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HISTORIOGRAPHICAL REVIEWS

POLITICS AND POLITICAL HISTORY IN THE TUDOR CENTURY

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ABSTRACT. *Recent writing on the Tudor century emphasizes the importance to the history of politics of the study of political processes. Tudor historians are, for the most part, less willing than hitherto to describe bureaucracies or institutions of government, and more concerned to present politics as something dynamic rather than static. Although their work remains rooted in the archives, Tudor specialists are increasingly receptive to the significance of (for example) political language, iconography, and literature. This article examines a number of recent contributions, in the context of post-war Tudor historiography. It accepts that the insights of other disciplines can enhance the study of sixteenth-century politics, and welcomes the intellectual and cultural turn in recent writing, but maintains that Tudor culture is not always being reconstructed with the sensitivity it needs.*

In recent years, historians of early modern Britain have spent some time examining the state and nature of writing on the Tudor century. In his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge in 1989, Patrick Collinson discussed a 'history with the politics put back', but the sort of politics he discussed went well beyond the interests of other generations of sixteenth-century historians. Professor Collinson's history was a history of political process rather than of sovereign states, a discipline capable of dealing with ideas and ideologies as well as social and ecclesiastical preoccupations.[1] More recently, John Guy has presented an agenda for a 'new political history' of the sixteenth century, built in part on Professor Collinson's call for politics to be put back, but broader in focus, sensitive to the work of historians of political thought and the insights of writing which moves beyond a consideration of lowland England. Professor Guy emphasizes the importance of studying the interaction between people, institutions, and ideas; of combining archival research with a sensitivity to literary and iconographical sources; of recognizing political language, and in particular the vocabulary of counsel; of understanding the impact of classical writing on sixteenth-century notions of duty and service, and the effect this eventually had on concepts of the state; and of the wider reach of the polity, in Ireland, Wales, and the borderlands of England.[2]

This is, potentially, a huge undertaking based on an already substantial body of work – even a basic reading list would have to include studies by Margaret Aston, Patrick Collinson, Steven Ellis, Steven Gunn, John Guy, Dale Hoak, Markku Peltonen, J. G.

[1] Patrick Collinson, '*De republica Anglorum*: or, history with the politics put back', in his *Elizabethan essays* (London and Rio Grande, 1994), pp. 1–29.

[2] John Guy, ed. *The Tudor monarchy* (London, 1997), pp. 1–8.

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A. Pocock, Quentin Skinner, David Starkey, and Maurizio Viroli.[3] It represents an important shift in focus for Tudor political history, which has conventionally emphasized the administrative, bureaucratic, and constitutional dimensions of (mainly central) government. The two dominant figures of Tudor history during the first half of the twentieth century, A. F. Pollard and Sir John Neale, both wrote in a tradition which emphasized the development of modern forms of government. Their studies of the Tudor parliaments, for example, explored growing constitutional tensions between government and MPs which led, almost inevitably, to collapse in the 1640s.[4] The approach of the pre-eminent figure of the post-war period, Sir Geoffrey Elton, was radically different in terms of interpretation, shattering Neale's model of puritan opposition in the Elizabethan parliaments;[5] but although Elton dealt with the issues of sovereignty and royal supremacy, his research was still primarily administrative in focus. In Elton's edited volume on *The Tudor constitution*, for example, a book which has influenced school and university students for nearly forty years, the text of the preamble to the Act of Appeals (1533) – the classic statement of imperial monarchy – is absorbed into a highly constitutional model of the Tudor 'state' centred on crown, council, secretariat, financial administration, courts, parliament, and the church.[6] It is perhaps worth comparing this approach with the thoughts of the medievalist K. B. McFarlane on the relationship between the institutions of government and its operation: 'Institutions sometimes seem to have a life of their own, but this is only an appearance. They are born, develop, change, and decay by human agencies. Their life is the life of the men who make them.'[7]

I

The recent rethinking of Tudor political history has been a gradual process, firmly rooted in an historiography which goes back to the 1950s, carefully written, and strongly defended. In 1979, Penry Williams presented an account of Tudor governance which concentrated 'on describing the ways in which government actually worked, the people

[3] It should be emphasized that this is a limited selection of key studies: Margaret Aston, *The king's bedpost: reformation and iconography in a Tudor portrait group* (Cambridge, 1993); Collinson, *Elizabethan essays*; Steven Ellis, *Tudor frontiers and noble power: the making of the British state* (Oxford, 1995); S. J. Gunn, *Early Tudor government, 1485–1558* (Basingstoke and London, 1995); John Guy, 'Tudor monarchy and its critiques', in Guy, ed. *Tudor monarchy*, pp. 78–109; Dale Hoak, ed. *Tudor political culture* (Cambridge, 1995); Markku Peltonen, *Classical humanism and republicanism in English political thought, 1570–1640* (Cambridge, 1995); J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *The varieties of British political thought, 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1993); Quentin Skinner, *Reason and rhetoric in the philosophy of Hobbes* (Cambridge, 1996); David Starkey, ed., *The English court: from the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War* (London, 1987); Maurizio Viroli, *From politics to reason of state: the acquisition and transformation of the language of politics, 1250–1600* (Cambridge, 1992).

[4] For example, A. F. Pollard, *The evolution of parliament* (London, 1920), especially pp. 166–86; and J. E. Neale, 'The Commons' privilege of free speech in parliament', in R. W. Seton-Watson, ed., *Tudor studies* (London, 1924), pp. 257–86.

