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# The True and Established Royal Line: Henry VII's Legitimization of the Tudor Dynasty

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*"The True and Established Royal Line":  
Henry VII's Legitimization of the Tudor Dynasty*

Rachel M. Taylor  
HIST 471  
26 April 2013

# “The True and Established Royal Line”: Henry VII’s Legitimization of the Tudor Dynasty

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“Of all the contenders for the English crown between 1455 and 1485, Henry Tudor’s background, connections and apparent abilities surely made him among the least likely to have established a secure throne and a thriving dynasty”<sup>1</sup>. Henry Tudor would come to be known as King Henry VII through a series of political manipulations. This man, who would found the great Tudor dynasty in England, had virtually no claim to the throne during a time when legitimate princes were fighting for it. The War of the Roses had split the royal families of England to the point that every king was suspicious of an heir to the throne. Henry VII would put an end to all of that, even though he came from a position of little royalty. He had to portray great tenacity and political cunning in order to end the warring in England and to establish his family on the throne. He looked for every possible route to the throne which is how he eventually achieved and maintained it. Through the marriage of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, a pure genealogical claim to Edward III’s throne was established and the Tudor succession was secured through Henry VII’s adherence to the four major elements of legitimacy in late Middle Ages England.

Genealogically, Henry Tudor had a very weak, almost nonexistent claim to the throne. He was a descendant of the Lancaster branch of the lineage of Edward III. However, he claimed this by being a descendant of a third wife and a second husband. This was very questionable when other heirs to the English throne could claim a far superior descent from Edward III. This is why Henry was betrothed and married to Elizabeth of York. She was a direct descendant of Edward III, and was the female heir to the

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<sup>1</sup> Cunningham, Sean. “Loyalty and the Usurper: Recognizances, the Council and Allegiance under Henry VII.” *Historical Research* 82, no. 217 (August 2009): 459-481. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 28, 2012).

York family. This combining of the two warring families, and the subsequent children born of the marriage, brought together two disparate lineages and calmed the genealogical debate.<sup>2</sup>

The Battle of Bosworth Field was fought between Henry Tudor and King Richard III, a descendant of York. Henry relied on his Welsh upbringing to enter England through Wales, as well as to recruit Welsh lords to join his cause against the current king. His mother's second husband's family also played a key role as turncoats on the battlefield. Both of these things led to Henry's victory and the subsequent death of Richard III. These strategies enabled Henry to call upon Parliament afterward, and declare himself King of England.<sup>3</sup>

The popular support of the noble families of England was necessary in the late Middle Ages in order to maintain kingship. This is something that Henry had to build. The Lancaster faction tended to follow him because he was their sole remaining heir to the throne. However, Henry had to obtain the support of the Yorkist faction in order to ensure minimal uprisings during his reign. His predecessor, Richard III was also an unpopular king and this garnished support for Henry. Through his genius use of historical imagery, Henry ensured that the York traditions were continued in the new Tudor reign. This led to further support from his former enemies.<sup>4</sup>

Henry also called on the divine to legitimize his kingship. The concept of the Divine Right of Kings was very prevalent in the late Middle Ages. Henry had to display that he had obtained this right.<sup>5</sup> The acknowledgement of his kingship from Pope Innocent VIII was a major turning point for Henry's

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<sup>2</sup> "War of the Roses (1455-1485): York and Lancaster Family Tree", House of Windsor Official Site, [www.royal.gov.uk], accessed March 8, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Lander, J.R. *The War of the Roses*. Thrupp: Sutton Publishing, 1965.

<sup>4</sup> King, John N. *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.

<sup>5</sup> Figgis, John Neville. *The Divine Right of Kings*. Cambridge: University Press, 1914.

quest.<sup>6</sup> Also, Henry again drew on his Welsh sensibilities and played into the legends of old. He portrayed himself as the descendent of Cadwallader, the last king of the Britons, and used Arthurian allusions regularly.<sup>7</sup>

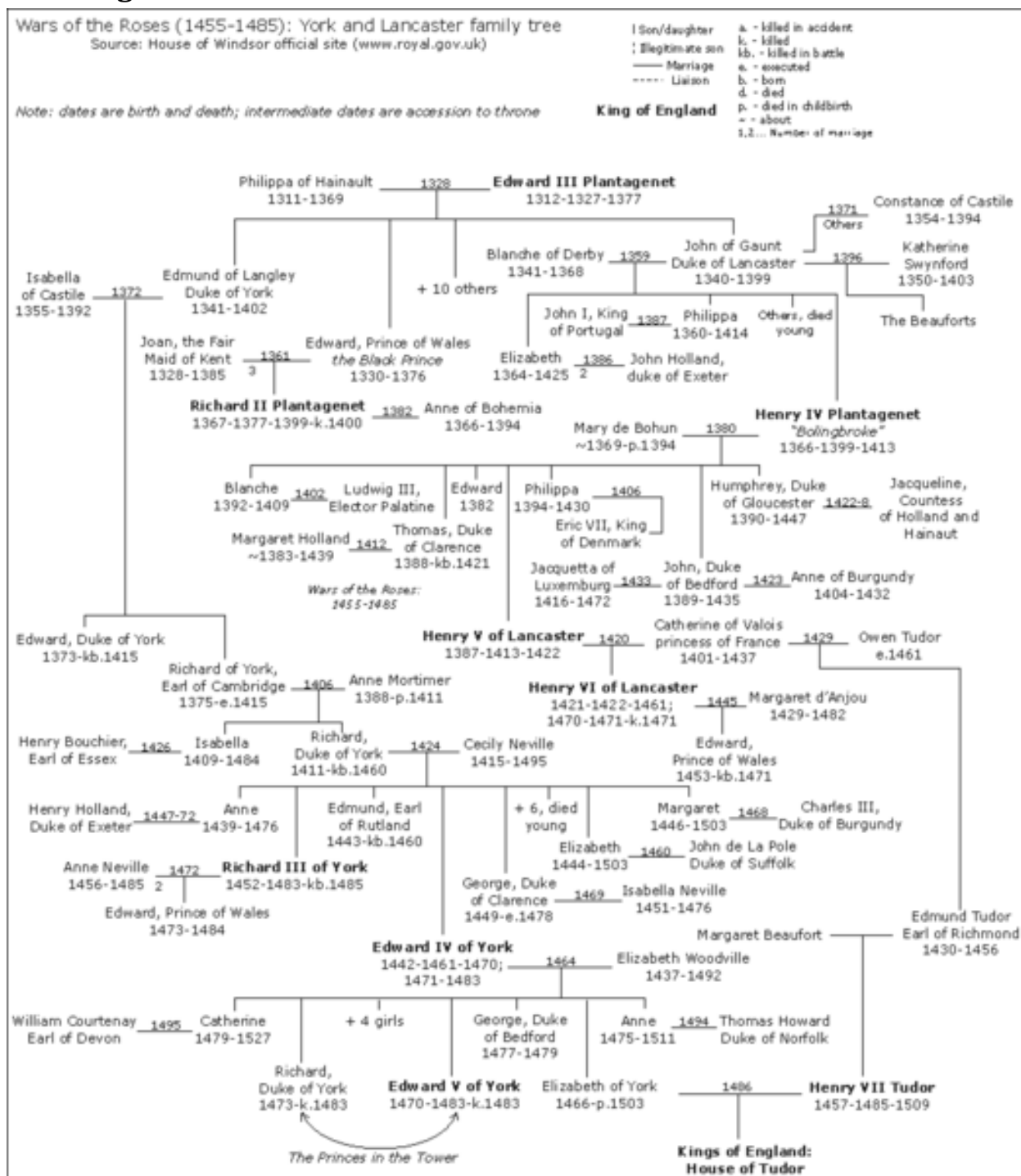
All of these things led to the establishment of the Tudor dynasty in England, one of the most famous in all of history. It would allow for the founding of the Church of England and some of the first successful female monarchs. These accomplishments could never have been possible without the political skill of Henry VII in obtaining and maintaining his throne.

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<sup>6</sup> Collier, John Payne. *Bull of Pope Innocent VIII on the Marriage of Henry VII with Elizabeth York*. London: Camden Society, 1847.

<sup>7</sup> Vergil, Polydore. *The Anglica Historia, A.D. 1485-1537*. London: Royal Historical Society, 1950.

## Genealogical Sketch



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<sup>8</sup> War of the Roses (1455-1485): York and Lancaster Family Tree", House of Windsor Official Site, [[www.royal.gov.uk](http://www.royal.gov.uk)], accessed March 8, 2013.

