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Royal Sacrality in England, 1154-1272: Accession and Access?

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Royal Sacrality in England, 1154-1272: Accession and Access?

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The theme of the present conference, expounded for the most part in Spanish, can be summed up as follows: to what extent did the accession and above all the inauguration of medieval rulers alter their perceived status? What determined the selection or rejection of particular candidates for kingship, and in particular, and in a largely Spanish context, to what extent did the presence or absence of ecclesiastical ceremony, not least of ceremonial coronation following unction with chrism, affect the status of the ruler so chosen? These are questions that have long been debated amongst Hispanists, not least because of the lengths to which various of the medieval Iberian dynasties, especially the kings of Castile, went to avoid the classic Romano-imperial rites of enthronement and crowning¹. Any attempt to view these problems from the perspective of medieval England seems from the outset to be doomed by the very different contexts in which royal ceremonial has been studied in its English as opposed to its Spanish setting.

A crude formulation here might run as follows. Although there seems to have been nothing to prevent the accession of Spanish women – Berengaria of Navarre (wife of Richard I), Eleanor of Castile (wife of the future Edward I), Constance of Castile (wife of John of Gaunt), and Joan of Navarre (wife of Henry IV) – to English queenship or prospective queenship, the status to which English kings or queens aspired is supposed, as early as the eleventh century, to have been established on a very different basis from that accepted in France, Spain or Germany. Through to the sixteenth century and beyond, continental kingship remained an essentially ‘sacral’ phenom-

¹ For introductions in English here, see the essays by P. Linehan, «Frontier Kingship: Castile, 1250-1350», in A. Boureau *et al.*, *La Royauté sacrée dans le monde Chrétien (Colloque de Royaumont, mars 1999)*, Paris, 1992, pp. 71-9, and *idem*, «The King’s Touch and the Dean’s Ministrations: Aspects of Sacral Monarchy», in M. Rubin *et al.*, *The Work of Jacques Le Goff and the Challenges of Medieval History*, Woodbridge, 1997, pp. 189-208.

anon. In England, by contrast, the ‘sacrality’ of English kings was fatally undermined by one undeniable event: the Norman Conquest of 1066. In what follows, I hope to challenge this perceived dichotomy. I shall do so in part by exploiting a pun. The Latin word ‘accessio’, from which the title to this conference derives, can be translated into English both as ‘accession’ (i.e. enthronement or the adoption of royal status) and as ‘access’ (i.e. the right of non-royal persons to approach or petition the person seated on the royal throne). As I hope to demonstrate, access as well as accession can teach us much about the supposedly sacral nature of England’s medieval kings.

Let us begin with context, and in particular with historical tradition. From a very early date, the received narrative of English history has been dominated by themes and obsessions intended to set England apart from the wider history of medieval Europe. No matter that various of these themes are illusory or that an exceptionalism just as pronounced as that boasted for England has been claimed for the history of each of the medieval European nations². What concerns us here is myth as much as reality. The received English narrative is often referred to as the ‘Whig Interpretation’, named after the Whig politicians of the eighteenth century who championed the house of Hanover, Parliament and a degree of ‘reform’ and religious tolerance against the supposedly reactionary ‘Tory’ supporters of the house of Stuart, the old order and the Anglican Church. The ‘Whig Interpretation’ assumes a belief in progress working through liberty and the sovereign rights of people and nation, set against the supposedly selfish or self-serving absolutism of continental, especially French, monarchy. In fact, so deeply engrained is this belief in all shades of English political opinion that it can be found just as easily in the writings of an avowedly ‘Tory’ historian such as William Stubbs (1825-1901) as in the history of the greatest of the Whig intellectuals, Thomas Babington Macaulay (1800-1859)³. Moreover, its roots can be traced back well beyond the dynastic and religious disputes of the seventeenth century that gave rise to Whiggery and Toryism. As far back as the histories of Geoffrey of Monmouth (c.1140) or even the Venerable Bede (d.735), very much the

² For a recent introduction here, see I. Wood, *The Modern Origins of the Early Middle Ages*, Oxford, 2013.

³ H. A. L. Fisher, «The Whig Historians», *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 14, 1928, pp. 297-339; H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, Cambridge, 1931, and, amidst a host of alternatives, P. B. M. Blaas, *Continuity and Anachronism: Parliamentary and Constitutional Development in Whig Historiography and in the Anti-Whig Reaction Between 1890 and 1930*, The Hague, 1978; M. Bentley, *Modernizing England’s Past: English Historiography in the Age of Modernism, 1870-1970*, Cambridge, 2005.

best sellers of their day, 'liberty', co-operation between king and nation, and the status of the English as God's chosen people freed from tyranny, were already significant themes⁴.

Once again, my concern here is not with the relative truth or falsity of such claims. There may indeed have been factors – the precocious emergence of national consciousness, a 'free' peasantry, a tradition of property ownership and respect for law – that set England apart from France, Spain or other parts of medieval Europe, perhaps as early as the seventh century, perhaps even, as James Campbell has dared to suggest, from 'prehistoric' antiquity⁵. Certainly, the twentieth century produced a number of scholars prepared to argue along such lines, for all that a counter-argument could be mounted, viewing each part of Europe as convinced of its own essentially exceptionalist destiny as freedom's true handmaid⁶.

Following the Whig Interpretation, and reaching full maturity in the writings of William Stubbs, effective founder of the Oxford school of medieval history, in due course Anglican bishop first of Chester (1884-9) and then of Oxford (1889-1901), English constitutional historians invested enormous significance in a series of foundational 'moments'. Some of these were enshrined in documents, such as Magna Carta (1215) or the Bill of Rights (1689)⁷. Others remained unwritten 'turning points' or 'watersheds' on the route to progress: the victories of King Alfred (871-899) against the Danes, the defeat of the Spanish Armada (1588), the doomed raising of the King's flag at Nottingham (1642)⁸. In all cases, the topographical vocabulary of 'points' and 'watersheds' reveals an essentially lineal, progressive trend of thought. Most of these 'moments' were established in national consciousness long before the reign of Queen Victoria, enshrined in countless illustrated histories, stretching back to Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774) and the 'popular'

⁴ H. A. Macdougall, *Racial Myth in English History: Trojans, Teutons and Anglo-Saxons*, London, 1982.

⁵ J. Campbell, «The Late Anglo-Saxon State: A Maximum View», *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 87, 1994, pp. 39-65, reprinted with a powerful «Introduction», in *idem*, *The Anglo-Saxon State*, London, 2000, pp. IX-XXIX, 1-30.

⁶ For England, and very much in the same tradition as Campbell, see A. Macfarlane, *The Origins of English Individualism*, Oxford, 1978. For continental drift, see J. Sommerville, «The Ancient Constitution Reassessed: The Common Law, the Court and the Language of Politics in Early Modern England», in M. Smuts, *The Stuart Court and Europe*, Cambridge, 1996, pp. 46-52. For an attempt at a comparative approach, S. Reynolds, «How Different Was England?», in M. Prestwich *et al.*, *Thirteenth Century England VII*, Woodbridge, 1999, pp. 1-16.

⁷ See, for example, N. Vincent, *Magna Carta: Origins and Legacy*, Oxford, 2015, pp. 83-150.

⁸ For example, J. Parker, *England's Darling: The Victorian Cult of Alfred the Great*, Manchester, 2007.

historians of the eighteenth century⁹. Goldsmith in turn merely trawled in the wake of David Hume (1711-1776), himself fundamentally influenced by the tradition of medieval chronicle writing that stretched from Roger of Wendover (d.1236) via Matthew Paris (d.1259) and the so-called St Albans school, through to Raphael Holinshed (1529-1580) and John Stowe (d.1605). Both Wendover and Paris were highly critical of the Plantagenet kings, imparting to their imitators an inherent bias against the pretensions of monarchy.