[5] For a statement of Elton's position on Neale, see G. R. Elton, 'Parliament', in Christopher Haigh, ed., *The reign of Elizabeth I* (London and Basingstoke, 1984), pp. 79–100.

[6] G. R. Elton, ed., *The Tudor constitution: documents and commentary* (Cambridge, 1960; 2nd edn 1982).

[7] K. B. McFarlane, *The nobility of later medieval England* (Oxford, 1997 edn), p. 280, a quotation employed by Steven Gunn in his illuminating discussion of the historiographical inheritances of Elton and McFarlane: Gunn, *Early Tudor government*, pp. 2–5.

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who ran it, the impact that it made upon society, and the reasons for its survival'. It was, above all, a book 'more concerned with processes than with structure'.[8] The collection of essays edited by Christopher Coleman and David Starkey, *Revolution reassessed* (1986), presented an account of politics which substantially revised Elton's interpretation of the revolutionary 1530s.[9] John Guy's exploration of 'Thomas Cromwell and the intellectual origins of the Henrician revolution' (1986) effectively rewrote the *Past and Present* debate of the 1960s, and it could do this because of the doctoral work of Graham Nicholson and Virginia Murphy on the intellectual context of the politics of Henry VIII's divorce.[10] At the same time, Tudor historians are still debating Elton's impact on the subject. Papers presented at the Institute of Historical Research in March 1996, examining his writings on law, parliament, politics, religion, and practice of history, have recently been published in the *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*.[11]

Tudor government, by David Loades, reflects this complex historiographical heritage.[12] It is a book primarily aimed at a student audience, representative of traditional concerns meeting new horizons. It presents readers with the mechanics of what Professor Loades believes to be essential features of the Tudor system. Working out from the centre of government, and an account of the role of political, legal, and fiscal institutions, the book considers the regions, county organization, urban government (including two case studies of Norwich as a county borough and the small Nottinghamshire town of Retford), the church, and the nature of franchises and lordships. The approach is clear and uncomplicated, and the book ends with what students may consider a godsend – a three-page epilogue in the form of a summary, dealing with the issue of whether the polity was more united in 1600 than it had been at the beginning of the Tudor century.

At the same time, Professor Loades has inherited a tradition which seems to be struggling with its own identity, and so the message of *Tudor government* is sometimes curiously mixed. The first sentence of the book maintains that 'Constitutional history has been out of fashion for a generation', and the first page establishes a general thesis: that 'recent political history has paid little attention to the skeleton of government', and that, more to the point, Tudor politics makes little sense without a governmental 'framework'. 'Statics' rather than 'dynamics' are Professor Loades's major concerns, but for a book which sets out to explain in clear terms the basic skeleton of government,

[8] Penry Williams, *The Tudor regime* (Oxford, 1979), p. vii.

[9] Christopher Coleman and David Starkey, eds., *Revolution reassessed: revisions in the history of Tudor government and administration* (Oxford, 1986).

[10] John Guy, 'Thomas Cromwell and the intellectual origins of the Henrician revolution', in Alastair Fox and John Guy, *Reassessing the Henrician age: humanism, politics, and reform* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 151–78, reprinted in Guy, ed., *Tudor monarchy*, pp. 213–33; G. R. Elton, 'The Tudor revolution: a reply', *Past and Present*, 29 (1964), pp. 28–42; G. L. Harriss, 'A revolution in Tudor history?' *Past and Present*, 31 (1965), pp. 87–90; G. D. Nicholson, 'The nature and function of historical argument in the Henrician reformation' (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 1977). V. M. Murphy, 'The debate over Henry VIII's first divorce: an analysis of the contemporary treatises' (Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 1984); Graham Nicholson, 'The Act of Appeals and the English Reformation', in Claire Cross, David Loades, and J. J. Scarisbrick, eds., *Law and government under the Tudors* (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 19–30; Virginia Murphy, 'The literature and propaganda of Henry VIII's first divorce', in Diarmaid MacCulloch, ed., *The reign of Henry VIII: politics, policy and piety* (London and Basingstoke, 1995), pp. 135–58.

[11] *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, sixth series, 7 (1997), pp. 177–336.

[12] David Loades, *Tudor government* (Oxford, 1997).

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'Structures of authority in the sixteenth century' seems an odd choice for a subtitle. The impact of this mixed historiographical inheritance has some rather disconcerting results. An interesting measure of this is the introductory essay on 'Theories of authority', which charts the development of sixteenth-century political thinking and measures it against practical experience of government. There is a tension between this brief introduction to intellectual history and *Tudor government*'s institutional analysis of government, and this becomes the major underlying (and probably unintentional) theme of the book. Professor Loades acknowledges that Steven Gunn (in *Early Tudor government*) and Penry Williams (in *The Tudor regime*) have written fine studies of political development, but he reacts almost instinctively to recent uninterest in institutional studies of Tudor government (p. viii). Loades recognizes that in *The Tudor constitution*, Elton seriously underplayed local government (p. viii); *Tudor government* remedies this by considering the localities (including Ireland) as well as the centre.[13] At the same time, Professor Loades's account of the royal court, in his own words 'the theatre and focus of a personal monarchy' (p. 246), covers eighteen pages and it is separated from the section on 'Crown and council' by over two hundred.