The story of Henry VII is incomplete without an in-depth analysis of the family tree associated with the families of the time period. While Henry VII had virtually no superior genealogical claim to his throne, his son, Henry VIII, would be descended from Edward III in four different ways.<sup>9</sup> This major jump in genealogy would not have been possible without the intricate web that the sons of Edward III would create.

Edward III Plantagenet (1312-1377) had many children throughout his reign. His three oldest sons were Edward, Prince of Wales (1330-1376); John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (1340-1399); and Edmund of Langley, Duke of York (1341-1402). Edward, Prince of Wales was Edward III's eldest son and heir to his throne. Edward, Prince of Wales' son became the next monarch, Richard II Plantagenet (1367-1399). When Richard died without a male heir, the families of John of Gaunt and Edmund of Langley would battle for the throne for the next eighty-five years. This was the reason for the split between the Lancasters (descendents of John of Gaunt) and the Yorks (descendents of Edmund of Langley).<sup>10</sup>

As the second son of Edward III, John of Gaunt's line had the next legitimate claim to the throne. His son would become king after Richard II, becoming Henry IV Plantagenet (1366-1413). After him, the next Lancaster monarch would be his son, Henry V of Lancaster (1387-1422). Throughout this time, however, the descendants of Edmund of Langley, third son of Edward III, felt that they also had a legitimate claim to the English throne. Several Dukes of York rose up against both Henry IV and Henry V. Eventually, the great-grandson of Edmund of Langley would become Edward IV of York (1442-1483), who won his crown on the battlefield.<sup>11</sup>

After many battles and changes in rule, Edward IV solidly established his rule. Throughout these battles, York forces had killed both Henry VI and his son, Edward, Prince of Wales. Almost all the

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<sup>9</sup> Manrubia, Susanna C., et. Al. "Genealogy in the Era of Genomics." *American Scientist* 91, no. 2 (March/April 2003): 158-165. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Kenyon, J. P. *A Dictionary of British History*. New York: Stein and Day, 1983.

<sup>11</sup> Pickering, Andrew. *Lancastrians to Tudors: England, 1450-1509*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000

remaining heirs of Lancaster appeared to be dead and the Yorks felt that it was their victory. After the death of Edward IV in 1483, his son, Edward V of York (1470-1483) should have become king at the age of thirteen. Because of his age, Edward needed a regent until he became of age to rule. An argument ensued between his mother, Elizabeth Woodville (1437-1492) and his uncle Richard, Duke of York. Eventually, Richard proclaimed himself the official protector of Edward. Shortly afterward, Edward and his brother Richard disappeared and his regent Richard became Richard III of York (1452-1485).<sup>12</sup>

After Richard III, Henry VII Tudor (1457-1509) became king. He traced his own lineage back to Edward III and eventually killed Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth. Henry Tudor's descent from John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster was complicated and dubious at best. On his father's side, there was no blood descent from Edward III. Henry's father, Edmund Tudor, Earl of Richmond (1430-1456) was the son of a courtly love affair. After his death, Henry V of Lancaster's widow, Catherine of Valois, Princess of France (1401-1437) married a Welsh man named Owen Tudor who worked at her court. The marriage was scandalous, but legitimate. Their son, Edmund Tudor became the father of Henry Tudor. One of the only benefits from his Tudor line was that Henry VI of Lancaster had recognized his half-brother, Edmund Tudor, and made him an Earl. This recognition also gave Henry Tudor the title of Earl of Richmond, and thus making him a noble in England.<sup>13</sup>

Henry's mother's lineage was only slightly more direct than his father's. Margaret Beaufort, Henry's mother, was a direct descendant of John of Gaunt and his third wife, Katherine Swynford. Margaret was a great-grand daughter to John of Gaunt. However, when her grandfather, John Beaufort was born, John of Gaunt and Katherine Swynford were not yet married, making him an illegitimate heir. In 1397, Pope Boniface IX passed a declaration that made the Beaufort family legitimate. However, in 1407 Henry IV added the clause 'excepta dignitate regale' [except the royal dignity]. This barred the

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<sup>12</sup> Starkey, David. *Henry: Virtuous Prince*. London: HarperPress, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Okerlund, Arlene. *Elizabeth of York*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.



Beauforts if there were any heirs with a more direct claim to the throne.<sup>14</sup> As a result this was a very doubtful route to royalty.<sup>15</sup>

Henry VII's eventual wife Elizabeth of York, had a lineage is equally as important as his. She had a much more direct and better claim to the throne of Edward III.<sup>16</sup> However, as a woman she was unable to rule and was not even thought of as a legitimate option for the throne.<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth of York was the eldest daughter of Edward IV of York and the sister to Edward V. She was named after her mother, Elizabeth Woodville. Edward IV and Elizabeth Woodville had ten children in total, three sons and seven daughters. After the disappearance of Edward V and his brother Richard, Duke of York into the Tower of London after the ascension of Richard III of York, Elizabeth Woodville took her remaining children into sanctuary at Westminster Abbey to escape the political tensions in London. Polydore Vergil, in his great work *Anglica Historia* recounts that the reason Elizabeth Woodville and her oldest daughter, Elizabeth of York, were able to survive the murderous Richard III was that Richard wanted Elizabeth of York as his wife.

Detained in the same fortress was Elizabeth, elder daughter of King Edward, whom Richard had kept unharmed with a view to marriage. To such a marriage the girl had a singular aversion. Weighed down for this reason by her great grief, she would repeatedly exclaim, saying 'I will not be thus married, but unhappy creature that I am, will rather suffer all the torments which St. Catherine is said to have endured for the love of Christ than be united with a man who is the enemy of my family.'<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cunningham, Sean. *Henry VII*. London: Routledge, 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Pickthorne, Kenneth. *Early Tudor Government; Henry VII*. Cambridge University Press, 1934.

<sup>16</sup> Okerlund, Arlene. *Elizabeth of York*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> Pickthorne, Kenneth. *Early Tudor Government; Henry VII*. Cambridge University Press, 1934.

<sup>18</sup> Vergil, Polydore. *The Anglica Historia, A.D. 1485-1537*. London: Royal Historical Society, 1950.

It was during this time in Westminster that Margaret Beaufort sent word to Elizabeth Woodville that her son, Henry Tudor, would be invading England. The women worked out a marriage agreement between Henry and Elizabeth, contingent on the death of Richard III. At the time, Henry had been exiled to France by Richard III, who had recognized that Henry Tudor was the last heir of Lancaster. On Christmas of 1483, Henry officially declared his commitment to marry Elizabeth of York.<sup>19</sup>

This marriage was engineered to end the fighting between the Lancasters and the Yorks. Vergil says, "It is legitimate to attribute this to divine intervention, for plainly by it all things which nourished the two most ruinous factions were utterly removed, by it the two houses of Lancaster and York were united and from the union the true and established royal line emerged which now reigns"<sup>20</sup> Because they were distant cousins, Henry and Elizabeth needed a papal dispensation to wed. Pope Innocent VIII would say in his dispensation, "Understanding of the longe and greuous variaunce, contentions, and debates that hath ben in this Realme of Englund between the house of Duchre of Lancastre on the one party, and the house of the Duchre of Yorke on that other party"<sup>21</sup> The pope's recognition of the wars of succession that had been occurring and his realization that this marriage could end them was significant to the legitimacy that Henry VII would eventually enjoy. His betrothal to Elizabeth of York signified that he was a legitimate contender to the throne.

So while Henry's genealogical claim was frail, he was able to find some descent from Edward III. After Richard III killed all other heirs to the throne, Yorks and Lancasters, Henry had one of the most direct claims to Edward III's throne genealogically. There were still other claimants, but most either were too afraid to challenge Richard III or they had other interests at stake.

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<sup>19</sup> Loades, D.M. *The Tudor Chronicles—the Kings*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990.

<sup>20</sup> Vergil, Polydore. *The Anglica Historia, A.D. 1485-1537*. London: Royal Historical Society, 1950.

<sup>21</sup> Collier, John Payne. *Bull of Pope Innocent VIII on the Marriage of Henry VII. With Elizabeth of York*. London: Camden Society, 1847.