Besides viewing matters from the perspective of medieval St Albans, Hume also inherited assumptions about England's 'Ancient Constitution' themselves put into circulation at least as early as the time of Edward Coke (1552-1634). Coke, chief justice under the Stuart king James I, had in 1628 commenced the publication of a series of *Institutes of the Lawes of England*. Essentially legal commentaries, these were intended to demonstrate that English law was fundamentally different from the law of Rome (home of 'popish' inquisition), of France (home of absolutism) or of Scotland (home to James I and the Stuart kings who from 1603 ruled England). In England, Coke argued, the King could not simply change or ignore the law, at royal whim. Not only were the liberties of the subject anciently established and respected, but their ancestry could be traced back via Parliament, their chief protector, to Magna Carta (1215) and thence back, far beyond the Norman Conquest of 1066, to the Anglo-Saxons with their own parliamentary tradition (the 'Witan'). According to Coke, the Witan derived from roots more ancient than King Alfred, than (the mythical) King Arthur, or even than the supposedly Trojan exiles (Brutus and his kin) who Geoffrey of Monmouth claimed had first introduced kingship to England. Once again, most of this was myth. It was nonetheless myth refined with polemic intent: to use law and (often invented) constitutional tradition as a means of restraining Stuart absolutism¹⁰.

Coke's 'Ancient Constitution' assumed (following Geoffrey of Monmouth) that England's earliest kings were descended from Brutus and his fellow exiles from Homeric Troy. Coke's successors, by contrast, tended to argue for essentially Germanic, *alias* 'Gothic', foundations (following Tacitus, and an assumption that the Anglo-Saxons were heirs to Germanic, 'trib-

⁹ R. Mitchell, *Picturing the Past: English History in Text and Image, 1830-1870*, Oxford, 2000, and much more generally, F. Haskell, *History and its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past*, New Haven, 1993.

¹⁰ The classic study here remains J. G. A. Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*, Cambridge, 1957, 2nd ed. 1987, supplemented by G. Burgess, *The Politics of the Ancient Constitution*, London, 1992.

al' freedoms)¹¹. In both cases, the basic architecture constructed for English history left small room for any sense of 'sacrality' invested in the person of the king. Kings were appointed to foster their nation's destiny. It was the nation, represented in Parliament, whose rights and liberties were sacred. In this interpretation, the 'divine right' boasted by the Stuart kings had been quite properly neutered, first in the English Civil War, then in the so-called 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 that chased the Roman Catholic James II from the English throne. A strong sense of dynastic tradition, of a line of kings and royal bloodlines stretching back to the dim distant past, did not in itself imply a challenge to this essentially secularized view of kingship. The association between kingship, royal ceremonial and national destiny, whilst identifying England's rulers as embodiments of tradition and racial identity, attributed no sacred or God-given destiny to kingship itself. From the 1170s onwards, in the titles adopted for royal letters and charters, all kings and queens of England claimed to rule 'By God's grace'. This did not, however, entitle them, save in the minds of their most sycophantic admirers, to sacral status as in any sense mediators between God and man.

All of these assumptions, and more, were both reified and perpetuated in William Stubbs' *Constitutional History* (1874-8). Stubbs published in the high summer of British imperialism, at a time when monarchy itself, in the person of Queen Victoria, perhaps for the first time in English history, posed no real threat to the constitutional sovereignty of Parliament. To this extent, Stubbs wrote of the disorders of the past in order to explain the relative perfection of the present. History itself could be narrated as a theatre of examples, explaining how the Victorian constitution, the apotheosis of all things good, had first been brought to birth¹². A similar teleology can be found in the work of Walter Bagehot, whose *English Constitution* (1865-7) was published a decade before Stubbs. Both Stubbs and Bagehot were aware of events taking place on the far side of the Atlantic ocean. Here, the American experience, first of Revolution (1776) and then of Civil War (1861-5), left little doubt that English traditions of law and liberty could flourish despite being entirely divorced from monarchy and the trappings of established state religion. In this context, the triumph of the English speaking peoples, both in the British Empire and in America, had to be attributed to causes other than good or bad kingship. In the past, good or bad kings might have been important as spurs or hindrances to the nation's destiny. As in the Old Testament, the

¹¹ R. J. Smith, *The Gothic Bequest*, Cambridge, 1987.

¹² Sympathetically evoked by J. Campbell, «Stubbs and the English State», in *idem*, *The Anglo-Saxon State*, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-68.

history of any chosen people required its heroes and its villains. But the secret of Anglo-Saxon success was clearly buried deeper than the largely decorative excrescences of kingship. Coke, Stubbs and Bagehot located it in the long working out of constitutional tradition, and hence in an element of genius imparted to the English as their racial birth-right.

To all this, Stubbs's most able pupil, Thomas Tout (1855-1929) added a further refinement. Writing as a professor in the University of Manchester, at the heart of a great industrial city rescued from aboriginal squalor by local boards of hygiene and sanitation, Tout identified 'administration' as the field in which England's constitutional genius had been most obviously displayed. With their tradition of 'administrative kingship', the English had been better served than the French or Spanish by their boasted absolutist or sacral monarchies. I doubt that the six volumes of Tout's *Chapters in the Administrative History of Medieval England*, published between 1920 and 1933, have been read, cover to cover, by any person now living, indeed perhaps by any person since Tout, and possibly Tout's wife. They nonetheless enjoyed great influence, combining a political narrative from roughly 1200 to 1450 with a forensic investigation of the processes of English government as displayed through the abundant records of chancery and Exchequer. So abundant were these records, and so underused by Stubbs and his predecessors (who had relied very largely upon chronicles rather than administrative sources), that Tout and his 'Manchester school' set the trend for the next century of English medieval scholarship, largely devoted to analysis of the means by which personalized kingship interacted with increasingly depersonalized bureaucracy¹³. Here, once again, in the work of scholars as influential yet diverse as F. M. Powicke (1879-1963), K. B. McFarlane (1903-1966) or J. C. Holt (1922-2014), there was scant recognition that kingship was in any sense a sacral as opposed to a political and administrative phenomenon¹⁴.

Any residual attempt to describe England's medieval kings in sacral terms tended to focus exclusively on the Anglo-Saxon period, before 1066. In the case of the heavily-criticized work of the American scholar W. A. Chaney this involved tracing such sacral elements to pagan-Germanic rather than

¹³ The best introduction to Tout's 'Manchester School' remains that by its most distinguished product, F. M. Powicke, *Modern Historians and the Study of History*, London, 1955, pp. 19-95.

¹⁴ For these and other historians mentioned here, see the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford, 2004, regularly updated online at <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>>, with surveys by J. C. Holt and Maurice Keen, not least of the work of Holt himself, in A. Deyermond, *A Century of British Medieval Studies*, Oxford, 2007, esp. pp. 27-69.

to Christian-Mediterranean influence¹⁵. Whatever else it did for the English, there seemed little doubt that the Norman Conquest of 1066 had been won through violence and dynastic usurpation. As is still apparent from the seals of each successive king and queen from William the Conqueror (1066-1087) to Elizabeth II (1952-), England's rulers from 1066 onwards combined the functions of law-giver, enthroned in justice on the 'majesty' side of the royal seal, with those of warlord, on the 'equestrian' side of the seal, riding into battle, from 1066 until the reign of Henry VIII armed with lance or sword¹⁶. The Conquest of 1066 was significant in all manner of ways, not least in establishing the debate over 'feudalism' in England on an entirely different basis from that of France or Germany¹⁷. It invested England's post-Conquest kings with a degree of authority, wealth and overlordship of which their continental rivals could only dream. The king became ultimate possessor of every acre of English soil, from Cornwall as far north as the Scottish border. At the same time, the events of 1066 confirmed that kingship was an essentially secularized prize, to be fought for and won, if necessary, by violent usurpation¹⁸. The Norman Conquest was followed by a century in which no king of England ascended his throne unchallenged. Thereafter came further disruptions with the accession of the Plantagenet dynasty (after 1154), and the violent depositions (and in most cases murder) of kings Edward II (1327), Richard II (1399) and Henry VI (deposed twice, in 1461 and again in 1471). By the fifteenth century, and in many interpretations as a consequence of forces first unleashed in 1066, the English were a nation more notorious for killing than for venerating their kings¹⁹.