There are important conceptual problems associated with writing an institutional account of Tudor government. First of all, it is dangerous to assume that there was an institutional structure or pattern to Tudor government which, apart from clear changes of function or personnel, remained substantially unchanged. From the other side of the traditional divide, medieval historians have dismantled inherited nineteenth-century writing on a constitutional framework for the fifteenth century.[14] So there are profound implications for the sixteenth if (as Professor Loades seems to suggest) we need to understand 'the framework' (singular) of the Tudor period (p. viii). There were, if anything, multiple frameworks and many interpretations. The challenge of writing the history of this period lies in the complexity of reconstructing what were, in effect, living organizations. Exchequer, Chancery, King's Bench, and privy council did not lead independent existences. They were firmly located within a political system, and their relationships were necessarily dynamic.

This tension between the formal structure of Tudor politics and its informal reality is clear in Professor Loades's exploration of the monarch's council as part of the 'central machinery' of government. The emphasis is 'executive and judicial', and his account focuses on the administrative duties of the council and its development over the sixteenth century. For Professor Loades, advising the monarch was the most 'nebulous of the council's functions' (p. 19). The monarch's council clearly and undoubtedly had a range of administrative and judicial functions, and yet Professor Loades himself makes the point that there was (in theory at least) no sense of collective or cabinet responsibility (p. 19). The distinction is between 'council' and 'counsel'. 'Counsel' did not necessarily mean 'council' or vice versa, and writers in the sixteenth century often did not make the distinction clear.[15] There are more difficulties which make an institutional reconstruction of advice to the Tudor monarchs almost impossible. Counselling the monarch

[13] Elton, ed., *Tudor constitution*, pp. 462–82.

[14] John Watts, *Henry VI and the politics of kingship* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 1–9, 13–14; Christine Carpenter, *Locality and polity: a study of Warwickshire landed society, 1401–1499* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 1–13; Christine Carpenter, *The Wars of the Roses: politics and the constitution, c. 1437–1509* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 6–26.

[15] John Guy, 'The rhetoric of counsel in early modern England', in Hoak, ed., *Tudor political culture*, pp. 292–310.

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was not limited to sworn councillors, and the council was subsumed within the royal court, both in terms of physical architecture and personnel.[16] Audiences with the king or queen generally went unrecorded, but there are occasional glimpses of (for example) Elizabeth I walking in the privy garden with an ambassador or locked away in a one-to-one consultation. At the same time, there are recorded debates in the council for the early part of Elizabeth's reign.[17] The actual operation of politics is arguably more interesting for students than tallies of the number of the men formally admitted to the councils of the Tudors. The personality of a king or queen – and certainly his or her sex and age – had a huge impact on the assumptions courtiers made about the nature of counsel appropriate for that monarch.

Counsel was a comment on the relationship between a governor and the governed. It legitimized and strengthened royal decisions but, if it was abused (or perceived to be abused) the effect could be extremely serious. The Tudor monarchs were absolute, but any political system must have an element of consent and a way of expressing, however subtly and loyally, dissatisfaction or disquiet. Michael Bush's study of *The pilgrimage of grace* explores and explains perhaps the most dangerous breakdown of the relationship between subject and monarch in the sixteenth century, when, in October 1536, around 60,000 men gathered to oppose the Henrician regime.[18] The subtitle of the book emphasizes that it is a study of the rebel armies, and its reconstruction of the hosts is detailed and complex. *The pilgrimage of grace* is neither pure analysis nor pure narrative. In a broad historiographical introduction, Dr Bush is prepared to downplay analysis as something which can, without a strong narrative base, lead to weak explanations of the cause of the revolt (pp. 6–7).

The result is a long and detailed account of the creation of the rebel hosts in the north of England in October. *The pilgrimage of grace* is undoubtedly the nearest a modern historian has come to reconsidering the study of the revolt published by Madeleine and Ruth Dodds in 1915.[19] Dr Bush has inherited the benefits of just over eighty years of professional historical work on the Henrician period but also the difficulties. By returning to the original sources of the pilgrimage, he has avoided the obstructions presented by Victorian archivists determined to mould the state papers in their image. Equally, *The pilgrimage of grace* is able critically to build on modern social studies of the north. At the same time, the book deals with the delicate issue of the religious implications of 1536 and the part the revolt has played in the work of a number of Reformation historians, who have, according to Dr Bush, used the pilgrimage in 'a persistent struggle between a catholic and a protestant interest' (p. 1).

One of the most interesting features of the sort of archival research undertaken by Dr Bush is its recovery of the authentic language of politics and protest. In a modern political culture of spin and carefully constructed image, the language of the pilgrimage – with its collective declarations of intent, replies from the regime, and oaths sworn by the pilgrims – is a fascinating insight into collective posturing and group identity. In

[16] For a sketch of the 'politically fluid and culturally polycentric' nature of the Elizabethan court, see John Guy, 'The 1590s: the second reign of Elizabeth I?' in John Guy, ed., *The reign of Elizabeth I: court and culture in the last decade* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 1–2.

[17] Stephen Alford, *The early Elizabethan polity: William Cecil and the British succession crisis, 1558–1569* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 10–14.

[18] Michael Bush, *The pilgrimage of grace: a study of the rebel armies of October 1536* (Manchester, 1996).

[19] M. H. Dodds and R. Dodds, *The pilgrimage of grace, 1536–1537* (2 vols, Cambridge, 1915).