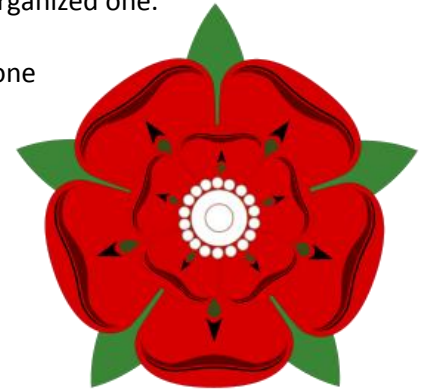
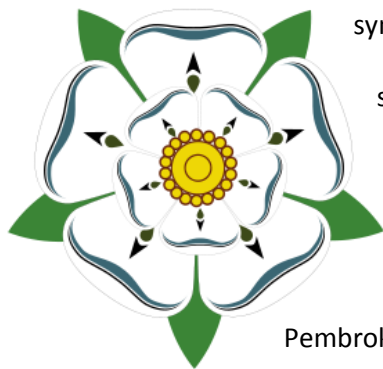
## War of the Roses

Henry VII's ascension to the throne would have been impossible without him winning the Battle of Bosworth, the final battle of the War of the Roses. The so-called War of the Roses was more of a re-occurring battle for the throne. It was not a continuous war, nor was it an organized one.

Mostly only the noble families of England were involved and it was usually one claimant to the throne against another and his followers. The roses that

are referred to symbolize the two families involved. The Red Rose symbolized Lancaster and the White Rose

symbolized York.<sup>22</sup>



Henry VII's involvement in the War of the Roses is limited to the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485. Henry had been born in Wales at

Pembroke and had grown up there. After being captured by the Yorks at age twelve, Henry and his Uncle Jasper Tudor fled to Brittany to live there for thirteen years. After Richard III gained the throne, Henry fled from Brittany to France in order to escape an attempt by Richard's forces to capture him. From France, Henry attempted one crossing into England. However, Richard was tipped off and the landing was a failure. On the second attempt, Henry decided to enter England through Wales, his own homeland.<sup>23</sup>

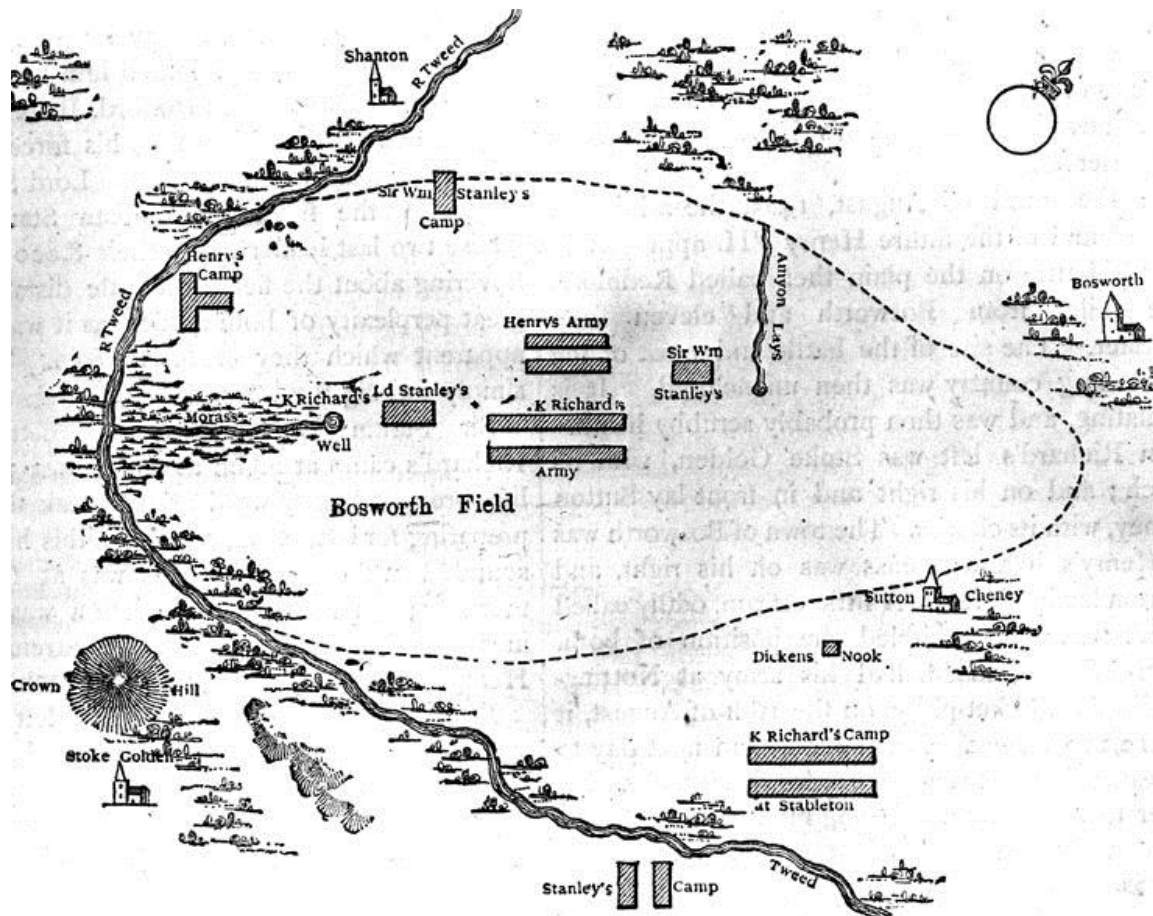
On 7 August 1485, Henry landed near Milford Haven, just north of his boyhood home of Pembroke. He moved through Wales and gained supporters as he went. Rhys ap Thomas, a powerful

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<sup>22</sup> King, John N. *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.

<sup>23</sup> "Henry VII: Chronology." *Historical Research* 82, no. 217 (August 2009): 379. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 28, 2012).

Welshman, joined forces with Henry. The Welsh were much more sympathetic to Henry's cause because of his Welsh heritage and the poor treatment of the Welsh by previous kings.<sup>24</sup>



Henry entered England at Shrewsbury and finally confronted Richard and his army at Bosworth, about one hundred miles northwest of London.<sup>25</sup> Richard had been staying at Nottingham, which was fifty miles northeast of Bosworth. An anonymous author wrote the poem, "Bosworth Field" about the meeting of the two men and their armies. Written from a decidedly pro-Henry standpoint, the poem highlights the excitement of Henry's forces and the foreboding of Richard's.

<sup>24</sup> Roberts, Peter R. "The Welshness of the Tudors." *History Today* 36, no. 1 (January 1986): 7-13. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Freeman-Grenville, G. S. P., and G. S. P. Freeman-Grenville. *The Wordsworth Book of the Kings and Queens of Britain*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1997.

That was well seene att steames stray; att Milford Hauen, when he did appeare with all his Lords in royall array, he said to them that with him weare: “into England I am entred heare, my heritage is this Land within; they shall me boldlye bring and beare, and loose my life, but Ile be King”<sup>26</sup>

According to this poem, Henry seems to have challenged Richard personally. This phrase, “ffor hee shall either ffight, or fflee, or loose his life, if hee bee Kinge” points to the charisma and confidence with which Henry led his men. “Bosworth Felde” goes on to speak of how Henry’s charisma and connections would win him the battle. The conversion of Lord Stanley and his men from Richard’s forces to Henry’s was a major turning point in the battle that ultimately led to the victory of King Henry VII at Bosworth Field.<sup>27</sup>

“Bosworth Felde” gives an indication of the size of Richard’s army. “King Richard did in his army stand, he was numbered to 40000 and 3 of hardy men of hart and hand, that vnder his banner there did bee”. This large army was undermined by the disloyalty of Lord Stanley and his forces. After Henry cut down King Richard, it was Lord Stanley who took the crown from the bushes where it had fallen and placed it on Henry’s head saying, “methinke ye are best worthy to weare the crowne and be our King”. Henry forces then took Richard’s naked body back with them as they progressed towards London.

Henry VII also used some iconology to support his cause at the battle. Henry fought under the red banner of Cadwalader, which bore the red dragon.<sup>28</sup> Cadwalader was the last king of the Britons and this was very meaningful to the English who believed their heritage to be linked to the Britons. This was both a nod to his heritage and an attempt to legitimate his genealogy. It was very typical for high-ranking Welshmen to be viewed as descendants of some of the great kings of the Britons. The culture of

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<sup>26</sup> *Bosworth Felde*. London: Richard III Society, 1868.

<sup>27</sup> Loades, D. M. *The Tudor Chronicles—the Kings*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990.

<sup>28</sup> Roberts, Peter R. “The Welshness of the Tudors.” *History Today* 36, no. 1 (January 1986): 7-13. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2013).

Wales promoted much more mythology and folklore than that of the English did. So Henry chose to fight under this standard to promote the idea that he was the fulfillment of Cadwalader's dream that one of his descendants would once again rule Britain. Henry's entrance into England through Wales also encouraged this notion.

Henry also wanted the nobles to forget, to some extent, that he had a very fragile genealogical claim to the English throne. Iconography had become very important during the Wars of the Roses. The two roses themselves were the symbols of the families, York and Lancaster. Richard fought under the standard of a boar. Henry's adoption of Cadwalader's dragon connected him to British history in a deeper way than any of the other claimants to the throne. Since iconography and propaganda were so common in England, Henry's needed to stand out among the others.