Not all modern historians were satisfied with this consensus. In 1955, for example, J. E. A. Jolliffe, previously author of a classically 'Whig' *Constitutional History of Medieval England*, published a book on *Angevin Kingship*, dealing with the first three Plantagenet kings (Henry II 1154-1189, Richard I 1189-99, and John 1199-1216). Here, and in part thanks to Jolliffe's experiences during the

¹⁵ W. A. Chaney, *The Cult of Kingship in Anglo-Saxon England: The Transition from Paganism to Christianity*, Manchester, 1970, reviewed by R. Brentano, *Speculum*, 47, 1972, pp. 754-5, and less favourably by H. Loyn, *History*, 56, 1971, pp. 433-4.

¹⁶ The only remotely comprehensive survey of English royal seals remains that by A. B. Wyon, *The Great Seals of England from the Earliest Period to the Present Time*, London, 1887, ending in the reign of Victoria.

¹⁷ For an attempt at a Europe-wide survey, see S. Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*, Oxford, 1994.

¹⁸ E. M. C. Van Houts, «The Norman Conquest Through European Eyes», *English Historical Review*, 110, 1995, pp. 832-53.

¹⁹ P. S. Lewis, «Two Pieces of Fifteenth-Century Political Iconography: (b) The English Kill their Kings», *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 27, 1964, pp. 317-20.

Second World War, spent in the Brazil of the dictator, Getulio Vargas, themes were addressed that stood apart from the essentially administrative approach of Tout or Powicke. Angevin kingship, Jolliffe argued, was a matter of ‘vis et voluntas’, of the King’s ‘ira et malevolentia’: expressions of spite or favour that rendered kingship itself a highly personalized affair, far closer to the absolutist tantrums of the seventeenth century than most English medievalists had previously allowed²⁰. The Plantagenets, Jolliffe declared, had ruled through ‘a sustained course of intrigue and violence which can by no stretch of argument be justified within any conventional limits of legitimate power’²¹. Jolliffe’s approach, for all its insights, was too easily dismissed by his contemporaries. In part this resulted from his crabbed and inelegant English prose style (still a barrier to all save the most determined of readers). In part it derived from Jolliffe’s conscious distancing of himself from all sources save the primary, citing (and all too often mis-citing) chronicles and chancery rolls, yet deliberately disengaging from any debate with the modern commentators, stretching from Stubbs via Tout to Powicke²².

This was doubly unfortunate, not only because it leant an air of isolated eccentricity to Jolliffe’s work, but because it denied Jolliffe himself access to the discoveries of two contemporaries who might have best complemented his approach. The first was Marc Bloch (1886-1944) whose *Rois thaumaturges* (1924) had for the first time explored the remarkable way in which touching for scrofula, as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries, became a means by which the kings of France and England displayed their God-given powers. This despite (or perhaps in deliberate opposition to) the supposed limitations placed upon royal access to priestly or religious authority after 1050 as a result of the Investiture Contest. Bloch was inclined to regard the English claims to the ‘royal touch’ as a pale reflection of powers first displayed in Capetian France. In reality, we now know that both the English and the French claims emerged at much the same time, from the 1040s onwards, and that by the thirteenth century, the kings of England were touching for scrofula on an almost industrial scale, almost certainly well in advance of what was being attempted in France²³.

²⁰ J. E. A. Jolliffe, *Angevin Kingship*, Oxford, 1955.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²² See the unduly critical review by H. G. Richardson, in *English Historical Review*, 71, 1956, pp. 447-53.

²³ M. Bloch, *Les rois thaumaturges*, Paris, 1924, reissued with an introduction by J. Le Goff, Paris, 1983; F. Barlow, «The King’s Evil», *English Historical Review*, 95, 1980, pp. 3-27; M. Prestwich, «The Piety of Edward I», in M. Ormrod, *England in the Thirteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1984 Harlaxton Symposium*, Harlaxton, 1985, pp. 120-8.

The second contemporary ignored by Jolliffe, with whom he would have briefly overlapped in the Oxford of the 1930s, was Ernst Kantorowicz (1895-1963). Kantorowicz's interest in the sacral claims of kingship and their liturgical expression had first been displayed in a book, *Laudes Regiae*, published in California in 1946. Here, Kantorowicz drew on English administrative evidence to reveal the ways in which the liturgical acclamation of the reigning monarch ('Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat') served as a feature of court life in England regularly enacted from at least the 1060s onwards²⁴. Despite the suggestion here that England's kings displayed as close an interest in their sacral pretensions as the kings of France or Germany, Kantorowicz had since developed a wider theory of Christian kingship in which England was once again assigned a role as counterfoil to continental sacralty. Indeed, in his *The King's Two Bodies* (1957), published two years after Jolliffe but with no apparent notice for Jolliffe's work, Kantorowicz speculated that the papal reforms of the eleventh century created a paradigm shift in kingly claims, from the King as embodiment of Christ, to the King as David or 'the law'. Christ-centered kingship yielded place to law-centered kingship, with Kantorowicz's main chapter on England dealing with the distinctly legalistic challenges of a treatise generally attributed to the royal justice, Henry of Bratton, composed at some time after the 1230s. Acknowledging that the book known as *Bracton* retained elements of Romano-canonical ruler-worship, Kantorowicz nonetheless placed it very much at the proto-constitutionalist rather than the proto-absolutist end of the scale of ideological development. In this reading, indeed, between the eleventh and the seventeenth centuries, England remained a land encumbered more by law and custom than by the divine right of kings. Only with the Stuart kings, James I and Charles I, did continental absolutism once more rear its head, duly cut off in the Civil War of the 1640s²⁵. Thus, by means that Stubbs and Tout would

²⁴ E. H. Kantorowicz, *Laudes Regiae: A Study in Liturgical Acclamations and Mediaeval Ruler Worship*, Berkeley, 1946, 2nd printing 1958, pp. 166-79. The book is dedicated (p. v) to 'Amicis Oxoniensibus', although for Kantorowicz's less than entirely happy relations with Oxford, see C. M. Bowra, *Memories 1898-1939*, London, 1966, p. 286, reporting a mistaken invitation made by the fellows of New College in 1934 to Ernst whom they had confused for the distinguished jurist Hermann Kantorowicz, 'who was no relation and whom (Ernst) did not much like'. It is a remarkable coincidence that both men were born in Posen, the sons of assimilated Jewish distillery owners.

²⁵ E. H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theocracy*, Princeton, 1957, esp. pp. 143-92 on *Bracton*, for which (and whom) see more recently N. Vincent, «Henry of Bratton (*alias* 'Bracton')», in M. Hill, and R. Helmholz, *Great Christian Jurists*, Cambridge, forthcoming 2017.

have found hard to recognize, was the essential nature of Stubbs and Tout's 'limited' or 'administrative' monarchy reasserted.

As a result, English medieval kingship has been denied a place amongst the bejeweled pantheon of Ottonian or Capetian claims to sacrality. It finds literally no place in the influential collection of essays, published in 1992, edited by Alain Boureau and others, devoted to *La royauté sacrée* in France, Spain, Hungary and many other parts of medieval Europe²⁶. Even in more recent works that have attempted to interpret the symbolic resonances of medieval kingship or kingly gesture, Francia and Byzantium are inevitably included; England remains conspicuous by its absence²⁷. The most that can be expected is an acknowledgement that England's medieval kings attempted, but failed to imitate the sacral pretensions of their contemporaries in France, Spain or Sicily. Three stock explanations have been supplied for this failure.