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many ways, Dr Bush perhaps underplays the significance of his reconstruction of the pilgrim oaths of 1536. These oaths may have been in imitation of the Succession Act of 1534, but over the course of the century they became an increasingly common expression of loyalty to a cause, and they have much to tell us about the way in which subjects explained themselves and regimes justified policy. At the risk of emphasizing one theme of a book which sets out to avoid a simple, single cause of the rebellion, the pilgrimage was a comment on the unacceptability of aspects of Henry VIII's regime, but the effect it had – forcing the regime to justify itself publicly in separate printed answers to the rebels of Lincolnshire and Yorkshire – was startling.[20]

In part the source of this unacceptability was the attack on traditional religion. But *The pilgrimage of grace* makes wider connections. Dr Bush points out that the emphasis on purgatory, saints, images, and pilgrimages during the Pontefract convocation of December 1536 'was not typical of the pilgrims's religious complaint' (p. 413). A greater concern was the physical destruction of the wealth of the church and, in turn, the impact on hospitality and charity. Dr Bush argues that 'the complaint belonged to a broad category of grievance which charged the government with showing contempt for the wealth of the king's subjects, for the constitution and for the society of orders; and therefore accused it of bad governance' (p. 413). The point is a crucial one. An important theme which emerges from *The pilgrimage of grace* is that issues we tend to separate and treat in isolation – 'economics', 'society', 'politics' – were so heavily bound together in the minds of the king's subjects. In this sense, 'Master Poverty, the conductor, protector and maintainer of the whole commonalty' (p. 283) speaks not only for economic grievance but for the state of the commonweal, and the pilgrim hosts in general linked corrupting influence on the king, the abuse of law, tyranny, heresy, and plunder.

Detailed studies like *The pilgrimage of grace* form a crucial bridge between our understanding of the preoccupations of the centre of government and the social and economic complexities of the Tudor polity. Counsel, reform, and religious stability were all part of the package of kingship, and they became, during the late 1540s and early 1550s, increasingly associated with the monarchical dimensions of Protestantism. The old debate on 'absolute' and 'limited' government in the sixteenth century is, in this sense, a false one. Monarchs like Henry VIII *were* absolute but they answered to God and were expected to act on behalf of their subjects, take good counsel, and protect religion.[21] When these accepted conventions were challenged, the vocabulary of loyalty and armed revolt of a remarkably organized degree could be employed to express dissatisfaction. Sir Richard Morison, writing against the pilgrims, argued that the commonwealth was like a body, and that it was the duty of the head to govern, but the

[20] For an account of the discussion of the regime in 1536, and particularly the debate on Henry's council, see John Guy, 'The king's council and political participation', in Fox and Guy, *Reassessing the Henrician age*, pp. 121–47. The regime defended itself in print in the *Answere made by the kynges hyghnes to the Petitions of the rebelles in Yorkeshire* (London, 1536), which included a detailed discussion of men appointed to the council: sigs. A4r–A5v.

[21] Bishop John Hooper of Gloucester summarized the relationship between monarch and subject in 1551: 'In a kyngdom, and monarchie, where one is appoynted to rule all the subjects of the same realm, are bound to obey the one kyng appointed by god, of what condition, stage or degre, so ever they be, as the king him self, is bound to be obedient unto the lawe, & unto God, where as the lawes be not contrary to the law of god and the lawe of nature.' *Godly and most necessary annotations in the .xiii. chapyter too the Romaynes* (Worcester, 1551), sig. B2v.

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metaphor of the body politic was all things to all people.[22] The body could, on occasions, remind the head of its duties.

Religion is, of course, only part of the story. There was a strong social dynamic to the organization of the rebel hosts and a tension between the pilgrimage as an armed revolt and its explicit attempt to reinforce the traditional society of orders, apparently under attack by heretics and subversives. The sixteenth century in general seems to have broken the relationship between high social rank and political participation, a fact which, in another way, manifested itself in the declining influence of great councils of the realm. In the pilgrimage of grace and during the northern rebellion of 1569, we seem to be presented with a northern aristocracy increasingly out of touch and unhappy with politics in London, for whom land no longer meant automatic political importance or influence. Historians have emphasized the development of a service nobility during the early Tudor period, men who relied more on royal favour and court office and promotion than territorial power, a process which encouraged the political exclusion of some noblemen.

John Dudley, duke of Northumberland, by David Loades, is in many ways a case study in service nobility.[23] From the start of the biography, there is a strong sense of Dudley's material and cultural rootlessness (p. x), a theme reinforced by an opening chapter on his father Edmund, a man apparently dependent on Henry VII's unique brand of fiscal political control. *Northumberland* is part of a biographical tradition in Tudor history which in its modern form was popular in the 1960s and 1970s and it depends, to quite a degree, on combining the story of Dudley with the general history of the reign of Henry VIII. This can, at times, obscure our view of Dudley and his development, and in the early chapters he sometimes falls victim to Professor Loades's narrative tour through the reign. Still, the organization of the book – with separate chapters on Dudley the young man, Lord Lisle, earl of Warwick, and duke of Northumberland, complemented by thematic accounts of the struggle for political power 1549–51 and the crisis of 1553 – does give the reader a sense of transformation and development.