The death of Richard III was met with little mourning, and even some rejoicing. He had not been a popular king. He was highly suspected of killing Edward V and Richard, Duke of York, his own nephews. Written posthumously about Richard,

Richard, the third of that name, ufurped the Crowne of England, and openly tooke upon him to bee King, the ninth day of Iune, in the yeare of our Lord, one thoufand foure hundred fourefcore and three, and in the twenty fifth yeare of Lewis the eleventh then being the King of France: and the morrow after, hee was Proclamed King, and with great folemny rode to Weftminfter and there fate in the feate of Royall, and called the Judges of the Realme before him, ftaightly commanding them to execute the Lawes without favour or dealy, with many good exhortations<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> More, Thomas. *The Historie of the Pitifull Life, and Unfortunate Death of Edward the Fifth, and the Then Duke of Yorke, His Brother With the Troublesome and Tyrannical Government of Usurping Richard the Third, and His Miserable End*. London: Printed by Thomas Payne for the Company of Stationers, and are to be sold by Mich. Young, 1641.

Richard was portrayed after his death as a tyrant and a usurper. His physical image was also defamed as “ill featured of limes, croke backed, and his left shoulder much higher than his right”. This was mostly propaganda by the followers of Henry VII, although some of it was true. He had, in fact, been proclaimed King by Parliament. Even if he was a usurper, he was now proclaimed King.<sup>30</sup> However, it was up to the King to call Parliament and the members would have been risking their lives to vote against him. Records from the City of York show that even in his dukedom, he was slandered after his death. “Bot he said that Kyng Ric was an ypocryte, a crochebake, beried in a dike like a dogge”<sup>31</sup>. However much his physical appearance as slandered, it contained an element of truth.

In September 2012, the burial place of Richard III was found under a parking lot in Leicester. At the time of his burial, it was the site of a Franciscan friary. The remains of Richard III are still being radiocarbon dated and the bones analyzed to determine their legitimacy. However, the skeleton that was found is consistent with that of someone who had scoliosis—a spinal deformity consistent with historical accounts of the king’s physical state. The skull of the skeleton shows “a puncture on the top of the head, the cleaving of the rear part of the skull, and a small piece of iron embedded in the spine.” These wounds are consistent with records of how Richard III died at Bosworth.<sup>32</sup>

Henry VII’s next move after Richard’s death was to date his reign starting at August 21, 1485, the day before Bosworth. This enabled him, when he called Parliament, proclaim anyone who fought for Richard a traitor and be punished.<sup>33</sup> After this, he made his way to London to call Parliament and to proclaim himself King.

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<sup>30</sup> John Strachey et al. *Rotuli Parliamentorum: Index to the Rolls of Parliament*. London: Parliament, 1832.

<sup>31</sup> Davies, Robert. *Extracts from the Municipal Records of the City of York, During the Reigns of Edward IV, Edward V, and Richard III: With Notes Illustrative and Explanatory: and an Appendix*. London: J.B. Nichols and Son, 1843.

<sup>32</sup> Patel, Samir S. “The Rehabilitation of Richard III” *Archaeology* 66, no.1 (January/February 2012): 9-10. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> Okerlund, Arlene. *Elizabeth of York*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

His chief care was to regulate well affairs of state and, in order that the people of England should not be further torn by rival factions, he publically proclaimed that (as he had already promised) he would take for his wife Elizabeth daughter of King Edward and that he would give complete pardon and forgiveness to all those who swore obedience to his name. Then at length, having won the good-will of all men and at the instigation of the both nobles and people, he was made king at Westminster on 31 October and called Henry, seventh of that name. These events took place in the year 1486 after the birth of Our Saviour.<sup>34</sup>

Henry was proclaimed King and subsequently married Elizabeth of York, after receiving the papal dispensation. She did not have a coronation until after she was pregnant with the couple's first child. Henry wanted to ensure that he was king in his own right and not dependent on Elizabeth's claim. "Henry would be crowned in his own right, quite independent of the heritage of Elizabeth of York. He would reign as a Tudor—not as an adjunct of the house of York"<sup>35</sup>

## Sources of Legitimacy

In order to maintain his proclamation as king, Henry VII had to convince everyone involved that his claim was a legitimate one. Because of the Wars of the Roses, legitimating a kingship was first and foremost in the minds of the nobles. Through a compilation of resources both from the time period and from leading scholars, there are four major elements to legitimizing kingship in the late Middle Ages in England. The best way for a man to legitimate his kingship was through genealogy. Should that fail, the next way to legitimate kingship was through usurpation of the throne. In addition to these methods, the claimant must have popular support and evidence of divine support.

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<sup>34</sup> Vergil, Polydore. *The Anglica Historia, A.D. 1485-1537*. London: Royal Historical Society, 1950.

<sup>35</sup> Okerlund, Arlene. *Elizabeth of York*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.



The first thing that Henry VII would have had to overcome was his genealogy. This is why, during the Wars of the Roses, every claimant went to great lengths to prove that they were the legitimate descendant of Edward III. The kingship of Britain to this point had been a fairly firmly held genealogical line. A major exception to this was Richard I of Normandy who gained his throne through the marriage of his daughter to the king's son, Aethelred the Unready. Another exception is Matilda, whose second marriage produced the heir to the throne, Henry II. Beyond these exceptions, the genealogy of the British throne was entirely father-son until the descendants of Edward III.<sup>36</sup> This tradition of a royal bloodline became a virtue that every king was expected to possess.

There was still a sense of hierarchy within the bloodline as well. It was taken for granted that Edward III's first son's descendants would inherit the throne first. However, when Richard II had no male heir, the battling began. The descendants of the second son of Edward III would take over the throne as the Lancasters. It was not until 1461, nearly a century after the death of Edward III in 1377, that the descendants of his third son would reach the throne.<sup>37</sup> The succession would always go first to the oldest son of the king, who was traditionally titled, "Prince of Wales", a tradition that carries on to today. Should the first-born son be unable to rule for reasons of death or insanity, the second born son would be the next legitimate choice. This would continue down the line of male heirs to their father's throne. The problem arose when there were no male heirs. This would leave the throne to either one of the king's brothers (preferably a second born) or to a husband of one of the king's daughters. This was an extreme last-case scenario and would probably end up in a succession dispute, as in the case of Richard II's lack of a male heir.

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<sup>36</sup> Kenyon, J. P. *A Dictionary of British History*. New York: Stein and Day, 1983.

<sup>37</sup> "War of the Roses (1455-1485): York and Lancaster Family Tree", House of Windsor Official Site, [www.royal.gov.uk], accessed March 8, 2013.

In the absence of a clear male heir, usurpation is the next source of legitimacy that a claimant must consider. The type of king who won his crown on the battlefield was considered a king *de facto*.<sup>38</sup> This claimant had been granted some sort of divine intervention in order to defeat the incumbent king in a battle, or in a simple murderous act. The legitimacy of a usurper is founded deeply in Divine Right Theory. This theory says that God must have given favor to the victor in these cases and His punishment was doled out through the new king killing the old. This was a very simple transition of power and easy for the common people to accept. "The easiest method of determining whether someone has a right to something is to assume that anyone who has it has a right to it"<sup>39</sup>. This assumption made the question of authority easy to answer. The usurper won his authority through traditional grounds. A belief in the sanctity of such traditions and the understanding that the usurper was acting underneath these traditions would ensure him the crown.<sup>40</sup>

The belief was that a usurper was simply receiving the favor of God that was no longer being shown to the incumbent king. Max Weber talks about the sociological importance of such a continuation, "In periods of strict traditionalism no new system of authority could thus arise without new revelations being proclaimed in this way, unless the new system of authority was not really looked upon as new but regarded as a truth that had already been valid but was temporarily obscured and which was now being restored to its rightful place"<sup>41</sup>. The view of the usurper as a continuation is what ultimately would grant them legitimization.

Even if a claimant had the genealogical credentials and had won his crown on the battlefield with the blessing of God, he still needed popular support of the nobles as well as the support of God. In the late Middle Ages, the court had become a major factor in the power of the king. The nobles either

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<sup>38</sup> Straka, Gerald. "The Final Phase of Divine Right Theory in England, 1688-1702" *The English Historical Review* 77, no. 305 (October 1962): 636-658. *JSTOR* (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Daly, James. *Sir Robert Filmer and English Political Thought*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979.

<sup>40</sup> Weber, Max. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. New York: Bedminster Press, 1968.