The first takes us back to the Norman Conquest of 1066. So violent a disruption did this create in dynastic right, and so widely was it reported as an act of usurpation and bloodshed, that no Norman king of England could henceforth dress himself comfortably in the rituals and sacral trappings of pre-Conquest kingship. William the Conqueror might be viewed as God's scourge, but on those occasions when he posed in Christomimetic garb, he invited not awe but ridicule. Janet Nelson and Geoffrey Koziol have both drawn attention to a story, told of King William I. Seated in majesty at one of his regular crown wearings, the King was viewed by a jester. 'Behold', the jester declared, 'I see God!' The reaction from the court was laughter rather than outrage²⁸. After 1066, furthermore, as George Garnett has emphasized, all dynastic bets were off. Between the death of one king and the coronation of his successor, England was literally kingless, with coronation conferring only insubstantial legitimacy upon rulers who, even when anointed, remained vulnerable to rebellion and civil war. King Harold was deposed in 1066, King Stephen less than a century later in 1140, Stephen's bloodline, in the persons of his son and daughter, again after 1154. Not until 1272 did a royal succession in England pass off unopposed and without giving rise to

²⁶ Above n. 1.

²⁷ As, for example, in the collections of essays edited by J. Bremer, and H. Roodenburg, *A Cultural History of Gesture: From Antiquity to the Present Day*, Oxford, 1991, and M. J. Braddick., *The Politics of Gesture: Historical Perspectives*, Oxford, 2009.

²⁸ G. Koziol, «England, France, and the Problem of Sacrality in Twelfth-Century Ritual», in T. N. Bisson, *Cultures of Power: Lordship, Status and Process in Twelfth-Century Europe*, Philadelphia, 1995, pp. 124-48, at p. 137 citing J. T. Nelson, «The Rites of the Conqueror», *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 4, 1981, pp. 131-2, herself citing the «Vita Lanfranci», in Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, 150, col. 53-4.

civil disturbance²⁹. Even then, Edward II, the son of the King recognized in 1272, was deposed and murdered within less than sixty years of his father's accession.

Secondly, and closely linked to the events of 1066, there was the papal attempt, from the 1050s onwards, to oppose the sacral pretensions of kingship and to deny to secular rulers powers and charisma henceforth reserved to the clergy. This line of argument was deployed by Kantorowicz, and has since reappeared in the writings of both Geoffrey Koziol and Karl Leyser. Leyser, for example, was well aware of the attempts by King Henry II and his successors to make use of relics and other sacral themes, not least by royal patronage of holy men. Yet this in itself, he concluded, was proof of the loss of charisma brought about by papal reform. England's kings favoured holy men precisely because, on their own merits, kings themselves lacked the sacral aura than they could gain only by access to clerical sanctity³⁰.

A third and final theme follows on. According to this, even if England's kings did lay claim to sacral authority, such claims were fatally undermined by events of the 1160s. The great dispute between Henry II and his archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket, exacerbated tensions between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* that England's more general disengagement from the Investiture Contest of the early twelfth century had tended to conceal. The consequence, after Becket's murder, was to reveal the Plantagenet kings as instruments not of God but the Devil. After 1170, it would have been as ridiculous for any king of England to claim to act in the person of Christ as it would have been for Pharaoh or Belshazzar³¹. This line of argument, with the Becket dispute at its centre, was deployed as long ago as 1929 by Josiah Cox Russell in an essay suggesting that in England, as opposed to other parts of medieval Europe, sanctity was generally reserved for the King's critics rather than his friends through the deliberate and regular 'Canonization of Opposition to the King'³². Similar assumptions have informed debate over

²⁹ G. Garnett, *Conquered England: Kingship, Succession and Tenure, 1066-1166*, Oxford, 2007.

³⁰ K. Leyser, «The Angevin Kings and the Holy Man», in H. Mayr-Harting, *St Hugh of Lincoln*, Oxford, 1987, pp. 49-73.

³¹ For Biblical typologies for the kings of England, see A. Saltman, «John of Salisbury and the World of the Old Testament», in M. Wilks, *The World of John of Salisbury*, Studies in Church History Subsidia 3, Oxford, 1984, pp. 343-63, and more generally N. Vincent, «The Strange Case of the Missing Biographies: The Lives of the Plantagenet Kings of England 1154-1272», in D. Bates *et al.*, *Writing Medieval Biography: Essays in Honour of Professor Frank Barlow*, Woodbridge, 2006, pp. 237-57.

³² J. C. Russell, «The Canonization of Opposition to the King in Angevin England», in C. H. Taylor, *Anniversary Essays in Medieval History by Students of Charles Homer Haskins*, Boston, 1929, pp. 279-90.

the intellectual legacy of Becket, in the work of John Baldwin, Beryl Smalley and Philippe Buc. Into the 1190s and beyond, we find a rich vein of prejudice on behalf of the masters of the Paris schools, in which the earthbound tyranny of English kings was contrasted with the Christomimetic devotions of the kings of France, champions in this reading both of Christ and of liberty³³.

Yet doubts persist. They have been articulated with growing confidence over the past fifteen years. Is the general level of criticism voiced against English kings by English chroniclers the product of genuine contempt or of the failure of any more panegyric works to survive? In particular, are we led astray by the clear but nonetheless circumstantial contrast between the historical school of St Albans as opposed to that of Saint-Denis?³⁴ Is the rich abundance of English chancery and Exchequer records the consequence of a self-consciously 'administrative' kingship or merely of the accident that stretched England's royal finances to the limit and therefore obliged the King's servants to use all means at their disposal to boost royal income? Does this rich abundance in itself give rise to false assumptions, creating an unreal dichotomy between the supposedly 'bureaucratic' nature of English kingship as opposed to the rich tradition of ruler veneration and panegyric found in France, Sicily or Byzantium? Indeed, has the survival of the royal archives of England, contrasted with their wholesale but essentially accidental destruction in France and elsewhere, created a particular school of English historian preconditioned by archival training to view matters in terms very different from those deployed in parts of Europe where facts are less abundant than theories?³⁵ In short, is the contrast between European sacrality and English 'administrative' kingship too neatly drawn, the result of modern perspectives rather than medieval realities?

A number of recent investigations have attempted to break free from the traditional 'Manchester school' pursuit of English administrative efficiency

³³ J. W. Baldwin, «A Debate at Paris over Thomas Becket between Master Roger and Peter the Chanter», *Studia Gratiana*, 11, 1967, pp. 119-32; *idem*, *Masters, Princes and Merchants*, 2 vols, Princeton, 1970; B. Smalley, *The Becket Conflict and the Schools*, Oxford, 1973; P. Buc, *L'Ambiguïté du livre: prince, pouvoir, et peuple dans les commentaires de la Bible au Moyen Age*, Paris, 1994, with a useful summary for those unable to read French, in Buc, «Princeps gentium dominantur eorum': Princely Power Between Legitimacy and Illegitimacy in Twelfth-Century Exegesis», in Bisson, *Cultures of Power*, pp. 310-28.

³⁴ As suggested by Vincent, «Strange Case of the Missing Biographies».

³⁵ N. Vincent, «Why 1199? Bureaucracy and Enrolment under John and his Contemporaries», in A. Jobson, *English Government in the Thirteenth Century*, Woodbridge, 2004, pp. 17-48, at pp.44-8.

to consider aspects of the king and his court that encourage closer comparison with continental archetypes³⁶. Indeed, not only has Manchester been challenged by such studies, but generally confounded by the realization that there was nothing especially 'efficient' even about English medieval administration: a system devised out of hard financial necessity, cobbled together from components that from their first combination were often archaic or unfit for purpose, struggling and often failing to keep pace with the personal needs of the king yet with little or no sense of obligation to the needs of the English people so administered³⁷.