Professor Loades presents the reader with Dudley the *arriviste*, slowly but doggedly climbing the Tudor political ladder and becoming, almost by accident, a member of Edward VI's corporate regime. The way in which he did this seems to cause some distaste. For Professor Loades, Dudley was a political and financial opportunist, skilful and amoral, but capable of miscalculating his political environment. His ultimate mistake was to underestimate fatally 'the forces of conventional morality' (p. x). The book sets out to counter the entrenched tradition of John Dudley as a dangerous and overmighty subject. Service is the keynote. Professor Loades argues that Dudley's influence over the council depended on strength of personality rather than kinship with Edward or territorial and tenant power. One of the major themes of *Northumberland* is Dudley's gradual accumulation of lands and offices, and these are usefully charted in two appendices. There are glimpses of his household men, but nothing on the scale of Simon Adams's reconstruction of the Dudley affinity.[24]

Northumberland is a narrative analysis of Tudor power politics, but the one thing conspicuously absent from the book is the sense Edwardians had of the conceptual

[22] David Sandler Berkowitz, ed., *Humanist scholarship and public order: two tracts against the pilgrimage of grace by Sir Richard Morison* (Washington, DC, 1984), pp. 117–18.

[23] David Loades, *John Dudley, duke of Northumberland, 1504–1553* (Oxford, 1996).

[24] Particularly (for this period) Simon Adams, 'The Dudley clientèle, 1553–1563', in G. W. Bernard, ed., *The Tudor nobility* (Manchester and New York, 1992), pp. 241–65.

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challenge of governing during a royal minority. This is one of the difficulties of assuming that there was a set 'constitutional' position in government. Professor Loades argues that Protector Somerset relied 'upon the constitutional powers bestowed by his letters patent', but 'Dudley had no patent, and no defined constitutional position' (pp. 192–3). Professor Loades certainly does not suggest that Seymour's power was solid and unassailable – the fourth chapter of *Northumberland* charts in close detail the collapse of the protectorate in 1549 – but politics and political relationships at the centre of power were surely more fluid. In fact, the regime sometimes had problems with its identity. In a powerful printed message to the people of Devonshire in July 1549, Edward declared that 'we are your rightfull kyng, your liege lorde, your kyng anoynted, your kyng Crouned, the sovereigne kyng of England, not by our age, but by Gods ordinaunce', at twenty-one or ten years of age. At the same time, court preachers like John Hooper seemed to suggest that it was the king and his council – or even the king counselled – who was engaged in the godly reformation of the commonwealth. Sir John Cheke, one of Edward's tutors, defended the authority of the 'King's Majesty etc' against rebellion in 1549.[25] The Edwardian regime was what men like Dudley made it and authority and ascendancy ultimately rested on securing the person of the king. This is one of the themes of Dale Hoak's 1982 essay on the Edwardian privy chamber, where he explored 'the most important department of the royal household' after 1547, built in part on the 'pioneering work' of David Starkey for the reigns of Henry VII and Henry VIII.[26]

Professor Loades realizes that the influence of the king, especially during the last years of the regime, is crucial. He steers a middle course between W. K. Jordan's view that by 1553 Dudley was considering a withdrawal from public life and Dale Hoak's argument that Edward was a conciliar puppet (p. 192).[27] He also considers Edward's written papers and detects in them a developing maturity – not as a direct influence on policy but as reflections of the king's 'social conscientiousness' (p. 194). More than this, Professor Loades recognizes that these notes were a stage in Edward's training in kingcraft. There is no doubt, as Professor Loades argues, that the king was being introduced to the political process. In January 1552, for example, Edward met his councillors in the 'inner privy chamber' at Greenwich and presented them with a list of important matters to be dealt with. It was a symbolic meeting, with the names of men in attendance carefully recorded.[28]

More broadly, the king's exercises reflect the intellectual milieu of the period, and the close association between Protestantism and calls for Christian commonwealth. Edward himself described his training 'in learning of tongues, of the scripture, of philosphie and all liberal sciences', under the supervision of Richard Cox, John Cheke, and Jean Belmaine.[29] Edward's tutors and court preachers helped to create a culture in which

[25] *A message sent by the kynges Majestie, to certain of his people, assembled in Devonshire* (n.p., 1549), sig. B5r; John Hooper, *An oversight, and deliberacion upon the holy Prophete Jonas* (London, [1550]); Sir John Cheke, *The hurt of sedicion* (London, 1549), sig. F3r.

[26] Dale E. Hoak, 'The king's privy chamber, 1547–1553', in Delloyd J. Guth and John W. McKenna, eds., *Tudor rule and revolution* (Cambridge, 1982), pp. 87–108; quotations at p. 88.

[27] W. K. Jordan, *Edward VI: the threshold of power. The dominance of the duke of Northumberland* (London, 1970), pp. 532–5; D. E. Hoak, *The king's council in the reign of Edward VI* (Cambridge, 1976), pp. 120–5.

[28] British Library, Cotton MS Vespasian F 13 fo. 273r–v, printed in J. G. Nichols, ed., *Literary remains of King Edward VI* (2 vols., Roxburghe Club, London, 1857), II, pp. 489–90.

[29] British Library, Cotton MS Nero C 10 fo. 11r, printed in W. K. Jordan, ed., *Chronicle and political papers of King Edward VI* (London, 1966), p. 3.