<sup>41</sup> Weber, Max. *Basic Concepts in Sociology*. New York: The Citadel Press, 1962.

supported or hindered the king throughout his reign. Without the support of these powerful men, the king would have to deal with uprisings that were supported by them and their vast amounts of wealth. The case of Richard III displays this concept. Richard III was not a popular king among the nobles. He was suspected of killing his nephews in the Tower and he was constantly suspicious of everyone around him. In fact, if Richard had obtained more favor from his nobles, he may have had more support at the Battle of Bosworth. Many of the nobles he had called to arms ignored his request.<sup>42</sup> While kingship was hardly limited by popular support, it was either supported or hindered by it.

Finally, the claimant must be able to display that he was following the will of God. The Theory of Divine Right had been the most important factor to kingship throughout the entire Middle Ages. St. Augustine's "City of God" had shown that a Christian should strive for the will of God and not for the will of man.<sup>43</sup> While Augustine pitted government squarely in the position of "City of Man", he also encouraged governments to attempt God's will in every way possible.<sup>44</sup> So the Theory of Divine Right was formed to ensure that God's will was being done through the government. If God had appointed and given a right to the monarch to rule, then the monarch's will should be the closest to God's. A first-born male heir was a sign of God's approval to the king, so he and his son must have obtained the Divine Right of Kings. Winning a battle to gain the throne was a sign of God's approval and support, so the victor must have obtained the Divine Right of Kings. It was believed that God must interject himself into the affairs of government, because He Himself was the ultimate authority. In this hierarchy of authority, it was necessary that God appoint the king.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Loades, D.M. *The Tudor Chronicles—the Kings*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990.

<sup>43</sup> Augustine, Marcus Dods, and Thomas Merton. *The City of God*. New York: Modern Library, 1950.

<sup>44</sup> Sunshine, Glenn S. *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2009.

<sup>45</sup> Straka, Gerald. "The Final Phase of Divine Right Theory in England, 1688-1702" *The English Historical Review* 77, no. 305 (October 1962): 636-658. *JSTOR* (accessed March 8, 2013).

If a claimant to the throne could claim either genealogical right or right by usurpation and could show that he had popular support and the support of God, he could have a legitimate claim to the throne. This was still far from a secure throne, but the necessary components to a claim would be legitimate. Henry VII had to face all four of these factors in order to establish his claim to the throne and he dealt with these factors for the rest of his life. In fact, even his children and grandchildren grappled with the same issue of legitimacy throughout the Tudor dynasty.

## **Henry VII and Sources of Legitimacy**

Through the four sources of legitimacy: genealogy, usurpation, popular support, and Divine Right of Kings, Henry Tudor became King Henry VII and the Tudor dynasty continued for 115 years. The two major elements that he engineered for this purpose were his marriage to Elizabeth of York and his skillful political manipulations. These two factors satisfied the sources of legitimacy and establish Henry VII as a legitimate English king in his own right.

The first major hurdle to Henry's claim was his doubtful genealogy. Henry VII was descended from Edward III maternally through a third wife of his second son and paternally, a second husband of Henry VI's widow.<sup>46</sup> This dubious bloodline should have cost him any chance at the throne. Henry was able to overcome this obstacle through several manipulations. First, he emphasized his connection to his "uncle," Henry VI, who was reported as having prophesied that the Tudors would succeed him on the throne.<sup>47</sup> Such a connection to his Lancastrian forefathers encouraged their support. It was also one of many ways that Henry was skilled at emphasizing that he did have some descent from kings however weak. He was also adept at downplaying the fact that his descent was not a direct bloodline. Another way he did this was to emphasize his Welsh heritage, which would assist him with legitimating his

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<sup>46</sup> "War of the Roses (1455-1485): York and Lancaster Family Tree", House of Windsor Official Site, [www.royal.gov.uk], accessed March 8, 2013.

<sup>47</sup> King, John N. *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.

questionable genealogy. After his ascension to the throne, “Henry sent a commission into Wales which produced a report tracing his ancestry through the heroes of Geoffrey of Monmouth to Brutus. Henry’s son, born 19 September 1486, was christened Arthur and hailed as ‘Arturus secundus’”<sup>48</sup> Henry fell into the pattern of many English nobles with Welsh heritage had, claiming to be descended from Welsh mythological figures.<sup>49</sup> Both through his iconography and his propaganda, he encouraged the belief that he was descended from Welsh kings, thus making him fit to be King of England and Wales. Naming his first son Arthur perpetuated such mythological beliefs.

Arguably the most ingenious way Henry overcame his dubious ancestry was to marry Elizabeth of York. In Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, he praises this marriage, “O now let Richmond and Elizabeth,/The true succeeders of each royal house,/By God’s fair ordinance conjoin together!/And let their heirs (God, if they will be so)/Enrich the time to come with smooth-fac’d peace,/With smiling plenty, and fair prosperous days!”<sup>50</sup> This celebration of the marriage was not overstated. With the heir of Lancaster and the female heir of York, the two families were able to combine and eventually end the wars of succession that had been occurring. The symbolic nature of the two warring families combining would have been good for the collective psyche of the weary English nobility.

Henry and Elizabeth were actually distant cousins. A papal dispensation was necessary for their marriage. In the Bull of Pope Innocent VIII, the Pope confirms that in this marriage, the purpose was to end the fighting in England. “...approveth confirmyth and stablisyth the matrimonye and coniuncion made betwene our souayn lord King Henre the seuenth of the house of Lancastre of that one party And the noble Princesse Elyzabeth of the house of Yorke of that other [party] with all thaire Issue laufully

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<sup>48</sup> Loomis, Roger Sherman. *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959.

<sup>49</sup> Roberts, Peter R. “The Welshness of the Tudors.” *History Today* 36, no.1 (January 1986): 7-13. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Shakespeare, William, and Jack Randall Crawford. *The Tragedy of Richard the Third: With the Landing of Earl Richmond and the Battle at Bosworth Field*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1927.

borne between the same”<sup>51</sup> Following this dispensation, it was confirmed in the Calendar of the Close Rolls that the king received this dispensation and continued on to marry Elizabeth.<sup>52</sup> This marriage was genealogically ingenious because it guaranteed that any heirs born to them would be descended from Edward III in four different ways. The legitimacy of Henry VII’s sons would never be questioned, even if his own was.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the obvious genealogical advantages to marrying Elizabeth, Henry had to ensure that his marriage to Elizabeth was not his only source of authority. If his only claim to the throne was through marriage, this would not keep other usurpers at bay. It was true that Elizabeth was a direct descendent of Edward III, but the matter of her gender kept her from ruling and Henry wanted to ensure that he ruled in his own right, apart from Elizabeth’s.<sup>54</sup> Richard III had proclaimed that Elizabeth and his other siblings were illegitimate in order to firmly establish his own kingship. One of Henry’s first acts as king was to lift this proclamation and therefore giving Elizabeth a right to the bloodline again.<sup>55</sup> This act of allowing her legitimacy gave Henry some sort of position of authority over Elizabeth. However, he also did not crown her queen until after their first son had been born.<sup>56</sup> This showed that she was only his queen to ensure an heir. She also was not queen until almost a year after Henry had been crowned king. This secured his position individually, and not contingent on Elizabeth’s royal bloodline.

Henry’s main route to an established rule, however, was through usurpation. Having won the Battle of Bosworth, Henry was fulfilling the role of usurper. It was reported that he killed Richard III with

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<sup>51</sup> Collier, John Payne. *Bull of Pope Innocent VIII on the Marriage of Henry VII with Elizabeth York*. London: Camden Society, 1847.

<sup>52</sup> *Calendar of the Close Rolls: Henry VII (1485-1500)*. London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1955.

<sup>53</sup> Manrubia, Susann C., et al. “Genealogy in the Era of Genomics.” *American Scientist* 91, no. 2 (March/April 2003): 158-165. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>54</sup> Okerlund, Arlene. *Elizabeth of York*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

<sup>55</sup> Cunningham, Sean. *Henry VII*. London: Routledge, 2007.

<sup>56</sup> Cunningham, Sean. *Henry VII*. London: Routledge, 2007.

his own hands.<sup>57</sup> This lent even more credibility to his divine support on the battlefield. Henry went further than simply winning the battle. Many kings had killed their predecessor and had failed to hold their throne, Richard III included. Henry needed to ensure this would not happen to him.

His first action was to officially date his reign from 21 August 1485, the day before Bosworth. This allowed him to proclaim Richard and his supporters as traitors. Their lives and property were now in the hands of Henry himself.<sup>58</sup> This allowed Henry to have those who fought for Richard to be tried, found guilty of treason, and punished. Any supporters of Richard then were either killed, went into hiding, or simply supported the new king. After the death of Richard, Henry immediately went back to London to call Parliament.