As for the survival of 'sacral' modes of behaviour, we might begin with the King's pilgrimages. Here we find most of the Norman and Plantagenet kings rarely out of the saddle, travelling the length and breadth of their English and continental dominions, often timing their 'adventus' in particular locations to coincide with the feast days of local saints. In this world, indeed, kings were as important to the saints as the saints were, in Karl Leyser's formulation, to the Angevin kings. At the shrines of the saints, kings left special gifts: coins, or silk cloth, that marked out their visits as especially significant. In so far as their lives were spent in a near ceaseless round of such visits and offerings, kings assumed a liturgical function reminiscent of the lifetime pilgrimage, or 'white martyrdom', long promoted as an aspect of monastic life and ultimately of sanctity³⁸.

³⁶ Beyond the essays cited below, see also, for example, B. Weiler, «Symbolism and Politics in the Reign of Henry III», in M. Prestwich *et al.*, *Thirteenth Century England IX*, Woodbridge, 2003, pp.15-41; *idem*, «Knighting, Homage, and the Meaning of Ritual: The Kings of England and their Neighbours in the Thirteenth Century», *Viator*, 37, 2006, pp.275-99; L. Kjaer, «Matthew Paris and the Royal Christmas: Ritualised Communication in Text and Practice», in B. Weiler *et al.*, *Thirteenth Century England XIV*, Woodbridge, 2013, pp.141-54; B. Wild, «Reasserting Medieval Kingship: King Henry III and the Dictum of Kenilworth», in A. Jobson, *Baronial Reform and Revolution in England, 1258-1267*, Woodbridge, 2016, pp. 237-58.

³⁷ W. L. Warren, «The Myth of Anglo-Norman Administrative Efficiency», *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series 34, 1984, pp. 113-32, and see also A. Cooper, «Protestations of Ignorance in Domesday Book», in R. F. Berkhofer, *et al.*, *The Experience of Power in Medieval Europe, 950-1350*, Aldershot, 2005, pp. 169-81.

³⁸ N. Vincent, «The Pilgrimages of the Angevin Kings of England 1154-1272», in C. Morris and P. Roberts, *Pilgrimage: The English Experience from Becket to Bunyan*, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 12-45, and for perpetual pilgrimage, see various of the contributions to L. Napran, and E. Van Houts, *Exile in the Middle Ages: Selected Proceedings from the International Medieval Congress, University of Leeds, 8-11 July 2002*, Turnhout 2004, esp. the essay by M. Brito-Martins, «The Concept of *Peregrinatio* in Saint Augustine and its Influences», pp. 83-94. For 'white martyrdom', see J. L. O'Reilly, «The Double Martyrdom of Thomas Becket: Hagiography or History?», *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History*, n. s. 7, 1985, pp. 201-2, with remarks on Becket's manipulation of the theme of 'adventus' at pp. 191-2.

Offerings take us on to the King's almsgiving: the regular and lavish feedings of the sick and the poor that mark out the royal liturgical year, combined from an early date with the royal patronage of hospitals and leprosaria where such largesse could conveniently be displayed. Reaching their zenith under Henry III, with the summoning of crowds of up to 5000 paupers which even the King's councillors considered impossibly large to assemble, such ceremonies were, by the reign of Henry's son, frequently accompanied by the King's touching for scrofula, under Edward I of up to 2000 invalids each year³⁹. Even as early as 1210, we find the otherwise supposedly ungodly King John setting aside Thursday in Holy Week for the reception of paupers, perhaps already engaging in the foot-washings and special offerings that were to coalesce into the royal 'Maundy' still practiced by English kings and queens today⁴⁰. In all of these instances – pilgrimage, almsgiving, the royal touch, and Maundy ceremonial England's kings stood at the forefront of Christomimetic, charismatic practices, in at least some instances as innovators rather than as pale imitators of their Capetian rivals in France.

Besides visiting the saints, kings of England travelled the realm with saints in their saddle bags⁴¹. A newly discovered list of gifts made to King Henry III, between December 1234 and June 1235, lists, besides a great quantity of gold and silver plate, silk cloths and other luxury items, a quite remarkable number of relics⁴². On 10 January 1235, for example, the King was presented with a silver reliquary containing relics of St George, St Theodore and St Pantaleon, as well as a wooden case containing a spine from the Crown of Thorns⁴³. On 8 February, the King's brother, Richard of Cornwall, delivered a finger bone of St Augustine of Canterbury⁴⁴. On 25 February, the Hospitallers offered not only a glass vase containing oil from the miraculous icon of Saidnaiya (north of Damascus), but relics of

³⁹ S. Dixon-Smith, «The Image and Reality of Alms-Giving in the Great Halls of Henry III», *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 152, 1999, pp. 79-96, and for leprosaria, C. Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England*, Woodbridge, 2006, esp. pp. 104-54. For 'touching', Prestwich, «Piety of Edward I» (above n.23). For French comparisons, see P. Alajidi, *Le roi père des pauvres, France XIII^e-XV^e siècles*, Rennes, 2009.

⁴⁰ A. Kellet, «King John in Knaresborough: The First Known Royal Maundy», *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 62, 1990, pp. 69-90.

⁴¹ For European context here, see E. Bozoky, «Les reliques, le prince et le bien public», in H., Oudart *et al.*, *Le Prince, son peuple et le bien commun de l'Antiquité tardive à la fin du Moyen Âge*, Rennes, 2013, pp. 203-15.

⁴² N. Vincent, «An Inventory of Gifts to King Henry III, 1234-5», in D. Crook and L. J. Wilkinson, *The Growth of Government under Henry III*, Woodbridge, 2015, pp. 121-46.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 137 no. 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 139 no. 12.

St Jerome, of the golden gate of Jerusalem, of the Holy Sepulchre, of Calvary, of the altar upon which Christ had been presented in the Temple, and of the burning bush from which God had spoken to Moses⁴⁵. What is remarkable here is not just the quantity of such gifts but their close association with Christ and his passion, many years before Louis IX came into possession of the passion relics from Constantinople, henceforth displayed in the Sainte-Chapelle. The most precious of all Henry III's Christological treasures, a portion of Christ's blood shed at the time of the crucifixion, dispatched to England from the patriarch of Jerusalem, offered the opportunity in October 1247 for a great ceremony at Westminster Abbey. Here the King not only processed his relics through the streets and royal palace, but took the opportunity to sanctify a series of his own most personal concerns: devotion to the cult of the canonized King Edward the Confessor (whose feast day it was), sympathy with the sufferings of the Holy Land (to which Henry was shortly to pledge himself a crusader), and the establishment of peace and harmony between the English nobility and his French half-brothers, the Lusignans (with the knighting of William de Lusignan and a great host of other young men, on the eve of his procession). We know of all this thanks to a report by the chronicler, Matthew Paris, personally summoned by the King to record the day's events⁴⁶.

This, the most ostentatious of Henry III's ritual displays, might easily be dismissed as a mere imitation of Louis IX of France, who two years earlier had stage-managed a great public ceremony for the display of the passion relics brought to Paris from Constantinople. Yet we should tread with caution here. In 1248, for example, a year after his procession of the Holy Blood, Henry III came into possession of a stone marked with a footprint from the time of Christ's ascension into heaven. This too he gifted to Westminster Abbey, once again with public ceremony, although here without any of the details supplied by Matthew Paris for the Holy Blood⁴⁷. It nonetheless appears that throughout the 1230s and 40s, Henry III was as keenly concerned to establish a personal relationship to Christ via objects touched by Christ as anything that could be boasted of the kingdom of France. Whether this extended to the supposedly Christomimetic practices of French kingship remains very much a matter of interpretation rather than certain fact.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 143 no. 15.