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application and learning – particularly training in classical literature and the arts of rhetoric – reinforced the model of the godly prince. The contrast to the intellectual tastes of Henry VIII must have been striking for Edwardians, but it set the tone for the reign of Elizabeth I, when the political elite of the late 1540s and early 1550s became Elizabethan governors. This is why Quentin Skinner's study of *Reason and rhetoric in the philosophy of Hobbes* (1996) has important implications for the second half of the sixteenth century, especially in its reconstruction of the educational training and models of behaviour which informed and explained the operation of politics.[30] Profound interest in classical scholarship not only underpinned the self-image of privy councillors – Sir Nicholas Bacon covered the walls of his long gallery at Gorhambury with classical *sententiae* appropriate to his public duties[31] – but affected practical governance. Memoranda 'in two parts', for example, helped the Elizabethan privy council to explore political issues.[32] In September 1552, William Cecil subjected the question 'Whither the K[ing's] Majestie shall enter in to the ayde of the Emperor' to rhetorical examination, and Edward VI added a 'conclusion'.[33]

II

Studies of language and culture can challenge traditional perceptions of a period, adding a third dimension to practical politics, and establishing the intellectual context of the actions of individuals. One contribution to Henrician research is Seth Lerer's study of *Courtly letters in the age of Henry VIII*.[34] For a Tudor political historian it represents an instructive (but at times disconcerting) insight into how the sixteenth century can be treated by another discipline. *Courtly letters* is a study of court literature and reading in the period before, according to Professor Lerer, Machiavelli and Castiglione become absorbed into the culture. His principal focus is Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, printed in the early sixteenth century by Wynkyn de Worde, Richard Pynson, and William Thynne, but he considers also Henry VIII's letters to Anne Boleyn, Chaucer in anthologies and letterbooks, and the work of Thomas Wyatt. Professor Lerer argues that there is a tension between the public implications of the court – in part diplomacy and power – and private correspondence and reading. He subjects Henry's letters to Anne to close textual analysis, and establishes a connection between the physical process of writing in the sixteenth century and artistic symbolism. Above all, *Courtly letters* considers the nature of reading and the texts which were read. One of the principles Professor Lerer establishes from the start – that Tudor literature was 'read and written in the margins of its manuscripts, the little quartos of its printers, the commonplace books of its men and women' – deserves some attention (p. 5).

Reading in the sixteenth century is an important subject. It was not a solitary occupation but an active engagement with the text. In a letter printed at the beginning of *A report and discourse ... of the affaires and state of Germany* – which may in itself have been a literary device – Roger Ascham reminded John Astley of how they had read Livy

[30] Skinner, *Reason and rhetoric*, pp. 19–110.

[31] Patrick Collinson, 'Sir Nicholas Bacon and the Elizabethan *via media*', *Historical Journal*, 23 (1980), pp. 257–62.

[32] Alford, *Early Elizabethan polity*, pp. 16–20.

[33] British Library, Cotton MS Nero C 10 fo. 73r–v.

[34] Seth Lerer, *Courtly letters in the age of Henry VIII: literary culture and the arts of deceit* (Cambridge, 1997).

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together and 'after some reasonyng we concluded both what was in our opinion to be looked for at his hand that would well and advisedly write an history'.[35] Perhaps the classic case is that of the Elizabethan Gabriel Harvey, whose interaction with his volumes of Livy has been reconstructed by Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine.[36] Professor Lerer emphasizes the physical environment of reading and writing, and maintains that court architecture and the development of 'small chambers surrounding the King's private apartment' was part of an 'enchamberment of power' (p. 91). Privacy was affected by architecture. Equally, privacy and intimacy could become a focus of politics and a route of access to the monarch.[37]

Courtly letters is surely right to suggest that contemporaries were aware of the significance of behaviour in this sort of environment, both for the men and women 'below stairs' and those above. The duties of officials were set down in instructions or discussed in books like *Of the office of servauntes* (1543), translated by Thomas Chaloner and dedicated to a gentleman of the privy chamber, Sir Henry Knyvet. Behaviour for courtiers of a more senior rank was later discussed in Thomas Hoby's translation of Castiglione and Roger Ascham's *The scholemaster* (1570), a book concerned with education in its broadest sense. For Professor Lerer *Troilus and Criseyde* played an early part in this literature – Sir Thomas Elyot seems to have taken the poem seriously in his *Pasquil the playne* (1533), a point *Courtly letters* makes in its epigraph.

This is, of course, a book written by a literary historian for other literary specialists. It uses a language of description and analysis which is at times difficult to penetrate. Some historians may feel uncomfortable at the way in which Professor Lerer establishes a psychoanalytical framework and relies on Freud and Sartre to illuminate the 'voyeurism' of reading the letters of other people (pp. 13–14). Historians may raise an eyebrow or two at Professor Lerer's examination of the relationship between Henry's letters to Anne Boleyn and the inherent violence of writing – violent because knives were used to sharpen quills and vellum was the carcase of a dead animal. 'If Henry writes the world, he does so on the multiple bodies of letter, buck, and lover' (p. 105).

This sort of approach does raise important issues for receptive historians genuinely interested in interdisciplinary work on the sixteenth century. The responsibility of the historian is to reconstruct the past as honestly and authentically as possible. Consequently, historians want to have proof that early modern men and women read books, understood what they had to say, and adjusted (or even reflected on) their behaviour because of them. This is one of the reasons why the work of Professor Jardine and Professor Grafton is so interesting: there is something demonstrable and tangible in the margins of Harvey's Livy. But imposing modern frameworks and constructs can distort the authentic political symbolism and language of the sixteenth century. Sixteenth-century commentators, for example, may have been more concerned about the implications of court flattery and bad counsel than on the courtier as 'pimp and prostitute' (p. 1).

Professor Lerer uses Michel Foucault to tell us that the royal body could be read 'as the locus of force relations, where the King's corporeal form is the site of national

[35] Roger Ascham, *English works*, ed. William Aldis Wright (Cambridge, 1904), pp. 125–6.

[36] Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, '"Studied for action": how Gabriel Harvey read his Livy', *Past and Present*, 129 (1990), pp. 30–78.