While in some respects, Parliament's declaration of Henry as king was merely a formality. However, it was the tradition that was being followed that assisted Henry's rise to the throne. The Index Rolls of Parliament record Henry's first Parliament "Henry the seventh, his good Qualities enumerated in a Speech by the Chancellor at the Opening of his Firft Parliament...Act fettling the Crown of France and England on him and his Heirs"<sup>59</sup> It was also recorded in the English Coronation Records that all the lords approved this appointment, "by the whole assent of all the Lords both Spiritual and Temporall, and also of all the Commons of this Land elect, chosen, and required the thirtieth day of October Anno Domini MCCCCiijv in London to be King of the same"<sup>60</sup> This proclamation of kingship was to be expected. The lords would have been daft to vote against the man who had just killed the previous king. Because of the fact of plain fear and possibly some loyalty and belief, the lords had no choice but to proclaim Henry king. It was reported that Henry addressed the Commons himself and emphasized his blood right

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<sup>57</sup> *Bosworth Fielde*. London: Richard III Society, 1868.

<sup>58</sup> Pickering, Andrew. *Lancastrians to Tudors: England, 1450-1509*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

<sup>59</sup> John Strachey et al. *Rotuli Parliamentorum; Index to the Rolls of Parliament*. London: Parliament, 1832.

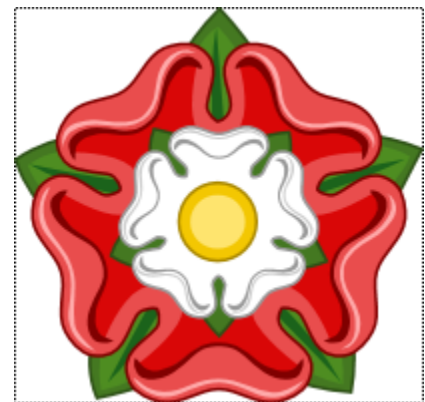
<sup>60</sup> Legg, L.G. Wickham. *English Coronation Records*. Westminster: A. Constable and Co., 1975.

through the Beaufort line.<sup>61</sup> He went on to be crowned at Westminster on 30 October 1485.<sup>62</sup> His coronation was nearly identical to that of Richard III and many of the other kings before him.<sup>63</sup> Through the recognition of both Parliament and the Church, Henry was truly the legal claimant to the throne.<sup>64</sup>

Henry's next mission was to win the popular support of the nobles. His main route to this was through iconography. He was also assisted in this matter by the death of almost all other possible heirs to the throne. Henry drew upon both the badges and heraldry of his family and his ancestors in order to show both the Yorks and the Lancasters that this was a new era, separate from either of their monarchs.<sup>65</sup>

Iconography had been a major factor in the Wars of the Roses. The roses of both the Lancaster and the York families were symbols for loyalty and support to one faction or the other. This legacy of iconography impacted Henry greatly, but in a different sense than other monarchs before him. He embarked on "a conscious strategy of image-making that proclaimed both his own virtue as an orthodox Christian and the legitimacy of the house of Tudor as England's ruling dynasty."<sup>66</sup>

One of Henry's major projects was the renovation of Henry VI's chapel at Westminster. King's College Chapel was made very ornate and grand as a symbol of the new dynasty that Henry VII was founding. Henry's own arms, supporters, and badges are found all around the chapel. One such image is the Tudor Rose. This rose is red and white, combining the two



<sup>61</sup> Cunningham, Sean. *Henry VII*. London: Routledge, 2007.

<sup>62</sup> Cunningham, Sean. *Henry VII*. London: Routledge, 2007.

<sup>63</sup> Pickthorn, Kenneth. *Early Tudor Government; Henry VII*. Cambridge: University Press, 1934.

<sup>64</sup> Horowitz, Mark R. "Introduction." *Historical Research* 82, no. 217 (August 2009): 375-378. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 28, 2012).

<sup>65</sup> Cunningham, Sean. *Henry VII*. London: Routledge, 2007.

<sup>66</sup> King, John N. *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.



roses of York and Lancaster. This symbolic image was meant to show that the two families were merging and that therefore, both families should be loyal to the new Tudor dynasty. Another image found in the chapel is the red dragon of Wales. Henry VII got much of his support for the Battle of Bosworth from Wales and that support continued throughout his reign. His Welsh heritage would be influential throughout his reign and the dragon in the chapel illustrates that. He included the greyhound of Richmond. Before becoming king, Henry had been the Earl of Richmond, thus honoring the symbol. Finally, he included the Beaufort portcullis symbol to honor his Beaufort heritage. This emphasized one of his only genealogical links to Edward III.<sup>67</sup> All of these symbols sought to strengthen his claim to the throne and to symbolize to the nobles that he was the combination of all of these established traditions.

Henry also drew upon his Welsh heritage even further for some of his iconography. Henry fought under the red banner of Cadwalader at Bosworth.<sup>68</sup> Cadwalader was the last king of the Britons. This symbolism gave Henry the impression of a mythological figure to many of the nobles. The fact that he had been born in Wales, where most of the myths originated, only propagated these myths. Henry encouraged them because it made nobles less likely to rise up against him if he were really the descendent of Cadwalader. In fact, Henry even commissioned a group of Welsh genealogists to trace his lineage back to the early Welsh and British rulers.<sup>69</sup>

In his article on propaganda in the Wars of the Roses, Colin Richmond talks about the necessity of kings to become propagandisers. "In other words, English kings became propagandisers (and not simply publicists) only when they were driven to it".<sup>70</sup> Henry formulated these symbols out of necessity.

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<sup>67</sup> King, John N. *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989.

<sup>68</sup> Roberts, Peter R. "The Welshness of the Tudors." *History Today* 36, no. 1 (January 1986): 7-13. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>69</sup> Roberts, Peter R. "The Welshness of the Tudors." *History Today* 36, no. 1 (January 1986): 7-13. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> Richmond, Colin: 1992. "Propaganda in the Wars of the Roses." *History Today* 42, no. 7" 12. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2013).

He had to find some way to prove to the nobles that he should be king by tradition. Iconography proved to be his way of doing this.

Henry was also helped in his quest for a legitimate throne by the fact that Richard III had killed most of the remaining heirs to the English throne. Churchill confirms that “Indeed, no fact stands forth more unchallengeable than that the overwhelming majority of the nation was convinced that Richard had used his power as Protector to usurp the crown and that the princes had disappeared in the Tower”<sup>71</sup>. Richard had usurped, and most likely killed, the rightful heir to the throne—thirteen year old Edward V. He also imprisoned and probably killed Edward’s younger brother Richard. Because of the controversy of the Princes in the Tower, many Yorkists had started to lose loyalty to Richard III. He had forced the rest of the late Edward IV’s family into hiding in Westminster. He killed his own remaining brother, George, Duke of Clarence. This left Richard III and eventually his son, Edward as the only Yorkist male heirs still alive. Edward would die the year before Bosworth, leaving Richard as the sole York heir. While this did give Richard some stability as king for a short time, it also allowed Henry to become the champion for both the Yorks and the Lancasters.

After the death of Henry VI and of his son, the Lancasters had no more direct descendants of Edward III. Henry was the sole male heir to the claim of the Lancasters. After the death of Richard, he was one of the only remaining heirs from either family. Also, because of the controversy with the Princes in the Tower and the hiding in Westminster, Henry had gained many Yorkist supporters. His promise to marry Elizabeth of York, who had been in hiding in Westminster, was what converted many Yorkists who had doubted the character of Richard III.

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<sup>71</sup> Churchill, Winston, and Henry Steele Commager. *Churchill's History of the English-Speaking Peoples*. New York: Greenwich House, 1983.

Lastly, Henry had to give evidence to the fact that he had been appointed by God. He did this both through a declaration of divine will and through an unconventional adherence to myths. Most important was the Papal Bull proclaiming Henry as king.

In the Bull of Pope Innocent VIII, the Pope says, “And in lyke wise his holines cofermeth stabilshith and approueth the right and title to the Crowne of England of the sayde oure souerayne lorde Henry the seuenthe, and the heires of his body lafully begoten to hym”<sup>72</sup> The recognition from the Pope is what ultimately secured Henry’s claim to the Divine Right. As God’s agent on Earth, the Pope was as close as Henry could come to getting God Himself to proclaim him king. This spiritual recognition supported the belief that Henry was acting on behalf of God when he killed Richard III. It was recorded in the Calendar of the Close Rolls that the Papal dispensation was received in England.<sup>73</sup> This shows that the English nobility at court would have been well-aware of the Pope’s support of Henry. It would have been a matter of conscience to be disloyal to a divinely-ordained king. Polydore Vergil even attributes the marriage to Elizabeth of York as divine. “He then took in marriage, Elizabeth, daughter of Edward, a woman indeed intelligent above all others, and equally beautiful. It is legitimate to attribute this to divine intervention, for plainly by it all things which nourished the two houses of Lancaster and York were united and from the union the true and established royal line emerged which now reigns”<sup>74</sup>. He seems to believe that because events worked out as well as they did, it must have been divinely originated and willed. This was a logical conclusion for the medieval mindset, especially after the Papal Bull had been received.

