportunism”.<sup>81</sup> Significantly, he had Henry VI buried beside his own brother and the architect of Henry’s murder, Edward IV.<sup>82</sup> He also gave generously to the support of King’s College, Henry VI’s greatest legacy.<sup>83</sup> This level of support from the most powerful Yorkist of them all indicates that the Yorkist establishment, following the example of the common Yorkist, had embraced the cult of Henry VI by the time Henry VII acceded to the throne, if only for political reasons. This reversal was expressed in the versicle of the office of prayers to Henry, which contained the line, “Those who disparaged you now come before you and adore your footprints.”<sup>84</sup> The groundwork for reconciliation had been laid.

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<sup>79</sup> Kemp, 135.

<sup>80</sup> Kemp, 135.

<sup>81</sup> Lovatt, 177.

<sup>82</sup> Lovatt, 177.

<sup>83</sup> Lovatt, 177.

<sup>84</sup> Walker, 96.

Although reverence for Henry VI was widespread in the north by 1485, Henry VII recognized the danger that the northerners would rebel against his rule. Part of the way in which he tried to ensure that this would not happen was by travelling to the north almost immediately upon acceding to the throne.<sup>85</sup> His progress, beginning in early 1486, took him to Cambridge, Huntingdon, Lincoln, Nottingham, York, Worcester, Hereford, Gloucester, and Bristol.<sup>86</sup> The fact that uprisings occurred even during the triumphal royal progress demonstrates the instability of Henry's grip on the country. Instead of directly responding to these uprisings, Henry continued on his route.<sup>87</sup> A large part of his behaviour on progress was related to putting forward an image of himself as a deeply pious king on the model of Henry VI.<sup>88</sup> Emma Cavell writes that Henry's purpose was, "[a]bove all, [to] reassure his subjects of his willingness to emulate the virtues of past kings of England", since "[m]onarchic piety had a special resonance".<sup>89</sup> Rather than frequenting private chapels, Henry attended holy services in public cathedrals and churches in Lincoln, York, Doncaster, Worcester, and Bristol. On Maundy Thursday he

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<sup>85</sup> Emma Cavell, "Henry VII, the North of England, and the First Provincial Progress of 1486," *Northern History* XXXIX: 2 (September 2002): 188-90.

<sup>86</sup> "Henry VII (1457–1509)," S. J. Gunn in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12954> (accessed October 4, 2013).

<sup>87</sup> Gunn, "Henry VII (1457-1509)."

<sup>88</sup> Cavell, 188.

<sup>89</sup> Cavell, 188, 190.



washed the feet of 29 paupers, and on Good Friday he gave extensive alms to the poor, touched for the king's evil, and blessed cramp rings in accordance with monarchic ritual.<sup>90</sup> All this was done because Henry recognized the importance of winning the hearts and minds of his people, and understood that this was to be done through expressions of piety. This does not mean that he was insincere, but that he recognized the power of piety for winning the support of his people.

All kings of England, including Edward IV and Richard III, had portrayed themselves as pious on progress, but Cavell has written that on Henry VII's first progress, the memory of Henry VI was likely of special significance.<sup>91</sup> In a region where Henry VI was popular and Henry VII was not, it was wise of him to present himself as a king along his uncle's model.<sup>92</sup> Henry VI's memory was a theme throughout the progress. The city of York put on a pageant for him featuring the previous six King Henrys, and the city of Worcester designed a pageant depicting the life and martyrdom of Henry VI which, however, was never performed.<sup>93</sup> The writers of the Worcester pageant, whose city had

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<sup>90</sup> Cavell, 189.

<sup>91</sup> Cavell, 188.

<sup>92</sup> Cavell, 188.

<sup>93</sup> Kevin Sharpe, *Selling the Tudor Monarchy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 63.

recently been in rebellion, presented Henry VI as a “holy mediator” who would plead with King Henry VII to have mercy upon the rebellious city.<sup>94</sup>

Henry VII certainly recognized the significance of Henry VI as a restorer of national harmony. Coming as he did from the Franco-Breton tradition that emphasized the violence inherent in English political culture, and believing in his own destiny to end that violence, Henry VII appears to have sought to identify himself with the influence of Henry VI in part for this reason. Literature from his court repeatedly portrays both Henries as peacemakers.<sup>95</sup> Prayers to Henry VI called upon him to bring peace to troubled places: “‘Let there be peace on earth and not war’ asks the popular invocation *Rex Henricus, sis amicus*, while one of the English prayers in his honour calls on Henry to ‘set this realm at rest.’”<sup>96</sup> A poem composed by Petrus Carmelianus upon the birth of Prince Arthur represented Henry VI as being chosen by a synod of saints to oversee the restoration of peace and harmony to the kingdom of England as united under Henry VII.<sup>97</sup> Henry VII himself was described by Bernard André among others as having restored peace to the realm and quelled the “rage” that had dethroned Henry VI.<sup>98</sup> The result was the creation of the “Tudor myth” that Henry VII had brought peace to England, when in

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<sup>94</sup> Piroyanski, 85.

<sup>95</sup> Goodman, 121.

<sup>96</sup> Walker, 95.

<sup>97</sup> Walker, 95.

<sup>98</sup> Goodman, 121.

fact he himself had caused the only significant disruptions to the peace of the realm since the early 1470s.<sup>99</sup>

### C. Dynastic and Prophetic Right to Rule

This myth was not the only one that Henry VII promulgated. His entire claim to the throne and account of his personal history were based largely on misinformation and ignorance. The relationship between Henry VI and Henry VII was completely irrelevant for dynastic purposes. They were related through Catherine of Valois, who had married Henry V and had no claim to the English throne in her own right. After Henry V died, leaving her with their infant son Henry VI, Catherine married Owen Tudor and had another son, Edmund. Edmund Tudor was therefore the half-brother of Henry VI, and his son, Henry Tudor, was Henry VI's "half-nephew". Despite the nearness of this relationship, it was dynastically insignificant, since the crown could only be passed through the direct line of Henry V, not of his widow. Historians, being aware of this fact, have tended to downplay the significance of Henry VII's relationship to Henry VI, instead focusing upon his claim to rule by right of conquest. However, Henry VII himself, while he did insist upon the right of conquest, also emphasized his family

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<sup>99</sup> Goodman, 121.