[37] For example, David Starkey, 'Representation through intimacy: a study in the symbolism of monarchy and court office in early modern England', in Guy, ed., *Tudor monarchy*, pp. 42–78.

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identity formation, diplomatic intrigue, and public spectacle (p. 5). But do we need this to be explained to us using Foucault? In 1483 Bishop John Russell of Lincoln asked 'What ys the bely or where ys the wombe of thys grete publick body of Englonde but that and there where the kyng ys him self, hys court and ys counselle?'[38] Describing the difference between the physical corpse of Henry VII and the body politic, Edward Hall allowed us to glimpse the profound symbolism of 'an Image or a representation of the late kyng, laied on Cusshions of golde… appareled, in the kynges riche robes of estate with a croune on the hed, and ball and scepter in the handes', a model of kingship shared in England and France.[39] It is possible to take the insights of a whole range of interdisciplinary studies – political theory, art, literature, sociology – but this work must be done within certain limits, conscious of the authentic context. Reconstructing the preoccupations of the period and applying them to literary texts can be transformative. *Richard II*, for example, was recognized as a political play, but its significance is only clear when the play is placed in the context of early modern kingship as it was understood at the time.[40]

Authentic reconstruction is an extremely hard task, and even historians who have worked with a subject for a number of years can find it difficult to look at related issues from a different angle. Norman Jones, in *The birth of the Elizabethan age*, experiences this challenge in a book which bravely moves from considerations of royal marriage to merchant trade and from the vestiarian controversy to family values.[41] The book attempts to consider how the first Elizabethans, with no sense of their place in history or the historical mythologies which later developed around the person of their queen, experienced life. It is, Professor Jones admits, an ambitious project. In effect it involves applying the insights of micro-history to a large society, with the added complication of determining the representativeness of the characters he has chosen – although, as the prologue makes clear, the individuals he considers did experience the decade and their experience is valid and important (pp. 2–3).

Professor Jones seems to suggest that this is academic history with a different focus. In *The birth of the Elizabethan age* he looks through the microscope in an attempt to make historical mountains out of molehills. The book does not reconstruct the politics of the first Elizabethan decade, but this is not its intention. Nevertheless, there are certainly wider implications. Professor Jones argues that this combination of political, religious, legal, and social history provides 'the contexts in which political, religious and legal choices are made' (p. 1). One example of this – and it was one of the main problems facing the political elite and the commonwealth during the first decade – was the relationship between Elizabeth's marriage, the succession, and the security of the realm. Professor Jones considers notions of marriage, and his short study of *A brief and pleasant discourse of duties in marriage* by Edmund Tilney (1568) and Sir William Cecil's manuscript notes on the duties of husbands and wives is really very instructive. The

[38] S. B. Chrimes, *English constitutional ideas in the fifteenth century* (Cambridge, 1936), p. 175.

[39] Edward Hall, *The union of the two noble and illustre famelies of Lancastre & Yorke* (London, 1550), Henry VIII, sig. A1. For the significance of the effigy in French royal funerals, see Ralph E. Giesey, *The royal funeral ceremony in renaissance France* (Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance, 37, Geneva, 1960), pp. 79–124.

[40] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The king's two bodies: a study in mediaeval political theology* (Princeton, 1957), pp. 24–41.

[41] Normal Jones, *The birth of the Elizabethan age: England in the 1560s* (Oxford, 1993).

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emphasis, predictably, is on obedience, subordination, and mutual support; but it also included, for Tilney, the giving of wise counsel (pp. 88–9). Comparisons between a man and his household and the king and his realm were common, and the problem of reconciling this against the practical reality of a woman governing a kingdom caused serious intellectual difficulties, difficulties which were explored on one level in a pamphlet debate between John Knox and John Aylmer in 1559.[42] During the 1560s, the consensus seems to have been this: female rule was tolerable within certain limits – eventual marriage, a settled succession, and the capacity of Elizabeth's councillors to compel as well as counsel.

These marital and national concerns were played out against a strongly providential backdrop. Professor Jones reveals that in completing the book he was struck by the 'sheer angst of the 1560s' (p. 2), a feeling of misery and crisis caused by unstable politics, hunger, disease, and an economy shattered by war against France. The political elite was traumatized and increasingly obsessed by the loss of England's final continental possession, Calais, by the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis. These problems were compounded by an inability to settle England's religion in terms of an agreed ecclesiastical structure and real reformation in the parishes. *The birth of the Elizabethan age* tackles 'the unsettled settlement of religion', and this analysis covers the attempt by the regime to construct a church (which is familiar territory for Professor Jones) and, interestingly, the popular response to more religious change – reactions to physical changes in parish furniture but also the influence of astrology and prophecy. These seem to have been common concerns. Professor Jones points out that Roger Ascham and William Camden were drawn to astrology (p. 38). Equally, the providential destruction of St Paul's Cathedral in 1561 drew comments from both sides of the religious fence – for Catholics it was a punishment for the end of the mass and for Protestants a sign that reform had not gone far enough (p. 44).