Henry also used mythology, to some extent, to show the divine origin of his reign. Vergil states, “For 797 years before, there came one night to Cadwallader, last king of the Britons, some sort of an

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<sup>72</sup> Collier, John Payne. *Bull of Pope Innocent VIII on the Marriage of Henry VII with Elizabeth York*. London: Camden Society, 1847.

<sup>73</sup> *Calendar of the Close Rolls: Henry VII (1485-1500)*. London: Her Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1955.

<sup>74</sup> Vergil, Polydore. *The Anglica Historia, A.D. 1485-1537*. London: Royal Historical Society, 1950.

apparition with a heavenly appearance; this foretold how long afterwards it would come to pass that his descendents would recover the land. This prophecy, they say, came true in Henry, who traced his ancestry back to Cadwallader”<sup>75</sup> This descent from Cadwallader has never been proved, however it is just as possible that this is true as false. If he were the descendent of Cadwallader, Henry would have a higher claim than any to the British throne. That is why he encouraged this story, even if he never mentioned it himself. Henry VI also claimed this descent, but to a lesser extent than Henry VII.<sup>76</sup> He was the “most credible candidate for the title of ‘son of prophecy’ once he became the Lancastrian claimant to the throne”<sup>77</sup> Henry, who was both Welsh and a claimant to the English throne, was the best person at the time to claim such a descent. A Welsh bard named Dafydd Llwyd of Mathafarn is credited with spreading this story to a large extent. He even predicted Henry’s victory at Bosworth because he was the descendent of Cadwallader and fought under his standard.<sup>78</sup>

Henry would also claim some of the Arthurian legends as well. Henry would go on to model his court after the Arthurian tradition, “outwardly chivalric in the character of its display and ceremonial.”<sup>79</sup> This was much more than mere coincidence. Henry obviously had knowledge of the Arthurian legends and he seemed to do more than parallel them. He even went so far as the name his first-born son Arthur, who was hailed as ‘Arturus secundus’ or “Arthur the Second”.<sup>80</sup> He intended this new Tudor dynasty to not only be descended from the kings of the Britons, but also be considered as the second-coming of King Arthur.

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<sup>75</sup> Vergil, Polydore. *The Anglica Historia, A.D. 1485-1537*. London: Royal Historical Society, 1950.

<sup>76</sup> Loades, D.M. *The Tudor Chronicles—The Kings*. New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1990.

<sup>77</sup> Roberts, Peter R. “The Welshness of the Tudors.” *History Today* 36, no. 1 (January 1986): 7-13. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>78</sup> Roberts, Peter R. “The Welshness of the Tudors.” *History Today* 36, no. 1 (January 1986): 7-13. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>79</sup> Grummit, David. “Household, Politics, and Political Morality in the Reign of Henry VII.” *Historical Research* 82, no. 217 (August 2009): 393-411. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 28, 2012).

<sup>80</sup> Loomis, Roger Sherman. *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959.

In his masterful article connecting King Henry VIII and King Arthur, David Starkey touches on many of these issues. While Henry was still Earl of Richmond, he collected several Arthurian romances showing that he read them and was familiar with the legends. Henry VII probably knew the Caxton Malory version of *Morte Darthur*. In Malory's narrative, "Westminster, the real capital, increasingly displaces the legendary Camelot". Henry VII would have been able to move "Camelot" and bring it closer to London for the people to see. Henry VII's palace at Richmond was displayed with many different displays of Arthurian imagery. He kept "The Garter" which was astonishingly similar to the Arthurian Knights of the Round Table. Henry saw himself as a parallel to King Arthur. Arthur had won his first battle under the standard of a dragon, defeating a man under the standard of a boar. Henry won the battle of Bosworth under a similar standard, defeating Richard who had the standard of a boar. Starkey continues on however to observe that the "Arthurian theme tended to surface only when the imperial pretensions of the English crown were at stake."<sup>81</sup> Henry used this mostly as part of his public image, but there is no reason to believe that he did not believe that he was, in fact, the "Rex Quondam Rexque Futurus". This was a powerful claim on Henry's part because it would make any noble very reluctant to challenge the legendary king. This gave Henry a sort of divine power because he was considered a "more holy" option than others because of this descent.

The reaction of the Yorks to the sudden rise of this Lancaster heir was surprisingly accepting. This is due, in most part, to Henry's political manipulation. It has been seen that "Henry VII thus benefitted directly from Richard III's failings as a personal lord and as monarch"<sup>82</sup>. The failed public image that Richard portrayed had left many Yorkists looking for another option. He was almost universally recognized as a usurper to the throne of Edward V, who was also going to be a Yorkist king.

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<sup>81</sup> Starkey, David, "King Henry and King Arthur," in *Arthurian Literature XVI*, ed. James Patrick Carley, 171-196. Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1998.

<sup>82</sup> Cunningham, Sean. "Loyalty and the Usurper: Recognizances, the Council and Allegiance under Henry VII." *Historical Research* 82, no. 217 (August 2009): 459-481. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 28, 2012).

So the Yorkist faction was already split, if not completely against Richard III. The second reason that the Yorkist reaction was so subdued is that Henry did not claim to be a Lancastrian king. He was attempting to start a new dynasty, separate from that of either the Yorks or the Lancasters, despite his Lancaster heritage. He created a “political culture of early Tudor England [that] was fundamentally different to that of its Yorkist and Lancastrian predecessors”<sup>83</sup>. Both families were simply weary of all the fighting and they were willing to submit to a new style of government that would incorporate both styles of rule and would ultimately lead to heirs descended from both families.

In these ways, Henry VII was able to establish, maintain, and secure his claim to the throne of England. He breezed over the issue of genealogy and married Elizabeth of York to give his children a sound genealogy. After winning the Battle of Bosworth, Henry followed through with his role as usurper to where he was viewed more as a savior than a usurper. He gained the popular support of the nobles through traditional iconography and through capitalizing on the unpopularity of Richard III. Finally, he showed that his reign was divinely originated through the Pope’s declaration of his kingship and through encouraging mythological theories of his genealogy. All of these factors led both the Lancasters and the Yorks to accept Henry VII as their king. His children and grandchildren would benefit greatly from his efforts.

## **Tudor Dynasty and Sources of Legitimacy**

After the establishment of himself on the throne, Henry VII’s next goal was to secure the kingship for his descendents. Just eight months after their marriage, Henry and Elizabeth had their first-born son, Arthur.<sup>84</sup> This was significant because there was a legitimate heir to the throne should Henry die, and because he drew upon his references to Arthurian legend by naming his son such. However,

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<sup>83</sup> Grummit, David. “Household, Politics and Political Morality in the Reign of Henry VII.” *Historical Research* 82, no. 217 (August 2009): 393-411. *Academic Search Premier*. EBSCOhost (accessed October 28, 2012).

<sup>84</sup> “Henry VII: Chronology.” *Historical Research* 82, no. 217 (August 2009): 379. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 28, 2012).

Henry's descendents would have to account for the same issues of legitimacy as Henry himself did. All five major Tudor monarchs would deal with issues of genealogy, usurpation, popular support, and obtaining the Divine Right. The struggle for legitimacy would shape the Tudor dynasty, however successful it was.

Prince Arthur would die before he became king. Henry VII's second son would go on to become the notorious King Henry VIII after Henry VII died. Henry VIII dealt with the issue of genealogy all throughout his life. After failing to have a male heir with his first wife, he went to extreme measures to ensure the birth of a son. He broke with the Church of Rome and established the Church of England in order to divorce his first wife and marry his second, in the hopes of producing a son. When they only had a daughter, he accused her of adultery and had her beheaded so that he could marry his third wife. In his third marriage, he was finally able to have a son, Edward VI. After his third wife died in childbirth, Henry went on to marry three more times, without any more children.<sup>85</sup>

This obsession with a male heir was not unfounded. Henry VIII would have heard the stories of the Wars of the Roses, which largely started because of Richard II's failure to produce a male heir. Henry VIII felt that the only way for him to secure the throne that his father had won was to have a son.