⁴⁶ N. Vincent, *The Holy Blood: King Henry III and the Westminster Blood Relic*, Cambridge, 2001, esp. pp. 1-19, citing M. Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. H. R. Luard, 7 vols., London, 1872-83, IV, pp. 640-5.

⁴⁷ Vincent, *Holy Blood*, pp. 12-13, 163, 169, following Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. Luard, v, pp. 81-2.

Take, for example, the myths spun around the Plantagenet dynasty and its origins. On the one hand, we find an open recognition that the Plantagenets sprang from the Loire, from a line of counts rather than kings. As early as the 1130s, Geoffrey of Monmouth had contrasted the Trojan descent of Arthur and his fellow English kings with the relatively ignoble descent of any French king, let alone any mere duke of Normandy or count of Anjou⁴⁸. Stories told by William fitz Stephen in his life of St Thomas, and subsequently repeated by Matthew Paris, make it plain that Henry II, the first of the Plantagenet kings, was under no illusion that he was born the son of a count rather than a king. Hence, according to Matthew, King Henry's willingness to serve at the coronation banquet of his eldest son, since the son was of royal birth, by contrast to the father⁴⁹. Gerald of Wales and others report the Plantagenets boasting of their ancestral origins not as kings but as the sons of Mélusine, the mythical she-devil⁵⁰. Hence perhaps the particular interest shown at the court of Henry II in images of snakes and dragons, displayed on courtier seals, not least on the privy seal of the King himself, reputed to have shown a chariot drawn by two serpents: almost certainly a reference to the 'drakones' that pulled the chariot of Medea, she-devil, betrayer of Jason, and ultimate source of the wars between Greece and Troy⁵¹. All of this suggests an entirely desacralized view of Plantagenet kingship. Yet it supplies only part of the story.

At more or less the same time that Henry II was celebrating the legends of Mélusine and Medea, Ailred of Rievaulx (himself in due course recognized as a saint) was producing a genealogy of the King, traced back via his mother's line to Anglo-Saxon antiquity and thence to the house of David. In this interpretation, Henry II, whatever his Angevin descent, shared ultimately in the same bloodline as Christ himself⁵². Richard I on crusade in the 1190s was openly compared by one of his more sycophantic admirers to Christ come

⁴⁸ As pointed out, although as part of a much broader analysis, by J. Gillingham, «The Context and Purposes of Geoffrey of Monmouth's History of the Kings of Britain», in Gillingham, *The English in the Twelfth Century: Imperialism, National Identity and Political Values*, Woodbridge, 2000, pp. 21-3.

⁴⁹ William fitz Stephen, in *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket*, ed. J. C. Robertson, 7 vols, London, 1875-85, III, p. 101; Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. Luard, IV, p. 546.

⁵⁰ Gerald of Wales, «De principis instructione», in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, ed. J. S. Brewer, 8 vols., London, 1861-91, VIII, pp. 301-2, and for the circulation of this legend, J. Le Goff, «Mélusine maternelle et défricheuse», *Annales*, 25, 1971, pp. 587-603, reprinted in Le Goff, *Pour un autre Moyen Âge*, Paris, 1977, pp. 307-31.

⁵¹ N. Vincent, «The Seals of King Henry II and His Court», in P. R. Schofield, *Seals in Context in the Middle Ages*, Oxford, 2015, pp. 14-16.

⁵² Vincent, «Pilgrimages», pp. 42-4.

again: a comparison that had been used elsewhere only sparingly for Christian rulers, most recently perhaps for the emperor Frederick Barbarossa in the writings of Otto of Freising⁵³. Similar things had been attempted for new or self-consciously parvenu dynasties in the past, not least for the Carolingian kings of France, legitimized both by Christian ritual and by claims to have surpassed the heroes of classical antiquity. At the Plantagenet court we find comparisons drawn not only with the Greek and Roman past – with the house of Atreus, with Alexander and Caesar – but with the Carolingians and especially with the achievements of Charlemagne⁵⁴. Hence Peter of Blois's boast that, until the reign of Henry II, 'in these regions (of France) there has been no prince since the time of Charlemagne so benign, wise, generous and strong'⁵⁵. Hence also the exegesis of Ralph Niger, one-time member of the courts both of Henry II's queen and eldest son, in which Jeroboam's division of sacred authority between the priesthood and the kings of Judea was compared to the surrender to Charlemagne and his successors by popes Leo and Hadrian of powers over both *regnum* and *sacerdotium* not previously surrendered even to the emperor Constantine⁵⁶. Certainly, the dynastic pretensions of Roman and Frankish emperors remained topics of keen concern at the Plantagenet court.

In the traditional formulation, a great gulf continued to divide Plantagenet from Capetian kingship. The Plantagenets remained earthbound and secularized. The Capetians, by contrast, surrounded themselves with the trappings and symbolism of Christomimetic kingship. France became the jealously guarded possession of the Virgin Mary, symbolized by the Capetian fleurs-de-lys⁵⁷. France's kings commissioned art and architecture, not least the magnificent 'bibles moralisés' of the courts of Louis VIII and Lou-

⁵³ J. T. Appleby, *The Chronicle of Richard of Devizes of the Time of King Richard the First*, London, 1963, p. 39, and *cfr.* Otto of Freising, «Gesta Friderici» I. 26, ed. R. Wilmans, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores*, 20, Hanover, 1868, p. 366, applying the words of St Luke 1:66 to the birth of Barbarossa as of Christ.

⁵⁴ For classical comparisons, N. Vincent, «William of Newburgh, Josephus and the New Titus», in S. Rees Jones, and S. Watson, *Christians and Jews in Angevin England: The York Massacre of 1190, Narrative and Contexts*, Woodbridge, 2013, pp. 57-90, esp. pp. 78-90.

⁵⁵ Peter of Blois, 'Letter 14', in J. A. Giles, *Petri Blesensis Bathoniensis archidiaconi Opera Omnia*, 4 vols., Oxford, 1846-7, I, pp. 42-53, esp. p. 46 («a tempore Caroli, nullum fuisse principem adeo benignum, prudentem, largum et strenuum»).

⁵⁶ Lincoln Cathedral Library ms. 26 (Ralph Niger on Kings) fos. 76r b – 76v a, whence P. Buc, «Exégèse et pensée politique: Radulphus Niger (vers 1190) et Nicolas de Lyre (vers 1330)», in J. Blanchard, *Représentation, pouvoir et royauté à la fin du Moyen Âge: Actes du colloque organisé par l'Université du Maine les 25 et 26 mars 1994*, Paris, 1995, pp. 162-3.

⁵⁷ In general, see C. Beaune, *The Birth of an Ideology. Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late-Medieval France*, trans. S. R. Huston, and F. L. Cheyette, Berkeley, 1991, pp. 204-11.

is IX, in which kingship itself was celebrated as a fully sacral, Christomimetic affair⁵⁸. Yet here again, we must take care to distinguish aspiration from reality. Henry II's seal of 'drakones' might suggest a bawdy, devil-may-care approach to dynastic origins. But what then of the counterseals employed by Henry's contemporary, the supposedly 'pious' Louis VII of France, which displayed not Christian symbolism but an 'abrasax', part man, part stag, part serpent?⁵⁹. What of the fact that, amongst the very earliest examples of the supposedly Capetian school of manuscript painting, the Leiden Psalter enjoys connections at least as strong to Geoffrey Plantagenet, bastard son of Henry II of England, as it does to the court of Louis of France?⁶⁰. Even amongst the bibles moralisées, various of the more magnificent examples belonged to, and can be assumed to have been commissioned for, English rather than French royal patrons⁶¹. Even in appeals to the Virgin Mary, English kings can be found, at least as early as the reign of Henry I, placing themselves under Mary's protection, leading in due course to the idea of England itself as the Virgin's dower⁶². It is the Plantagenet queens, Eleanor of Aquitaine at Fontevraud and Berengaria of Navarre at L'Épau, who are depicted on their tombs with psalters in hand, displaying their concern for mercy, intercession and the liturgy, many years before similar imagery was adopted for Capetian queenship⁶³.