connection to Henry VI. He always referred to him as his uncle and rarely used his own family name, Tudor.<sup>100</sup> Davies has demonstrated that Henry VII followed a deliberate policy of “obfuscation and concealment” regarding his own personal and family history.<sup>101</sup> The average English person in the late fifteenth century did not have access to detailed dynastic information, and Henry VII’s background was shrouded in even deeper obscurity than usual, since his family came from Wales. Most average people in the kingdom had only a vague idea of Henry VII’s background and the basis of his claim to the throne.<sup>102</sup> This lack of information is evident in contemporary chronicles, which demonstrate only a vague awareness of the events surrounding Henry VII’s provenance and rise to power.<sup>103</sup> Even Bernard André, Henry VII’s court historian, is misinformed, ignorant, or deliberately misleading about many facts regarding his king’s childhood and youth.<sup>104</sup>

The emphasis of the contemporary accounts is on Henry VII’s connection to Henry VI, apparently as the direct result of Henry VII’s own narrative of his origins. At every possible opportunity, Henry VII wished to remind his audience of his relationship

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<sup>100</sup> C. S. L. Davies, “Information, Disinformation and Political Knowledge under Henry VII and early Henry VIII.” *Historical Research* 85, no. 228, 228.

<sup>101</sup> Davies, 228-9.

<sup>102</sup> Davies, 230.

<sup>103</sup> Davies, 237.

<sup>104</sup> Davies, 245.

to Henry VI, and insisted that others do so as well. This was true even though Henry VII's only real claim to the throne was through his mother's line. Bernard André does mention the Beaufort line as an aspect of Henry's claim to the throne, but only after first dwelling at greater length upon Henry VII's ties to Henry VI and Cadwaladr, the legendary last king of the Britons.<sup>105</sup> In 1484 the French government had even claimed that Henry Tudor was Henry VI's son, although this falsehood did not catch on.<sup>106</sup> Rather, in all official documents of the reign, Henry VI is described as Henry VII's uncle. For example, in his first Parliament, during which Henry VII reversed all charges of treason against Henry VI and his family, Henry VI was always described as some variant of "the most famous, blessed and Christian prince of noble memory Henry VI, late king of England, your uncle".<sup>107</sup> It could be said that Henry VII hid his own personal history behind the story of his relationship with Henry VI.

This emphasis was picked up in less official documents as well. The Italian writer Giovanni Gigilis wrote an "Epithalamium" in 1486 which described Henry VII as Henry VI's "successor", who "[liberated] England from tyranny after the murder of the

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<sup>105</sup> Bernard André, 9-11.

<sup>106</sup> Davies, 238.

<sup>107</sup> Parliament Rolls of Medieval England, Henry VII's 1485 Parliament, Part I, Vi-280, column a, 6.[11]. Accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.sd-editions.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/AnaServer?PROME+0+start.anv+id=HENRYVII>.

princes.”<sup>108</sup> The Great London Chronicle describes Henry VI’s elevation of his “brethren on the mother’s side”, Edmund and Jasper Tudor, to the peerage, thus indirectly opening the way for Henry VII’s own rise to power.<sup>109</sup> The writer of the Chronicle did not, however, mention that Henry VII had a stronger claim to the throne through his mother, Margaret Beaufort, a direct descendent of Edward III.<sup>110</sup> Either the chronicler left out the Beaufort connection because he was ignorant of it, or because he was reflecting Henry VII’s own account of his origins by discussing Henry VI instead. Whatever the case, it appears that Henry VII was content to keep the focus firmly on his relationship to Henry VI rather than on the facts that were more important from an objective genealogical standpoint.

In addition to the more prosaic genealogical connection between them, Henry VII promoted the idea that Henry VI had prophesied his rise to power.<sup>111</sup> This myth was only recorded later in the reign of Henry VII, but may have been current earlier on and written down after having circulated for some time at a popular level. André’s *Historia*, written sometime after 1500, contains the first known written mention of the legend. He describes Henry VI as saying of the young Henry Tudor, “aliquando regni gubernacula

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<sup>108</sup> Davies, 245.

<sup>109</sup> Davies, 236.

<sup>110</sup> Davies, 237.

<sup>111</sup> Sydney Anglo, *Spectacle, Pageantry, and Early Tudor Policy* (London: Oxford UP, 1969): 40-41.

suscepturum, omniaque manu sua (ut nunc videmus feliciter possidet) habiturum...”<sup>112</sup>

Henry VII made no recorded statement about this legend, but the fact that it appears in André’s history strongly suggests that the king looked upon it with approval and even encouraged it. The account of the prophecy is also taken up in Polydore Vergil’s history of the life of Henry VII. According to Vergil, the “holy man” Henry VI only looked at Henry Tudor’s face for a few minutes before declaring, ““This trewly, this is he unto whom both we and our adversaryes must yeald and geave over the dominion.”<sup>113</sup> The prophecy was prevalent enough that Shakespeare knew of it nearly a century later and included it in his *Henry VI Part 3*. Here the legend found its most famous expression, and gave voice most fully to the Tudor myth it had helped create:

Come hither, England's hope. If secret powers  
Suggest but truth to my divining thoughts,  
This pretty lad will prove our country's bliss.  
His looks are full of peaceful majesty,  
His head by nature framed to wear a crown,  
His hand to wield a sceptre, and himself  
Likely in time to bless a regal throne.  
Make much of him, my lords, for this is he  
Must help you more than you are hurt by me.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> “Someday the government will look up to the king, and he will have everything in his hand (as, happily, we now see he possesses).” My trans. Bernard André, *Historia regis Henrici Septimi*, 14. For the date of André’s history, see James Gairdner, introduction to *Historia regis Henrici Septimi*, xi.

<sup>113</sup> Polydore Vergil, 135.

<sup>114</sup> William Shakespeare, *Henry VI Part 3*, Scene IV.

The significance of this prophecy, whether it was real, a fabrication, or, as is most likely, a gradually-evolved figment of the popular imagination, is obvious. A prophecy coming from a “holy man” such as Henry VI, who was believed to possess heavenly wisdom and vision, could be considered to have a degree of divine authority. The fact that the myth appears first in a document written after 1500, and not earlier, is in accordance with the continued popularity of Henry VI’s cult after the turn of the century. On the official level, it shows that Henry VII did not cease to promote his connection to Henry VI even after he was stable upon his throne. At least fifteen years had passed since Bosworth, but Henry VII was still interested in his relationship to Henry VI. This interest was most prominently manifested in his campaign for Henry VI’s canonization.