This willingness to accept the reality of God's punishment for the slow pace of reformation was certainly common. Elizabethan privy councillors were convinced that the French king (along with the other powers of what they believed was an organized European conspiracy against Protestant England) could be used by God as an instrument of his wrath. Prayers for the queen in illness linked the sins of her people to her own physical condition. Professor Jones comments on the 'jarring note of divine vengeance against those who fail to perform their responsibility' in William Cecil's notes on marriage (p. 89), and Cecil, like many of his contemporaries, was quite capable of seeing the same sort of relationship with God work on a national and international level. This wider, European dimension is missing from *The birth of the Elizabethan age*, and in a book which deals thematically with a number of issues and a country which was, on a popular level, probably fairly insular this is no great surprise. But England was in many ways defined by what it was not, and for all the perceived failings of its reformation the regime could still point to the virtues of reconstructing the 'primitive' or 'apostolic' church. Persecution was only a short sea crossing away, and the politics of continental Europe and the existence of Mary Stuart Queen of Scots as an alternative candidate to Elizabeth's crown energized the regime to a startling degree. Again, this is not the subject of *The birth of the Elizabethan age*, but if Professor Jones believes that his book provides the wider context of religion and politics these considerations are

[42] Patrick Collinson, 'The monarchical republic of Queen Elizabeth I', in Guy, ed., *Tudor monarchy*, p. 113; Guy, 'Tudor monarchy and its critiques', p. 94.

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significant. They are part of a modern historiographical debate on radical political solutions to what Elizabethans imagined to be a politics of emergency and crisis.[43]

III

Beyond the obligation to rule with their subjects in mind, Tudor monarchs were not bound by a formal constitution or a stated way of doing things. Their authority came from God. At the same time, commonplaces on kingship were deeply ingrained in the political culture of western Europe. Monarchs were capable of criticism and, on rare occasions, direct opposition. The pilgrimage of grace was almost unique in its character and capacity, but it underlined the sort of monarch subjects wanted to subject themselves to. Equally, monarchy was open to scrutiny by Protestants as well as by Catholics. Norman Jones makes a significant point when he quotes the Catholic John Martial, writing on behalf of his faith in 1564. 'There is no blast blown against the monstrous regiment of women; there is no libel set forth for order of succession; there is no word uttered against the due obedience to the sovereign' (p. 66). The direct reference is to John Knox, but it is worth thinking about the counter-contribution of John Aylmer and the long-term implications of the work of John Ponet and Christopher Goodman. Patrick Collinson has argued that 'the polemical critique of monarchy' is more appropriate than 'resistance theory' as a term for the work of these authors.[44] This linguistic shift emphasizes a significant point: books like this were part of a changing and complex debate on the nature of the polity which affected those inside the regime as well as those outside. Even privy councillors desperate to encourage Elizabeth I to settle the succession could make an important comment on the nature of imperial power by emphasizing parliament's duty to counsel the prince.[45] An equally significant point is that these debates can be traced in public print or in private memoranda and letters: they are wholly political in the widest sense.

Tudor politics was clearly informed by its intellectual context, and this context could be moulded by print, literature, or, in the case of Sir Nicholas Bacon at Gorhambury, a long gallery lined with classical *sententiae*. Rhetorical training and classical learning not only gave Edwardians and Elizabethans a cultural sense of their own identities but could have practical uses in the analysis of policy alternatives. David Loades briefly discusses the case of William Thomas (pp. 200–2), an Edwardian clerk of the council, who counselled (or at least offered to counsel) the king by writing on political subjects strongly reminiscent of the themes of Machiavelli's *The Prince*.[46] Thomas was an expert on the Italian language and Italian history, which suggests that even clerks of the council could be extremely erudite, a suspicion lent some force by the multi-talented Elizabethan Robert Beale. The politics of the continent, strong Protestantism, and an awareness of the classical heritage of Europe are common themes in many Tudor

[43] Patrick Collinson, 'The Elizabethan exclusion crisis and the Elizabethan polity', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 84 (1995), pp. 51–92; Alford, *Early Elizabethan polity*, pp. 209–22; Guy, 'The 1590s', pp. 1–19.

[44] Collinson, 'Monarchical republic', p. 119.

[45] Alford, *Early Elizabethan polity*, pp. 103–19, 142–57.

[46] British Library, Cotton MS Titus B 2 fos. 85r–90r. He seems to have completed three written discussions, all of which survive in British Library, Cotton MS Vespasian D 18: 'Wheather it be expedient to varie with tyme' (fos. 2r–11v); 'What Princes Amitie is best' (fos. 12r–19r); and 'Wheather it be better for a common wealthe, that the power be in the nobilitie or in the commonaltie' (fos. 20r–7v).

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careers. David Loades's John Dudley is, in some ways, a curious hybrid: a 'new' service nobleman with limited intellectual tastes who found it difficult to understand his king's written Latin – a standard position in the late fifteenth century and typical of some Elizabethan noblemen but probably increasingly unusual.

Some of these details are lost or in danger of being left unrecovered if historians continue to write high political narratives with an interest only in fact and event or studies of bureaucracies. But this seems highly unlikely. Students are now aware of the inherited traditions of late medieval and Tudor history and are more willing to cross the boundary of 1485. Characters like Henry VII now appear less willing to sign accounts (something late medieval monarchs may have done but their books have not survived) and more determined to encourage a vibrant court.[47] The relationship between court culture and politics is clearer from interdisciplinary work, and some attempts have been made to consider the intellectual environment of Elizabethan politics and the queen's relationship with her councillors. The study of the language of politics in the sixteenth century can only benefit from a determination to look at original documents and a willingness to consider a European tradition of political writing. Political historians seem to have recovered political history, and it is an exciting read.

[47] Principally S. J. Gunn, 'The courtiers of Henry VII', *English Historical Review*, 108 (1993), pp. 23–49, reprinted in Guy, ed., *Tudor monarchy*, pp. 163–89.

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