Even Henry VIII's best efforts did not secure the genealogy to the throne. After his death, his son became Edward VI, but only for a short while before he died as well. This left the two daughters of Henry VIII to inherit the throne. His first daughter by his first wife became Queen Mary I. The ascension of daughters to the throne was a major upheaval and had only rarely been seen before. She was a successful queen in her own right, but also as the wife of Philip II of Spain. He never had a ruling hand in England and Mary would retain that right. The female monarch made Henry VIII's obsession with a son

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<sup>85</sup> JONES, NEIL. 2013. "Divorced, beheaded, survived... (Cover story)." *Britain* 81, no. 1: 67-72. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 14, 2013).

seem almost contrite, but there were other issues that went along with a female monarch. Mary had to ensure that she was the queen of England and that her Spanish husband did not have a ruling hand there. The English people were not willing to have a foreign monarch.<sup>86</sup> When Mary died with no children, Henry VIII's second daughter of his second wife would become Queen Elizabeth I.

Elizabeth I would be one of the most well-known monarchs in English history. Much of her reign would be called a "Golden Age" in England, where the nation rose to a high status in the world. However, Elizabeth refused to marry for fear of sharing her throne.<sup>87</sup> She maintained that she had the same constitution as a man and could rule just as well.<sup>88</sup> However, when she died without a child to inherit the throne, the Tudor dynasty was officially over. Her cousin would become James I. So the issue of genealogy was always at the forefront for a Tudor monarch, and would ultimately be the dynasty's downfall.

Every Tudor monarch also dealt with the issue of usurpation. Henry VII dealt with several uprisings orchestrated by Margaret of Burgundy, who had been exiled to France after his ascension. He was able to handle each of these, but the threat was always real. Henry VIII would also be very suspicious of uprisings. He relied on men that he thought he could trust to find secrets of treason for him. Good favor with the king was everything in his reign. He would have anyone who was rumored to be treasonous executed.<sup>89</sup> When Henry VIII's son became king at the age of nine, he had to deal with regents who were hungry for power. It was the same sort of usurpation that had gotten Richard III his

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<sup>86</sup> Duffy, Eamon, "The Queen and the Cardinal" *History Today* 59, no. 5: 24-29. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 14, 2013).

<sup>87</sup> Doran, Susan. "Elizabeth I, Gender, Power and Politics" *History Today* 53, no. 5: 29. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 14, 2013).

<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth I, "Speech to the Troops at Tilbury" (Tilbury, Essex, 9 August 1588).

<sup>89</sup> Starkey, David. "Privy Secrets: Henry VIII and the Lords of the Council." *History Today* 37, no. 8 (August 1987): 23. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 14, 2013).



throne. While Edward VI's regents never gained complete power, Edward VI never had power either.<sup>90</sup> This constant threat of usurpation made every Tudor monarch consider the possibility.

Popular support was a major issue all throughout the Tudor reign. Tudor monarchs would retain the imagery used by Henry VII. In fact, they probably did not even call themselves the "Tudor dynasty" but went by the title the House of Richmond, a reflection of Henry VII's former title.<sup>91</sup> This was a symbol of their connection to the first Tudor monarch. The Tudor rose would continue to be used as a symbol of the royal household. The concept of the royal seal would become more and more important. "In medieval England, the royal secretaries were organized round the royal seals, the instruments with which the Crown authenticated its letters"<sup>92</sup>. The symbolism of the royal seal was simply a way to display further authority of the Tudor crown to the nobles.

Despite the attempts to nurture popular support, the concept of family factions did not disappear. The Tudors still needed to stand apart from the other families at court. For example, with each of his six wives, Henry VIII would raise her family to higher standing. Family rivalries were common during his reign. This is a reflection of the family fighting in the Wars of the Roses. Every Tudor monarch realized that if family rivalries got out of hand, it could result in a similar struggle.

Finally, the Tudors were well aware of the concept of Divine Right. The most obvious example of this was Henry VIII's split with the Catholic Church. He proclaimed himself the Supreme Head of the Church of England, with authority higher than that of the Pope's. This could only be done if he believed he was ordained by God himself to be king. He believed that he understood God's will better than even the Pope. This was a similar claim to his father's. Both believed that they controlled God's Divine Will,

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<sup>90</sup> Jordan, W.K. *Edward VI: The Threshold of Power. The Dominance of the Duke of Northumberland*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1970.

<sup>91</sup> Roberts, Peter R. "The Welshness of the Tudors." *History Today* 36, no. 1 (January 1986): 7-13. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 8, 2013).

<sup>92</sup> Elton, G.R. *England, 1200-1640*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969.

and that they could entrust it to themselves. Henry VII believed he could win it on a battlefield, Henry VIII believed that he had it naturally and therefore could control the Church.

The Arthurian imagery was a continuous theme throughout the early Tudor dynasty. Henry VII's naming of his son Arthur is an obvious example of this. It was encouraging the theme.<sup>93</sup> However, the image of Arthur would be less fulfilled in Prince Arthur as in his brother, King Henry VIII. Henry VIII would consciously use the court of King Arthur as a constant model for himself. Themes of chivalry, courtly love, and courage would be encouraged by Henry VIII. He held many Arthurian-style tournaments and part of his early education was surely an understanding of Arthurian legends.<sup>94</sup> This would continue to be a source of divine origin for the Tudors, who would all have fairly similar court styles.

The concepts of genealogy, usurpation, popular support, and Divine Right would shape the Tudor dynasty. Just as Henry VII had to satisfy each of these criteria for legitimacy, his descendants would continue to have the need to address them.

## Conclusion

The Tudor dynasty would reign for 118 years after the Battle of Bosworth in 1485 until the death of Elizabeth I in 1603. Without Henry VII's marriage to Elizabeth of York and his political manipulation, this pure genealogical claim to Edward III's throne would not have been established or secured. Henry VII's genealogical claim was weak, but because genealogy was a necessary factor to be king, he emphasized that he did have some claim and de-emphasized the questions to it. He married Elizabeth of York to quench some York displeasure, and also to ensure his children would have a genealogical claim that he never had. During the Wars of the Roses, Henry avoided capture and eventually was able to win

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<sup>93</sup> Loomis, Roger Sherman. *Arthurian Literature in the Middle Ages: A Collaborative History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959.

<sup>94</sup> Starkey, David, "King Henry and King Arthur," in *Arthurian Literature XVI*, ed. James Patrick Carley, 171-196. Woodbridge, Suffolk: D.S. Brewer, 1998.

his crown at the Battle of Bosworth. His landing in Wales enabled him to garner the support he needed to win the battle. The unpopularity of Richard III also enabled him to convince some nobles to switch sides and also reduced Richard's army. Henry met all the criteria for legitimacy in late Medieval England, even if it was more in show than in truth. He glazed over the issue of genealogy by marrying into the direct lineage of Edward III and by emphasizing his own descent from John of Gaunt. He promoted popular support through the combination of the two symbols of York and Lancaster into the Tudor rose and through the incorporation of many British traditions into his symbols. He was also assisted by Richard's killing of many heirs to the throne. Finally, Henry engineered his image to appear to have received the Divine Right of Kings. The approval of the Pope, the victory on the battlefield, and his fulfillment of British myths all portrayed divine approval. He set the way for his descendants to obtain the throne, but also to deal with the same issues that he did.

The Tudors left a strong legacy to England. Henry VII changed the course of English history and greatly impacted the history of Western civilization. Because of his masterful establishment of the Tudor dynasty, the Church of England was founded by his son, Elizabeth I would become a patronage of the arts in England, the English military would be greatly strengthened by the monarchs, and even the concept of "popular consent" would be incorporated into the monarchy by Elizabeth I. Without the first Tudor monarch, none of the Tudor accomplishments would have been the way they were. These same changes may have happened anyway because of the progress of Europe, but the security of the throne that was established by Henry VII enabled them to happen at a faster pace. Most of these progressive reforms would lead Europe into a new age of politics and religion.

The story of one of the men “least likely to have established a secure throne and thriving dynasty”<sup>95</sup> is one that needs to be understood to understand the Tudor dynasty. Henry VII set England on a course that would look dramatically different from the one that he first ruled. His establishment of a secure throne would not only stop the Wars of the Roses, but return the kingship to a position of authority that would remain relatively unquestioned. Richard III would be the last king of England to die on a battlefield. This legacy of a secure monarch is even seen today in the fact that a government that does not need a monarch still honors one. Henry VII’s legacy will forever be one of a father of a dynasty, as well as of a secure king in the face of a questionable claim to the throne.

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<sup>95</sup> Cunningham, Sean. “Loyalty and the Usurper: Recognizances, the Council and Allegiance under Henry VII.” *Historical Research* 82, no. 217 (August 2009): 459-481. *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 28, 2012).

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