## Section II: Henry VII's Pious Interest in Henry VI

### A. Henry VII Was Pious

Most historians writing about Henry VII's efforts to have Henry VI canonized as a saint have written about every motivation he could possibly have had apart from what ought to be the most obvious: his piety. The canonization of a saint, after all, was and is inherently a religious activity, regardless of the political or social uses to which a saint may be put. Moreover, it is unlikely that any man of the highly religious fifteenth century should not have absorbed in some degree the religious beliefs and motivations of his generation to some degree, let alone a man such as Henry VII, who lived and died in a deeply religious court culture.<sup>115</sup> Nonetheless, many historians ignore this reality and instead reduce Henry VII's efforts to secure Henry VI's canonization to a cynical political move. Sydney Anglo, for instance, describes Henry VI as a "weapon" that Henry VII developed "for political purposes."<sup>116</sup> This interpretation fails to understand the complex interconnections between politics and religion in late medieval England.

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<sup>115</sup> Goodman, 116-17.

<sup>116</sup> Anglo, 40.

Henry VII was without doubt a very pious individual, more so even than was ordinary in his very pious time. He attended mass 2-3 times every day, far beyond what was normal.<sup>117</sup> He founded the Savoy Hospital, better described as a homeless shelter, on which he planned to spend at least 20,000 marks.<sup>118</sup> He also gave alms excessively and built an almshouse to provide for thirteen poor men, including a priest.<sup>119</sup> He invited an order of the Friars Minor to establish a residence on the grounds of Richmond Palace in 1501 and paid for its construction and upkeep.<sup>120</sup> He completed the chapels of St George at Windsor (where Henry VI's body was buried) and of King's College, Cambridge (which Henry VI founded).<sup>121</sup> Colvin, who has undertaken the most exhaustive investigation into Henry VII's pious works, writes that, despite sometimes being portrayed as the first early modern king of England, "in matters of religious observance Henry VII was as convinced a believer in the mechanics of medieval piety as any of his predecessors."<sup>122</sup> Storey has described his demonstration of piety as "obsessive."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> R. L. Storey, *The Reign of Henry VII* (New York: Walker, 1968), 63.

<sup>118</sup> H. M. Colvin, "Henry VII's Works of Piety," in *The History of the King's Works, III, 1485-1660 (Part 1)* (London: H. M. Stationary Office, 1963), 196, 202.

<sup>119</sup> Colvin, 187.

<sup>120</sup> Colvin, 195-6.

<sup>121</sup> Storey, 63.

<sup>122</sup> Colvin, 187.

<sup>123</sup> Storey, 184.

This obsession manifested itself most strongly in the extensive provisions he made in his will for the welfare of his soul. Storey has described him as having an “excessive, almost morbid preoccupation with his spiritual welfare”.<sup>124</sup> Accordingly, he took extreme measures to hasten his soul through Purgatory. He provided for 10,000 masses to be said for his soul upon his death, more than any of his predecessors had required since Henry III.<sup>125</sup> In addition, he provided for the construction of two more hospitals like the one at the Savoy. These never came into existence, but his plan included the significant detail that the 100 inmates of each new hospital would say a prayer for him every night, as was already the practice at the Savoy.<sup>126</sup> He left hundreds of pounds to the Franciscan Observants because of “our long continued devotion towards St Francis, their patron”, and because “we always have had a special confidence and trust in the devout prayers of the Friars Observants”.<sup>127</sup> Significantly, Henry’s will stipulated that the Chapel at King’s College was to be completed “for the singular trust that we have to the prayers of our said uncle, for the great holiness of his life and virtue that he was of in earth.”<sup>128</sup> Perhaps most importantly, he constructed a chapel, commonly known as the

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<sup>124</sup> Storey, 63.

<sup>125</sup> Storey, 63.

<sup>126</sup> Colvin, 187, 198.

<sup>127</sup> Quoted in Roger Lockyer and Andrew Thrush, *Henry VII*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Longman, 1997), 64.

<sup>128</sup> Quoted in Lockyer and Thrush, 94.

Lady Chapel, at Westminster Abbey at the cost of £9,650, with a further £30,000 dedicated to the purchase of lands for its endowment.<sup>129</sup> His original plan was to have himself buried in this chapel together with “the holy body of his said Uncle Henry vj<sup>th</sup>”, but in the end it held only his own corpse.<sup>130</sup> Contrary to his father’s will, Henry VIII did not have the relics of Henry VI translated to Westminster Abbey.<sup>131</sup> Had all gone according to plan, the two Henries would have lain together surrounded by images of Henry VII’s “armes, bagies, cognoisaunts, and other convenient painting”, and guarded by 105 statues of saints, including “one or two obscure Breton saints to whose protection Henry had no doubt appealed during his years of exile before Bosworth field.”<sup>132</sup> In Sharpe’s words, this royal chapel “was intended to represent his kingship as well as piety.”<sup>133</sup> All this goes to show that Henry VII had a strong interest in religion going beyond what was merely conventional. Significantly, he demonstrated clearly his belief in the cult of saints.

Henry VII’s piety may have been influenced by his guardians in France and Brittany and by his mother. The courts in which Henry VII grew up were preoccupied

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<sup>129</sup> Storey, 63.

<sup>130</sup> Anglo, 43.

<sup>131</sup> J. W. McKenna, “Piety and Propaganda: The Cult of King Henry VI,” in Beryl Rowland, ed., *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1974), 83.

<sup>132</sup> Colvin, 217.

<sup>133</sup> Sharpe, 63.

with “the especially elaborate realisations of spiritual concepts” and with the practice of princely piety.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, Henry VII’s mother, Lady Margaret Beaufort, was even more extravagantly pious than her son. Although he had seen very little of her during his childhood, she became one of the most significant influences on him during his reign.<sup>135</sup> He wrote to her that “in all ...things that I know should be to your honour and pleasure, and weal of your soul, I shall be glad to please you as your heart can desire it, and I know well, that I am as much bounden so to do, as any creature living for the great and singular motherly love and affection that it hath pleased you at all times to bear me.”<sup>136</sup> Lady Margaret was also interested in the cult of Henry VI. In her royal charter for Christ’s College, Cambridge, she explained that she had been motivated to found the College by love for Henry VI and “confidence in his sanctity”.<sup>137</sup> Some historians have gone so far as to suggest that she was the real champion of Henry VI’s cult and merely acted through her son.<sup>138</sup> This view may have some foundation in fact, but the truth is probably more nuanced; Henry VII may not have been his mother’s puppet in seeking to procure the

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<sup>134</sup> Goodman, 116.

<sup>135</sup> Quoted in S. B. Chrimes, *Henry VII* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 301.

<sup>136</sup> Quoted in Chrimes, 301-302.