Moreover, even if we turn to those cults of the saints supposedly most critical of Plantagenet kingship, most sympathetic to the sacral claims of the kings of France, we find that things were not at all as Josiah Cox Russell and others have inclined us to assume. Thomas Becket may have died a martyr to the Satanic rage of Henry II, but very shortly afterwards, Henry himself made his peace with the martyr. In 1174, he travelled to Canterbury and there did penance, barefoot, after a night at the saint's shrine, scourged by each of the one hundred or more monks of the cathedral priory. On the following morning he departed for London, there to receive news of the

⁵⁸ J. Lowden, *The Making of the Bibles Moralisées*, 2 vols, Philadelphia, 2000.

⁵⁹ Vincent, «Seals of King Henry II», pp. 13, 15.

⁶⁰ N. Vincent, «The Great Lost Library of England's Medieval Kings? Royal Use and Ownership of Books, 1066-1272», in K. Doyle, and S. Mckendrick, *1000 Years of Royal Books and Manuscripts*, London, 2013, pp. 73-112, esp. pp. 93-4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 100, citing J. Lowden, «The Apocalypse in Early-Thirteenth-Century 'Bibles Moralisées': A Re-Assessment», in N. Morgan, *Prophecy, Apocalypse and the Day of Doom*, Donington, 2004, pp. 195-219, esp. pp. 198-9.

⁶² N. Vincent, «King Henry III and the Blessed Virgin Mary», in R. N. Swanson, *The Church and Mary: Studies in Church History*, Woodbridge, 2005, pp. 126-46, esp. pp. 128-9, 138.

⁶³ Vincent, «Great Lost Library», p. 93.

defeat of rebellion in the north and the capture of the king of Scotland. Thus did Becket display his new-found favour to the King. Over the remaining fifteen years of his life, not only did Henry return regularly on pilgrimage to Canterbury, but he spent a small fortune rebuilding Dover castle as a symbol of Plantagenet imperialism, closely linked to other deliberately 'Roman' symbols, clearly visible from northern France, not least to those pilgrims, including the counts of Flanders and King Louis VII of France, who now crossed the Channel to visit Becket's shrine. Becket indeed was launched on his new career as a protector as much as a critic of English kingship. In due course, he was to be promoted as a fit rival to France's Saint-Denis, indeed as a provider of sacral protection to English kings at the time of their coronations in many ways equivalent to the protection afforded to the Capetians by Reims and the legends of the Sainte-Ampoule⁶⁴. By the 1320s, the oil of Clovis at Reims was openly challenged by the oil of St Thomas Becket used at the coronations of successive kings of England, from Henry IV onwards⁶⁵.

In all of this, we can detect impulses and imagery that transcend the supposedly secularized, administrative kingship of Stubbs or Tout. Let us end, however, with a question posed at the beginning of this paper: to what extent did accession to the throne, and access to it, remain linked phenomena? Accession in England has been studied by a number of scholars, most notably in the past century by H. G. Richardson and George Garnett, focusing in the first case upon the coronation oaths of England's kings, in the second upon the combination of custom and uncertainty that followed the death of each successive ruler⁶⁶. There are elements here that accord

⁶⁴ T. K. Keefe, «Shrine Time: King Henry II's Visits to Thomas Becket's Tomb», *The Haskins Society Journal*, 11, 2003 for 1998, pp. 115-22; N. Vincent, «In the Shadow of the Castle Wall: Henry II and Dover 1154-1179», in S. Brindle, and D. Robinson, *Dover Castle: The Great Keep*, London, forthcoming.

⁶⁵ T. A. Sandquist, «The Holy Oil of St Thomas of Canterbury», in *idem* and M. R. Powicke, *Essays in Medieval History Presented to Bertie Wilkinson*, Toronto, 1969, pp. 330-44.

⁶⁶ Beginning with a series of articles published jointly with G. O. Sayles, H. G. Richardson's «Early Coronation Records», *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 13, 1936, pp. 129-45; 14, 1937, pp. 1-9, 145-8; 15, 1938, pp. 94-9; 16, 1939, p. 1-11) grew into an article, «The English Coronation Oath», *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series 23, 1941, pp. 129-58, itself thereafter revised and rethought in two further recensions: *idem*, «The English Coronation Oath», *Speculum*, 24, 1949, pp. 44-75, and *idem*, «The Coronation in Medieval England: The Evolution of the Ceremony and the Oath», *Traditio*, 16, 1960, pp. 111-202. George Garnett's article, «Coronation and Propaganda», *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series 36, 1986, pp. 91-116, is the basis from which sprouts Garnett, *Conquered England*. For further literature, see A. Spencer, «The Coronation Oath in English Politics, 1272-1399», in B. Thompson, and J. Watts, *Political Society in Later Medieval England: A Festschrift for Christine Carpenter*, Woodbridge, 2015, pp. 38-54, esp. p. 40n.

with broader European trends: the emphasis, for example, in the earliest accounts by the chroniclers, of the significance attached to popular acclamation and, in the case of Richard I, upon the King's own intrusion into ecclesiastical ceremony. In 1189, it was Richard who took up the crown, laid on the high altar of Westminster Abbey, before passing it to the archbishop of Canterbury, Baldwin of Ford so that it might be placed on the royal head⁶⁷.

In all of this, the principle of heredity prevailed without entirely excluding the element of election. In 1130, on the death of Henry I leaving only a daughter to succeed him; in 1199, when Church and barons chose John, Henry II's youngest son, over John's nephew, Arthur of Brittany, and in 1215, when, John's tyranny provoked the rebellious barons to 'elect' Louis of France to the English throne, dynastic tradition was trumped by political circumstance. None of these coups proved entirely successful. Despite attempts by King Stephen to have his eldest son acknowledged as successor, the Church refused consent⁶⁸. After 1154, Stephen and his offspring were supplanted on the throne by the heirs of the daughter spurned in 1130. Having been crowned in 1199, John was shortly afterwards implicated in the murder of his nephew, Arthur, leading to rebellion and the loss of a large part of his French estate. Despite 'election' in 1215, Louis of France was never crowned King of England and was defeated in battle, in 1217, allowing the son of the tyrant John unchallenged possession of the throne⁶⁹. There remained, nonetheless, a strong element of uncertainty here: a sense that the three successive dynasties of Normandy, Blois and Anjou, raised to the throne within less than a century of 1066, were none of them entirely legitimate. Time alone, and an unbroken line of male heirs between 1199 and 1377, brought an element of stability, but even then not without violent depositions in 1327 and 1399, and the threat of such in 1215, 1264 and 1311.

Accession meanwhile gathered its own set of customs: an amnesty to prisoners, the emergence from 1066 onwards of Westminster as coronation church, the adaptation of essentially imperial *ordines*, and, perhaps as early as 1154, the inclusion in the coronation oath of an undertaking by the king, borrowed from papal-episcopal rites, not to waste or diminish his royal in-

⁶⁷ *Chronica Rogeri de Houedene*, ed. W. Stubbs, 4 vols., London, 1868-71, III, p. 11

⁶⁸ Garnett, *Conquered England*, pp. 262-5; D. Crouch, *The Reign of King Stephen, 1135-1154*, Harlow, 2000, pp. 245-7, 258-9.