<sup>137</sup> Marsden, 58-59; Lockyer and Thrush, 62.

<sup>138</sup> McKenna, 83.

canonization, but he may have been influenced and urged on by her, both in the canonization specifically and in his religion more generally.

In conclusion, Henry VII was a very pious man who had been greatly influenced in that direction by his guardians and especially by his mother. There is no reason to suppose he did not share in the common belief that saints such as Henry VI could work miracles and could intercede for him on behalf of his kingdom and his soul. On the contrary, there is strong evidence to suggest that he did hold just such a view. Little as most people would consider this belief reasonable today, it was perfectly ordinary at the time, and Henry VII was a man of his time.

### **B. Requirements and Precedents for English Royal Canonizations**

Henry Tudor was acquainted with the requirements for canonization. He knew that any canonization involved extensive investigations into the holiness of the proposed saint and that it was an expensive and time-consuming process. This was not an activity to be undertaken lightly or without confidence, particularly by a man as careful with money as Henry VII. He would not have invested so much time and so many resources into the campaign if he had not had been confident in its success – in other words, if he had not believed that Henry VI really performed miracles from beyond the grave that could be

proven to the satisfaction of the papacy. In this sense, canonization was an inherently religious activity.

Canonizations, even when pursued by kings, did not always succeed, and Henry VII must have been aware of this. Henry VI himself had recently failed to have King Alfred canonized, and Richard II had failed to have Edward II canonized.<sup>139</sup> In both these cases, however, a major popular cult had been lacking. In his own canonisation efforts for Alfred, Henry VI appears to have been motivated by his legendary piety and by a feeling of affinity with the Anglo-Saxon king.<sup>140</sup> Richard II is generally reputed to have had base political motives for pursuing his grandfather's canonization (though perhaps with investigation this thesis too could be overturned).<sup>141</sup> Certainly Edward II enjoyed no significant amount of popular devotion except in the west of England.<sup>142</sup> The failure of these canonization attempts might have given Henry VII pause. His own situation, however, clearly promised better results. The cult of Henry VI was far more popular than that of Alfred or Edward had ever been, and unlike the two older kings, Henry VI was continually performing miracles. A believer in the cult of saints would have every reason to be confident that the papacy would be convinced of Henry VI's sanctity. Moreover,

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<sup>139</sup> Walker, 84, 87.

<sup>140</sup> Walker, 87.

<sup>141</sup> Walker, 84.

<sup>142</sup> Walker, 84.

Henry VII's healthy relationship with the papacy could not but have given him confidence that his efforts would be met with a positive response.<sup>143</sup>

### C. The Failure of the Canonization

Various theories exist as to why the campaign for Henry VI's canonization did not succeed. For one reason or another, Henry VII is usually blamed. Polydore Vergil took the simplest view, that Henry VII had been prevented from achieving his goal by his own "too hasty death", but this view has not been widely accepted by modern historians.<sup>144</sup>

Henry VII's popular reputation for stinginess, combined with the belief that he had no sincere pious interest in Henry VI, have led many historians to assume that Henry simply wasn't willing to pay the necessary price to have his uncle canonized. This interpretation is borrowed from the chronicler Edward Hall (1497-1547), who wrote that Henry VII "thought it more necessary to kepe his money at home, for the profite of his realme and countrey, rather than to empoverish his kingdom, for the gaining of a new holy day of saint Henry."<sup>145</sup> Jenkyns repeats this view when he writes that Henry VII gave up on the

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<sup>143</sup> For Henry VII's relationship with the papacy, see Storey, 184-85; Goodman, 123.

<sup>144</sup> Polydore Vergil, 156.

<sup>145</sup> Edward Hall, *Chronicle*, Henry Ellis, ed. (London: J. Johnson, 1809), 304.



campaign because “in the end, the pontiff’s price proved too steep.”<sup>146</sup> McKenna, too, writes that the campaign was “reportedly hampered by the King’s unwillingness to contribute the necessary sums.”<sup>147</sup> These historians and others have accepted Hall’s interpretation on the grounds of no other evidence, apart from Henry VII’s reputation. Hall, however, was only a child when Henry VII died and his Chronicle may not have been written for decades afterwards (the exact date of composition for the different parts of the Chronicle is unknown, but it was not published until the late 1540s).<sup>148</sup> Therefore, his account of Henry VII’s reign should not be considered authoritative in all its details. In addition, Hall may have been biased against Henry VII.<sup>149</sup> As a devout Protestant whose writings contain strong Protestant overtones, Hall may not have taken Catholic devotion seriously.<sup>150</sup> Therefore, his description of Henry VII as financially motivated is not trustworthy. Sydney Anglo makes the best rebuttal to Hall’s position, arguing that it “is difficult to reconcile with the years of negotiation, investigation, and compilation,

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<sup>146</sup> Richard Jenkyns, *Westminster Abbey* (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 53.

<sup>147</sup> McKenna, 83.

<sup>148</sup> “Hall, Edward (1497–1547),” Peter C. Herman in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2012, <http://www.oxforddnb.com.ezproxy.library.ubc.ca/view/article/11954> (accessed February 10, 2014).

<sup>149</sup> Richard Knox and Shane Leslie, introduction to *The Miracles of King Henry VI*, eds. and trans. Knox and Leslie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 5.

<sup>150</sup> Herman, “Hall, Edward (1497–1547)”.

which had been lavished on this cause.”<sup>151</sup> A man as shrewd and politically aware as Henry VII could not have been ignorant of the difficulties and expense of securing a canonization, nor is it likely that he would have continued his efforts through the terms of three successive popes and two papal commissions if he had not been willing to pay.

Henry VII was not as stingy as he is often represented to have been. His expenditures upon religious foundations, charities, and particularly the provisions for his spiritual welfare after death, were extraordinary. Moreover, he was very willing to spend large sums of money upon lavish celebrations, pageants, tournaments, and so on. In most cases where a public event could be seen as enhancing his royal image or his spiritual welfare (which, as will be discussed below, were not wholly separated in his mind), Henry was actually quite generous.<sup>152</sup> Since the canonization was so entirely relevant to both Henry VII’s royal image and his spiritual welfare, we should expect him to be willing to spend lavishly upon it – as in fact he did.

Another oft-mentioned theory as to why the canonization failed is that it ceased to be politically valuable or relevant. Theilmann suggests that the canonization stalled because the “political saint” had been exposed as a ploy during the reign of Richard II

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<sup>151</sup> Anglo, 43, n. 1.

<sup>152</sup> Sharpe, 60-62.

and had since lost its viability.<sup>153</sup> If this were the case, it is difficult to explain why Henry VII would have begun the campaign at all, or why he would have pursued it for over fifteen years. It has also been argued that he ceased to pursue the canonization after he had firmly established his hold upon the throne.<sup>154</sup> This view is difficult to reconcile with the fact of his continued interest in Henry VI, even up to the time of his death, and the provisions in his will for them to be interred and remembered together in perpetuity.

Underlying all the aforementioned theories is the unwarranted assumption that had he only cared to do so, Henry VII could easily have prevailed upon the papacy to canonize Henry VI. McKenna, for instance, writes, “It is surely true that Henry VII, who was on excellent terms with the papacy ... could easily have expedited the canonization of his uncle.”<sup>155</sup> It is certainly true that Henry VII was on good terms with Rome throughout his reign: the papacy anathematized all rebels against him on three separate occasions, presented him three times with a blessed sword and cap, and named him Defender of the Faith. Goodman writes that Henry VII had an unprecedented level of support from and reliance upon the papacy for a fifteenth-century English king.<sup>156</sup> Nonetheless, no English king ever had sufficient influence with the papacy to force a

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<sup>153</sup> Theilmann, “Political Canonization and Political Symbolism in Medieval England,” 264, n. 76.

<sup>154</sup> McKenna, 84.

<sup>155</sup> McKenna, 84.

<sup>156</sup> Goodman, 123.

canonization through if the papacy itself were unwilling. Henry VII's failure therefore cannot be used as evidence for his lack of interest or commitment. McKenna's conclusion, that Henry VII must not have been personally interested in the canonization, rests upon a weak premise and a failure to investigate the canonization from the papal perspective.<sup>157</sup>

The failed canonization of Henry VI can be much more easily explained if it is considered in the wider context of late medieval canonizations. Between 1482 and 1523, within which period the campaign for Henry VI's canonization took place, the papacy canonized only five new saints.<sup>158</sup> Of those, only two had lived in the fifteenth century: Francis of Paola (1416-1507) was canonized in 1519, and Antoninus of Florence (1389-1458) was canonized in 1523. Of the other three saints, one (Bonaventure) had lived in the thirteenth century, and two (Benno of Meissen and Leopold V of Austria) in the eleventh century. No saints at all were canonized between 1485 and 1519, the period during which Henry VII petitioned for Henry VI's canonization.<sup>159</sup> It seems very likely that it was not Henry VII's lack of interest or support, but the papacy's unwillingness to proceed, that caused the canonization to fail.

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<sup>157</sup> Cf McKenna, 84.

<sup>158</sup> Ronald Finucane, *Contested Canonizations : The Last Medieval Saints, 1482-1523* (Washington, DC, USA: Catholic University of America Press, 2011).

<sup>159</sup> For all canonization statistics, see Finucane, *Contested Canonizations*.

It was quite normal that the papacy should take an extremely long time to pronounce a verdict upon canonization; the aforementioned cases of Benno of Meissen and Leopold of Austria are examples of this fact. Finucane has observed in a book upon the subject that “delay was built into the system”, and that the popes and their committees deliberately suspended judgment in order to see if cults would remain popular and miracles would continue to occur.<sup>160</sup> Canonizations often took centuries. The 15-20 year period during which Henry VII sought Henry VI’s canonization appears like a momentary blip within the papal timeframe. In short, there was nothing at all unusual about the lack of results. Francis Bacon, in his 1616 *History of Henry VII of England*, suggested that the papacy had a particular reason for prevaricating upon this case. He wrote that

the pope, (who was extremely jealous of the dignity of the see of Rome, and of the acts thereof) knowing that King Henry the Sixth was reputed in the world abroad but for a simple man, was afraid it would but diminish the estimation of that kind of honour, if there were not a distance kept between innocents and saints.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Finucane, *Contested Canonizations*, 26.

<sup>161</sup> Francis Bacon, *The History of the Reign of Henry the Seventh*, J. Rawson Lumby, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 207. Online.

While Bacon is even less of a primary source than Hall, his judgement on the case seems much more reasonable, and is much more in keeping with what is known about both Henry VII and the papacy.

The last major event in the process of Henry VI's canonization took place in 1504, when Pope Julius II renewed the commission investigating Henry VI's miracles. At this time there were only five years remaining in Henry VII's life, and his health was deteriorating. It is very likely that Henry VII would have continued his support for the campaign had he lived longer, and in this sense Polydore Vergil's judgment on the case appears most apt. When there had already been a gap of ten years between renewals of the commission with little in the way of concrete results, a lack of major documented activity during the last five years of Henry's life cannot be used as evidence that he had ceased to care about the canonization, or even that he considered it to have failed. It is more likely that he considered the matter to be in the hands of the pope, and was awaiting his judgment. The fact of the matter is that we cannot know why Henry VII did not push harder for the canonization, or what he thought about it, during those last five years, any more than we can know why the popes delayed – if indeed they had any particular reason for doing so beyond their general policy. We do know, from the evidence of his will, that Henry VII continued to have faith in the saintly intercession of Henry VI, and continued to have a genuine interest in him up until the time of his death. In consideration of these certainties, it is very doubtful that he had given up on the canonization, even if, in his state of deteriorating health and burdened by many cares, he no longer had the strength to make it a priority.



## Section III: The Canonization Campaign as a Manifestation of Medieval Political Theology

### A. Henry VII's Belief in Sacral Kingship

It can hardly be denied that Henry VII gained a political advantage in pursuing the canonization of Henry VI, but to cease analysis there is to conflate the effect and the intention, and to oversimplify the motivations of a complicated man.<sup>162</sup> While his adherence to the cult of Henry VI may have served Henry VII politically, it would be a mistake to believe that he therefore had no genuine pious motive. On the contrary, within the context of late medieval thought, the political and the pious were often closely related. The place where this belief stands out most clearly is in the sacred office of the king.

Henry VII certainly believed in the medieval concept of sacral kingship. Bloch identifies this belief as having persevered in the popular memory since the days of paganism, when kings were believed to be priests or gods.<sup>163</sup> In the early medieval period

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<sup>162</sup> Cf Dougal Shaw, "Nothing But Propaganda? Historians and the Study of Early Modern Ritual", *Social and Cultural History* 1, no. 2 (2004), 149.