⁶⁹ D. Carpenter, *The Minority of Henry III*, London, 1990, p. 13, and for the elective element in 1215, for example, *Radulphi de Coggleshall Chronicon Anglicanum*, ed. J. Stevenson, London, 1875, pp. 176-7.

heritance⁷⁰. The coronation oath itself entered political debate, and from at least 1100 was accompanied by the proclamation of coronation charters, promising to rule in accordance with right and custom. The debate over Magna Carta, in 1215, was to this extent merely an attempt by the barons to judge and control the performance of royal office according to promises made by King John at his accession⁷¹. Accession and coronation imposed obligations on England's kings. But they also conferred prestige and an element of sacral authority. Hence the emphasis upon ceremony, regalia, and in particular upon the holy chrism with which the king was anointed⁷². Hence the emphasis upon the timing of coronations, to mark particular anniversaries or festivals of the Church⁷³. Hence the questions posed by King Henry III of Robert Grosseteste, in the 1230s, probing the extent to which the King's anointing secured his ordination to ecclesiastical as well as secular office⁷⁴. In all of this, the playing off of secular against sacral elements is reminiscent of the wider trajectory of English kingship, suggesting a compromise between *regnum* and *sacerdotium* in which king and Church struggled for supremacy without either party achieving domination.

Accession to royal office continued to blend elements of the sacred and the secular. So too did the broader phenomenon of access to the throne. Who could or could not approach the king was (and remains) a question of great significance, and not only in those monarchies, such as Byzantium, that demanded ritual abasement before kings. Recent rereading of the sources suggests that the kings of England were themselves protective of their dignity here, as was Henry II in the 1170s, riding through South Wales, accosted by a petitioner who addressed him in English. The King's response was to ignore the petitioner, but to ask one of his knights, in French, to question 'that peasant'⁷⁵. In 1239,

⁷⁰ Amnesty, first reported in 1189: Howden, *Chronica*, ed. Stubbs, III, p. 4. Westminster: E. Mason, «The Site of King-Making and Consecration: Westminster Abbey and the Crown in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries», in D. Wood, *The Church and Sovereignty c.590-1918: Essays in Honour of Michael Wilks*, Studies in Church History Subsidia 9, Oxford, 1991, pp. 57-76. Coronation Oath: Richardson, «Coronation in Medieval England», 1960, pp.151-61,

⁷¹ N. Vincent, «Oaths and Magna Carta», in J. Aurell, and M. Aurell, *Le Sacré et la parole: Le serment au Moyen Âge*, Paris, forthcoming.

⁷² D. Carpenter, «The Burial of King Henry III, the Regalia and Royal Ideology», in Carpenter, *The Reign of Henry III*, London, 1996, pp. 427-61, esp. pp. 434-5.

⁷³ J. Dale, «Royal Inauguration and the Liturgical Calendar in England, France and the Empire, c.1050-c.1250», *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 37, 2015, pp. 83-98.

⁷⁴ Carpenter, «Burial of Henry III», p. 437, citing *Roberti Grosseteste Epistolae*, ed. H. R. Luard, London, 1861, pp. 348-51 no.124.

⁷⁵ Gerald of Wales, «Itinerarium Kambriae», in *Giraldi Cambrensis Opera*, ed. Brewer, VI, pp. 64-5. For further details, here and for what follows, see my forthcoming article, «Meeting and Greeting the Kings of England, 1154-1272».

having for many years been obliged to heed the counsel of his chief marshals, Henry III perhaps took no small delight in barring his chamber to Gilbert Marshal, hereditary bearer of the marshal's wand of office, shooed away by the king's attendants waving their own staves as wands⁷⁶.

We might end here with a story employed by Karl Leyser to demonstrate the deference displayed by the secularized King Henry II to a holy man, St Hugh of Lincoln, but now read in a rather different sense⁷⁷. The story concerns the King's anger with St Hugh, displayed theatrically by his refusal to acknowledge the bishop's presence, when Hugh came to visit him out hunting at Woodstock. Instead, the King sat in silence, slowly and painstakingly bandaging an injured finger. Hugh, who had found the King's seated in a circle of his earls and magnates, having insisted on taking the place of the earl next to the King, attempted a joke. 'How closely you resemble your kinsmen from Falaise', he said (a risky allusion to the descent and illegitimacy of Henry's ancestor, William the Conqueror). The King dissolved into laughter, explaining the joke to his companions, thereby relieving the previous tensions⁷⁸. Leyser read this as evidence of a down-to-earth approach to kingship, robbed of sacral pretensions in the post-Gregorian world, here revealed as histrionic rather than majestic, rendered helpless with coarse laughter and self-mockery. Yet there are other aspects to this story. We find the court seated 'in a circle' (*modum corone*) around the King, with the word 'crown' here carefully chosen, albeit perhaps borrowed from the companions of Ajax in Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 13:1). Words applied both to Ajax and to Aeneas (Virgil, *Aeneid*, 2:1) are here re-appropriated for the fury of Henry II. Moreover the court, although out hunting, clearly sat in rank and order. Hence the daring with which Hugh appropriated the position next to the King, previously occupied by an earl. The earls of Henry II, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, were keenly aware both of being ranked in a pecking order, and of the significance of personal access to the King⁷⁹. Finally, although Hugh addressed the King in the second person singular (as *tu*), the King replied in the first person plural, referring to 'our ancestor' (*proavus noster*), once again an indication that royalty spoke and behaved, and was expected to speak and behave, rather differently from the average run of men.

⁷⁶ Paris, *Chronica Majora*, ed. Luard, III, pp. 523-4.

⁷⁷ Leyser, «Angevin Kings and the Holy Man», pp. 58-60.

⁷⁸ Adam of Eynsham, *Magna Vita Sancti Hugonis*, ed. D. L. Douie, and D. H. Farmer, 2 vols., Oxford, 1985, II, pp. 113-19.

⁷⁹ N. Vincent, «Did Henry II Have a Policy Towards the Earls?», in C. Given-Wilson *et al.*, *War, Government and Aristocracy in the British Isles, c.1150-1500. Essays in Honour of Michael Prestwich*, Woodbridge, 2008, pp. 1-25

Whether we attribute this difference to ‘sacrality’ or to ‘charisma’, there is little doubt that kings, even in England, and even those like Henry II descended from William ‘the bastard’, the first in their royal line, were regarded differently from other mere mortals. The word ‘sacrality’ is perhaps unhelpful in this context, not least because it has no very obvious echo in the Latin vocabulary of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries⁸⁰. But then no more does the word ‘charisma’, a Greek hybrid, itself attended by a great deal of post-Weberian baggage. The dangers of vocabulary can hardly be avoided here, as anybody will know who has touched upon the edges of that Serbonian bog known as ‘Feudalism’ (with or without capital letter ‘F’). Abstraction can all too easily harden into ideology. Historical comparison dissolves essential differences, just as sunlight robs colour from fabric or paint. In just the same way, medieval rulers employed the language of ‘empire’ and ‘imperialism’ in ways that their classical forebears would have struggled to comprehend. In all these instances, what matters perhaps is not linguistic nit-picking but the avoidance of those distortions that a particular terminology is inclined to impose upon our understanding of the past. Looked at from one angle and from within a particular tradition of historical pre-assumptions, English kingship after 1066 was a secularized affair, far removed from the ‘sacral’ pretensions of France or Byzantium. Looked at straight, England’s twelfth- and thirteenth-century kings seem to have thought of themselves, and were indeed on occasion accepted, as rather more than merely secularized administrators. The throne to which both they and their subjects sought access remained a religious as much as a secularized phenomenon.

⁸⁰ Various problems over vocabulary were long ago noticed by J. T. Nelson, «Royal Saints and Early Medieval Kingship», in D. Baker, *Sanctity and Secularity: The Church and the World*, Studies in Church History 10, Oxford, 1973, pp. 39-44, esp. pp. 41-2.