<sup>163</sup> Bloch, 31.



amongst the Anglo-Saxons and Merovingians, this belief had already translated into the unofficial canonization of deceased royal family members (these being the days before papal canonization).<sup>164</sup> By the eleventh century, these royal canonizations had become a fairly widespread phenomenon. Although the majority of kings were not canonized, it was not at all uncommon.<sup>165</sup>

The idea that God elected Christian kings had been accepted since at least the tenth century, and was even more prevalent in the fifteenth.<sup>166</sup> Medieval kings were *personae mixtae*, both human and sacred, and wielding both temporal and divine power.<sup>167</sup> Their coronations involved anointing with holy oil in the style of Old Testament kings of Israel. Belief in sacral monarchy was most powerfully embraced in France, where by the thirteenth century the Capetian monarchs were seen as “saintly kings siring new saintly kings, a race promoted by Christ from the very beginnings of the Christian faith, a most holy royal house to which God had granted a heavenly oil for the anointment of its kings”.<sup>168</sup> In England, too, kings believed in the holy nature of their

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<sup>164</sup> Bloch, 33.

<sup>165</sup> Gábor Klaniczay, *The Uses of Supernatural Power: The Transformation of Popular Religion in Medieval and Early-Modern Europe*, trans. Susan Singerman, ed. Karen Margolis. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990.

<sup>166</sup> Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study of Late Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957), 330-31.

<sup>167</sup> Goodman, 116.

<sup>168</sup> Kantorowicz, 333.

office. “Thaumaturgical kingship” had existed there since the reign of Henry II, and English kings had taken to styling themselves *rex christianissimus* after the French fashion.<sup>169</sup> The Bishop of Lincoln had to remind Henry III that the royal unction did not make the king superior or even equal to priests, nor did it give him the power to perform priestly offices.<sup>170</sup> (Exactly how Henry earned such a rebuke is not known.) While the Church, in this case in the person of the Bishop of Lincoln, may have tried to restrict the religious pretensions of kings, Bloch observes that this incident reveals the “royal mental tendency” of the medieval period.<sup>171</sup> By the late fifteenth century, the time of Henry VII, it was believed that the king’s body politic, as distinct from his body natural, never died, but was continuously and mysteriously renewed by God like a phoenix rising from the ashes.<sup>172</sup>

It was in this court culture that Henry VII reached his maturity, immersed in doctrines of the holiness of kings. He was very likely present at Charles VIII’s *grand entrée* into Rouen in April 1485, where the French king was greeted by pageants depicting Solomon receiving his anointing and Constantine seeing his vision of the cross,

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<sup>169</sup> John M. Theilmann, “The Miracles of King Henry VI of England,” *The Historian* 42, no. 3 (May, 1980): 456; Walker, 87.

<sup>170</sup> Bloch, 112.

<sup>171</sup> Bloch, 112.

<sup>172</sup> Kantorowicz, 333-4.

both dressed as kings of France.<sup>173</sup> Henry's guardians, the Montfort ducal family of Brittany, demonstrated a keen interest in the reform of religious institutions, patronage of religious figures, and development of their own personal religion in accordance with a pious, legendary Breton history.<sup>174</sup> They also practiced the cult of saints, including a special devotion to the cult of their own family saint, the Dominican friar Vincent Ferrer (1350-1419), who had been canonized at the request of Duke Peter II in 1455, and whose relics they possessed.<sup>175</sup> Goodman writes of them that "ducal participation in [pious activities] intertwined with ducal policy."<sup>176</sup> In other words, the duke and his children did not view their political selves as entities that could be cleanly separated from their religious selves. Rather, they saw policy and piety as being closely bound together.

Henry VII's interest in Henry VI should be seen in the same light, since he was deeply influenced in his formative years by these very people and their pious activities. He had seen first-hand the prestige and popularity that accompanied the canonization of a saint connected to the family, but he had also been influenced by the genuine piety and interest in religious matters that the Montforts exhibited, and their desire to "[reconcile]

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<sup>173</sup> Goodman, 116.

<sup>174</sup> Goodman, 119.

<sup>175</sup> Goodman, 120.

<sup>176</sup> Goodman, 119.

courtly living with royal piety.”<sup>177</sup> It is evident that he was deeply influenced by his experiences in France in other areas apart from the religious; Kipling has demonstrated, for example, that Henry greatly admired the Flemish-Burgundian cultural sensibility and “deliberately set the Tudor artistic and literary establishment in the control of poets, printers, stationers, librarians, tapissiers, artists, and illuminators trained in Flemish-Burgundian styles.”<sup>178</sup> In his palace at Richmond he imitated the Breton preoccupation with their legendary past going back to Troy by commissioning “sculptures of past British kings going back to the mythical Brutus”.<sup>179</sup>

The belief in sacral kingship manifested itself in many areas of Henry VII’s reign. He blessed cramp rings and touched for the king’s evil, thus demonstrating his participation in the traditional superstition that kings possessed supernatural power to heal particular diseases.<sup>180</sup> Indeed, he actually designed an elaborate ceremony for performing the royal touch that remained in force for over a hundred years.<sup>181</sup> Further demonstrating his belief in the holiness of kingship, he requested that the pretender Lambert Simnel be ordained as a priest after his rebellion was put down, since he had

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<sup>177</sup> Goodman, 124.

<sup>178</sup> Gordon Kipling, *The Triumph of Honour: Burgundian Origins of the Elizabethan Renaissance* (The Hague: Leiden University Press: 1977), 8.

<sup>179</sup> Sharpe, 63.

<sup>180</sup> Theilmann, “Political Canonization and Political Symbolism in Medieval England,” 245

<sup>181</sup> Sharpe, 63.

been anointed as king in Dublin and it would be blasphemous for him to remain a layman thereafter.<sup>182</sup> In a pageant to welcome Catherine of Aragon to his court, he presented himself and Prince Arthur in the characters of God the Father and the Son.<sup>183</sup> He revived the tradition of public crown-wearings on holy days including Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Whitsun, and All Saints, “on which occasions”, according to Sharpe, “he blended Christic with Tudor majesty.”<sup>184</sup> Finally, his frequent use of royal and religious symbols together demonstrates a close connection in his mind between divine and monarchical power. A striking example of this connection is the ornate decorations depicting Tudor signs and sigils that still cover the walls of his chapels at King’s College and Westminster Abbey. Likewise, his will required the priests praying for his soul to wear his royal insignias on their vestments.<sup>185</sup>

The Montfort influence most importantly manifested itself in Henry VII’s vision of his role as a uniquely holy king. As mentioned above, he saw himself as conquering England in order to settle the ancient discord that plagued the realm, and to restore peace and harmony in accordance with the Christian ideal. Goodman writes that “Henry’s Franco-Breton background led him to envisage his mission as being closely bound up

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<sup>182</sup> Goodman, 116.

<sup>183</sup> Sharpe, 84.

<sup>184</sup> Sharpe, 63.

<sup>185</sup> Sean Cunningham, *Henry VII* (London: Routledge, 2007), 116.

with a renewal of the religious authority of kingship.”<sup>186</sup> England needed to be restored to a position of Christian glory. Henry VII’s councilors expressed the deeply religious ideology of his reign too. Edmund Dudley, popularly remembered as one of his most avaricious agents, observed that “the root of the love of God, which is to know him with good works, must chiefly grow by our sovereign lord the king”, and the nurture of this love in the people was the king’s “principal delight and affection.”<sup>187</sup> This comment coming from a financial agent is suggestive of the pious atmosphere that was prevalent in the early Tudor court. Even if pious sentiments may not always have been genuine, they were nonetheless a central part of the political ideology of Henry VII’s court.

The campaign for the canonization of Henry VI must be viewed in its proper context, as an example of Henry VII’s overall vision of his reign. It was an expression of his belief that during his reign the holiness of English kings and their Christian responsibilities would be carried to a higher, more official level, with himself as the champion of and successor to his half-uncle’s holy legacy. His attempted canonization of a “martyred” king should not be viewed as a simple political move, but as one that reflected his beliefs about the nature of kingship, of a king’s relationship with his

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<sup>186</sup> Goodman, 122.

<sup>187</sup> Edmund Dudley, *The Tree of the Commonwealth*, edited by D. M. Brodie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948). Quoted in Goodman, 122.

kingdom, and of his own reign in particular. The unique nature of Henry VI's cult made it a particularly appropriate object of his attentions.

## B. The Cult of Henry VI as an Expression of Support for the Holy

### Monarchy

Henry VI's cult has often been interpreted as a standard "political saint" cult, and therefore royal sponsorship of it has been interpreted as a kind of political damage control, an attempt to bring a potentially dangerous popular movement under royal authority, thereby subverting its potential for resistance and transforming it into a tool for strengthening the existing dynasty. McKenna, for instance, has called the cult "a quasi-religious touchstone of political opposition."<sup>188</sup> Henry VI, however, hardly counts as one of the "late medieval political saints" at all, despite often being pigeonholed with them. If compared to some of the other figures in this category, such as Thomas Becket and Simon de Montfort, who were perceived as figures of opposition to the crown, Henry VI stands out very strikingly. Unlike any of the other "political saints", he was himself a king, and his cult was, at its heart, an expression of support for monarchy.

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<sup>188</sup> McKenna, 75.

In every aspect, Henry VI's cult served to reinforce the uniqueness, power, and holiness of kings. The fact that his murder was seen as martyrdom at all, not simply as an assassination, suggests a widely-held belief in the holiness of his office, since his assassination was politically motivated and had nothing to do with his piety, only his position (except inasmuch as his other-worldliness made him a poor king). Further, the fact that his martyrdom was seen as such a great atrocity merely underscored the holiness with which the king's office was invested.<sup>189</sup> The Council of Constance had in 1415 gone so far as to declare regicide a heresy, thus emphasizing the holiness with which kingship was viewed in the late medieval period.<sup>190</sup> In accordance with this belief, the entry in the Crowland Chronicle upon the death of Henry VI concluded with the pious comment, "May God have mercy upon and give repentance to him... who dared to lay sacrilegious hands upon the Lord's Anointed!"<sup>191</sup> Henry VI himself, according to a story in Blacman's *Collectarium*, rebuked a would-be assassin with the words, "Forsothe and forsothe, ye do fouly to smyte a kynge enoynted so!"<sup>192</sup> This emphasis of the holiness of

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<sup>189</sup> Walker, 86-87.

<sup>190</sup> Michael Evans, *The Death of Kings: Royal Deaths in Medieval England* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003), 120.

<sup>191</sup> Evans, 137.

<sup>192</sup> *Henry the Sixth: A Reprint of John Blacman's Memoir with Translation and Notes*, trans. M.R. James (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1919). Project Gutenberg.



the king as the Lord's Anointed is in keeping with Henry VII's own perspective, as seen above.

Those eager to emphasize the political nature of Henry VI's cult frequently seize upon a particular miracle story that tells of a person who could only be healed of scrofula by praying to Henry VI, not the false king Richard III. This legend does indeed include an element of political opposition, but more than that, it is an expression of support for and belief in the miraculous powers of a legitimate holy king. Moreover, it represents only one of almost two hundred miracle stories, the majority of which are concerned with Henry VI's power, his mercy, and his protection of the innocent. All of these are classic characteristics of both good saints and good kings, without having any specific political connotations.

Henry VI's saintly power was fundamentally associated with his kingship. In depictions of him in churches, he is almost always seen holding an orb and sceptre, the most important symbols of royal power.<sup>193</sup> He was often portrayed in company with Saint Edmund and Saint Edward the Confessor, England's two most popular royal saints throughout most of the medieval period.<sup>194</sup> A hymn to Henry included the lines, "O

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<sup>193</sup> Piroyanski, 80.

<sup>194</sup> Piroyanski, 80-81.

Crownyd kyng with sceptur in hand/ Most nobyll conqueror I may thee call”.<sup>195</sup> While his reign had been marked by a series of catastrophes, from the loss of France to his bouts of insanity to the Wars of the Roses, Henry VI’s weakness and meekness in life paradoxically contributed to the popular idea of his power as a royal saint. Moreover, Henry VI’s cult had a significant message about the power of the king for the specific purpose of protecting his kingdom. Piroyanski has written that “Henry’s posthumous task as heavenly intercessor was a continuation of his earthly role as a king – to care for the well-being of his people.”<sup>196</sup> He not only oversaw reconciliation and the restoration of harmony, but was also revered as a healer and was frequently invoked for victims of the plague.<sup>197</sup>

Coming from his particular background and bearing his particular vision, it was only to be expected that Henry VII should see Henry VI as a particularly meaningful and valuable figure for his reign. He had a vision for the renewal of Christian kingship, and here was a king who had exemplified the Christian virtues and was popularly revered for having done so. Henry VII’s vision depended upon his own ability to conquer and control the realm, and Henry VI was believed to wield supernatural power and to have

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<sup>195</sup> From a hymn to Henry, in Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of Henry VI*, 9-10.

<sup>196</sup> Piroyanski, 85.

<sup>197</sup> Piroyanski, 87.

“conquered... a hevynly kyngdome most imperyall”.<sup>198</sup> He himself contributed to the depiction of Henry VI as a distinctly royal saint by placing a statue of him in Prince Arthur’s Chantry (completed 1504) holding his orb and sceptre, watching over the dead prince for eternity.<sup>199</sup> The presence of this statue in this place further demonstrates the significance Henry VI still had to the first Tudor, even in the closing years of his life.

Henry VII was a firm believer in sacral kingship, and in the unique religious significance of his own reign. His cultural perspective did not dispose him to view his political ambitions as separate from his pious acts; rather, he would have seen them as interdependent and closely related. He was *persona mixta*, a divinely anointed king. His pursuit of Henry VI’s canonization can never be fully appreciated unless it is viewed within the context of the first Tudor’s typically medieval perspective on the nature of kingship.

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<sup>198</sup> From a hymn to Henry, in Knox and Leslie, *The Miracles of Henry VI*, 9-10.

<sup>199</sup> Piroyanski, 83.



## Conclusion

Henry VII's attempt to have Henry VI canonized was a complicated phenomenon that cannot be dismissed as a merely political maneuver. Not only was the canonization of a saint necessarily a religious activity, but for a king such as Henry VII, political policy could not be divided from religious belief and identity. In his own eyes, he was not only a political figure, but also a divinely anointed one with a mandate from God to rule. His agenda for England involved not only what we might call ordinary government business, but also "Christian renewal" and the restoration of peace, which was seen as a heavenly blessing. These goals could only be achieved once the "ancient discord" that plagued the realm of England had been put right by the restoration of "divinely sanctioned authority" under the true king, namely, himself.<sup>200</sup>

The cult of Henry VI fit perfectly into Henry VII's vision of himself and the vision he had for England. His uncle's sainthood could confer upon him the legitimacy he lacked when he first usurped the throne (or, in his narrative, recovered it from the Yorkist usurpers), thus ensuring that his rule would not only rest upon his military might but upon divine sanction and popular appeal. He had also, of course, to assert his

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<sup>200</sup> Goodman, 122.

dynastic legitimacy, but he did so by proclaiming his dynastically insignificant relationship to Henry VI, rather than his more relevant royal descent through his mother's line. The cult was a tool for reconciliation – quite the opposite of a political weapon – since devotion to Henry VI across a broad section of the general public could serve as a means of bringing the broken realm back together following the Wars of the Roses. As a saint, Henry VI had a very broad appeal because he would succour anyone in need regardless of their position or political affiliation. This universal magnanimity meant that at the height of his cult he was attaining to the status of a national saint along the lines of Edward the Confessor, with all the potential for unification that status implied.<sup>201</sup> Thus Henry VII's sponsorship of Henry VI's cult could help to accomplish a goal that was both political and religious: the restoration of harmony and peace across the kingdom of England, with Henry Tudor as its king.

Henry VII's preoccupation with asserting his divinely sanctioned authority was evident in many aspects of his reign. His style of rule was marked by a reassertion of royal power on a practical, as well as symbolic, level, and an unprecedented concentration of authority in the hands of the king. Even his fiscal prudence, his best-remembered and perhaps least-attractive characteristic, supports this interpretation: according to Gunn, it was yet another aspect of Henry VII's "always intensely personal

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<sup>201</sup> Piroyanski, 81.

monarchy.”<sup>202</sup> In addition, he depended upon the symbolic power of the papacy to an unprecedented degree to support his rule. His use of papal approbation was so pronounced that Henry VIII could tell Thomas More, years after his father’s death, that “we received from that Sea [of Rome] our crowne Imperiall”.<sup>203</sup> All of this goes to show that Henry VII believed strongly in the rights and powers a king ought to have, and saw them as closely connected to the powers of the Church and God.

In light of the philosophy – or theology – of kingship that pervaded his reign, Henry VII’s campaign for Henry VI’s canonization cannot be dismissed as mere politics. It may have had that element, but more significantly it was the summation of everything Henry VII believed and sought to realize about the very nature of kingship. One of the most important themes of the cult, according to Piroyanski, was the “reassertion of the right order of things, that sacred monarchy can overcome its enemies.”<sup>204</sup> Few messages were more appropriate to a king in Henry VII’s situation. Henry VI was believed to hold immense heavenly power, and to be a conqueror and a saint, all by virtue of his kingship. His people believed that he had led a holy life, but they also believed that he was a martyr

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<sup>202</sup> “Henry VII (1457–1509),” S. J. Gunn in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/12954> (accessed October 4, 2013).

<sup>203</sup> Goodman, 125.

<sup>204</sup> Piroyanski, 83.

because he had died still insisting upon his right to be king.<sup>205</sup> As Augustine wrote, *non poena sed causa* – not the pain, but the cause, makes the martyr. It was not only Henry VI himself, but also the fact of his kingship, that was considered holy.<sup>206</sup> Everything about this cult must have appealed to Henry VII, committed as he was to magnifying the secular and sacral significance of monarchy.

With all this taken into consideration, Henry VII's sponsorship of the cult of Henry VI cannot be interpreted as simple political manipulation of popular religion. It may have redounded to his credit and magnificence as king – or he may have hoped that it would do so – but even that was more than just political to him. To consider Henry VII to be acting from an unadulterated desire to glorify himself and crush his opposition is to fall into the misconception Clifford Geertz identified: that “political symbology... is but the instrument of purposes concealed beneath or towering over it.”<sup>207</sup> On the contrary, a phenomenon such as the canonization of a saint was a complicated one in which various meanings were celebrated and displayed. This particular canonization was to have been a celebration not only of Henry VII's personal power, but also of the redemption of holy

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<sup>205</sup> Cf. *Henry the Sixth: A Reprint of John Blacman's Memoir with Translation and Notes*, trans. M.R. James (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1919).

<sup>206</sup> Cf. Klaniczay, 81.

<sup>207</sup> Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980), 122. Cf. Dougal Shaw, “Nothing But Propaganda? Historians and the Study of Early Modern Ritual”, *Social and Cultural History* 1, no. 2 (2004), 154.



monarchy from the evil of usurpation, the salvation of the realm from years of civil war, and the reconciliation of warring dynasties under the patronage of a merciful and righteous king. Moreover, for Henry VII himself, the canonization appears to have been motivated by a profound personal piety deeply characterized by a concern for his soul after death. Only when attention is paid to these complex layers of meaning can the significance of Henry VII's campaign for Henry VI's canonization be properly understood.

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